

On Sunday 28 April at 7:00PM via ZOOM the Friends of Dragon Run will tackle one dimension of the ever-growing problem of invasive species. Clint Morgeson of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) will discuss "Aquatic species introductions in Virginia: An overview of past, present, and future invasive species management." Briefly, the presentation will cover some of DWR's history and management of aquatic invasive fish species, especially in Eastern Virginia.

The discussions will cover the impacts on recreation, the economy, and our natural heritage. But just as important is that the presentation will cover how the risk is being managed and what additional steps are planned for aquatic invasives and introduced species.

Are there invasive and introduced aquatic species entering the Dragon Run?

One of the challenges to preserving and protecting the lands and waters of the Dragon Run is identifying and mitigating the risks associated with the many invasive species that are entrenched in the Commonwealth or establishing themselves in the Commonwealth. Among the Friends of Dragon Run's priority strategies is to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate where possible invasion species.

Through Citizen Science initiatives the Friends of Dragon Run have expanded work to identify, map, and act where possible to contain the threat an invasive species presents. The list of invasives – both flora and fauna - is long and growing. To name a few - Tree of Heaven, Spotted Lanternfly, Blue Catfish, Phragmites, Emerald Ash Borer, Northern Snakeheads, Japanese Stilt Grass, etc. And we are also on the lookout for species that are moving in the direction of the Middle Peninsula and the Dragon Run such as the highly destructive Nutria.

State agencies and many of the conservation focused non-profits such as FODR are clearly concerned and increasing collaborative efforts. I think we collectively agree that we are not yet winning against invasives and know we are in this struggle for the foreseeable future.

The threat invasive species pose have many dimensions. They can upset food chains needed by native species. They can displace native species from our lands and waters. And they can put at risk our economy - particularly agriculture and forestry -, recreational activities, and our natural heritage. Collectively or individually, they are a management issue for both property owners, communities, and for governments at all levels.

A key need is for all of us to learn more about invasive species, how to identify them, figure out which ones are the most serious threats, and learn what we can do to mitigate or eliminate the threat that they pose to the biodiversity of our region.

Clint Morgeson is a Regional Aquatics Manager for the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. This includes developing and directing a comprehensive regional aquatic resources program designed to manage, enhance, protect, and utilize the Commonwealth's fishery and aquatic resources in a multi county region in Eastern Virginia. Prior to working at DWR, Clint worked for the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the Illinois Natural History Survey.