



# The Dragon's Tale

Friends of Dragon Run P. O. Box 882 Gloucester, VA 23061

Volume XLII Issue 2 June 2024

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## **From the President, Jeff Wright**

In the Year of the Dragon there are certainly a lot of Dragon happenings within FODR. Paddles, hikes, citizen science, property monitoring, community outreach, guest speakers on environmental topics and the Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship are all building blocks supporting FODR's mission. Explore what we've been doing so far this year.

[Read more](#)

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## **Lindsay Fisher Selected as FODR'S First William and Mary Volunteer Intern** *By Jeff Wright, President*

This summer, a volunteer intern from William and Mary University will help FODR with achieving our goals. Lindsay Fisher from Williamsburg, Virginia, class of 2026, was selected as the inaugural intern. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Science with majors in Integrative Conservation and Environmental Humanities. [Read more](#)

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**Look for FODR** at the Juneteenth celebration (June 19) at Holly Knoll on the York River in Gloucester. The main event of this annual celebration will be held from noon to 5 p.m. Drop by and visit the FODR table! And, if you're interested in staffing the FODR table, contact Anne Ducey-Ortiz at [OutreachDragonRun@gmail.com](mailto:OutreachDragonRun@gmail.com).

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## Mark your calendars for the General Meeting and Founders celebration! August 11, 2024

Yes, we will hold an in-person General Meeting Sunday August 11 from 2 to 4 p.m. at Brent and Becky's Bulbs in Gloucester Virginia. Watch our website for more information about this celebration of FODR.

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## Paddle News! Mark Your Calendar now for the Summer and Fall Seasons

*By Jim Ewan and Carol Kauffman, Paddle Masters*

Thirty-two paddle guides, logisticians, and nature guides made this year's spring paddle season a success. We are already working on the summer and fall paddle seasons.

**Registration for summer opens at 9 a.m. June 8, and paddle days will be July 17–28.**

[Read more](#)

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## Harvey Morgan *Harvey Morgan Interview with Jeff Wright*

Harvey Morgan is one of the founding members of Friends of Dragon Run. When asked about ideas to protect Dragon Run, his answer was to the point: "We should never ever rest in our mission to speak up for the Dragon and with citizens along the Dragon." [Read more](#)

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## **The Big Tree** *By Anne Atkins*

It was magical to put my hands against a living being between 800 and 1,000 years old. When this tree was just a sapling, the Vikings were exploring Northern Europe, the Crusades were under way, the Byzantine empire flourished, and the Maya were thriving in South America. What else will occur during its lifetime? [Read more](#)

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FODR hosted students from three local middle schools this spring season. Each group of students paddled on the Dragon, hiked on trails to identify species, and conducted water investigations.

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## **Continuing the Dream**

*By Molly Broderson, Youth Outreach Committee Chair*

Grants and funds raised through Giving Tuesday give us approximately \$22,000 to continue growing and building programs to benefit youth and our communities. [Read more](#)

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## **The Dragon After Dark**

*By Anne Atkins*

On May 17, eight spring paddle guides and logisticians gathered for an evening paddle in appreciation for their volunteer efforts during the paddle season. Here's what it was like being in the swamp after dark. [Read more](#)



## **Property Monitoring** *By Jeff Wright, President*

Friends of Dragon Run (FODR) owns ten tracts of land in the Dragon Run watershed and actively manages each property using property monitoring teams with four or five members.

[Read more](#)



## **Tire Fest!** *By Jeff Wright, President and Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler*

On all FODR properties we are zeroing in on removing invasive species. But the invasives we have concentrated on during April and May were tires (and even a dishwasher) dumped at Eagles Nest. [Read more](#)



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## **The Eagles Nest Irises**

*By Robin Mathews, Hike Master*

The Eagles Nest property is an open area full of widely spaced cypress and hardwoods, grasses and sedges, shrubs, wildflowers, birds galore, and irises . . . lots of irises. [Read more](#)

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## **Beavers: Pest or Ally? *By Anne Atkins***

Beavers are critical to the health of farmland, undeveloped areas, urban, and suburban areas in ways we are just beginning to understand. Without beavers, Dragon Run probably would not exist. [Read more](#)

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## **Beavers: FAQs** *By Anne Atkins*

Beavers, known scientifically as *Castor canadensis*, are fascinating subaquatic mammals that seamlessly transition between land and water. Their unique physical characteristics and behaviors make them one of nature's most remarkable engineers. [Read more](#)

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## **Trash Pickups, Clean Swell, and Virginia's Adopt a Highway Program**

*By Jeff Wright, President and Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler*

In the past FODR's trash pickups were performed on the roads leading to three bridges that cross Dragon Run. In 2024 we expanded our Adopt-A-Highway Road cleanup program to 12 bridges. [Read more](#)

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## **CitSci Update** *By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair*

Our current tallies for the Dragon Run watershed include 1,289 species! This is thanks to the efforts of our members who have entered more than 5,500 observations in iNaturalist. We've also bumped our bird totals to 135 species.

[Read more](#)

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**Streamside Attractions** Galls: You May Have Seen Them, But Do You, Know What They Are?  
*By Kevin Howe, Treasurer*

Galls are a swelling or growth on a plant in response to an external stimulus such as a virus, bacteria, fungi, insect, or mite. Galls may be referred to as a pathogen; they are like a tumor, wart, or scar tissue seen in animals.

[Read more](#)

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[You're Invited . . .](#)

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## From the President, Jeff Wright

In the Year of the Dragon there are certainly a lot of Dragon happenings within FODR. For example, check out Wyrmling Writings by students who came on one of the school trips to [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org). You'll find their descriptions of flora and fauna under Swamp Sightings at DragonRun.org. These young writers have written about their experience with the Dragon through field trips to FODR properties. Please add wyrmling to your vocabulary as it means young dragon. There are a lot of young (and old) dragons alike being nurtured by our programs for youth and adults. Membership and involvement are growing. Many of our dedicated volunteer Wyrmlings even have gray hair.

Dragons are timeless, of course, so we try to build programs to support dragons of any age. These programs are aimed to excite hearts and minds to preserve, protect, and encourage wise use of Dragon Run, foster environmental literacy, and provide a fun and meaningful watershed experience. Paddles, hikes, citizen



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science, stewardship, property monitoring, community outreach, guest speakers on environmental topics, and the Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship (DREAM) are all building blocks supporting FODR's mission.

Good news! Supporting our mission to provide youth education and the DREAM program, we recently received a grant from the Virginia Department of Conservation Resources. And, following our successful spring paddle season, we are preparing for the summer and fall paddle seasons and other events such as our General Meeting and Founders Celebration in August. Visit [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org) to see all the upcoming activities.

Noteworthy are our continuing efforts through citizen science to identify and record species in the Dragon Run watershed. We have documented 1,289 species in the watershed so far. This number includes 135 bird species. Also important, 62 of the species documented had not been previously recorded in the county where they were found. We expect the number of species identified to increase significantly through a series of group activities such as citizen science days, bio-blitzes, species-specific counts, as well as individuals taking the time to survey yards, neighborhoods, and habitats. We are documenting our discoveries in iNaturalist.

For a Wyrmling it is always the Year of the Dragon Run. On to summer!

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## Lindsay Fisher Selected as FODR'S First William and Mary Volunteer Intern

*By Jeff Wright, President*

This summer, a volunteer intern from William and Mary University will help FODR with our goals to protect the environment, further our understanding of biodiversity, increase environmental literacy, and champion nature. The intern will participate in planning, preparing, and conducting public events such as hikes, kayak paddle tours, community science, citizen science, and education. This person will also assist in land stewardship and field surveys.

FODR worked with William and Mary University to develop the job description. We had an exceptional group of applicants apply for the volunteer position. The candidate selection was based on interviews and application reviews made by a committee comprised of FODR President, Vice-President, Citizen Science Chairperson, and our Co-Hike Master.

Lindsay Fisher from Williamsburg, Virginia was selected as the inaugural intern. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Science with majors in Integrative Conservation and Environmental Humanities. She is a member of the Class of 2026.



The internship is unpaid; however, it may qualify for academic credit. Students also are encouraged to apply for William and Mary's Fund for Unpaid and Underfunded Student Experiences.

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## **Mark your calendars for the General Meeting and Founders celebration! August 11, 2024**

Yes, we will hold an in-person General Meeting Sunday August 11 from 2 to 4 p.m. at Brent and Becky's Bulbs in Gloucester Virginia. We will honor our founders, hear from our founders, discuss on-going activities, and socialize. Smiles and laughter are expected. Watch our website for more information about this celebration of FODR.



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## Paddle News!

Mark Your Calendar Now for the Summer and Fall Seasons  
*By Jim Ewan and Carol Kauffman, Paddle Masters*

Thirty-two paddle guides, logisticians, and nature guides made this year's spring paddle season a success. Paddle masters Carol Kauffman and Jim Ewan, and other FODR members are already planning and strategizing the summer and fall seasons.

**Registration for summer will open at 9 a.m. June 8**, and paddle days will be July 17—28. Registration for fall will open at 9 a.m. September 14, and paddle days will be October 17—November 3.



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## By the Numbers

475	Total active FODR members
125	Life members
146	Auto-renewal memberships
204	Annual memberships
337	Paddlers during spring paddle season
3	School visits during spring paddle season
53	Students participating in spring trips
6	Teachers participating in spring trips
\$17,500	Paddle trip donations
22	New members who joined during spring paddle season
125	Tires collected
1.5	Tons of tires collected
1,289	Species in the Dragon and documented in iNaturalist
135	Bird species in the Dragon and documented in eBird

Activities at the Prothonotary nest boxes as of May 21, 2024

At Mascot 2 nests and 9 eggs and nest material in another box

At Big Island, 4 nests and 16 eggs and nest material in two other boxes

1 Chickadee nest with evidence that 5 chicks fledged

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## Harvey Morgan

*Harvey Morgan Interview with Jeff Wright*

### **How did you become one of the founders of FODR?**

I was working in our drug store in Gloucester with my brother Jimmy Morgan. Jerry Stokes from Tappahannock (with Chesapeake Bay Foundation) called to set up a meeting with Jimmy. He arrived at the appointed evening just before we closed at nine. He told us about the opportunity possibly to purchase from Mrs. McKenna what is now the FODR Big Island property.



After we closed the drug store the three of us gathered at a table and discussed the opportunity, its importance, and the challenges of finding money to buy the property. Jimmy was familiar with the area and really excited about its possibilities. After Jerry left, Jimmy and I talked about it and decided that we needed to contact friends who might be interested. Jimmy did most of this as I was in the legislature and away much of the time. He would set up meetings with friends who were interested in the Dragon. This was the spark. These friends were eager to help, and they did help in so many ways. They really are Champions of Dragon Run. Jerry Stokes continued to be the point person to make it happen.

### **Are you the older or the younger brother of Jimmy Morgan? Are you related to Captain Morgan rum?**

I am three years younger than Jimmy. Also, I am not as spicy as Captain Morgan Rum. (I'm much smoother and more companionable!)



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## **What was the greatest challenge in building the organization.**

Funding was the greatest challenge followed by getting enough volunteers to do the initial stewardship work on the Dragon. There were an amazing number of trees blocking the Dragon basically from Ware's Bridge to Route 17. But our volunteers did great work. Jimmy and some of the other founders really rallied to get individuals to donate money to enable the purchase from Mrs. McKenna of what was FODR's first property – Big Island. These individuals were generous in terms of both dollars and labor, all with the common goal of protecting Dragon Run.

## **Looking back, what was your favorite memory of FODR?**

I think it was the amazing times that we would get to work in the Dragon, and one overnight paddle that gave me my most memorable recollection. I was just dozing off in my sleeping bag when a very near beaver loudly slapped its tail on the water startling me and then disappeared into the swamp. It is an amazing place and that was an amazing, unforgettable moment.

## **A funny story from the past especially about paddle trips on the Dragon?**

One is about Mary Helen. We were canoeing at Big Island one day and stopped to explore the island and look at Jimmy's Rock and his signposts identifying the trees. One sign indicated that a latrine was in the direction of the other end of the Island, but when we arrived there, we saw another sign saying the latrine was in the other direction. (A cruel joke.) My brother's sense of humor?

Two more stories if I may:

Four pharmacists, including me, all in their 50s or older and of somewhat questionable fitness, were attempting an overnight paddle on the Dragon from Ware's Bridge to the Rte. 17 Bridge. Well, we missed the yellow Dragon sign posted on a tree by my brother that would have led us to the channel and down the Dragon as planned. So, we inadvertently followed the old logging canal, portaging over (and under) seemingly hundreds of fallen trees. We were admittedly lost and did not have adequate food or water. After exiting the canal, we found a dirt lane leading away from the Dragon Run and followed it, hoping to find a house, and



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assistance. Seeing no houses, our hunger was building when we entered a farmer's field and found a crop of ripe wheat. So, reminiscent of Jesus' disciples, we stood in the farmer's field, eating the grain from the stalks. It did refresh us. Thankfully this was before the era of game cameras!

We resumed our journey to the Rte. 17 bridge. Although we were paddling on the water, we had no drinking water left. When we arrived at the Rte. 17 bridge there was a man fishing, who deserves sainthood. He had two beers. Both were F & S Beers (Furhmann and Schmidt, a brand of little renown whose brewery in Shamokin, Pennsylvania went defunct). The fisherman gave us one of his beers. The four of us shared gulps of that one beer. To date this remains the best beer I ever had.

My brother Jimmy had an old Mercury station wagon that burned more oil than gasoline. It was his work vehicle that carried all his tools, plus his canoe on the roof. It was notorious and a laughable sight to see. He knew it was one of his trademarks, dreaded far and wide. His boys and I, and many who would go on to be FODR founders, would look for ways to hide when we saw or heard the car —and not ride with Jimmy as we knew when he showed up in his "oil burner" that he would put us to work. And we always dreaded when he insisted on doing "one more thing" before we headed home.

Somewhere in the FODR archives there must be a picture of his amazing dual fuel (oil and gas) station wagon.



## **Any ideas you want to share to further protect the Dragon Run?**

Yes, I have two: FODR should further engagement and outreach in our communities and with our neighbors who own land along the Dragon Run. Sharing the importance of the Dragon and listening to our neighbors' views are important to maintain positive relationships. This is a continuing responsibility and part of our mission to preserve, protect, and encourage wise use of the Dragon Watershed.



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A few decades back, access was lost to the Dragon near the Route 17 bridge, (which today is named for my brother and FODR's founder, Jimmy Morgan.) I believe this loss of access was the result of a lack of constructive dialogue between those that sought to use the Dragon and those who owned land along the Dragon.

Additionally, we must continue championing by preventing bad things from entering the Dragon from any source, including chemicals, leaching toxins from illegal dump sites, erosion, etc. During my tenure in the legislature, more than a few times we were called on to act by curtailing among other things the problem of illegal dumps and

dumping that adversely impacted the Dragon Run watershed and all of us living in this amazing place.

We should never ever rest in our mission to speak up for the Dragon and with citizens along the Dragon.

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## The Big Tree

By Anne Atkins



*From left to right: Jim Ewan, Carol Kauffman, Anne Atkins, Steve Mathews. Not pictured--Jack Kauffman*

On paddle trips we always point out the Big Tree—an ancient bald cypress tree standing in the distance. The tree is located well away from the channel, so it takes an effort to visit it. However, a small group (Jack Kauffman, Carol Kauffman, Jim Ewan, Anne Atkins, and Steve Mathews) made the trip as they were returning from putting in gates for the spring paddle season.

This visit wasn't quite as difficult as others because the spatterdock, arrow arum, and smart weed were just beginning to come back from winter dormancy. The trip required a combination of paddling and wading through the water, muck, and plants. There was no single clear channel. Instead, we followed any small stream of open water as long as we could until it became impassable, weaving our way across the expanse of plants and water.

We didn't have the instruments required to accurately measure the Big Tree, but a rough measurement showed the tree to be a little more than 23 feet in circumference, a tiny bit greater than when measured several years ago.

It was magical to put my hands against a living being between 800 and 1,000 years old. When this tree was just a sapling, the Vikings were exploring Northern Europe, the Crusades were under way, the Byzantine empire flourished, and the Maya were thriving in South America. What else will occur during its lifetime?

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## Local School Field Days

*By Carol Kauffman, Vice President and Susan Walton, Youth Outreach Committee*

FODR hosted students from three local middle schools this spring season. Teachers from two of the schools participated in the 2023 Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship program (DREAM). Each group of students paddled on the



Dragon, hiked on trails to identify species, and conducted water investigations.

We incorporate MWEEs (Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience) teachings in all our student activities. MWEEs help connect students with their local environment and equip them to make decisions and take actions that contribute to stronger, sustainable, and equitable communities.

Susan Walton, retired science teacher, along with Sherry Rollins, also a retired teacher, lead the water investigation part of our student field days. Water quality studies for the DREAM field experience include biotic and physical





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assays. Looking for macroinvertebrates is by far the most popular activity with students!

The students dip for samples with a long-handled net and bring up good leaf litter, the habitat for all those macroinvertebrates. Then, the hunt begins! Students use charts and keys to identify the organisms they find. In recent field work the students saw dragonfly, mayfly and damselfly larvae as well as isopods, amphipods and very tiny crayfish. Right and left-handed snails were also seen. Right-handed gilled snails need more oxygen, so they are a good indicator of healthy water. After identifying the catch, students apply a scale that assigns higher values to species that are intolerant of pollution. Dragon Run always ranks as excellent!





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Other studies include chemical tests for phosphates and nitrates and using a turbidity tube to determine water clarity. Students relate this information to the broader watershed and to what might be happening upstream that affects our results. Unfortunately, we rarely have enough time to measure dissolved oxygen.

Be sure to check out Wyrmling Writings under Swamp Sightings at [DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org). These are short articles that students researched and wrote about flora and fauna in the Dragon.

*Thank you so much again for all the work you guys put into the entire MWEE trip for the students. We received an immense amount of positive feedback from them. They gained an invaluable understanding of our local Dragon Run swamp ecosystem, conservation, and the Chesapeake watershed while having a blast doing so! We are very excited for next time!*

From Mr. Moore – Life Science teacher, St Clare Walker Middle School, April 24, 2024

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## Continuing the Dream

*By Molly Broderson, Youth Outreach Committee Chair*

The Youth Outreach Committee was notified by the Virginia Department of Conservation Resources (DCR) that FODR has received a \$13,700 grant to support FODR's youth programs. This is the full amount we applied for. A big thank you to the DREAM team members and my ALL STAR educators: Bambi Thompson, Carol Kauffman, Susan Walton, Terry Skinner.

This grant for \$13,700 added to the \$5,000 we raised from Giving Tuesday, spearheaded by Carol Kauffman plus a \$3,000 grant from Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund gives us approximately \$22,000 to continue to growing and building programs to benefit youth and our communities.

A big thank you to the Dream Team for their dedication and vision for building environmental literacy and encouraging folks of all ages to Cherish the Dragon.

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## The Dragon After Dark

By Anne Atkins



*If you ever go back into Woolly Swamp son, you better not go at night  
There's things out there in the middle of them woods  
That'd make a strong man die from fright  
There's things that crawl and things that fly  
And things that creep around on the ground  
And they say the ghost of Lucias Clay gets up and walks around.*

The Legend of Wooley Swamp  
Charlie Daniels

Even though the Dragon isn't as sinister as the song suggests, there are dozens of gloom-filled openings inviting the paddler to enter, promising a short cut to the kayak landing but delivering a dead end. And without moonlight, everything is a suffocating black.



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On May 17, eight spring paddle guides and logisticians gathered for an evening paddle in appreciation for their volunteer efforts during the paddle season. We started out around 7 p.m., well before sunset, and took our time paddling upstream and then downstream to the tree with the resurrection fern. We stopped along the way several times to enjoy the evening and to look and listen to the oncoming night fall.



It was cool that evening. On a warmer night, we would have heard the deafening chirps and croaks of thousands of frogs, other amphibs, and insects. The frogs would eagerly have jumped on our kayaks to hitch a ride with the strange aliens. And, when we followed the beam of our headlamps to shore, we would have seen green, fluorescent eyes staring back at us—spider eyes.



*Night paddlers. From left to right: Steve Mathews, Anne Atkins, Adrienne Frank, Alison Smith, Carol Kauffman, Gary Driscole, Robin Mathews, Brenda Sylvia, not shown Jeff Wright*

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On a similar night paddle several years ago, the legendary Empress of the Dragon, Teta Kain, spelled out the conditions necessary to experience “spidah” eyes and the cacophony of frogs and insects. “It has to be hot and humid,” she said. She emphasized that you “have to ‘suffah’.”

Still, a night paddle on the Dragon is an extraordinary experience whether or not you “suffah.”



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## Property Monitoring

*By Jeff Wright, President*

Friends of Dragon Run (FODR) owns ten tracts of land in the Dragon Run watershed and actively manages each property using property monitoring teams. These teams, usually 4 or 5 FODR members, are responsible for checking trails, removing broken limbs and trash, verifying property boundaries, maintaining trail and boundary signage, bio-blitzing, identifying invasive species, and organizing FODR events to accomplish special projects such as installing water crossings at Powcan, removing tires at Eagle's Nest, and removing hazmat items from the Morgan property. Each team submits a monthly report to the Project Manager, Dave Milby. Here are highlights from recent work conducted by the property monitoring teams



*Property monitoring teams like this one for the Morgan property regularly inspect the property. From left to right: Davis Rhodes, Dave Milby, Dan Schlangen, Jeremiah Roberts, Terry Thorpe*

### Revere

Gary Grabb and Sue Grabb, property monitors, cleared trails and removed branches following several windstorms.

### Teta Kain Nature Preserve

Property Monitors Tiffany Gould, Maryanna Fisher, along with Trash Wrangler Mark Alling, cleaned the road from TNC Dragon Flats well past the bridge (Bob Hancock's driveway), as well as the areas around and under the bridge, and the trails at TKNP.



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## Eagles Nest

Steve Mathews and Robin Mathews and new team members Anne Parker and David Yeager continued to monitor, map, bioblitz, and note possible invasive species such as tires.

The photo on the right is an Eastern newt by Anne Parker taken in an area of the Eagles Nest where the team was surveying a possible vernal pool. Everyone thought at first that the round white thing was fungus until they looked closer and realized it was a golf ball. The photo captures many elements of FODR's mission and the importance of property monitoring activities.



Following the scheduled trash pickup on route 603, Mark Alling, Maryanna Fisher, Tiffany Gould, Jeff Wright, Susan Crockett, and Brian Hawthorne went to Eagles Nest and picked up 42 tires from Property Monitor, Steve Mathews. Read the following article for a full account of the Eagles Nest "tire fest."

## Morgan

Property monitors Davis Rhodes, Dan Schlangen, Terry Thorpe, and Jeremiah Roberts removed old electronics with tube technologies that qualified as HAZMAT items.

Future property monitoring events scheduled include continued surveys of the land and watersides of the property and continued dialogue with neighboring landowners.

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## Tire Fest!

*By Jeff Wright, President and Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler*

On all FODR properties we are zeroing in on removing invasive species. But the invasives we have been concentrating on during April and May are tires (and even a dishwasher) dumped at Eagles Nest.



Property Monitor Steve Mathews led the charge in finding the tires, digging them out from decades of dirt and leaf litter, and gathering them to take to a recycling facility.

Above, Steve is standing by more than a dozen tires he gathered from the woods.

On the right is just one load of tires ready to be taken to the Hanover recycling center.





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As Susan Crockett will tell you, carrying mud caked tires out of the woods is a tough job.

In order to dispose of the tires, we have to use the Hanover County Recycling Facility. They recognize what we are doing and are aiding our effort to recycle the tires. Their one condition is that we pressure wash the tires before bringing them to the facility. This is at the request of the vendor for the Hanover facility who cuts up the tires for use in paving materials and other applications. Our muddy tires were dulling the blades of the cutting tools.

Thus, Mark pressure washes *each* tire before we take a load (10 tires) to the Hanover facility.

On the right, Mark Alling is standing in the water behind a dishwasher that had to be dragged on to the bank.

So far, we have taken 123 tires, weighing 1.5 tons to the recycling facility. And the tire fest isn't over. Volunteers estimate that there may be between 40 and 80 more tires.



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## The Eagles Nest Irises

*By Robin Mathews, Hike Master*



*Irises . . .lots of irises Photo by Robin Mathews*

When our monitoring team (Steve and Robin Mathews, Anne Parker, and Dave Yeager) went on our first visit to assess the Eagles Nest property on April 2, 2024, we had no idea what a treat we were in for. We saw lots of cool things that day (including a red-spotted newt on a golf ball!) but the most thrilling to me were the irises. The first clumps we saw were right under our noses in a swamp near the Dragon. Little did we know that later in morning we would find many more on the other side of that swamp.



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The Eagles Nest property is an open area full of widely spaced cypress and hardwoods, grasses and sedges, shrubs, wildflowers, birds galore, and irises . . . lots of irises. We had an initial concern that they might not be native irises. It's my understanding that it is impossible to tell until they bloom. On April 25, three weeks later, we were rewarded with blooming irises, the blue-violet native color we were hoping for, rather than the dreaded nonnative yellow. We cheered, clapped, whooped, and did a happy dance! It was truly a magical experience.



*Iris versicolor (northern blue flag)*  
Photo by Robin Mathews

On subsequent visits, Anne Parker attempted to count the irises. We were curious to ascertain the approximate number since there were so many. She estimates 41 clumps or groupings (some quite extensive) of plants, containing 520 stems with flowers or bulbs. The number of actual blooms is exponentially higher.

A big question was whether they were *Iris virginica* (southern blue flag) or *Iris versicolor* (northern blue flag). We assumed they were virginica but were quickly challenged on iNaturalist by a person with iris identification expertise. After lots of discussion with experienced FODR members and others, we determined that these are *Iris versicolor* (northern blue flag).

We've found many other interesting flora and fauna at Eagles Nest while monitoring the property and there are sure to be more surprises coming, but the



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discovery of the swamp full of irises on that April morning is a precious moment in time that I will never forget.

Other treasures identified at Eagles Nest include devil's urn (fungi), black huckleberry, and many more yet to be discovered.



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## Beavers: Pest or Ally?

*By Anne Atkins*



If you've paddled down the Dragon, you've witnessed FODR guides pulling the beaver gates and heard them describe the beavers as residents of gated communities. These gates, however, offer the beavers no protection from predators, including wolves, coyotes, bears, foxes, and the beaver's most lethal predator, humans.

It's understandable that beavers and landowners might be adversaries. Beaver dams can clog drainage ditches and culverts, flood roads, and felled trees can damage property, all requiring someone to clean up the mess. At the same time, however, beavers are critical to the health of farmland, undeveloped areas, urban, and suburban areas in ways we are just beginning to understand. Without beavers, Dragon Run probably would not exist.



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In short, beavers can reduce flooding and drought. They help retain groundwater and improve the growth of trees and vegetation all of which increases the health and diversity of wildlife including insects, amphibians, birds, reptiles, fish, and mammals whether they live in a populated area or on undeveloped land.

Extensive land development, deforestation, use of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, and monoculture farming have stripped much of our soil and the plants, microbes, insects and animals that once held it in place leaving the ground compacted and



hard. As a result, instead of seeping slowly into the ground and replenishing aquifers, rainwater rolls over the ground sweeping away more soil and nutrients, gouging out gullies, ponding on roads and hard surfaces, and causing flooding and more extensive damage than beavers. Without sufficient water, streams, lakes, and rivers run dry and drought follows. Subsequent heavy rains cause flooding.

Beavers don't create water, but their activities help manage it in a beneficial way by slowing its movement. Rather than coursing downstream, beaver dams capture rainwater creating reservoirs and ecosystems that support fish, amphibians, insects, birds, mammals, and plants. At the same time, sedimentation occurs, and water slowly seeps into the ground, refreshing aquifers and keeping the soil moist and nourished.

Ponds created by beaver dams are one way beavers slow the water flow; but the placement of their dams also slows water flow and captures and holds organic sediment. Think back to the kayak path down Dragon Run. It turns, curves, and snakes through the swamp. The water rarely flows in a straight line. By



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meandering, the water is furthered slowed, allowing more opportunities for it to soak into ground, enriching the soil, and supporting plant and animal life.

As a bonus, beavers help modify the effects of climate change by reducing the amount of nitrogen in the water. Excessive use of fertilizers for farming and extensive use by homeowners has loaded the soil with nitrates that wash into streams, rivers, and ponds. High levels of nitrates lead to algae blooms. Algae cover the water surface depriving fish and other organisms of oxygen. During the process of building dams and creating ponds, beavers increase the interaction of water with soil and plant matter. Bacteria in the soil and organic material turn nitrates into nitrogen gas which escapes back into the air. Studies show that beavers can reduce nitrogen levels between 5% and 45%.

This 60-pound, buck-tooth rodent, long considered a pest, is a powerful ally in preserving pristine environments like the Dragon. The beaver may also be a valuable ally as we cope with the effects of soil depletion, water loss, and climate change.

To learn more about beavers and the role their role in ecology, check out *Eager—The Surprising Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, by Ben Goldfarb, 2018.

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## Beavers: FAQs

By Anne Atkins

Beavers, known scientifically as *Castor canadensis*, are fascinating subaquatic mammals that seamlessly transition between land and water. As the largest rodent in North America, they measure approximately 3 to 4 feet in length and can weigh up to 60 pounds. Their unique physical characteristics and behaviors make them one of nature's most remarkable engineers.

### Physical Characteristics

- **Stocky Bodies:** Beavers have robust, stocky bodies adapted for their semi-aquatic lifestyle. Their front paws possess digits, and their hind feet are webbed to facilitate swimming.
- **Preening Toe:** A special preening toe on each hind foot allows them to groom themselves, which is crucial for maintaining the waterproof and insulating properties of their fur.
- **Flat, Scaly Tails:** Their tails, which can vary in shape and size, from short and broad to long and narrow, are often a family trait. These tails serve multiple functions, including functioning as a rudder while swimming and as a warning signal when slapped against the water.
- **Incisors:** Beavers have prominent long orange incisors that are constantly growing. These teeth are worn down through their gnawing activities, which include cutting down trees and branches.





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## Habitat and Lifespan

- **Natural Habitats:** Beavers are typically found in ponds, lakes, marshes, swamps, rivers, and wetlands across North America.
- **Lifespan:** They have a lifespan in the wild of about 10 to 12 years.



## Behavior and Ecology

- **Environmental Engineers:** Beavers are one of the few mammals, along with humans, capable of significantly altering their environment. They are best known for building dams to create ponds, which provide them with a safe habitat and access to food.
- **Lodges:** In addition to dams, beavers construct dome-shaped lodges in the water. These lodges feature multiple underwater entrances and a dry shelf inside where they sleep and eat. Both dams and lodges are built from tightly woven twigs and sticks and insulated with mud and leaves.
- **Herbivorous Diet:** Beavers are herbivores, primarily consuming leaves, twigs, and wood. Despite common misconceptions, they do not fell trees to eat the wood but rather to access foliage and building materials.
- **Winter Preparations:** During the summer and fall, beavers gather leaves and sticks, storing them inside their lodges to ensure a steady food supply through the winter months.
- **Musk Mounds:** To mark their territory, male beavers build musk mounds where they deposit their scent.

## Social Structure

- **Family Units:** Beavers live in family units and often mate for life. A typical family consists of the parents and their offspring.



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- **Kits:** Young beavers, called kits, are born with their eyes open and fully covered in fur. They remain with the family unit for about two years, during which time yearlings help care for the newest litter of kits.

## Communication and Warning Signals

- **Tail Slapping:** One of the most distinctive behaviors of beavers is their use of tail slapping as a warning signal to other beavers. This loud, sharp sound alerts family members to potential danger.

Beavers' remarkable ability to transform their environment, coupled with their complex social structures and adaptive behaviors, make them a key species in North American ecosystems. Their activities create habitats that benefit a wide range of other wildlife, showcasing the integral role beavers play in maintaining ecological balance.

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## Trash Pickups, Clean Swell, and Virginia's Adopt a Highway Program

*By Jeff Wright, President and Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler*

Collecting trash to keep it out of the Dragon Run is a necessary and constant battle. In the past FODR's trash pickups were performed on the roads leading to three bridges that cross Dragon Run: The Rte. 17 Jimmy Morgan Bridge near Saluda, Rte. 602 Wares Bridge, and Rte. 603 Mascot. The Dragon forms the boundary between four counties, so in essence we were collecting trash in King and Queen, Middlesex, and Gloucester counties.

In 2024 we expanded our Adopt-A-Highway Road cleanup program to 12 bridges. We intend to pick up recyclables and trash from roads on both sides of every bridge over Dragon Run and its major tributaries such as Exol Swamp and Timber Branch Swamp. As a result, now we collect trash in all four of the counties of the Dragon Run watershed: Essex, Gloucester, King and Queen, and Middlesex counties. We intend to continue trash collection quarterly at the original three locations Rt 17, Rt 603, Rt 602 as we have done in the past plus nine new locations.

In April we began to pick up trash and recyclables twice a year on Dragon Run at Bestland Bridge Rt 612, Cheaneys Bridge Rt 607, Jones Bridge Rt 607, and the Rt 612 bridge a mile north of Rt 617.

In May we began picking up trash and recyclables twice per year from roads approaching five bridges on Exol Swamp at Routes 607, 612, 617, 615, and 614, and as Rt 610 approaches to the bridge over Timber Branch Swamp.

All FODR's cleanups are conducted as part of the Commonwealth's Adopt-A-Highway program.

A Citizen Science approach is used for the cleanups. We use a Mobile APP called *Clean Swell* from the Ocean Conservancy to record what we take to a collection site or recycling center. This allows us to keep collection totals by



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location and item types, e.g. food containers, bottles, cans, fishing gear, paper, etc. Unfortunately, we find a lot of trash and recyclable items that are not accepted by the trash and recycling facilities in the four counties. Most of these are recyclable plastic items that we must place into the regular trash.

## Trash Pickup Schedule

Date	Location	Date	Location
July 10	Dragon Run, Bestland Br., Rt 612 Br.  Dragon Run, Cheaneys Br., Rt 607 Br.		
September 19	Dragon Run, Rt 17 Bridge.  Dragon Run, Teta Cain Pk, Rt 603 Br.  Dragon Run, Ware's Br., Rt 602 Br.  Dragon Run, Byrd's Br., Rt 604 Br.	November 14	Dragon Run, Rt 17 Bridges.  Dragon Run, Teta Kain Nature Preserve, Rt 603 Br.  Dragon Run, Ware's Br., Rt 602 Br.  Dragon Run, Byrd's Br., Rt 604 Br.
October 9	Exol Swamp, Rt 607 Br.  Exol Swamp, Rt 612 Br.  Exol Swamp, Rt 617 Br.	December 12	Exol Sw., Rt 615 Br., 0.5 mi N of Rt 610.  Exol Sw., Rt 614 Br., 1 mi above mouth.  Timber Branch Sw., Rt 610 Br @ Rt 614

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## CitSci Update

*By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair*

The Citizen Science Committee has really hit the ground running this year! On March 16, we hosted an event for members that took place at our Big Island property in Middlesex County, only accessible via boat. It was our second visit to the site, and to date we have reported 51 species of birds for the property, as well as adding our iNaturalist project totals to 142 species. We found



*Participants in the March CitSci event at Big Island. From left to right: Anne Parker, Robin Mathews, Chris Jackson, Maria Altonen, Bryna Brennan, and Kevin Howe. Photo by Maeve Coker*

everything from salamanders to mistletoe, and all creatures in between! Big thanks to the 11 volunteers who came out that day!

Near the beginning of April, I visited a private property in Middlesex County that hosts an uncommon habitat and associated plant community. There are beautiful bluffs over the Dragon Run, easily 30 feet or more, and the soil conditions here are anomalous in their pH and composition.



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The plant community is dominated by hickories and several oak species in the canopy. The resulting herbaceous layer also hosts interesting species of plants that typically do not grow together or are simply uncommon in the Middle Peninsula. One of the strangest plant combinations found that day was one of our native cacti, the eastern prickly-pear (*Opuntia humifusa*), and the yellow trout lily (*Erythronium americana*).



*Prickly pear and yellow trout lilies growing together, an unusual combination. Photo by Maeve Coker*

On April 20, the Citizen Science Committee gathered to monitor invasive species at our Powcan property and to record new data because no prior surveying had been done during that time of year. We made many exciting finds that day! We found a white-footed mouse nursing her young, multiple frogs and butterflies, and many plants.

We have entered nearly 500 observations into this property's iNaturalist project, with 226 different species, as well as 55 bird species into our eBird Hotspot. One of our favorite new species this year is the large whorled pogonia, *Isotria verticillata*. It prefers dry upland habitats, specifically those with acidic soils and dominated by oaks and members of the heath family like mountain laurel



*White footed mouse nursing her young. Photo by Chris Jackson*



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and various blueberry species. Our Powcan property has an abundance of habitat to support the pogonia.

Our current tallies for the Dragon watershed include 1,289 species! This is thanks to the efforts of our members who have entered more than 5,500 observations in iNaturalist. We've also bumped our bird totals to 135 species. Our newest bird addition is a King Rail, a secretive marsh bird that was found in the upper Dragon Run in Essex County. This rail has very few records in the Coastal Plain of Virginia, especially away from Virginia Beach and the Eastern Shore, so this was quite an exciting find. We hope to encounter more species of rail at this location in the future, as the specific habitat conditions there are ideal for supporting migrating rails.

Our committee has sporadic events planned this year. Normally events are held the third Saturday of each month, and we have placeholders in the Activities Calendar on DragonRun.org. Look for announcements on our website, DragonRun.org, our Facebook page, and in your email inbox for announcements about upcoming events. We hope to see you on a future adventure!



*Large whorled pogonia, Isotria verticillata. Photo by Maeve Coker*

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## Streamside Attractions

Galls: You May Have Seen Them but Do You Know What They Are?

*By Kevin Howe, Treasurer*

*All photos by Kevin Howe*

As we enter summer and fall along Dragon Run, we encounter odd growths, knots, or swellings on many plants. Some of these growths are called galls. You may have seen them but never knew what they are.

Galls are a swelling or growth on a plant in response to an external stimulus such as a virus, bacteria, fungi, insect, or mite. Galls may be referred to as a pathogen; they are like a tumor, wart, or scar tissue seen in animals.

I am focusing on insect and fungal galls because they are easy to spot. Galls are not a small, obscure feature of nature but are numerous and easy to recognize. In fact, on our summer and fall kayak trips, galls are abundant on many of the wetland and forest plants.

Galls are specific to a plant species and their growth form is specific to the organism that triggers growth of the gall.

Keeping track of the names of the galls and the organisms that cause them can be confusing. Here's how it works:

Name of gall

host plant + organism name + gall

Cedar apple rust gall

Name of organism causing the gall

Host plant + gall + organism name

Cedar apple gall rust



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*A young cedar apple rust gall on an eastern red cedar tree*



*A mature cedar apple rust gall on an eastern red cedar tree. The tentacles are the fruiting body of the fungus and produce spores.*

The cedar apple rust gall grows on apple, crabapple, and eastern red cedar trees (among others) and is caused by a *rust* which is a type of fungus. It first appears in spring as yellow-orange spots on the upper surface of apple leaves and is considered a parasitic pest. The eastern red cedar has needles, not leaves, and this rust develops a red-brown round gall that can be up to two inches in diameter with small circular depressions in the middle.

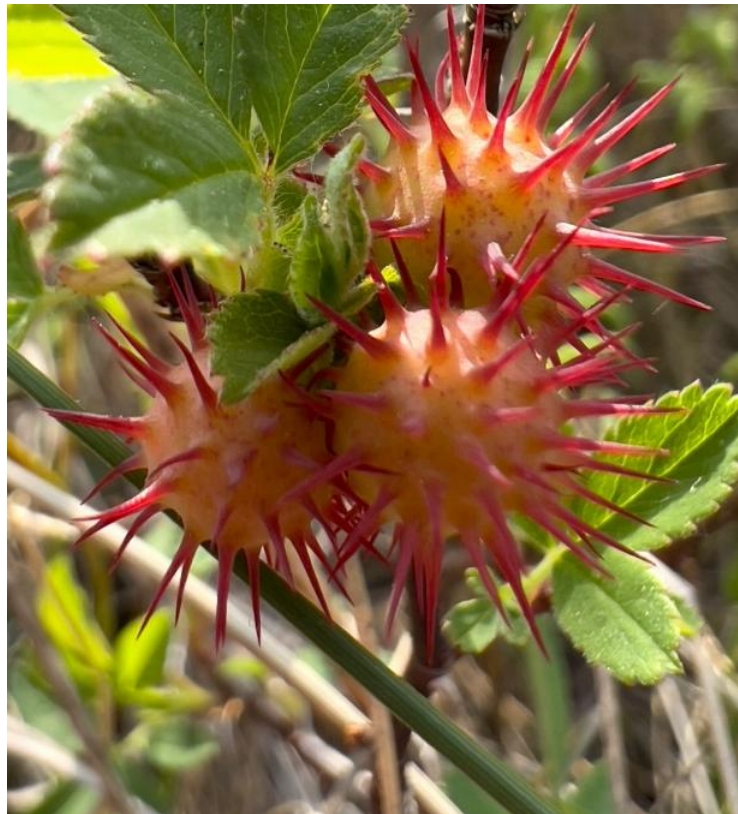
Orange tenacle-like structures,  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch, rise from each depression. The tentacles appear after rains and abundant spring rains lead to an abundance of the galls. The tentacles are spore-producing organs of the fungus (rust) and spores are spread to new hosts (apples, cedars) by the wind. As you can see in the photos, they are peculiar in either form – the red brown, almost young cone looking stage or the more mature orange tentacle stage. We find these on eastern red cedars in Dragon Run upland forest properties.



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In Dragon Run we see a few galls that really stand out. Along the shore and on hummocks (small islands or downed trees in the water), we find lots of swamp rose, a small and lovely native rose in bloom right now. A small female wasp lays her eggs in—yes *in* and not on—a rose branch. As the eggs develop into larvae, the rose grows a spiny gall which protects the eggs while the larvae develop into adults (usually over the winter). The wasp is called the spiny rose gall wasp, and the gall is called the spiny rose wasp gall. The spines help prevent the gall and larvae from being eaten. The growth of the gall tissue provides food for the larvae after hatching. These gall wasps are tiny – less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch and a single gall holds a few dozen eggs.



*A spiny rose wasp gall*

Two other galls we find along the Dragon are both found on bald cypress trees and are caused by midges (1/8-inch-long flies). Midges are abundant in the wetlands of Dragon Run, but these are not human-biting flies. Quite the opposite, and extremely valuable within the Dragon Run food chain. Midges are eaten by everything larger—fish, frogs, birds, dragonflies, damselflies, and many more. The two galls are the cypress twig midge gall and the cypress flower midge gall.

The cypress twig midge gall results from the midge laying about 15 eggs in the midribs of young cypress needles (leaves). As the eggs hatch into larvae, the gall develops and is a white spongy mass described as looking like a pineapple and about an inch long. Larvae may hatch into adults while on the tree or after the gall



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*Young cypress twig midge gall*



*Mature cypress twig midge gall*

turns brown and falls to the ground. If the gall falls to the ground, the larvae overwinter in the gall and emerge the following spring. It appears this midge can produce two generations per year. And, as you might surmise, this insect is called the cypress twig gall midge.

A different species of midge found in Dragon Run is abundant in our bald cypress trees and appears in late summer and fall. It is the cypress flower gall midge. This midge is a different species but has a life history similar to the cypress twig gall midge.

Females lay their eggs in the young cypress needles. The midge larvae cause the needle to develop a gall which looks like a tiny bright white flower (1/8 inch long) similar to a miniature narcissus. These flower-like galls become pinkish then brown. Each flower-like gall contains a single larva. It is thought that the



*Cypress flower midge gall*



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gall falls from the tree and that the larva overwinter in the gall and develop into the adult the following spring.

Galls are fascinating for any nature lover, and many are well studied because their life history is tied to agricultural crops. But in Dragon Run, they are a vital part of the bald cypress tupelo swamp and a rich source of food for many animals up the food chain. FODR's major focus and goal is to protect this unique and largely undeveloped ecosystem including the tiniest organisms.

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## **Join the Action; Become a FODR Volunteer**

*By Carol Kauffman, Vice President*

To our delight, 2023 brought us new volunteers who have given their time to preserve and protect Dragon Run. Our 74 volunteers contributed hours maintaining trails, guiding paddles, leading hikes, picking up roadside trash, monitoring and building bird boxes, participating in bird and butterfly counts, and identifying species for citizen science.

There are many other ways volunteers can help. We especially need volunteers to help with logistics on paddle days, as property monitors, and to handle merchandise sales. Want even more responsibility? We could use a coordinator for our merchandise, an assistant to handle mailings (email), and a grant application writer.

It's easy to volunteer! Contact Carol Kauffman at [vicepresidentdragonrun@gmail.com](mailto:vicepresidentdragonrun@gmail.com).

## **You're Invited . . .**

FODR members are invited to submit articles and photographs pertaining to Dragon Run. Share your knowledge about and your experiences on the Dragon. Written submissions should be three or four paragraphs. Images should be in JPG format. We look forward to having you as part of our communications team. Send your articles and photos to [CommunicationsDragonRun.org](mailto:CommunicationsDragonRun.org).

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## Activities Calendar

Check the FODR website for more information—[DragonRun.org](http://DragonRun.org)

### June 2024

- 1 Newsletter Publication
- 8 (Saturday) Summer Paddle Registration – 9:00 am
- 9 (Sunday) Stewardship Volunteer Event
- 17 (Monday) Board of Directors Meeting
- 19 (Wednesday) Juneteenth
- 20 (Thursday) - Trash Pickup
- 22 (Saturday) Citizen Science Event

### July 2024

- 10 (Wednesday) - Trash Pickup
- 12 & 13 (Fri and Sat) Paddle Crew Training
- 15-28 Summer Paddle Season Days
- 15 (Monday) Board of Directors Meeting
- 29-31 Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship (DREAM)

### August 2024

- 1 - 2 (Thurs & Fri) DREAM
- 11 (Sunday) General Membership and Founders Celebration Meeting
- 14 (Wednesday) - Trash Pickup
- 19 (Monday) Board of Directors Meeting
- 20 (Tuesday) Dragon Run Butterfly Count

### September 2024

- 1 Newsletter Publication
- 10 (Tuesday) Stewardship Volunteer Event
- 14 (Saturday) Fall Paddle Registration – 9:00 AM
- 16 (Monday) Board of Directors Meeting
- 19 (Thursday) Trash Pickup
- 21 (Saturday) Citizen Science Event
- 24 (Tuesday) Hike Preparations
- 29 (Sunday) Member Hike

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## Board of Directors for 2024

### Executive Committee - One Year Terms

Jeff Wright, President  
Carol Kauffman, Vice President  
Kevin Howe, Treasurer  
Adrienne Frank, Secretary

### Directors

Anne Atkins  
Andy Brown  
Marsha Carlton  
Maeve Coker  
Anne Ducey-Ortiz  
Jim Ewan  
Gary Grabb  
Andy Lacatell  
Jack Kauffman  
Steve Mathews  
Dave Milby  
Andrea Mitman  
Harvey Morgan  
Davis Rhodes

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## Standing Committees, Working Groups, and Appointees

### Appointees

#### **Paddle Masters**

Carol Kauffman  
Jim Ewan

#### **Safety Officer**

Jack Kauffman

#### **Membership**

Carol Kauffman

#### **Logistics**

Davis Rhodes

#### **Trash Wrangler**

Mark Alling

#### **Communications**

Anne Atkins

#### **Merchandise**

Jack Kauffman

#### **Hike Masters**

Robin Mathews  
Steve Mathews

#### **Property Manager**

David Milby

### Committees

#### **Outreach**

Anne Ducey-Ortiz

#### **Youth Outreach**

Molly Broderson

#### **Stewardship Management**

Jeff Wright

#### **Citizen Science**

Maeve Coker

#### **Communications**

Anne Atkins

#### **Hunting**

Andy Brown

#### **Dragon Keeper**

Art Gilbert  
Andrea Mitman

#### **Investment**

Art Gilbert

#### **Public Access Property Committee (TKNP)**

Jeff Wright

### Working Groups

#### **Health of the Dragon**

Occasional meetings of leaders focused on projects such as water testing, trash collection, invasive species mapping, and Dragon Keeper. This working group is our effort to track the health of the 40 miles of Dragon Run.

#### **Dragon Community Science**

Occasional meetings of leaders of various citizen science, community science, bird box trails, support to agency and university projects, vernal pools, and species counts to advance projects and share ideas and information.





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## **Donations**

Marsha Carlton

## **Webmaster**

Carol Kauffman

## **Administration**

Jack Kauffman

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