

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship

The Friends of Dragon Run Youth Outreach Committee held its third Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship (DREAM) program on July 30th. This experience immerses teachers in hands-on fieldwork, describes the importance of the Dragon Run ecosystem and coaches them to develop a Meaningful Watershed Education Experience with their students. Grant-sourced funds enable FODR to compensate the teachers for their time and give them materials to use at their schools. The DREAM team of retired teaching professionals (Terry Skinner, Molly Broderson, Bambi Thompson, Dave Norman, and Susan Walton) were excited to engage with this year's high-quality applicants! Participating in this year's training were:

Renee Hypes: Renee teaches agriculture, advises the Future Farmers of America and Envirothon teams, and will teach a dual enrollment Environmental Science class this fall at Gloucester High School. Renee was interested in attending DREAM to learn more about the local ecosystem, so she can help her students gain relevant experiences and more completely connect to their environment.

Kate Anderson: Kate is an Earth Science and Environmental Systems teacher at George C. Marshall High School in Fairfax County. Kate is interested in water quality, Chesapeake Bay health, and its relation to urban environments. She wanted to attend DREAM to gain hands-on

experience to share with her students and possibly engage them in environmental action.

This year's program included a two-hour paddle of the Dragon and reflection on their first experience of the pristine swamp. They were encouraged to take in the diversity of plants, insects, birds, and other wildlife that call the Dragon their home. Back on land, they learned how to perform water quality assessment and use macroinvertebrate sampling as a measure of water purity. Wildlife survey techniques were demonstrated, as well as the importance of robust data collection. Animal skulls and nests were used as a way to get students to think about an animal niche. Participants discussed the connection and appreciation that comes with being able to identify plants and wildlife in one's environment. Jeff Wright, FODR's Past President, described the results of citizen science projects in the watershed and answered questions about conservation easements. He emphasized the importance and challenges of managing the wise use of Dragon Run, balancing preservation with accessibility and educational opportunities. The program ended with a strategy session allowing participants to learn from the experiences of other teachers (what works and what doesn't).

Aves Gill, FODR's Summer intern, helped the DREAM Team with logistics and implementation. She learned from the experienced teachers attending DREAM as well as the instruction provided.

Through a variety of activities, the DREAM program hopes to show teachers the importance of place-based experiences in conservation and environmental studies. It could be the sunlight shimmering on the water, or the sprawl of dodder, or the distant call of a pileated woodpecker that inspires curiosity and the desire to learn more. Dragon Run appreciates the teachers who signed up for the program with the desire to use their

educational reach to promote greater engagement with environmental studies.

The DREAM Team also offers graduates of the program mentorship both inside and outside the classroom and field trips for their students.

If you are a teacher or know a teacher who would enjoy and profit from DREAM, it is not too early to apply for our 2027 class. Contact Terry Skinner, terryandsteve@gmail.com, for more information and an application.

Caption: 2026 Graduates of Friends of Dragon Run DREAM Program: (L-R) Kate Anderson and Renee Hypes. Photo by Molly Broderson