9th Annual Patuxent River Sojourn Promises Big Fun!

The Patuxent Sojourn is a guided five day trip down the Patuxent that involves paddling, hiking, restoration work and nighttime festivities on this premier tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. This year’s Sojourn on the Patuxent will start on June 18th at Patuxent 4-H near Bowie and will cover nearly 20 miles of waterway by the time it’s over on the 22nd at “Perry Tract” in southern Prince George’s County. The second night of the Sojourn will feature a waterside blues and folk concert that will be open to the general public. The concert will be held at historic Mt. Calvert mansion, located at the confluence of Western Branch and the main stem of the Patuxent, which offers a stunning vista of the river and the Anne Arundel and Prince George’s regions of Patuxent River Park and Jug Bay. See box for other Sojourn Highlights. Patuxent Riverkeeper is hosting this year’s Sojourn. Organizational partners include Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, Patuxent 4-H, Sierra Club of AA County, and Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary. The number of participants is strictly limited. You can join us for as short or long a time as you like. For registration or other information, visit www.paxriverkeeper.org or call Patuxent Riverkeeper at 301-249-8200 ext 2.

Overview of this year’s Sojourn

Day 1  Sojourn Overview, Welcome, and Introductions

Day 2  Patuxent talk by Nick Carter
Paddle Queen Anne 4-H Canoe Launch to Mt. Calvert Blues and Jazz Concert followed by Contra Dancing

Day 3  Restoration Projects around Jug Bay
Creek Paddles around Mt. Calvert
Campfire Circle with Accoustic Music

Day 4  Archaeology Talk at Mt. Calvert
Tour of the Rural Life Museum
Paddle to Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary
Owl Prowl with Melissa Boyle
Night Paddle on Mattaponi Creek

Day 5  Paddle to Perry Tract
Lunch at Spice Creek
Spirit of the Sojourn Awards Ceremony
Historic River Concert
June 19th, 6:30 - 10:00pm

Patuxent Riverkeeper has joined with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission to sponsor a live concert by one of the area’s best jazz, folk and blues groups on the lawn of Mount Calvert (Prince George’s County side) overlooking Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary. This is the first time a concert has been held at this centerpiece of Maryland history. The concert features a performance by local folk, jazz and blues artists Frank Schwartz, Theresa Whitaker and Mac Walters. Theresa is a musician and storyteller, originally from Cynthiana, Kentucky. Rhythm and a mercurial voice are trademarks of Theresa’s lively and joyous performances. Frank, one of the founding members of O’Malley’s March, is a gifted and versatile musician and songwriter from Baltimore who plays many styles of music. Mac, also from Baltimore, is an exciting, dynamic master of the acoustic guitar.

The concert will be followed by contra-dancing under the stars. Bring family and friends for a summer evening riverside concert. Hot dogs, burgers, chicken, and cold drinks will be available for purchase. Contact the Patuxent Riverkeeper for more information and for advance ticket sales at www.paxriverkeeper.org. Fee: $20; Mount Calvert Historical and Archaeological Park; 16801 Mount Calvert Rd., Upper Marlboro.

A Celebration of Water and Music
River Concert on the Patuxent
Artist Spotlight

The first thing you might notice about Theresa Whitaker and Frank Schwartz is how accessible and unassuming they are as performing artists. They are talented and veteran musical artists—not musical celebrities but regular folks who happen to have a gift for music, rhythm, song and story telling. Their eclectic collection of musical instruments reflects a history of music that tells stories about the earth and about the lives of regular people. The duo, who sometimes perform as a trio with guitarist Mac Walters, play banjos, various types of guitars, African drums, and turtle shells. Even household items sometimes become the tools for making compelling sounds that are simultaneously new and yet strike a chord of familiarity in most of us.

Frank was born and raised in Baltimore where he was a founding member of the Irish music-oriented band called O’Malley’s March, which featured Martin O’Malley, now the Governor of our State. Frank and Theresa Whittaker from Kentucky, whose own musical past pulls from very different but likewise very American musical roots, met and married. They have maintained a creative partnership with another well-known local artist, Tom Wisner. All of them, along with Mac Walters, have a special fondness for performing music that celebrates Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay.

Theresa: “Working with Tom I learned about writing songs that celebrate the various animals and wildlife sounds to be found on the Bay. I came to Maryland in order to write songs and I lived in Solomons for a long while; it was there where my first impression of the Bay was formed. I explored the Patuxent and the side creeks, learning about all these incredibly precious and deeply personal places that make the Patuxent such as fantastic resource.”

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Advocacy

Maryland Waterkeepers Settle Maryland Department of the Environment Lawsuit

Twelve Maryland Waterkeeper organizations and the Waterkeeper Alliance, represented by the University of Maryland Environmental Law Clinic, have reached an agreement with the Maryland Department of the Environment ("MDE") resolving the Waterkeepers’ legal challenge to MDE’s general stormwater permit for construction sites. The settlement requires MDE to update the state’s erosion and sediment control standards no later than May 2010 to toughen measures that must be taken on construction sites to prevent polluted runoff from reaching our waterways. The current standards, more than 15 years old, are outdated and provide inadequate protection for the Bay and its tributaries. MDE has committed to incorporating provisions that emphasize up-to-date measures to prevent erosion and sediment-laden runoff from the exposed soils of construction sites. MDE has also committed to incorporating into its General Permit any specific effluent limits issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), applicable to construction stormwater. The agreement requires MDE to set procedures that ensure expanded opportunities for the public to review and comment upon stormwater planning documents for construction sites. Finally, the agreement provides for improved protection of waterbodies already over-burdened by sediment by requiring large construction sites in these specific watersheds to apply for individual permits.

Riverkeeper Helps Major Nutrient Source Clean Up Its Act

Patuxent Riverkeeper and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) teamed up to produce major gains for the Patuxent. For well over a decade the largest single source of industrial nutrient pollution on the Little Patuxent has been the MD, DC, Virginia Dairy Producer’s Co-op. This facility, located in Howard County, had a history of effluent and other violations identified through a “sweep” of compliance records maintained by the Maryland Department of the Environment. The plant operators blamed weather (freezing temperature) and problems at the plant. Patuxent Riverkeeper launched a campaign of vigorous advocacy, supported by the legal staff at NRDC, which included dialogue with the violator, meetings with permitting officials and Patuxent Riverkeeper issuing a request for a public hearing. In response, in December the dairy plant agreed to a deal with Howard County authorities to discharge into the County’s wastewater treatment facility instead of into the river. Patuxent Riverkeeper commends the State regulatory agency, the Dairy Producers and the Natural Resources Defense Counsel for their assistance in creating a positive outcome for the river and for the environment.
Environmental Justice

Riverkeeper Fred Tutman has participated in two public events so far this year aimed at drawing attention to the plight and the concerns of people who for reasons of race, class, and/or lack of empowerment in our society suffer daily from environmental pollution. Fred moderated a panel discussion on Earth Day at the University of Maryland Clarisse Smith Center. The distinguished panel featured State's Attorney for Prince Georges County Glen Ivey, plus local activists and others who work to break the cycle of disparities and injustice that so often are the result of bad land use decisions, inadequate investment, urbanization, toxic dumps, noncompliant industry, and other features of society that transfer wealth by shifting clean air, water and other assets from one group to others. Fred also hosted a workshop in early June at the Annual River Rally conference in Baltimore, where water quality advocates talked openly about the taboo subject of race and the environment and discussed ways to ensure greater inclusiveness for those most affected by environmental injustice.

Big Box Store in a Wetlands?

Patuxent Riverkeeper has joined Anne Arundel citizens in a contested case hearing to oppose and overhaul a state issued wetlands permit. The permit would authorize the construction of a big-box store in Crofton near the intersection of Route 3 and the Patuxent River. Citizen opposition to this development has raged for over two years. Concerns include traffic on the State Highway, proximity to adjacent preserved parkland, and the impact of a big-box store on the surrounding vendors and local economy. Even more significant, however, are the environmental implications of a 20 acre construction project planned for fragile wetlands and the impact on water quality in the river that runs next to and through the site. Co-plaintiffs in the proceedings are numerous citizens and Patuxent Riverkeeper members potentially affected by the planned project. Our policy is to limit public comment on a matter currently litigation. Periodic updates will be posted online, in advisories and in our regular newsletter.

Dispatches from Waterkeeper Chesapeake:
Chester Riverkeeper

TOM LEIGH, CHESTER RIVERKEEPER: The big highlight we have to report is the passing of HB 1105 / SB 721. This legislation makes illegal the construction of private Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP) on lands that do not pass a perc test. This is a direct outcome of our lobbying efforts in Annapolis and was born from a situation we are still fighting in Kent County where one of these WWTP’s is permitted by MDE but unwanted by the County. Both Kent & Queen Anne Counties have the exact same language in their Comp Plans and they thought they were covered, but MDE was “forced” to issue a permit as no law existed to say they couldn’t.
Editorials

Are We Creating Watershed Nasty Zones?

The Patuxent is host to several locations that have deeply entrenched and possibly even permanently contaminated locations. These invariably are locations where manufacturing and other activities have occurred for extended periods and have so polluted the land and the surrounding environment that it is unlikely we will see restoration and remediation in our lifetimes. Some of the obvious ones are to be found at and around military installations such as Fort Meade in Laurel, where unexploded ordnance remains on the lands and in the river bottom, The Patuxent Naval Air Station in Leonardtown where rocket fuel dumps and other leftovers from military operations have been poisoning the land and environment for years, and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center where remnants of chemical experiments have created a toxic environment which has defied decades of efforts to clean up, due to budgetary and other constraints. Former industrial activity in Savage, in Howard County has left a legacy of contaminants that affect humans through a variety of means. Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties have surface mining operations, which spew gravel, mud and sediment into the waterway. Ground water used by residents near Waugh Chapel in Anne Arundel County has been polluted by fly ash (a by product of coal burning).

At a recent community meeting in Odenton citizens vented their rage and frustration to Army officials, who announced that carbon tetrachloride from former dry cleaning operations has been detected in the deep water acquirers and forecast that it may take a year or more before environmental studies are complete. All this raises a question. When your home is inhospitable to life and they are passing out bottled water because ground water is unsafe to drink, where will you go and what can you do? Who cannot feel outrage and compassion on behalf of citizens who have discovered their home values, their communities and maybe even their mortality may be permanently bushwhacked by interests that did not think about the likely outcome of activities that poison the air, water and land? The inequity and tragedy is almost beyond comprehension.

So what are we collectively going to do about it? We can't all move to toxic free neighborhoods. The challenge ahead of us is one of priorities and values. Exactly how much fly ash do you think is acceptable in your drinking water? How much mercury and PCBs do you think you should have in your body tissue? Any socially and fiscally responsible answer reflects a zero tolerance for chemicals in our environment that are fundamentally poisonous to life itself. The toxics bill in the MD General Assembly this year failed. But it will take more than a gavel to erase the legacy of death dealing substances that continue to grow in the environment, are slow to be cleaned up and that are waiting to be disclosed to any of us.

Three Top Ways Politicians Can Spur the Improvement of the River?
(excerpt from an interview of Fred Tutman, Patuxent Riverkeeper, conducted by Lindsay Hollister)

I don’t accept necessarily that the politicians alone are the cause for the root problems. We do have some ethics problems in some quarters and I think the burden should be very high nowadays on elected officials to conduct themselves in a transparent manner. I think we as voters and major stakeholders need to hold our elected officials to really stringent stands of ethical conduct and to expect them to deliver far sighted environmental thinking. While it is hard to justify electing people on a single platform such as the environment, it’s my view that those who are progressive and forward looking on the environment will likely be good problem solvers, and consensus builders. That’s what we need to look for: people willing to answer the call to public service who are not just saying the things we like them to say, but instead are capable of governing and who are electable. I believe President Obama, with his background in community organizing, exemplifies where our next crop of great leaders should come from. Not privilege and party patronage and special interests or soft money but by, for and of the people. We need to work really hard to build the present and next generation of leaders and hold them to the highest standards of statesmanship. We need problem solvers, not nest builders.
Restoration

Annual Patuxent River Cleanup Results

On April 4, 2009, just over 400 volunteers joined forces at 22 sites throughout the Patuxent River Watershed. The volunteers removed 22,110 pounds of trash (just over 11 tons). In addition to the trash, 12,145 recyclables were removed. In addition to the standard tires, bottles, bicycles, fishing line and food wrappers, some of the more interesting items removed this year included a tractor seat, typewriter, car parts of every type, refrigerator door, and a toy penguin. At one site, Tucker Lane, the students from Sandy Spring Friends School removed 98 tires and 100 8ft treated lumber boards. Patuxent Riverkeeper staff would like to thank the site leaders who kept each site running smoothly before, during and after the cleanup, as well as the volunteers who came out on a gorgeous spring day to lend the river a helping hand. Next year’s cleanup will be on Saturday April 10, 2010. Start thinking about new cleanup sites now.

Sands Road Cleanup: A Group Effort

Patuxent Riverkeeper teamed up with Capital Off Road Enthusiasts (core4x4.org), Chesapeake Paddlers Association (cpakayakers.com), Greater Baltimore Canoe Club (baltimorecanoeclub.org), Anne Arundel County Recreation and Parks, Maryland Conservation Corps and Patuxent Greenways LLC to clean up a stretch of the Patuxent River shoreline in Harwood. The site had been used a dumping ground for decades and was filled with stoves, refrigerators, water heaters, hunks of unidentifiable metal, and cars from the 1950s. In a nearby ravine two dozen acetylene tanks had also been dumped. The group was able to remove the vast majority of the appliances, acetylene tanks and assorted metal, filling a full size roll-off dumpster provided by the county. Also, most of one of the cars, that had to be cut using a saw similar to that used by the Fire Department, was removed. The Capital Off Road Enthusiasts came equipped with their four wheel drive vehicles to haul the trash back to the road where the dumpster had been left. They also were able to use the winches attached to two of the vehicles to haul the trash up the steep hills, of which the trash was at the bottom (isn’t that how it always happens). The group hopes to return to the site in the future to haul out the rest of the cars and trash still left at the site. The before and after photos are truly amazing, courtesy of CORE.

Patuxent River Earns a “D-” for the Second Year in a Row

The overall water quality health of the Patuxent River has shown no meaningful improvement some 30 years after the State of Maryland embarked on efforts to clean up the river. This is confirmed by a report card released in March by the Patuxent Riverkeeper and the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, which gives the Patuxent River estuary a score of D- for 2008. Water quality and biological data collected by state and federal agencies was analyzed to provide the second geographical look at the estuary’s health. Key findings were: The middle estuary scored the highest (46%), largely due to the increased aquatic grass cover and dissolved oxygen levels that more frequently met target levels. While aquatic grass cover in the upper estuary had relatively high scores in the previous report card, this year saw a small increase, but not large enough to raise the overall score or compensate for the decrease in water clarity and phytoplankton community health. Water clarity was consistently poor throughout the estuary, reaching target levels at a frequency of zero to four percent. The lower estuary scored the lowest (19%), despite an increase in the overall health score from 2007, with all indicators scoring poorly relative to target levels.

For copies of the report card, please visit: www.eco-check.org/communication/ or www.paxriverkeeper.org. More information about the report card can be obtained from Lauren Webster, Restoration Coordinator, 301-249-8200x6. The Riverkeeper website is at: www.paxriverkeeper.org
Artist Spotlight
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Frank: “I’ve never been one who likes to be pigeon holed. I think more and more music has opened up with all kinds of styles. I think love of nature is powerful oil. Jazz, folk, blues, percussion. Along with Mac’s guitar stylings we offer a real breadth of sounds and like to perform music that created images in people’s minds and we love to tell stories that way.”
Theresa has also been involved in a project that involved recording the oral histories of the elderly in order to preserve their stories and wisdom. She and Frank also became involved with a musical group called “Earth and Sky Consort” which featured bagpipes and trumpet, and which host a benefit each year for Clean Water Action. And they have worked on various projects that featured dancers, musicians and storytellers who celebrate the Bay area.
Frank: “We began to feel lots of concerns about water and the shortage of it, plus the quality of it. In Kentucky where Theresa is from there are a lot of people getting cancer and people used to say this had something to do with the river. There are lots of chemical companies upriver and there are lots of industries that have benefited from the river. Most of us take water for granted or know almost nothing about the state of it. Our music helps people reconnect with the water in their world.”
Theresa: “Baltimore and the Bay area was and is a major port community and as a water based community it brings all kinds of people into the city and of course they all bring their music with them. One of the things that always gets us excited is the realization that there are “rivers” of people of all kinds flowing through our area and the folk traditions are so rich that it too is like a river of music that needs to be captured and shared.”

Frank: “We like to find ways to transfer people to the images in our music, but without getting didactic. Sometimes it can be hard to sing about the environment without getting didactic. The more you go into the mystery of this planet the more you find truly is amazing things, including the music, poetry and the souls of people that connected you to the planet. Water is also a great mystery. In some places it has phosphorescence, it glows in the dark and it is in all ways alive with a life force.”
Theresa: “The main thing is we think of ourselves as storytellers first and foremost. What we are singing and performing is not just entertainment for its own sake, it’s about telling stories about people’s lives and how those lives are enriched by being in nature. Our shows often incorporate storytelling along with the music, sometimes people sing along. It’s about community.”
Events/ Get Involved

Wine on the Patuxent

Ever had some Patuxent wine? Maybe it’s time you did! A number of local growers and wineries have collaborated to establish a wine tour of Southern Maryland. Visitors interested in the Patuxent Wine Trail can visit www.patuxentwinetrail.com or pick up a wine trail brochure at area visitors centers, attractions and other outlets.

Looking for a Few Good Volunteers!

Patuxent Riverkeeper has need of short term volunteers to help us with the enormous job of sorting, categorizing and filing complaints files, correspondence and other materials related to our mission on the Patuxent. We offer a pleasant office environment and our undying respect and appreciation. We are the primary non-governmental organization working to protect the Patuxent and working in our office will give you the opportunity to learn about the work being done to protect the river in all its seven counties. Interested? Contact: Nancy@paxriverkeeper.org

PATUXENT RIVERKEEPER CALENDAR

NOTE: These dates are subject to change (for various reasons, like bad weather). Please call us at 301.249.8200 for more details and to check availability.

June

14
Bernie Fowler Wade-in

18-22
Patuxent River Sojourn

19
Historic River Concert
Mt. Calvert

July

20-24
Patuxent Teen Paddle
Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary

22
Patuxent Riverkeeper
Speaking at Lake Kittamaqundi in Columbia

25
Patuxent Roughneck
Work Trip

26
Patuxent Riverkeeper
Open House

August

8-9
Little Orleans Sierra Club Tubing Trip

21
Patuxent Riverkeeper
Speaking at Sotterly

22
Patuxent Roughneck
Work Trip

For info on Sojourn and Roughnecks call Lauren, 301.249.8200x6

For info on Trips contact Fred, 301.249.8200x7
First Annual Greenweek

Patuxent Riverkeeper partnered with Davidsonville Area Citizen’s Association (DACA) to organize a first ever Earth Day celebration that encouraged businesses and residents in Davidsonville, Upper Marlboro and Edgewater to stand together to adopt practices, products and a neighborhood that is as green and as sustainable as possible. Participating vendors included over twenty businesses located along the Central Avenue corridor of Anne Arundel and Prince George’s County.

Wanted: Faith Based Paddlers

A group of citizens and churches has been discussing creating a coalition of organizations in the Patuxent Watershed devoted to celebrating the role that nature and the environment play in our lives, and in particular experiencing firsthand the spirit of one of Maryland’s greatest treasures, the Patuxent River. The vision is for places of worship from all seven counties of the Patuxent corridor to send a delegation of young people to kayak or canoe down a section of the river. Each group will convey their hopes, prayers and wishes for the environment to the next group in an adjacent section of the river, who will in turn carry this spiritual momentum and energy until it eventually reaches the Chesapeake Bay in Solomon’s, MD. This spiritual sojourn will involve overnight camping on the banks of the river, and will include opportunities for young and old to learn about the beauty of our river, its marine life, history and folklore, and the many contributions made by the river to the quality of life we enjoy. In addition, the young people will experience first hand the many environmental and manmade challenges facing the river and the vital role that stewardship must play in protecting it for future generations. This effort is being spearheaded by Trinity United Methodist Church in Prince Frederick and Bethany United Methodist Church in Ellicott City. It is not, however, our intention to make this a “Methodist” venture, but an ecumenical interfaith effort. The Patuxent Riverkeeper has agreed to help by providing organizational assistance, boating equipment and technical support. But we want this to be a true collaboration and for that we need the advice, guidance, support and volunteer efforts from as many different groups as possible, whatever their belief system. We are hoping to launch the first such Paddle in September 2009. Interested? Please send inquiries to info@paxriverkeeper.org.
Seeping from a spring at its headwaters near Mount Airy in Howard County, the Patuxent River gathers force as it winds through seven counties. The river flows through two dams, over Savage Falls, through the vast Patuxent Refuge and the untamed lowlands of Jug Bay, into a deep water culture of oysters and crabs along the rolling fields in Southern Maryland, and finally joins the Chesapeake Bay in St. Mary’s and Calvert Counties.

Get to know your river. Join us on a kayak trip!

See our calendar inside. We have lots of different trips planned—on the Patuxent and around the watershed.