



# The Sycamore Islander

MAY 2012 | VOLUME 91 NUMBER 5

## President's Letter

Congratulations to all new waiting list members !! Welcome to Sycamore Island. We "old-timers" enjoyed meeting many of you at the workfest. If you joined John Noble, membership secretary, at the May 6 orientation you can now apply for a wait list pass. While on the wait list, you are encouraged to attend all club events and meetings and volunteer for committees, substitute caretaking and other activities. This is a great way for you and your family to spend time on the Island, weekdays and weekends, and meet other club members.

Thank you Drew Walsh, Captain, and Joe Hage, Caretaker, for organizing a very productive workfest – and to everyone who came, brought food, and played and worked hard.

The club's next monthly meeting is Wednesday, May 9, on Sycamore Island. The meeting begins at 7:30 and includes our second State of the Nation's River program organized by member Paul Hagen. Our speaker is Robin Broder, vice president of the Potomac Riverkeeper.

The club's regular business meeting follows the program. Three proposed changes to the Standing Rules may be voted on. The first clarifies rule 7 on when wait list passes are available. The second, discussed last month, gives a two year deadline to those on the old pre-lottery wait list. Bill Marmon will make both of these motions. Both should be brief and non-controversial. The third issue involves possible proposed changes to the club's alcohol policy. The club has been debating this issue for several months.

The Potomac Downriver Race is May 12. Sycamore Island is the finish line. Call Star Mitchell at 301.530.3252 to volunteer. Come to the Island mid-morning, help out, and cheer the paddlers as they come in.

Islander Frank Daspit teaches a canoeing class on Saturday, May 19, for all members and persons on the wait list. Canoe supervisor John Membrino says just be on the Island by 10:30 a.m.

The Sycamore Island Summer Solstice Dance Party is June 23. Contact Carolyn Gelb, Jane Winer, Cindy Bertaut, Jody Benjamin, or Joe Hage and volunteer to help. See you at the dance.

JIM DREW  
President



May apple

CAROL BEEHLER

## Minutes for the April 11 Meeting

**Attendees:** Marianne Ross, Trisha Hartge, Alan Gelb, David Winer, Jane Winer, Lucky Marmon, Bill Marmon, Karen Possner, John G. Tapko, Phoebe Hamill, Star Mitchell, Jody Benjamin, Bobby Benjamin, Gerry Barton, Whitney Pinger, John Stapko, Drew Walsh, Joe Hage, Ann Marie Cunningham, Sherry Fitzdale, Charlotte Brewer, Larry Heilman, Caroline Gelb. Tryon Wells

**The Membership Lottery:** Prior to the meeting, members assembled to witness the lottery by which applicants were selected for a place on the club waiting list. Applicants were placed in two pools... 40-years-old and older and 39-years-old and under. There were 94 applicants in the 40-and-older group and 28 in the 39-and-under group. Each applicant received a number which was written on a poker chip. The chips of each age group were different colors (white and red) and were drawn from separate bags. The first 32 from the 40-and-older group and all 28 in the younger group will be placed in alternating sequence on the future waiting list. Successful applicants will be notified by Membership Secretary John Noble. Larry Heilman read out the numbers on the chips. The numbers were recorded by Sherry Fitzdale. Bill Marmon presided over the drawing.

**The Meeting:** The meeting was called to order by club vice-president Bill Marmon. President Jim Drew was out of town.

The March minutes were corrected to include Marianne Ross and Gerry Barton as attendees. Ann Marie Cunningham's proposal regarding allowing alcohol on the island was redefined and clarified as a proposal, not a motion.

**Communications:** None

**Treasurer's Report:** Treasurer Alan Gelb has filed the Club's annual financial report with the IRS.

**Captain's Report:** Tryon Wells and Joe met to discuss planning for the work fest on April 22. The clubhouse roofing work has been completed.

**Membership Committee:** Regular membership has dipped from its ceiling of 160 to 148. Some members

were dropped for non-payment of dues; others elected senior status. Still others selected inactive status because of a move out of the area.

David Winer proposed that 10 applicants on the current active waiting list be elected to regular membership: Penelope Mitchell, Jennifer Urguard and Michael Edwards, Kein and Carole Hearle, Thomas Barry, Kaitlin Barry, Gretchen Sinclair and Joseph Stauton, Geoff Holdridge and Bonnie Roberts, Corrine Roosevelt and Michael Colon, Ellen Kennedy and Kent Marcoux, Drew Walsh

There was a lively discussion about how often members on the old waiting should be allowed to defer joining the club. Many of these persons—17 to 20—are the children of members and have been on the waiting list for years.

There was a motion that members of this group would be officially advised that by April 2014, which is the time of the next lottery, they will, if asked, be required to accept membership or be dropped from the waiting list. These persons may defer up to April, 2014. Deferral of membership will not be permitted for persons on the new waiting list. This motion will be voted on at the next meeting.

The sixty members on the new waiting list will be added to the bottom of the old waiting list.

**New Business:** Beer and wine on the Island. Ann Marie Cunningham made a motion that consumption of beer and wine be allowed on the island after 6:00 pm by those of legal drinking age. Island rules currently prohibit alcohol consumption on the Island, and members can be expelled for violating this rule. People voice concern about safety and liability and insurance issues. Other members treasure the "no drinking" culture of the Island. It was noted that it would be very difficult to police drinking and ascertain who was drinking too much. Some members noted that the no drinking policy was routinely violated by members, including by teenage children of members. As President Jim Drew had previously requested that this motion be discussed for several months, no vote was taken. In accordance with the the Standing Rules, notice of when the vote will be taken will be placed in the *Islander*.

Speaker at Next Meeting: Robin Broder, vice president of the Potomac Riverkeeper will be the club's featured speaker for the 2012 State of the Nation's River talk scheduled for Wednesday, May 9 at 7:30 p.m. on

Sycamore Island. Robin will provide her perspectives on the state of the Potomac River and highlight some of the important work being done by Potomac Riverkeeper to improve water quality. More info on Riverkeeper can be found at: <http://www.potomacriverkeeper.org>.

Carl Linden died several weeks ago. Various members spoke of Carl's incredible patience and civility. He was a valuable member of Sycamore Island and will be remembered with great affection. The recording secretary will send a card to Carl's family on behalf of the membership.

**Large Parties:** The party scheduled by Lucky and Bill Marmon for April 14 was canceled and will be rescheduled for June 8.

It was suggested that the *Islander* be sent out earlier so that announcements of events are more time relevant. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,  
LUCKY MARMON  
Co-recording secretary

## Report on Sycamore Island Cleanup, April 14, 2012

The Potomac River Watershed Cleanup, which occurred on April 14, was supported by our own small team of skillful and enthusiastic garbage pickers: Jim Drew, Renee Dunham, Marianne Ross, and guest picker from Germany Juliane Graf. Absence of serious spring flooding this year reduced the trash content of the Island over last year. Over all, we gathered only one large bag's worth of cans, bottles, bits of foam, limp pieces of plastic bags, and other debris. We don't find this dull work at all. It is not often that one gets to inspect Sycamore and its shoreline inch by inch—a grounding experience and good counterpoint to watching sunsets from the dock. Going out by canoe to Rupert's Island and the Maryland shoreline is the best part, however. We are river people after all.

Overall results from the entire Potomac Watershed Cleanup area produced these interesting statistics garnered from the Cleanup Website:

Volunteers: 7,532  
Sites reporting: 271  
Sites registered: 392

Tons: 118.053  
Tires: 1,178  
Recyclable beverage containers: 126,500  
Plastic bags: 25,571  
Cigarette butts: 24,616  
Top brand names reported:  
McDonalds  
Pepsi  
Deer Park  
Budweiser

I don't know how this compares with last year's results. The Trash Free Potomac Initiative, defined in 2006, seeks a trash free watershed by 2013. This seems unreachable to me, but it has fostered collaboration, education, and action towards this goal that did not exist before.

This year's volunteers reported interesting items found: American flag, bicycles, coconut, cocaine, car fender, deer skull, door, dishwasher . . . and on through the alphabet. Come on out next year and see what YOU can find.

## Canoeing Class

The club will offer canoeing instruction this spring thanks to Frank Daspit, who once again has generously volunteered to lead the class. Mark your calendars now—the class will be held at the Island on Saturday, May 19, at 10 a.m. Paddlers with all levels of experience are welcome, and club canoes will be available. Members new to the club are especially encouraged to attend as are waitlisters. Frank will go over basic paddling techniques, how to enter a canoe properly, hazards of canoeing on our stretch of the Potomac, and, time permitting, other topics such as rescue techniques and equipment. This is a great opportunity to learn how to make your river excursions safe and enjoyable. For more information, contact Canoe Supervisor John Membrino at 301.229.1154.

The Environmental Committee will have its next meeting on May 9 at 6 p.m. on the Island, prior to the State of the River presentation and monthly club meeting.



## Notes from the Island

**Monday, April 2, 2012**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 4.2 Water Temperature: 60**

I just found the third goose nest . . . it's right under the tree house!!!

Bluebells are fading but still hanging tough.

Somehow, the steps here at Sycamore have become a popular take-out for paddlers. Because of the long carry, over the bridge, up the trail to the parking lot, there has been relatively little river traffic here over the years. But that is changing. Maybe it's because there is more parking down here, but for whatever the reason, folks like Liquid Adventures and others have decided that the carry isn't too bad after all and now use our steps on a regular basis. Now, early every Saturday and Sunday you can count on the lower parking lot being full and at least one large wave of kayakers to be pouring up our steps and up the hill.

I think its cool and I like talking to the kayakers as they train for the next Cheat River Race or the next CCA Down River Race (May 12, finish line; Sycamore Island). I think its cool, as long as everybody realizes that the ferry has the right of way. The truth is, if there wasn't a Club here, full of paying members, there wouldn't be any steps to the river nor would there be a bridge here over the canal.

Gerry Barton had a good idea to help prevent further erosion next to our steps. We were noticing a lot of foot traffic on the slope next to our steps and we were



Vultures on the roof

JOE HAGE

afraid that the spice bushes that we planted there were going to get trampled. (If you recall, this section of the berm was washed out in 2010.) Gerry suggested putting up some kind of fence in order to direct people toward the steps, so I installed a six-foot section of three-foot high, wood fencing at the landing. It looks pretty good, and I watched over the weekend as all of the kayakers went up the steps and not through our revegetation zone.

**Wednesday, April 4, 2012**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.9 Water Temperature: 60**

I was still in bed this morning when I heard some strange noises outside my window. Then, I thought I heard something on the roof. I quickly got dressed and went outside to see what was up. I was a little startled when I looked up to see 13 black vultures congregated on the roof of the clubhouse. I ran back inside to get the camera. I climbed out onto the roof to get a better picture, and that was when the massive birds all flew over to a nearby sycamore tree. I've never seen that many black vultures on the Island before.

We have some different gulls hanging around now. Every winter we can count on the herring gulls and the ring-billed gulls to be here, but they left about a month ago. Right now there are dozens of Bonaparte's gulls dipping and diving on the open water above the dam.

**Friday, April 6, 2012**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.8 Water Temperature: 60**

The story for the last two days and nights has been the barred owls. Every hour, it seems, the calls of at least one barred owl can be heard hooting nearby. Sometimes there is a strange chorus of several owls and their unfamiliar calls reminded me of the howler monkeys I heard in Costa Rica. Last night at dusk, we even got a good look at the owls as two of them swooped by the clubhouse and perched in the trees close by.

**Friday, April 13, 2012**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.4 Water Temperature: 59**

Be careful out there folks this is the time of year to watch out for snakes! I was walking along the shore near the Captains Float, pulling up any new poison ivy sprouts that I came across, when I nearly stepped on a snake basking in the sun. It didn't try to strike me but it didn't matter, I let out a yell and jumped five feet into the air anyway. This snake happened to be a northern

water snake (non-poisonous) but there have been copperheads (poisonous) on the island before, so keep your eyes peeled and always stay away from snakes. The owls are still out there making noise, its been a topic along the towpath this week. Seems everyone is asking about the strange sounds in the woods. Also, the phoebes are a regular sight, and we also have bluebirds and gold finches. Still waiting for the northern parulas and orioles to get here.

I just received this "thank you" note from Ginny Schubert Boawn, the daughter of past Island president, John Schubert. "I just want to thank you on behalf of myself and our family and friends. We had such a fantastic time at the Island on Sunday, April 1. The Island is as unique and beautiful as we remembered it from all those years that we were members there. It is so quiet and peaceful and so full of fond memories for all of us. Thank you so much for letting us come there again to celebrate our parents lives."

Club member John Stapko is a total stud and a huge asset to this club. Yesterday, he put on his lumberjack hat and carried his chain saw down here to cut down a problem tree. I knew he was the man for the job and his expertise was evident when this 30-foot tree fell in the only safe place it could have fallen. The tree had to come down, it was growing right in between the clubhouse, the tool shed and the outdoor shower so we decided to cut it down before it got any bigger. He had me help him rig up two come-alongs high up in the tree. Then, as he cut the trunk, I just kept tightening the come-alongs. When the ropes all went slack, I knew it was time to run. I turned in time to see the tree fall right between the shed and the shower with very little room to spare. Gerry Barton was there and helped us move all the brush and newly cut logs. Good job John, and thanks again!

BTW, I recorded a Rock&Roll CD with my brother. It's called "STILL HUNGRY" by HAGE BROS. If you want to listen to a sample of it you can go to [drumsandbones.com](http://drumsandbones.com). I also have copies of it here.

### Saturday, April 21, 2012

#### Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 66

The trees are all leafed-out and the forest canopy has returned. The Island is now blanketed with shade. The bluebells and the other spring flowers have faded and it feels like spring is giving way to summer. Heck, the river is even warm enough to swim in.



JOE HAGE

Canada goose family

Well, since I plan to paddle every mile of this river eventually, I took my canoe up to Brunswick, Maryland and knocked off a few miles towards that goal. It took two and a half days to do the 25 miles down to Edwards Ferry. The weather was great and the water was just high enough to keep us from scaping. I'd never floated along this part of the river before and it was fun passing Point of Rocks, Catoctin Mountain, Monocacy Aqueduct (with Sugarloaf Mountain in the background), Dickerson power plant, Whites Ferry, and Balls Bluff Battlefield. It wasn't as nice or as remote as paddling the Paw Paw bends but we found some good camping sites and there was an abundance of wildlife. My old map showed ferries operating on two islands along the way, one to Heaters Island and one to Harrison Island. The one at Heaters was obviously long out of use, but it looked like there was still some type of ferry still in use on Harrison Island.

We did not see a whole lot of other paddlers on the river, mostly fishermen in their bass boats, but on Sunday night we were passed by a fellow camper, in a kayak. We waved as he passed our campsite up near Point of Rocks and I never gave the guy another thought. I never gave him another thought, until two days later that is, when I see the same kayak paddling past the ferry landing of Sycamore Island! Luckily I was out there to catch the guy and he told me that he had put in at Harpers Ferry on Sunday morning and planned to get to National Airport by Tuesday evening! That's like 70 miles in three days, including portages!



I got a chance to help the USGS on Tuesday morning. I arrived at the ferry landing to find two guys in USGS t-shirts looking perplexed. They needed to get their water-monitoring instruments out into the middle of the river but were not confident that their small inflatable could handle the windy conditions. They were appreciative when I offered them the use of a canoe and they said that they would be happy to give a presentation to the Club all about their water monitoring data. Maybe we'll get them to present at a meeting next fall.

**Monday, April 23, 2012**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 66**

On Saturday I was waxing poetic about how spring is turning into summer, but now it feels like spring is turning into winter. It was almost 80 on Saturday and right now it's only 45 degrees! It's cloudy, the wind is blowing and yesterday we had two and a half inches of cold rain! Spring is so weird around here; I guess it was a good thing that we postponed the workfest until the 29.

**Tuesday, April 30, 2012**

**Water Level at Little Falls: 3.6 Water Temperature: 66**

Well, it was a record-setting day at the workfest on Sunday. We set the record on number of people in attendance and a record for the amount of cleaning and repairs that got done! The weather was great the food was good and we had a huge turn out from our new wait-listers, many of whom had never set foot on Sycamore Island before! I'm so encouraged! They all



JOE HAGE

Workfest

DON'T MISS

*Sycamore Island*  
*127th Anniversary Dance*

**SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 7-10 P.M.**

THIS WILL BE A COWBOY DANCE  
FEATURING THE HONKY-TONK SOUNDS OF

**COLONEL JOSH AND THE HONKY TONK HEROES**

SO PUT ON YOUR COWBOY HAT  
AND COME DANCE THE TWO-STEP ON  
BEAUTIFUL SYCAMORE ISLAND

**we will have drinks and food but please bring  
something to share**

KARAOKE ★ GAMES FOR THE KIDS

seem like fun people and they are definitely good workers.

It looks like all of the goose eggs have hatched and sometime I get a view of the little fuzz balls as they scurry to keep up with their parents.

The prothonotary warbler has arrived and is busy looking for a proper nesting site. I saw it go into one of our birdhouses but it was already occupied and the prothonotary was chased away by a male bluebird. Lots of drama down here at this time of year!

If you want to be included in our Canal Steward Program, send me an email and I will keep you posted as to when the next volunteer day will be.

Also, don't forget the Summer Solstice Dance on June 23!

JOE HAGE  
Caretaker

## Potomac Riverkeeper to Lead Annual State of the Nation's River Talk on May 9

Robin Broder, vice president of the Potomac Riverkeeper will be the club's featured speaker for the 2012 State of the Nation's River talk scheduled for Wednesday May 9 at 7:30 p.m. on Sycamore Island. Robin will provide her perspectives on the state of the Potomac River and highlight some of the important work being done by Potomac Riverkeeper to improve water quality.

Potomac Riverkeeper works to stop pollution and restore clean water in the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers and their tributaries through community action and enforcement of the Clean Water Act and other environmental laws. The organization's leadership includes Mac Thornton, a club member who until recently served as the non-profit's Board Chair.

Potomac Riverkeeper, Inc. was established in 2000 by principals from several local environmental organizations. The goal was to create a strong advocate for the river and enforce existing federal and state laws governing the Potomac watershed. The organization enjoys the support of over 2,700 members throughout the four states and the District Columbia that comprise the almost 15,000 square-mile Potomac watershed. Please join us for this timely discussion of the progress being made and challenges that lie ahead for the Nation's River. More information on Potomac Riverkeeper can be found at [www.potomacriverkeeper.org](http://www.potomacriverkeeper.org)

## Proposal to Amend Standing Rule 7— Waiting List Passes

The provision in existing Standing Rule 7 on waiting list passes, which makes waiting list passes available only after a person has been on the waiting list for three years, no longer makes sense with our new waiting list procedures where the waiting list is limited and designed to be no longer than 4 years. We propose amending the first paragraph of the Rule as shown below. Second paragraph of the Rule, also printed below, is not changed.

We propose amending the Stand Rule 7 to read as follows:

*Waiting list passes may be issued by the Membership Secretary to any person on the waiting list who has attended a formal club orientation and has paid the requisite waiting list pass fee. Passes may be issued at any time and are good for the calendar year in which they are issued. The cost of the pass is the same, regardless of the month issued.*

*Holders of such passes and members of their immediate families shall be entitled to the use of all facilities of the Island, subject to the Bylaws and Standing Rules, between November and April, inclusive, and from Monday to Friday, inclusive, during the remainder of the year, except for national holidays, and may pay an additional fee for the use of a canoe rack, if available. Waiting list pass holders, who are single may bring a friend while visiting the Island. The Financial Secretary shall collect from each waiting list pass applicant, prior to issuance of the card, a fee equal to one-half the regular annual dues.*

JIM DREW, BILL MARMON and JOHN NOBLE

## Alcohol Amendment to the Standing Rules

For two months the following amendment has been discussed at the monthly meeting: Through December 31, 2012, Section 1.a. of the Standing Rules be amended to read, "Beer or wine may be consumed on the Islands after 6:00 p.m. by persons of legal age, provided that it is not consumed to an extent that the person becomes intoxicated; nor shall any person come to the Islands in an intoxicated state. Any person who violates this rule may be asked to leave club property."

This amendment, to allow the consumption of beer and wine on the Island on a trial basis, will be voted on at the May meeting. All members will have an opportunity to judge by the end of 2012 whether this change would affect the character of the Island if it were made permanent.

During discussion at the last two meetings, concerns expressed were safety, liability, enforcement, and the character of the Island. This amendment limits the time drinking is allowed in order to limit the possibility of intoxicated behavior. The club has always emphasized that members are personally liable for their own safety. Allowing alcohol consumption does not change that personal responsibility. This amendment requires no more enforcement than the current ban on alcohol and might be easier to enforce.

Our members have always demonstrated concern for the environment and each other. I believe we will still act in a responsible way, knowing that our actions affect the quality of our experience on the Island. I hope that we will give ourselves a chance to find out.

ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM

# The Sycamore Islander

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ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

## FIRST CLASS MAIL



*The Sycamore Islander* is the monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Every attempt is made to publish *The Islander* before the second Wednesday of the month in advance of the monthly meeting. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to: Carol Beehler, [cbeehler@comcast.net](mailto:cbeehler@comcast.net). The deadline for inclusion in the June issue is June 1. Masthead photo by Joe Hage

### Large Parties Scheduled

Saturday, May 5, 2 p.m. to dusk,  
Gordon Phillips, 20 people, Boy Scout troop

Saturday, May 19, 2 to 8 p.m.,  
Chris White, 45 people, picnic for operational members  
of the Glen Echo Fire Department

