



The Sycamore Islander

AUGUST 2012 | VOLUME 91 NUMBER 8

President's Letter

Our next club meeting is August 8 at 8:00 p.m. on the Island. There will be a picnic before at 7:00. After some brief business, the rest of the meeting will be happily devoted to the following once-in-a-decade celebration and tribute:

A CELEBRATION OF JOE HAGE'S 10th ANNIVERSARY AS CARETAKER

Come to the Island at 8:00 p.m. on August 8 for this festive event and pay tribute to Joe Hage, Sycamore Island Caretaker from August 2002 through August 2012. We are so fortunate that Joe has been on Sycamore Island for the past decade. Come, celebrate, and tell Joe why we treasure the past ten years and look forward to the next ten. See you there.

Sycamore Island's annual Regatta will be held on Labor Day, September 3. The Regatta is a great way for Sycamore Island families to spend the holiday. For more information see the announcement in this issue.

The July meeting passed the new rule allowing wait list pass holders to bring up to four guests when visiting the Island. Already this has resulted in happy faces and increased weekday usage—including a delightful toddler and young children's group that gathers weekly.

Some advice for wait list pass holders and reminders for all members: Remember that you are responsible for your guest's behavior and safety. Among other things, this means (1) you need to find out if your guests are good swimmers before letting them go in the water, and (2) you are responsible for enforcing the mandatory club rule that requires your guests wear life vests when out in a canoe or kayak (this rule applies as well to all waitlisters). Also, please try and reduce Joe's ferry trips if you can by meeting your guests at the ferry landing and crossing together.

The big storm blew down several very large trees and knocked out power on the Island for a few days. Islanders responded with energy, chain saws, and a great collective effort. You can again walk the paths upriver from the swimming area and we now have many new stacks of firewood for the winters ahead. Thank you to Captain Drew Walsh, Caretaker Joe Hage, and to the many members and waitlisters who volunteered long hours of very hot and heavy work putting the Island back in shape.

JIM DREW
President

Minutes for the July 11 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by President Jim Drew after an enjoyable dining experience including home-made cookies.

Attendees: Jody Benjamin, Jeff Komarow, Jim Drew, Louise Meyer, Fred Pinkney, Peter Dean, Sherry Fizdale, Jane Winer, Phil Ross, Carol Beehler, Olya Duzey, Trip Reid, Ben Robinson, Alan Gelb, Tryon Wells, John Butler, Phoebe Hamill, Kathy Carroll, Drew Walsh, Star Mitchell, Gerald S. Barton, Rich Lodish, Julie Saulnier, Mark Friedrick, John Cunningham, and Ann Marie Cunningham.

Minutes: The minutes were amended to read “applicants on the waiting list” rather than “waiting list members” wherever the phrase appears. The minutes, as amended, were approved.

Treasurer’s Report: The club is solvent.

Swimming Supervisor’s Report: The Swim and Water Safety Workshop, planned for June 30, was postponed due to the storm that occurred the day before it was to be held. However, Larry Heilman and Bob Whelan, a swim and safety expert and Island wait-lister who is serving as interim swim supervisor in Larry’s absence, walked around the Island evaluating the current water safety situation. Jim Drew received an email with detailed suggestions. Olya Duzey summarized the suggestions, which included purchasing a torpedo-like safety tool, installing the safety rings and other equipment in such a way as to eliminate or minimize the amount of untying that must be done to use them, placing a throw ring in the canoe by the swim float, and adding a whistle and safety ring to the captain’s float.

Editor’s Report: Carol Beehler reported that it is her goal to get *The Islander* out before the upcoming meeting. She commented that often the content is redundant, since the minutes report upcoming events that have already occurred by the time it is published. It was



JOE HAGE

Tree work fest and clean up after the powerful June 29 derecho



DREW WALSH

suggested that a publication date of the first of the month be set so that all contributors can word their content accordingly. A limitation to what she can do with *The Islander* is the current format which dictates that the number of pages be in multiples of four due to the way that the paper copies are printed. A discussion ensued as to whether we should continue to print and mail paper copies. Currently, there are about 60 copies printed each month, 40 to members with no email address, and 20 to organizations such as the DC Historical Society for inclusion in the Club's Archives and the Glen Echo Fire Department. Over time the cost of printed copies has been greatly reduced, from more than \$8,000 to \$1,800 per year. All agreed that *The Islander* looks beautiful each month, with a nice balance of text and photos.

Membership Report: The membership numbers are unchanged. Waiting list passes will be mailed next week. As a result of a suggestion last month, an amendment to change the second sentence in the second paragraph of Standing Rule number 7 to read, "Waiting List Pass holders may bring up to four guests while visiting the Island," was moved and seconded. The current rule allows those who purchase the passes to use the Island on Monday through Friday from May to October except for national holidays, and allows full use of the Island during the rest of the year. For safety reasons, the current rule allows single pass holders to bring a friend so as to be able to swim or boat with a buddy. Those opposed to the change were concerned that the increased usage would result in full utilization of the picnic tables and floats, making them unavailable to members that arrived later. An amendment to the motion to change the number from four to two was made, seconded, and then defeated. The motion as written was passed.

Captain's Report: Drew Walsh reported that several large branches and trees fell during the derecho, leaving a great hole in the canopy at the upriver end of the Island. Twelve members and applicants came to a special workfest on Sunday, July 7, to help cut, stack and otherwise eliminate the debris. Another mini-workfest will be scheduled to finish the cleanup.

An overview of the Environment Committee and a report on activities to help stabilize the Island from future floods will be printed in *The Islander*.

Website Supervisor: Tryon Wells reported that a rule that allows applicants who volunteer to support a club-approved activity, can receive a pass that entitles use of the Island for the volunteer and up to nine guests was inadvertently deleted from the Standing Rules. This rule was passed to encourage applicants to become involved with the club by serving as relief caretakers, helping at workfests, and providing other service to the club. Tryon will look into methods of backing up the website so that other losses will not occur.

Old Business: Devin Millett, former captain John Matthews' grandson, is serving as caretaker during Joe's absence.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
ANN MARIE CUNNINGHAM
Co-Recording Secretary

Tree work fest

After the remarkable Derecho storm that propelled through the area last June, the Island was in need of some cleaning up. On Sunday, July 8, industrious islanders schlepped their chainsaws, rakes, and most importantly, themselves to work in the 100 degree-plus heat. John Stapko, the first to arrive, began to tackle the most challenging limbs. It was nice to see a large group turn the corner on the lawn and join the work party. John and Anne Marie Cunningham led the way with Joe and Simon Palmore, Chris Stern, and Greg Hitz following. Later Richard, Scott, and Cindy Bertaut joined in along with Gerry Barton, Kent Halstead, and Mike Savage. Caretaker Joe Hage contributed his guidance and hard work. We had quite a team down on the Island! Battling extreme heat and humidity, we cleared the debris around the swim dock, lawn, and captain's dock. I also wanted to mention that just after the storm Olya Duzey, Bob Whalen, Larry Heilman, and Gordon Phillips took on some debris-clearing on their own. Thank you to all who joined in!

DREW WALSH
Captain

The next Environmental Committee Meeting
will be held on August 19 at 11 a.m.
on the Island.

Notes from the Island

Friday, July 6, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 2.8 Water Temperature: 90

It was pretty dead down here yesterday. I guess it's on account of the heat. We did get a few picnickers on the holiday and it was good to hear the horse shoes hitting the metal and the subsequent cheers.

I painted the swim float yesterday. The bare wood was beginning to splinter so I threw on two coats of some red paint that I had laying around. Of course, I put some Island sand in the mix to keep it from getting too slippery. I kind of like the red-colored dock.

Wednesday, July 11, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.0 Water Temperature: 84

The river is all brown after the big deluge last night. I was really surprised at the amount of rain that we got. There were two fishermen out in it and two swimmers had to swim through the wall of rain drops to get back to the dock. We waited around for the rain to die down but some got impatient and we pulled the ferry in the driving rain. There was also a small book club that had to retreat to the screen porch from the captain's float.

The muddy water will hurt the fishing, which has been great, but on a positive note, the water has cooled from over 90 degrees to a nice 84 degrees.

There is a club meeting tonight. I won't be there but club members will vote on new rules for the waitlisters so make sure you come out and vote.

Wednesday, July 25, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.3 Water Temperature: 80

This place is literally crawling with bugs. We've got spiders of all varieties, potato bugs, moth larvae, slugs, and now, thousands of tiny caterpillars that I find covering the walkways and climbing the walls every morning. Yuck.

Speaking on unwanted pests, I've spent a good part of the last couple of days pulling kudzu and other prolific vines (i.e. seeded bur cucumber). I've also been busy keeping the grass cut and the trails clear. Everything is growing so fast with the rain we've been getting that it's hard to keep up with it all.

I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about trash. It's a busy time of year on the Island and inevitably some trash is going to be left behind but I want to remind people to please take their trash with them

when they leave. This is important—not just to spare me the task of carrying up more trash—the fact is that Sycamore Island does not have trash pick up. Since the club is not a residence and is considered a business in the eyes of county waste management, we do not get curbside pick up. Over the years this has been dealt with in a number of ways but right now it is only the generosity of my neighbors that keeps me from having to drive to the dump every week.

There are 37 new waitlist families that are now using the club during the week. It makes for a busier time for me but its fun to see the new faces and to get this influx of toddlers. As a matter of fact there is a group of new Sycamore Island moms here right now.

Saturday, July 21, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.0 Water Temperature: 84

I'm back from my vacation to the mid-west. It was a great trip and I crossed a lot of great rivers along the way: Youghiogheny, Allegheny, Mississippi, St Croix, and Minnesota just to name a few. So many rivers, so little time.

I wasn't too happy with the way I found the Island when I got back. I always seem to have a lot of cleaning



JOE HAGE

up to do after I go away for a week. I'm not sure exactly why that is but I hope everyone was happy with my substitute.

I also discovered that one of the new life rings is missing.

We're having ant trouble in the club kitchen so it is especially important to not leave any mess in there. Do your dishes and wipe down the counters.

We continue to work on the fallen trees on the Island. John Stapko was here yesterday and made another big dent in the tree work. There is much more grunt work that needs to be done so don't be shy if you want to get you hands dirty.

On the environmental front, there is a new film about the dangers of fracking and its threat to safe drinking water. Check out <http://vimeo.com/44367635>.

Tuesday, July 31, 2012

Water Level at Little Falls: 3.1 Water Temperature: 85

There is a lot of beaver activity on and around the Island lately. We strolled down to the foot of the Island one evening and there we found two massive beavers. They were chewing on the short-trimmed weeds like a couple of grazing cows. They were almost the size of cows too and I doubt I could have lifted either one of them. After we had frightened them into the water, we made our way around the horn of the Island. There we found another beaver, but this one was a tiny little baby



JOE HAGE



Demonstration against fracking

about the size of a cat. Beavers are cool to see and watch and the babies are so cute; I just wish they wouldn't cut down our trees.

I'll be talking about my next kayak trip at a special Potomac Riverkeeper event. Hope you can make it. August 9, 6:30–8:00 p.m., 1100 15th Street, NW, 11th floor. More details below.

Potomac Riverkeeper members are invited to an evening with Garret Peck, best-selling author of *The Potomac River: A History and Guide*. Garrett will be joined by Potomac Riverkeeper's Whit Overstreet and Sycamore Island Caretaker Joe Hage as they recount their adventures on and off the Potomac. Whit and Joe will also discuss their upcoming Island-to-Island trip. Event is FREE to members. Please RSVP by August 6! Not a member? Join today for a special introductory rate of \$20! Garret Peck's new book about the Potomac is a must-have for any lover of this river.

Finally, I want to say thank you to all the club members as I celebrate my ten-year anniversary as the Caretaker of Sycamore Island. It is rare to be able to do something you love for ten years straight. I feel very lucky; it has been a pleasure to work here and an honor to be included in this great community.

JOE HAGE
Caretaker

Summary of Scott Petrey's Erosion Report

The report concluded that there are two basic approaches that could be taken to fix the erosion problem. The first approach, structural or hard stabilization, e.g. concrete breakwaters, while effective, would be costly and difficult to carry out on the Island. He eliminated this option as not being feasible for us.

The second approach uses a "living shoreline" to stabilize the eroding banks. With this approach, the roots of the plants provide stability by holding on to surrounding soil, tempering wave action on the shoreline, and trapping sediment to help build up the shoreline. The report included a list of seven trees and shrubs, plus four herbaceous plants that could be used.

These plants would be placed along the shoreline and back towards the woods. The suggested trees are a mix of fast (black willow, sycamore, red maple) and slower (swamp white oak) growing species. The report suggested planting small plants, e.g. one gallon containers, not ball and burlap plants, as small ones are easier to care for and will catch up in size after a few years while larger plants are expensive and are more vulnerable to being lost to flooding before they are firmly established. The report noted that the density of plantings most likely would depend on our budget.

As an example, he said WSS typically plants black willows at a rate of 1 per linear foot in a row along the shore, and woody materials at 650 stems per acre (1 gallon size). He noted that this planting rate is generally higher than most publications recommend, as WSS believes that overplanting increases the likelihood of success by getting plants established early, thereby allowing some die off without a need for replanting.

He noted that while this approach would be unlikely to eliminate the erosion, it should slow it down. In addition to planting, other measures could be employed to help protect the vegetation until it becomes established. These include coir logs (a 12" diameter "log" made of coconut fiber that biodegrades overtime) that could be placed along the shoreline to help buffer the wave action, coir matting (a coconut fiber netting that also degrades over time) could be used to help prevent surface erosion, and shoreline exclusion fences (to keep waterfowl out). [During the inspection he also suggested that existing fallen trees could also be used to slow erosion.]

He added that once we have decided on a course of

action, he would recommend contacting the Maryland Department of the Environment and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to determine if permits would be required. Working without a permit, when in fact one is needed, could lead to a penalty that could be more costly than if a permit were obtained up front.

Finally, he listed four potential grant possibilities that we could look into to help fund our endeavor (some are just loans and some require a cost-share).

TRIPP REID

Labor Day Regatta

on the island

Waitlisters and Guests are welcome!



Monday, September 3rd

1:30pm - 6pm

Games and Races for all ages from 2 - 5 pm

Pot-Luck Dinner at 5:30pm

Prizes and lots of fun!

Contact Cindy Bertaut for more info or to help
cindybertaut@gmail.com

Thank you Joe for ten years of service to Sycamore Island!



The Sycamore Islander

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ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED

FIRST CLASS MAIL



Derecho clean up

The Sycamore Islander is the monthly newsletter of the Montgomery Sycamore Island Club. Every attempt is made to publish *The Islander* by the first of the month. Text and graphics may be sent as email attachments to: Carol Beehler, cbeehler@comcast.net. The deadline for inclusion in the September issue is August 24.

Masthead photo by Joe Hage



DREW WALSH



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