AMC POTOMAC CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

The mission of the Appalachian Mountain Club is to foster the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the outdoors.

We envision a world where our natural resources are healthy, loved, and always protected, and where the outdoors occupies a place of central importance in every person’s life.

Announcements

The Chapter needs a Communications Chair. Do you like to write, do you have web design experience, have you always wanted to try your hand at blogging? The Chapter needs a new Communications Chair! This is an exciting time for the Potomac Chapter and we need to tell people about what we’re doing. If you’re interested in volunteering, please contact our Chair, Lisa Novins @ chair@amcpotomac.org.

Wednesday, April 21, 2021 @ 7:30 pm: Conservation Conversation (online). How healthy is the Chesapeake Bay after three decades of conservation efforts? Join the Potomac Chapter’s own Rich Batiuk will be our guest for this conversation about the health of the Chesapeake Bay. Kick off your Earth Day celebration with us (the day before Earth Day). Register here.

In-Person activities are filling up fast! Because we’re keeping group size small and our creative leaders are offering interesting excursions, activities are filling up quickly. For example, one exciting upcoming trip is a three-night mid-week backpack in Dolly Sods Wilderness (WV). Dolly Sods is a 17,000-acre remote wilderness area containing heath and bog ecosystems more representative of southern Canada than the neighboring forests. And it’s just three hours from DC! A similar trip may be offered later in the year. Keep an eye on the Activities Database for open activities.

Chair’s Corner

It’s only April and this has already been an exciting year for the Potomac Chapter. We continue to host more online events, offer more in-person activities, and train more new leaders. We established a paddling committee to better position ourselves to take advantage of the amazing paddling opportunities within our Chapter. And we are starting a bicycling committee so we can offer a variety of bicycling trips. So be on the watch for more hikes, bikes, backpacks, paddles, and even bikepacks in the coming months.

A few upcoming events are outlined in this newsletter, but always check online because new activities are added frequently. If you haven’t attended one of our online events, keep an eye on AMC’s Activities Database, or the Chapter Meetup and Facebook pages. Online events are proving to be an excellent way to connect with others with a passion for the outdoors and all that AMC does and to provide input into the Chapter’s new initiatives.

As always, feel free to contact me with questions at any time.

- Lisa Novins, Potomac Chapter Chair, chair@amcpotomac.org

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and don’t hesitate to sign up for waitlists - plans change!

Saturday, May 1, 2021 @ 9:00 am: Lost River State Park (WV) hike. The Cranny Crow/Big Ridge hike is a combination of a loop and out/back hiking. With Cranny Crow, Cheeks Rock, and the Big Ridge vistas, and ridge meadow, this hike has beautiful scenery around every corner in its trail system. Approximately 6 -7 miles, 4-5 hours. Register here.

Friday, May 7 - Sunday May 9, 2021: Bike-Packing in the Monongahela National Forest/Otter Creek Wilderness. This bike-packing trip is on gravel forest roads and wilderness trails. It consists of 10 miles round trip bike-packing through the Fernow Experimental Forest. At the Big Springs Trailhead we switch from bike-packing to backpacking and cover up to 3 miles round trip. On Saturday we will do a loop or out and back hike with day packs in the wilderness area with a maximum distance of 10 miles. This trip is open to families. Register here.

Wednesday, May 12, 2021 @ 7:00 pm: Conservation Conversation (online). While astronomers have been the first to note the increase of light at night, light pollution has huge environmental impacts - as well as impacts on human health and safety. Learn about this major conservation issue, what you can do about it, and what the AMC is doing in this arena. Join this conversation with Douglas Arion, PhD, Executive Director of the Mountains of Stars program, and Professor Emeritus of Physics and Astronomy and Donald D. Hedberg Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Entrepreneurial Studies at Carthage College. Register here.

Friday, May 21 - Monday, May 24, 2021: Novice Backpacking Workshop for Adults w/Overnight (Glen Jean, WV). This is a three-night program for novices who want to build their hiking and camping skills and then go on an overnight backpack. The trip will be held at the 11,000-acre Summit Bechtel Reserve. It consists of pre-program course content and camping, followed by an overnight backpack on the Reserve or in the nearby New River Gorge National Park. Register here.

May 3, 2021 and June 7, 2021 @ 7:00 pm: Chapter Chats (online). Not yet posted but coming soon! The May Chat will focus on bike commuting and the June Chat will be about a winter trip in Maine! Chapter Chats are held monthly. Each Chat has a learning segment and a social segment. We learn about something related to AMC (outdoor adventure, conservation, AMC history, AMC facilities, etc.) and then we chat about a related topic.

Future Activities. Watch our Meetup page, our Facebook page, and the AMC Activities Database to find activities happening in person or online. You can search for regional activities (by chapter or state) or online activities (search #BeOnlineWithAMC).

Photo Credit: Jill Watkins, Appalachian Trail White Blaze.

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In just over two hours travel time from downtown Washington, D.C. you can find yourself at a great place to flatwater paddle and more. A trip to Delaware’s Trap State Park is like a trip back to the time of dinosaurs with its bald cypress swamp forests teeming with turtles, dragonflies, waterfowl, wading birds, and great fishing opportunities. Nest all of this in a Delaware State Park complete with campgrounds, yurts, cabins, playground, pavilions, Nature Center, places to bicycle and a trail around the pond, and you have a great place to get outside with family, friends or both for a day, a weekend, even a week’s worth of vacation.

**Trap State Park** has something for just about everyone. But for the paddler, this single park offers two completely different ponds for the price of one. Right in the middle of the park is **Trap Pond** itself, complete with boat launching ramp as well as soft kayak and canoe launches adjacent to each of the campgrounds along the shoreline across the Pond from the picnic area and Nature Center.

A short 5-minute drive will take you to **Trussum Pond**, still part of Trap Pond State Park. Whereas Trap Pond has a lot of open waters with a bald cypress forest in the upper third of the pond, Trussum Pond is principally a bald cypress forest within a pond. Motorized boats are not allowed on Trussum Pond so you will share these waters only with other folks using arm-powered vessels! Read on for a closer look at these two very unique waterbodies and all the other recreational opportunities that surround them:

**Trap Pond**

With 88 acres to paddle, Trap Pond has a lot to offer canoers and kayakers. You can paddle on Trap Pond itself and lose yourself in one of the many coves along its extensive, principally forested shoreline. If you are a fisherperson, then you have come to the right place as the pond’s shoreline and shallow water areas provide a treasure trove of fishing opportunities for largemouth bass, bluegills, several species of sunfish, yellow perch, white and black crappie, golden shiners, and pickerel . . . at least these are the species I have been fortunate to catch and release over the decades of paddling and fly fishing on Trap Pond.

At the end of Trap Pond opposite the picnic area and nature center, you can canoe or kayak well upstream following the **Terrapin Branch Water Trail** to get up close and personal with the bald cypress trees and the diverse flora and fauna that live there. Take in the sights, sounds, and smells as you journey further into the cypress swamp. On prior paddles, my wife Susan and I have experienced wood duck families, foxes, turtles (and more turtles!), great blue herons, wildflowers, big dragonflies in a multitude of colors (making you think how truly huge dragonflies during the age of dinosaurs would have been with their six-foot wing spans even compared with your kayak!) and more.

The upper third of the pond is peppered with big bald cypress trees that you can paddle around for a chance to see these gentle giants up close. This is a great place to improve your paddling skills as the number of trees and the placement makes for a wonderful canoe or kayak obstacle course—no straight lines in this forest submerged in the middle of a pond!

**Trussum Pond**

After launching your canoe or kayak near the parking lot, you will immediately become immersed in a water-filled bald cypress forest of 59 acres, quickly losing touch with all those things that would normally worry you. Why? Because your senses of sight, touch, sound and smell take over your brain here (continued on next page)

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**Aiming Off (A Navigation Story)**

The imprecision of the compass bearing is amplified over distance—not accounting for this can set one astray. Our intrepid adventurer drove north through the forest on the Old Pikesville Road until he reached the parking spot most convenient and east on foot to Simmond’s Lake. His GPS would lead him there, and he could enjoy the scenery, maybe catch a few fish, and be back home well before dark. It was easy going through the woods, and only a few others had walked there, their faint tracks criss-crossing his way. The lake was as pretty as always, and the day remained clear and bright.

Late in the afternoon he packed up his gear and was about to head back to the car. It was a straight shot west and the GPS would guide him two miles through the woods, but when he pulled out the machine and pressed the power button, it wouldn’t turn on! Did he forget to charge it, and had it chosen this time to run out of juice? Well, at least he hadn’t lost it or dropped it in the lake. Time to take out the compass, which he had brought just for a day, a weekend, or a wonderful canoe or kayak obstacle course—no straight lines in this forest submerged in the middle of a pond!

The standard solution to this problem was to “aim off” 5 degrees to the south of the lake. Time to take out the compass, which he had brought just for the canoe or kayak well upstream following the Terrapin Branch Water Trail to get up close and personal with the bald cypress trees and the diverse flora and fauna that live there. Take in the sights, sounds, and smells as you journey further into the cypress swamp. On prior paddles, my wife Susan and I have experienced wood duck families, foxes, turtles (and more turtles!), great blue herons, wildflowers, big dragonflies in a multitude of colors (making you think how truly huge dragonflies during the age of dinosaurs would have been with their six-foot wing spans even compared with your kayak!) and more.

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Paul Rowe

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meetup.com/amc-potomac
Places to Paddle (continued from previous page)

at Trussum Pond! Each tree seems to have its own personality due to differences in size and shape. Who could not be fascinated with big trees growing up entirely surrounded by water? And who knew that turtles could climb that far up on the base of a bald cypress tree? You can look for climbing gear and ropes, but for these turtles it’s all in the claws.

Don’t be surprised if you are merrily paddling along and come to a complete stop all of a sudden. Welcome to Trussum Pond! Your canoe or kayak has just hit the submerged trunk of a former bald cypress tree. No cussing or hard feelings, though, as these former trees provide an incredible subsurface habitat for the BIG largemouth bass, pickerel and panfish that inhabit these waters. Just cast a fly, bobber with a worm on the hook or your favorite lure towards the base of a close by bald cypress tree, slowly retrieve and hold on for the strike.

Trap Pond History

Trap Pond was once the site of a large freshwater wetland and still hosts the country’s northernmost natural stand of bald cypress trees. The pond was created in the late 1700s to power a sawmill used in harvesting the bald cypress. The federal government purchased the pond and surrounding farmland during the 1930s, and the Civilian Conservation Corps began to develop the area for recreation. Trap Pond became one of Delaware’s first state parks in 1951. Delaware may be a small state, but they manage one of the best state park systems in the country.

More Things to Do Outside

Take a Pontoon Tour: Tired of paddling yourself and want to learn more about Trap Pond and the surrounding area? Join a park staff member on a pontoon boat to travel across the pond and into the cypress swamp. Learn about the history and wildlife of the park from the comfort of an elevated pontoon boat.

Explore the Bob Trail: Hike or bike the 4.6-mile Bob Trail through the park. The trail is an excellent place for birdwatching, and you’ll enjoy pondside views of the cypress swamp. Visitors can enjoy free bike rentals during the summer months.

Visit the Baldcypress Nature Center: Trap Pond has a rich history that has shaped the culture and community of the area. Stop by the Baldcypress Nature Center to discover past cultures and learn about the importance of watersheds.

Go camping: Trap Pond’s campground offers a wide variety of sites beneath its tall loblolly pines, including RV and tent sites with water and electric, walk-in tent sites, a popular island tent site, and primitive camping areas for youth groups (available by reservation only). Waterfront climate-controlled camping cabins, each with a living area and bedroom, are available year-round. Yurts, round stationary structures with canvas walls, allow a rustic camping experience without having to pitch your own tent.

Enjoy the Park Multiple Amenities: A large playground with equipment suitable for ALL ages; a large, shaded picnic area with lots of picnic tables and free-standing barbeques; and several pavilions available with advance reservations. Visitors can also bike around the campgrounds as well as on Bob Trail that winds around Trap Pond.

For further information visit: Trap Pond State Park website.

- Rich Batiuk, Potomac Chapter Treasurer, avid kayaker and fly fisherman always looking for somewhere else new to paddle, explore, and fish
AT Review: Cole Mountain/Spy Rock

I’ve been doing week-long section hikes on the Appalachian Trail in Virginia for the past few years. In 2019, a friend and I planned to backpack from Punchbowl Mountain Shelter near Buena Vista north to Rockfish Gap. Eight days on the trail was ambitious enough, and we cut our trip short due to the weather. It was an absolutely beautiful section, and we were out there during peak fall color.

On the first day we hiked to Brown Mountain Shelter and spent the night in the heaviest rainfall I’ve ever experienced: solid downpours from about midnight to 9:00 AM. We had originally planned on having a long mileage day the next day but decided instead to stop at Cow Camp Gap Shelter to set up our tents early and let our gear dry out. This turned out to be a great decision because this shelter has a huge tenting area and the sun came out to dry out our tents and gear.

The next day turned out to be the best day: sunshine, blue skies, and a 360-degree view on top of Cole Mountain. At that point we began thinking about a possible weekend trip that included Cow Camp Gap Shelter and Cole Mountain and some side trails we thought must be part of the George Washington National Forest.

That night we stayed at Seeley-Woodworth Shelter and planned our long mileage day for the next day. The weather was beginning to deteriorate again, and we had The Priest ahead of us: a 3,093 foot decent in 4.3 miles (in the rain). We passed by Spy Rock because by that point the fog had set in and we knew we wouldn’t have a view, but in our minds we added Spy Rock to the idea forming around a weekend trip from Cow Camp Gap Shelter. Both Spy Rock and Cole Mountain have 360-degree views, so that seemed like a fun idea for a trip.

Descending The Priest was not as difficult as we had imagined it would be, but once we got to the top of Three Ridges Mountain the weather was deteriorating even further. It was raining, and the forecast showed cold rain for the next few days with temperatures plummeting to below freezing at night. We knew our gear and clothing would never dry and it could be dangerous to be out in those conditions. Luckily, there was cell service on Three Ridges and I arranged for my parents to meet us at Humpback Rocks campground the next day. We stealth camped that night and hiked out in the pouring rain, glad to have altered our plans!

Undaunted, we planned a scouting trip last year to see if our Cole Mountain / Spy Rock idea could work. We car camped at Hog Camp Gap and hiked up to Cole Mountain for the sunset. It was spectacular! The next day, we backpacked to Seeley Woodworth Shelter and set up a basecamp. The next day, we hiked to Spy Rock, on to the Crabtree Falls trail junction, and back to Seeley Woodworth. That made for a long day of ups and downs, nearly 12 miles. We hiked back to our cars the next day.

It was a little more difficult making this weekend trip work than I’d assumed it would be, but I plan on having all the trip details worked out for the fall. Things that go into planning include:

1. Ideally having low miles on the first and last day, since those are typically also travel days.
2. Total number of miles per day, taking elevation gains and loss into consideration.
3. Noting good campsites for groups of 8-10 people. This includes water availability.

A couple things that we learned on the scouting trip are:

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AT Review (continued from previous page)

1. Spy Rock is really crowded on weekends because the trail is easy to get to for day hikers. The same is true for Cole Mountain: We arrived on a Thursday to a nearly empty parking area but by the time we came off the mountain on Sunday, it was packed!

2. Access to the AT from Crabtree Falls and Montbello Fish Hatchery are both easily accessible for day hikers and are steep uphills.

3. It’s difficult to include Cow Camp Gap Shelter in the mix and also avoid long mileage days. This could mean developing two separate trips.

Check the AMC Activities Database later this summer for one or two AT trips in this area!

- Jill Watkins

Just One Hike To Happiness

Hiking and outdoor activities saved me and my girlfriend from those endless coronavirus winter afternoons. While we hiked regularly in the warmer seasons, we had fallen out of the habit in the winter. One afternoon we decided to change that. We were desperate for something to lift our spirits and keep us going through the dreary gray months of December and January. We live in a DC suburb where good nature is hard to find, yet once inside our local park the sounds of highways and shopping centers quickly faded to rushing water and rustling leaves and our smiles and laughter returned. With just an hour of hiking we returned home focused, uplifted, and energized.

Seeing the benefit of our time outside, we continued through the winter. Researchers theorize that because humans evolved in wild natural environments, we all share an innate need to connect to nature. Exposure to natural sights and sounds is shown to improve cognitive brain function - such as stress reduction and attention span - but what about the effect on our emotional states? Why did those afternoon hikes have such a positive effect on me and my girlfriend? One 2015 study showed that after participants took a 90-minute walk, they experienced decreased activity in the part of the brain that handles negative memory and emotion. The researchers concluded that walking (or hiking) can help break the cycle of negative emotions commonly found in people with depression. In a 2019 literature review of research on the effects of nature on well-being, scientists found that immersion in nature led to increases in feelings of happiness and well-being and also provided a sense of meaning and purpose in life. In addition to

We’re looking for Bicycling Leaders and Riders!

The Potomac Chapter is planning to add bicycling trips to expand the range of outdoor experiences we offer our AMC and Meetup members. As a first step, we are currently forming a Bicycling Committee to determine the type, difficulty levels, and locations for these bicycling trips. As with all of our activities, bicycling trips will require Leaders, so we are looking for experienced cyclists and potential Bicycling Leaders who would like to participate in committee discussions and/or lead trips for the Chapter. All new Bicycling Leaders will be required to become certified AMC leaders.

Are you a past Bicycling Leader for another group or an experienced biker who (with AMC training) would like to lead bicycling trips for the Chapter? Or are you an experienced cyclist who would like to be part of the discussion? Find out how to join us by contacting Ken Shuck at bicycling@amcpotomac.org.

Are you interested in joining the Chapter on bicycling trips? We hope to have trips later this year. Let us know what kinds of trips interest you - a few miles; a few days; bikepacking? Contact Ken Shuck at bicycling@amcpotomac.org.

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Land and Water Conservation Fund

Though for many of us 2020 was a difficult and challenging year, the campaign for full permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was a welcome success story.

Established in 1964, LWCF uses earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing to purchase and protect our lands and waters, as well as to award grants at the state and local level. LWCF has helped protect valuable open space in every U.S. state and at every scale from national parklands to neighborhood playgrounds. The Act has funded over 44,000 outdoor recreation projects, in spite of the fact that funds were often siphoned away during the Congressional appropriations process. (According to the LWCF Coalition, in which AMC is a lead partner, $22 billion has been diverted.) In 2019, the John J. Dingell Conservation, Management and Recreation Act permanently reauthorized funding for LWCF. However, this still did not guarantee the money would be spent as intended.

Finally, in August 2020, after decades of advocacy from AMC and many other coalition partners, then-President Trump signed the Great American Outdoors Act, which permanently guarantees $900 million a year to LWCF along with $9.5 billion over five years for maintenance projects at national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and other public lands. This was the same administration that withdrew from the Paris Agreement on climate change, calling climate science a hoax, and dismantled one environmental regulation after another. Indeed, the Trump budget plan was to eliminate spending on LWCF altogether. What was behind the change of heart?

As it turns out, protecting the outdoors is just good politics. Earlier in 2020, Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Steve Daines (R-MT), both facing tough reelection bids, met with Mr. Trump to present their case for major conservation legislation that would benefit outdoor recreation. They argued that the politics of such a move during stay-at-home orders would help keep a Republican majority in the Senate. Trump was convinced and pledged to sign the bill. The Great American Outdoors Act did indeed pass both houses with overwhelming bi-partisan support and was signed into law. (Note, Gardner lost and Daines won their respective reelection bids.)

However, the Administration’s support would not last. LWCF is a two-pronged fund, with both state grant programs and federal programs. The Trump administration made major, politically-motivated changes to LWCF’s State Assistance Program (stateside grants) during the Biden transition period. In November, a Secretarial Order gave state and local jurisdictions veto power over federal public land projects, among other restrictions. Then in January 2021, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt announced he was ending the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program and diverting its approved funding. The ORLP program awards grants to underserved urban areas. With the help of AMC’s continued advocacy alongside hundreds of coalition partners, Congress resisted these attempted changes. All changes have been officially rescinded by the Biden Administration.

Looking ahead for possible future threats to LWCF, we see a good news/bad news story. Opponents of federal government action across the board - and federal land conservation specifically - will always seek openings to restrict LWCF. As the new administration addresses the climate crisis and our nation’s energy mix begins to change, oil and gas revenues may decrease. With that, LWCF’s funding source may need to change as well. While renewable energy sources do not emit carbon, they do still have impacts on land, water, and recreation access, so conservation offsets like LWCF will always be needed.

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One Hike to Happiness (continued from previous page)

making people feel happier and more purposeful, research has shown that exposure to natural stimuli reduces the stress hormone cortisol. One of the most comprehensive studies on outdoor activity tracked 20,000 adults in the UK who all spent two hours each week doing outdoor activities. Across all subgroups (young, old, healthy, chronically ill, etc.), participants reported significant improvements in well-being and overall health.

It seems my girlfriend and I were following a natural instinct to find peace and happiness in an afternoon hike. Research suggests everyone can benefit from hiking, backpacking, canoeing, climbing, photography, whatever gets us out the door into the sanctuary of nature!

- Mitchell Skopic

Photo Credit: Jill Watkins, Fall Colors

Photo Credit: Susan Batiuk, Trap Pond State Park

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Land and Water Conservation Fund (continued from previous page)

But there are also tremendous opportunities as we look ahead to the future of conservation. The Biden Administration’s Executive Order issued in January included a critical recognition of the importance of land as an asset in the fight to both mitigate and manage the impacts of a changing climate on America’s natural resources, its wildlife, and its people. The President’s commitment to protect 30% of the nation’s land and water by 2030 (“30x30”) is a bold vision that will require investment and innovation, and LWCF will be one of the most important tools for its execution. It is also an inclusive vision, which emphasizes the need to focus on communities that are both disproportionately impacted by pollution and underserved by access to parks and green space. There is much work to be done with partners in these communities and with the Administration to ensure that implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act means that more LWCF funding flows to the people that need it most.

So, AMC’s commitment to LWCF remains as strong as ever, and we are ramping up advocacy on 30x30 as well. Check out the Conservation Action Network for actions that you can take to build support in Congress at Outdoors.org/conservation-action-network and get involved with your local land trust and municipality to support LWCF projects in your own neighborhood!


Maryland has received approximately $233.7 million in LWCF funding supporting: the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center, the Potomac River, Assateague Island National Seashore, Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, Monocacy National Battlefield, C&O Canal National Historic Park, Sandy Point State Park, and Tuckahoe State Park, among many others.

Washington, D.C. has received approximately $18.9 million in LWCF funding for projects including: Ford’s Theatre NHS, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Mary McLeod Bethune NHS, and National Capital Parks-East.

Photo Credit: Lisa Novins, Riverbend Park

Photo Credit: David Mong, Sky Meadows State Park

Photo Credit: Susan Batiuk, Trap Pond State Park

Photo Credit: David Mong, Riverbend Park