



Volunteers Needed For Royal Lake Wildlife Conservation Efforts Prior To Dredging Operations



By Tony Vellucci

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On April 6th, Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) representative Christopher Ruck provided an ecological overview of Royal Lake, the impacts of dredging operations to surrounding wildlife, and the need for volunteers from the community to save as much aquatic wildlife as possible - specifically fresh water mussels. Members of the Friends of Accotink Creek (FACC) and Friends of Woodglen Lake (FOWL), as well as residents from the communities of Kings Park West, Lakepointe and Bonnie Brae attended the two-hour meeting at Oak View Elementary School.



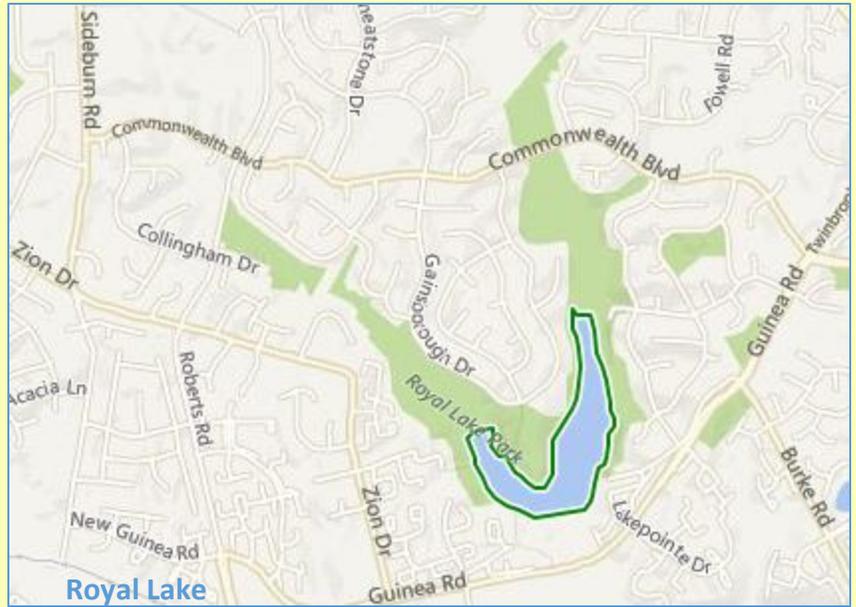
The presentation provided data on lake oxygenation levels revealing that the greatest amount of aquatic life is about 1.5 meters below the surface, which should also be the location of where the greatest density of Royal Lake fresh water mussels will be found. Freshwater mussels are an essential component of our rivers and streams and by their siphoning action, are one of the few animals that improve water quality.

Mr. Ruck provided an overview of the two fresh water mussel species expected to be found noting lessons learned from the dredging of Huntsman Lake and [Woodglen Lake](#). The two species expected to be seen and relocated are the Eastern Floater (*Pyganodon cataracta*) and the Paper Pondshell (*Utterbackia imbecillis*). These can be found in streams, but are more successful in slow-water environments.

Having received conditional support from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries state malacologist to relocate the mussels to other bodies of water in the Pohick Watershed, he is now working on obtaining the necessary state permits authorizing the relocation. DPWES may also investigate if Royal Lake mussels can be transported to the Accotink Watershed - specifically Lake Accotink Park.

Lake drawdown activities will begin as soon as the electro-fishing is complete. Thus, drawdown can start as early as April 29th, or May 3rd, if the May 2nd rain date is exercised. Given that the drawdown of the lake at about six inches per day, the location of the mussels, and the fact that any rain storm will add water to the lake, there is no way to know now when to schedule the mussel rescue party.

While it would be convenient to schedule the rescue party for a Saturday morning, the reality is that it will most likely occur sometime during the week necessitating an effort after normal working hours. Consequently, DPWES ecologists will monitor the many variables and then put out a call through as many outreach channels as possible for maximum exposure to the greatest number of volunteers. If you are interested in participating, please send an email to Friends of Royal Lake so that you can be put on an email list and notified. The address is: friendsofroyallake@gmail.com Once DPWES identifies a window for the Mussel Rescue Party, they will communicate that to Friends of Royal Lake and other friends groups who will then alert their members seeking as many volunteers as possible.



Volunteers need to bring gloves and five-gallon buckets in which to place the mussels for transport. Of key importance is to ensure that only native species are relocated, and that all invasive species, such as Asiatic clams, are left behind so that they are destroyed through the dredging process. Handouts will be available for mussel recognition.

Also, DPWES will use this opportunity to attempt a pilot program of re-introducing mussels from Royal Lake to Pohick Water-shed streams where DPWES has already completed stream restoration projects. One such location will be the Rabbit Branch tributary behind DeQuincey Drive.

The [Friends of Accotink Creek](#) (FACC) and [Friends of Lake Accotink Park](#) (FLAP) recently funded a [fresh water mussel study](#) to learn more about these amazing organisms that can live to be about 80 years old. The study determined that a primary impact to thriving populations is sediment caused by stormwater run-off. The study is posted on the Friends of Accotink Creek website at www.accotink.org.

For more information on fresh water mussels, their importance to the environment, and the rich diversity of fresh water mussels found in the United States as compared to other parts of the world, see <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/freshwater-mussels.asp>.

Watch this site for updates and schedules.

CONTACT Friends of Accotink Creek
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