

Friends of Accotink Creek



Comments Presented before the Fairfax County Environmental Quality Advisory Committee Annual Meeting – January 12, 2016

My name is Kris Unger, and I am the Primary Conservator for the [Friends of Accotink Creek](#), a local watershed group dedicated to protecting, promoting, and restoring the Accotink Creek Watershed. We work with schools, communities, companies, government entities, NGOs, and volunteers on projects including stream cleanups, stream and habitat restorations, citizen science, advocacy, education, community engagement, and plant and mussel rescues.

Our motto is “Find just one other person who cares”, and I definitely feel like I’m among people who care here. As a watershed advocate, I’m not used to coming to meetings and standing up and speaking out with the message “Carry on!”, but that’s what I’m going to do today.

The Friends of Accotink Creek fully support [EQAC’s priority recommendations to the Board of Supervisors](#), namely continuing and increasing funding for environmental programs, and developing policies to address climate change.

We especially appreciate the EQAC report’s emphasis on the importance of working with the Park Authority to support more resources for, and focus on, Natural Resources, starting with implementing Phase 1 of the Natural Resources Management Plan.

I often describe Accotink Creek as an ecological jewel in Fairfax County, one that despite the thousand cuts of human impact remains a very special and important place. I spent a few days this fall wading through Accotink Creek with scientists, as part of a freshwater mussel survey. We have been rescuing mussels stranded after floods for years, and I fully expected to find that they were just barely hanging on, since we only ever say a few at a time.

To my amazement, the State of the Freshwater Mussel in Accotink Creek is Strong, an estimated 10,000 individuals. And they’re amazing beings, living up to 80 years, using American eels to travel. The female mussels lure in the eels by mimicking prey, and then squirt out fertilized eggs, which attach to the eel and drop off in a new location days later. And American eels are catadromous, they swim out to the Sargasso Sea (which is now a trash vortex) to breed, and the babies swim being to Accotink Creek. So you have a stationary being that uses an ocean migrator to travel in the Creek!

Amazing. I just wanted to give you a taste of some of the wonderful things going on out there. Experiences like this drive my commitment to working for nature, and I’m

grateful to the many partners in this room and throughout the County who are working to protect the environment. We are stronger together!

When I'm working with youth in nature, I often find myself forced to explain the things that have resulted in the Anthropocene, an era of mass extinctions and devastating climate change caused by human activities. It's hard to find a message of hope within that narrative, but what I tell them is "Nature always wins". The only way for us to create a sustainable path forward for us and all the trillions of beings that we share this world with is for us to work with nature.

We are stronger together!

