

Return to the River gears up for summer adventures with new equipment

Program will partner with USFWS, Menokin on historical interpretation



Woodie Walker

Generous donations from a tribal supporter have paved the way for an expansion of our Return to the River (RTR) program, led by Assistant Chief Mark Fortune. RTR has been very active and successful in past years, but was disrupted last summer as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In May we purchased a new kayak & canoe trailer and placed an order for a dozen kayaks with paddles and Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs). Our boats won't be

ready from the manufacturer until fall, so our partners at the Virginia Outdoor Center in Fredericksburg loaned us a selection of kayaks for the summer. Assistant Chief Fortune is planning activities for interested tribal members, and in the meantime tribal members and staff are developing a partnership with Menokin in Richmond County and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Menokin is working with that agency and the Town of Warsaw to promote water recreation and environmental education. Menokin staff invited the tribe to develop an interpretive presentation that tells the story of the historical and contemporary Rappahannock community. Interpretation will take place on Cat Point Creek, site of a major Rappahannock town at the beginning of the colonization era.



Return to the River boats are ready. A new trailer and fleet of kayaks are prepped for field trips to explore indigenous history, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and the lower Rappahannock River ecosystem. *Photo by Steven Nelson*

Sacred Bald Eagle population soaring back

Bald Eagles once teetered on the brink of extinction, reaching an all-time low of 417 known nesting pairs in the lower 48 states back in 1963. However, after decades of protection, the banning of the pesticide DDT and conservation efforts with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) numerous partners, the bald eagle population has flourished and has grown to more than 71,400 nesting pairs in the lower 48.

According to a USFWS report on the Bald Eagle population in the lower 48 states, there are an estimated 316,700 individual Bald Eagles now, a growth of four and a half times more eagles than the last estimate in 2009.

Fones Cliffs in the Rappahannock Tribe homeland near Warsaw is an important site for Bald Eagle nesting and East Coast migration.

"Today's announcement is truly a historic conservation success story. Announcements like ours today give me hope. I believe that we have the opportunity of a lifetime to protect our environment and our way of life for generations to come. But we will only accomplish great things if we work together," said U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, an enrolled member of the Laguna Pueblo.

- from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



EPA grant secured; river herring update

The Rappahannock Tribe has been approved for a second year of its ongoing capacity-building grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This long-term partnership with the EPA focuses on improving regional surface water quality, monitoring indoor air quality in tribal community homes, and consultation with local, state, and federal agencies and non-profit organizations to conserve natural resources.

An exciting aspect of our work involves sharing TEK with agency scientists. Recently we met virtually with Dr. Henry Legett, a fisheries biologist from the Smithsonian Institution. Dr. Legett studies the seasonal migration of anadromous fishes like river herring in the Rappahannock River. Tribal members have identified river herring as a species of special concern, because of its historical importance to the community as a subsistence food source. Dr. Legett has offered to visit the Tribal Center to learn more about what the tribe can share regarding these important fish.