

Feature Story: Cu Maurice River J. Morton Galetto



What is CU Maurice River?

Over the coming months Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and its Tributaries, Inc. (CU Maurice River) hopes to bring you many stories about the region's natural and cultural resources. Because of our vast network of waterways and contiguous forests, we are blessed with a great many interesting wildlife species. Furthermore there are lots of historic and present day resources that we as a people have

used to develop our livelihoods and sustenance.

It seems appropriate that our first feature should tell you about who we are. CU Maurice

River is a registered nonprofit charitable organization founded in 1979 and incorporated in 1986. Our mission will give you a great insight into our purpose. We are dedicated to protecting the watershed of the Maurice River and the region known as Down Jersey, thereby enabling current and future generations to enjoy the environmental, recreational, cultural, and scenic resources of this Wild & Scenic global treasure. CU invites participation and fosters responsible stewardship. CU supports education, awareness, and informed decision-making utilizing fieldwork, research, and advocacy.

CU has a staff and a diverse group of volunteers that carry out many programs and projects to accomplish our mission. We have about 700 memberships, and since many of those are families we estimate our membership to be about 2,450 members. Each year at least 200

members volunteer and provide more than 10,000 hours of service. Our members represent all walks of life and a diversity of ages. Many of our most active members are teachers since education is a major component of our mission.

So what do we do? We run educational programs like Wild About Cumberland, getting fourth graders unplugged and turned on to nature. We coordinate educators who offer Connect with Nature weekly activities at the YMCA's Camp Merrywood. Presentations are made at local schools, civic organizations, and clubs. We have installed interpretative trails and offer many guided walks. We offer community field trips and events; these include not just the walks, but paddles, cruises, frog slogs, birding ventures, presentations, socials, wildlife habitat projects like nesting boxes, clean-ups, water quality sampling, horseshoe crab rescue, and much more. In fact our annual calendar has 100 different ways to get engaged. You may have attended one of the festivals where we have been a major participant, like the Eagle Festival, Purple Martin Spectacular, Bay Day, Barn Day, Pledge

to Fledge, or East Point Light's Open Houses.

We do a lot of serious conservation work both for advocacy and action. We have produced films and an abundance of reading materials. In fact we have many written resources available at our office at 17 E. Main St., Millville. We have a map and educational piece for the Maurice River Bicycling and Hiking Trail, checklists of local species, a community stewardship guide, publications about Wild & Scenic Rivers, and many other brochures. We are also active in a number of regional environmental coalitions. Support of open space initiatives is an important part of our activities. And for more than 30 years, we have conducted avian surveys along local waterways.

We offer an extensive website that includes a history of the tidal Maurice River, a guide to southern NJ's plants, lots of detailed information about our rivers, an overview of our avian projects, and information about volunteering. We invite you to check out our website's calendar at cumauriceriver.org and join us for some Down Jersey adventures. You need not

be a member to engage, but our guess is you will want to join and become involved.