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*Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries, Inc.*

**NEWSLETTER**

July – September 2023

1. **PUBLIC OUTREACH, VOLUNTEER COORDINATION & VISITOR MANAGEMENT**

**PROGRAMMING AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

*08.26.2023 -* **4th Saturday Walk**

Mary Watkins and Tony Klock led this August's 4th Saturday Walk along the Maurice River Trail. Our group enjoyed the songs of red-eyed vireos, grey catbirds, and Carolina wrens. We also enjoyed late summer blooms of Joe-Pye, cardinal flowers, and jewelweed. A special highlight of the trip included a beaver sighting! Thank you to our CU Naturalists who led our walk and to all of those who joined us! We hope to CU again next month!

*09.05.2023* - **Tuesday on the Fly**

For September's TOF, the group explored two trails at the Union Lake Wildlife Management Area. One trail took us along the shoreline and gave us beautiful views of Union Lake. The second trail took us through wooded areas of the area, giving us views of a variety of mushrooms and pine trees.

*09.09.2023 -* **Volunteer WorkGroup**

In their second full growing season, the WheatonArts gardens have really taken off! The planting sessions this year of seeds germinated at home by CU Volunteers and students from Vineland High School have been a great benefit to filling in the empty spaces in the gardens. There are fewer unwanted grasses crowding the native flora species that are multiplying readily. On Saturday, a group of volunteers convened at the WheatonArts Pollinator Gardens to do a late summer weed removal. The obedient plant was swarming with multiple species of bumblebees. Other pollinators such as wasps, skippers, and common buckeye frequented the stiff goldenrod, thoroughwort, and other late summer bloomers.

*09.13.2023 -* **Bi-Monthly Membership Meeting**

This month the meeting was hosted by Jane Galetto and Karla Rossini. Jack McDonough from CMBO presented on Monarch Migration. He empowered the audience to garden with monarchs in mind.

*09.27.2023 -* **Volunteer WorkGroup**

Volunteers focused on weeding out the non-native grasses, working to get the middle large mound free from the masses of weeds and we made significant progress! Discovered 9 senna plants that survived from last year's fall planting (out of 50).

*09.30.2023 -* **Waterways Cleanup**

We cleaned up 75 bags of trash from Alliance Beach! This was the first cleanup there since March and this accounted for all of the garbage from the spring/summer gatherings. Nobody kayaked during the cleanup, everyone was on land which kept us plenty busy.

**OUTSTANDING RESOURCE VALUE MANAGEMENT**

**BIODIVERSITY**

*09.09.2023 -* **Sensitive Joint-vetch Mapping**

We sampled a small portion of land for SJV but did not find any. Due to the heat (95 degrees) we decided to end the survey early but checked out *Utricularia resupinata* (an endangered plant in NJ) at one of the blue holes that can be accessed off the railroad tracks.

*August – September,* **Waterfowl and Raptor Papers**

Environmental consultants continue to dedicate *pro-bono* time to the revision of the waterfowl and raptor papers that summarize the data and knowledge gained from the 35 Year Maurice River Winter Raptor and Waterfowl Study. CU Executive Director coordinates with the consultants and connects them with resources to assist their development of the papers.

**HABITAT AND WATER QUALITY PROTECTION**

*August – September* ***-*** **A Rutgers Environmental Stewardship Program Intern** has been working with CU Maurice River, toward reinvigorating and modernizing CUMR’s water quality program with the objective of installing water quality meters at essential locations within the Wild and Scenic designation area. As sea level rise affects wetland health, the end goal of this project is to collect data on conductivity, temperature, and depth upstream. We hope to compare the current data to the years of data collected by CU Community Scientists on the Manumuskin. This data will be helpful in understanding the status of freshwater wetlands within the system as well as informing future restoration projects. During this time period the intern has developed educational outreach materials in order to better approach the homeowners whose properties in the end will host the meters.

*August – September* - **Watershed Stewards’ Wildlife-Friendly Designations**

CU Maurice River recognized five property owners’ property stewardship efforts by awarding them with Wildlife-Friendly designations. Each of these members have taken significant measures towards creating properties with wildlife and water quality including green areas enhanced with native species, rain gardens, rainwater conservation, compost receptacles, wildlife habitat, and more. From extreme property transformations to cleverly designed backyard gardens, each of these members improved upon their best management practices in support of local water and habitat quality.

**INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT**

*August – September* – **Wetlands Restoration**

CUMR Executive Director is working with Restore America’s Estuaries to fulfill necessary requirements in order to secure the project funding that was awarded in June 2023. CUMR and RAE aim to sign contracts by the end of the year. Pending final approvals, the proposed project will remove c.25 acres of Phragmites Australis from the Wild and Scenic Manumuskin.

**ACCESS**

*August - September* - **Waterway Access Map**

Princeton Hydro is developing an online ArcGIS Story Map of recreational resources on the river: a paddle trail for the Maurice River Watershed. CUMR Executive Director has been gathering mapping data, providing images, and drafting text. CUMR has also provided audio files to be included in a self-guided river tour within the StoryMap. This grant was awarded to CUMR by the Mohawk Canoe Club.

**OUTREACH, ENGAGEMENT, AND COVERAGE**

*09.16.2023 –* **RiverFest**

As a part of the Mauricetown Riverfest CU Maurice River offered two walks to the public.The first was held at the Maurice River Bluffs and lead by Jane Galetto. Particpants enjoyed the opportunity to learn the history of the preserve and to witness beautiful views of the Maurice River. The second walk was held at the Mauricetown Preserve and lead by Mary Watkins and Wendy Walker. Participants enjoyed an introduction to this preserve, as it was many particpants first time at this preserve. The groups spotted birds, mushrooms, and a plethora of Ghost Pipe. As a part of the Mauricetown Riverfest, CU Maurice River ran an outreach table, as well as an activty for children. The activity involved having nature items on display, posters introducing habits of the area, and a community mural.

*08.29.2023* – **Vineland Rotary Club Presentation**

CUMR Executive Director presented on the Wild and Scenic Maurice River, the designation story, the system’s ORVs, and how CUMR involves the community in resource protection.

**SNJToday**

CU President continues to submit articles to the local newspaper, SNJToday which are published on a weekly basis. These are included in the Feature Section under *The Great Outdoors* which explores the region’s natural and cultural wonders.

**PARTNERSHIPS AT WORK**

**National Park Service's Wild and Scenic Partnership Program –**

CUMR has been contracting with the National Park Service on implementing aspects of the Maurice River Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan since c. 2004. Prior to this, CUMR was awarded NPS Partnership grants beginning in 1996. Proper administration of the Wild and Scenic River Management Plan remains a cornerstone of our work. In the fourth quarter of 2022, CUMR continued work with the River Manager, Paul Kenney, to meet new reporting expectations and modify formats successfully.

**FORUMS, COALITIONS, ADVOCACY, AND THE LIKE**

**Wild and Scenic Partnership Meeting**

CU Education Coordinator and Executive Director attended the Wild and Scenic Bi-annual Partnership Meeting in Florida.

**South Jersey Bayshore Coalition** – CUMR continues to coordinate the meetings of SJBC.

**Wild and Scenic Coalition** - CU Maurice River has attended the Coalition’s meetings; these have been helpful in connecting our team with available resources as well as updating us on current activity within the program.

**NJ DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife, Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee Meetings**- CU Maurice River continues to hold a seat on this committee.

**Delaware Bayshore Council** – CU Maurice River has been functioning as the interim SJBC representative on the Bayshore Council.

**Association of New Jersey Environmental Educators** – Programming staff continues to interact with this association benefiting from the community’s knowledge, skills, and resources.

CU also continues to serve on the **Aquaculture Stakeholder Committee** for the State and Federal conservation measures that involve the oyster harvest and its impacts on shorebirds. This is specific to the federally endangered red knot and its migration on the Delaware Bayshore.

*August and September* **- South Jersey Transportation Organization**

CUMR has been participating on an Advisory Group to inform a study being conducted to improve the eco-tourism experience in the Wild and Scenic Maurice River area. The South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) is partnering with Cumberland County to develop a Corridor Study for the Maurice River. The goal of this effort is to identify opportunities for ecotourism, trails, and economic development while continuing to protect, enhance, and enjoy the river. To gather input from stakeholders about the needs and opportunities within the Maurice River Corridor. So far, CUMR has attended one meeting and helped the environmental consultant identify stakeholders.

*09.28 – 09.29.2023 -* **Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed**

CUMR Executive Director, Outreach & Education Coordinator, and Program Coordinator attended this regional forum. To build working relationships, gain insight on funding resources, and share conservation perspectives as they pertain to protecting the ORVs of the Wild and Scenic Maurice River.

1. **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING / OUTDOOR EDUCATION FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES**

Month of August – **Nature Journaling**

In the third year of Nature Journaling we covered the following topics: flora at the WheatonArts pollinator gardens and nature trail, insects at the Maurice River Bluffs, wildlife at Parvin State Park, and landscapes on the Maurice River Bicycle and Walking Trail. Flora and insects were the most popular among the kids as they are more hands on and we were able to look up close at both of them with magnifying lenses and digital microscopes. Wildlife highlights spotted at Parvin State Park: green heron, red-tailed hawk, rat snake, numerous turtles, and several leopard frogs. Program Coordinator Julia Wiberg assisted on field days and intern Amy Hemple assisted on art studio days. Local artist and teacher Linda Robinson was their art instructor and Kimberly Spiegel was their field instructor.

**Family-Friendly Friday**

*09.15.2023 –* Monarch Mania, This event was rescheduled twice due to inclement weather and shifting migration periods. In the end, it was led in October 2023.

**Outdoor Classrooms: Climate Change through a Local Lense**

*August - September,* CU Outreach and Education Coordinator has been partnering with the Levoy Theater to plan an after-school program that marries science education with the performing arts. Students from Millville, Bridgeton, and Salem will be introduced to climate change topics and explore how these specifically affect natural and urban areas in Cumberland and Salem County. Then the students will create tell climate-themed stories through performance art.

**Millville Child Family Center**

*August – September*, CUMR Executive Director has been coordinating with Millville Child Family Center, the area’s largest preschool and only free daycare. In October, CUMR Program Coordinator will offer classes outdoor education sessions on the WheatonArts Nature Trail, where the children will explore insects, trees, vernal pools, and more.

1. **OPERATIONS AND OFFICE SUPPORT**

**Personnel**

* CUMR’s former Office Manager has temporarily returned to the office as a 1099 employee to bridge the gap while CUMR searches for an administrative personnel to run the front office.
* Holly City Development Corporation Internship Program ended in Augusts 2023. CUMR has decided to keep the intern on until the end of the year.
* Programming staff continues to implement the 2023 calendar of outdoor awareness events and stewardship opportunities.

**TRAINING**

* **Association of New Jersey Environmental Educators -**CU's Environmental Education and Outreach Coordinator continues to take advantage of ANJEE's training and networking opportunities.
* **Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resource Management Training for Professionals** CU's Environmental Education and Outreach Coordinator is attending Rutger's Green Stormwater Infrastructure Champion Course. She has received her training certificate and continues to attend workshops and lectures.
* **Avalon Environmental Commission hosted a talk by Dr. Tallamy of the University of Delaware.** He spoke on the need for habitat enhancement in suburban and urban settings in order to support the biodiversity of open spaces. CUMR Outreach and Education Coordinator attended this activity as a training session.
* **River Management Society’s Wild and Scenic Speaker Series –** As part of her position’s training process, CUMR Program Coordinator has been accessing these webinars to learn more about the history and functioning of the National Park Service’s Wild and Scenic Program.

**ADMINISTRATIVE WORK**

**National Park Service -** Administrative reporting to the National Park Service is an aspect of our functioning beyond the actual carrying-out of the contracted deliverables. CU continues to meet reporting requirements as it waits to be put on the semi-annual reporting schedule from which other partnership rivers benefit. Staff continue to work with NPS River Manager to implement new reporting procedures. In the first quarter of 2023, staff compiled the documents needed to renew the five-year Cooperative Agreement with NPS's Wild and Scenic Partnership Program. CUMR is expecting final approval in July. The new contract will go into effect August 20th, 2023.

**Office**

Administrative staff works to maintain an efficient, welcoming, and safe work space for the whole CUMR team. They also manage organizational documentation, supply inventory, service contracting, and purchasing.

**Volunteer, Participation, and Financial Tracking** - The programming and administrative staff continue to track many aspects of CUMR activities, including but not limited to NPS billing, volunteer hours, participation/attendance, volunteer recruitment, bookkeeping, corporate support, birth, deaths, illnesses - all the details that make CU a community.

**Social Media** – CU Maurice River’s Facebook page is more active than ever. You can view videos, see pictures from outings, read volunteer stories, and much more. By following CUMR and liking our posts, you not only stay better connected but you also help us get more information out to more people in the community.