Deal Island Peninsula Project
DECEMBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

Check out what we've been up to this month

Hello Project Stakeholders and new contacts!

As we move swiftly toward the new year, we hope you'll stay engaged with all of the exciting DIPP activities we have planned for 2017. We've had a busy December with the kick-off meetings of the ICRA focus area teams. Below you'll find a brief summary of these meetings and a save the date announcement for our January & February fieldtrips. You'll also find a few other interesting items on ghost forests and barn owls (warning: they're cute!), as well as a link to the just-finished Rock Creek Cemetery ancestry online tool. With the upcoming focus area work, we hope to engage new local community members in these activities. We also encourage nonlocal DIPP stakeholders to continue to stay involved since many of you have expertise that will be instrumental in developing risk reduction strategies for the Deal Island Peninsula. Help us get the word out by sharing these newsletters with your friends, neighbors, and colleagues! You can also email us if you would like to add someone to the DIPP mailing list.

Thanks & Happy Holidays!
Jo Johnson and the rest of the Deal Island Peninsula Project Team

SAVE THE DATE!
Upcoming January Focus Area Team Field Trips

Photo: Tidal ditches in Oriole that often overflow onto roadways, representing one of many concerns voiced at our December meetings (see below for more details).

Focus Areas Teams will be taking field trips to assess key areas of concern in each of focus area. These field trips are to help build the case for assistance/funding needs for implementing strategies that will reduce flooding, erosion, and other risks to the community now and into the future. We will meet before and after our trip into focus areas at the locations designated below:

January 28th:
Dames Quarter: 9am-12pm | The Farmhouse (Dames Quarter, MD)
Oriole: 1-4pm | St. Peter's Church Hall (Oriole, MD)

February 4th:
The Harbors: 9am-12pm | Rock Creek Church Hall (Chance, MD)
The DI shoreline @ Crowell Rd.: 1-4pm | Rock Creek Church Hall (Chance, MD)

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www.dealislandpeninsulaproject.org

Update on December Focus Team Gatherings

On December 3rd and 10th, DIPP convened Focus Area Teams to discuss four areas around the Deal Island Peninsula area: 1) Deal Island Shoreline at Crowell Rd., 2) Deal Island Harbor, Scott's Cove, and Wenona Harbor, 3) Dames Quarter, and 4) Oriole. These areas were identified by DIPP stakeholders in January and February of 2016 as key places of concern for current and future flooding, erosion, and social changes. Each team met as as a group of 7 to 17 individuals to discuss problems, review flood maps, and identify target areas to visit during follow-up field trips in late January/early February (see above). Below you'll find a brief summary from each focus area meeting. For more information about these meetings, please contact us: dealislandpeninsulaproject@gmail.com.

Dames Quarter [Dec 3 AM at St. Paul's Church Hall]
The Dames Quarter Focus Area Team identified several locations along Long Point Rd., Riley Roberts Rd., and Hodson White Rd. that become impassable during high-high tides due to overflowing ditches and flooding from surrounding marsh areas. They also discussed problematic erosion on properties along the Tangier Sound and Long Point Rd, and the cost to residents for maintaining shorelines. Concerns were also raised about the declining socioeconomic health in some areas of the community, and the potential loss of key community assets, such as the churches.

Oriole [Dec 3 PM at St. Paul's Church Hall]
The Oriole Focus Area Team discussed concerns related to ditch flooding and marsh encroachment onto properties. Another concern into the future will be increasing flooding in the area as much of it is low-lying. This area also includes Champ and St. Stephens. A concern for the St. Stephen's area is standing water and flooding, and people's inability to sell their homes and move to higher ground.

Deal Island Shoreline near Crowell Rd. [Dec 10th at Fire Hall]
The key concern in this shoreline area is erosion of the small beach between Crowell Rd. and Hunt's Hill that protects an interior marsh. If inundated, flooding of this marsh would lead to drastic changes for the communities off of Ballard Rd., Ford Rd. and potentially communities farther north. This could also impact Deal Island Rd. (near Ford Rd.) and thus potentially interfere with travel to and from Wenona. Another major concern for residents is flooding and standing water in the ditches.

Harbors [Dec 10th at Fire Hall]
For the harbors, the discussion focused on issues of flooding. At this time, flooding in the Deal Island harbor is not a large risk, but areas of Scott's Cove Marina are potentially at risk to future flooding. In addition, certain points along the road through the Scott's Cove area seem to be at higher risk, and if inundated would hinder travel. For Wenona, flooding is seen to be quite historic, and has improved somewhat in recent years. However, flooding is still seen to be a big concern for residents living nearby Wenona Harbor.

Meet a Project Stakeholder: Elizabeth “Liz” Brightman

I am a local Realtor and small farmer with my husband. We live nearby and attend church regularly in Oriole at St. Peters United Methodist Church. Through that connection, we have gotten to know the local people. As a Realtor, I am concerned about the impact of the rising waters in our area related to property values, tourism and general growth. We need to find a way to improve the local economy. It is important to know the critical issues influencing the economy in order to find the best resources for improvement.

Monitoring Barn Owls in Monie Bay Reserve

If you have been out in a boat on Monie Bay you have probably seen some large wooden boxes sitting atop 4x4 post at the edge of the marsh (like the one photographed on right). You would rightly assume they look like an oversized birdhouse that you might have in your yard. What in the world would need a box that large? If you guessed Barn Owl, you guessed right.

Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) are a cosmopolitan species found on every continent except Antarctica. Here in Maryland, we are fortunate enough to have them as year-round residents. A medium sized owl, they stand about 15" tall with a 3-foot wing span. They favor open fields and thin woodlands like the marshes of Somerset County, which provide excellent hunting grounds. They are also cavity nesters, preferring to build their nests in large, partially hollow trees. I'm sure you could find a few trees that fit the bill, but generally they tend to be in limited supply in the marsh areas around Monie Bay. We provide these nest boxes to help supplement natural nesting sites, giving local Barn Owls a place to call home.

The Barn Owl Box Monitoring Project is being carried out by the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in cooperation with MD-DNR Wildlife and Heritage Division to place and monitor the nest boxes. Through the project, we replaced all the boxes previously placed by MD-DNR, and we added some new locations, resulting in a total of 13 boxes in the Deal Island Wildlife Management Area. We also monitor nest fate and productivity, and have revived a program to band the young owls before they fledge (i.e., are able to fly). Banding helps us understand how these birds disperse from their natal grounds. Monitoring how many young survive to fledge gives us a sense for how well the marsh supports a healthy owl population. If numbers drop, it could be a sign of declining prey availability or even a decrease in marsh quality.

Between May and November, we banded or recaptured 34 owls, making 2016 a very good year. We even recaptured adults in the boxes that were banded as juveniles in Pennsylvania and Calvert County. It seems people aren't the only ones moving to the Eastern Shore for the good life! Barn owl populations have significantly decreased in Maryland and other eastern states. This could be due to habitat lost for nesting and hunting, and possibly rodent control affecting prey availability. Our population in Monie Bay appears to be fairly stable, but we will continue to monitor Barn Owls to ensure they stick around for years to come.




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Rock Creek United Methodist Church Website and Cemetery Maps Now Available!

This summer, Sarah Hartge, UMD, mapped the Rock Creek Cemetery under the guidance of Michael Paolisso (UMD) and Dan Harris (Salisbury University). She also developed a website for Rock Creek United Methodist Church and cemetery, which features a short description of the church, a link to the ArcGIS Online map and other resources, and over 250 short biographies about people buried at the cemetery. These biographies were put together with help from community members. Points on the ArcGIS Online map are linked with photos of the gravesite as well as a biography (if available for that person).

Visit the website at:
www.rockcreekunitedmethodistchurch.com

Ghosts Forests of the Chesapeake Bay

"Watching his family's land drown at such an alarming rate inspired Kirwan, now a professor at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, to study these so-called "ghost forests"—dead coastal forests that are transforming into marshland. Kirwan and students have discovered that sea level rise has killed more than 400 square kilometers of coastal forest around Chesapeake Bay since the 1850s.

Photo: Ghost Forest near St. Stephens, taken from Deal Island Rd.

At Goodwin Islands in Virginia, for instance, the rates of forest loss have increased every decade since the 1940s, growing even faster in the past decade. In the United States, ghost forests are most common along the Atlantic coast, from Canada to North Carolina, as well as in Louisiana. Yet as ominous as these eerie ecosystems appear, Kirwan's research has shown that they are not a sign of impending doom. Instead, ghost forests actually offer evidence that the natural world is responding to climate change, and resiliently transforming to survive sea level rise. By sacrificing a strand of trees along the coast, the newly-formed marshland can protect the forest and other land further inland."

Excerpt from: "Ghost Forests" Are, Surprisingly, a Sign of ResilienceNature is fighting sea level rise in its own way. By Lyndsey Gilpin Published December 1, 2016. The original article can be found online: hakaimagazine.com/article-short/ghost-forests-are-surprisingly-sign-resilience.

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