

# Success! Sixty Forested Acres Added to Pickering

**T**hanks to more than 130 people who stepped forward in support of our recently concluded “More Acres, More Trails, More Space to Explore” campaign, this September we were able to acquire 63 acres of woods adjacent to the center’s 400 acres, allocate money for trail creation as well as trail maintenance and improvement across the campus. Together we were also able to add to the Center’s endowment to ensure our ability to care for these new acres and trails and seed future land protection efforts around the Center. This marks the Center’s second acquisition of land in the last six years, preserving invaluable undeveloped land in Talbot County for the entire community to benefit from—both wild and human.


Over the last 30 years, Pickering Creek has played a major role in providing space in the community for people seeking places to enjoy nature for exercise, respite, and outdoor exploration and learning. Over the next three years we will work to create trails throughout the new woods, adding new dimension to Pickering’s already fantastic trail system, and fully integrating them within our main campus. New interpretive panels, trails and

maps will be sprouting up during that time to both celebrate the expanded property lines as well as ‘mulch the pathway’ to new and exciting learning adventures.


When brother and sister George Olds and Margaret Strahl donated Pickering Creek’s main campus in the early 1980s they envisioned a place where everyone in the community would feel welcome as they explored nature as it is intended. In 2016, shortly after the completion of the Center’s Master Site Plan, Pickering Creek Audubon Center received a generous donation of a home within a 10-acre woods across the Creek from the Peterson Family. Cemmy & George Peterson envisioned that their gift would expand Pickering’s ability to reach new people and encourage others to imagine the fantastic impact for the community that comes from expanding the center’s acres and protecting its boundaries.

In 2018, a significant lead gift allowed us to begin evaluating our ability to acquire the 63 acres adjacent to the center which were at the time being prepped for sale and/or development. Our process was slowed by COVID and then a decision to

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*Dedicated to  
Community-Based  
Conservation  
of Natural Resources  
through Environmental  
Education and Outreach  
on the Eastern Shore  
of the Chesapeake Bay.*



Among the noteworthy trees on the new property is this huge Tulip Poplar.

# Pickering Creek Woods

By Peter Stifel

Whose woods are these I hope you know-  
But if you don't- I'll tell you, so

She has no name, takes up no space,  
She doesn't breathe, she has no face.  
The universe is her domain-  
She is the winds, the rocks, the rain.  
She is the comet, too the stars-  
She is Saturn, she is Mars.  
She is the Moon, the asteroid-  
She is the dust, the light, the void.  
She is the atom, and its parts-  
She is our minds, our thoughts, our hearts.  
We live each day by grace of her-  
She's all we know-as it were.

These woods are kept a natural space,  
With little moved or put in place,  
Where creatures large and small can live,  
And she to each of them can give  
A chance to breathe—and die—to be-  
Just as she does for you and me.  
So skeeters too are home in here,  
An turtles slow, and quick the deer-  
And birds that flit from tree to tree-  
And eagles soar, perchance you'll see.  
Recycling here by fungus works,  
And tiny bug and worm that lurks  
Within the leaf, the log, the bark,  
Who feed by day and too by dark.

Many love these woods, you know-  
I hope on you they'll also grow,  
For if I truly had my way,  
I'd pass through here most every day-  
And doing that, I also might  
Walk through these woods on moonlit night.  
You're welcome, please, to visit here-  
Whether come from far or near.  
Be here as often as you may,  
On rainy or on sunny day,  
In cold and snow or summer heat,  
The owner's here for you to greet.  
Do come to walk, to see, to smell,  
And when you leave, she'll bode you well.



A view of the Farm to Bay Trail from the new 63 acres across the creek.

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amicably part ways with the National Audubon Society, however the urgency did not let up. As one of the projects key supporters stated again and again, "They are not making land anymore."

Together, we envisioned protecting important forested land for wildlife, protecting the Center's wild experience for everyone from school kids to trail hikers. Beyond that we saw the opportunity to offer more trails to explore at Pickering Creek. And since we see the best classroom that was ever built is the great outdoors itself—and not a building—creating an even bigger classroom for adventures at Pickering Creek would be an excellent choice for the community.

The addition of these acres will add tremendous opportunities for discovery for our school year program participants as well as summer camp kids. We envision campers canoeing across the creek to these woods and having wild experiences exploring a remote woodland seemingly disconnected from the rest of the world they usually explore.

Over the next three years we will add new trails for individuals and families to explore and seamlessly connect them to main campus trails accessed from the main parking area near our farm buildings. Expect the first trails to open in late 2023.

We will be offering guided walks through these woods on the second Wednesday of every month in the afternoon from December through next May. These guided opportunities will share big trees, beautiful creek views and the peaceful quiet of these delightful woods that have only been enjoyed by a very small handful of people and myriad wildlife over the last 50 years.

*We hope to see you on the trails!*

## Rekindling Traditions A Return to EcoCamp

"PSSST. Paw Paw come here," a voice whispered from behind a bayberry bush as I walked along our wetland trail on a hot July afternoon. I stopped for a moment, unaware of any talking shrubs that knew my camp nature name. "Paw Paw, come here for a second!"

I looked around and saw the broken outline of some children, hiding behind a bush. "Ok, give me a second," I said as I carefully picked my way through the tall grasses.

"Are you sure we should show him?" I overheard another voice whisper.

"It's ok, Paw Paw can know," said a different voice, "he won't tell anyone."

Eventually I had meandered my way through the dense vegetation and around to where the EcoCampers were; small grinning faces speckled with mud greeted me.

"Welcome to the secret island," the EcoCamper who had called me overstated with arms flung wide. The secret island was maybe six feet across at its widest, a small spit of mud and some grasses that barely stood out above the surrounding wetland water. "Wyatt told us about it and we finally found it!"

"It's awesome!" I said graciously, "This is a great secret spot."

"I know," replied another EcoCamper, "we're going to build a fort here no one else can find."

"That sounds like fun! And don't worry, your secret island is safe with me..." I promised.

The sound of campers screaming, running around, laughing and playing filled Pickering Creek once again as summer EcoCamp was back in full swing this year. Familiar faces were a welcome sight, even if they were several inches taller this year compared to the last time we saw them, while new faces were just as exciting to meet.

For some this was their 4th, 5th or



even 6th year coming back. Reese & Wyatt have both been here for over five years and were happy to be back. Reese's favorite memory of EcoCamp was "Running around in the rain outside. Even though we got wet we had so much fun!" while Wyatt said "I got scars one time from running through brambles but the scars remind me of all the fun I had." They were excited to be back as the "older" kids now and hoped to pass on many traditions like several camp songs (little red wagon is a camper favorite but a camp staff nightmare), games like froggy detective, capture the flag and splat as well as canoeing and special places like the secret island in the wetlands.

Other campers had been here before for only a year before the Covid-19 pandemic closed camp. Brady and Ben had both been here before but hardly remembered it. Regardless, they had a blast this year. "This camp is different from other camps," Brady said, "other camps don't have wetlands, frogs and skinks. They (other camps) did the same thing every day

but here we do like 5-6 fun things every day." Ben reminisced on the things he'd miss once the summer was over, "I'll miss canoeing, playing games and catching all the frogs."

And for some campers, this was their very first summer EcoCamp experience. Going to the cardinal circle to make forts, playing on the sandy shorelines of the creek and catching frogs and fish were favorite past times. When asked if they learned anything new this summer, Mario responded "It's very hard to catch bait for fishing" while Leigh and Mary commented that "we learned about Corn Snakes and Eastern Box Turtles."

Whether a seasoned veteran of wetland walks and forest forays or a first year EcoCamp explorer, all of our campers this year loved being back at Pickering Creek and our staff were so happy to have them here! We already can't wait for next summer! Keep your eyes peeled at the end of February for news about when EcoCamp 2023 begins in March!

# Becoming Of, By and For All

At the very top of Pickering Creek's list of guiding values is that nature should be accessible and welcoming to all. Everyone, from every walk of life, should be able to benefit from the thrill of being outdoors, hearing birdsong, feeling seasons change, the crunch of leaves underfoot, and seeing hawks soar in the skies above. This is the primary reason there is no admission fee to visit Pickering Creek. It is why we offer no to low cost (subsidized by gifts from people like you) programming for schools- to make sure entire grade bands including ALL students get field trips to Pickering, and not just the high performing classes with interested teachers. It is why we actively look to remove barriers like transportation for summer camp and teen programming.

We know we can do more, and just as the world paused in March 2020, the Pickering board and staff had begun taking a deeper dive into pursuing our vision of becoming an even more inclusive Center

where every member of our community felt invited and welcome to visit Pickering Creek. We embarked on becoming part of the 2020 cohort of the OF BY FOR ALL Change Network (OBFA). The OBFA Change Network is a nonprofit organization serving a global network of passionate people and committed organizations like Pickering Creek Audubon Center, who are actively working to become more of, by, and for the communities they serve. As part of the cohort, organizations participate in a self-paced, 12-month online program that provides structure, tools, coaching, and community to accelerate an organization's goals toward becoming more equitable and inclusive.

## But what does OF BY FOR ALL even mean?

It is a universal concept—if you want to become welcoming to groups of people who have not had any connection with your organization in the past, one of the

most effective ways to do it is to become more representative of them and collaborate with them to co-create programs by them. And if you can become of and by a community, then it is much more likely to be enthusiastically involved, and the organization is much more likely to be successful at sustainably becoming for them.

So just as the 2020 cohort began, it stopped, and Pickering joined the rest of the nation in rejiggering all of what it does and how it works. As you know, Pickering Creek rejiggered so much that it fledged from the Audubon nest in 2021 to function on its own. The OBFA Change Network did some rejiggering as well and transitioned from its founding Executive Director, Nina Simon, to a new dynamic leader, Courtney Hartge to lead its charge. Needless to say, there were bumps in the kick-off of the 2020 cohort, and luckily, we were in a position to steadily continue our work with OBFA.

We worked with the OBFA Change Network to adopt new ways of working to become of, by, and for our community,

apply an equity lens to both external programs and internal policies, bring structure and clarity to forging partnerships within the community, dedicate space for staff and board for reflection and growth based on lessons learned from the community and connect with a global peer network of members facing similar challenges in other countries and nonprofit sectors.

Pickering's OBFA team, comprised of 3 board members and the 6 full-time staff members, chose a very specific and narrow 'audience' or "Community of Interest" to focus on in the coming year that will enable Pickering Creek to better serve the community. After a number of conversations with people in that community to hear their interests, goals, hopes for the community at large we put together a set of goals called a Change Plan for the staff and board to work on over the next year.

"It's invigorating to work with a team of people who envision better access to nature for all of our neighbors and are open to reaching out in new ways to work with members of our community as co-creators of programs that accomplish that," remarks Pickering educator, and OBFA team co-champion, Samantha Pitts.

"We were excited to be invited to work with this international cohort of change makers as we continue our journey to connect people of all backgrounds with nature in their daily lives," says Susanna Scallion, Pickering Director of Operations and OBFA Co-Champion. "Pickering's first guiding value is that nature is accessible and welcoming to all, but our final guiding value is understanding and promoting the power of collective action which is key in protecting the gift of nature—and it requires EVERYONE to be involved." Stay tuned for more in upcoming newsletters!



# Commitment to Community Into the Garden With Habitat for Humanity

In late March before the trees had fully leafed out a large group of adults with children, including babies in strollers, gathered near the Byron Cottage at Pickering Creek with Center Director Mark Scallion. They are Habitat homeowners who have come out to learn about native trees that might work well in the yards of their newly acquired homes. They listen intently as he introduces them to the willow oak that graces the small space in front of the cottage and to other native trees and shrubs in the vicinity. For many, this is their first visit to the Center and they are both curious and cautious. However as the morning's workshop progresses, they become more engaged and enthusiastic about what they are learning and curious about other opportunities to learn with Pickering Creek. Some of these visitors come back a month later for the annual spring Gardening for the Bay workshop.

These two workshops, the annual "Gardening for the Bay" and the newly added "Bay Friendly Native Trees for your Yard," are key elements of Pickering Creek Audubon Center's Habitat for Humanity project funded by Chesapeake Bay Trust. Organized in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity Choptank, they are offered to current Habitat homeowners and prospective homebuyers. They provide participants the opportunity to gain basic gardening skills and earn sweat equity hours (which is part of the requirements they must satisfy as Habitat homeowners) as they learn about the importance and value of native plants for healthy yards and a healthy Bay watershed for people and wildlife.

These workshops have introduced a new audience of local residents to Pickering Creek and have been a gateway to further participation in the Habitat for Humanity program. The core of the Habitat for Humanity program has been deep collaboration with a small group of homeowners to establish native plant gardens in their



JoNesha planting her habitat garden.

yards over the course of a year and a half. The most successful and engaged gardeners participated in at least of these introductory workshops before they were invited to join the cohort.

Some of the plants now adorning Habitat yards are from native plant seeds collected at Pickering Creek that were propagated by Pickering volunteers to share with homeowner participants. While the majority of plants used in the yards of Habitat homeowners were primarily from local nurseries, the plants grown by Pickering volunteers serve as a symbol of the importance of sharing and working together to steward the health of the whole community, both wild and human.

We are looking forward to further connecting Habitat homeowners with the outdoor resources that Pickering provides, and offering these and other workshops in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity Choptank in the future.

# New Viewing Deck for the Wetland Overlook Loop

Pickering Creek's new **Eleven Eagles Viewing Platform** is a small deck overlooking an eleven-acre wetland that is part of the Center's 80-acre wetland complex. The creation of the platform was supported by the Talbot Bird Club of the Maryland Ornithological Society, thanks to several gifts to the Bird Club including a planned gift from the estate of Chandler Robbins. Robbins, co-author of *Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification* spent much of his life in Maryland and was a fixture around Ornithology. Talbot Bird Club members are regular visitors to the Center and share Pickering Creek's interest in encouraging people to connect to the outdoors through birdwatching. As construction began, builder Julian Larkin and his son watched eleven eagles soar over at one time. The moment enjoyed by father and son and the magic of the outdoors gave lead to the viewing platform's name "Eleven Eagles."

The platform improves views of this particular wetland, previously obscured by cattails that are great for hiding birds, but not good for seeing them! The extra elevation of the platform offers the opportunity to set up a tripod for scope viewing as well as an extra bit of height needed to see the wetland in its entirety. This wetland often features teal, mallard, black ducks and other ducks in the winter and snowy egrets and other herons the rest of the year. The short walk from the main trail to the platform has spectacular blooming ironweed, tickseed sunflower, goldenrod in late



summer and early fall, where you can see myriad pollinators feeding.

Pickering Creek Audubon Center is open daily in the winter from 7:00AM-5:00PM. Trails around the wetland complex can have standing water in winter and spring, waterproof boots are recommended. For the latest visit <https://pickeringcreek.org/visit/planning-a-visit/>

The Talbot Bird Club offers walks throughout the area most weekends of the year that are free and open to everyone. To see their latest schedule visit <https://mdbirds.org/join/chapters/talbot-bird-club/>

# Dorchester 7th Graders Want You to Stay Safe and Cool



*“Climate change isn’t always something that people think of when preparing for household emergencies, but that just makes it all the more important that we be prepared. A heat wave or flood can be just as dangerous as a blackout,”* Habitat for Humanity’s Mimi Sanford wrote to 7th graders at North Dorchester Middle School this past June. *“Your kits will be shared with families in the Habitat program for first-time home ownership. We plan on emphasizing climate change and readiness as a safety issue, and distributing your kits will be a big part of that!”*

The students had just completed their participation in the Chesapeake Linked program; a collaboration between Pickering Creek Audubon Center and Dorchester County Public Schools (DCPS) and supported through a cooperative agreement with the NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program. During the 2021-22 pilot school year, 150 students and four teachers at North Dorchester Middle School participated during both science and social studies classes.

By pulling together local climate and wildlife data, reading local stories of storm surge and flooding, attending two local field trips and interviewing friends, family and neighbors, students gained an understanding of what people cherish about their community. Working together, the students then chose ways they could help wildlife and people in the face of climate challenges like extreme heat, flooding, severe storms and biodiversity loss.

In Social Studies, the 7th graders attended a field trip to Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park (HTURSP) in April. While there, students joined Maryland State Park rangers to tour the museum and consider how Tubman used her understanding of local wildlife and landscapes to aid in her navigation and communication as she escaped from enslavement and returned 13 times to aid others to freedom. Students saw how green building and site practices at



**Dorchester County teachers participate in multiday Professional Development days with Pickering educators.**

the park help to protect the historic and culturally significant site as sea-level rise encroaches on the surrounding landscape.

Science students attended field trips to Pickering Creek in mid-May, visiting diverse habitats to observe wildlife. Each group caught aquatic animals in the wetlands and discussed restoration and carbon sinks as a climate change solution. They used various tools to identify birds in the field and then played games modeling the struggles of migratory birds.

Each class voted on action project choices to implement in collaboration with their teachers as they considered how they might improve space at their school and in their community for wildlife and people. Science classes elected to plant 105 native plants at their school, including black-eyed Susan, foxglove beardtongue, swamp milkweed, andred chokeberry.

Meanwhile in Social Studies, students voted to assemble and distribute “climate readiness” kits. Students first used their investigation research and personal interview findings to draft a letter to the individuals receiving their kits. Seventh graders Landon and Donnie wrote, “We have been learning about how climate change affects us locally... As part of our project, we’ve talked to people we know about the impacts they’ve seen. We’ve

learned that the water is rising and storms are getting worse... We hope you stay safe and cool this summer!” The kits included emergency action plans, first aid supplies and cooling materials like misting bottles, battery-operated fans, cold packs and bandanas.

It was important to the students that families with children, seniors and people who were experiencing homelessness received the kits. Pickering Creek educators worked with Social Studies teacher Mark Lowrie to identify three organizations who would be able to distribute the kits effectively; Delmarva Community Services, Habitat for Humanity of the Choptank, and Talbot Interfaith Shelter.

Asked what the most valuable part of this program was for teachers, Mace’s Lane Middle School teacher Jeff Thompson reflected, “Helping me transition to more student-agency driven lesson plans where student engagement is authentic.” Caitlin Stiegler, science teacher at North Dorchester shared that “watching students enjoy and learn while outdoors,” is a highlight of the year for her.

The Chesapeake Linked program will continue in all Dorchester County 7th grade science and social studies classrooms this school year and through the 2023-24 school year.

# Seeds, Soils & Second Graders

Little hands grabbed the index card as their eyes focused on the picture of the small bird with one word underneath. Hummingbird the card said. Their heads sprang back up, eyes darting from one tree to another. At last they found what they were looking for, a paper plate cut into the shape of a red flower pinned to the bark of a beech tree about 20 feet away. Small feet moved forward and tiny legs pumped as they ran to the tree and deposited their index card at the base. Running back they tagged the next student in line, this student studied a black and white picture of a bee on it. The two lines of children cheered each other on as the relay race to match pollinator and flower went down to the wire. Finally, the last two children sprinted across the finish line and declared victory.

“It’s a tie!” exclaimed Pickering Creek educator, Harrison Jackson, “Good job everyone!” Chaperones applauded everyone’s effort as the students caught their breath. “Now it’s time to go for a hike!”

The second grade students broke formation and grabbed their water bottles, haphazardly strewn about the ground when the relay race was announced, and got into a slightly curved line to go into the woods.

This spring 300 Talbot County 2nd graders and nearly 100 of their adult teachers and chaperones returned to the forests of Pickering Creek to get hands-on experiences learning about seeds, soils and pollinators. It was a welcome return of young learners to the Center this fall as their enthusiastic cheers could be heard reverberating through the trees and on the Zoom



calls of staff stuck working in the office.

The field trip consists of three different sections. The pollinator station involves students behaving like bees in search of pollen and participating in the pollinator relay race. Students also test their sense of smell. Pickering educators asked, “If you were a pollinator, which scent would make you want to visit a flower?” Each second grader sniffed the hidden scents and decided which flower they would visit. Most students loved the sweet smell of vanilla, the refreshing smell of mint, and the citrusy smell of lemon. Surprisingly, each group had students who preferred the acrid scent of vinegar!

Another section of the field trip invites the 2nd graders into the forest to

touch and test different types of soils. While on a hike around the Woodpecker Trail, the students use their hands to sift through soil from a sandy shoreline, a wetland, and a forest full of decomposers. Each class makes a hypothesis about how long it will take water to percolate through different soil samples followed by conducting experiments to find out if they were right.

Finally, Pickering Creek educators guide students to search for different kinds of seeds on the forest floor. Students learn how different seeds move around the environment and work as a small group to sort a wide variety of seeds into categories matching their dispersal methods. Carefully dissecting a lima bean, each second

grader examined a seed coat and embryo up close. The students play a game of seed collection tag, acting as seeds floating in the wind, being moved by animals, and floating in a waterway.

There has been nothing Pickering Creek staff missed more during the pandemic than hosting school and camp groups out at the Center to make memories in nature. At the end of each field trip held in the spring of 2022, students and chaperones left with a little more dirt in or on their shoes and beaming smiles on their faces. The next bunch of second graders from TCPS arrived this autumn, exploring the same trails and places as last spring’s second graders with the same excitement and readiness to explore!

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**Thank you for considering including the Pickering Creek Audubon Center as a beneficiary in your will, living trust, insurance, or retirement plan.**

When you make an estate gift to Pickering Creek Audubon Center you know that your values will continue into the future. You help ensure that the mission will spread and grow. The love and appreciation of nature being built here at Pickering Creek, is inspiring others around the world, so it needs to last well beyond our time here on earth.

By letting us know you have made such a gift, you become a member of the **Pickering Creek Legacy Society**. As a member of the Legacy Society, you will be among the first to hear about Pickering Creek happenings and receive invitations to exclusive events.

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