

## **DCAS CONSERVATION & ADVOCACY COMMITTEE FIGHTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN D.C.**

As 2019 wraps up, we wanted to share DC Audubon Society's Conservation & Advocacy Committee work over the past year. In addition to our bird walks, participating in community events, and offering our Introduction to Birding classes, DCAS has been working behind the scenes to influence our local decision makers to adopt bird-friendly and environmentally sound practices.

As one of the largest re-development projects ever in D.C., the site around RFK Stadium continues to be on our radar. Our efforts began last year with organizing a coalition of 10 conservation groups in D.C. to comment on plans by Events DC that we felt were lacking in environmental protections and coordination with other projects along the Anacostia. This year, we continued those efforts with discussions and informational walks around Kingman and Heritage Islands key stakeholders. Among other things, we expressed our concern over the number of new bridges (three) proposed to cross the Anacostia. While we support increased access to the Kingman and Heritage Islands for our neighbors east of the Anacostia, we are adamant that three bridges is excessive and pose serious environmental concerns. There are other ways to provide access without sacrificing this unique natural area in our city.

At a time when it seems like protecting the environment is getting harder and harder, we had a significant success in 2019 when we protested a badly located solar project that Georgetown University wants to build in the Nanjemoy Forest in Charles County, Maryland. While we applaud Georgetown's commitment to clean energy, this 500-acre solar project would destroy over 200 acres of the Nanjemoy Forest—the largest area of forest in the state of Maryland—and compromise high-quality streams. The National Audubon Society lists the Nanjemoy Forest as an "Important Bird Area," and it is home to a number of at-risk bird species, including wood thrushes, bald eagles, worm-eating warblers, and prothonotary warblers. There are far better locations for solar facilities such as degraded agricultural sites. Along with another D.C. conservation organization and a group of students and alumni from Georgetown, we encouraged Georgetown to find another site and requested that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources deny a critical permit which would allow building on a wetland. We were happy to learn that the Maryland Department of the Environment denied the water quality permit this summer. The company developing the project has the right to appeal, so we will continue to follow this closely.

Another ongoing project for the Conservation & Advocacy Committee is the protection and responsible redevelopment of Kenilworth Park. As jointly proposed by the National Park Service and the District Department of Transportation, the Arboretum Bridge and Trail Project would build a bridge across the Anacostia in an environmentally sensitive area and obstruct the last remaining vista up the river without major infrastructure. The agencies conducted the original environmental assessment for the project nearly eight years ago, and as a result it fails to consider the raft of more recent plans for development along the Anacostia. The environmental assessment also does not propose any alternatives to connecting Kenilworth Park with the Arboretum, in terms of bridge location, bridge type, or using existing infrastructure. DCAS sent comments to NPS and DDOT (with the support of other organizations) voicing these concerns and requesting an updated analysis.

Other projects in 2019 included writing to, and meeting with, members of Eleanor Holmes Norton's staff to support adoption of the Bird-Safe Buildings Act, which would require all Federal buildings to adopt measures to minimize bird collisions with windows; organizing invasive plant removal days on Kingman Island; and organizing volunteers to maintain the Native Plants Garden at the Rock Creek Park Nature Center. We are also represented on the Mayor's Citizen Advisory Panel for input on D.C.'s plans to convert 75,000 streetlights to LED technology. And once again, DCAS will participate in Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, the longest running citizen science project in the world.

We could not do what we do without the help of many volunteers and want to extend our sincere thanks to each and every one of them. If you are interested in getting involved with the Conservation & Advocacy Committee, please reach out and send an email to [dcaudubonsociety@gmail.com](mailto:dcaudubonsociety@gmail.com).

Thank you for your interest and continuing support of DC Audubon and our efforts on behalf of birds.