



# The Queen Anne's Chronicle

CELEBRATING QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY

INFORMING THE CITIZENS

## THE WOODED LANDS OF QUEEN ANNE'S

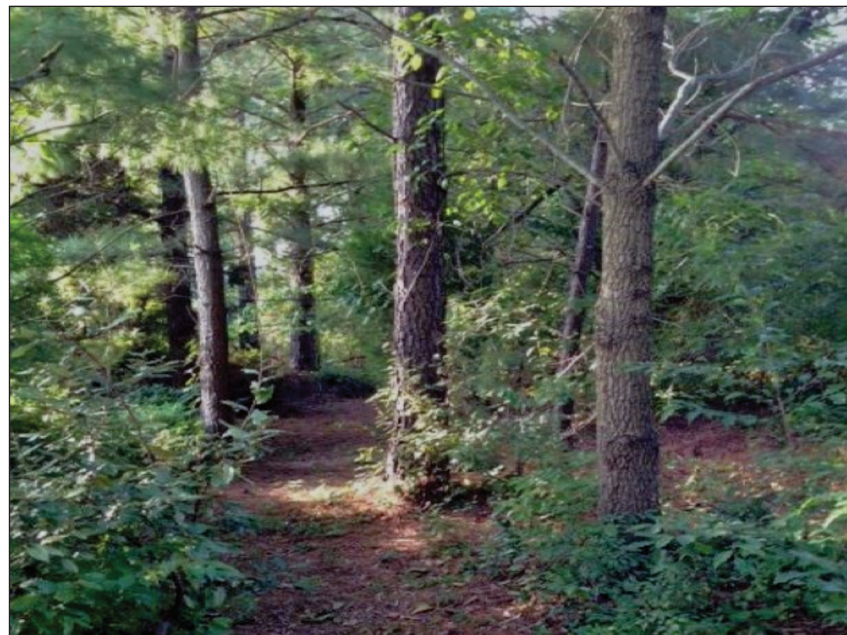
One day as we were walking in the woods at Tuckahoe, we began thinking about the County's forests, not just in this State Park, but on private lands all over the County. After living here for so many years, how little we knew about the wooded lands of Queen Anne's County!

Farms we'd been steadily learning about, as we watched one crop season follow another – but those patches of forest that everywhere appear among the farm fields, those magical stands of trees that add so much to the beauty of our rural landscape? About them we had learned far less.

As luck would have it, it was just then that we crossed paths with the **Knowledgeable Forester** – or “K.F.” as he is known to his friends. K.F. is out here often, loves the sylvan world, and is generous with his time. So taking full advantage, we decided to get a quick tutorial.

**Chronicle: If you don't mind, K.F., our subject is the forests of Queen Anne's County, but we'd like to begin at the beginning – with the trees. What makes a plant a “tree”?**

**K.F.:** Robert Frost once wrote that a tree was a “vague dream-head lifted out of the ground, and thing next most diffuse to cloud.” The U.S. Forest Service, however, defines a tree as “any perennial woody plant species that can attain a height of 15 feet at maturity”.



*Into the woods, near Centreville*

*– Chronicle Photo*

The trees we are most familiar with here in QAC have no trouble with that height requirement – and some of them get really tall! Queenstown, for example, has 100-foot Oaks, Tulip Poplars, and American Beech. Grasonville has an 80-foot Red Maple, and Prospect Bay has an 85-foot Sweetgum. The very common Loblolly Pine can also top 100 feet, and some have been measured at that height in QAC.

**Chronicle: We suppose the Forest Service also has a definition of a “forest” – after all, it's in their name.**

**K.F.:** Right you are. Forest land, according to the Forest Service, is land at least 10 percent stocked with trees, at least one acre in size, and at least 120 feet wide. Forest land can exist in urban and agricultural

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## IT'S SEPTEMBER: YOUR PROPERTY TAX BILL IS DUE

Ah, September! Cooler weather, autumn on the way. Often, a beautiful month. Always, the last month to pay your property tax without a penalty.

Gazing out the window, you sit with your tax bill before you, check book open, pen in hand. The bill came some time ago, but now it can't be ignored any longer. It has to be paid. You study the bill. Much of it is hard to decode, but the “balance due” is clear enough – and, as always, it's painful. How did they get that number?

### Finding Where It Hurts

Continuing to study the bill, you locate the two sources of the pain, or three if you live in a town: there's the tax amount for the County, a much smaller tax amount for the State, and an amount for the municipality, if applicable, that can start to approach as much as half the County amount (if you live in Centreville, for example).

Each of these two (or three) tax amounts is, as the bill shows, based on an “assessment” of your property. The assessment amount is translated into the tax amount by multiplying it by so many cents per \$100 of assessed value, depending on which tax we are talking about.

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## QAC FOREST FACTS

Forest land as a percentage of all QAC land: 27%

Percentage of QAC forest land that is:

- Not affected by residential development: 67% (Talbot: 49%)
- Outside the effects of roads: 36% (Talbot: 25%)
- Undisturbed by conditions at edges: 26% (Talbot: 24%)
- In patches larger than 100 acres: 82% (Talbot: 75%)

QAC forest lands lost to development, 2002-10: 688 acres (Talbot: 757 acres)

Sources: <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/forests/pdfs/MarylandsForests2008a.pdf> [Nov.2011];

<http://planning.maryland.gov/PDF/OurWork/LandUse/County/QueenAnnes.pdf>;

<http://planning.maryland.gov/PDF/OurWork/LandUse/County/Talbot.pdf>

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# CORSICA WATERSHED AWARENESS DAY

Corsica Watershed Awareness Day will be held September 21st from noon to 4 p.m. at Bloomfield Farm on Route 213, just north of Centreville. This free event combines family fun with engaging environmental education.

The family fun includes tours of the historic farmhouse, a variety of tasty food offerings, live music, hayrides, pony rides, petting zoo, pond fishing, face painting, balloons, pumpkin painting, and creative craft activities for children.

The environmental education is provided by exhibits on rain gardens, oyster restoration, storm water management, river testing results, living shorelines, land preservation, cover crop programs, septic system upgrades, and other environmental issues. Back by popular demand will be Scales and Tales with their wildlife exhibit and the



First 150 visitors at Corsica Watershed Awareness Day get a free tree!

Photo Credit – Corsica River Conservancy

Fishmobile from the Phillips Wharf Environmental Center on Tilghman Island.

Bloomfield Farm, now owned by the County, is still being farmed. Some wetlands have been restored; hundreds of trees have been planted; and a fishing pond and community sports fields have been installed. The home at Bloomfield farm, a large brick house, dates to the early 1800's.

The first 150 families attending the event will be given a free native tree. A raffle will also be held for a kayak and related equipment.

Corsica Watershed Awareness Day is an outreach effort of the Corsica River Conservancy, a local group of volunteers dedicated to restoring and preserving the Corsica River and its watershed. For more information on the many activities of this impressive organization, visit [www.corsicariverconservancy.org](http://www.corsicariverconservancy.org)

## Wooded Lands, continued from Page 1

areas so long as it meets these requirements, and – this is important – the understory is not mowed or grazed. That rules out a lot of residential land as “forest” – but unless we are careful, definitions can sometimes mislead as well as clarify. A residential neighborhood with a good native tree canopy throughout the whole area, not just Bradford Pears scattered here and there, can be a real benefit to the warblers, thrushes, and all the other forest-dependent “neotropical migrants” that travel up and down the Atlantic Flyway.

**Chronicle: Staying just with forests as defined, how would you generally describe the ones we have in Queen Anne's County?**

**K.F.:** In Queen Anne's County, most of our forests are on seasonally wet, poorly drained land, or on sloping land such as land going down on both sides of a creek. The obvious reason for that is we are in the heart of some of the oldest continuously farmed land in the U.S., with some of the best soils, so the land most suitable for farming has long since been cleared for that purpose. But we also have some blocks of upland forests as well – in the Carmichael and Wye Island area and on Spaniard Neck and some of the other necks outside Centreville.

Some birds and other wildlife need patches of forest far larger than the one acre minimum in the Forest Service definition – like five hundred acres or more. In Queen Anne's County, most of our larger forested areas are in the eastern part of the County – the Sudlersville, Ingleside, Barclay areas. The central and western parts of the County are more in agriculture, though there is a nice large forested tract on southern Kent Island near Romancoke – hope that remains there!

**Chronicle: Overall, how much forest land, as the Forest Service defines it, is there left in Queen Anne's County?**

**K.F.:** Maybe more than you might think. Of the total 237,000+ acres comprising QAC, a little over 60,000 acres are forest land, or 26-27%. State-wide, about 40% of Maryland land is forested. Remember, we are the leading agricultural county in Maryland, and so our percentage of forested land is naturally going

to be below that of most other counties. QAC is in the same forested range as the other mid-Shore farming counties, while north of us Cecil, and south of us Worcester, are much more forested.

**Chronicle: Because we're a rural, low-density county, isn't possible that our forested land, even though there may be less of it, is "better" in some ways than the forested land in the more urbanized counties?**

**K.F.:** Good question. To answer it, let's begin by looking at the issues of *urbanization* and *fragmentation* of forest land, which are two Bad Things that can happen to forests and the so-called “ecosystem services” they render, like cleansing the air, protecting watersheds, and conserving biodiversity.

Start with urbanization. The Forest Service measures urbanization by identifying forest lands with a house density of greater than 15.5 houses per square mile and then calculating what percentage of total forest lands contains this housing density – so a low percentage is a Good Thing.

QAC's forest urbanization percentage is 33% – only three Maryland counties are lower than that: Dorchester, Garrett and Worcester. Kent's forest lands are only a shade more urbanized than ours (35%); Talbot's forested lands, as one can sense by driving around there, are significantly more urbanized than QAC's: 51%.

So, in terms of damage from urbanization, the forested lands of Queen Anne's County are better off, on a percentage basis, than most other Maryland counties.

**Chronicle: Very encouraging – if we're good on urbanization, what about fragmentation?**

**K.F.:** That's a more complicated story. First, what are we talking about when we say “fragmentation”? If a relatively small wooded area is cut through the middle by a highway or is mostly quite close to a housing development or industrial site, it's not going to be as good a place for all those migrating birds, or for a quiet woodland walk like we're having here. Or if your forest lands are nothing but small parcels interspersed among more intensively used areas, again the wildlife and the hunting and so on are going to be less viable. That's the damage fragmentation does to a forest.

From an ecological standpoint, as the scientists have worked it out and as the Forest Service measures it, you like

to have as much as possible of your forested land (1) more than 295 feet from the forest's *edge* with development or agricultural use, (2) more than 980 feet from a *road*, and (3) in a *patch* greater than 100 acres in size. How a forest does on these three measures of non-fragmentation – and here a high percentage is a Good Thing – indicates how undisturbed the forest interior is, and therefore how good it is for wildlife habitat or recreation.

QAC is below the Maryland average on the edge standard (we're at 26%, MD average is 40%) and on the patch standard (82% versus 87%), but we're above the average on the road standard (36% versus 33%). Perhaps there are no surprises here: as an *agricultural* county, we are going to have smaller wooded patches and more edges with farms, while as a *rural* county we will have more wooded land away from roads.

And once again, while we're on a par with Kent, we're better off than Talbot on all three of the fragmentation measures.

Now if you want my opinion, these three measures of edge, road and patch don't capture all of QAC's advantages. Surely it matters, for example, whether the forest's edge is a housing development or a farm, or whether the road near the forest is a superhighway or a country road. QAC is, more than most counties, blessed with large areas of farmland and lightly-traveled country roads. So I say that the raw numbers on the Forest Service fragmentation measures don't quite do us justice.

**Chronicle: But what about the fact that our forests in Queen Anne's County are largely forested wetlands – isn't that a count against us on the forest quality scale?**

**K.F.:** Not in the least! You surprise me. Didn't the *Chronicle*, just two issues back, have a big article on the magnificent wood duck, the only duck that nests here in appreciable numbers, and didn't you say that wood ducks frequent what you called wooded swamps? And didn't you say that the largest part of the wood duck diet is plants like sedge, duckweed and smartweed – you need wet ground for those – and that they also eat insects and small aquatic animals?

As to insects, wet woodlands provide a greater abundance of insects than dry woodlands. And these insects are a key food for the hundreds of species of birds that funnel down the Atlantic Flyway and touch down in woodlands along the Delmarva to refuel

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## PERSPECTIVE: ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY IN QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY SCHOOLS

By SEAN MEEHAN

While the financial picture in Queen Anne's County has more recently changed from red to black, a new set of environmental literacy standards has county schools going green. In June, 2011, the Maryland State Board of Education voted to add environmental literacy as an educational requirement for all high school graduates, beginning with students entering high school in the 2011-2012 year. This action made Maryland the first state to require environmental literacy as a graduation requirement.

Though some critics were quick to label this requirement an imposition serving a politically motivated agenda -- recycling as a new, fourth "R," the Maryland State Department of Education has emphasized that these new literacy standards were conceived with flexibility in mind for both the school systems and the students. Rather than simply adding courses in environmental sciences, schools are challenged to teach environmental literacy "as an interdependent network of ideas and skills" in a range of existing courses or in designing new courses and programs. In thus emphasizing the "integrative nature of environmental education," the MSDE envisions environmentally literate students who may not necessarily become "professional environmentalists but will be the informed and capable stewards of their environment."

At Queen Anne's County High School, for example, there is an environmental club working towards "Green School" certification. Gretchen Mann, a science teacher at QACHS, has begun to fulfill the standard for outdoor educational experience by taking environmental science classes to Camp Pecometh.

In a 2010 op-ed in the *Baltimore Sun* touting the proposed standard before its adoption, Governor Martin O'Malley highlighted an ecology initiative at Kennard Elementary School in Centreville in which students solved a rainwater problem by creating a wetlands. "If these

elementary school children can build a marsh in their own schoolyard," the Governor wrote, "I believe we can build a first-rate environmental education program in our own collective backyard."

It is hard not to share in the Governor's enthusiasm for the students of our County, and also for his wish that our leaders might be equally productive in our "collective backyard" on our behalf. As a parent in the district, and a professor at Washington College who chose to live in Queen Anne's County because of its environmental and educational resources, I take pride in the fact that our educational programs in environmental literacy are already a mark of distinction across the state and nation. Since all education takes place in an environment, it is to the advantage of the County for its schools to be known for the robustness of its educational environment and its programs.

Such robustness comes with costs, of course, since the environmental literacy graduation mandate is unfunded by the State. The standard is designed for local control, which also means it is in need of local support. It costs money, for example, to transport students to Camp Pecometh; and unfortunately, the enrichment teacher who organized the ecology club at Kennard, whose initiative the Governor celebrated, did not survive recent budget cuts.

Growth in education, like growth in a garden, requires a fair amount of tilling and tending. We still use the same word for both endeavors, "cultivation." While students work towards becoming capable stewards of their environment, as challenged to do so by these new educational standards, we might also challenge ourselves in becoming more informed and capable stewards of our schools and their programs.

*Sean Meehan is Associate Professor of English and Director of Writing at Washington College, where his courses include nonfiction, environmental writing, and the Chesapeake Semester. He is the author of Mediating American Autobiography: Photography in Emerson, Thoreau, Douglass, and Whitman. He has a son at Kennard Elementary School and a daughter at Centreville Middle.*



*Osage Orange (Madura Pomifera) – MD State Champion; 101' tall, 258" circumference. Private property, Centreville*



*River Birch (Betula nigra) MD State Co-Champion; 88' tall, 167" circumference. Private property, Centreville*



*Sweet Gum (Liquidambar styraciflua); tied for 2nd place; 85' tall, 179" circumference. Prospect Bay Country Club, Grasonville*

*Photo credits – Dori Murphy, Maryland Big Tree Program*

## THE BIG TREES OF QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY

The Big Tree Program originated in Maryland in 1925 and became a national program in 1940. Our Maryland Big

Tree Program collects data, measures trees, and determines the Maryland State Champion and runners-up for the various species of trees found in Maryland.

The Maryland Big Tree Program has a website, [www.mdbigtrees.com](http://www.mdbigtrees.com), listing many, but not all, the tree species found in Maryland and giving information about the largest trees. The

Program is in the process of adding the missing species and their champions and near-champions to their website.

Above are three of Queen Anne's County's very big trees. For scale, note people standing by the trees.

## CONGRATULATIONS, STEVENSVILLE

The *Chronicle* congratulates Stevensville – its artists, its arts and historical organizations, and their supporters – on the State’s designation of Stevensville as an Arts and Entertainment (A&E) District. The A&E designation offers tax benefits to encourage artists, arts organizations and businesses to locate in a jurisdiction.

In choosing Stevensville, the Maryland State Arts Council said, “As a hub of history, art and culture, Historic Stevensville on Maryland’s Eastern Shore draws history enthusiasts and features opportunities to shop and dine within a quaint and distinctive village setting. [The] Historic Stevensville Arts and Entertainment District is strategically situated to become town center for Kent Island with the goals of appealing to new, year-round business; offering diversified events; [and] leveraging arts and historic assets to become an authentic destination and create a welcoming and inviting streetscape.”

As to streetscapes, apparently the State Highway Administration is committed to help by building sidewalks and improving traffic flow and signage.

Maryland was one of the first states to sponsor these A&E districts as a way to stimulate an area’s economy and improve its quality of life. According to an economic impact study of the State’s then 19 (now 22) Arts and Entertainment Districts, in 2012 “the A&E Districts collectively supported 4,188 jobs that paid more than \$128.1 million in total wages – plus a total State GDP of \$379 million, and total tax revenue of \$29 million.”

This is great news for Historic Stevensville and its arts and business communities, as well as for Kent Island and our County. Fulfilling the promise of the A&E designation will take time and considerable effort, but the groundwork has been laid and the possibilities are exciting. We owe our thanks to those who saw Stevensville’s potential, worked to earn this designation, and are committed to its success.



QAC – Woods, Water and Wildfowl

Photo Credit – David Godfrey

## The Queen Anne’s Chronicle

**The Queen Anne’s Chronicle is published by  
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Chris Pupke – Chairman of the Board

Jay Falstad – Executive Director

Mary Campbell – Editor

Queen Anne’s Conservation Association (QACA), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, is the Eastern Shore’s oldest conservation organization. Its mission is to promote stewardship of Queen Anne’s County’s natural resources and to protect its rural character and small towns while encouraging the management of prudent and sustainable growth.

### Queen Anne’s Conservation Association

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4 Back issues of *The Queen Anne’s Chronicle* can be accessed at [www.qaca.org](http://www.qaca.org)

## COMMISSIONERS’ MEETINGS

Here are selected items summarized from the approved Minutes and QACTV coverage of the County Commissioners’ meetings.

### May 28, 2013. The Commissioners:

- Approved a RFP for the former Sudlersville Middle School Site.
- Designated “Fairness” as the Character Counts! Pillar of the Month for June.
- Heard a presentation on a **County program deferring property tax increases** for persons over 65 making less than \$100K and on a State program capping property taxes for low-income persons; decided to post more information on programs on QAC website.
- Held hearings, at which three persons (the developers’ lawyer, one of the developers, and a Queenstown resident) testified, on ordinances making zoning law changes to facilitate town center development of the **Lowery Farm** in Chester and apartment development on the Mears Point property at Kent Narrows.
- Continued work on the **FY 2014 Budget**.
- Heard no public testimony at Press and Public Comment.

### June 11, 2013. The Commissioners:

- Held a Closed Session at which, according to the Minutes and confirmed by Commissioner President Arentz (QACTV 94:10; see also 100:40), the Board discussed the **FY 2014 Budget**.
- Discussed training requirements for compliance with the Open Meetings Act.
- Received a comprehensive report from Emergency Services Director Aftung that included:
  - State-level recognition of Sgt. Scott Wheatley as the “EMS provider of the year”;
  - with help from better volunteer fire service staffing, reduction of County-wide response time (from 911 call to unit at the door) to 12 minutes and 22 seconds, 75% of the time;
  - in national competition in DC, QAC EMS team’s first-place finish in State and ninth in Nation;
  - public safety communications improvements, fire marshal inspections of pools and liquor stores, and emergency management preparation including partnership with BOE to assist with school lockdown procedures and storm safety.
- Heard, beginning at QACTV 60:42, a 25-minute presentation on **property assessments and taxes** by Margaret Ness, Supervisor of Assessments for Queen Anne’s County, which included a section-by-section walk-through of the website of the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT): <http://www.dat.state.md.us/> [See separate article on taxes and assessments elsewhere in this issue].

- Received, but did not act on, Budget and Finance Director Seeman’s presentation of three options for FY2014 funding of County schools in response to the BOE request for a \$6.1M increase for additional teachers and salary increases: Option #1 – divide increase equally between FY14 and FY15; Option #2 – provide \$4.5M in FY14 and up to maximum of \$1.75M in FY15; Option #3 – fund increase only to extent of adding \$1M to \$2.2M increase already in proposed FY14 budget.
- Heard a presentation of the Economic Development Commission survey of citizen attitudes on economic issues conducted by the BEACON group at Salisbury University [reported on in the May/June issue of the *Chronicle*].
- Heard 3 persons speak at Press and Public Comment

### June 19, 2013. The Commissioners:

- Held a Closed Session at which, according to the Minutes, the Board discussed the COLA amount to award county staff and the effects this would have on the proposed budget.
- Adopted the **FY 2014 Budget** with the following principal provisions:
  - Budget balanced with projected revenues and expenditures both at \$113.9 million;
  - No increase in the property tax;
  - Funding for construction of the new County Complex and initial funding for the new Circuit Courthouse;
  - Funding for the Board of Education at the requested \$6 million but only half in FY 2014 and the rest not until FY 2015 (see Option #1 from previous meeting);
  - 3% COLA for County employees.
- Heard one person speak at Press and Public Comment.

### June 25, 2013. The Commissioners:

- Made 19 appointments to 9 boards and commissions, including the appointment of Jeffrey Reiss to the Planning Commission.
- Designated “Citizenship” as the Character Counts! Pillar for July.
- Heard an update from Commissioner Arentz on slow progress of cost analyses and discussions with the State with respect to sewer down Route 8.
- Heard one person speak at Press and Public Comment concerning transparency in handling the Lowery Farm development proposal

### July 9, 2013. The Commissioners:

- Held a closed session to discuss legal issues regarding **Route 8 sewer** at which, according to the Minutes, two County lawyers and five senior staff were present.

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# INTREPID SQUIRRELS

By JANE SCOTT

I have a love hate relationship with squirrels. On the one hand, I can't help admiring their skill in getting around any device that the Audubon Society can dream up. On the other hand, they do eat my birdseed. Squirrel baffles? My resident squirrels simply hang onto the edge with their hind feet and help themselves. A feeder surrounded by a cage? One tried to chew his way through the top and when that didn't work, he simply hung upside down on the cage and swung the feeder faster and faster until the seed spilled on the ground. I also gave up planting tulips in my garden after he and his pals dug up all the bulbs and ate them.



A shy, large-eyed flying squirrel peeks out of a bluebird box on a farm near Centreville.

Photo credit — Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage

## Squirrel Power

There is no doubt that squirrels are smart. They are also very athletic, as anyone who has seen them running up and down trees and taking terrifying leaps from one flimsy branch to another can attest. Unlike cats who can only run up a tree, squirrels also run down a tree head first, thanks to their sharp claws and a peculiar ability to rotate their hind legs a hundred and eighty degrees. They also use their bushy tails for balance and sometimes as a parachute. It is said they can fall as much as a hundred feet without hurting themselves.

It is squirrels that build those leafy nests high in the crotch of a tree, although they will also move into old woodpecker holes. They use them for breeding — squirrels have one or two

litters a year — or to keep warm in winter.

These days, it seems as if squirrels are everywhere, but it was not always so. Although early settlers to this country told of mass migrations of as many as a thousand individuals moving through the woods at once, by the early twentieth century so much of the original forest had been cut that they were actually in danger of becoming extinct. We forget that they are an arboreal species and are only found where mature deciduous trees or pines produce plentiful amounts of seeds and nuts. (Of course, we help them out by those well-stocked bird feeders.)



One of Queenstown's blue-eyed white squirrels

Photo credit — Tom Pendleton

## Local Squirrels

My resident squirrel is an eastern gray squirrel, *scurius carolinensis*, and is the familiar grayish brown color with a bushy tail. Gray squirrels also come in black and, although rare, some black ones have apparently been seen on Kent Island.

Our most-noted local squirrels, however, are the white squirrels of Queenstown. They are so famous, in fact, that they are featured on the Town seal. Tom Pendleton, who has often photographed them, says they have blue eyes, and, according to a 2009 article in the *Science* section of the *New York Times*, that means they are true albinos. As albinism is caused by a recessive gene that both parents must carry in order to produce albino offspring, the Queenstown colony must have been interbreeding for years. Obviously, they have found a congenial home!

We also have flying squirrels, although very few of us have actually seen one because they are only active at night. Sometimes, if you are lucky, you may glimpse one at dusk or just before dawn. They are lovely little creatures, about nine or ten inches long, with a long silky coat, colored gray or brown above and creamy white beneath. They also have large luminous eyes to help them see in the dark.

Ours is the southern flying squirrel, *Glaucomys volans*, that, despite its name, is found in deciduous forests all the way from southern Ontario to the Gulf. Of course, they do not actually fly, but glide from tree to tree with the help of a membrane that stretches from the wrist of the front leg to the ankle of the hind one. When the legs are extended, it forms a sort of wing that allows them to glide as far as a hundred feet between trees, deftly steering between the trees by using their tail as a rudder.

## The Renowned Delmarva Fox Squirrel

The *most* famous member of our squirrel tribe, however, is the Delmarva fox squirrel. A subspecies of the eastern fox squirrel, *Scurius niger*, another denizen of the eastern woods, it is only found here on the Peninsula. Although its gray coat and white under parts superficially resemble those of the familiar gray squirrel, the Delmarva fox squirrel is considerably larger, with a



The endangered Delmarva Fox Squirrel

Photo credit — DNR

brownish head and a much bushier tail. It is also more apt to be seen running along the ground rather than cavorting among the trees, and it lacks the brassy boldness of the gray squirrel. You won't find him in your back yard; he prefers a quiet life in the deep woods.

Apparently it was Delmarva's comparative separation from the rest of the country that allowed our fox squirrel to evolve as a separate subspecies. It is a fact that when any small group of animals or plants becomes isolated from their parent population, their recessive genes begin to combine in ways that allow different characteristics to become dominant. When the differences are significant enough to prevent them from breeding with the original parent population, they are considered a subspecies.

Historically, Delmarva fox squirrels were found throughout the Peninsula, thriving among the mature loblolly pines and hardwoods. Unfortunately, the widespread clearing of Delmarva's forests over the past two centuries reduced them to a tiny remnant population found only on the Eastern Shore and landed them on the Endangered Species list. Efforts to reintroduce them into some of their former range are beginning to pay off, although their future remains challenged by sprawl, cars, logging of their habitat, and climate change. That the Delmarva fox squirrel has been making a comeback is certainly the good news. The bad news would be to relax our efforts to help him do so. He is, after all, our native son.

*Jane Scott, a writer and illustrator, is the author of Between Ocean and Bay: A Natural History of Delmarva (Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1991), and Field and Forest, A Guide to Native Landscapes for Gardeners and Naturalist (Blackburn Press, 2002), as well as other works. She traces her roots in Delaware back to the 1730's and now lives on the Eastern Shore.*

## It's September, *continued from Page 1*

Thus, the bill you're looking at requires a tax payment to the County of \$0.8471 per \$100 of assessment, \$0.1120 per \$100 to the State, and, if you live in a town, a third, different number of cents per \$100, ranging from \$0.167 (Sudlersville) to \$0.38 (Centreville).

So what you pay in property tax to each level of government depends on two things: the assessment of your property and the tax rate. For the State, the tax rate is set to cover the payments on State bonds. For the County, the tax rate is set, as we know, each year by the County Commissioners; it's the subject of much discussion as part of the budgeting process that goes on for many months. Over the past decade, the County tax rate has been as high as \$0.976 per \$100 of assessed value and as low as \$0.767.

The other factor affecting your property tax bill, the assessment, is a bit more mysterious, and it too can vary quite a bit over the years. The Chronicle decided to probe into assessments after watching (on QACTV) an excellent presentation that was made to the County Commissioners this past June by Margaret Ness, QAC Supervisor of Assessments.

Here are the highlights of what we found out — both about individual assessments and about the bigger picture of assessments County-wide.

### Assessing Your Property

While the County tax rate is set by the County Commissioners and your tax bill comes to you from the County's Treasury Office, the assessment of your property, and therefore the assessment figures on your bill, come from the State — specifically, the State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT), which has a local supervisor and office in each county.

Your assessment is an estimate of the fair market value of your property. Properties are reassessed once every three years, and property owners are notified of their assessment (you will remember getting those notices). If there's an increase in your assessment, it's phased in over three years, but if there's a decrease, it takes effect immediately. Once it's done, the assessment typically remains in effect for the three years, but positive or negative changes in value (e.g. major improvements or heavy storm damage) can result in an interim adjustment.

There are two basic appraisal approaches used by assessors to estimate the fair market value of your home: the sales approach and the cost approach. The sales approach examines the sale prices of comparably zoned and located properties — especially useful for determining land values — while the cost approach looks at the cost to construct a house like yours, with a subtraction for age and condition (depreciation). A further refinement to the cost approach is called the "market value index", which adjusts the depreciated replacement cost of your house based on an analysis of recent sales of houses of similar types in the same area.

## Understanding Your Assessment

In the office of Supervisor Ness at 120 Broadway, your "assessment worksheet" is waiting for you to inspect it at any time, if you want to. Every one of the 25,761 assessable real properties in Queen Anne's County has had its own individual assessment recorded on a worksheet. The worksheet describes the property in some detail (year built, condition, size, bathrooms, decks, fireplaces, etc.), and you can access the various calculations made to reach the appraisal estimate (construction costs, comparable sales, market value index, etc.).

As a property owner, you have the well-known right to appeal an assessment within 45 days after the date of the notice of assessment. You also have the less well-known right to petition for a review of your assessment once each year within the 3-year cycle. Your petition needs to be filed before the beginning of the

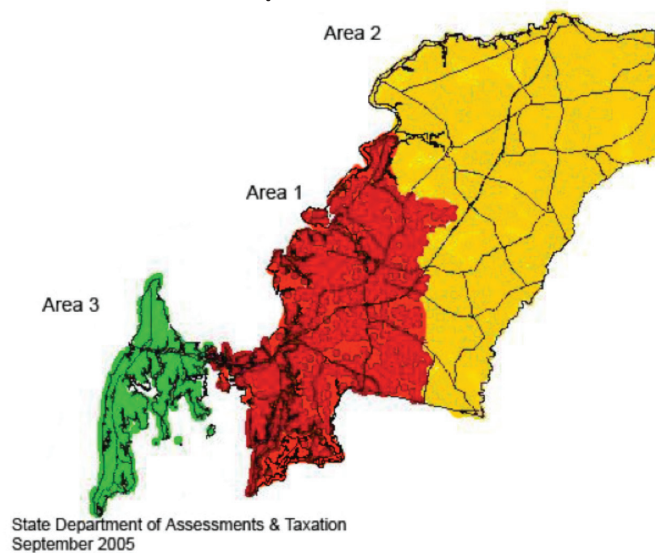
of January 1, 2014 and will receive their notices later this year. Thereafter, Kent Island homeowners (Area 3), last reassessed as of January 1, 2012, are due for reassessment as of January 1, 2015, and so on around the cycle.

Each time a residential area is reassessed, the assessors are looking back at what has been happening in the market during the past three years since the last assessment. What the assessors have been seeing lately, of course, is the continuing damage from the big drop in home prices that happened when the Great Recession slammed us beginning in 2008. Overall, the total assessed value of properties in QAC declined 15% between 2009 and 2013, and it has yet to turn upward again, even though home prices have lately been rising.

The reason why we don't yet see an upturn in residential assessments is the drag of the depressed prices that prevailed in the past years in the three-year assessment period. The same phenomenon is at work when our local assessment office advises the County, as it does twice a year to help with the budget, on what the assessment picture looks like for the current year and two years out. Each of the years covered by the office's advice has working on it the dragging effect of the prior three years, so when the "market" is down (or up), the forecasted assessments of properties lag the trend in property prices.

Accordingly, notwithstanding recent rosy reports from the realtors, the best our local assessment office can advise right now is that the era of declines looks to be over and that there will be "no substantial change" in the County's assessment base when the Commissioners start work early next year on their FY2015 budget. We should all take that as good news, after what we've been through. Beyond that, if the overall economic recovery continues (and without asking the assessment office to use a crystal ball that it refuses to use), a citizen or a County Commissioner might reasonably expect assessments to start rising again, if not nearly so strongly as they did during the long-gone glory days from 2001 to 2008.

## Queen Anne's County Residential Reassessment Areas



Area 1	Assessment Area 1 was reassessed for January 1, 2013
Area 2	Assessment Area 2 will be reassessed for January 1, 2014
Area 3	Assessment Area 3 will be reassessed for January 1, 2015

*Your property tax bill contains a 10-digit Property ID. The first two digits are "18", standing for Queen Anne's County; the next two digits can lead you to what Assessment Area you are in -- if you know the code, which is based on election districts: 03 and 05 mean you are in Area 1; 01, 02, 06 and 07 are in Area 2; and 04 is Area 3. The last six digits are your individual property number.*

year for which you are seeking a reassessment — once the year is under way, it's too late for that year.

The first round of an appeal or review is known as the Supervisor's level of appeal and allows for an informal exchange of information with an assessor in the local office. The property owner can discover how the appraisal was made and bring forward information which may affect the fair market value of the property. (After that, if needed, further increasingly formalized administrative and judicial appeal routes are available.)

### Looking at the Big Picture

While all properties in QAC are assessed every three years, not all properties are assessed at the same time. The County is divided into three residential reassessment areas, as shown on the accompanying map. As the map says, those of us who live in Area 1 were just reassessed as of this past January 1, while next up are the property owners in Area 2, who will get reassessed as

*The Chronicle thanks Supervisor of Assessments Margaret Ness and Assistant Supervisor/Commercial Assessor Matthew Bevins for supplying information used in preparing this article. Any remaining errors, as well as opinions expressed, are solely the responsibility of the Chronicle. The SDAT website, [www.dat.state.md.us/](http://www.dat.state.md.us/), provides a wealth of information about assessments, and the County website is very helpful on property tax billing and collections: click on the Finance/Taxes box on the home page and follow on through to Treasury Office and click on it to open its menu.*

*This article does not discuss the Homestead Credit, which comes into play to limit how much your taxable assessment can increase in any year — certainly not a matter of major relevance in the last several assessments, but one that the Chronicle took a shot at explaining in our November/December 2011 issue, available along with our other back issues at [www.qaca.org](http://www.qaca.org).*

# CHARLES WILLSON PEALE

The last issue of the *Chronicle* focused on a few of the County's many talented artists. A sign at the corner of Route 18 (4H Park Rd) and Wright's Neck Road reminds us that a famous artist from the past, Charles Willson Peale, was born not far from our County Fair Grounds.

A naturalist, soldier, and artist, Peale painted George Washington from life more times than any other painter – seven times. His most famous rendering is the portrait below – a life size picture (7'7" x 4'10") of Washington after the Battle at Princeton (1779). It was very popular and he painted about 18 replicas of it on request. The original hangs in Philadelphia, and the earliest recorded replica by Peale hangs in the US Senate Building.

Peale not only painted portraits – including those of Thomas Jefferson and Lewis and Clark – he also painted scenes such as the "The Unearthing of the First American Mastodon," which reflected his interest in natural history; a picture of his first wife weeping over their young daughter's death from smallpox; and the clever eye-fooling "The Staircase Group" (below).



## Commissioners' Meetings, continued from Page 4

- Agreed in subsequent open session, Commissioner Olds abstaining, to (i) retain expert legal counsel for guidance on the sewer project, (ii) develop a proposal for determining the "economic benefit premium" to be enjoyed by the owners of vacant lots, and (iii) contract for a "customer engagement survey" concerning the project.

- Heard, beginning at QACTV 20:00, a favorable report from Public Works Director Todd Mohn and Chief Sanitary Engineer Alan Quimby on the system layout and cost estimate of a Septic Tank Effluent Pump (STEP) **sewer system for Southern Kent Island.**

- Received, beginning at QACTV 42:47, a **Financial Review** from Budget & Finance Director Seeman in which he reported an estimated operating surplus for the just-concluded FY 2013.

- Heard Commissioner Simmons encourage public input on the proposed **Route 8 sewer project** as "things are now moving rapidly . . . over the next weeks or months".

- Heard one person speak at Press and Public Comment about the former Sudlersville Middle School site.

**July 23, 2013.** The Commissioners:

- Adopted, Commissioners Dumenil and Olds opposed, a proposal to spend \$5,000 on a conceptual design and cost estimate to service

an additional 690 existing homes south of the nine communities presently proposed for service by the **Southern Kent Island Sewer Project.**

- Designated "Respect" as the Character Counts! Pillar of the Month for August.

- Received an Update from Mary Margaret Revell Goodwin, Chair of the QAC War of 1812 Committee, concerning the 1812 War Memorial Park at Nesbit Road and Route 8 and its signage presenting newly-discovered information about local participation in the War's Chesapeake Campaign of 1813.

- Held hearings on eight proposed ordinances, relating to various subjects, including:

- a change to the zoning law to increase the uses allowed at the intersection of Routes 301 and 213 to include regional shopping centers, convenience stores with or without gas pumps, retail sales, and conference centers, as to which change the Town Council of Centreville asked for a postponement to allow for further discussion and about which a total of 17 persons testified; and

- reorganization of County Animal Services by transfer of responsibility for animal control to the Sheriff's office and by privatization of animal adoption.

- Heard one person, Steve Wilson, speak at Press and Public Comment about his concern with the large size of the County's budgeting for capital projects.

# PLANNING COMMISSION

## • June Meeting

**Karbaum Mine.** Roland Karbaum, owner of Merrick Farm LLC, applied to the Planning Commission for a favorable recommendation on his plan to expand his sand and gravel extraction and washing operation in Ingleside on the east side of Maryland Route 313 between Merrick Corner Road and Ingleside Road. (Pictures of the existing operation were offered by the applicant at 10:30:00 on QACTV 06/13/13.)

The applicant is seeking to remove an existing 20-acre limit on his open dredging pit and expand the pit to occupy 89 acres.

The Commission explored issues and received comments relating to impacts from the expanded pit. The Commission sent forward a favorable recommendation on the expansion of the excavation pit with 18 conditions addressing its various impacts and, pursuant an amendment offered by Commissioner Howard, with a recommendation that the Board of Appeals give special attention to hours of operation, timing of entry of trucks into the site, and truck dirt/mud/gravel on Merrick Road.

**McDonald's at Thompson Creek.** Holly Tompkins, Senior Planner, presented a request by McDonald's USA, LLC, for approval to replace an existing commercial building, housing the R's Americantina restaurant and the Nails 50 nail salon, with a new McDonald's restaurant on Thompson Creek Mall Drive, south of US Route 50/301.

The Commission heard first from the applicant's lawyer and five witnesses, and then heard comments from 22 members of the public, 17 of whom opposed the McDonald's principally on grounds of increased traffic hazards. The Commission concluded the hearing by asking the applicant for additional traffic-related information.

**301/213 Intersection.** Completing work on a zoning text amendment, first considered at its April meeting, to authorize convenience stores, regional shopping centers, and other "light industrial highway uses" at this intersection (now surrounded by farms), the Commission voted to forward a favorable recommendation on the amendment to the County Commissioners.

## • July Meeting

**McDonald's at Thompson Creek.** After hearing further traffic-related testimony from the applicant, from public officials involved in traffic safety, and from 11 members of the public opposed to the project, the Planning Commission approved, Commissioner McClellan voting against, the new McDonald's in Thompson Creek Mall.

**Comprehensive Plan.** (1) The Commission took public comment on, but postponed further consideration of, a staff report listing "options for allowing enhanced growth in Designated Growth Areas (DGA) and the preservation of equity in the county's agricultural lands". Chairman Waterman emphasized that the options were being offered as a way around roadblocks to Comp Plan implementation assertedly created by State legislative enactments (like the septic bill), and were not being offered as proposals to change the Plan.

(2) The Commission received, but took no action on, a novel petition, from the owners of the site of the proposed 180-unit Chester Haven Beach subdivision in the Critical Area on Kent Island, to amend the Comprehensive Plan to bring their property back into the Chester-Stevensville Growth Area from which it had been excluded by the Plan.

## REMEMBERING ISABEL'S ANNIVERSARY



This month we mark the 10th anniversary of Isabel, a weather event that was, for many of us, a wake-up call. Wikipedia tells the story this way:

"On September 19, [2003], Tropical Storm Isabel passed through extreme western Maryland, though its large circulation produced tropical storm force winds throughout the state..In Eastern Maryland, hundreds of buildings were damaged or destroyed, primarily in Queen Anne's County from tidal flooding..In Queen Anne's County, the hurricane destroyed 37 homes, greatly damaged 151, and moderately damaged 192, with damage totaling \$37 million."

As the storm surge rose, Queenstown resident Tom Pendleton was out with his camera. In this photo, he captures the Grasonville Volunteer Fire Department doing a water rescue on Main Street in Grasonville.

## THE MONETARY REWARDS OF FORESTS – OR, YOUR WOODS AND YOUR WALLET

Besides the rewards forested areas contribute in terms of wildlife habitat, cleaner air, and protecting our watersheds, forested areas also provide monetary rewards.

### HIGHER PROPERTY VALUES

Maintaining healthy trees and woods on your property is a good investment. Wooded lots sell for 7 percent more than equivalent houses on open lots.

### LOWER ENERGY BILLS

Through shading in summer and blocking wind in winter, trees can lower a home's annual energy costs by 25 percent. The National Arbor Day Foundation reports that the net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating twenty hours a day.

### MORE INCOME

As a woodlands owner, you can earn income from: – leasing your forest land for hunting, – managing timbering for paper producers, furniture manufacturers, and other wood users, and – selling the development rights from your woodlands, without selling the land itself.

### LOWER TAXES

State and local governments have a number of programs that result in lower taxes.

- Under a **Forest Conservation and Management Agreement**, you agree to develop and maintain a plan to take care of your woods (five acres or more) for up to fifteen years; your property taxes are then frozen for the life of the plan at low agricultural rates. If you owned, say, fifteen acres of woods with a value of \$5,000 per acre, your annual property tax bill would normally be about \$750. With a Forest Conservation and Management Agreement, your taxes would be lowered to \$18.75, using an average agricultural property value of \$125 per acre.
- The **Woodland Assessment** is a similar program that will assess your property at \$187.50 per acre. Counties require that you maintain a forest management plan to receive the lowered tax rate. While the assessed value is higher in this program, there are no time commitments or initial set-up fees. Entrance and withdrawal from the program is often easier.
- The **Maryland Income Tax Modification** program allows woodland owners of three to 1000 acres to deduct, from their federal adjusted gross income on their Maryland tax return, double the cost for reforestation and approved practices that improve forest health.
- There are also significant local, state, and federal tax benefits available for permanently protecting your woods from development through a **Conservation Easement**. With it you retain ownership of the land and authority to make decisions about its management, but you give up most or all of the rights to develop and subdivide the land. The Maryland Environmental Trust can provide you with more information.

*The foregoing is excerpted and condensed from Welcome to Your Woods, published by Forestry for the Bay (www.forestryforthebay.org). This publication covers all aspects of woodlands, tells you how to get help from a professional forester, and is available online at [http://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/pdfs/Welcome\\_to\\_Woods\\_v9.pdf](http://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/pdfs/Welcome_to_Woods_v9.pdf).*

## Wooded Lands, continued from Page 2

for the next stages of their spring and fall migrations. And small aquatic animals? Think of all the reptiles and amphibians that thrive in our forests' saturated areas and "Delmarva Bays": frogs, snakes, toads, salamanders, skinks, newts, lizards, turtles. And what about the larger mammals that like the forested wetlands: opossum, otter, beaver? Among the larger mammals, need I mention white-tailed deer? When they leave their cornfield forests after the summer, there's scarcely a patch of woods in Queen Anne's County that doesn't see deer hunting – and there's hunting for wild turkey in the spring, and rabbits, squirrels. . . I could go on and on.

You should go read the great article in the July issue of the *Chesapeake Bay Journal* by Kathy Reshetiloff of U.S. Fish and Wildlife in Annapolis. She points out that while nowadays most everyone in the Bay area understands the value of marshes, the equal value of forested wetlands is often overlooked. As she summarizes it, "just like marshes, forested wetlands are great places to hunt, fish, watch wildlife or explore. Saturated forested wetlands literally breathe life into the ecosystem."

**Chronicle: We stand corrected, K.F. Last question – and thanks for walking with us: is QAC losing or gaining forest lands?**

**K.F.:** We're certainly not gaining – but how serious you think the losses are depends on your perspective and what you think the future holds.

Between 2002 and 2010, QAC lost 688 acres out of 61,560 acres of forest land, or about 1%, the same percentage loss as for its farmlands and wetlands. The 2002-2010 combined forest/farm/wetland loss was almost all to residential development: 82% of it.

The recent losses are clearly not as bad lately as they were earlier. One apparently can't break out the forest-only numbers, but the rate of loss in the combined forest/farm/wetland category was much greater in the three decades before 2002 than in the period since then – 720 acres per year in the earlier period versus 237 acres per year lately.

Is the trend our friend? Let's hope so: if we can keep on slowing down the losses, and really get committed to smart growth, there will still be both forests and farms left here for the coming generations.

*The Knowledgeable Forester asked the Chronicle especially to thank Josh Homyak of DNR's Wildlife and Heritage Service in Millington and Teri Batchelor of DNR's Forest Service in Centreville for their contributions to his knowledge. (K.F. added that he alone is responsible for any errors, as well as opinions expressed, in what he told us as we walked together at Tuckaboe.)*

*Some of K.F.'s information (and much else of interest) can also be found in Maryland's Forests 2008, Resource Bulletin NRS-58, published November 2011 by the U.S. Forest Service, <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/forests/pdfs/MarylandsForests2008a.pdf> and in a document from the Maryland Department of Planning available at <http://planning.maryland.gov/PDF/OurWork/LandUse/County/QueenAnnes.pdf>. For Kathy Reshetiloff's article in the always-informative Chesapeake Bay Journal, go to [http://www.bayjournal.com/article/wetlands\\_are\\_life\\_support\\_system\\_for\\_all\\_that\\_lives\\_in\\_near\\_them](http://www.bayjournal.com/article/wetlands_are_life_support_system_for_all_that_lives_in_near_them)*



Autumn scene in Queen Anne's County

Photo credit – Tom Pendleton

## A Calendar Of Verses

### SEPTEMBER: SAILING

A wet sheet and a flowing sea,  
A wind that follows fast  
And fills the white and rustling sail  
And bends the gallant mast . . . .

There's tempest in yon horned moon,  
And lightning in yon cloud;  
But hark the music, mariners!  
The wind is piping loud . . . .

– Allan Cunningham

### OCTOBER: WITCHES' DANCE

Witches dance in that tall tree  
whose branches plunge and fly  
in the night's storm.

On writhing limbs I see  
outlined against the flashing sky  
their black enraptured forms

– Anon.

