

# THE GREAT OUTDOORS



*The CU Annual Natural Lands Eagle Trail is a favorite with CU Maurice River members. Photo: CU file photo.*

## **Standing Invitation**

It's a new year, and the region's premier environmental organization invites you to join excursions in the great outdoors.

By J. Morton Galetto, CU Maurice River

As we begin the New Year I'd like to share the context under which I write the column and invite you to get out into the wonderful space that surrounds us here in Down Jersey.

I've been a member of the environmental community for around 40 years, and served for 35 years on the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Fish and Wildlife's Endangered and Nongame

Species Committee before retiring from that position in 2023. My role there was the representation of a non-profit called Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries, Inc. for which I serve as Board President. The organization is aka CU Maurice River (CU).

### **Who is CU Maurice River?**

*Citizens United*, a non-profit corporation since 1986, was pivotal in achieving the designation of the Maurice River as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System, and it is dedicated to promoting the well-being and quality of life in the region known as "Down Jersey". *Citizens United* sponsors a variety of educational, fieldwork, and research initiatives that contribute to greater understanding and appreciation of the region's natural treasures. The organization also prides itself on promoting a wide range of opportunities for the public to get out and enjoy the ecological, cultural, and recreational aspects of the area.

Our activities are as diverse as our membership. Wildlife consultants conduct surveys and studies of the Maurice River Watershed, but much of the work, the fellowship, and the sheer fun that characterizes the organization is carried on by the members.



*Thanks to recovery efforts by the New Jersey Fish and Wildlife, Endangered and Nongame Species Program, American bald eagles are now prevalent in New Jersey. Photo: J. Morton Galetto*

Collectively our members participate in over 10,000 hours of involvement annually; they get involved in clean-ups of natural areas, water quality analysis, planting of stream buffers, construction of osprey platforms, biota studies, and the like. Many individuals are involved in a horseshoe crab rescue program known as "ReTurn the Favor." We emphasize the importance of native plants and quality wildlife habitat with practical application, providing demonstration projects

such as rain gardens to illuminate these concepts. Wetlands are also mapped to track the encroachment of invasive plants.

We offer many experiential field trips - primarily nature walks, paddles, and cultural explorations. Most months we schedule excursions called CU Saturday, Fourth Saturday Walk, Tuesday on the Fly, and lots more. There are activities for children, families, and adults. Family Friendly Fridays are a popular nature-themed evening. Our annual Jersey Devil Campfire and Frog Slog are always fully booked, often months in advance. There are monthly presentations on topics of interest either at our meeting or at a CU Social.

We do our best to make fundraisers "fun" fundraisers- generally with a mission orientation. Each year we have a team in the World Series of Birding where our members show support by making donations to CU. Similar to a walk-a-thon raising monies by miles walked, the team raises dollars by bird species identified. CU also holds a paddling fundraiser known as "Raise the River," in which boaters raise both money and river resource awareness. Our Holiday Match is a virtual tour of places in our region to explore. Our annual Autumn Dinner Fundraiser takes place on the shores of Union Lake. Our World-Famous Chili Bowl is

a combo of chilis and auction items which allows members a chance to get to know each other and to interact socially.

Each year we celebrate the contributions of our volunteers and the Shorebird Recovery Team with an Ah Why Knot riverside award ceremony. Here exemplary people are awarded a red knot decoy for contributions to the environment. The name derives from those who selflessly reply "Ah Why Knot?" when asked to devote time to environmental undertakings.

We coordinate Purple Martin cruises held during the purple martin migration in August as well as Lighthouse cruises on the Delaware Bay.

Staff and volunteers are key in coordinating some local events like the Eagle Festival in February and the Mauricetown River Fest in September.

I've given you a very abbreviated overview of our activities and hopefully some of you will want to get involved in - or at the very least support - our activities. You needn't be a member to participate, but we do encourage that you consider joining.

We invite you to get involved in the Great Outdoors. In addition to the two invitations

in the green and blue boxes, CU has endless opportunities to explore with us throughout the year. For more information about CU opportunities for involvement check out our calendar at [www.cumauriceriver.org](http://www.cumauriceriver.org). To participate, you must register in advance on our website.

### **Invitation 1: An Eagle Restoration Hike**



If you would like to experience CU activities firsthand, the staff would like to invite you to the CU Saturday Eagle Trail Walk hosted by our naturalists. Generally, only one or two naturalists guide each of our outings, but this annual outing involves many of our leaders, allowing members to get reacquainted after the holidays and

permitting new people to meet them. It takes place on Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup> on the Natural Lands Eagle Trail in Dividing Creek.

The walk explores where eagles were initially reintroduced to New Jersey by the State Division of Fish and Wildlife. In 1978 the bald eagle was federally listed as an endangered species and was sliding toward extinction; at the time there was only one active nest in our region. After many years of diligent conservation work, the bald eagle was removed from the federally endangered list in 2007, a true victory for the environment.

Today NJDEP Fish and Wildlife monitors 267 nest sites, of which 250 were documented as active. The Delaware Bay area has been a stronghold for the recovery of eagles in the state, with almost half of all nests located in Cumberland and Salem counties and on the bayside of Cape May County. Cumberland County boasts the most eagles' nests of any of New Jersey's counties.

Our leaders will discuss the history of the bald eagle's successful reintroduction to New Jersey, highlight the role volunteers have played, and interpret other natural points of interest.

Costs: free. Registration necessary – [www.cumauriceriver.org](http://www.cumauriceriver.org)

## **Invitation 2 Cumberland County Eagle Festival**



### **2024 Cumberland County Winter Eagle Festival**

**Saturday, February 3, 2024**

**8:00 AM to 4:00 PM**

**Mauricetown Firehall**

**9544 Noble Street, Mauricetown, NJ**

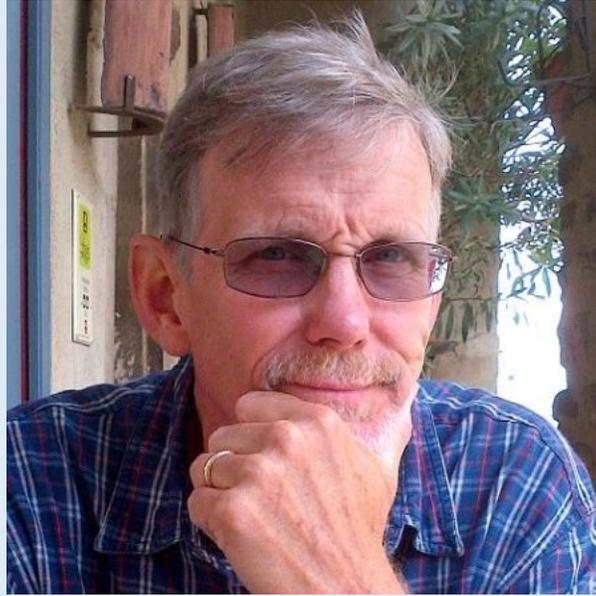
**\$10.00 Adults**

**\$5.00 Children (12 and under)**

In conjunction with Cumberland County, CU coordinates the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Eagle Festival; this occurs in Mauricetown, New Jersey on Saturday, February 3, 2024 from 8:00 a.m. 4:00 p.m. at the Mauricetown Firehall. The festival kicks off with a walk at 7 a.m. on Turkey Point Rd., which the CU World Series of Birding team "The Fish Hawks" will be leading.



At the firehall there will be presentations throughout the day. Beginning at 9 a.m. Conserve Wildlife Biologist Emmy Casper will present on Oystercatchers on Delaware Bay. Jim Feaga of Ducks Unlimited will introduce attendees to a continental, landscape approach to wetlands conservation.



Dr. Paul Kerlinger, an avian consultant, will discuss what contributes to the massive decline in North American bird populations and how we can save them.

Natural Lands Regional Director Steve Eisenhauer is speaking about Natural Lands nesting boxes for flying squirrels, kestrels, barn, and screech owls.

The Endangered and Nongame Species program Bureau Chief Kathy Clark will discuss the recovery of bald eagles in New Jersey.

And at 3:00 p.m. Tony Klock will wrap up the presentations with a deeper look into the life of northern harriers.

Concurrently environmental organizations will host information tables and vendors will offer nature-oriented products for sale. The firehall staff will be providing food - including local fare such as oysters.

Outdoors there will be six guided walks and staffed viewing sites (10a.m. – 4 p.m.). I will be leading a ramble at 3 p.m. with nature enthusiast Christine Brown at Berrytown Rd., and I'd love to have you join us.

Other walks include: 9 a.m. Maple St. Trail at the Glades Preserve with New Jersey Audubon's Adehl Schwaderer and Kimberly Spiegel of CU.

11a.m. Bayshore Center Wetlands Walk with CU World Series members Tony Klock and Dr. Kathy Michel.

1p.m. The Eagle Trail with Debbie Beer of Natural Lands.

In true festival tradition the day will wrap up with an Owl Watch at twilight along Turkey Point Rd. and at the observation tower, at 5 p.m. with Mary Watkins and other naturalists.

So bring your binoculars, a cap, and dress in appropriate layers depending upon the

weather conditions. Come to the firehall to register and get a full list of activities.

The cost is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children.