

## **2007 Potomac River Sojourn**

**-Adam Griggs  
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River Basin (ICPRB)**

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The 2007 Potomac River Ramble kicked off with a shuttle to the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV, where introductions were made and the group was welcomed. A leave-no-trace fire was made on a mound of deposited Potomac sediment and ICPRB's Watershed Coordinator, Adam Griggs attempted to call owls using owl-ringtones stored on his cell phone, but it seemed nobody was home.

On Thursday morning, the group got off to a good start. Elevated water levels and eager arms helped the group complete the first 10 miles before lunch in only 2.5 hours. This section of the river is spotted with occasional riffles but is mostly slow, flat water popular with power boaters and jet skiers. During a lunch stop at the Shepherdstown boat launch, the group met with representatives of Mirant Mid-Atlantic, a River Ramble sponsor and donator of that day's lunch. Mirant took the time to educate the Ramblers about their mission to upgrade their three area coal-burning power plants to meet more stringent Maryland air pollution standards three years ahead of schedule. Camp was made at the Antietam campground along the C&O National Historical Park and the group picked up a few more Ramblers who would join us for the trip. Jen Dotson, ICPRB's certified arborist, took the group on a riparian tree ID walk which pointed out natives such as Hackberry, Sycamore, Osage Orange, and Box Elder amongst invasive species like the Tree of Heaven.

On Friday morning, coffee ran hot and nerves were cold as the ramblers, some of them first-time paddlers, prepared for a day of whitewater on the Needles section upstream of Harpers Ferry. Mike Dudash, a highly energized kayak instructor from River and Trail Outfitters, came on to help prepare the group for the upcoming whitewater at their lunch stop. The Needles consist of Class I and II rapids that require some technical turning due to the striated geologic formation that runs across the Shenandoah River, Harpers Ferry, and the Potomac River. In the Shenandoah, the section of whitewater is known as the Staircase and our friends on the Shenandoah Sojourn joined us in Harpers Ferry after completing that section on rafts. Programs included a guided tour of the historic town by NPS staff and some traditional period music from a string band complete with cloggers. There also was an informal remembrance of ICPRB Pennsylvania Commissioner Bill Plank, a longtime participant in the Rambles, who died in February after a car accident. The festivities went on despite a strong thunderstorm that dumped a lot of rain, unwelcome at the time, but useful for getting downstream the next day.

Saturday would bring another day of great weather and the largest rapids of the trip, Mad Dog and White Horse. The majority of Ramblers came through just fine but a pair of canoes and their swimmers were reeled in after swamping out in the wave trains.

Potomac wildlife was the theme of this day as the group passed by an active Heron rookery, and saw Bald Eagles and Great Egrets on their way downstream. The lunch program consisted of sampling and seining for insects and fish that live in the Potomac's waters. ICPRB biologists Jim Cummins and Adam Griggs were on hand to identify the various insects and fish collected including mayflies, Water Pennies, Fallfish, Smallmouth Bass, and Spotfin Shiners among others. Once at Brunswick, the group caught the tail end of the Potomac River Family Festival and indulged in snow cones and lemonade. The group was greeted by Carroll Jones, Mayor of Brunswick, who told the group about development in the town, and the enhanced nutrient removal wastewater treatment plant being constructed to handle sewage. Continuing with the wildlife theme later in the evening, Adam Griggs called in a barred owl, this time without using his phone, and it alighted in the center of camp where it continued to hoot loudly until 1:30 in the morning.

Sunday brought the 2007 Summer Potomac River Ramble to a close after a short program from Curtis Dalpra, ICPRB's Communications Director, on the operation and importance of the USGS stream gauging system using Point of Rocks as a demonstration. The trip came to an all-to-soon close at Tarara Winery, a River Ramble partner, where many of the Ramblers enjoyed touring and tasting.

Feedback from the Ramblers was tremendous, and several noted that their impressions of the river have changed permanently. "I'll never be able to look at the river, or read about it, without thinking about all the things I've learned, and how important the river is in our daily lives," noted one paddler.