



Catoctin News

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Carroll, Frederick and Washington Counties

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Summer 2019

Is the Weather Changing?

By Shannon Bohrer

On cold winter days the radiant warmth from a cast iron wood stove can be very comforting. Wood fires seem to make you feel warmer and there is something heartening about providing your own heat, especially when it comes from your own wood lot. For several years, the task of gathering the wood has been hampered by unusually wet winters. This past year, Maryland reported a record 84 inches of rainfall. Generally, we like to have our firewood split and stacked during the winter months, but for several years we have not finished until early spring. We seem to be having more wet and muddy days than usual that limit the times we can traverse our hay fields to gather wood.

The wet weather not only affects gathering firewood, but also making hay. Last year, our fields were so wet that our first cutting was about a month late. For many farmers, last summer was disastrous. One neighbor lost his entire first hay cutting. Compared to previous decades, the current weather patterns just seem abnormal. Then again, maybe this abnormal weather is the beginning of a new normal.

Countrywide, severe weather, including hurricanes and tornadoes, is increasing. I recall that just a few years ago tornadoes were reported on Christmas day. If the strange weather becomes the norm, how will that affect agriculture? And will it affect how and where we live?

In 2017, Houston, Texas experienced widespread flooding from Hurricane Harvey. It was said that a hurricane of that magnitude was a once-in-500-year event. The problem is that the once-in-500-year events are occurring more frequently. Houston

experienced three such events in three successive years. When areas flood that have never recorded major floods and the flooding is repeated, that suggests a major problem. In my former career, we would call that a clue.

In 2016, Maryland experienced a once-in-1,000-year event, when Ellicott City flooded. In 2018, a similar event occurred there. While two once in 1,000 year events in just three years might seem

unprecedented, from 2010 to 2015 the state of South Carolina experienced six such events. That would be a larger clue.

This year's flooding in Nebraska is the largest natural disaster in the state's history. The initial estimates of loss for Nebraska is \$1.5b. After the initial loss estimates were made, the same areas experienced extreme snow storms, followed by more flooding. What happens when



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they can't plant spring crops?

Worldwide, 2018 was the fourth hottest year on record. According to NOAA and NASA, it was also a near record year for "climate disasters." The five hottest years on record are the last five years. During the last twenty two years, "the twenty hottest years on record" occurred. Attributing these trends to global warming, scientists predict that we will experience more extremes in our weather like droughts and floods. I can't help but feel that the predictions have become the current reality.

At the recent world economic forum In Davos Switzerland, Ms. Ernman Thunberg, a 16-year-old from Sweden, addressed the attendees. Here is part of her speech:

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"Adults keep saying: we owe it to the young people to give them hope. But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire, because it is. You say you love your children above all else, and

yet you're stealing their future in front of their very eyes. Our house is on fire"!

Her speech put my firewood issues in perspective. If our house is on fire, we won't need any firewood, but we will need unflooded land, and land without droughts, to grow food.



Season of Creation

By Lewis Sherman

The Vatican letter reflects a growing concern within the Christian world over climate change and the overall environment.

On May 23, 2019 the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development sent a letter to Dioceses, worldwide, asking them to participate in the month-long Season of Creation that begins on September 1, 2019 and to use this opportunity to put *Laudato Si* into practice. *Laudato Si* is the encyclical letter released by Pope Francis in 2015 focusing exclusively on the environment. See "The Pope and the Environment", *Catoctin News*, vol. 2, issue 4, winter 2015/2016". On June 14, 2019, the *Guardian* newspaper from London, reported the Pope has declared a global "climate emergency," warning of the dangers of global heating and that a failure to act urgently to reduce greenhouse gases would be "a brutal act of injustice toward the poor and future generations."

The annual Season of Creation, is a celebration of prayer and action by Christians on six continents to protect the environment and alleviate the effects of environmental degradation that mankind has foisted upon itself.

Christians of all traditions participate in this event. This year's theme "The web of life" reflects the role humanity has as stewards of creation and the urgent need to protect biodiversity. The latter is prompted by a United Nations estimate that one million species are under threat of extinction, primarily due to "our way of life." No doubt, the Pope's June 14th declaration adds a higher level of urgency for this year's discourse.

Local communities across the globe host events for the season. Some pray, some do hands-on projects, some advocate. The letter asks dioceses to urge parishes to participate in this event. It does not dictate activities; each Parish can hold environmental activities and advocate as they choose. A dozen ideas to get started are in the celebration guide. Last year over 700 communities

participated in this event, a small number on global terms, but the numbers are growing.

The Dicastery said that the invitation sent to Catholic communities this year is closely tied to the upcoming Synod of Bishops on the Amazon region, which is seriously threatened by deforestation and environmental degradation.

The Vatican letter reflects a growing concern within the Christian world over climate change and the overall environment. There are numerous faith-based organizations, both nationally and internationally, that have taken up the cause. Some examples are:

- California Interfaith Power and Light, Oakland, CA
- Christian Environmental Project, Portland, OR
- Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), New York, NY
- Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Birmingham, UK
- Global Catholic Climate Movement, Washington, DC
- Voices for Earth Justice, Southfield, MI

Many of these organizations are interfaith-based as is the local Multi-faith Alliance of Climate Stewards (MACS) of Frederick County. All call attention to the rapid degradation of the earth's environment and promote prayer, action and advocacy for protecting the only home of humanity.

In various ways, each faith-based environmental organizations emphasize that the earth was given to humanity by a higher power and that power expects us to be good stewards of his creation. This is a powerful message to believers and offers great potential for making major changes in the way humans treat their common home.

MYTHS

about making



By Lewis Sherman

Compost is great for improving the soil structure and an excellent source of nutrients. Yet many gardeners feel composting is too odious a chore to make its use worthwhile. The following composting myths extracted from the Website, "Vegetable Gardening with Lorraine," may change some minds.

- **Myth 1 – COMPOST STINKS**

When you make compost with the right mix of ingredients, there is no smell. If you mix about 2-3 parts dry, brown plant material like dried leaves or weeds (no seeds), with one part fresh green plant material like grass clippings or kitchen scraps, and keep it about as moist as a wrung-out sponge, it will decompose quickly with no smell.

- **Myth 2 – COMPOSTING ATTRACTS FLIES & RODENTS**

This will not happen if a compost pile is made with the correct balance of ingredients. Bins add additional assurance against rodents.

- **Myth 3 – COMPOSTING IS A LOT OF WORK**

By using the right balance of ingredients, compost will break without much work. Turning bins and piles occasionally to provide aeration and distribute moisture is all that is required.

- **Myth 4 – COMPOST PILES ARE HARD TO HANDLE**

If you follow the basic recipe when adding material to the compost pile, there is nothing to "manage". When adding kitchen scraps, include about 3 times as much dried leaves. Add water occasionally.

- **Myth 5 – COMPOSTING IS TIME CONSUMING**

If you choose a reasonably simple bin that is easy to spin, composting requires little time. You just add scraps and leaves, give it a quick spin, and leave it until you have more to add. Turn a small open pile occasionally. Even a large composting operation in open-topped bins, only takes about half an hour, once every three weeks to turn, mix and aerate the compost.

- **Myth 6 – KEEP COMPOST BINS/PILES WELL AWAY FROM THE HOUSE**

See myths 1 & 2 above. When compost is made correctly, it can be located near the house. If you are really worried about critters, there are sealed compost tumblers that will keep them out.

- **Myth 7 – COMPOST BINS ARE PRETTY MUCH ALL ALIKE: A BIN IS A BIN IS A BIN**

Of course this is not true. Styles, sizes, and prices abound in the marketplace. However, the reality is that you need nothing complicated. A tumbler, wire enclosure or an open topped bin is all you need.

- **Myth 8 – YOU CAN ADD EARTHWORMS TO A COMPOST PILE TO SPEED IT UP**

Worm composting works well, but it's a completely different process than traditional composting. A traditional compost pile is not a good place for worms, because the decomposition process makes it too hot for worms.

- **Myth 9 – ADDING A HANDFUL OF SOIL OR BIOREACTORS MAKES COMPOSTING FASTER**

The organisms that break down compost are present on the scraps and leaves you are adding. Additives will not speed up decomposition.

- **Myth 10 – IF I USE FERTILIZER ON MY GARDEN, I DON'T NEED TO COMPOST**

There are many benefits of compost and they are different than fertilizer. Compost helps create important soil structure, optimizes water retention, keeps nutrients from washing away, moderates pH and most importantly, provides necessary microbes that make nutrients available to plants.

- **Myth 11 – IF I USE COMPOST ON MY GARDEN, I DON'T NEED FERTILIZER**

Compost provides microbes and some nutrition, plus all the benefits listed above, but unless your soil already contains the right balance of complete minerals you will still need to amend it with fertilizers.

Catoctin Subgroup Established in Washington County

Douglas Arnall

The Washington County Member's email list has grown to 176 as word is spreading of its existence and activities.

Sierra Club members in Washington County have been very committed and active since their organizational meeting in May of this year. Following the Catoctin Group's Executive Committee Chair, David Barrow's visit, and utilizing the Group's listserv email system Dave provided, residents expressed interest in meeting locally as a subgroup of the Catoctin Group.

The May meeting was attended by 17 members and enthusiasm was high. Areas of greatest concern for the members were likely pollution impacts from the Rockwool Insulation Plant under construction near Ranson, West Virginia and the proposed building of the Potomac Pipeline, near Hancock, MD. Other areas of interest discussed, included working with the local education community, climate change and outings, including neighborhood litter pick-up parties. People indicated their commitment by accepting responsibility for several functions such as meeting minutes, membership records, education outreach, media contact and activism.

At June's meeting, 16 members learned about the effect of climate change locally from Bob Schwartz, state forester with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. He explained how the tree species changed within the different subregions of the Maryland forest. The presentation also covered how tree species and ground cover will change as the temperatures increase

over time. The audience was dismayed to learn that if change continues at current rates, Maryland will experience climates currently found in Mississippi. He ended his presentation with a startling graph of the projected temperature increases, with best- and worst-case scenarios based on how effective our efforts are at controlling climate change factors.

- As the Washington county members prepare for July's meeting, they can count many successful actions.
- One member has started an on-line library for articles relevant to current group issues.
- One committee is planning outreach to young people through the schools, including the Hagerstown Community College.
- Although in the beginning stages, a survey is being developed to determine local student awareness of, and concern about climate change.

We have also been active with several members attending the pipeline protest in Hancock, and others supporting protestors at the Rockwool plant. Representing the Sierra Club, Doug Arnall spoke at a Washington County Commissioners meeting requesting a letter be written opposing the Rockwool pollution emitting plant; several members accompanied Mr. Arnall at the meeting. As a result, the commissioner's wrote letters to Maryland and

West Virginia environmental departments regarding constituents' concerns about pollution, although they did not express opposition to the plant itself. In addition, Congressman David Trone's office was contacted and a meeting was held with Trone representative Sonny Holding. Holding expressed Trone's commitment to the environment and indicated he would update him on the Rockwool situation.

The Washington County Member's email list has grown to 176 as word is spreading of its existence and activities. Tracy Cannon, a well-known local activist, will be updating members about ongoing actions against Rockwool at July's meeting. Plans are in the works for a group picnic along the Potomac, and a future meeting will feature a panel discussion on the connection between Rockwool and the proposed Potomac River Pipeline.

Officers/Committee Chairs

Chairperson	Dave Barrow
Treasurer	Douglas Arnall
Acting Secretary	Jan Barrow
Energy	Dan Andrews
Social Media	Amy Andrews
Political	Kathleen Rall
Waste	Dan Andrews
Outings	Harry George,, Paul Walker, Mark Gregory
Newsletter	Manager/Editor: Lewis Sherman Design Editor: Dee Dolan



Further Information

<http://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/catoctin-group>