



CITIZENS FOR A BETTER EASTERN SHORE

# SHORELINE

*A Journal of Natural Resources, Public Affairs and Culture on the Eastern Shore of Virginia*

TM

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## Menhaden Regain Prominence in Local Discussions

*The menhaden industry has again become a hot topic on the Eastern Shore, with various concerns and questions being widely circulated on the internet as well as in local and regional print publications. This month, ShoreLine presents information on the topic in the form of an article from the Bay Journal (including a ShoreLine comment), an investigation into potential health risks from fish spills, and an introduction to a local group started after thousands of fish washed up on a northern Northampton beach. The conversation continues; this subject emerges as a point of discussion (or contention) with some regularity.*

### Fouled Beaches Catalyst for Menhaden Group

*Menhaden – Little Fish, Big Deal* is an Eastern Shore-based Facebook group that formed after a series of fish spills in July and August polluted local shorelines in Northampton County. “That was its call to action,” said co-founder Debbie Campbell, who moderates the page with 2 others.

“It offers information to those interested in the downsides associated with Omega Protein’s factory fishing ships operating in the Chesapeake Bay, with first-hand accounts, news articles, maps, videos, papers and presentations, and more,” said Campbell, who added that the Shore has suffered from the actions of the menhaden industry for many years.

For instance, she said, there is comprehensive coverage of the 12,000 pounds of dead red drum fish that perished recently from an Omega net release, and rotted in the sun alongside thousands of menhaden, causing Kiptopeake State Park to close its northern and southern beaches for several days, until the beaches had been cleaned.

Campbell points out that *Little Fish, Big Deal* is one of many efforts to spread the word of the urgency of the damage being done to the

See **Fouled Beaches**, *Cont’d on p. 4*

### Atlantic Menhaden: Status Update

By Karl Blankenship and Timothy B. Wheeler

*This article was excerpted, with permission, from the Bay Journal.<sup>1</sup>*

An updated menhaden population assessment that takes into account the ecological role of the species as a popular food for other fish deems the coastwide stock to be in good shape. The latest assessment, presented to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) August 3, incorporates data collected through last year.<sup>2</sup> It concluded that “overfishing is not occurring, and the stock is not considered overfished.”

Menhaden are small fish but have long stoked big controversies, especially in the Chesapeake Bay, where conservation groups contend commercial harvests leave too few of the “forage” fish in the water to support striped bass and other fish.

#### New Methodology, Same Conclusion

That concern spurred the ASMFC, an organization made up of fishery managers from East Coast states and federal agencies, to make adjustments to their assessment methodologies 2 years ago to better account for the role of menhaden in the food chain.

But even with the new methodology, the latest assessment concluded the overall stock was healthy — a finding immediately touted by the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition, a group representing commercial harvesters. “Using these stricter standards that

incorporate the forage needs of predators, the new assessment has found that the menhaden fishery is sustainable, and that menhaden fishing does not negatively affect predator populations,” it said in a statement.

#### Different Viewpoints From Conservationists, Industry

Some conservation groups contend the assessment evaluates the menhaden stock coastwide and does not necessarily reflect what is happening in the Bay, where much of the harvest takes place. A coalition of 11 national and Virginia-based groups petitioned Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin in June to put the Bay off-limits to Omega Protein.<sup>3</sup>

Omega, which operates a “reduc-

See **Menhaden**, *Cont’d on p. 3*

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# Shore Native Is CBES New President Introducing George Mapp

By Donna Bozza

It's been a decade since CBES has passed the baton from one President to the next. With a unanimous vote by the CBES Board, George Mapp took over for outgoing president Arthur Upshur, who successfully steered our nonprofit through turbulent times (see August 2022 *ShoreLine*).

George joins a dedicated succession of CBES leaders, beginning in 1988 with founding President Suzanne Wescoat. He brings with him a diverse background and set of skills that will well serve our 34-year-old nonprofit.

Born and raised in Nassawadox, George graduated from William and Mary in 1973 and worked at a variety of jobs, including lab technician at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, where he later earned a master's degree in Marine Science. While working for the Navy in Bay St. Louis, MS, for 5 years, he spent nights working towards a master's degree in computer science at the University of Southern Mississippi.

After moving to Durham, NC, his resume includes working for the Environmental Protection Agency, ABB (a European electric power company), the NC Employment

Security Commission, and GlaxoSmithKline. George retired in 2019.

Appreciating the value of volunteerism to a community's success comes naturally to George, who spent years as a volunteer EMT. Currently he serves on the Eastern Shore Rail Trail (ESRT) Working Group and the ESRT Foundation. He also volunteers at The Nature Conservancy, staffing events and helping with oyster reef and seagrass restoration. Wait, there's more – he's a Virginia Master Naturalist, too.

He cites this same community spirit for the reason he accepted the move from CBES Board Member to leading the organization.

"It is an opportunity to give back to the Shore community – to volunteer and try to live up to my (CBES) predecessors," said George.

As a long-time Life Member, he appreciates the in-depth articles about local issues in CBES monthly *ShoreLine*, so much so that readers will now find his byline in many issues.

"Zoning, public health, education, poverty, housing, ground water, internet access, the environment – CBES has addressed them all in a rational, unbiased fashion," he said.

He salutes the current volunteer writers and the publisher, as well as the late Jack Ordeman, among many others, for making *ShoreLine* an invaluable tool in keeping our community informed.

When it comes to how he sees the function of his new role, George explains it like this:

"I want to carry on the good work



An avid cyclist, Mapp has been instrumental in promoting the Eastern Shore Rail Trail, and created an online biking guide, *Bike-Friendly Places on Virginia's Eastern Shore* (<http://bit.ly/3a4jc9L>), as well as a Facebook page of the same name. Photo credit: Cathy Mapp.

of CBES," he said. "That includes *ShoreLine*, sponsoring community outreach events, and supporting the Shore's premier ecotourism event – a world-class bike tour, as well as promoting the ESRT.

*ShoreLine* joins CBES Members in thanking George for taking on CBES leadership and wish him much success. 🦅

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## Of Note:

A frequent topic of discussion at public meetings in Northampton County has been the proliferation of Short-Term Rentals and the potential need for reviewing the current permitting process. Subcommittees from the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission are meeting regularly to discuss possible solutions to the challenges that accompany such a development.

Also under discussion is the scarcity of affordable and workforce housing in the county, a situation shared by many other U.S. communities.

tion” fishery based in Reedville, VA, is responsible for about 70% of the East Coast menhaden harvest, which it turns into a variety of products, from fish oils for humans to feed for pets. The remainder of the harvest is conducted by smaller operations in the Bay and along the coast, primarily for bait in other fisheries.

Those urging an end to Omega harvests in the Bay said their views were unswayed by the ASMFC finding. “We have reason to believe there is localized depletion in the Bay,” said Steve Atkinson, president of the Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association, one of the groups participating in the petition.

The groups, which include the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, and state and national sport fishing associations, contend that annual harvests of menhaden have “deprived gamefish like striped bass, bluefish, and weakfish of a critical food source.” Jaclyn Higgins, spokesperson for the Roosevelt conservation group, said that while the ASMFC’s latest assessment updated estimates of menhaden abundance, it relied on 5-year-old data about other fish species in the food chain, the status of which could have changed in that time.

The striped bass population has been in decline for years; conservation groups have blamed menhaden harvests in the Bay, which is a nursery area for most of the East Coast striped bass population, for playing a role in their decline. Diet studies, though, show that bay anchovy and other species tend to be more important to striped bass in the Chesapeake.

Omega spokesman Ben Landry said he wasn’t surprised that “special interest groups are blaming the company for all of their self-created woes.” Landry noted that the ASMFC’s striped bass assessments have blamed overharvest, particularly by recreational anglers, for the decline of striped bass. “The reason for the decline in striped bass numbers is not a lack of available menhaden in the species’ diet,” Landry said. “Instead, the culprit is right in front of our faces: recreational anglers have removed too many strippers and now the species is having trouble recovering.”

Omega’s menhaden harvest in recent years has averaged 137,000 metric tons. Its Bay harvest is capped at 51,000 metric tons, with the rest coming from coastal waters. If Bay harvests were closed, Landry said, it would be the “beginning of the end of the Reedville operations” because weather and sea conditions along the coast would make it “incredibly difficult and dangerous” for the fleet to extend its fishing season in the Atlantic.

### Bay-Specific Studies Needed

Chris Moore, senior regional ecosystem scientist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation<sup>4</sup> — which is not a part

of the Virginia petition — said menhaden still needed to be managed in a “precautionary manner,” noting that the ASMFC at its August meeting also heard that 2 other fish species frequenting the Bay, Atlantic spot and croaker, are not doing well. “That highlighted overall that a number of forage species in the Bay are not in great shape,” Moore said, “and we really need to be thinking about managing the ecosystem so we have enough forage. Obviously, menhaden are a really important part of that.”

Understanding the status of menhaden in the Bay has proven to be a challenge, as the species migrates along the coast and moves freely in and out of the Chesapeake. Some Bay-specific numbers may be in the offing, though. Congress approved funding in this year’s federal budget to support collection of menhaden abundance data in the Chesapeake. Still, it will take years to collect that information, and the ASMFC indicated that its next menhaden assessment, expected in 2025, will continue to evaluate the stock coastwide. 

<sup>1</sup> Blankenship K, Wheeler TB. Atlantic menhaden not overharvested, fisheries commission concludes. Bay Journal. Aug 7, 2022. [https://www.bayjournal.com/news/fisheries/atlantic-menhaden-not-overharvested-fisheries-commission-concludes/article\\_7aa9dc10-16ad-11ed-b7d0-531729fae2a9.html](https://www.bayjournal.com/news/fisheries/atlantic-menhaden-not-overharvested-fisheries-commission-concludes/article_7aa9dc10-16ad-11ed-b7d0-531729fae2a9.html)

<sup>2</sup> Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. ASFMC Atlantic menhaden board approves draft addendum I for public comment to consider commercial allocations, episodic event set asides, and incidental catch/small-scale fisheries: Stock assessment update finds resource is not overfished or experiencing overfishing. Aug. 4, 2022. [http://www.asafc.org/uploads/file/62ec2292pr23\\_AtMenhaden\\_AddI\\_PublicComment\\_AssmtUpdate.pdf](http://www.asafc.org/uploads/file/62ec2292pr23_AtMenhaden_AddI_PublicComment_AssmtUpdate.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Pipkin W. Anglers aim to rein in harvest of Chesapeake menhaden. Bay Journal, Jul. 28, 2022. [https://www.bayjournal.com/news/fisheries/anglers-aim-to-rein-in-harvest-of-chesapeake-menhaden/article\\_e37cd338-0cd9-11ed-8d5c-cf8f9bc60386.html](https://www.bayjournal.com/news/fisheries/anglers-aim-to-rein-in-harvest-of-chesapeake-menhaden/article_e37cd338-0cd9-11ed-8d5c-cf8f9bc60386.html)

<sup>4</sup> Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Atlantic menhaden. 2022. <https://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/more-than-just-the-bay/chesapeake-wildlife/menhaden/>

**ShoreLine Comment:** *This is a difficult issue to understand and make recommendations for. There seems to be the beginning of a consensus in the scientific community that the available data do not show signs of a depleting fishery. But we also know that the track record of our management of this issue has been pretty badly flawed.*

*The management of the resource by the legislature for years – and the money donated to keep it that way, long after all other fisheries were managed by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) – always raised questions about how well this management was being conducted for the long-term sustainability of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. At a minimum, there has certainly been an underinvestment in the research in*

*See Menhaden, Cont'd on page 4*

**The striped bass population has been in decline for years; conservation groups have blamed menhaden harvests in the Bay ... for playing a role. [Meanwhile,] the ASMFC’s striped bass assessments have blamed overharvest, particularly by recreational anglers, for the decline.**

**Menhaden, Cont'd from page 3**

*the Chesapeake on the role of this species in the overall ecosystem, along with anchovies and other critical prey species that we know so little about.*

*This is a fishery where the benefits focus on one plant location in Reedville, on the western shore of the Bay. Since it is a fellow rural community, we acknowledge how important this industry probably is to that local population. But for our part, the Eastern Shore has competing interests that have a far greater impact on our local community. For example, the community of recreational fishermen has a substantial impact on our local economy. Tourism and clean beaches on the bayside are critical resources for communities along the Bay, like Cape Charles, Smith Beach, Silver Beach, and many other residential communities sprinkled up and down the bayside. Watermen and the aquaculture industry continue to depend on clean water, and one has to believe that a filter-feeder with the abundance of menhaden is probably an important part of that puzzle.*

*The Eastern Shore depends on VMRC investing in the scientific inquiry necessary to help them get this balance right. The risks if they get it wrong are huge and, frankly, the importance of the continued harvest to our community is pretty small. So we would urge that VMRC approach the management of this fishery with a little humility and seek to minimize the risks.*

*This has not always been the approach of VMRC in the past, since many of the constituencies that matter for the Eastern Shore have not been their focus in the past. But until the science is better developed for the Chesapeake, and VMRC has a little better track record of successfully managing sustainable fisheries, we would urge caution.*

*At a minimum, we believe we need to start a discussion of where these industrial fishing operations should operate in the Bay, to help reduce potential damage to the tourism and recreational fishing industries on the Eastern Shore along our bayside. And we wholeheartedly support more resources going into research, in order to better understand how these fisheries are impacting our Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.*



**Fouled Beaches, Cont'd from p. 1**

Chesapeake Bay, fishery, and area tourism.

“Our goal is to have the regulatory agencies move the Omega factory ships into the ocean, as they do in every other mid-Atlantic state.”



**ShoreLine Comment:** *CBES has long promoted citizen involvement in local issues, as it can often be an instrument of positive change.*



**Fish Kills and Public Health**

By George Mapp

**D**uring discussions about menhaden, questions arose regarding public health. After a cleanup, when are the beaches and the water safe for swimming and sunbathing? Is it safe to re-enter the water immediately after a clean-up, or is a waiting period advised? How dangerous, from a public health standpoint, are fish kills?

Jon Richardson, the Chief Operations Officer of the Eastern Shore Health District, who was coincidentally at Silver Beach during the recent spill there, said, “There has been a good bit of research on aquatic ‘animal’ (fish, shellfish, etc.) exposure to humans relative to bacterial and parasitic infections. There just isn’t research, that I’ve seen, specific to the health risk associated with dead fish from a netting incident, relative to human health. Generally, these fish were healthy and died as a result of the netting mishap, not from an infection or environmental exposure. The risk of contracting an infection through an exposure to dead fish from a netting incident would be very low. The risk is elevated if you come into contact with an infected animal and have an open wound.

“We would recommend avoiding swimming in an area where dead fish are floating in the water, and reaching out to report it immediately. Please call the Virginia Emergency Operations Center to report these incidents, at 800-468-8892.”



On the Eastern Shore, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) monitors water quality in bayside creeks and sea-side lagoons for shellfish safety. They publish closures for each county on the VDH website. They also monitor water quality at 4 swimming beaches: Assateague Island -Toms Cove South, Guard Shore, Cape Charles Town Beach, and Kiptopeke State Park.

VDH’s website states in their FAQ<sup>1</sup>: *If the waters are condemned for shellfishing, can I safely swim in the waters?* It is safe to swim in most condemned shellfish waters in Virginia. The shellfish standard is much more stringent than the swimming standard. However, there is always a certain degree of risk associated with swimming in any natural body of water.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/environmental-health-services/shellfish-safety/frequently-asked-questions/>



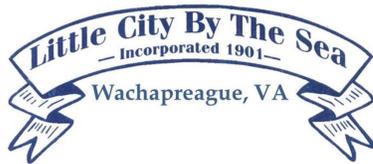
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Photo by Cecil Watts

## CBES 29<sup>th</sup> Between the Waters Bike Tour

Saturday, October 22, 2022

*Grab your friends. Meet friendly folks. Pick the tasks and times that suit you. Check in riders, cheer on participants, help at rest stops, & MORE!*

Riding in the Tour but want to help? Help with setup before Saturday!

Sign up at: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f4daeab22a3fbc52-cbes1>

*Need help with signing up? Give Mary a shout.*

Mary Ehmann, CBES Bike Tour Coordinator, cbesbiketours@gmail.com (973) 787-7895

**Thanks for Supporting "Pedal to Protect Virginia's Eastern Shore"**



## RECYCLING CORNER

By Sue Mastyl

### What We're Doing Right – and Wrong

Although we all know the basics of what can and cannot be recycled, there are always nagging questions about whether we're really doing it right. So we checked with Kathy Russell, Education Outreach Coordinator at TFC Recycling in Chesapeake, which takes all the recycling from Accomack and Northampton counties.

**Plastic bottle caps:** We've heard that we should take the cap *off* a plastic bottle, so that it's more easily compressed, and also that we should keep the cap *on* a plastic bottle, since the caps can jam up the machines. Which is preferred? Can the caps be recycled as well, or should they be tossed in the trash?

**TFC:** *With improvements in recycling technology, it's OK to leave them on, including the plastic ring.*

**Paper:** Do we need to remove the transparent windows from envelopes, or glue spots in magazines?

**TFC:** *No, these come out easily in the recycling process.*

Is shredded paper still unacceptable, since it jams the sorting machines?

**TFC:** *Loose, shredded paper is still not accepted. But we can accept it if you place it in a paper bag, staple it shut, and mark it "shredded paper."*

Are paper egg cartons acceptable?

**TFC:** *Yes, but only the paper egg cartons.*

**Pizza boxes:** We've heard that even the word "pizza" on the side of a box (even if it's clean) will be enough to have a whole bale of cardboard rejected. Is this still true?

**TFC:** *If the box has cheese or grease on it, then it cannot be recycled. But if you have a pizza box with grease on the bottom, but the lid is clean, you can separate the two sections and recycle the clean portion.*

**Cardboard:** Is there a limit on the size of cardboard boxes?

**TFC:** *It just needs to fit in the Recycling Container, and can be folded.*

**Aluminum:** We know you accept aluminum cans and aluminum foil – what about aluminum pie plates? Beer bottle caps?

**TFC:** *Yes, as long as they're clean.*

**Medicines:** Can you take vitamin and medicine bottles, if they're #1 or #2? What about things like cough syrup and lotions?

**TFC:** *We can't take pill bottles; because of the size, the scanner has a hard time picking the material up. Cough syrup and lotion bottles are OK, as long as they're clean.*

**Glass:** We know that only Northampton County accepts

## The Last Summer Salad



Still a good many ripening tomatoes on the vines, but blossoms are getting fewer. The basil is getting leggy and a little brown around some edges. But the afternoons are still summertime-warm and dinner can still feel like midsummer's bounty. Heavy-ripe tomatoes, and that very special mozzarella-type cheese called burrata, can make a salad a whole meal. The cheese has a soft, runny center, cream and cheese in one bite. A few finishing touches, some crusty bread – a delicious, simple end-of-summer meal.

- A few very ripe tomatoes, peeled, cut into chunks and drained slightly
- Fresh burrata cheese, drained and patted dry
- Fresh basil
- Very good olive oil
- Rice wine vinegar (or your choice)
- Salt and pepper

In a rimmed plate, pour a few tablespoons of olive oil, a little vinegar, and salt and pepper. Combine gently. Add tomatoes, tossing a little to coat. Add cheese and coat with oil/vinegar, then top with a good bit of freshly cut basil. That's it.

*The Kitchen Hive – Mary Miller*

*Reprinted with permission: <https://www.talkrealnow.com/>*



glass recyclables. Can all glass be recycled?

**TFC:** *We don't accept broken glass, because it's too dangerous for our workers; or glassware, ceramics, lightbulbs, windowpanes, or mirrors, because they're made from different processes.*

**Finally, what practices do you wish people would change?**

**TFC:** *Please don't put plastic bags or batteries in with your recycling. Remember that there are many recycling streams (electronics recycling, scrap yards, etc.). Just because it has a recycle symbol, doesn't mean it goes in the bin. Research your area and see what is acceptable in your local recycling program.*

*If you can't remember what to recycle, get back to basics – paper, bottles, and cans. When in doubt, throw it out.*

For more information, visit TFC's website at <http://www.tfcrecycling.com/>, or call them at 757-543-5766.

# VOTE!

## Be Sure to Vote!

Tuesday, November 8, is Election Day. Polls will be open 6:00 AM to 7:00 PM. Candidates on the ballot will be:

- **Member, U.S. House of Representatives, Congressional District 2:**
  - Elaine G. Luria (D)
  - Jen A. Kiggans (R)

A new law from the 2021 General Assembly special session changes all town elections from May to November.

**Elections for Town Council and Mayor** will be held in:

- Accomack County – Accomac, Belle Haven, Hallwood, Keller, Melfa, Onley, Painter, Saxis, Tangier, and Wachapreague
- Northampton County – Cape Charles, Cheriton, Eastville, Exmore, and Nassawadox

**Elections for Town Council only** will be held in:

- Accomack County – Bloxom, Chincoteague, Onancock, and Parksley

No excuse is needed for voters who choose to vote by mail or vote early in person. A witness signature is required on all mail-in ballots. Key dates to remember:

- October 17 – last day to register to vote or update your address
- October 28 – last day to request that an absentee ballot be mailed to you. If you mail your absentee ballot, it must be postmarked by Election Day, November 8, and received by noon on November 11. Drop boxes for absentee ballots will be available at all polling places on Election Day.
- September 23 to November 5 – Registrars' offices open for in-person voting, including 2 Saturdays (October 29 and November 5) and 1 Sunday (October 16, 1:00 to 5:00 PM)

For more information, and details on polling locations, visit the Registrars' websites for Accomack County (<https://www.co.accomack.va.us/departments/registrar>; 757-787-2935) and Northampton County ([https://www.co.northampton.va.us/government/departments\\_elected\\_offices/voter\\_registration\\_and\\_elections](https://www.co.northampton.va.us/government/departments_elected_offices/voter_registration_and_elections); 757-678-0480).

**Remember, all elections matter, and every vote counts – including yours!**

## Water Wise Home Challenge: Tired of Raking Leaves? Try Mulching Them



*The Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District (ESSWCD) has introduced the Water Wise Home Challenge (<https://www.esswcd.org/copy-of-scholarships>), with 9 challenges for folks to do more to help protect our water quality. Once you've adopted at least 3 of the action challenges, you can claim a yard flag or sign by contacting [Julie.head@esswcd.org](mailto:Julie.head@esswcd.org). This is the second of 3 reprints of these challenges for our readers. We thank ESSWCD and Eastern Shore First for their permission.*

When we think of fall, we often think of raking leaves into piles and bagging them up to be hauled off. Is this really a good way to dispose of leaves? NO!!!

Mulching leaves and grass has a number of benefits:

- **It is good for your grass and soil.** Mulched leaves are decomposed by earthworms and other microorganisms. They turn the leaves and grass into plant-usable organic matter that helps reduce or eliminate the need for fertilizer. Returning this organic matter will also allow the soil to hold more moisture during dry spells, which will reduce the need for watering.
- **It saves space in the landfill.** Many leaves wind up going to landfills. Not only does mulching leaves to keep them out of the landfill save space, but decomposition in a landfill produces methane gas, which is a strong greenhouse gas. Natural decomposition produces carbon dioxide, which is not nearly as strong (or as damaging) as methane.
- **It is good for wildlife.** Many species of butterflies and moths overwinter as eggs, pupae, or adults in leaf litter. Toads hibernate by digging into loose soil in the winter. The mulch also helps with insulation.
- **It helps protect our water quality.** Mulching leaves keeps them from clogging up roads and drains. It also keeps leaves away from bodies of water, where the broken-down nutrients from the dead leaves can cause algae blooms.

For information on how to mulch your leaves, check out this article: "Mulching leaves: Why mowing leaves is better than raking them" (<https://www.bobvila.com/articles/mulching-leaves/>).



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*\*Raffle will be drawn Dec. 8*

