

Rivanna Currents

Winter/Spring 2007

Rivanna
Conservation
Society

The Rivanna Conservation Society is dedicated to safeguarding the ecological, scenic, recreational and historic resources of the Rivanna River and its watershed

Volume 17 Issue 1

Albemarle County Looks at Water Quality Improvements

By Morgan Butler

Electoral year winds are whispering promising news into the ears of Albemarle County residents who want to see water quality improve in their County and in the Rivanna River watershed. At a February meeting, the County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a group of modest amendments to the County Code that will augment existing protections for some County streams and rivers. Water quality advocates are hoping that vote bodes well for the fate of a separate, more robust set of potential amendments that the Board is currently considering.

County Approves Amendments to Water Protection Ordinance

On an icy Valentine's Day evening, the Board found a harmony it rarely reaches when it votes on natural resource protection measures. After relatively little debate, the six members of the Board unanimously approved three amendments to the County's Water Protection Ordinance that will help to improve water quality. The first change was introduced in response to a requirement under Virginia law that the County expressly prohibit the discharge of pollutants into the public storm sewer system. Pollutants discharged into the storm sewer system ultimately find their way into natural waters and adversely

impact the quality of those waters. However, because the County's public sewer system is relatively small, County staff suggested that the Board go further than the minimum required by state law and prohibit discharges of pollutants to all surface and underground waters in the County. The Board agreed with the recommendation of its staff and adopted the prohibition. Although the prohibition does not apply to a number of harmful and relatively common discharges -- including discharges of pollutants via rain runoff and snowmelt -- the amendment means that the County has a new tool at its disposal to help keep some damaging pollutants from entering our waterways.

The second change the Board approved that night involves new protections for streams located within the sub-watershed of a drinking water intake situated on the North Fork of the Rivanna River near Chris Greene Lake. This intake is the primary source of potable water for the northern portion of the County's urban service area. With the approved change, intermittent streams within the intake's sub-watershed will now be protected from most development activity by a one-hundred foot buffer. Previously, the buffer applied only to perennial streams within that sub-watershed. While the intake's sub-watershed represents only a small portion of the County's geographic area, the new protections for intermittent streams within this area will help to mitigate problems in the North Fork caused by excessive sediment.

The third step the County took that night was to reinforce the validity of an existing provision of the Water Protection Ordinance that requires a 25-foot buffer between all perennial streams in the County and any lands on which crops are being grown. While the "agricultural buffer" requirement has been on the County's books for some years, the County attorney's office felt the authority for enforcing that buffer was not adequately set forth in the County Code. The Board unanimously approved a change to the ordinance that makes this authority clear.

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President's Message

By Angus Murdoch

"Keep a stiff fin and stem all the tides thy mayst meet"

*-Henry David Thoreau...in admiration of the American shad**

Greetings RCS friends,

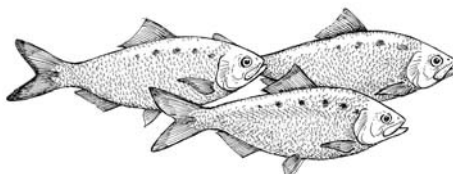
The Winter newsletter has slipped over into another beautiful Spring in Virginia. The peeper frogs are hollering for love in any spot low enough to hold water. Whippoorwills still out number leaf blowers on my road, and I hereby resolve to cherish that situation for however long it lasts.

Local environmental policy has given us a mixed bag, lately. As of this writing Albemarle is moving forward with mountain protection and enhanced stream buffer ordinances. Fluvanna, meanwhile, appears to be pedaling in the opposite direction, and County Supervisors have shown no appetite to pursue rural preservation zoning, stream protection, or other environmental measures likely to fan the ire of the property rights lobby. The revised Fluvanna Comprehensive Plan appears likely to include greatly expanded growth areas and encourage a dispersed exurban growth pattern across most of the northern half of the county. Fluvanna Supervisors did, however, unanimously reject a package sewage treatment plant for a 240 house rural cluster subdivision on a small Byrd Creek tributary near Wilmington. Many residents feared this would set a dangerous precedent for rural headwater streams countywide, and that local resources are inadequate for proper long-term water quality monitoring and enforcement of basic maintenance standards.

On a more encouraging note at the State level, Virginia DEQ is in the process of developing Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) standards for various pollutants in the several sections of the Rivanna on the DEQ list of impaired Virginia waterways. In accordance with State law, the Rivanna TMDL will include specific implementation standards for the restoration of currently degraded stream segments. RCS plans to stay involved in this process for the duration, and we applaud our executive director for her solid and diligent work on this front over the past few months.

Despite the slight cooling in the local real estate frenzy, poorly managed residential and commercial development remains the most severe and immediate threat to the prospects for a healthy Rivanna watershed. In February, RCS added its voice to the coalition of local environmental groups calling on Albemarle planners to identify a "sustainable" population carrying capacity compatible with long term environmental health and quality of life. RCS recognizes that this is no simple task, and that any meaningful result will need to address multiple variables beyond raw human numbers. Please see the RCS statement on page six for more details.

Thanks, once again, to all for your ongoing interest and support.



-Angus Murdoch

*as related by John McPhee in *The Founding Fish*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

Executive Director's Report

By Robbi Savage

Serving as your Executive Director for the past three months has been a true delight. I so enjoy living at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the beauty of historic Charlottesville is so welcoming.

With more than thirty years of environmental non profit management experience in Washington DC, it is exciting to be in a position to see the environmental programs and projects that I worked on at the national level being implemented at the watershed level. It is gratifying to watch concepts embedded in congressional legislation and federal regulations transformed, through local action, into the actual clean up and protection of the beautiful Rivanna River.

Since joining The Rivanna Conservation Society in November, we have instituted a number of new projects and programs. Each is designed to bring enhanced credibility to RCS and expand its scope and reputation.

For example, the **Third Thursday Brown Bags** have been created to bring environmental and conservation professionals and community advocates together to share their insight and expertise at this monthly public forum. The Brown Bags are one hour in length and are held at the Central Library in Charlottesville. Brown Bag topics include: stormwater management, the development of total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) the watershed Score Card, the StreamWatch report on the Rivanna, and the James River Sojourn. (See page 5 of this newsletter, for more detail log on to www.rivannariver.org/calendar.html)

And, with the mention of the **James River Sojourn**, RCS has been invited by the Chesapeake Bay Alliance to host the Sojourns' kick off at Palmyra. On June 17th, RCS will host educational events on the Rivanna and launch the paddlers as they begin their trek down to the James and on to the Chesapeake Bay. This is a tremendous opportunity to work with our community partners and to highlight the upstream and downstream impacts of human activities on the waterways.

RCS is excited about its new partnership with the Southern Environmental Law Center and the UVA Environmental Law Clinic to implement the James River Association's **Watershed Score Card Program**. The end result will be the recommendations to the Boards of Supervisors of the City and Counties within the boundaries of the Rivanna Watershed.

In an effort to expand its partnerships with related organizations, RCS has become a member of the Board of Directors for **Virginia Citizens for Water Quality** and has become a Steering Committee member for the **Middle James Roundtable**.

Another new program will be the celebration of **World Water Monitoring Day** on October 18, 2007. This annual event is designed to bring people throughout the watershed and throughout the world together through the in-stream sampling of pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen and turbidity (clarity). RCS will serve as the host organization for WWMD and will work with organizations throughout the region to assure an exciting and educational event (www.worldwatermonitoringday.org)

The Rivanna Conservation Society will continue its bacteria monitoring program, seasonal river clean up events, youth education programs at the Scheier Nature Area, the azalea nursery buffer program and if adequate funds can be secured, RCS will institutionalize the teacher education program launched last November.

And it is with great anticipation that RCS looks toward the imminent breach of the **Woolen Mills Dam**. After years of design, planning and dogged perseverance, the dam is expected to come down this year. We hope it won't be long now before we see schools of shad running again in free flowing streams above Charlottesville.

This spring RCS will sponsor its traditional **river clean up** event and will host its regular **river paddles**, to assist its neighbors with an interest in seeing the river in a canoe or kayak.

In addition, RCS will again be spearheading the development of the **River Days Brochure** to provide a handy catalog of seasonal events being sponsored by the plethora of water and conservation organizations in the Rivanna River basin. Among these activities will be the June 9th **Rivanna Regatta and River Festival**, which is co-sponsored by RCS.

And, on the administrative side the RCS has adopted and begun to implement its **7 Year Strategic Plan**, has upgraded and updated its website (www.rivannariver.org) and instituted new fiscal and data management procedures.

To assure the success of these new and existing programs, RCS has created its **Student Intern Corps** to engage the community's young people in the service of the Rivanna. To date we have engaged the services of six student interns and are excited about the potential for this program to increase over time.

As I close this first Executive Director's Report, it is important for me to express my sincere appreciation to the RCS Board of Directors, the Committee Chairs, the staff and the members of this vital and growing organization for the opportunity to serve you. I look forward to having this opportunity for many years to come.

-Roberta (Robbi) Savage

Albemarle Water Quality Improvements, continued from front page ...

Notably, the agricultural buffer applies only to “crop land” and is not required on lands being used for silviculture or pasture.

Other, Stronger Measures Under Consideration

In addition to the three amendments adopted on February 14, a majority of the Board has recently indicated its support for another set of proposed measures that would help improve the County’s water quality. During a work session on January 10, the Board discussed a number of provisions aimed at protecting the valuable natural resources located in the County’s mountainous areas, including headwater streams. At that meeting, a majority of the Supervisors agreed that some of the provisions under consideration would achieve a greater level of protection if applied throughout the County’s “rural areas” instead of being applied only within the mountains.

As a result of the Board’s strong direction, County staff is now drafting ordinance language that would require a 100-foot buffer around all intermittent streams in

the County’s rural areas. (The buffer is already required around all perennial streams in the County.) This would establish buffers on approximately 730 miles of intermittent streams that currently have no such protection.

A second provision would make it harder to build residential roads and driveways across steep slopes. Because of their less stable soils, disturbances to steep slopes have a much more adverse impact on water quality than do disturbances to more level topography. However, the County Code currently allows driveways to be built across steep slopes in many situations in which routing the driveway across the steep slopes is unnecessary. The proposed provision would help eliminate many such disturbances.

Unlike the first set of amendments that were adopted on February 14, a formal vote remains to be taken on the second, stronger set. At this point, staff is still working on drafting the language. Because these provisions would help safeguard the ecological resources of the Rivanna River, RCS anticipates supporting these amendments when they are finally presented to the Board, and we hope this will occur this spring. *cs*

RCS Rain Barrels

Now Available in Three Locations!

Eltzroth and Thompson Greenhouse

1686 Monacan Trail Road
Charlottesville, VA 22903
434 295-2488

The Garden Barn

2646 Frays Mill Road
Advance Mills, VA 22968
434 978-7887

Pennington's Nursery & Gifts

7353 S. Seminole Trail (Rt. 29)
Rochelle, VA 22738
540 948-7057



Barrels are \$95 each or \$80 when two or more are purchased

Meet a (New Board) Member

Jay Willer is currently the Government Affairs Director, Blue Ridge Home Builders Association, Charlottesville, VA (covers Albemarle, Greene, Fluvanna and Nelson Counties). Jay's responsibilities include development and articulation of Association positions on relevant industry and political issues, and effective communication of those positions to members, industry, politicians, public and media.

Prior to moving from Washington DC to Greene County, Jay worked from 1988-2004 as the Director of Washington Operations for the Gas Technology Institute, a Chicago-based research laboratory addressing the technology interests of the natural gas industry, including stationary and transportation fuel cell development; natural gas vehicle on-board technology and infrastructure; and biomass energy conversion.

Jay's responsibilities included federal R&D funding strategies, Congressional liaison, business development, coalition building, and public relations.

From 1982-1988 Jay was the Legislative staff for Congressmen/Senator Paul Simon (D-IL) and his responsibilities included primary legislative and constituent manager for all energy, environmental and agricultural issues.

Jay has a BA in English from North Central College, Naperville, IL and holds a ABD MS in Community Development, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL.

Finally, from 1998 – 2005, Jay was a member of the Board of Directors and Treasurer, Biomass Energy Research Association (BERA, www.bera1.org) ☞



Virginia Environmental Endowment Matching Grant– Success!

Our membership campaign of 2005-2006 was a success, gaining 257 new memberships for RCS, and a total of \$11,095 membership dollars. Because of the VEE grant's dollar for dollar match, this increases our membership dollar total to \$22,190. Thank YOU!

Third Thursday Brown Bag Forums

Pack a lunch and join us each month for this new educational lecture series. Forums meet every third Thursday at noon, in the Madison Room of the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library, Central Branch, Downtown Charlottesville.

April 19th

Subject: Total Maximum Daily Loads

Rick Parrish, Senior Counsel with the Southern Environmental Law Center, and **Rochelle Garwood**, Environmental Administrator, Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, will talk about The Rivanna River TMDL. This session will focus on Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) what they are, how they are developed, the challenges to TMDL implementation and the process for creating a TMDL on the Rivanna River.

May 17th

Subject: James River Sojourn

Leslie Middleton, Senior Program Coordinator for the Chesapeake Bay Alliance, will provide the details of the upcoming James River Sojourn and share with the participants the various opportunities to become involved in the program. This year the Rivanna Conservation Society will host the launch of the Sojourn from a portage on the Rivanna River in Palmyra.

June 21st

Subject: Stormwater in Depth

Greg Harper, the Water Resources Manager for Albemarle County and **Kristel Riddervold**, City of Charlottesville will build upon the February Brown Bag discussion by providing details of what is being done to manage stormwater in the City of Charlottesville and the County of Albemarle.

July and August – Third Thursday Brown Bag Lunch on Hiatus

September 20th

Subject: The Rivanna – A Political and Environmental Challenge

Marvin Moss, a member of the Fluvanna County Supervisor, President of the Fluvanna County Historical Society and Heritage Train Foundation and a member of the River Basin Commission will share his views on the importance of affecting all aspects of river protection: Physical, Chemical, Biological and Political

October – December Subjects: To Be Announced



RCS Endorses Effort to Identify “Sustainable” Albemarle Population

February 14, 2007

Albemarle County Board of Supervisors
Charlottesville City Council

Cc: Fluvanna County Board of Supervisors
Greene County Board of Supervisors

Dear Members of the Board and Council,

On behalf of the Rivanna Conservation Society (“RCS”), as well as the organization’s 500 members, I am writing in support of the proposed project to identify a sustainable population size and density for the Charlottesville-Albemarle Community.

In light of our watershed conservation mission, RCS is particularly interested in sustainable carrying capacity defined as the human population which the Rivanna and nearby watersheds can accommodate while still preserving high quality streams and associated native wildlife communities throughout large areas of those basins.

Analysis of StreamWatch sampling, summarized in the 2006 “Living in Our Watershed “ report, suggests that, while several of the Rivanna’s rural sub-watersheds presently support a healthy range of stream organisms, the biology of most of the heavily developed urban and suburban tributaries has been severely degraded, probably beyond reasonable hope of recovery. A majority of the Rivanna watershed, however, falls into middle categories of stream health where, we believe, stream conditions could either be substantially restored, or else rapidly pushed into failing biological health.

In accordance with the demonstrated strong correlation of stream health with human population, we believe that continued rapid human population growth makes the latter scenario very likely, especially if future development inflicts per-capita impacts typical of recent decades and if that future population increase is widely dispersed in an “exurban” pattern throughout the landscape. We believe that the negative impacts could be even more severe under the current zoning “build-out” scenarios for Fluvanna and Greene counties, where rural development zoning is much less restrictive than in Albemarle.

RCS recognizes that the settlement pattern, land-use, and per-capita impacts typical of present day Albemarle residents is only one of a wide range of possible options for accommodating human beings within the landscape. Rather than identifying a single fixed “ideal” population number based on current conditions, we believe that it would be more useful to recognize that a population carrying capacity consistent with good stream health will be a product of numerous land-use, lifestyle, and local density variables.

While we are very concerned about the continuation of current trends, we also recognize that it could be entirely possible to accommodate the current or even substantially increased human population with much less damage to stream health and the local environment, generally. We also recognize that changing such trends will be an enormous educational and political challenge, since the changes necessary to reduce per-capita impacts may require a level of intrusive regulation of individual land-use decisions which many current residents would consider unacceptable. We also recognize that a capped population or slow growth would not, in itself, be sufficient to safeguard environmental health. For example, previous generations of Virginians (specifically 18th and 19th century plantation and subsistence farmers), living within the economic norms and constraints of their time, caused enormous environmental damage with a much lower population than today’s. In other words, “carrying capacity” should focus on specific projected physical impacts on the environment under various development scenarios rather than on the search for a “sustainable” number removed from its attendant socio-economic context.

At the end of the day, the prospects for healthy local streams and water resources will depend upon the political willingness and ability of local governments and the public at large to insist upon strong protection for critical shared environmental assets. RCS encourages Charlottesville and Albemarle leaders to undertake the effort to identify population carrying capacity within a wide range of development variables in order that work on the necessary regulatory and physical infrastructures can begin in time for those measures to be effective.

Sincerely,

Angus Murdoch, President, Rivanna Conservation Society

The Rivanna River Watershed Investigation

June 25-29, 2007

This teacher professional development opportunity is being conducted as part of the **Chesapeake Classrooms Institute** of Chesapeake Bay Foundation in partnership with Rivanna Conservation Society. The local, 5-day course will provide teachers with a means to incorporate **Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEE)** into their own classrooms. These experiences consist of standards-based activities and assessments, field-based investigations and community-based student action. The Rivanna River Watershed Investigation is a five day, hands on field immersion experience that will provide local teachers with the opportunity to investigate the connections between land use and water quality in the connected Rivanna, James & Chesapeake Bay watersheds.

Participants will explore the ecology, history and politics surrounding the Rivanna and James River watersheds. Teachers will also develop techniques for bringing these field lessons into the classroom. **Tuition (\$150) includes all provided education materials, food, lodging, and boat & automobile transportation. Applications due by May 16th.** Course space limited to 12-15 participants. Funding assistance is available.

Itinerary will include an Orientation Session, canoe floats on the Rivanna, water quality analysis, fieldtrips to a Community Supported Agriculture farm, archeological sites, and Stone Robinson Elementary School to investigate some classroom and schoolyard projects by teachers there.

No overnight stay will be required in this course. Participants will be able to return to the comfort of their homes each night. Staff will assist those seeking overnight accommodations in the region during this course (those traveling long distances or in need). Much of our investigation will take place onboard canoes. No prior paddling experience is required. All training and equipment will be provided.

When teachers return home they should be prepared to create a portfolio plan, a document that outlines how they would execute a mini-unit that would lead to a local community-based student service project. The creation of these units is supported by an online library of bay education resources on the Chesapeake Classrooms online community. Upon receipt of your plan, CBF grants teachers credits. These may be used as teaching recertification or graduate credits. Teachers who are interested in deepening their understanding, particularly in the area of classroom application, may opt to participate in the 8-day pathway of Chesapeake Classrooms which includes our workshop series.

Conventional workshops include:

Standards-Based Field Investigation: Training in how to use a field setting, from the schoolyard to a river, to teach SOL-based instruction.

Student Action Training: Training in how to design, implement, and monitor local and school-based action projects.

Watershed Action for Virginia's Environment (WAVE) Curriculum Training: Instruction in CBF's Virginia Department of Education curriculum module. This workshop provides activities that complement issues investigations and the resources to implement these lessons.

Teachers may earn additional credit by creating a portfolio which includes documentation of the Meaningful Watershed Education Experience that they have designed for their own students.

To register or to learn more, please contact:

Cindy Duncan

Phone: (804) 241-3178

Email: cduncan@cbf.org



An Easy Way to Help RCS

If you register or re-register your MVP card, Food Lion will donate a percentage of its sales to RCS whenever you shop and use your card. To register your card, please call (800) 210-9569, menu option 3, and mention that RCS is registered in Charlottesville, Virginia (though you can shop with your card at any Food Lion store). You can also log on to www.foodlion.com and go to Li-onShop and Share. Members have to re-register for 2007. The more members we have registered, the higher percentage donation RCS will receive.

2006 Photography Contest

Thank You's Are in Order

The Rivanna River Photo Contest reception brought together the contest winners, their families, members of RCS and friends throughout the community. The reception could not have been possible without the generous support of the New Dominion Book Store on the Charlottesville Mall. Thanks to New Dominion for allowing us to host the reception at their lovely shop. Thanks also to Sandy Huckstep, Marketing Specialist at Whole Foods Market, for the donation of fruit and vegetable trays. A special thanks to the following individuals and businesses for their support: Studio Art for giving a discount on framing, Marjorie Siegel for assistance with set up, Eileen Merritt for bringing the youth portion of the contest to life and for her contribution toward framing costs, board members Kris Parker, Tracey Crehan Gerlach, and Tatyanna Patten for their support and contributions, and of course our honorable judges Hal Brindley and James Yates;

And for providing prizes with which to honor our participants: Integral Yoga Natural Foods, Chaps Ice Cream, Alakazam Toys and Gifts, Café Cubano, Cary's Camera, Creative Framing and The Art Box, Charlottesville Ice Park, Twisted Branch Tea Bazaar, Vivian's Art for Living, and Hugh Gildea. And now for the winners:

Adult Winner Overall: Bill Emory

Youth Winner Overall: Cole Peale-Grody

River Critters

Adult Winner: Jeff Maurer

Adult Runner-up: Tom Barton

Youth Winner: Cole Peale-Grody

Youth Runner-up: Jonathan Romero

Dominguez Youth Honorable

Mention: Meranda Dudley

Fantastic Flora

Adult Winner: Tom Barton

Adult Runner-up: Hugh Gildea

Youth Winner: Sasha Colasuonno

Youth Runner-up: Jonathan Romero

Dominguez Youth Honorable Men-

tion: Meranda Dudley

People and the River

Adult Winner: Hugh Gildea

Adult Runner-up: Hugh Gildea

Riverscapes

Adult Winner: April Krajewski

Adult Runner-up: Bill Emory

Youth Winner: Alex Petze

Youth Runner-up: Malik Grace

Youth Honorable Mention: Marie Carter

Impacts

Adult Winner: Bill Emory

Youth Winner: Janie Marie Deane

Art Interpretive

Adult Winner: Jeff Maurer

Adult Runner-up: April Krajewski



Bill Emory's "Adult winner over-all" photo

RCS Calendar of Events

RCS Board Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00pm at Java Java Coffee, 421 East Main Street, Charlottesville Downtown Mall.

StreamWatch Activities: Please keep an eye out for scheduling announcements via email. If you are not currently on the StreamWatch email list, but would like to be, contact John Murphy at 434-923-8642 or johnmurphy@streamwatch.org

RCS 4th Sundays at Scheier April 22, May 27, June 24, July 22, August 26. A variety of fun natural history educational events for all ages. Free. Meet in parking area of the Rivanna Conservation Society's Scheier Natural Area in Fluvanna County. Check the RCS website for programs, times and directions.

Saturday April 7th Scheier Natural Area Work Day 10:00am to 3:00pm. Hike and help clean the trails of winter debris.

Sunday April 8th Special Scheier Natural Area Gathering; Dedication of the James C. Erdle Memorial Bench and Garden 3:00pm to 4:00pm. All are welcome.

Thursday April 19th Third Thursday Brown Bag Forum; Topic: Total Maximum Daily Loads, Noon-1pm at the C'ville Central Library.

Sunday April 22nd 4th Sundays at Scheier; Nature exploration for all ages. Check the RCS website for programs.

Saturday April 28th Earth Day Extravaganza and Meadow Creek Clean-up; Charlottesville, McIntyre Park, Time TBA.

Saturday May 5th RCS Spring BBQ & Rivanna River Celebration! at The Garden Barn, 2646 Frays Mill Road, Advance Mills, VA 22968 Time: 2:00pm to 6:00pm (Fund Raising Event) Please RSVP: (434) 97-RIVER

Sunday May 6th Rivanna River Float with RCS 10am, RSVP and details, call 97-RIVER

Thursday May 17th Third Thursday Brown Bag Forum Topic: River Sojourn, Noon- 1pm at the C'ville Central Library

Sunday May 27th 4th Sundays at Scheier; Nature exploration for all ages. Check RCS website for programs.

Saturday June 9th Rivanna Regatta and River Festival, RCS River Clean-up ; Begins at 9:30am, All Day Events at Darden Towle Park, Josh's Landing and Pen Park. For more details log on to www.rivannariver.org

Sunday June 17th 2007 James River Sojourn: Rediscovering Conservation: Land Use along the James, Then and Now A week-long paddling and educational trip coordinated by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, June 16th-23rd. For more info and registration details go to www.AllianceChesBay.org RCS hosts the kick-off of the James River Sojourn and the Blessing of the Fleet. Launch: Palmyra 8:00am – 9:30am, all are welcome.

Thursday June 21st Third Thursday Brown Bag Forum Topic: Stormwater, Noon-1pm at the C'ville Central Library.

Sunday June 24th 4th Sundays at Scheier; Nature exploration for all ages. Check the RCS website for programs.

Sunday July 15th Rivanna River Float with RCS 10am, Location TBA

Sunday July 22nd 4th Sundays at Scheier; Nature exploration for all ages. Check the RCS website for programs.

Friday August 17th RCS Annual Meeting at Pen Park, Meadow Creek Golf Course. Light Lunch provided, Noon to 1:30pm. Please RSVP 97-RIVER

Friday August 17th Golf Fundraising Event for RCS at Meadow Creek Golf Course. Shotgun start at 2pm, call 97-RIVER for details.

Sunday August 26th 4th Sundays at Scheier, Nature exploration for all ages. Check the RCS website for programs.

**For more information call
Mary Anderson at 434 97-RIVER
or log on to the RCS Website
www.rivannariver.org**

Thank You to all of our supporters!!

RCS depends on the generosity of its members and corporate sponsors.

We could not fulfill our mission without your contributions.

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Ruth Douglas
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Steve & Nell Tharp

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Memorial Gift to the Rivanna Conservation Society

RCS extends its sincere sympathies to the wife and family of James Cunningham Erdle, who died unexpectedly on Tuesday, January 23, 2007. **We thank** them for their gracious memorial donation to the Rivanna Conservation Society.

Naturalist's Corner

SIGNS OF SPRING - - AND SKUNKS!

By Ida Swenson

We look for the signs that the Winter is over and Summer is on the way. Ah, the wonderful sights, sounds and smells of spring. (Insert the violin music) The tinges of pastel unfolding before our eyes, the gurgling streams rushing to the Rivanna, the aroma of SKUNK! Peeyooo! Maybe it was just one of the many spring road kills, or maybe someone's dog tried to chase the wrong critter! No matter the reason, the 'sweet' aroma of skunk is one of the signs of spring. Because the skunks do not truly hibernate, they may come out of their dens when the weather is warm looking for food. Mating season is February and March, which means that the males are roaming, and may explain why there seem to be more road kills then. In early Spring, three to eight tiny, blind young are born in a den lined with soft vegetation. They grow rapidly, and in 6-7 weeks can be seen trailing behind their mothers on foraging expeditions. In five months they are as big as their parents.

We have two races of striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis mephitis* and *Mephitis mephitis niger*) in our watershed. Occasionally a spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*) has been reported. Skunks used to be classified in the weasel family (Mustelidae), but more recently have been put into their own family- - Mephitidae. They all produce a powerful, foul smelling musk from scent glands inside their anuses, and use this ability as an effective defensive maneuver. As omnivores, they eat a wide variety of plants and animals. In fact several sources proclaimed the skunks as the "gardener's best friend" because of their fondness for insect pests, especially grubs. They especially dig up lawns which are harboring Japanese beetle and other larvae. They also eat mice, other insects, eggs, tender buds and shoots. They are nocturnal, so you will probably not see them- - only smell them if they are threatened.

Skunks frequently arouse concern as they will make dens under houses and porches. Sometimes they are trapped in basement window wells. Of course, if you leave your garage or shed open overnight, they consider it an invitation. To discourage skunks (and other animals) on your property, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries suggest you:

- Keep trash inside until the morning of trash pick-up or place trash in an animal proof container, such as a metal trashcan with latches on the lids.
- Do not leave pet food (cat or dog) outside overnight.
- Close up all openings under and into your buildings. These animals look for places to den - don't give them that opportunity.

Encourage neighbors to do the same. If anyone in the neighborhood is feeding these animals it can cause trouble for everyone. Hopefully you will find ways to coexist with these very beneficial animals.

Just a reminder that skunks or other wild animals which approach humans in daylight may have rabies. If you suspect an animal is rabid, call your county animal control officer immediately and keep your children and pets inside the house away from it.

Other signs of spring are the increased bird songs as they establish territory and find mates. Red maples are the first to bloom, with the willows quickly following. Bluebirds, robins, phoebes and flickers will become more numerous as the migrators return. Peepers (a tree frog) will begin their chorus, and daffodils, crocus and ephemeral wildflowers such as squirrel corn, dutchman's breeches and Virginia bluebells start to poke their heads through the soil and leaf litter. Get outside and enjoy the change of seasons. The Scheier Natural Area in Fluvanna County is open year round with trails and ponds that are full of signs of spring.

Ida Swenson is a certified master naturalist in the Rivanna Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists. If you would like more information on becoming a master naturalist, go to their website at www.virginiamasternaturalists.org



Striped skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*

Saturday, May 5th

Spring BBQ

and River Celebration

Live Music by “Faster than Walking”

Big Jim’s BBQ

2pm - Rain or Shine!

At the Garden Barn

2646 Frays Mill Road, Advance Mills, VA.

29 North, 5 miles North of Airport. Left at Advance Mills “Rt. 641” (Frays Mill Road)
Right at the gazebo.

Fundraising event, suggested donation; \$20 per person, \$30 per couple. \$8 kids 14 and under.

MUSIC! FOOD! FUN! RAIN BARREL RAFFLE AND MORE!

The Rivanna Conservation Society– Membership Information

Yes, I want to join the Rivanna Conservation Society to protect our precious natural resource, the Rivanna River

Name: _____ Organization: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Individual....\$20.00 Family...\$30.00 Wood duck...\$50.00 River Otter\$100.00

Blue Heron....\$250.00 Osprey....\$500.00 Bald Eagle...\$1000.00+

Corporate Membership: Green Heron...\$100.00 Mink...\$500.00 Kingfisher...\$1000.00 +

All contributions are tax deductible. All members receive our quarterly newsletter, invitations to special events, and exclusive events at Scheier Natural Area. Thank you for your support.

Please complete and mail with check, made payable to:
Rivanna Conservation Society, PO Box 1501 Charlottesville, VA 22902

Now available: membership online! Go to www.rivannariver.org

Cole Peale-Grody's winning photograph, "Shedding Skink".
More about the 2006 RCS Photography Contest inside.



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The date above your name is the date of your last contribution. Please consider renewing your membership if more than a year has passed.

The Rivanna Conservation Society (434)97-RIVER www.rivannariver.org