



Rivanna Conservation Society

Our Heart is With Our River

October 10, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Board,

My name is Robbi Savage and I am the Executive Director of the Rivanna Conservation Society. The RCS would first like to associate itself with the comments made by Mr. Butler, Mr. Cannon and Mr. Schuyler.

The RCS urges the Board of Supervisors to extend the County's current stream buffer protections to intermittent streams located in the rural areas, and to preserve steep slopes from access roads and driveways.

Intermittent Streams

Intermittent streams are an invaluable natural resource and play a critical role in the overall health of a stream system because they often represent the headwaters of a watershed's stream and river network. During storms, intermittent streams can contribute large volumes of sediment and other pollutants to the stream system. Buffers along intermittent streams help reduce these threats by keeping streambanks from eroding and by trapping sediments before they reach the stream. Buffers also reduce the severity of floods by slowing water that reaches the floodplain and riparian area.

Currently, the County's intermittent streams only receive a protective buffer against new disturbances if they are located on land that drains into our public water supply reservoirs or intakes. Under the proposed amendment to the water quality ordinance, buffer protection would be extended to all intermittent streams located in the County's rural areas. Without this protection, many of our other efforts to promote the health of our local streams and river network are severely undermined.

The RCS views this important proposal as amounting to a simple and straightforward change to the County's existing stream buffer ordinance. The end result will be an increase in the number of intermittent streams that receive protection under the ordinance. In practice, it would involve application of the same County staff survey procedures currently used to identify intermittent streams on lands located within the County's water supply protection areas. As long as these survey procedures are clearly defined and thoroughly publicized, to ensure fairness, with objective and consistent application, we see no reason not to adopt this important provision.

Critical Slopes

The County recognized the water quality benefits of protecting and conserving steep hillsides when it passed the critical slopes ordinance in 1989. The preamble to that ordinance enumerates many of the dangers that disturbances to critical slopes present to the environment (as well as public health and safety) and makes clear that the ordinance intends to "discourage development on critical slopes."¹

¹ Albemarle County Code § 18-4.2.

We understand that the existing critical slopes ordinance has been interpreted in a way that often exempts residential roads and driveways from restrictions against disturbing steep slopes. RCS is generally opposed to private access roads or other development on slopes greater than 25 percent and we urge you to adopt provisions that adequately protect these fragile natural resources by limiting the land-disturbing activities that may take place upon them.

These two of the provisions will provide important benefits to the County's rivers and streams and limit damage to important natural resources. For these reasons we urge you to extend the County's current stream buffer protections to intermittent streams located in the rural areas, and to preserve steep slopes from access roads and driveways.

Thank you for your careful consideration to these provisions.