



**Rivanna
Conservation
Society**



Chesapeake Bay Program
A Watershed Partnership



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS CONFERENCE:

10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, August 15, 2007

**Riverview Park, City of Charlottesville
(directions at end)**

Date: August 14, 2007

**Contacts: Alan Weaver, VDGIF Fish Passage Coordinator, (804) 305-4284
 Jason Halbert, RCS Volunteer Project Coordinator, (804) 347-5337
 Robbi Savage, RCS Executive Director, (202) 297-3563**

Woolen Mills Dam Breach Begins

Project hopes to restore American shad to river and improve boating and fishing

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA -- The Rivanna Conservation Society (RCS), the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and other community partners, today announced the breaching of the Woolen Mills dam on the Rivanna River. The breach will restore fish habitat, allow easy passage for boaters, remove a dangerous river hazard, reduce flooding in Charlottesville's Riverview Park, and allow migratory fish such as American shad and eels to repopulate the upper Rivanna River.

"Removing this dam will restore natural fish habitat," said Alan Weaver, Fish Passage Coordinator for the Commonwealth of Virginia. "Resident and migratory fishes will have unlimited passage access to over 16 miles of stream above the dam, and boating safety through this reach of the river will be greatly improved."

"From the ocean, through the Chesapeake Bay, and up the James through Richmond, both anadromous (shad) and catadromous (eels) fish species will now be able to access the upper Rivanna River for the first time in almost two hundred years. The VVDGIF is proud to be part of this great multi-faceted partnership that has brought this project to fruition," Weaver continued.

A team of volunteers led by Jason Halbert and Pat Punch, with the help of Alan Weaver at VDGIF, began this effort six years ago. RCS applied for and received all necessary local, state, and federal permits, and Isaac Shelley's Shelbeck Excavating of Scottsville, VA won the bid to remove the dam. The Rettew company of Lancaster, PA handled design and contracting. Conservation Services, Inc. of Verona will handle restoration. UVA Graduate student Tamara Doucette and Dr. Mark Kopeny are working with VDGIF to study the before-and-after effects of the removal on the local fish populations. Funding for the study is provided by the project partners.

“For millennia, American shad returned to spawn up the James and Rivanna rivers from the Atlantic Ocean,” said Jason Halbert, coordinator of the project. “But by the last half of the 20th century, dams and over fishing decimated what was once the largest fishery in Virginia. Removing dilapidated, unused dams like Woolen Mills

-- more --

helps restore ancient fisheries and improve the environment for our grandchildren. We are very excited about the opportunity to recreate the once-great spring shad run on the Rivanna River.”

"Most people don't know that shad used to come up past Charlottesville by the thousands" said Marvin Moriarty, northeast regional director for the Fish and Wildlife Service. "This partnership among public and private partners shows how on-the-ground collaboration can contribute to the conservation of our native fisheries and wildlife habitats for future generations."

"FishAmerica is pleased to have joined together with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the many other partners to remove the Woolen Mills Dam," said Johanna Laderman, Executive Director of the FishAmerica Foundation. "We eagerly await the increased fishing opportunities for local anglers and the many miles of improved habitat for American shad and bass."

“The Woolen Mills dam was first erected by the Rivanna Navigation Company in 1830 to provide water power for a mill and as part of a series of dams, locks and canals to allow bateaux to travel up river,” emphasized Angus Murdoch, President of the Rivanna Conservation Society . “The Woolen Mills manufactured wool uniforms until its closure in 1964. The mill switched to electric power about 1899. The dam was destroyed at least once and was last rebuilt in roughly 1870 and it is slowly falling apart, serving no purpose. At least one person has drowned at the dam and many have been seriously hurt.”

”There are thousands of dams in the United States and most are privately owned. Regulations governing dams in Virginia have been tightened in recent years, but still many are crumbling and are in desperate need of repair or demolition,” said Halbert.

Roughly one-quarter of the Woolen Mills dam will be left standing for historic interpretation, provided it is deemed safe, otherwise it will be removed. A kiosk will be erected on the east side of the river explaining the history of the site. “Restoration efforts will include the planting of over 500 trees and shrubs this fall and next spring,” continued Halbert.

“This dam is privately owned by the Thach Family. We owe Buddy and Edith Thach, and their son Presley Thach, our thanks and appreciation for their vision and enthusiasm. This project was truly a community partnership and we are most grateful for all the support we have received,” said Roberta “Robbi” Savage, Executive Director of RCS.

Funding for the project was provided by many individuals, American Rivers, an Anonymous local foundation, Bama Works Fund, Breeden Foundation, Canaan Valley Institute, Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Program (EPA), VDGIF, FishAmerica Foundation, Hartfield Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Perry Foundation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the WestWind Foundation.

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The Rivanna Conservation Society (RCS) is the primary conservation organization in Central Virginia dedicated exclusively to restoring the Rivanna River. Our mission is to safeguard the ecological, scenic, recreational and historic

resources of the Rivanna River and its watershed. RCS works throughout the Rivanna's 760-square-mile watershed to protect and restore the Rivanna with programs in education, protection and advocacy. www.rivannariver.org

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is dedicated to restoring American shad to the James River watershed. All of the several dams in Richmond have been breached, notched or retrofitted with a fishway to allow migratory fish access to the upper James River watershed including the Rivanna River. It is the mission of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; and to promote safety for persons and property in connection with these outdoor activities. For more information, visit the Department web site at www.VDGIF.virginia.gov.

The Chesapeake Bay Program is a unique regional partnership that has directed the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since 1983. The Bay Program partners include the states of Maryland, New York, Delaware and West Virginia; the commonwealths of Pennsylvania and Virginia; the District of Columbia; the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, representing the federal government, and participating citizen advisory groups. www.chesapeakebay.net

The FishAmerica Foundation is the conservation and research foundation of the American Sportfishing Association—keeping our nation's fish and waters healthy. FishAmerica provides grants to non-profits, conservation minded groups to enhance fish populations, restore fisheries habitat, improve water quality and advance fisheries research to improve sportfishing opportunities and success. FishAmerica unites the sportfishing and boating industry with non-endemic corporations, foundations and government agencies to invest in fisheries and habitat in the US and Canada. Since 1983, FishAmerica has awarded nearly \$9 million to more than 900 projects in all fifty states and Canada. Our grants empower local communities and leverage volunteer support to invest in the future of fishing. These grants are an important part of the broader nationwide efforts to conserve the outdoors and ensure millions of Americans and future generations can enjoy fishing. www.fishamerica.org

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. www.fws.gov

Directions to Riverview Park:

From the east: I-64 West to Shadwell/250 Exit. Go right onto Rt. 250 west. Follow up and down big hill to Free Bridge across the Rivanna River. Be in left lane and turn left immediately after bridge onto High St. At first light go left onto Meade Ave. One block before next light is left turn onto Chesapeake St (adjacent to Meade Park). Follow to end to entrance to Riverview Park.

From the west: I-64 east to Charlottesville/Rt. 20 North exit. Go to first light and turn right onto Carlton. Follow to through two lights. One block after second light is right turn onto Chesapeake St. Follow to end to entrance to Riverview Park.

From North/South: Rt. 29 to I-64. Follow directions "from the west" above For a map click [here](#)