

Ways to save our resources

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Formation of the Rivanna River Basin Commission and Charlottesville's entry into the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District constitute two encouraging and complementary efforts to protect local resources.

Charlottesville only recently joined the Soil and Water Conservation District, finally realizing that the city's impact, especially on water quality, was significant enough to warrant cooperation with other localities on resource issues. Indeed, the city has a responsibility to its neighbors to work with them to preserve water and soil, as several streams run through Charlottesville en route to the Rivanna, which in turn forms part of the city's boundary.

Gratifyingly, the city has an abundance of candidates for its first election to the conservation district's board. Three candidates - Rich Collins, John Conover and John Pfaltz - are running for two seats. In some localities, there is virtually no competition.

Meanwhile, the city has joined as a founding member of the Rivanna River Basin Commission, with Albemarle, Fluvanna and Greene counties and the regions' two conservation districts.

According to the Nature Conservancy, which was instrumental in establishing the commission, "the Rivanna River watershed remains one of the finest freshwater river and stream systems in the Piedmont," managing both to sustain a growing human population and a large "citizenry" of plants and animals, including the globally rare and endangered James spiny mussel.

But due to increasing development and population growth, the watershed's health faces intensified pressures.

Because the river basin is so far essentially healthy, and because it is small enough "to get our arms around," in the words of commission Chair-woman Sally Thomas, chances of successfully protecting it seem good.

The commission will evaluate the Rivanna and its tributaries, and try to find solutions for its problems.

One of the problems is sedimentation and the way it alters a stream. Sedimentation suffocates river life. It changes the nature of the stream itself, and eventually even affects the river's location and locomotion.

Sedimentation has long been a problem for local water reservoirs. Soil washed into the reservoirs takes up space meant for water storage.

Soil and water conservation work together. When soil is protected, it stays on the land and does not smother our waterways or clog our reservoirs. It is available to nurture agriculture and wild-growing plants alike.

Both for our own sakes and for the welfare of the non-human creatures that share these resources, it behooves us to keep them healthy and functional for the long haul.