

Presentation of  
Robbi Savage, Executive Director  
Before the  
Rivanna River Basin Commission  
Thursday, August 2, 2007

Good Evening. My name is Robbi Savage and I am delighted to be here to share the history of the Rivanna Conservation Society, its current programs and the plans for the organization's future.

The Rivanna Conservation Society (RCS) was established in 1990 and over its 17 year history has grown into a very credible and successful federation of dedicated volunteers. As I am sure you are well aware, RCS members and volunteers are committed to and donate an incredible number of hours to the protection and enhancement of the Rivanna River and its tributaries.

In recognition of the increasing challenges to the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the Rivanna River and the complexity of managing a sophisticated nonprofit organization, the RCS Board of Directors determined that the services of a professional staff would be necessary to implement the Society's strategic plan. RCS currently has two staff members, a part time bookkeeper, a volunteer webmaster and 4 college interns volunteering for the summer. The membership numbers nearly 500 citizens in more than 10 states.

The Rivanna Conservation Society was created for the sole purpose of improving and protecting the Rivanna River and its watershed. One of the most significant challenges to the wellbeing of the Rivanna is rainwater runoff that carries human and animal waste, pesticides and fertilizers over the land and into the stream, causing increased levels of bacteria and nutrients in the waterway. This type of pollution is generally referred to as "Nonpoint Sources."

Since the passage of the 1972 Clean Water Act, many of what are called "Point Sources," discharges that come from a pipe or other discreet conveyance, have been addressed. As previously mentioned, the more prominent remaining pollution comes from what is termed "Nonpoint Sources." Nonpoint sources are defined as diffuse sources entering the waterway from multiple and often non discernable locations. This distinction is important because "Point Sources" are generally produced at industrial facilities and waste water treatment plants and "Nonpoint Sources" are usually the result of individual activities in homes, on yards and as a part of farming practices. For this reason, information sharing, citizen involvement, youth education and teacher training, embellished by personal involvement in the stream monitoring and ongoing protection efforts become critically important.

To achieve its mission to improve the conditions that can threaten the quality of the Rivanna River, the RCS has undertaken a number of programs and projects to increase public outreach and involvement in watershed protection. These include:

- Third Thursday Brown Bag Public Education Forums
- Fourth Sunday at the Scheier (field experiences on native plants, bird, pond culture, etc.)
- River Clean Ups and Paddles
- Stream bank buffering, easement and restoration programs
- Youth Education Programs for schools within the watershed
- Teacher Training Programs

- Rain Barrel promotion and Sales
- The Rivanna River Regatta and Festival
- The Rivanna River Launch of the James River Sojourn
- The Woolen Mills Dam Breach planning and design project

Over the coming months, the RCS intends to expand its programs/projects to include;

- The breach of the Woolen Mills Dam (August)
- The expansion of the Watershed Score Card program (Sept)
- The initiation of World Water Monitoring Day (October)
- The sponsorship of a Teacher Watershed Summit (TBD)
- The sponsorship of a Youth Watershed Summit (TBD)
- The expansion of the RCS Student Interns Program (Ongoing)
- The expansion of the RCS Speakers Bureau (Ongoing)
- The development of youth education publications (December)
- The expansion of programs at the Scheier Natural Area, and
- The initiation and facilitation of the Citizen Dialogue on Stormwater (TBD)

As previously mentioned, the majority of the programs and projects undertaken by the Rivanna Conservation Society (or cosponsored with partners like the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the James River Association, the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, the City and County Parks and Recreation Depts.) are directly linked to public outreach, education, training and involvement. This is because environmental insults to our waters are increasing daily, population growth is placing new and increasing demands on our watershed and fiscal resources from federal and state governments are diminishing. The end result is that, in many instances, our community will need to make its own decisions on how best to protect the Rivanna River and how to raise the money for prevention, restoration or remediation from local taxpayers. Like those around this table, we at RCS know that in order to make the best possible decisions, the public and its elected decision-makers need the most current and credible information available. RCS is dedicated to providing such information and to working with other organizations, like the Commission, to develop additional data as appropriate.

Specifically, the RCS would like to work with the Commission to track and be engaged with the DEQ on Rivanna TMDL, the Water Quality Standards revisions to the Bacteria Criteria and the proposed integration of the environmental boards. And at the national level, we will be engaging in the Farm Bill Reauthorization and any water related legislation.

In summary, the Rivanna Conservation Society is excited about the opportunities to expand its efforts to increase public education, community involvement and its outreach to government leaders, home owners, farmers and ranchers, developers and contractors, young people and senior citizens. In addition, the RCS is committed to increasing its volunteer monitoring programs and to collecting, through citizen scientists, the highest quality of data possible. We look forward to having the opportunity to work closely with this Commission to attain our mutual goal, which is the improvement and long term protection of the beautiful and historic Rivanna River.

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