



“Protecting the Rivanna River Watershed: A Confluence of Interests”

March 6, 2008

Nesha Mizel
DCR
44 Sangers Lane
Suite 102
Staunton, VA 24401

Dear Ms. Mizel:

I am writing, on behalf of the Rivanna River Basin Commission, to recommend and request that the Rivanna watershed be given high priority for TMDL Implementation Plan development and implementation funding. The Rivanna watershed has been identified by The Nature Conservancy as one of the finest Piedmont river systems remaining in Virginia. The Rivanna River Basin Commission was formed to provide guidance for the stewardship and enhancement of the watershed’s natural resources.

We recognize that there are no resources available now, but if there is such a thing at “getting in line,” this is our official request to be at the front of the line.

The Commission was established in 2006 by the counties of Albemarle, Fluvanna, and Greene, and the city of Charlottesville. The Commission is comprised of two members from each governing body, one representative each from the Culpeper and Thomas Jefferson Soil & Water Conservation Districts, and one citizen from each of the four localities.

To ensure that we focus on the greatest threats facing the Rivanna, the Commission appointed a technical advisory committee in 2007 to help guide our work. The Commission requested that the technical advisory committee make a recommendation about which issues to tackle first. Following four two-hour sessions, the group of local watershed professionals advised the Commission that we should focus our resources on addressing the threat posed by altered hydrology. We believe that as the watershed has shifted from a forested to a non-forested environment, water which used to infiltrate into the ground and recharge our groundwater is now racing across the landscape and into streams, where it tears apart streambanks and buries the streambed in sediment. In addition to suffocating the life out of our rivers and streams, the sediment is also filling up the region’s reservoirs.

The Commission supports the TMDL process and the recently completed TMDL study, which dovetails with the Commission’s work on altered hydrology and sedimentation. The TMDL study identifies sedimentation caused by higher runoff flows “as a primary stressor impacting benthic invertebrates in the biologically impaired segments of the Rivanna River.” The study also states that “improvement of the benthic community in the biologically impaired segment of the Rivanna River watershed is dependent upon reducing sediment loadings through stormwater control, as well as restoring instream and riparian habitat to alleviate the impacts of urbanization on the river.”

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Roberta Savage

Culpeper SWCD
Robert Runkle

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John E. Easter, II

The Commission intends to begin work to implement strategies on the ground designed to stop this excessive sedimentation and recharge our groundwater in the Rivanna watershed. The Commission is currently researching the effectiveness of management practices to address these threats, including working to install and monitor practices in the field. In addition, the Commission has raised nearly \$300,000 in private funds to initiate our work, making the Commission ideally situated to multiply any funding received.

With the Commission in place, this community is uniquely positioned to protect and restore our watershed and serve as an example for others faced with similar threats. As a result, giving the Rivanna watershed high priority for Implementation Plan development and implementation funding will ensure that the state's resources are wisely spent. Together, we can make great progress toward abating the threat of sedimentation and achieving our mutual goal of protecting and restoring the rivers and streams of our community.

Sincerely,

Sally Thomas, Chair