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Proposal to integrate the Rivanna River Coordinating Group into the formal structure of the Rivanna River Basin Commission

Background

The Rivanna River Coordinating Group (RRCG) is an informal networking forum for area nonprofits and government personnel. The RRCG was created in 2006 and includes participants from the Counties of Albemarle, Fluvanna and Greene and the City of Charlottesville. Governmental participants have included the environmental administration, planning, outreach, engineering, inspections, parks and recreation.

Non- government organizations (NGO) representatives include the Rivanna Conservation Society, Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy, Rivanna Trails Foundation, Fluvanna Heritage Trails Foundation, League of Women Voters, Piedmont Environmental Counsel, The Nature Conservancy, StreamWatch, Ivy Creek Foundation, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, James River Association, Virginia Naturally, along with other interested parties, including the Rivanna Rambler and agencies including the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority, Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District, the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the VA Department of Environmental Quality.

At its inception the group met quarterly, sometimes with a theme and other times to simply serve as a networking opportunity. In each meeting there was an opportunity for participants to share upcoming activities and plans. Carl Schmitt, representing the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy, served as the first chair, with Diane Frisbee of The Nature Conservancy providing administrative support.

In 2007, Robbi Savage, representing the Rivanna Conservation Society, took over the role of chair and also took on the responsibility for administrative support (e.g., arranging meetings, developing agendas, summarizing the meetings and providing lists of programs and projects).

During a recent meeting, Robbi Savage (RCS Director, chair of the Coordinating Group and a member of the RRBC) and Leslie Middleton (Commission staff and a former member of the RRBC) met to discuss the Commission's grant proposal submitted to the NFWF. As a part of that discussion, they discussed the structure of the Commission and the potential for adding a public outreach and involvement Committee. Robbi and Leslie identified the Rivanna River Coordinating Group as one forum for this outreach and began to work on a set of options to propose to the Commission at its April 2009 meeting.

At the February 26, 2009, meeting of the RRCG, Robbi broached the subject with the members of the group, and there was enthusiastic support for the idea of integrating the RRCG into the Rivanna River Basin Commission. If such a merger was to be accomplished, the expectation is that the staffing of the Committee would be transferred from RCS to the Commission staff.

This draft proposal is put forward with the support of the Rivanna Conservation Society and the Rivanna River Coordinating Group.

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The Issues.

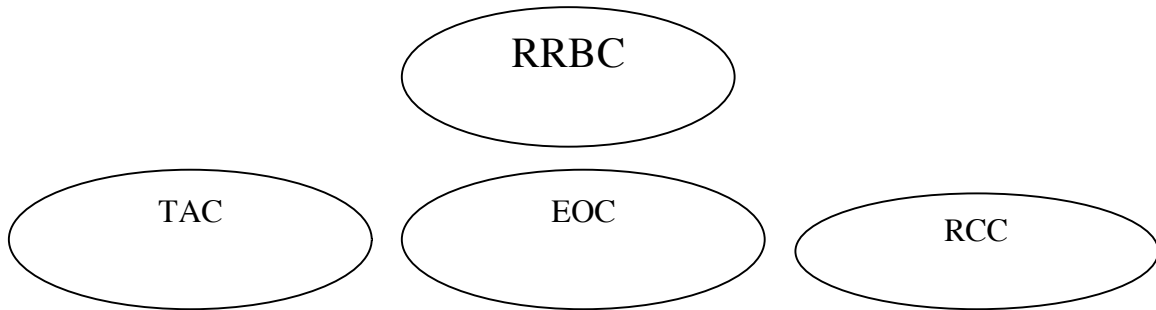
1. A number of coordinating meetings take place throughout the watershed. Government personnel and NGO leaders find themselves attending meetings with the same folks different locations and times to discuss similar topics. There is a growing sense of "meeting weariness" – as well as concern that there could be a more efficient way to coordinate activities, project planning, and response to funding opportunities.
2. The Rivanna River Coordinating Group provides the NGO community with the opportunity to regularly engage with the governmental professionals (who are able to attend) in order to stay abreast of the key issues facing the watershed.
3. The Rivanna River Basin Commission's Technical Advisory Committee meetings, while open to the public, are focused on the work of the TAC, which heretofore has been highly technical and focused on developing a threat analysis for the Rivanna. Presently, the TAC comprised of professional staff appointed by the localities, plus selected technical experts including planning, engineering, and stormwater management professionals. The make-up of the TAC is based on the charter of the RRBC. The Rivanna River Coordinating Group, on the other hand, is broad based and is open to all, especially those with an interest in environmental protection, environmental education, conservation and recreation. These interests and activities have little or no representation on the RRBC's TAC.
4. The RRBC is comprised of elected officials and citizens members appointed by elected officials from four jurisdictions. The Commission is unique among the many Rivanna groups in that it is multi-jurisdictional make-up that is reflective of the Rivanna watershed. The make-up of the RRBC and its TAC has made it possible to move quickly forward in identifying the main threat to the Rivanna watershed and the next step of focusing on implementing solutions through its member jurisdictions.
5. The component of the RRBC's charter ("... *promoting communication, coordination, and education...*") has yet to be realized. This could be accomplished by moving the administration of the Rivanna River Coordinating Group to the Rivanna River Basin Commission.
6. Administration of the Rivanna River Coordinating Group requires resources that will need to be identified to ensure its sustainability regardless of which entity provides these services.

The Proposal

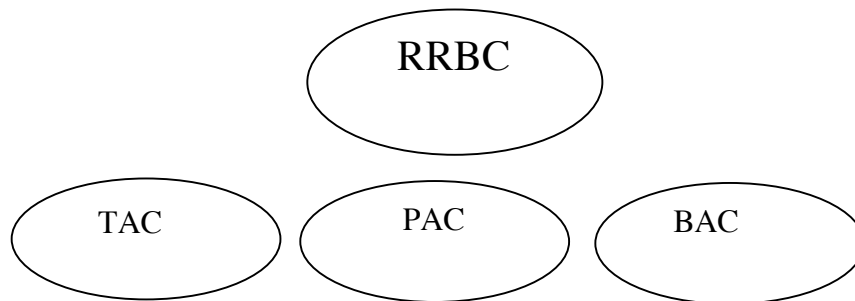
The Rivanna Conservation Society and the Rivanna River Coordinating Committee are recommending that the Coordinating Group become a Committee of the Rivanna River Basin Commission. This would increase the effectiveness of coordination by decreasing meeting overlap, formalizing activities under the RRBC, and providing a central "repository" of information regarding activities and programs for staff of localities and NGOs as well as the public. As a committee of the RRBC, it would provide the networking opportunities that are so attractive to the participants and will also allow for public input to the Commission through a formal mechanism.

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Option I: Committees of the Rivanna River Basin Commission could include: (1) The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC); (2) Education and Outreach Committee (EOC); and (3) Recreation and Conservation Committee (RCC).



Option II: There is a second option that could be considered to provide a way to include business and corporate representation on the Commission through its committee structure. Committees of the Rivanna River Basin Commission could include: (1) The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC); (2) the Public Advisory Committee (PAC); and (3) the Business Advisory Committee (BAC). If this option were pursued, it would be worthwhile to explore whether the Public Advisory Committee should include both education *and* recreation interests or whether two separate committees could be created:



Next steps

The Technical Advisory Committee has been successfully operating within the structure of the RRBC, and input of TAC members will be instructive as the Commission considers structural opportunities. The recommendations of the TAC will be presented to the RRBC at its April 2009 meeting.