



A flood of good intentions

There's a lot being done to help the river

by : Jayson Whitehead

In 1998, Moore's Creek, which drains parts of Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville and forms much of the southern boundary of Charlottesville, was placed on Virginia's Impaired Waters list for levels of fecal coliform bacteria that indicate the creek is unsafe for swimming and fishing. The next year, the [Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission](#) (TJPDC) began working to get it off the list, performing a bacterial source tracking study to determine where the bacteria were coming from and installing a gage to monitor stream flows.

The second phase, mandated by federal law, was a TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) initiated in 2001 to help determine the broad categories of pollutant reductions that would need to be made in order for the creek to meet health standards. The final TMDL, which called for the removal of all nonpermitted human sources and all cattle from the stream as well as reductions in grassland, residential, and urban loads, was approved by the Environmental Protection Agency in May 2002. The next step was to draw up an implementation plan, which addresses the specific actions needed to bring fecal coliform bacterial levels in Moore's Creek within safe limits for human contact and identify potential sources of funding. TJPDC's implementation plan proposal has been funded and work is now underway.

The same year Moore's Creek was listed as impaired, the [Rivanna River Basin Project](#) issued its State of the Basin report. Initiated by TJPDC, the project's stated goal was to "assess past and current conditions of the Rivanna River and its tributaries and to articulate desired future conditions." Their ambition was realized six years later when Virginia's General Assembly—250 years after opening up the Rivanna—passed a bill creating the [Rivanna River Basin Commission](#) to "provide guidance for the stewardship and enhancement of the water and natural resources." On April 25 of this year, the Commission met for the first time. Made up of representatives from Albemarle, Fluvanna and Greene, the Commission already has \$285,000 (raised by the Nature Conservancy) in its purse and will likely have quite an impact on the efforts to restore the river basin.

In addition to the TJPDC, Albemarle County has enacted a number of programs to protect streams and other water resources, including capital projects to fund storm water management retrofits, stream channel and floodplain restoration, and wetland and upland enhancements. They have also engaged in numerous public education and involvement activities directed towards the general public, business owners, and home owners, like the multiple demonstration projects at county office buildings (including green roof, rain tank, rain garden, rain barrel, underground StormVault, and pervious pavers). They also continue to support stream biological monitoring (through [StreamWatch](#)), and participate in studies correlating stream health with land use. "As land use intensity increases," StreamWatch's John Murphy says, "biological conditions decline."

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