

THE RIVER RUNS

News from the Cowpasture River Preservation Association

CRPA + 40 Years = One Clean River: Celebrating A Rich History



Board Member Bill Hardbarger is leading the CRPA History Project

In January, 1972, a group of people met in the Millboro High School gymnasium to hold the first organizational meeting of what would become the Cowpasture River Preservation Association. The meeting was called by Temple Kessinger, Sr. and over 50 people from Bath, Alleghany, and Highland Counties, including my father, Herbert Hardbarger, Sr., attended this meeting. Much has happened since then, but if we flash forward to January of 2012, one can see a great deal of change and growth to our organization.

We have an Executive Director, some pretty technical and scientific river data that we regularly collect, a professional and informative published newsletter, a scholarship program, and a vast email distribution list. But we cannot look at our history without realizing that we have also suffered loss and setbacks; we have bid adieu to many faithful servants and early “fathers and mothers” of the CRPA and we have witnessed dissension in the community and in our own ranks over our differences of opinion about how to best protect our river.

But the good news is...we are still here and we are stronger than ever! In spite of our struggles, we have always focused on the river and never lost sight of our mission: *“To preserve and protect the Cowpasture River and its tributaries*

for present and future generations.” As we look back over our 40-year existence and ponder how we should celebrate, there is an overwhelming desire to savor...and save...what got us started in the first place. This year of celebration that will culminate at our August picnic needs your help. We plan to compile a timeline of major

events and CRPA activities, but we also want to celebrate the special relationship that we have with the river and with each other. We are asking you to submit your personal memories, pictures, and experiences with the river, with your family and friends and with the CRPA for sharing on our website. You may submit these to or contact our Executive Director, Keith Carson, at directorcrpa@gmail.com. If you have events or ideas for our timeline, you may submit them to Bill Hardbarger at bill.hardbarger@gmail.com.

You will be hearing more in the spring newsletter about our annual meeting on May 19th and our summer celebration to be held in August. Both will offer opportunities to remember our history and allow those of us who love and enjoy the river to renew our purpose as we begin the next era in the CRPA. Plan now to be a part of our celebrations and think how you can contribute to our formal and informal history collection.

Also In This Issue

- ◆ From the President
- ◆ Executive Director’s Update and Message
- ◆ Events/Need to Know
- ◆ What Matters!
 - People:* Member Profile, Thank YOU and Welcome
 - Outreach*
 - River Clean-up, Summer Picnic, Conservation Tour
 - Education*
 - Out and about with the Nature
- ◆ Conservancy
- ◆ Tweets and Tidbits: News In Brief
- ◆ Creature Feature

CRPA

P.O. Box 215

Millboro, VA 24460

www.cowpastureriver.org

Board of Directors:

2011-2012

Officers:

Jean Howell, President

540.925.2435

Joe Wood, Vice President

540.862.9408

Michael Whiteside, Secretary

Elizabeth Biggs, Treasurer

Directors:

John Fowler

William Hardbarger

James Houff

William Jones

Read Lunsford

David Peters

George Snead, Jr.

Robin Wood

Staff and Editor:

Keith Carson

Executive Director

directorcrpa@gmail.com

540.474.2858

From the President

Hello Everyone,

Well, we're well into 2012 and I'm thinking it's still January 1. Let's hope all of you are much more in tune with the calendar!

And as I think about the calendar I am focusing on the 40th anniversary of the CRPA. It's hard to imagine that our organization, begun by so few so confidently 40 years ago has reached this advanced age. And we're really not so little any more. Our ranks have grown to over 300 members as I write this, and we've never been

stronger. Were it not for the efforts of so many over the years we would not be here today. Whether keeping an eye on new and/or changing legislation that would affect the river or establishing parameters for and actually monitoring the ongoing health of the river, we've been busy and alert. That's what makes this year is so important. We have a lot to be proud of.

In order to mark this milestone this year we've begun planning a couple of events. Several of our current board members under the leadership of Bill Hardbarger are developing a historical presentation for our Annual Meeting on May 19th. But they can't do it all alone. Bill has included a notice in this newsletter explaining how you can help. Now's the time to search for any Cowpasture memorabilia you have stuck up in a corner of the attic or filed in the basement file cabinet.

And then at our picnic this summer, we'll take the opportunity again to acknowledge all those who have been so instrumental in preserving and protecting our wonderful Cowpasture.

So mark your calendars for both events. It's your celebration as well!

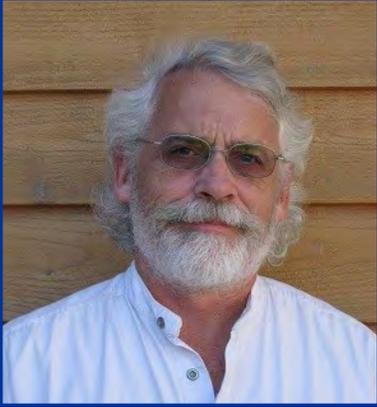
See you in May at the Annual Meeting.

Jean



On a sunny January day Carroll Draft (center foreground) flows into a small, unnamed stream (on the right) to form the Cowpasture River in eastern Highland County, a bucolic beginning for our favorite waterway.

Introducing the New Executive Director



Welcome to the winter newsletter, my first as Executive Director. By way of introduction, let me tell you how it is that I came to live in the Allegheny Highlands. I was born in Roswell, New Mexico and grew up in an Air Force family traveling around the U.S., spending 3-4 year periods in Indiana, Louisiana, and Ohio. Then I spent a wonderful four years near Tokyo, Japan where I completed high school. In 1970, I returned stateside to Plattsburgh, NY for a year of college in Utica, NY and then I transferred to Raleigh, NC where I completed a BS degree in Biology at N.C. State University. That was where I discovered my love for the Biological Sciences. In 1974, I entered the Neurobiology PhD Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and spent four and one-half years completing my doctorate, studying the effects of diabetes on the nervous system. Then I was off to Duke University

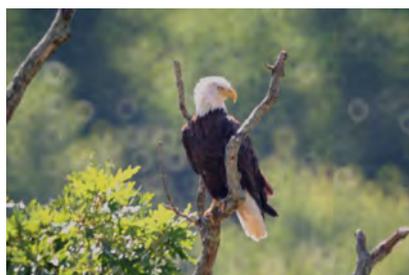
Medical Center for a one year research fellowship followed by a one year appointment at Harvard Medical School where I did research on the effects of Alzheimer's Disease on the brain. In 1980, I just happened to see a job advertisement for a faculty position at Old Dominion University. The next thing I knew, I was packing everything I owned into the back of a van and driving to Norfolk, Virginia to start work as an Assistant Professor of Biology and Director of the Laboratory of Electron Microscopy. I later became an adjunct faculty member at Eastern Virginia Medical School and director of the joint Biomedical Sciences PhD Program of ODU and EVMS. One summer day in 1989 I interviewed a young female assistant professor on the faculty of the Neurosurgery Department at EVMS, who wanted to join the Biomedical Sciences PhD Program faculty. A few months later I ran into her again in Phoenix, Arizona, at the Society for Neuroscience meeting, and we struck up a conversation. We discovered that we had some common interests not only in science but at a personal level too. That was how Polly and I met and we have been together ever since. She brought me to the Allegheny Highlands to visit her parents, who lived on a small farm in Highland County. Several years of visits to the mountains of western Virginia convinced us that this was where we wanted to be. We found a wonderful piece of property near Snowy Mountain in the Blue Grass Valley and developed a plan to make it our full-time residence. That plan came to fruition in 2006 when I left ODU and joined Polly in Highland County. We had our off-grid dream house built on a high point overlooking the valley and powered it with solar and wind energy. Since moving to Highland County, I have worked at the Nature Conservancy's Warm Springs office, and have been involved with the Bath-Highland Bird Club (president), the Alleghany Highlands Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists (president), the Virginia Native Plant Society, the Virginia Society of Ornithology (Board member), and the Virginia Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation (Board member). Through these groups I have enjoyed many wonderful outdoor adventures. Polly and I plan to develop a native tree arboretum, a native plant preserve and other wildlife friendly areas on our property. We have greatly enjoyed all of our fascinating wildlife visitors and invite you all to come see our haven in the Highlands.

The Blue Grass Valley view, looking south from our house. From left to right is the Devil's Backbone, Monterey Mountain and Lantz Mountain



Special Message From the Executive Director

Working on the Annual Campaign for the past 4 months has given me the chance to learn a great deal about the CRPA and its membership. It has been a real eye-opening experience. For the past three years I had numerous opportunities to meet and get to know many of you when I accompanied Polly to various CRPA meetings and activities. However, just as the Cowpasture River shows its many dimensions and complexities to those who get close and look carefully, I have now seen some of the deeper layers and brighter facets of the CRPA. Members with lifetimes of experience on the river and tales that would fill volumes have made a real impression. Members' dedication to the CRPA and passion for conservation is only surpassed by their generosity when it comes time to support their organization. A few weeks ago I took a drive up to see some of the source streams of the Cowpasture in eastern Highland County. I spoke with a landowner there who is the sixth generation of his family to farm that land, going back to before the American Revolution. What an amazing heritage! Imagine all the tales that land could tell if we could only understand its many tongues. The story of the Cowpasture River is not only a tale of the people on the land, it is also marked by the presence many natural wonders, from the rocks and fossils to the trees, wildflowers, and animals that occupy its corridor through our landscape. One of my goals as Executive Director is to try and bring more of that natural wonder to the membership and the greater community. I hope you all will let me know when you see interesting animals, plants, rocks and other natural phenomena along the river. If you have a large or special tree, I'd like to see it. If you have interesting native plants on your property, I'd like to see them. I will always be ready, with camera and field guide in hand to share that experience with you and bring it to other members in the pages of the newsletter. I wasn't sure what to expect when I accepted the Executive Director position, but so far it has been a real pleasure to work with the Board and learn more about the river. It has been a truly humbling experience to have your confidence that I can continue the momentum that Polly built during her tenure as ED. I hope to see you this year and experience your special part of the Cowpasture River. Below are a few photos I have taken in Highland County—enjoy!



Upcoming Events: Near and Far

Saturday, February 25: James River Association's RiverRat training session, Victory Hall Theater, Scottsville, VA, 9 am to 4 pm, for more information contact Amber Ellis, 804-788-8811 or volunteer@jrava.org. Visit their website for a complete program description, www.jamesriverassociation.org.

Thursday, March 15: Richard Louv, nationally known author of *Last Child in the Woods* and *The Nature Principle*, will speak at the Paramount Theater, in Charlottesville at 7 pm. Tickets are \$12 for adults and \$8 for students; free book signing after the lecture, tickets available at www.theparamount.net.

Sunday, April 22: Walton Track CleanUp and Wildflower Walk with Charles Garrett, 2-5 pm; contact the Executive Director at directorcrpa@gmail.com or call 540-474-2858 to sign up.

Saturday, May 19: CRPA Annual Meeting, 40th Anniversary Celebration, Fairview Community Center, 5-8 pm, more information in the next newsletter.

Member Profile: Jean Ann and Jack Manner

Long before there was a CRPA, there was a community of folks gathered on the west bank of the Cowpasture one mile south of the Route 60 bridge and just north of the big bend in the river. This community, called Sharon, is where Jean Ann Manner's parents, Bill and Martha Higgins bought a river camp property in 1929 from Doug Nicely, great-grandfather of Tommy Slusser. The camp had a log cabin that was the scene of many glorious summer days on the river for Jean Ann and her two brothers, Thomas and Paul. Soon after the last day of school, Mom and the kids would head for the river camp where they would spend most of the summer until the approach of the first day of school called them back to Clifton Forge in late August. The flood of 1936 carried away the original cabin, but it wasn't long before a new river camp house was built on the site. The arrival of electricity was still more than ten years away. Life was simple and carefree. The kids fished, caught frogs and turtles, and plotted great adventures along the river. In later years Paul Higgins killed a 6 foot pine snake which Jack Manner put in a burlap sack and gave to unsuspecting Bud Estes who thought he was getting a big bag of home grown tomatoes. He must have jumped ten feet in the air when he opened that sack. One summer, Dimmitt and Ann Kirby brought their duck to the river. He was enjoyed by everyone, swimming with them above and below the water. He showed his displeasure by quacking loudly when left alone in the river. During World War II, Jean Ann went off to Madison College to study business and after returning to Clifton Forge, she went on to teach business courses at the high school and community college. Her college friends often visited the Higgins camp in the summer time, and after 60 years, some still come back. Jean Ann and Jack Manner were married in 1952 and they continued to enjoy the river camp and spent many happy summer hours there with their children. A flood in 1969 brought four feet of water into the camp house. In the early 1970s property owners along the Cowpasture were starting to meet to talk about the potential threats to the river. That led to formation of the Cowpasture River Association in 1972. Allegheny County had a plan to build a dam above the I-64 bridge and take thousands of gallons of water from the river. Area residents and other supporters organized and voiced their opposition to that proposal. Later, the Interstate 64 project threatened to increase silt and sediment levels in the Cowpasture. River enthusiasts kept an eye on construction activities to ensure that damage to the river was minimized. When a Millboro Springs restaurant wanted a permit to discharge untreated waste into the river, opposition mobilized quickly to block the permit. Cowpasture River community members traveled to Richmond to address the State Water Control Board and other government groups. The flood of 1985 hit Sharon hard, washing several camp houses away. The Manner Camp house stood its ground in floodwaters that went all the way up to the rafters. Business skills came in handy for Jean Ann when she was elected Secretary of the CRPA in 1989 during Bill Hardbarger's presidency. She served a total of 12 years on the Board. Jack worked as an engineer with CSX and helped with the many activities of the CRPA. Jean Ann and Jack watched their children, and then their grandchildren, learn the ways of the river at the Manner Camp. Jack passed away in 2008. The river rolls on as the new generations keep the traditions alive.



Jack and Jean Ann Manner enjoy a relaxing summer day at their Cowpasture River camp in Sharon.



The Manner Camp house in the flood of 1985.

People Matter: Welcome and Thank You

Welcome to our family and THANKS from all of us to all of you for new memberships and contributions since the last newsletter. As of publication, the annual campaign has raised \$26,254, so close to our goal of \$30,000! Thanks to all who have given and recruited new members to the CRPA for 2012. If you've not yet contributed to the campaign, your dues for 2012 are now due. Gifts in excess of dues are tax deductible and welcome any time of year. Did your contribution slip your mind? It's not too late. Maybe YOU can take us over the top!

Bedrock Patrons

Elizabeth Biggs and Nelson Hoy
Stewart and Lissy Bryan
The L.S. and J.S. Bryan Fund of the
Community Foundation—Serving
Richmond and Central Virginia
Tuck and Chris Carter
Cowpasture Camp Inc.
Kent and Ellen Ford
Bob and Ann Howe Hilton
Charles and Fleming Lunsford
Cleve and Barbara McGehee
George and Frances Phillips
Tim and Lynn Pistell
Truman T. Semans
George Snead, Jr.
Michael Wildasin

Wallawhatoola Society

Lucius and Pam Bracey
Lee Elliott and Bill Jones
Betty and Lou Robinson
Ross Waller and Ann Huebner

Watershed Stewards

Cynthia and Roger Baroody
Kip Brooks
Clarence L. Carson
Michael and Patricia Christian
W. Paul and Joan G. Higgins
Jean Howell
Allan and Becky Howerton
Tal and Christine Kemper
David Kirk
Read Lunsford
Jean Ann Manner
Jim and Anne McVey
Tom and Betsy Regnell
Don and Donna Thomson
Jean D. Warren and David Warren
Philip and Alston Watt

Headwaters Circle

Jay and Ann Batley
Charles Black
Lewis and Peggy Brinkley
David P. Brooks

Headwaters Circle, cont.

Martha and Dennis Brown
Raymond "Skip" Cheseldine
Wayne M. Cross
Mike and Shirley Cunningham
John DeVenny
Monroe and Kathy Farmer
Sharron and Ronnie Frahm
Bill and Christie Hardbarger
Bob and Ann Howe Hilton
Leighton and Pinky Houck
Jimmie and Dimmitt Houff
Jon and Kathy Jencks
Linda and Charles Lunsford
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lynn
Clifton Marshall
The Otis Mead Family
Norwood and Susan Morrison
Howard and Barbara Newlon
Todd and Ann Nugent
John and Doris Percy
Dave and Sandra Peters
Martha Rule
Mason and Cheryl Simpson
Donald "Skeet" Sutton, Jr.
Bill and Barbara Tavenner
Bob and Lee Tavenner
Tom and Cathy Thomson
John Turner, Jr.
Peggy and Mike Van Yahres
Eddie and Sheri Walters
Tom and Patti Watts
John Wood

River Guardians

Lt/Col & Mrs. Wm. G. Anderson, Jr.
Donald Arnold
Doug and Scarlett Bunting
Cynthia Kane
Bonnie Higgins Carpenter
Beatrice and Sonny Clark
Larry and Jo Denius
Mike Goode
Remi Gratton
The Gunn Family
Charles Garratt
Layton Hulette
Mark Koslen
Lloyd and Elizabeth Lipscomb

River Guardians, cont.

William Lipscomb
Phil and Charlotte Lucas
Dr. Edward E. Metzger
Richard and Jean N. Miller
Rick and Suzanne Miller
Percy and Anne Montegue
C.J. and Bonnie Nicely
Mr. and Mrs. Fred Paxton
James and Sarah Redington
Roy Simmons and Sally Branch
Ann May Shelton
William and Eleanor Washburn
Mercer Pendleton Watt
Ben and Kay Wilkerson

Members

Phil Agee
Shirley Anderson
Michael Barnes
Richard Barnes
Ben Beach
Sally Bingley
Ann F. Caldwell
Matt and Linda Cauley
Lynda Davies
Barrett S. and Ryan Divina
Chip Donahue
John Dynes
Robin Eddy
Wade Evans
Kathleen Gordon
Genevieve Goss
Channing Hall
J. Lesslie Hall, III
Jennifer Hawes
Marshall, Jane, Patrick and
David Higgins
Dr. David Jones
Jeff and Kim Mollohan
Mary Ellen Plitt & Henry Dickerson
Peter Pistell
Barbara Ray
David Ray
David Ray
Hallie Shires
Eddie Stinespring
Tenny and Eleanor Wellford
Frances Wolfe

People Matter (continued)

Welcome and Thank you! New Members, Memorials, and More Since July, 2011

Ryan Divina
Lynchburg, Virginia

Chip Donahue
Salem, Virginia
and Junior Members:
Isabelle, Parker and
Finnan Donahue

Sharron and Ronnie Frahm
Greensboro, North Carolina

James T. Lambiase, Jr.
Staunton, Virginia

Jeff and Kim Mollohan
Pacolet, South Carolina

Tom and Betsy Regnell
Alexandria, Virginia

William and Eleanor Washburn
Richmond, Virginia

Edward E. Metzger, M.D.
Lynchburg, VA

In Memorium: Jack Manner
Betty and Lou Robinson

In Memorium: Peck LaRue
Bill and Christie Hardbarger

Congratulations and thank you to member Bob Hilton, who turned whiskey into clean water with his winning bid of \$851 in our recent e-auction of the Buffalo Trace Millennium bottle!

Did we get it wrong? We're sorry for any errors or omissions in these lists covering donations received since the last newsletter in July, 2011 and through 1/30/12. We are happy to correct errors. Email directorcrpa@gmail.com

**A new way to give!
Now you can pay dues or make a gift online at www.cowpastureriver.org. Just go to "donate" and find the way you'd like to give.**

Rain Barrels For Sale!

A limited number of assembled rain barrels left over from last year's workshops are now available for purchase. The price is \$75.

Barrels are ready to be installed and installation instructions will be included.

Numbers are limited and sales will be on a first come, first served basis.

*Contact Keith Carson at
directorcrpa@gmail.com or
call 540-474-2858*



Fun, fellowship, and stewardship go well together!

By Polly Newlon, contributing writer

In addition to racking up 40 years of existence, the CRPA is now entering its 5th year of participation in the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation's Adopt-A-Stream program. At least twice a year, volunteers attack the USFS Walton Tract below Millboro Springs and haul out large amounts of trash left behind by the visiting public. Some years, the Evans Tract in Alleghany County and the Wallace Tract in northern Bath receive the same favor. In 2011, the spring cleanup was washed out, literally, by persistent high water. But, the September 18th cleanup was graced with a nice day - balmy even, and a good-sized group turned out, including some new recruits. It was evident that the Forest Service had been there working over the summer as the amounts of litter were substantially less than usually found in the fall, especially since we hadn't been in for the spring cleanup. The bad joke was



that all of the spring trash ended up in Hampton Roads thanks to flooding. Seriously, we hope not! This year, thanks to member support, the CRPA purchased some nice "grabber" devices to help volunteers deal with what seems to be a cruel prank on the part of the litterbugs - tossing their bottles and cans directly into the middle of the sticker bushes. The new tools will clearly reduce the blood loss!



Last fall's noble band of (somewhat grubby) warriors. First row: Lee Taplinger, Everette Rosen, Cynthia Baroody, and Bill Jones. Standing: Mike Whiteside, Monroe (Puggy) Farmer, Roger Baroody, Eddie Walters, and Charles Garrett. Not pictured (undoubtedly off sniffing something): Hank the pup. And thanks also to Mike Jamison, who came on a different day due to schedule.

A Hearty Party at Ol' Camp Wallawhatoola

July ushered in a well-attended, very special annual picnic hosted by members George and Frances Phillips of Windy Cove Farm and held at the old Camp Wallawhatoola lodge. The Phillips purchased property some time ago that included the site of the Camp where so many of Virginia's fine young men spent their summers from 1922 until it closed in the 1980's. Most of the camp structures are long gone, with last remnants washed away in the 1985 flood, but the lodge structure, though much in need of repair, still stood when the Phillips purchased the land. They set out on a careful, yet extensive renovation of the building, restoring it as close to the original as possible. Today it serves as a wonderful venue for jovial fellowship and still includes much memorabilia from camp days. Picnic goers were able to canoe, kayak, fish, swim, or just lounge around the lodge listening to the water. A brief shower passed by but didn't dampen any spirits and the pot luck fare was, as usual, superb! Burgers and dogs were grilled to perfection by the grill crew, including Mike Whiteside, Chip Snead, and Bill Hardbarger and the day seemed like a refreshing walk back to a simpler time.... just what we all need these days. Thank you, George and Frances for your generosity in sharing this treasure with the membership.



You too can join in these fun events!

Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District (MSCD): Another enlightening conservation tour

In August, the Mountain SWCD board and Virginia Cooperative Extension held their annual tour of selected conservation project sites in the area. People gathered at The Bath County Pumped Storage Station and then headed to a farm in Highland to see a large planting project of warm season forage grasses. Next was a visit to this year's conservation award winners Brasil and Julia Hamrick at their farm on Upper Back Creek where a large riparian tree planting project is ongoing. A good proportion of their plantings are of native fruit trees, no doubt a favorite for many species of local wildlife. The Hamricks use a double fencing technique for young fruit trees to give them a starting chance and report that, except for a few overzealous bucks, this system seems to be working well.



Above right: A large group attended the tour including the inaugural class of The Allegheny Mountain School, a new program in Highland County educating young adults in sustainable agriculture practices. Right: VA Tech faculty member, Ben Tracy, was on hand to describe the benefits and challenges of planting and maintaining warm season and native grasses on rural lands. Left: John Wright, forester with the VA Dept. of Forestry, advises the group on the best ways to protect the trunks of young trees while the Hamricks look on. Each year, the Mountain SWCD gives an award to someone in the community demonstrating a commitment to stewardship and use of best management practices (BMPs).



The final stop on the tour was a return to the Bath County Pumped Storage Station, owned by Dominion and Allegheny Power companies. This renowned hydroelectric engineering project went online in 1985 and generates power using two large water reservoirs, one on a mountaintop and one at the base. The upper reservoir is 265 surface acres of water with depth fluctuations of 105 feet during operation. The upper reservoir stores power for production when extra is needed quickly by the grid. When called for, the water can be released within minutes to run down the mountain through giant tunnels to turbines producing electricity which is then released to the grid. The water in the lower reservoir is pumped back up at night using excess power produced by VA's nuclear stations that must run 24/7 regardless of demand. This facility is unique in many ways, but the dam holding the upper reservoir is one of the largest such structures in the world. At 460 feet high and 2,200 feet long, it contains 18 million cubic yards of earth and rock fill. The tour group learned about a program started by employee Sara Bell for surface management of the upper reservoir dam. A challenge for the facility over the years has been the need for the entire dam to be inspected regularly for leaks or any structural issues. But, being earthen, a great deal of plant growth takes hold on the dam during the growing season. The facility staff tried many methods to keep the dam clear of vegetation over the years, but the angle of the dam is so steep that it prohibits use of heavy machinery or even small mowing equipment. And, in addition to other drawbacks, spraying herbicides was also difficult on the high angle surface where safety is always a priority. Several years ago, Ms. Bell began talking with other large dam managers around the country and found that goats just might be the answer. Today, the Station rents a herd from North Carolina to make short work of the dock, thistle, and other plants that cling to the dam. They have a guard dog to protect them from predators and the staff have become quite attached to their animal coworkers. Following the tour of the upper reservoir and visit with the goats, the group was provided lunch at the Station. An inspiring day was had by all, who went away with new ideas and information in hand. These tours are held annually and are open to the public. They are a great educational opportunity and chance to network with many people who are totally tuned in to the latest and greatest BMP's for our region. Tours are generally advertised in advance in the local paper and there is no cost, but registration is required.



Before and after: In 2008 (left) goats were placed on small parcels of twenty or so acres for an initial reduction in large plant growth. The animals were then moved around the dam area, and returned to their home farm in the fall. Three years later (right), the dam is free of excess vegetation allowing for easy inspections. The animals will now simply keep the larger expanse under control, clearly a piece of cake (or thistle) for them! Rent-A-Goats are becoming a popular and "green" way to control invasive plants. And, hey - fertilizer comes with the deal! A win-win for both the soil and environment. Photos courtesy of Ron Searcy, Wells Farm.



Education Matters: CRPA helps TNC with LEAF

By Polly Newlon, contributing writer

What? The acronyms killing you? Well, let me explain. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has a fantastic educational program called Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future (LEAF). Each summer, high school students enrolled in designated environmental high schools around the country can become paid interns for four weeks in July. They travel to distant areas containing TNC management sites to gain experience in areas such as land management, conservation, public outreach, and research. Most are from urban areas and, for many, this is their first job experience. During their internship they also have fun with activities such as kayaking and camping out. A LEAF team consists of three students and a mentor so there is a great deal of personal attention. The groups also visit colleges in the region in which they are being hosted.

Last summer, Marek Smith, CRPA member and Director of TNC's Allegheny Highlands Program based in Warm Springs, hosted a team of LEAF interns from New York City. He offered the CRPA an outreach opportunity to collaborate on a macroinvertebrate monitoring experience for the youth on the Cowpasture River in northern Bath County. A most pleasant day was had by the group. For its part, the CRPA provided equipment and tools, expertise, and fellowship. In addition to the executive director, devoted CRPA volunteers included Kent and Ellen Ford and Keith Carson. After the students learned about the streambed animals and got their feet wet learning about biodiversity and the environment, they were off to the Coursey Springs Fish Culture Station for a tour and lunch.



Before "jumping in", ED at the time, yours truly, explained how counting bugs can provide meaningful information about the health of the river.



On the larger end of the continuum of critters common to this area are the hellgrammites and crayfish. Usually even the most urban of folks can recognize a crayfish, if only from a hearty Cajun dinnerplate. The aggressive hellgrammites, the larvae of Dobsonflies, are a favorite bait of fisherfolk who also know to handle them with care as those pincers can inflict a painful bite. All insects and other animals are held only long enough to be identified and counted and are then returned to the stream.

Upper, right: Marek Smith explains to the interns how to properly place the seine net for a controlled catch of the larvae and other animals on the riverbed. Once placed, the rocks in a square foot area of the river bottom in front of the net will be rubbed and agitated for precisely twenty seconds in order to free bugs from their attachments to the rocks, leaves, and pebbles.



Bottom, right: Volunteer Kent Ford tells the interns about some anatomical features to look for when trying to identify various animals found in the net.



For more information on TNC's LEAF program go to <http://www.nature.org/aboutus/diversity/leaf/>

Clean Water Act Is Also 40 Years Old

In 1969, an American river caught fire. You may remember when it happened. The Cuyahoga River, which runs through northeastern Ohio and outlets into Lake Erie in Cleveland, was heavily contaminated – so much so that stretches of the waterway contained no life at all. It was thick with pollutants. That fire wasn't the river's first. It had exploded into flames at least twelve times before. But the conflagration in 1969 was the last time. There's a simple explanation why. Three years later, in 1972, the Clean Water Act became law after Congress overrode President Nixon's veto. No longer could companies and localities legally dump pollutants into waterways. No longer could states turn a blind eye to their doing so. But three years after the Clean Water Act passed, public investment in water infrastructure as a share of our gross domestic product had peaked. As the decades have passed, we've invested less and less in our water resources. At this point, the EPA estimates that in order for America's water systems to be able to operate without sewage overflows or contamination, we'd need to invest \$188 billion dollars. Here's the thing: we can't afford not to. Each year, enough untreated sewage is released into America's waterways to cover the entire state of Pennsylvania in sewage one inch deep. Spending the money to prevent those overflows would pay off: Adding over a quarter of a trillion dollars to the economy and employing nearly 1.9 million people. Unfortunately, this isn't the direction we're headed. The Clean Water Act, never popular with polluters, is coming under increased attack. A still-stagnant economy is the perfect opportunity for those who think it's easier to dump pollutants in our rivers than to dispose of them properly. The polluters, and their allies in Washington, are fighting hard to curtail the Clean Water Act, using the now hackneyed argument that having to clean up their messes costs jobs. Regulations like the Clean Water Act don't increase costs. They determine who bears the responsibility for the problem and requires that **they** pay the costs. Polluted waterways have a cost that's often borne by local residents whose health is impacted and by those like fishermen who rely on the waterways for their livelihood. The Clean Water Act mandates that the polluters pay those costs—not us. We are currently facing some tough choices. We can either improve our water systems or see them continue to deteriorate. We can either create jobs or increase the profit margins of polluters. We can build from the success of the Clean Water Act -- or we can revert to a time when our rivers were so polluted that some were in flames. As water resources decrease, the competition for water will

intensify. The future of our drinking water is at risk. The choice is yours. If this concerns you, contact your representatives and tell them not to weaken the Clean Water Act, but to work to build our water infrastructure and improve our water quality for future generations.

Virginia Land Conservation Tops in the Southeast

A report from the Land Trust Alliance concludes that trusts in Virginia conserved more land between 2005 and 2010 than any other state in the Southeast. Citing data from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, the alliance found that over 314,000 acres were conserved during that period by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and over 78,000 acres by private land trusts.

Final GW National Forest Management Plan Nears Release

U.S. Forest Service officials gathered in Roanoke, Virginia in early December to review over 53,000 public comments on the draft George Washington National Forest plan. Their efforts to incorporate many of the concerns expressed will shape the final version of the plan set for release in March. The plan was last updated in 1993. The new plan will govern administration of the GW for the next 15 years. A year of public meetings on the draft plan produced thousands of public comments. Some conservation groups are disappointed that the plan does not include a recommendation to make Shenandoah Mountain a National Scenic Area which would provide additional protections. The draft plan bans horizontal drilling which would, in effect, ban hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, as it is currently practiced, from the GW. Opponents of this controversial drilling technique say that the potential risks of water pollution, habitat destruction and the effects on local residents' quality of life outweigh the benefits of fracking in the G. W. National Forest. Sarah Francisco of the Southern Environmental Law Center has stated that the draft plan still doesn't go far enough to protect old-growth forest, watersheds supplying local drinking water, and intact backcountry tracts called roadless areas. Forest administrators feel that they will be able to accommodate a variety of users and still protect this important natural resource.

Elk To Be Released in Buchanan County

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries staff say that about 15 elk will be trapped this winter, held in quarantine until spring, and then released in April or May. The goal is to grow Virginia's elk population to about 400 animals.

More Tweets

James River Association Releases 2011 State of the James Report

The James River Association's report gives the river's health an overall score of 53% and a grade of C. This represents a 4% drop in the overall score over the past two years. This reduced score shows that the river remains vulnerable and that progress in restoring the river to full health has stalled. For the James River's key fish and wildlife species there were some gains and losses. Bald Eagle populations continue to increase (see William and Mary's Center for Conservation Biology website for details, <http://ccb-wm.org>). The American Shad has shown signs of a comeback after a three-year decline. Oysters and brook trout continue to struggle at low levels compared to their previous populations. The river's important habitat indicators also reflected ongoing challenges and some successes for the river. Stream health decreased slightly from two years ago. There are 15,000 miles of tributaries that flow into the James River. Unhealthy streams transport nutrients and sediment into the river and play an important role in the overall health of the James. In 2010, 60% of the James River's tributaries were classified as being in good or excellent condition (including the Cowpasture). While better than waterways in many other parts of Virginia, this is still a long way from the goal of having 100% of the streams and creeks classified as being in good or excellent condition. Continued restoration efforts, careful land-use planning and management, and education will be necessary to improve the river in future years.

Brook Trout are Virginia's official freshwater fish and prized by fly-anglers. Because of their sensitivity to changes in water quality and temperature, they are an important indicator species for aquatic health. Declines in water quality and competition with other trout species have dramatically reduced the Brook Trout's range. Once thriving in 100 stream systems in the James River basin, there are currently healthy populations in 9 stream systems, while they have been lost completely from 30 stream systems. The state benchmark is to restore viable populations in 20 streams consistent with the Brook Trout Joint Venture. Achieving this goal will require protecting forested watersheds, planting streamside buffers and reducing pollution runoff.

Smallmouth Bass fishing is extremely popular in the upper and middle James River. Recently a population decline in this prized recreational species has been noted by state game officials. Studies released in 2010 showed that the Smallmouth Bass population in the James was in decline. Several recent poor spawning years are a major reason for the decreased numbers of these fish caught in annual state surveys. Since 2007 several fish kills have occurred in the upper James, although this trend diminished in the past two years. Population fluctuations can be normal, but several years of declines warrant additional investigation.

Regardless of the specific cause, better river health would help improve reproductive success and fish health.

Pollution continues to be the greatest threat affecting the health of the James River. There are many forms of pollution including bacteria, heavy metals, and toxins, but the most prevalent forms of pollution affecting the James are sediment, nitrogen and phosphorous. These pollutants cause a variety of problems including decreased water clarity and algae growth. High algae numbers can lead to oxygen depletion which can reduce populations of beneficial river organisms including fish. Pollution also greatly diminishes people's enjoyment of the river and can be a threat to drinking water supplies and human health.

(The above summary was adapted from the James River Association's State of the James River—2011; to read the full report, visit the James River Association's website, www.jamesriverassociation.org.)

Park Service Looks At Possibility of New Park

An area of the Allegheny Highlands of West Virginia stretching from Durbin, north to Elkins and east to Franklin, including over 500,000 acres is being examined for a possible proposal for National Park or Preserve status. Aerial surveys are underway to see if the natural, recreational and historic resources would qualify the area under the congressional criteria for park or preserve formation. The area includes much of Pendleton County and part of Pocahontas County, as well as the popular tourist attractions Seneca Rocks, Spruce Knob, Dolly Sods and Blackwater Falls. West Virginia lands currently in state parks and the Monongahela and George Washington National Forests would make up much of the new park or preserve. Residents of the land under consideration are concerned that National Park status could prohibit hunting, trapping or fishing, but Senator and former West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin has stated publicly that he would not support any proposal that restricted hunting, trapping and fishing. Supporters of park or preserve status say that the change would increase tourism and bring needed revenue to these counties, as well as providing protection for these special natural areas.

James River Association is looking for RiverRats

The JRA is holding several regional training sessions to train RiverRats. This program engages volunteers to patrol the James and its tributaries and to take action to protect and restore the entire watershed. Whether walking a neighborhood stream or kayaking a local river, JRA RiverRats will document potential pollution sources and their effects while also reporting natural patterns in river hydrology and wildlife sightings. A scientific background is not required. Training and equipment will be provided. See their website, www.jamesriverassociation.org for the details.

Around the Highlands



No Winter in the Allegheny Highlands Yet? We have not seen much snow in our area so far this winter, but that doesn't mean there are no other signs of the season. This is Highland County's famous Ice Falls located on Route 220 a few miles south of Mustoe. The ice falls form when water from rain or melting snow comes out from between cracks in the rocks and then freezes at night. The falls are about 15 feet high.

Can You Identify This Tree?

With the Cowpasture River flowing by in the background, look carefully at the bark of this fine double-trunk example of a common tree of the riparian zone. Its beautiful orange and green flowers in the canopy are one of our spring highlights. The cone-like fruits are similar to those of other magnolias. The outer flower parts persist through the winter on the branches making this tree easy to identify even after leaf fall. It was named by Linnaeus himself *Liriodendron tulipifera* meaning "lily tree bearing tulips." We know it as the tulip-poplar, tuliptree or yellow poplar. Interestingly, it is neither a tulip nor a poplar, but is actually a member of the magnolia family. It is a North American native and was first brought to England in the 1620's, where it was a big hit among the plant-collecting aristocracy because of its rapid growth, unusual leaf shape, and colorful flowers. Settlers in colonial America called it the "canoe wood tree" because Native Americans used its large straight trunks to make long canoes. The wood was light and the trunk was hollowed out by burning away the center. Colonials also called it "old woman's smock" because the leaves resemble a dress for a paper doll. This is the tallest deciduous tree in North America and more than one naturalist has observed "that whoever has once seen a mature tulip tree, can never forget it." A valuable timber tree, its wood is used for furniture, toys and musical instruments.



Creature Feature

The northern river otter, or North American river otter, (*Lontra canadensis*) is a semiaquatic native of our rivers and wetlands. This carnivore is a member of the Family Mustelidae that includes weasels, mink, ferrets and martens. It is a close relative of the sea otter. Populations declined significantly during the mid-20th century due to declining fish populations and degradation of water quality. In response to population decline, VADGIF closed the season on otter trapping west of the Blue Ridge in 1978. The river otter was classified as an endangered species in Virginia in 1978, but due to population increases since then, its status was changed to “special concern” in 1991. In March, 1988, 17 otters from Louisiana were released at sites on the Cowpasture River 1.6 km above Millboro Springs and 8 km below Millboro Springs in Bath County. Eight females and nine males were released although 4 apparently died within a week of release. Three had implanted radio transmitters. They dispersed



Photograph by Charles Garratt

along the river north to Williamsville and south to the mouth of the Cowpasture, a distance of about 30 miles. Although some of these animals survived and likely reproduced, it's unlikely that our current population is the result of this stocking effort. A much more plausible scenario is that the otters we currently have throughout western Virginia are from a natural dispersion of native otters from counties east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Otters are found in every county in Virginia, but are more plentiful in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions. Data from the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries show that since the late 1980's, otter populations have increased significantly in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont and have improved west of the Blue Ridge as well. Otter populations have been steadily increasing in western Virginia and were sufficient to justify reopening the trapping season 5 years ago. Although fishermen sometimes complain about otters, there is little evidence that they have impacted fish populations in Virginia waterways (except possibly private ponds). In localized areas, otters could temporarily decrease fish populations.

This endearing creature captivates people with its playful nature. The young often chase each other and individuals have been observed repeatedly sliding down muddy or icy stream banks. “Tobogganing” appears to be a favorite pastime. During winter, slides are made on steep slopes coated with ice and snow. During summer, a clay stream bank serves the same purpose. Taking turns, a family of otters will plunge down one after the other in quick succession with their legs turned backward. With a splash they land in the water and then return by a side path and start all over again. River otters range in length from 26 to 42 inches, about one-third of which is a long, tapered tail. Adult males are about 20% larger than females and weigh up to 30 pounds. Otters swim by either paddling the limbs or dorso-ventral undulation. They are more graceful in the water, but are quite able travelers on land. They can cover over 20 miles in a day, although typically they move shorter distances. Otters are continually on the move and may travel a 20 mile circuit of connecting lakes and rivers in 2-3 weeks. The river otter does not hibernate, and is most active at dusk, dawn and in the dark. The otter becomes more nocturnal in the spring, summer, and fall seasons but is more diurnal during winter.

(Continued on the next page)

Creature Feature (continued)

Otters can swim underwater over 200 yards without a breath, staying under for several minutes at a time. Like otters in Europe, the North American river otter lives in a holt, or den, often constructed from the burrows of other animals or in natural hollows such as under a log or in a river bank. They often end up in burrows made by ground hogs, foxes, nutria or in beaver's dens. Otters often live in family groups consisting of one adult female and her offspring. These groups may include 15 or more members. Although from mid-winter through the breeding season, adult females typically move and den alone. Litters typically consist of 3 pups, born in March or April in Virginia. They are about 10 inches long at birth. At 10-12 weeks old, pups will come out of the den to play on land with their mother, who brings them food. At about 14 weeks of age the mother introduces pups to the water and then dives and comes up under them for support while they learn to swim. The female typically will not allow the male near the pups until they are 6 months old, after which both male and female may provide food for the pups. Adult otters grunt, growl, and have a shrill chirp that sounds like a hiccup. They also produce a soft chuckle and a variety of other noises. When frightened or angered, they scream and give forth a strong musky smell. During mating, the females may emit a cat-like yowl. North American river otters, like most predators, prey upon the species that are the easiest to catch. Fish is a favored food among the otters, but they also consume crayfish, amphibians, turtles, mollusks, and aquatic insects. Some studies have shown that otters prefer slower moving, bottom dwelling fish like suckers and catfish. Otters undoubtedly take some trout, but studies to date have not found any significant impact of otters on trout populations. When fish are not plentiful, crayfish may make up over half of the diet. On occasion otters have been known to feed on ducks and other water birds, hawks, snowshoe hares, muskrats, and young beavers. Some vegetation and fruit may be eaten, especially in summer. The river otter can be trained by humans to catch and retrieve fish, ducks, and pheasants from land or water. Otter-fishing originated and has longest been practiced in China, Malaya, and India. Among these countries, the Chinese seem to have been the first people to domesticate the otter and use it to catch fishes. Otter fishing has also been practiced in North America although its use is not widespread. Otters typically avoid polluted waters and cannot live in waters depleted of fish, so they are an indicator of the river's health. If you see otters in the Cowpasture River, please contact me. I am interested in starting an informal record of otter sightings in the Cowpasture. Thanks to Michael Fies and Paul Bugas of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for some of the information used in this report.

Want to Volunteer ?

Walton Tract River Cleanup and Wildflower Walk

Sunday, April 22, 2-5 pm

Meet at the Walton Tract turn-off from Route 42

Wear sturdy shoes and clothes for rambling in the brambles

Bags, gloves, and refreshments provided

***For more information or to sign up, contact Keith Carson at directorcrpa@gmail.com
or call 540-474-2858***

Sign Up NOW!



Was your membership a gift? You too can support CRPA!

- \$20 Individual (minimum annual membership donation)
 - \$50 River Guardian
 - \$100 Headwaters Circle
 - \$250 Watershed Steward
 - \$500 Wallawhatoola Society
 - >\$500 Bedrock Patron
 - Junior Membership(s): 15 years and under; Cost—4 hrs./year volunteer service
- Other _____

NAME(S) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY — STATE — ZIP _____

PHONE _____

E-MAIL _____



- I prefer not to have my name published as a contributor.
- I am interested in becoming a volunteer river monitor
- I want to help save valuable resources, please send my newsletter by email

CRPA

Cowpasture River
Preservation Assn.

P.O. Box 215

Millboro, VA 24460

STANDARD
PRESORT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 38
DALEVILLE, VA



*Printed on recycled paper.
Please recycle this newsletter
when finished by passing it on
to someone else.*