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The Cowpasture River is one of this area's most popular attractions and important resources. It rises in northeastern Highland County and flows southwestwardly between Bullpasture Mountain and Shaws Ridge. It flows through Bath and Alleghany counties to the town of Iron Gate, where it meets the Jackson River. The two combine to form the James River as part of the Chesapeake Bay water shed. Pictured is the Cowpasture as seen from Lynchburg Camp last August. Learn more about the river's protection inside. (Photo courtesy Tom Watts)

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Cowpasture River association turns 50

ALLEGHENY HIGHLANDS — This year, the Cowpasture River Preservation Association celebrates 50 years of delivering on its mission: To preserve the natural condition and beauty of the Cowpasture River and its tributaries for present and future generations.

So far, mission accomplished.

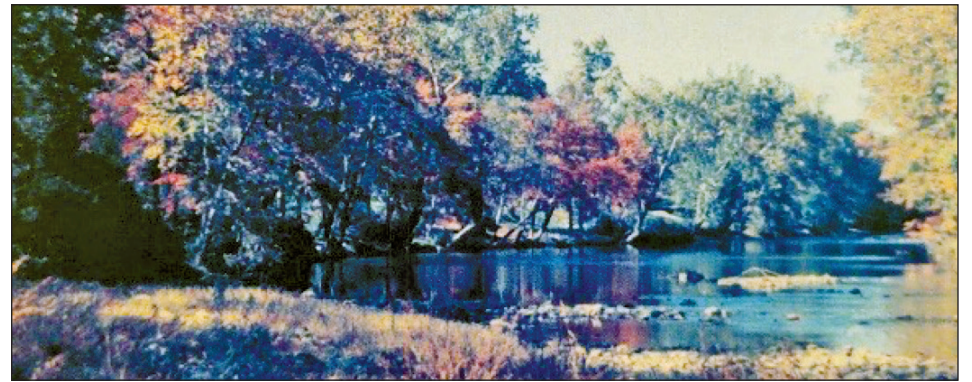
Founded in 1972, CRPA was way ahead of its time in pursuing this named mission. Nationally, the Environmental Protection Agency was just

getting under way after being founded by President Nixon. And Virginia was still a decade away from founding its Department of Environmental Quality.

Indeed, CRPA led the watershed preservation movement and has become a model for many similar organizations.

Today the association has four key initiatives:

- Water quality monitoring – For several decades, CRPA volunteers have helped ensure the water quality by ac-



The Cowpasture River in 1952. (Photo courtesy David Van Lear)

tively testing it. These tests are of two categories: bacterial and benthic. The former measures the relative amounts of bacteria (e. Coli) present, while the latter relies on counting macroinvertebrates (bugs) in the river.

- Water quality education – In three counties – Allegheny, Bath, and Highland – CRPA volunteers work with educators to teach students about the importance of water quality. Public, private, and home schoolers participate

in its version of the Virginia-mandated “Meaningful Watershed Education Experience.”

- Water quality advocacy – Since its inception, CRPA has been an advocate for and supporter of best practices for any activity that could affect the level of water quality excellence. This includes both surface and groundwater issues, whether local, regional or statewide. One

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Students examine bugs retrieved from the Cowpasture River at the Boys Home River Lab held Sept. 26, 2017. (Photo courtesy Kathy Farmer)



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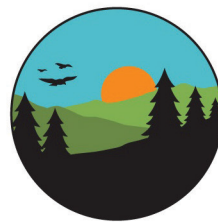
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Students at the Clifton Middle School River Lab, May 11, 2018. (Photo courtesy Kathy Farmer)



CRPA member Puggy Farmer in the Cowpasture River with students for hands-on collection at the sixth annual Dabney S. Lancaster Community College Ecology Water Quality River Lab in September 2019. The event was held at the home of Mike and Marla Whiteside. (Photo courtesy Kathy Farmer)



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A fall photo of the Cowpasture River taken at Lynchburg Camp in October 2021. (Photo courtesy Amy Pugh)

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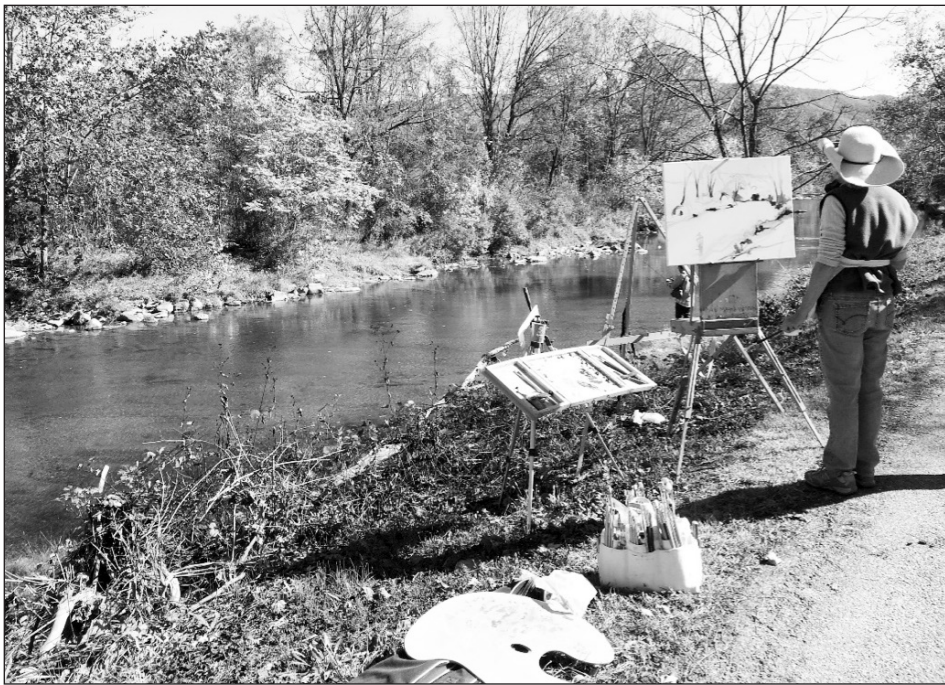
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CRPA board member Nan Mahone Wellborn painting the Cowpasture River on Oct. 15, 2015. (Photo courtesy Danny Hart)

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issue, in particular, was the organization’s fight against the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which took members all the way to the Supreme Court.

On Feb. 24, 2020, the Supreme Court of the United States started its term’s roster by hearing the combined cases of “The United States Forest Service, et al. versus Cowpasture River Preservation Association, et al.” and “Atlantic Coast Pipeline LLC versus Cowpasture River Preservation Association.”

And, though CRPA members would learn a few months later that it lost the case, CRPA won the war in early July when ACP announced the project had been abandoned.

- Watershed aesthetics – Important to everything the CRPA does is celebrating the joy the Cowpasture watershed brings to the community and its members. This initiative promotes and encourages an artistic celebration of the river in any medium of expression.

Additionally, CRPA has created a series of authoritative pieces on the watershed, including history, ecosystem, and more. Visit the publications tab at www.cowpartureriver.org to enjoy the full collection.

The future

CRPA, like the river it represents, continues to mature. In addition to the initiatives the CRPA does today, in coming years its members plan to present their water quality monitoring data in an easily accessible, map format.

Additionally, they will post student-gathered data from their watershed learners as well as public access points to the river.

They plan to include features important to residents and visitors alike. And the CRPA will continue to be the best source of information and conservation for the Cowpasture River and its tributaries.



Former CRPA board president Dick Brooks (fourth from left) and colleagues in front of the Supreme Court on Feb. 24, 2020.

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