

THE RIVER RUNS

News from the Cowpasture River Preservation Association



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Photo of the ever famous rope swing at the Walton Tract. Photo taken by Lynne Griffith at the October 2024 Walton Tract Clean-Up.

Please send us your best photos of the Cowpasture River and the surrounding wildlife.

Board of Directors (2026-2027)

Officers:

Dick Brooks, President

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Kelly Kemper

Joe Revercomb

Ann Warner

Tom Watts

Nan Mahone Wellborn

Kathy Wood

Staff:

*Lynne Griffith,
Executive Assistant*

Editor: *Lynne Griffith*

From the President

Dear CRPA Members,

Like most of us, I generally hold off on looking back at what's been happening personally or professionally until it's time for the annual review at year's end. This year, however, as summer comes to a close, I've been looking at what we have achieved so far. And, as I'm about to tell you, it's good.

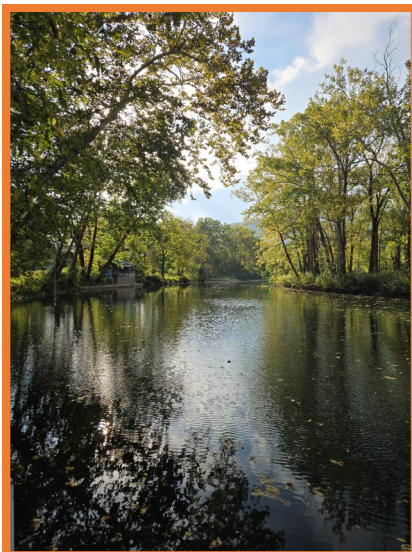
First, our water quality isn't just acceptable, it's excellent. Our friends with the Allegheny Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA), Andrew Young included, along with our volunteers, are out on the Cowpasture measuring it regularly. I like to think we're the envy of every other watershed conservation organization—our numbers are that good.

Second, the organization's financial condition is secure. We may never have all the resources that we'd like, but we continue to be healthy, especially after a record year of giving in 2025. Thank you to Tuck Carter, our treasurer, and her finance team for all their work in managing CRPA funds for both current and long term stability.

Finally, our membership continues to grow. As of this writing, we have 445 members, not quite a record, but close. That tells me we are staying relevant to our current members as well as offering

something meaningful that encourages new people to join. Our members make our work possible—many thanks to you all.

Enjoy the advent of autumn with its cooler temperatures and shorter days. Is there any lovelier time along the Cowpasture than in the fall?



Cowpasture River photo taken at Lynchburg Camp by Tom Watts on September 20, 2025.



Executive Assistant's Corner

As we approach this time of year, we want to once again express our sincere thanks to the many donors who sustain our organization. We truly appreciate your generosity. Please refer to pages 14 & 15 to view our list of donors and members from the campaign cycle that began on January 1, 2026. Since our annual campaign now aligns with the calendar year, this campaign will wrap up on December 31, 2026.

We are pleased to welcome our newest board member, Joe Revercomb. Please take the time to learn about Joe by reading his biography on page 7. Joe's mother, Denise, was previously on the CRPA board, so we are thrilled to have the Revercomb lineage continue on with us.



I think you will be moved by the photos of the campers participating in the "River Day" activities at Camp Mont Shenandoah (CMS) on July 14th (pages 10 & 11). This is the second year in a row that we, along with the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA), have been invited by CMS director Ann Warner to teach the campers about the health of the Cowpasture River, in particular, and about rivers in general. We feel so fortunate to have Ann on our CRPA Board of Directors, and we congratulate her on the camp's 100th reunion anniversary this past August. There were almost 300 alumnae in attendance for part or all of the weekend events. We are also thrilled and honored to have so many of the CMS campers and staff as members of our association.

We also want to congratulate CRPA member Peg Sheridan who won this year's award for "Best Cowpasture or Bullpasture River in Any Medium" at the Bath County Art Show. Peg is such a talented artist who often participates in our yearly online auction. You can see a photo of her award-winning painting on page 13.

Finally, I have a reminder from our Social Media Director, Catherine Roland. Please continue to send in your favorite photos of the Cowpasture River. She would like to post them to our Facebook and Instagram pages. You can send them directly to Catherine via socialmedia@cowpastureriver.org. Thank you!



Photo by Dick Brooks

Come Join Us for the Walton Tract Clean-Up Saturday, October 24, 2026 (1:00 — 3:00 pm)

It's that time of year again when we collect litter along the Cowpasture River. We will meet at the Walton Tract lower public access point ("rope swing"). To sign up, send an email to director@cowpastureriver.org or call 540-620-7795. Further details will be provided upon your RSVP. We hope to see you there!

Carl Pattison, Puggy Farmer, Josh Lipscomb, Su Flint, Frank Ford and Jane Lindsay at the April 2026 Clean-Up. (Not pictured: Dick Brooks)

A SUMMER OF KEEPING WATCH

by Andrew Young, CRPA Watershed Monitoring Coordinator

This Labor Day weekend we wrapped up a full summer of weekly *E. coli* monitoring on the Cowpasture and Jackson rivers. Every Thursday we collected bacteria samples at public access sites. At those same stops, we took YSI water-quality readings. That gave us a week-by-week look at bacteria levels and basic river conditions at places where people regularly swim, fish, paddle and launch boats.

Now comes the less glamorous part: checking the data and making sure everything passes quality control. By the winter newsletter, we plan to share at least a preliminary summary of average *E. coli* results from our 11 Cowpasture sites. In the meantime, the preliminary weekly results are already posted on [James River Watch](#), where you can compare the Cowpasture with the rest of the James River watershed.

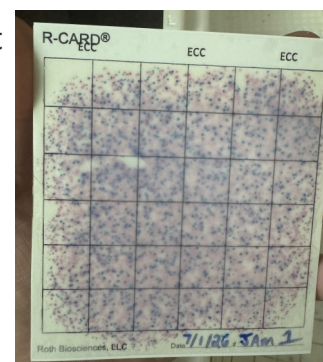
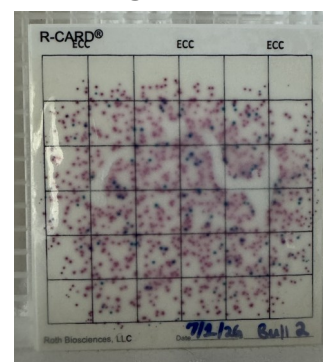
For most of the summer, the results were reassuring. Most sites were below the Virginia Department of Health advisory level of 235 CFU/100 mL.

July 1 was different. The James River at Iron Gate came back at about 43,000 CFU/100 mL. At the Bullpasture River swinging bridge in the Highland Wildlife Management Area, the result was about 4,500 CFU/100 mL. The Iron Gate number was not just a little high. It was the kind of result that makes you wonder whether there had been a sewage release or another concentrated source of fecal contamination upstream.

With July Fourth only a few days away, I did not want to wait until the next regular sampling round. I went back on July 3 and again on July 4. Neither follow-up round reproduced the July 1 numbers, and the sites we resampled were back below the advisory level.

That was good news, but it did not explain what happened on July 1. We reported the results to Virginia DEQ. The agency could not get into the field until July 6, so we had already completed two follow-up rounds before DEQ could sample.

That is where a local monitoring program earns its keep. DEQ covers a huge area. We are already here, we know the access points, and we can get back to a site relatively quickly. When an unusual result turns up just before a holiday weekend, a two- or three-day head start matters. This is the kind of publicly useful data we want the program to continually provide.



July 1 test results.

(continued on next page)

One sample never tells the whole story, and a high result by itself does not identify the source. But timely local data gives people something better than guesswork. It lets families make more informed decisions about swimming and paddling during one of the biggest holidays of the year, and it gives us a reason to look more closely when something does not make sense.

Weekly bacteria sampling was on top of the 22 Cowpasture sites we monitor every month. Those regular visits continue year-round and build the longer record we need to understand how conditions change.

There are lighter moments, too. While sampling at the U.S. 250 bridge in June, I met Highland County Sheriff Kelly and had a chance to explain the program. I am hoping that, now that he knows who I am, dispatch will get fewer calls about a suspicious redheaded man standing beside the river with sample bottles and science equipment.

September also means a shift from bacteria season to benthic macroinvertebrate, or “river bug,” season. These insects and other small animals living on the stream bottom can tell us a lot about a river’s health over time. Kim Manion and I are now certified Virginia Save Our Streams trainers, so we can train volunteers who want to become certified monitors.

As of September 7, we were already halfway through the fall Cowpasture surveys. We finished Evans Tract and Sharon on September 3, then the Cowpasture at Liberty and the Bullpasture at McDowell and McClung on September 6. We expect to finish the remaining sites by the end of the month.

October brings our watershed-wide synoptic survey. That is our twice a year snapshot of the whole watershed taken over a short period. We will sample our 22 regular sites and then move farther into the headwaters and smaller tributaries, including Pads Creek, Little Wilson Creek, Mill Creek and Shaws Fork. By the time we are done, we expect to have sampled more than 120 locations across both the Cowpasture and Jackson rivers.

That is a lot of ground to cover, and it only works because people help. We want to keep the weekly *E. coli* program going next summer. People deserve to know what is in the water before they get in. With volunteers and community support, CRPA and ABRA can keep making those results public.

To volunteer, become a certified monitor, support the program or learn more, email me at monitor@cowpastureriver.org. You can also look for us at upcoming Board of Supervisors meetings in Alleghany, Bath and Highland counties.

See this summer’s preliminary bacteria results on [James River Watch](#). Read [ABRA’s James River Headwaters summer update](#), and explore our sites and results on [ABRA’s project map](#).

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.



Thriving Communities
Grantmaking Program
EPA Region 3

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SUMMER PICNIC

Many thanks to Witcher and Elizabeth Dudley for hosting our summer picnic on July 25th at their beautiful home at Windy Cove Farm along the Cowpasture River. We had 65 people in attendance, along with some of the best side dishes you could ever imagine! Our thanks to Dick Brooks and Puggy Farmer for grilling all of those hamburgers and hot dogs for the group. They were fantastic!



Photo by Jon Fitzgerald/ABRA

Elizabeth Dudley, Nan Mahone Wellborn,
Glovie Lynn and Dick Lynn.



Photo by Nan Mahone Wellborn

Puggy Farmer, one of our two grillers, speaking with
Witcher Dudley, one of our cohosts.



Photo by Nan Mahone Wellborn.

Dick Brooks at the grill, assisted by Kelly Kemper.



Photo by Nan Mahone Wellborn

Catherine Roland, her son Jack, Dan Bracey and one cute puppy dog.

Meet Our Newest Board Member

We are happy to welcome Joe Revercomb to the CRPA Board of Directors. You can learn more about Joe by reading his biography below.



I grew up and spent the first 18 years of my life in Roanoke where I was raised by parents who enjoyed spending time outdoors and instilled that spirit in me and my three brothers. My parents bought a property on the Cowpasture River when I was a young boy. My brothers and I spent many nights camping in the river field when we were kids, recreating on the river and enjoying what the property and surrounding area had to offer. My family has since built a cabin there, but for the first 10 or so years it was just the land and the river. My brothers and I fell in love with the outdoors and picked up many outdoor recreational hobbies stemming from a love of this land and enjoying what nature provided. I spent several years in Wyoming after graduating from UVA then returned home to Virginia in 2015.

I now enjoy spending time here with my wife and twin five-year-old girls who never tire of spending hours on the river swimming, catching crawfish, fishing, or just running wild with their five cousins. Our family has lived in Richmond for the past 10 years, but you can find us frequently in Bath County. I enjoy spending time here every season, whether hunting, fishing, canoeing, camping, mountain biking, trail running or just about anything else one can do outdoors in this beautiful place. I hope that my daughters will get as much joy out of this place as I have in my life. If their first five years are any indication, we're on the right track!

I am the Sales Director for [Force of Nature](#). We are a mission-oriented meat company founded to scale regenerative agriculture and build healthy ecosystems. Through agricultural practices that improve the land over time, we aim to provide healthy meats for consumers and foster resilience for our farmers. I love to cook for my family and others and enjoy spending time with people around a table of food.

I have a lot to learn in joining the board of the CRPA but hopefully a little to offer as well. I would love a chance to give back to the river and the community that have given so much to me.

Request for Online Auction Items

We are once again holding our annual online auction to benefit both the Bill Hardbarger Educational Scholarship Fund as well as the William Kent Ford, Jr. Memorial Scholarship Fund. This will be our seventh year in a row to host this auction, and it will begin on Monday, November 2nd and wrap up on Friday, November 13th. In past years, members have donated a whole array of items, ranging from beautiful paintings, a cabin stay, fishing gear, craft items, even a trip to Costa Rica! **If you are interested in donating items to our auction this year, we would love to hear from you. Please contact Lynne at 540-620-7795 or email her at director@cowpastureriver.org. Thank you.**

Education Committee Update - Scholarships

by Tom Watts, Chair of the Education Committee



Tom Watts awarding the William Kent Ford, Jr. Memorial Scholarship to Alleghany graduating senior Peyton Broughman.

The Education Committee had a fun year! Our focus this year has been to build relationships with the local school counselors responsible for their scholarship programs. They were extremely helpful and collaborative throughout the scholarship review process.

The CRPA board recently decided to put our money where our mouth is, so they increased the William Kent Ford, Jr. Memorial scholarships for graduating high school students from \$500 to \$1,000. The Bill Hardbarger Educational Scholarship for a second-year forestry student at Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) remained at \$1,000.

Alleghany County graduated 190 seniors, and approximately 20% applied for scholarships. The total amount awarded in scholarships was about \$201,000. We had five applicants. We selected Peyton Broughman, who has been accepted to Virginia Tech and plans to major in Wildlife Conservation. Highland County graduated 19 seniors, and approximately 38% applied for scholarships. The total amount awarded in scholarships was about \$157,950. Although there was only one applicant, Colleen Adams was an outstanding candidate (see below). Bath County graduated 33 seniors, and approximately 50% apply for scholarships. The total amount awarded in scholarships was about \$200,000. We had two applicants. We selected a candidate who had been accepted to Mountain Gateway Community College but later decided not to attend college, so the Bath County scholarship was not presented this year. And finally, the CRPA Bill Hardbarger Educational scholarship at MGCC was awarded to Aydan Fedak.

We were surprised that so few students applied for scholarships. The counselors reported similar concerns across counties. Students were often reluctant to complete the application process. One valuable outcome of this effort was recognizing the need for a standardized system for the entire process. We have created form letters for applicant outreach, acceptance letters that include funding procedures, and a basic speech for award presentations. These materials should make the transition for the next Education Committee Chair much smoother.



Colleen plans to attend North Carolina State University for the next four years, where she hopes to earn her bachelor's degree in Environmental Science and possibly minor in Environmental

Engineering. After college, she hopes to find a job in Wildlife Biology.

Education Committee Update — Bath County Nature Play

*by Teece Nowel and Kelly Cowden
Coordinators of Bath County Nature Play*

A Heartfelt Thank-You! We extend our sincere gratitude to the Cowpasture River Preservation Association. Thanks to their generous grant funding, several local families were able to receive financial support to send their children to camp this summer, making these river and forest adventures accessible to even more of our community.

What a vibrant summer it has been at Fort Lewis Lodge! Led by Teece Nowell and Kelly Cowden, our summer season brought together over 40 children aged three to nine across two summer camps, alongside our continuing year-round Thursday program.

Guided by the core principles of child-led play and place-based learning, young adventurers spent their days exploring the surrounding woods and open fields. A major highlight was cooling off in the Cowpasture River, where water, mud, and stream discovery took center stage. Along the way, kids learned to identify local plants, connecting with the natural world around them while building real-world grit and problem-solving skills as they navigated outdoor challenges together.

Each week sparked new wonder as the children put their boundless imaginations into practice. Themed days saw them step into roles as Protectors of the Forest, play Guardians of the Grove, or venture into the magical realm of forest fairies. The kids gathered wild treasures to mix "fairy brews," transformed with face paint, played superheroes, shared story times under the canopy, and created hands-on nature arts and crafts.

(Note: Our year-round Nature Play program continues every Thursday at Fort Lewis Lodge!)



Camp Mont Shenandoah River Day

On July 14th, CRPA and the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA) joined forces for a fun and educational day with the campers at Camp Mont Shenandoah (CMS), located along the Cowpasture River. During the event, the campers learned about river health, river monitoring, conservation efforts, and environmental awareness. Several CRPA members attended the event to demonstrate benthic macroinvertebrate sampling. They taught the campers what this type of testing reveals about the overall health of the river. In addition, Dan Shaffer of ABRA taught the campers how to perform both bacterial and YSI-based measurements and also gave a demonstration. As CRPA Board Member Traci Miller commented, "Water Day was wonderful! Let's keep the conservation momentum going by paying it forward to the next generation of river stewards."



(Left) Puggy Farmer checking out the bugs through the microscope. (Above) The girls analyze the bugs and stream crud. (Right) The campers analyze a small bug that is alive and wiggling out of focus.



Mindy Brooks and Nan Mahone Wellborn of CRPA, along with Jon Fitzgerald and Dan Shaffer of ABRA.



The campers checking out the bugs and stream residue.

Artwork from the CMS River Day

Nan Mahone Wellborn and Mindy Brooks from the CRPA Aesthetics Values Committee spent time with the campers during the big River Day event. They gave the campers the choice to either draw a picture or write a poem. As you will see, this year the girls chose to draw.



OPEN HOUSE—BUTLER CAVE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

We were honored to participate in the Butler Cave Conservation Society (BCCS) Open House held on August 22, 2026. Andrew Young represented CRPA and ABRA at the event. The open house provided a great opportunity for BCCS to promote their mission of protecting caves and karst, while allowing us to share the importance of protecting our waterways. We truly appreciated the invitation to join together with such a fine local organization.



Emerging from Butler Cave after multiple hours underground.



ABRA and CRPA table literature with water quality monitoring information.



The Open House offered a chance to go deep into Butler Cave.

Toxicology Report Follow-Up

We published an article in our summer issue entitled “Human & Environmental Impact of Chemical Pollution — Jackson and Cowpasture Rivers.” Dick Brooks had written a summary of a toxicology meeting he had attended on February 26, 2026 given by Joe DiNardo, a retired toxicologist. After reading the article, one of our members wrote in saying that he found the data about the PCB and mercury contamination very concerning. He wondered if this was perhaps more of an issue for the Jackson River rather than the Cowpasture River. We went back to Joe DiNardo and asked him this question. A portion of his response is listed below:

“With respect to the Cowpasture River, as far as I can tell, DEQ has not tested the river for PCBs — so no one knows if PCBs are a problem. Below is the only data from DEQ that is for heavy metals in fish for the Cowpasture. They only tested heavy metals between 2001 and 2017. I do not know the reason why they tested, but obviously they had some level of concern about heavy metal toxicity. Of these, the one that concerns me the most is mercury, which can travel up to 2,000 miles in the air from coal burning power plants before settling to earth. That might have been the reason - not sure.”

Joe said that he would follow-up with DEQ to see if there were any future plans to test the river for chemicals. CRPA President, Dick Brooks, noted that when DEQ tested the Cowpasture for PCBs, they found only one fish with an elevated count. All of the rest of the fish tested fine. And since PCBs were only found in one AND that fish was harvested near the confluence of the rivers, it was suggested that it might have come from the Jackson. For a deeper look, check out

[PCB TMDLs | Virginia DEQ](#)

Cowpasture Data — Heavy Metals Fish Tissue

			As	Cd	Cr	Hg	Pb	Se
Year	Location	Fish Type	PPM	PPM	PPM	PPM	PPM	PPM
2001	Cowpasture River near Rt. 633 -	Redbreast Sunfish	<0.5	<0.01	<0.05	<0.01	<0.1	<0.5
	Cowpasture River near Rt. 633	Black Jumprock Sucker	<0.5	<0.01	<0.05	0.075	<0.1	<0.5
	Cowpasture River near Rt. 633	Rock Bass	<0.5	<0.01	<0.05	0.039	<0.1	<0.5
2005	Cowpasture River near Rt. 633 -	Redbreast Sunfish	0.29	<0.01	0.47	0.06	<0.1	<0.5
	Cowpasture River near Rt. 633	Rock Bass - 1	0.29	<0.01	0.16	0.07	<0.1	<0.5
	Cowpasture River near Rt. 633	Rock Bass - 2	0.37	0.01	0.19	0.04	<0.1	<0.5
2017	2-CWP002.58	Rockbass	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.21	0.00	0.54
	2-CWP002.58	Redbreast Sunfish	0.03	0.00	0.01	0.22	0.00	0.45
		Average Levels (excludes < values)	0.208	0.003	0.166	0.102	0.00	0.495

Note: Our federal toxicologist (ATSDR) report Kidney toxicity at 0.01 ppb Hg (mercury). Average Levels found in Cowpasture fish tissue was 0.102 ppm = 102 ppb or roughly 10,000 times the level that causes kidney toxicity.

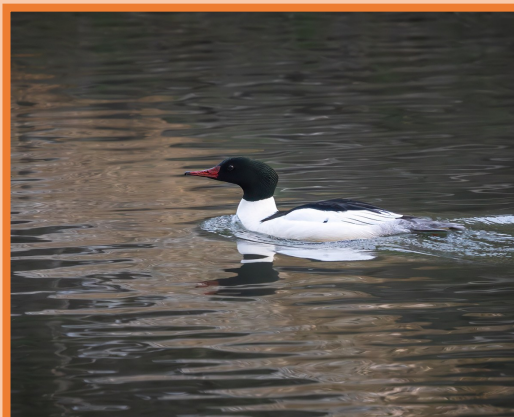
BATH COUNTY ART SHOW

Congratulations to Peg Sheridan for winning the award for “Best Cowpasture River or Bullpasture River in Any Medium” at the recent Bath County Art Show. Peg’s painting is titled “Cowpasture River at Fort Lewis.” CRPA is once again proud to sponsor this yearly award in support of our local arts community.



Jon Fleuchaus Photos

Many thanks to Traci and Mett Miller for sending us these beautiful photos taken along their stretch of the Cowpasture River by Jon Fleuchaus.



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Watershed Steward — \$500—\$999

Headwaters Circle — \$250—\$499

River Guardian — \$100—\$249

Streamside Level — \$50—\$99

Individual Level — \$25—\$49

Memorial Contributions — Any amount in memory of a loved one.

In Honor of Contributions — Any amount in honor of a living person(s).

Thank You To Our Loyal Watershed Members

During the first eight+ months of this year's Annual Campaign that began on January 1, 2026, our members have generously contributed over \$19,000. The following list includes all dues and gifts given between the dates of January 1, 2026 and September 9, 2026. Thank you for your continued support.

We welcome our **new members and first-time donors who are highlighted in bold.** (Note: Some donors asked that their names not be published.) **Total donations for the current campaign, thus far = \$19,433.43.**

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Thank You To Our Loyal Watershed Members

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L/Col. Thomas H. Adams

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Susie Mowry
Carol Preston
Jan H. Smith

Joe and Kathy Wood

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Melvin Daniel Coffman, Jr.
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Otis Mead
Bruce Levitt

James Revercomb
Dick and Glovie Lynn

Michael Wildasin
Nan Mahone Wellborn

In Honor Of:

The Marriage of Ruth Bordett & Nate Zett

Lineberry, French, Morgan & Jennings
Families

Tom Watts' Birthday

John Frye

Kelly Hood

PayPal Giving Fund via Facebook
(Miscellaneous Donors)

The definitions of the
various giving categories are
listed on page 13.

If we overlooked anyone or made an
error, please let us know. We would
like to correct any errors in the next
newsletter. Please contact Lynne at
director@cowpastureriver.org.



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in memory of _____

☐ \$12 Junior Membership Dues

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☐ I am RENEWING

☐ This is a gift membership for _____

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ADDRESS: _____

CITY — STATE — ZIP

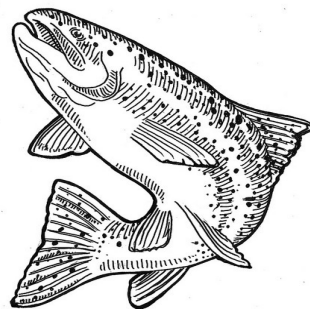
PHONE

E-MAIL: _____

☐ I prefer to NOT have my name published as a contributor.

☐ Please send my newsletter by email version only.

☐ I am interested in becoming a volunteer and/or river monitoring.



(Note: A financial statement is available upon written request from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services — Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs.)