

Development of the 2011 RRBC Strategic Plan

The 2011 RRBC Strategic Plan was developed from October 2010 through February 2011, when it was approved by the Commission on February 14, 2011. This document provides a short history of the process and summary of the major components of the plan.

Background. The Rivanna River Basin Commission was created by Virginia statute and formed once the majority of localities agreed to join the Commission. It commenced meeting in April 2007 and from 2007 to 2008 was supported by staff at The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and guided by the deliberations of its Technical Advisory Committee. In January 2009, RRBC contracted with Leslie Middleton to provide programmatic and administrative support and subsequently hired Ms. Middleton in April 2009 as its first Executive Director. Because of hiring formal staff and receiving a substantial federal grant (\$725,000), it was necessary for RRBC to assume fiscal agency, which had been provided by the Thomas Jefferson Soil & Water Conservation District, thus increasing RRBC's organizational responsibility.

From 2009 through 2010, both the Commission and staff were focused on developing and adopting organization and administrative systems while at the same time beginning to implement the large and very complex grant. RRBC staff increased in 2010 to include one ½ time administrative assistant, who was later replaced by a ¾ time program coordinator. In June 2011, RRBC staff increased to two full time employees: the Executive Director and a Program Development Coordinator, Ms. Jessica Lassetter.

During this time, the RRBC's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was also in transition. In the years prior to 2009, and guided by the scientific threat assessment process used by TNC, the TAC focused its work on identifying the major threat to the health of the Rivanna watershed: excessive sedimentation of area streams due to changes in the natural flow regime, in turn caused by the increase of hardened surfaces (roads, driveways, houses). The large grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), *A Watershed-based Approach to Stormwater Management*, was designed to fund activities around the watershed to help educate and equip local government staff and elected officials to better manage stormwater to address this major threat. Coordination of these activities became a new focus of deliberations within the TAC, which was still eager to serve in an advisory capacity to the Commission if given adequate guidance.

The RRBC Strategic Planning Process. It became apparent that a strategic planning process would be helpful for developing a cohesive approach to the activities of the Commission, TAC, and staff. RRBC secured the support of Mr. Mike Foreman of the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation, a highly skilled facilitator, to plan and guide the process in late 2010. Commissioners and TAC members participated in an online survey to collect perspectives and issues from various members of the RRBC. In addition, Mr. Foreman met with small groups of commissioners and TAC members to further identify organizational issues prior to the planning retreat. On November 19, 2010, the Commission and its TAC met for a day in a series of facilitated sessions to identify RRBC's goals and strategies for achieving those goals. The output from this meeting was assembled by staff and subsequently developed into a matrix of goals, objectives, and strategies during work sessions that included members of the commission, TAC, and staff. The final plan was recommended for approval by the TAC and approved by the full Commission on February 14, 2011.

Since then, the final plan has been used by the Executive Director to develop the annual work plan and budget for the RRBC, though the Commission as a whole has not reviewed the plan or fully evaluated the priorities since it was adopted in 2011.

Key Elements of the 2011 RRBC Strategic Plan.

Goal 1. Create an organizational structure that ensures the effectiveness of the Commission in serving its statutory purpose. This goal focuses in establishing roles, responsibilities, and expectations of commission members, advisory committee, and RRBC staff, and strategies for effective communication between all parts of the RRBC.

Goal 2. Serve the member localities as a source of technically based information to guide policies and initiatives related to resource stewardship. This goal identifies methods by which the RRBC serves in its advisory role by providing technically and scientifically based recommendations. Commissioners serving on the RRBC are offered education and tools to help bring a watershed perspective to local government decision-making. RRBC also promotes the collection and dissemination of information, studies, and data for policy making at all levels of government using sound watershed science.

Goal 3. In accordance with RRBC charter, inform and engage local, state, federal legislative bodies and citizens regarding the use, stewardship and enhancement of the Basin water and other natural resources. This goal focuses on the activities by which RRBC supports the effective management of water and natural resources in the Rivanna basin. These include hosting and participating in meetings, workshops, advisory groups; providing information and comments on policies and legislation; creating forums for stakeholder deliberations; and encouraging coordination between groups and programs for efficient and effective use of resources.

Goal 4. Recommend strategies and tools informed by sound watershed science to localities that ensure stream and watershed health within the Rivanna basin. This goal focuses on the development of a watershed management plan for the Rivanna, called the "Rivanna Watershed Action Plan." The strategic plan identifies components of the planning process (assess current conditions, envision future outcomes, etc.) and the importance of building on previous and current efforts to ensure a coherent strategy for protecting and restoring natural resources in the Rivanna basin.

Because the Rivanna Watershed Action Plan will be *the* signature product of the RRBC, obtaining resources for and developing the Action Plan is the main focus of the RRBC staff at this point in time. Once completed, implementation of the Action Plan can guide and focus resources and activities between local governments, agencies, and programs as we seek healthy and abundant water and natural resources in the Rivanna.

Goal 5. Ensure the long-term viability and effectiveness of the RRBC. To do so requires establishing the unique value of the RRBC, by developing methods of implementing policy and planning defined by the watershed boundary rather than political boundaries and by fostering cooperation between local governments for the good of the watershed. This goal articulates the need to develop and maintain relationships, secure adequate funding, and maintain effective internal operations.