

Group Urges Supervisors to Protect Rivanna

By Heather Harris | Posted: Wednesday, April 17, 2013 1:00 am

During the April 3 meeting of the Fluvanna County Board of Supervisors, Leslie Middleton, the executive director of the Rivanna River Basin Commission, presented the 2012 edition of the Snapshot. Compiled by the RRBC and its Technical Advisory Committee, the publication aims to inform readers about the health and condition of the Rivanna River without an over-abundance of data.

“We have data to back up every statement and every figure that we call out ... but we also wanted it to be evocative of the values that, particularly, Fluvanna places on the Rivanna River, but the other communities as well,” said Middleton.

There are features on rare and endangered animals of the watershed, such as the James spiny mussel, a small freshwater mussel that was classified as endangered nearly 25 years ago. Due to habitat loss, it is now found primarily in the Dan and James River basins.

Stream Watch has partnered with the RRBC to do biological and bacteria monitoring of the river and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality conducts regular checks on the numerous rivers and streams throughout the commonwealth. Though the Virginia DEQ has stated that 123 miles of streams are impaired for bacteria, the Rivanna River is in relatively good condition, something Middleton attributes to the large amount of forest cover.

“The sources of the bacteria are livestock in streams, septic systems that are not working properly, [and] pet waste,” said Middleton. “The bacteria is coming from the intestines of warm-blooded animals, including ourselves.”

Swimming in streams that are infected with bacteria can pose health hazard. Middleton urges everyone to use anti-bacterial soap after participating in any water recreation, especially after a rainstorm.

“One of the things that we can all do is remind ourselves where the sources of these bacteria are and make sure land use patterns are not promoting more of that,” said Middleton.

A large number of land parcels have been put under private easement, whether by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, a nature conservancy group, or a private foundation. Fluvanna County also owns some of these properties. Keeping these pieces of land protected is beneficial not just for the river, but for the community, as well.

Middleton believes the key to protecting the river is to understand the role it plays in our lives. Relating to the water through swimming, fishing, boating, and other forms of recreation can help us realize the importance of the water.

“I think watershed protection comes from really understanding how we live in the watershed,” said Middleton.

The Snapshot has useful maps, charts, graphs, and helpful information, but there are certain areas that the RRBC wants to investigate further. They have contacted the U.S. Geological Survey and asked them to provide more information about ground water resources.

“For a rural, somewhat-developing county like Fluvanna, this should be of great interest, because the more of us start putting straws down into the pretty unconsolidated aquifers that are in Fluvanna ... eventually that’s going to start catching up with us,” said Middleton.

The RRBC hopes to gather more data about stormwater BMPs (Best Management Practices) and land use, providing the public with the most up-to-date and relevant information possible. This information may also prove useful to the Board of Supervisors during future planning.

The City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County have recently agreed to a joint undertaking of a river corridor planning exercise. These practices will collect information about the land that extends anywhere from 100 feet up to one mile from the edge of the river. Middleton feels it is crucial for Fluvanna County to participate.

“It’s our contention that that kind of planning should not be done without Fluvanna and it should not be done without Greene [County],” said Middleton.

The Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 to reappoint Palmyra resident Marvin Moss to the Citizen Representative Position on the RRBC. Moss received a Bachelor of Science from the United States Military Academy, and a Master of Arts from American University.

More information about the Rivanna River Basin can be found on the RRBC’s website at <http://rivannariverbasin.org>.