



Rivanna River Basin Commission

A CONFLUENCE OF INTERESTS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rivanna "Healthy Waters" Project Highlights Opportunities for Conservation and Restoration

Charlottesville, VA – The Rivanna River Basin Commission (RRBC) reports that about 35% of Rivanna streams meet the criteria of "healthy waters," based on an assessment tool developed by Virginia Commonwealth University developed specifically to identify healthy waters in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

While this is a greater percentage than many areas in Virginia, the study highlights the importance of protecting existing healthy waters before they become degraded.

Of the 54 streams assessed in the Rivanna basin, 16 streams (29%) and 4 streams (7%) were "exceptional" based Virginia Commonwealth University's *INSTAR* assessment tool developed for Virginia's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

From July 2009 through September 2010, VCU scientists worked with local professionals from the Rivanna River watershed's community-based biological monitoring program, StreamWatch, to assess 54 streams by sampling the aquatic life in the streams (fish and benthic macroinvertebrates) and assessing the quality of the habitat in and near these streams.

Thirty-six of the streams assessed in this study had occurrences of ecologically or economically important aquatic living resources, including brook trout, American eel, and smallmouth bass.

Leslie Middleton, Executive Director of RRBC, explains, "The Rivanna River Basin Commission undertook this work with the help of our partners so that we would have additional information and tools to help us identify and protect existing healthy waters in the Rivanna watershed."

RRBC, a local government commission comprised of elected and appointed officials from Greene, Fluvanna, and Albemarle counties and the City of Charlottesville, has also been working with its member localities to incorporate the results of this and other water quality studies in the Rivanna watershed in local land use planning.

Carl Schmitt, Supervisor from Greene County and member of the Rivanna River Basin Commission, says: "In these difficult economic times, we as decision-makers must work to balance the need for economic health in our communities today and the need to protect our water and natural resources as a legacy for future generations. Having sound scientific data helps us weigh these needs with a more complete picture of likely consequences."

Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality Approximately is required to identify waters that are not healthy (i.e., "impaired"). According to its latest study (2010), almost 50% of the streams sampled in the Rivanna do not meet water quality standards.

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Albemarle County

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Rick Hill, Healthy Waters Program Manager at DCR, explains, "Funding and measurable improvements remain focused on cleanup of impaired waters, even though the Clean Water Act clearly mandates anti-degradation of stream health. Although ecological decline is an insidious threat to natural systems, focusing on conservation of healthy waters is a positive message. The folks who live in the Rivanna watershed have a real opportunity to be proactive about protecting their healthy waters."

The Commission is working on tools for decision-makers that will quantify the present and long-term values of protecting healthy waters local and regional bodies. "Though the Chesapeake Bay clean-up plan focuses on water pollutant reductions, we are working with our state and federal partners to integrate healthy waters protection into Chesapeake Bay watershed implementation planning, especially at the local level," said Middleton. But the most importantly, she said, "We want our community to understand that we have exceptional resources in the Rivanna that are worthy of our added protection."

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The report is available online at <http://www.rivannariverbasin.org/dcr-healthy-waters.php>.

For further information about this project or the work of the Rivanna River Basin Commission, see www.rivannariverbasin.org or Leslie Middleton, Executive Director, at (434) 971-7722 or (434) 293-5770 or middleton@rivannariverbasin.org.

The mission of the Rivanna River Basin Commission (RRBC) is to provide guidance for the stewardship and enhancement of the water and natural resources of the Rivanna River Basin and to be a forum in which local governments and citizens can discuss issues affecting the Basin's water quality and quantity and other natural resources. The RRBC was formed through enabling state legislation in 2004 and consists of elected officials from the governing bodies of Greene, Fluvanna, and Albemarle counties and the City of Charlottesville, as well as board members from the Thomas Jefferson and Culpepper Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and citizen members appointed from each watershed locality.

For information about Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Healthy Waters Initiative, see http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil_and_water/healthy_waters/index.shtml or contact Rick Hill, Planning and Outreach Manager, (804) 786-7119 or Rick.Hill@dcr.virginia.gov.

For further information about StreamWatch, Community Based Stream Monitoring for the Rivanna Watershed, please contact John Murphy, Executive Director, at johnmurphy@streamwatch.org or (434) 242-1145.

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) released the Final 2010 305(b)/303(d) Water Quality Assessment Integrated Report (Integrated Report) on February 9, 2011. The 2010 Integrated Report is a summary of the water quality conditions in Virginia from January 1, 2003 through December 31, 2008. See: <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/wqa/ir2010.html>.

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