



Rivanna River Basin Commission

A CONFLUENCE OF INTERESTS

July 9, 2013

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Chairs of Boards of Supervisors and Planning Commissions
of Albemarle, Greene, and Fluvanna and Charlottesville

Good afternoon,

On behalf of the Rivanna River Basin Commission, I am enclosing a white paper drafted by RRBC staff in April 2013 that outlines its recommended approach for conducting river watershed planning (and its subset, river corridor planning) for the Rivanna River.

Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville have agreed to include this document as an appendix to their updated comprehensive plans. We urge the elected bodies of these two localities to include it in the final comprehensive plans.

RRBC also recommendation that Fluvanna County and Greene County, soon to embark on updates to your comprehensive plans, include this document in your comprehensive plans.

The enclosed guidance document, if adopted by all four Rivanna jurisdictions, would provide foundation for watershed planning that is consistent throughout the Rivanna watershed.

Sincerely,

Marvin Moss, Chair

Copy to:

Mr. Tom Foley, Albemarle County Administrator
Mr. Mark Graham, Albemarle Director of Community Development
Mr. Maurice Jones, Charlottesville City Manager
Mr. Jim Tolbert, Director, Charlottesville Neighborhood Development Services
Mr. John Barkley, Greene County Administrator
Mr. Bart Svoboda, Greene County Planning Director
Mr. Steve Nichols, Fluvanna County Administrator
Ms. Allyson Finchum, Fluvanna County Planning Director

Encl: RRBC Rivanna River Corridor Planning_Framework_13Jul09.pdf



Rivanna River Corridor Plan – Draft Concept and Framework

Introduction

Noting the escalating interest over the last year in the Rivanna River, and especially in Rivanna river corridor planning, the Rivanna River Basin Commission (RRBC) has taken the opportunity to assemble some resources that could be helpful to the localities that are part of the Rivanna watershed in conducting these types of planning activities.

This information is being forwarded to all the Rivanna localities (the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle, Greene and Fluvanna counties) so that it may be included by reference in comprehensive planning and implementation documents.

What is River Corridor Planning?

River corridor planning is a component of watershed management that focuses on the “river corridor” to achieve specific river management goals and objectives.

FEMA describes the river corridor as that which “includes the width of the channel in which water flows and is typically expanded to account for the extensive influence of the watercourse into the surrounding landscape...corridors also allow the free movement of wildlife from area to area within the region, help control erosion and river sedimentation, and help absorb floodwaters.”

The river corridor may be defined – and river corridor planning may focus on -- the floodplain, floodway, or land adjacent to and outward from the river channel, floodplain, or floodway to a defined extent (1/4, ½, 1 mile, etc.) It may include major tributaries or even all tributaries. It may be a part of a comprehensive watershed management plan that addresses the entire watershed, not just the defined corridor.

A Guide to River Corridor Management Plans, published by New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services in 1997, lists several definitions of river corridors (Table 1).

Table 1. Approaches to Determining River Corridor Width (Adapted from NHDES 1997)

Approach	Measure of River Corridor Boundary
National Park Services, Wild, Scenic, and Recreation River Program Guidelines	¼ mile from the ordinary high water mark on each side of the river
FEMA	100 or 500 year floodplain
New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services River Program Guidelines	Land area located within a distance of 1,320 feet (1/4 mile) of the normal high water mark on either side of the river or to the landward extent of the 100 year floodplain, whichever is larger
Towns	Boundaries of each town that border the river
Identifiable Features	Roads, railroads, development, and natural geographic features in cliffs
Natural Systems	Watershed boundary of the river, or the extent of unique habitats or natural communities

A river corridor plan may have a variety of goals and objectives including:

- preservation and enhancement of water quality and habitat;
- providing for nature-based recreational opportunities;
- establishing a framework for future growth; and



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- Providing a forum to advise local government in land use planning and decision-making.

It may also serve as a guiding document to create strategic financial investments across multiple jurisdictions.¹

The City of Charlottesville has identified the following five goals for river corridor planning in its Draft Rivanna River Initiative (see <http://www.charlottesville.org/index.aspx?page=3366>)²

1. Reconcile all prior river planning efforts into a cohesive plan of action for the City’s portion of the Rivanna River
2. Present a concise vision for the Rivanna River and adjacent properties.
3. Explore the river’s value as a resource for economic development.
4. Respect the river’s role in the region’s ecosystem, as well as the natural beauty the river contributes to the Charlottesville community.
5. Engage in a coordinated planning effort embraced by both the City and Albemarle County.

What is at stake?

As population in the region increases, demands of growth and development put pressure on all of our natural resources, including the river. Over half of the streams assessed in the watershed are impaired. Without a cohesive plan, we risk the chance of further degradation that in turn create public health issues and discourage recreational uses, thus limiting potential economic benefits that accrue from a scenic, healthy waterway. By not acting, we may lose the opportunity to leverage the momentum and potential for joint collaboration between Charlottesville City and Albemarle County as we plan for increased demands through a thoughtful, comprehensive planning process that recognizes the competing *and* complementary uses of the river.

Who should be Involved?

The Rivanna River flows from its headwaters in Greene County, through Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville, to Fluvanna County where it enters the James River at Columbia, Virginia. As such, the Rivanna River corridor plan should include governments, academic institutions, non-profits and NGO, and residents in the Rivanna River watershed (see Table 2). Regardless of how we define the river corridor, we must take a “whole-watershed” approach because what we do in one part of the river affects the entire watershed.

Table 2. Potential Stakeholders

Agency/ Organization/Department	Expertise/Viewpoint
City of Charlottesville: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDS • Parks and Recreation, Environmental Administration and Economic Development Albemarle County <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Development • Parks and Recreation, Greenways & Blueways Manager • Watershed Resources Management • Economic Development Greene County <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Zoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site plan design review and approval • Urban planning, zoning administration • Park planning and maintenance • Stormwater management • Neighborhood and community development • Land use planning • Economic development

¹ NHDES, 1997; VRWO, 2010; VRMP, 2010

² [Rivanna River Initiative](#), accessed on March 7, 2013.



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Fluvanna County	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Parks & Recreation 	
RWSA	Protect drinking water resource for rate payers
UVa PVCC	Innovative design/use ideas Recreational activities for student body
RCS JRA	River advocacy Education/outreach
TNC PEC	Land protection (easements), acquisition, science-based resource management Natural resources protection (Albemarle and Greene counties)
StreamWatch	Water quality, habitat, and stream conditions monitoring and studies
TJPDC	Regional perspective Planning expertise
RRBC	River and watershed-based coordinating entity (statutory-based) Watershed perspective Rivanna-focused data Elected officials outreach/education Natural resources protection
TJSWCD, CSWCD	Agriculture perspective/work with farmers
Riparian landowners	Property value, privacy, encroachment concerns
Chamber of Commerce Local developers Virginia Farm Bureau Virginia Cooperative Extension Wine Growers Association	Private development Economic growth Farmers Viticulturists Local food growers
Rivanna Trails Foundation Fluvanna Heritage Trail Foundation	Recreation, public access and land protection, especially river and stream corridor
Residents	Recreation Scenic beauty/aesthetics Quality of life Conservation values Public access and river access (hiking, boating) Health, public safety

What are the Barriers?

- Potential in-stream conflicts among varying interests including:
 - Environmental/ecosystem services
 - Habitat/natural community
 - Private development/economic development
 - Preservation/historic resources
 - Education/outreach
 - Recreation
 - Scenic beauty
- Pollution and impaired streams may inhibit recreational uses
- Existing by-right uses of river corridor parcels
- Legacy industrial sites and landfill properties adjacent to the river



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- Funding implementation of a plan
- Public perception: “Not another plan!”
- Data gaps that make obtaining a complete picture of the corridor and
- Planning options may be difficult due to jurisdictional differences/perspectives/needs and inter-jurisdictional relationships
- Lack of clarity of roles, relationships, and funding of and for the three Rivanna-based organizations
- Perception that a well-buffered and protected river is contrary to economic development along the river
- Resistance to urban core localities (Albemarle and Charlottesville) planning with upstream and downstream neighboring localities

What are the Opportunities?

- Build on the existing momentum surrounding the Rivanna River including:
 - Recently published *2012 Rivanna Watershed Snapshot* and accompanying Technical Report (that includes data gaps, methodology of analyses used)
 - The Rivanna River Vortex project, which looked at the design of a 3-mile stretch of the river; year of the Rivanna at UVa School of Architecture
 - Charlottesville City stormwater utility fee and Albemarle County’s consideration of such a fee
 - Expanding trails, including the opening of the Old Mills Trail in November 2012
 - Chesapeake Bay watershed implementation planning
 - Local TMDL implementation plans (Cville Streams, Moores Creek)
 - Rivanna Conservation Society’s “Can You Swim Here?” campaign
 - RCS Extreme Watershed Makeover planned for fall 2013 in Moores Creek watershed
 - Bacteria monitoring by StreamWatch and continued monitoring for aquatic bugs
 - New state stormwater regulations to go into effect in 2014 and local governments response
 - TJPDC’s 1-Community project looking at the livability of the Cville, Albemarle County, and MPO
 - New buffer protections in Fluvanna County and intent to do the same in Greene County
- City of Charlottesville and County of Albemarle *1-Community* Project joint planning commission recommendation that joint river corridor planning is 1 of 2 highest/immediate priorities for continued joint planning activities that should take place
- Engage stakeholders, including three Rivanna-based organizations (RCS, StreamWatch, RRBC)
- Expanding scientific understanding of the river and natural resources through monitoring programs
- Originally proposed in the *1998 State of the Basin Report (TJPDC)* and subsequently included in RRBC 2011 Strategic Plan and FY13 Work plan
- Build on existing planning and implementation efforts: Fluvanna Heritage Trail, Albemarle County Blueways Plan, Rivanna Trails Foundation

Description of Recommended Process

The Rivanna River Basin Commission offers the following the steps outlined below to guide the development of a Rivanna River corridor plan:

1. Convene a stakeholder advisory committee under the auspices of the RRBC that includes all four localities and a representation of special interests and stakeholders
2. Define the study area, or corridor, and the components of the plan, likely to be (3 through 6 below)
3. Create a public outreach plan and determine method to solicit public input
4. Identify existing conditions, regulatory framework, opportunities/constraints
 - a. Understand land use/land cover within the corridor (protected lands, growth areas, commercial, residential, etc.)
 - b. Existing planning tools (protection overlays, entrance corridors, floodplain/water protection)
 - c. Water quality and water quantity (discharges/withdrawals)



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- d. Natural features (wetlands, critical slopes, rare, threatened and endangered species)
5. Define vision, goals, actions, and timeframe for implementation with public involvement
6. Define accountability, roles, and responsibilities, planning updates
7. Proceed with the formal process for boards and council review and endorsement
8. Implement plan, assess progress, update plan as needed

Possible Next Steps

1. Encourage City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County to include river corridor planning as an implementation goal in their 2013 comprehensive plan updates
2. Discuss opportunities for coordinated river corridor planning with staff and elected officials from Greene and Fluvanna counties; review comprehensive plan and county work plans for opportunities to dovetail existing efforts (e.g., riparian buffer ordinance in Greene County)
3. Identify core planning team to seek dedicated funding

Rivanna Resources

See: www.rivannariverbasin.org for Rivanna River and watershed information, data and studies, especially: <http://www.rivannariverbasin.org/studies-reports.php> for

2012 Rivanna Watershed Snapshot, RRBC, and *Snapshot Technical Report*, March 2013

Rivanna Healthy Waters Pilot Project, Rivanna River Basin Commission, 2010

Draft Moores Creek Implementation Plan 2012 Update, DCR and RRBC, 2012.

Final Draft Moores Creek, Lodge Creek, Meadow Creek, and Schenks Branch Watersheds TMDL Implementation Plan; Albemarle County and the City of Charlottesville, Virginia, DCR and DEQ, 2012

Land Use Study Technical Report: Land Use and Stream Health in the Rivanna Basin 2007-2009, [StreamWatch](#), 2011.

Development of Building Blocks to Prescribe Ecological Flows for the Rivanna River Watershed, The Nature Conservancy, 2006.

Rivanna River Restoration Project, Phase I Final Report: Woolen Mills Dam Breach Study, [Rivanna Conservation Society](#), 2005.

Rivanna Watershed Conservation Area Plan, TNC, 2003

South Fork Rivanna Reservoir and Watershed, Reflecting on 36 Years, Anticipating 50 Years, Bowler, Stephen, Prepared for Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority; County of Albemarle, VA; Albemarle County Service Authority; and City of Charlottesville, VA, 2003.

Rivanna Watershed Needs Assessment, The Institute for Environmental Negotiation, 2002.

Rivanna River Basin Project: State of the Basin, Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, 1998.

Examples of River Corridor Planning

[1999 Appomattox River Corridor Plan](#)

Relevance to Rivanna River: Major tributary of the James River; portion designated as Scenic River



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Corridor Area: 22-miles long; 750-feet on the edge of the 100-foot flood plain with some variation

Goals: Healthy ecosystem; private interests; preservation; education; economic development; public interests

Timeframe: Ongoing

Process: Crater Coastal Resources Management Task Force, the Appomattox River Corridor Working Group and the general public through three workshops.

2012 Colorado River Corridor Plan (Texas)

Relevance to Rivanna River: Coordinate regional and local planning efforts; larger corridor; more recent plan (2012)

Corridor Area: 30,565-acres; 32-mile stretch of river

Goals: Conserve and protect natural resources; improve quality of life; provide improved mobility and transportation choices

Timeframe: 25 years

Process: Utilized a consultant (Bosse & Associates); local river authority; city and county

Highlights: Identified existing conditions; regulatory framework; opportunities and constraints; and summary of critical issues for each of the following key elements: land use; water quality and supply; transportation; and parks and land conservation. Provided a table identifying strategies, objectives, tools/policies implementation, and timeframe. Considered the importance of current land use within the corridor (residential, commercial, agriculture, recreational, etc.)

Exeter River Corridor and Watershed Management Plan

Relevance to Rivanna River: Focus is the entire watershed; references a “Natural Resources Inventory,” similar to the *2012 Rivanna Snapshot Technical Report*

Corridor Area: Exeter River watershed (watershed, not corridor?) size not identified)

Priorities: Water quality and quantity; wildlife habitats and natural community; scenic, recreation, historical resources; education and outreach

Timeframe: 1999-2000 and 2000-2001

Process: Exeter River Local Advisory Committee; mailed out questionnaires to gather public input

References

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) (1997) A Guide to River Corridor Management Plans (1997) Accessed March 5, 2013. Available at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/publications/co/documents/r-co-97-3.pdf>

Vermillion River Watershed Organization (VRWO) (2010) Vermillion River Corridor Plan. Accessed March 5, 2013. Available at http://vermillionriverwatershed.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=67

Vermont River Management Program (VRMP) (2010) Vermont Agency of Natural Resources River Corridor Planning Guide to Identify and Develop River Corridor Protection and Restoration Projects. Accessed March 5, 2013. Available at http://www.vtwaterquality.org/rivers/docs/rv_rivercorridorguide.pdf