



**RIVANNA**  
CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

# Restoring the Rivanna River

**Lisa Wittenborn, Ph.D.**  
**Executive Director**

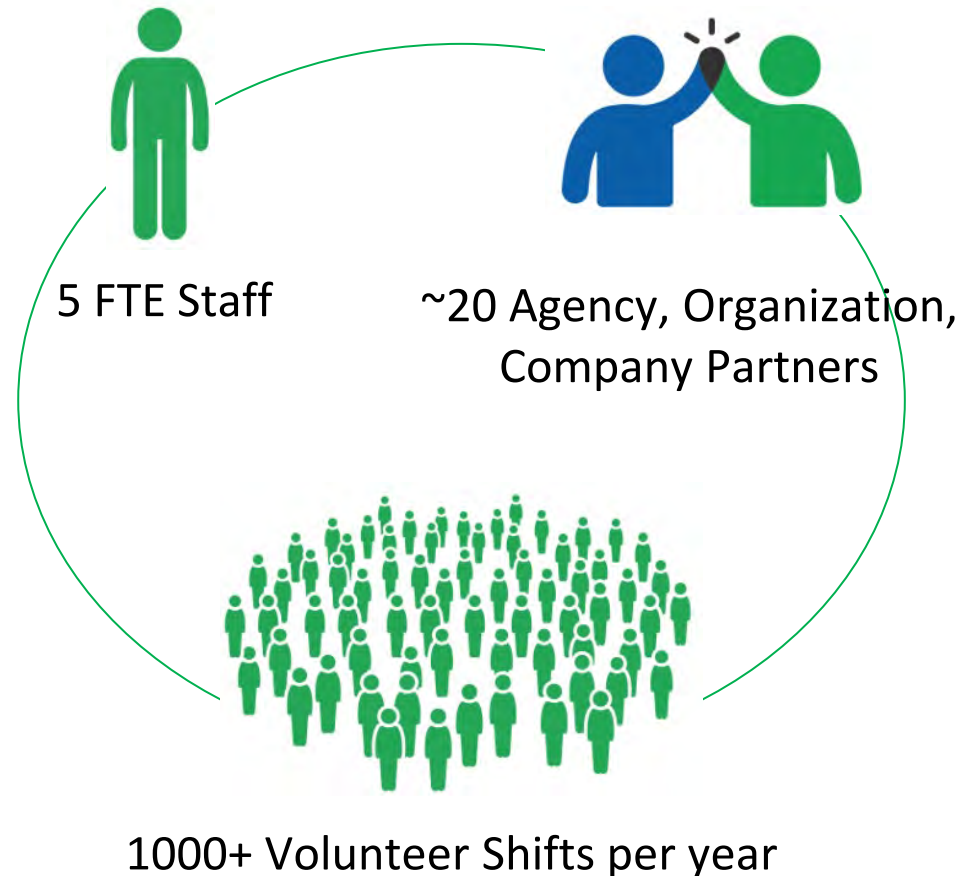
**Rivanna Conservation Alliance**

# Rivanna Conservation Alliance Background

Working in the Rivanna watershed for 34 years!

**Mission:** Working with the community to conserve the Rivanna River and its tributaries through monitoring, restoration, education, and advocacy

**Our Vision:** We envision a healthy Rivanna River and watershed that benefits an engaged community



# RCA's Core Program Areas



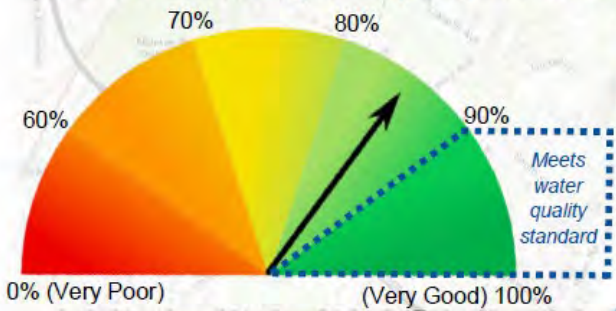
# Clean Water Enables the River to Provide Benefits



# Percent of Bacteria Samples Meeting Recreational Water Quality Standard

## 2022 Bacteria Data

Percentage of Rivanna River samples with *E. coli* levels meeting water quality standard



**Darden Towe Park**  
**83.3%**  
of water samples

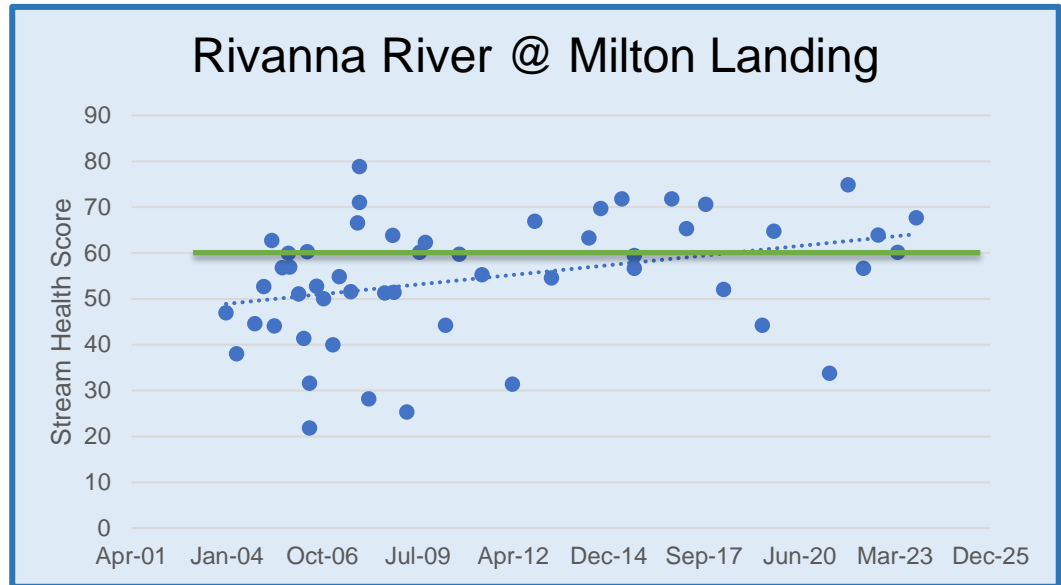
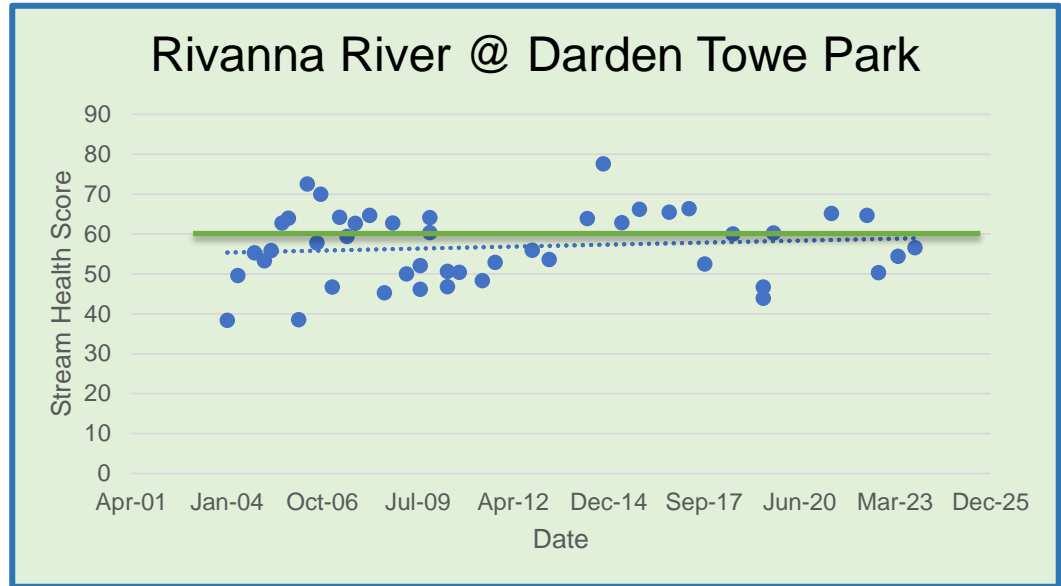
**Riverview Park**  
**83.3%**  
of water samples

**Palmyra Boat Launch**  
**87.5%**  
of water samples

2023 Bacteria Data  
Darden Towe = 87.5%  
Riverview = 87.5%  
Palmyra = 93.7%

# 2002–2023 Biological Stream Health Scores

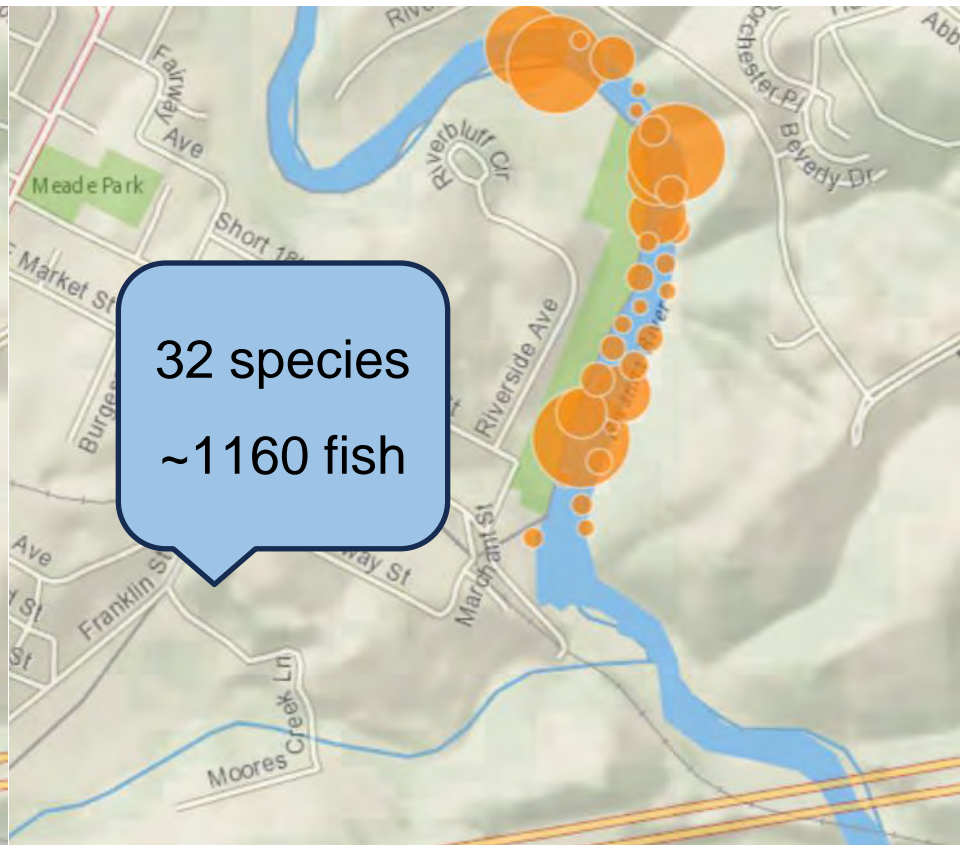
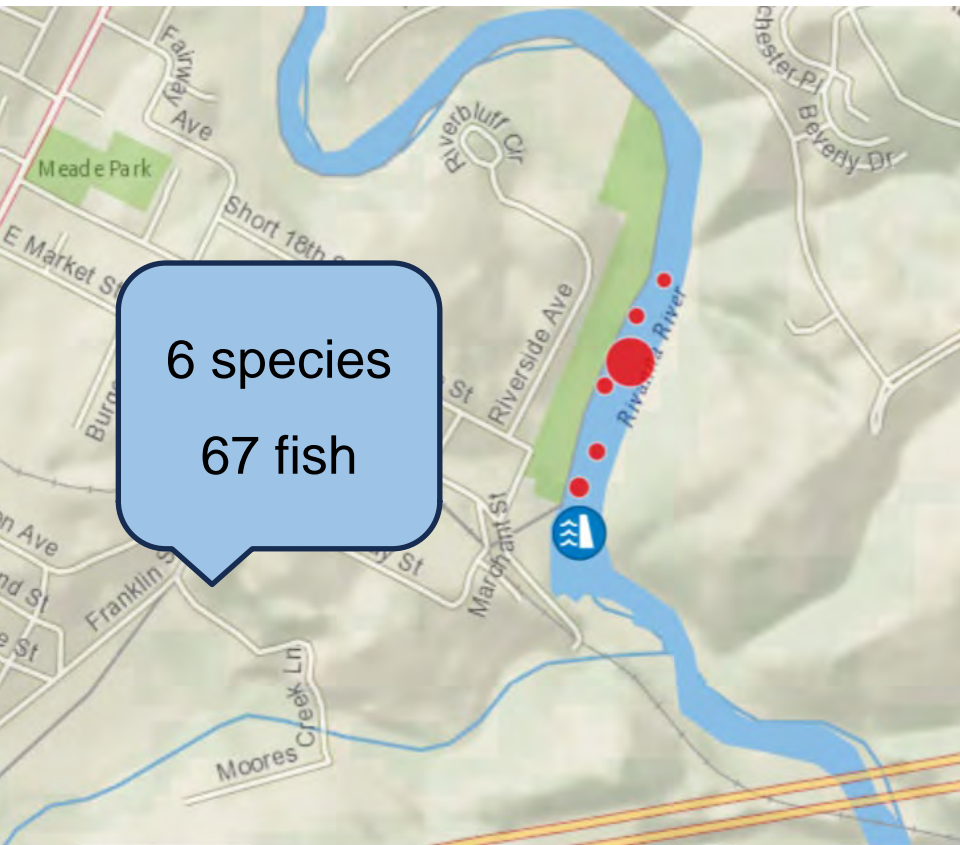
- Calculated by collecting and evaluating samples of benthic macroinvertebrates
- Scores of 60 and higher meet Virginia’s water quality standard for aquatic life
- Trend lines are for illustration only, not statistically significant



# Benefits of 2007 Woolen Mills Dam Removal

2006 Fish Survey

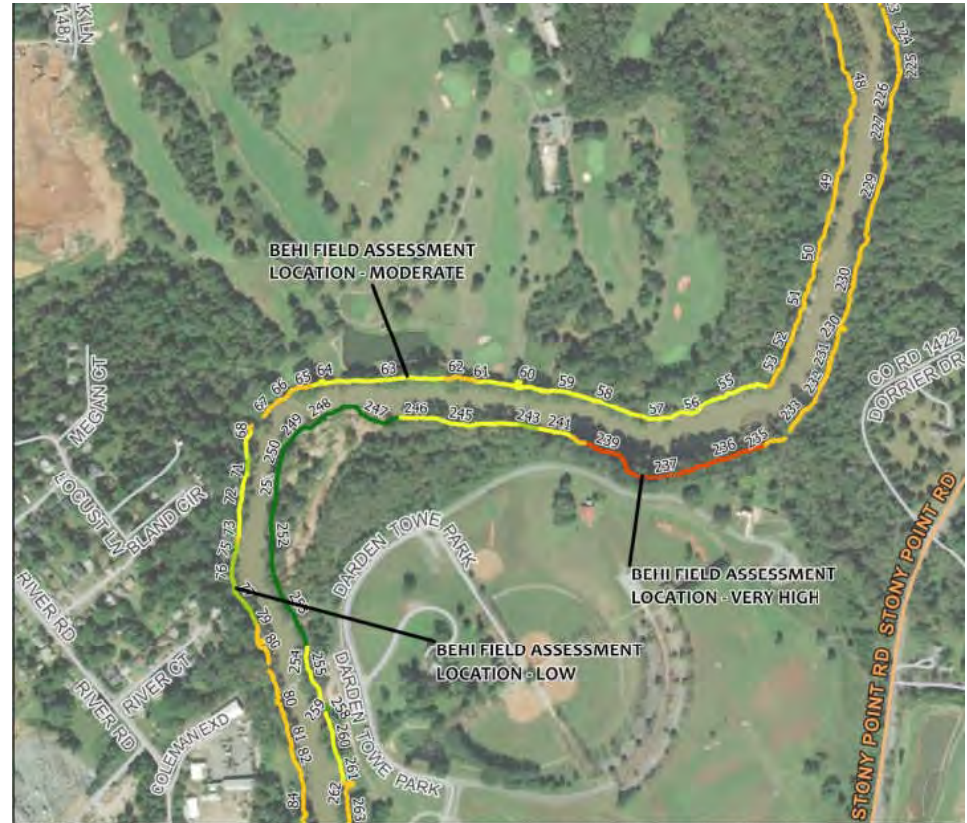
2019 Fish Survey



# 2019-2020 Rivanna Prioritization Study with Ecosystem Services



This area near Darden Towe Park required emergency repairs with riprap when erosion exposed utility lines in 2019

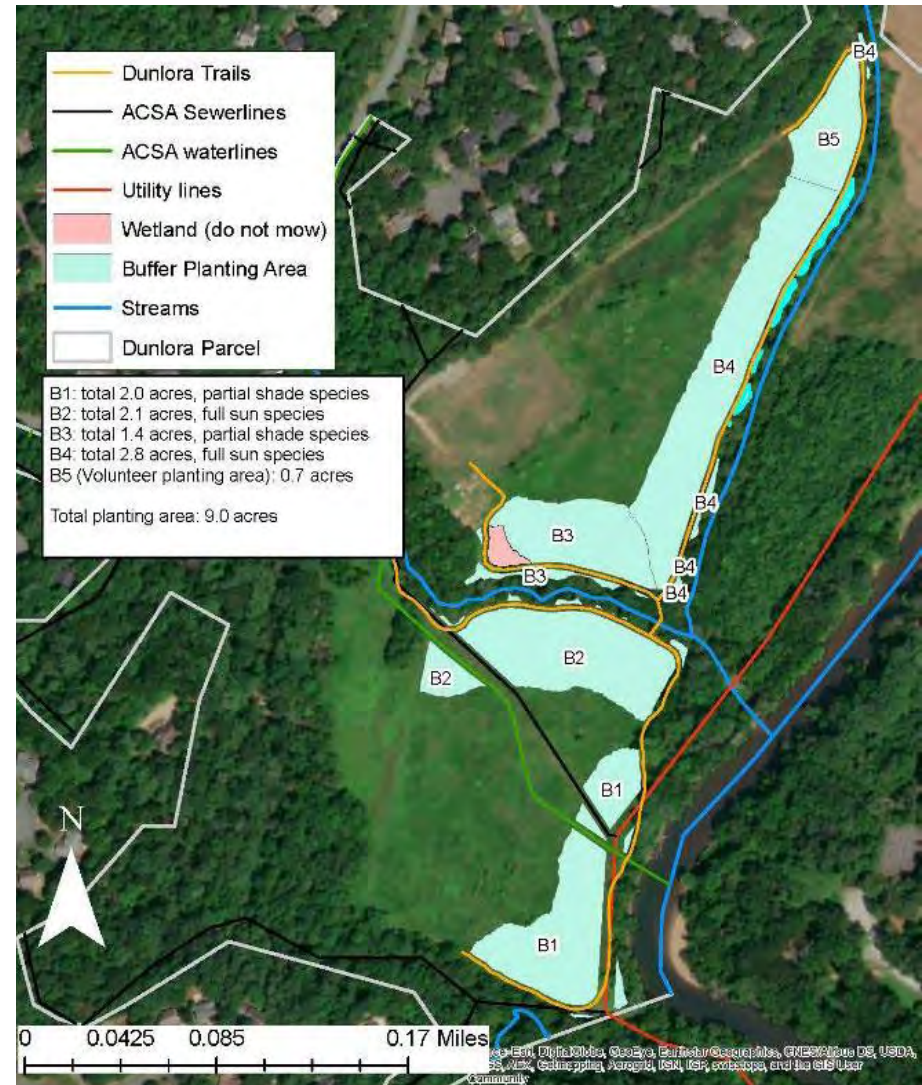


	<h2>BEHI RATINGS MAP</h2> <h3>Rivanna River Prioritization Study</h3>		
	<b>ECOSYSTEM SERVICES</b>	<b>MAP 3 OF 5</b>	
1739A Allied Street Charlottesville, VA 22903   540.239.1428   <a href="http://www.ecosystems-services.us">www.ecosystems-services.us</a>			



# Rivanna Prioritization Study - Results

- Result was a ranked list of potential project locations
- Talked with landowners and project partners to vet the top ranked locations
- Started pursuing buffer restoration projects right away
- Planted nine acres of new forest buffer on Dunlora HOA property in December 2021
- Adjacent to Rivanna Trail spur



# Rivanna Restoration at Riverview Park Project

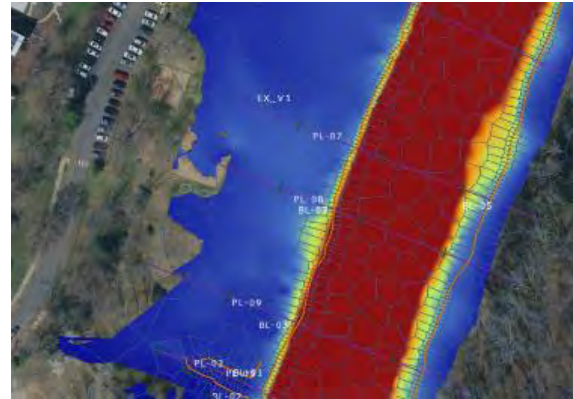
Riverview Park selected because it has potential to generate the most significant environmental and community benefits:

- Will improve water quality and habitat
- Has highest concentration of active public use
- Has many important community amenities and infrastructure that would be protected and improved
- Most likely to bring together partners and funders



# Designing the Riverview Restoration Project

- Conceptual design supported by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant in 2022
- Ecosystem Services evaluated technical feasibility
- RCA engaged community
  - Goal was to determine if a project was desired and what it should look like
- Wolf Josey pulled design concept together



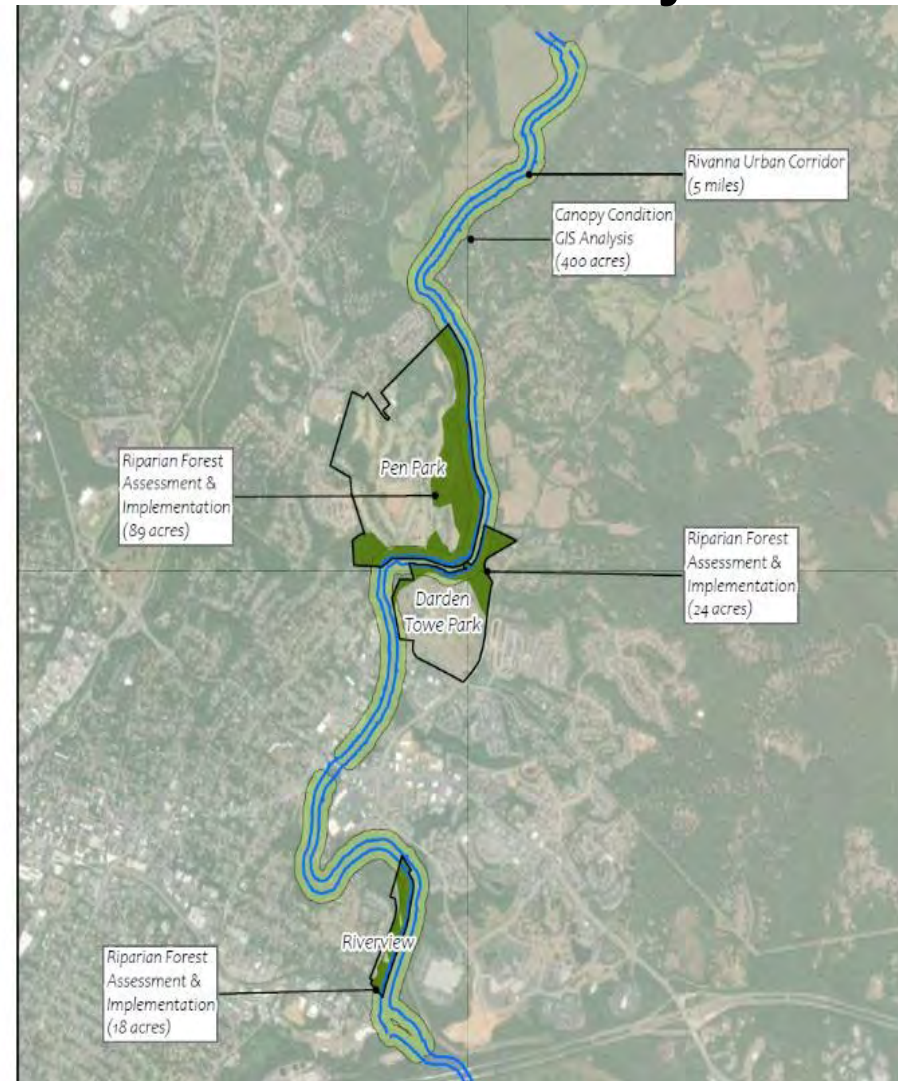
# RIVERVIEW RESTORATION: CONCEPT DESIGN



# Rivanna River Forest Health and Resilience Project

Project is underway and funded through April 2025:

- 134 acres of forest assessed by 35 trained volunteers
- Targeted forest management plans being developed for three parks
- Invasive management and tree planting work begins fall and winter 2024-25
- Volunteer and workforce training, community outreach, and targeted education
- Rivanna River Resilience Partnership



# Riverview Park–City of Charlottesville

11  
Management  
units

11.3  
Acres  
Assessed



# Darden Towe Park - Albemarle Co.

18  
Management  
units

25.7  
Acres  
Assessed



# Pen Park – City of Charlottesville

**33**  
Management  
units

**97.2**  
Acres  
Assessed





# Rivanna River Resilience Partnership



Long-term Vision: A Rivanna River watershed with resilient riparian forest corridors whose health and integrity are sustained through long term, collaborative community action

- Promote long-term collaboration and collective action
- Maintain and expand the footprint of invasive management zones
- Recruit, train, and direct volunteers
- Support ongoing community outreach and education
- Create opportunities for workforce training and development

# URBAN RIVANNA RIVER CORRIDOR PLAN: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Forest  
Health  
Project

Riverview  
Restoration

1	Identify and protect the most sensitive biological and ecological areas		
2	Retain and steward natural habits and systems throughout the river corridor.		
3	Identify and implement riparian restoration and mitigation projects, including removal of invasive plant species...and the stabilization of eroding streambanks in a manner consistent with natural system function.		
4	Continue and initiate activities of the City and County to improve water quality in partnership with other organizations.		
5	Encourage the use of locally native plants for landscaping at parks and businesses.		
6	Promote stewardship, awareness, appreciation, and education of the natural elements through interpretive and informational signage		
7	Continue to deliver a compliant and effective stormwater management program that meets or exceeds minimum state regulations.		
8	Protect and enhance riparian forests within the river corridor		
9	Consider opportunities to reduce mowing and create naturalized grasslands/meadows in existing open areas.		
10	Collaborate with other organizations to leverage resources for		



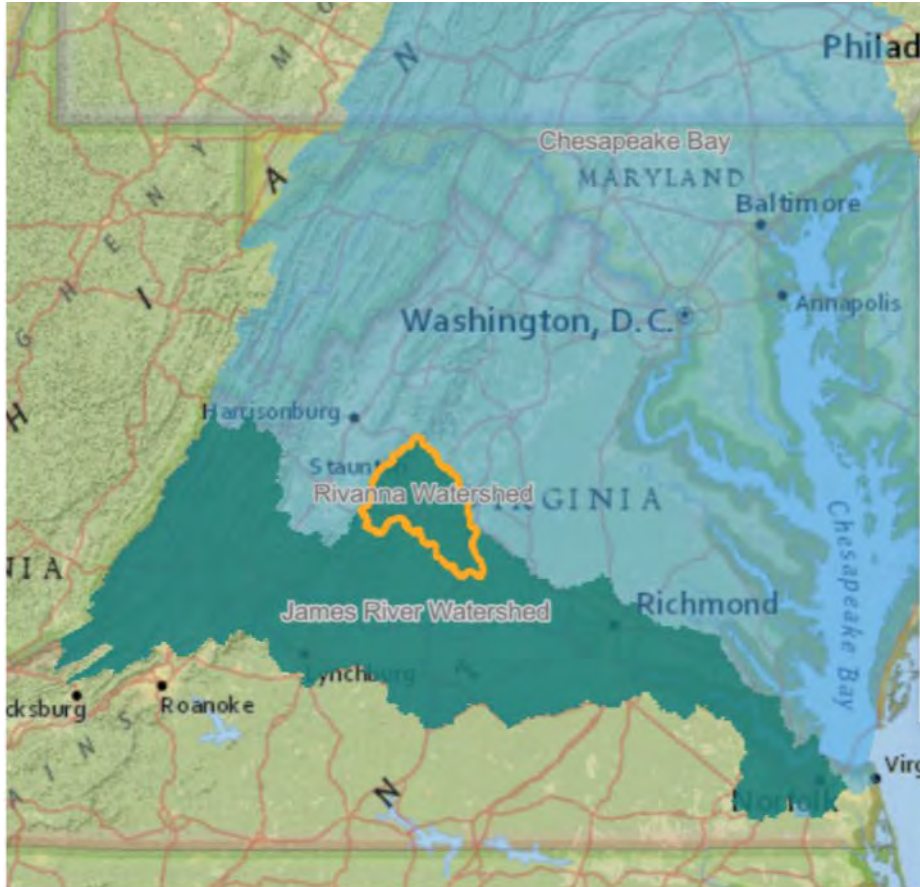
**Thank you to the many different partners and funders making these projects possible!**

The **Rivanna Restoration at Riverview Park Project** and the **Rivanna River Forest Health and Resilience Project** are both made possible through grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation with support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Chesapeake Bay Program.

**Questions?**



# Rivanna River Watershed



# NEED FOR RESTORATION

## Erosion is causing:

- Loss of trees, land, trail, and river access
- Safety hazards
- Degradation of native riparian and instream habitat
- Water quality impairments



# WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY WANT?

- Collected input from >250 people: public meetings (60), online forms (76), paper forms in Park (103), one-on-one conversations (25+)
  - **Most important park features:** trails, safe river access, natural landscape, clean/healthy river
  - **What want to see improved:** reduce erosion/stabilize banks, remove invasives and plant natives, improve river access, improve trash management, more education/public awareness
  - **Top concerns about project:** tree loss, impervious surfaces near banks, invasive plant management, longevity
-

# CONNECTIVITY

Parks + Trails + Outdoor Recreation



**Tim Padalino**  
Chief of Parks Planning  
Albemarle County



**Chris Gensic**  
Park and Trail Planner  
City of Charlottesville





# Urban Rivanna River Corridor Plan

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

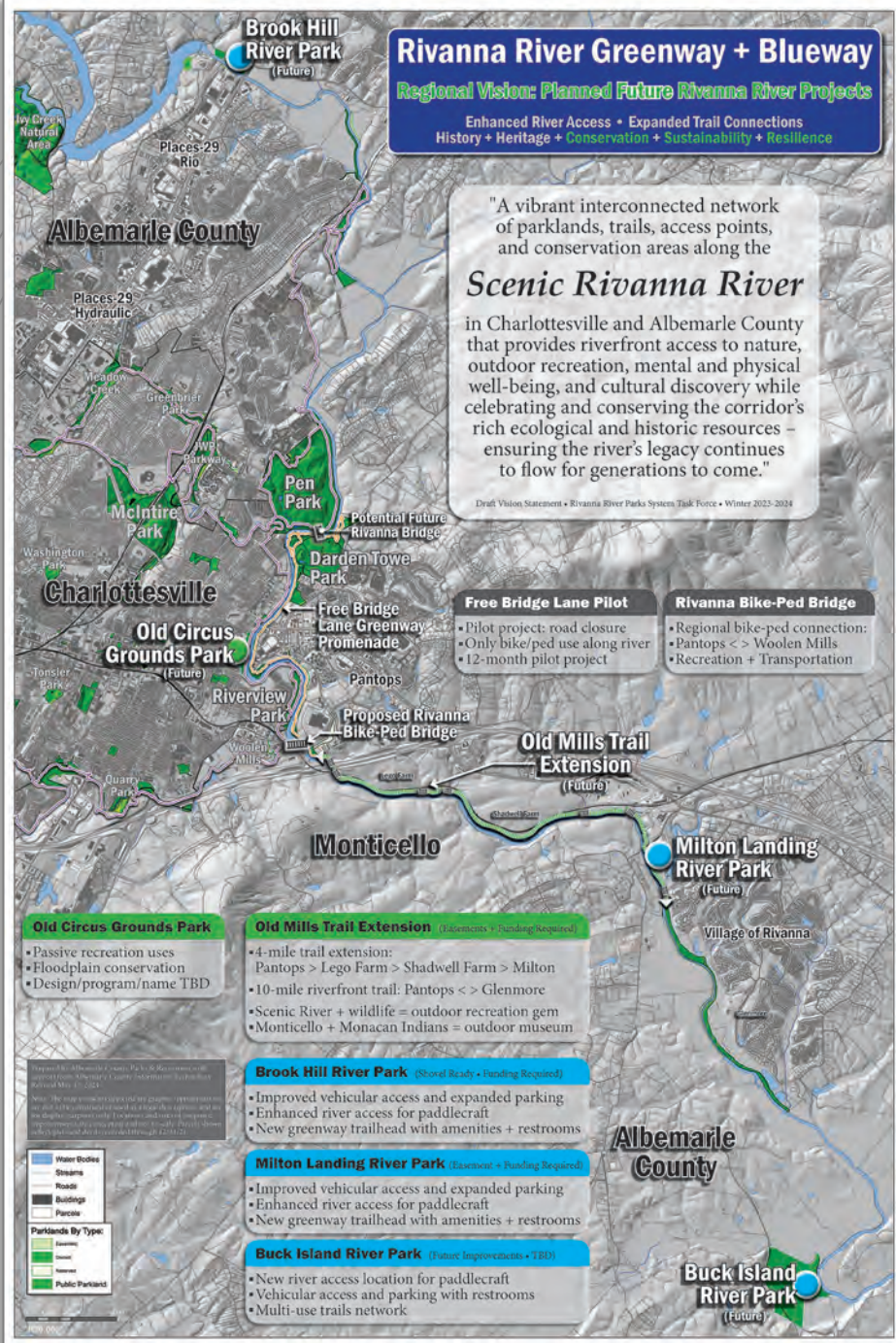
- improve trail connectivity between corridor and nearby neighborhoods
- improve and expand system of parks and trails within the corridor
- increase number and type of access points to river and waterfront
- develop a variety of trail types/specs for different users and varying abilities
- promote wildlife observation

## MULTI-PURPOSE TRAILS & BRIDGES

- new bike/ped bridge connections:
  - Pantops and Woolen Mills
  - Pen Park and Darden Towe Park
  - Free Bridge
- provide seating at regular intervals
- diversify trail surfaces
- sustain regional focus (including potential Three Notch'd Trail route)

## HISTORIC PLACES & CULTURAL FEATURES

- comprehensive inventory of historic and cultural resources
- protect resources
- promote resources
- interpretive signage/programming
- partner with schools and local organizations (including Monticello and Lewis and Clark Center)
- support Monacan Indian Nation



# Rivanna River Greenway + Blueway: a regional vision for an interconnected system of riverfront parks and trails

## Greenway Trails:

- Rivanna Trail
- Old Mills Trail (Pantops)
- ➔ ■ Old Mills Trail (Shadwell > Milton > Glenmore)
- Free State Trail / RT River North Spur

## River Parks:

- ➔ ■ Brook Hill River Park
- Darden Towe Park
- Riverview Park
- ➔ ■ Milton Landing River Park
- ➔ ■ Buck Island River Park

*Rivanna River Greenway + Blueway:  
 "Planned Future Projects"*

# Rivanna Greenway & Blueway: Pantops to Milton



River-view Park  
(City)

**Rivanna Greenway:  
Old Mills Trail  
(Existing Section)**  
2.5 Miles of Primitive Trail from  
Darden Towe Park to Pantops (End)

WOOLEN  
MILLS

INTERSTATE 64

PANTOPS

Martha  
Jefferson  
Hospital

Lego  
Farm

South  
Lego  
Farm

**Rivanna Greenway:  
Old Mills Trail  
Planned Future Extension**  
Public Right Of Way is Currently Incomplete;  
Currently Not Open for Public Access or Use  
Milton to Current End of Old Mills Trail (Pantops): 4 Miles  
Milton to End of Trails in Darden Towe Park: 7.5 Miles  
Glenmore to End of Trails in Darden Towe Park: 10 Miles

INTERSTATE 64

US-250

Luck Stone

MONTICELLO

**Rivanna Blueway:  
Riverview Park to Milton**  
Float Distance: 4.3 Miles  
Scenery: Excellent  
Required Skill Level: Intermediate  
Rapids: Several Class II - III Rapids  
Take-out at Milton: Poor  
Source: Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources  
<https://dwr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/rivanna-river-public-landings-float-map.pdf>

Shadwell  
Farm

Pending  
Greenway Easements  
(In Progress)

Stone-  
Robinson  
ES

The  
Clifton

**Milton Landing  
River Park  
River Access &  
Greenway Trailhead**

Future  
Greenway  
Easement  
(Reserved)

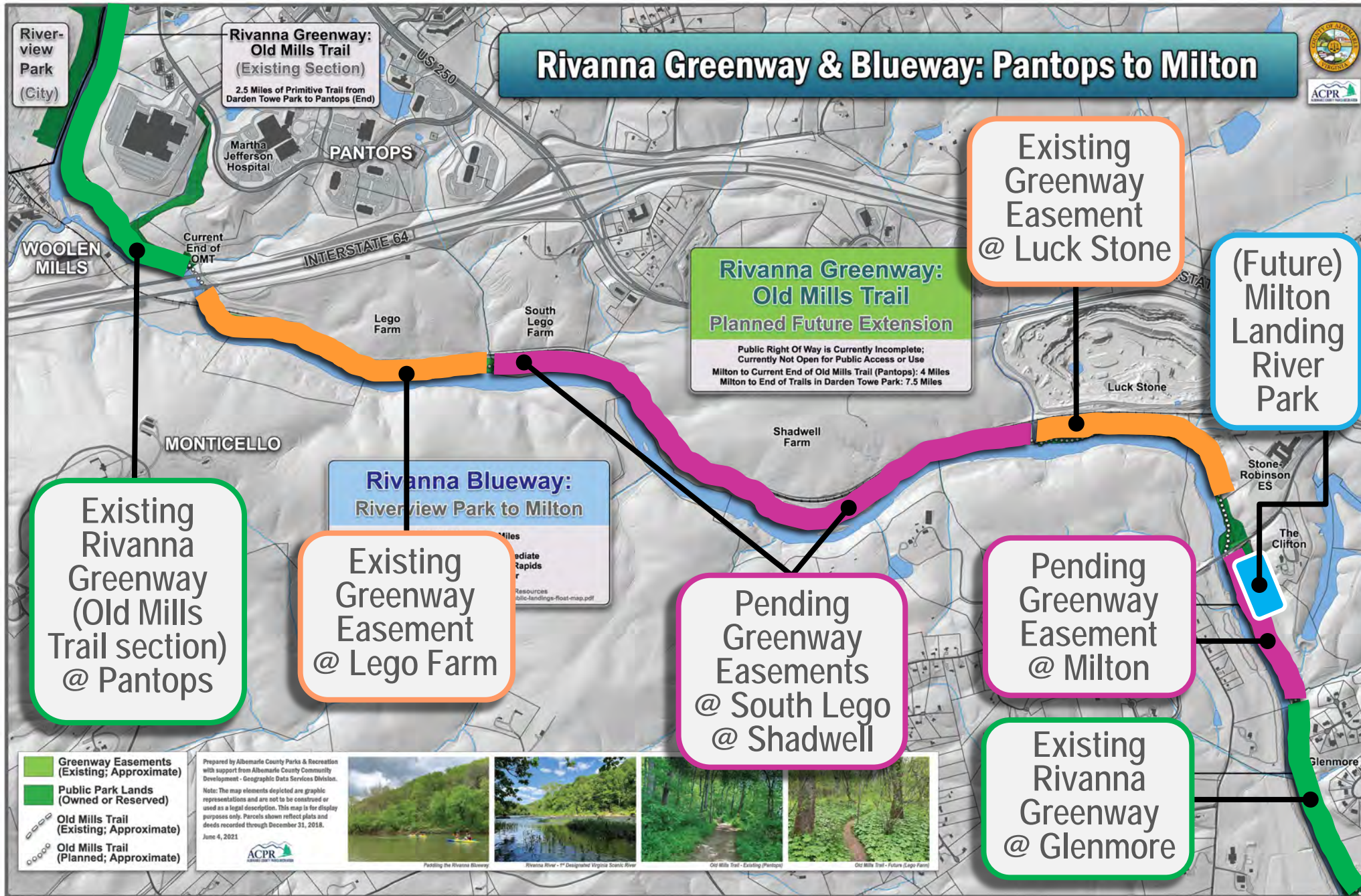
Glenmore

**Rivanna Greenway  
at Glenmore  
(Existing Section)**  
2.5 Miles of Primitive Trail  
Maintained by ACPR  
Currently No General Public Access

- Greenway Easements (Existing; Approximate)
- Public Park Lands (Owned or Reserved)
- Old Mills Trail (Existing; Approximate)
- Old Mills Trail (Planned; Approximate)

Prepared by Albemarle County Parks & Recreation with support from Albemarle County Community Development - Geographic Data Services Division.  
Note: The map elements depicted are graphic representations and are not to be construed or used as a legal description. This map is for display purposes only. Parcels shown reflect plats and deeds recorded through December 31, 2018.  
Created June 2021  
Updated December 2023





**Project Status:**  
Acquisition Phase

**Existing Trail - Open for Use:**  
Old Mills Trail section  
Glenmore section

**Existing Easement - Not Built or Open:**  
Lego Farm  
Luck Stone

**Easements Pending:**  
South Lego Farm (TJF)  
Shadwell Farm (TJF)  
Milton Landing (The Clifton)



## Old Mills Trail greenway trail extension:

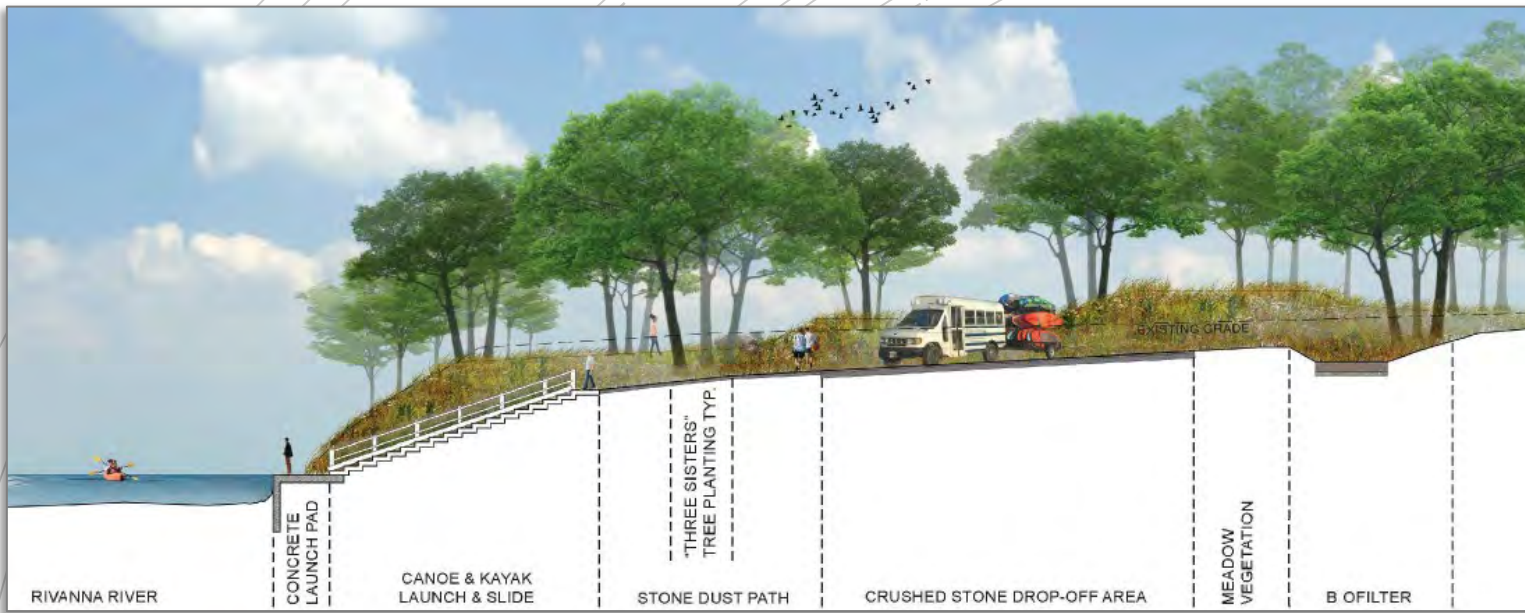
- Approximately **3.75-mile trail extension from Pantops to Milton and Glenmore**, crossing Monticello's Lego Farm and Shadwell Farm (UNESCO World Heritage Site and birthplace of Thomas Jefferson)
- Planned extension will result in approximately **10 continuous miles** (total) of riverfront greenway trail from Darden Towe Park to existing County greenway at Glenmore
- **Premium “outdoor recreation” facility** along the Scenic Rivanna River immediately downstream from Pantops and City of Charlottesville
- **Special “outdoor museum” experience** with interpretive signage
  - Rivanna River natural heritage and biodiversity
  - Monacan Indian Nation heritage and culture
  - Thomas Jefferson birthplace and river-oriented commerce/industry
  - Peter Jefferson Mill ruins (circa 1807)



## Milton Landing River Park:

- **Expanded, improved river access** to address/resolve existing deficiencies and establish more user-friendly, inclusive boat launch
- **New greenway trailhead** (for greenway trail use and overflow parking for river access)
- Randolph Mill Lane spot improvements / re-surfacing
- River access enhancements:
  - circular drop-off and limited parking near boat slide
  - boat slide
- New trailhead parking and overflow river access parking (~75 spaces)
- Pavilions/shelters
- Bathrooms
- ADA-accessible paved trail to river observation point
- Site furnishings – picnic tables, benches, waste bins, etc.
- Signage

# Brook Hill River Park:



- **Permanent enhancements to expand and improve river access** that will address/resolve existing deficiencies and establish a new “boat slide” amenity for more inclusive use and enjoyment

- **River access enhancements:**

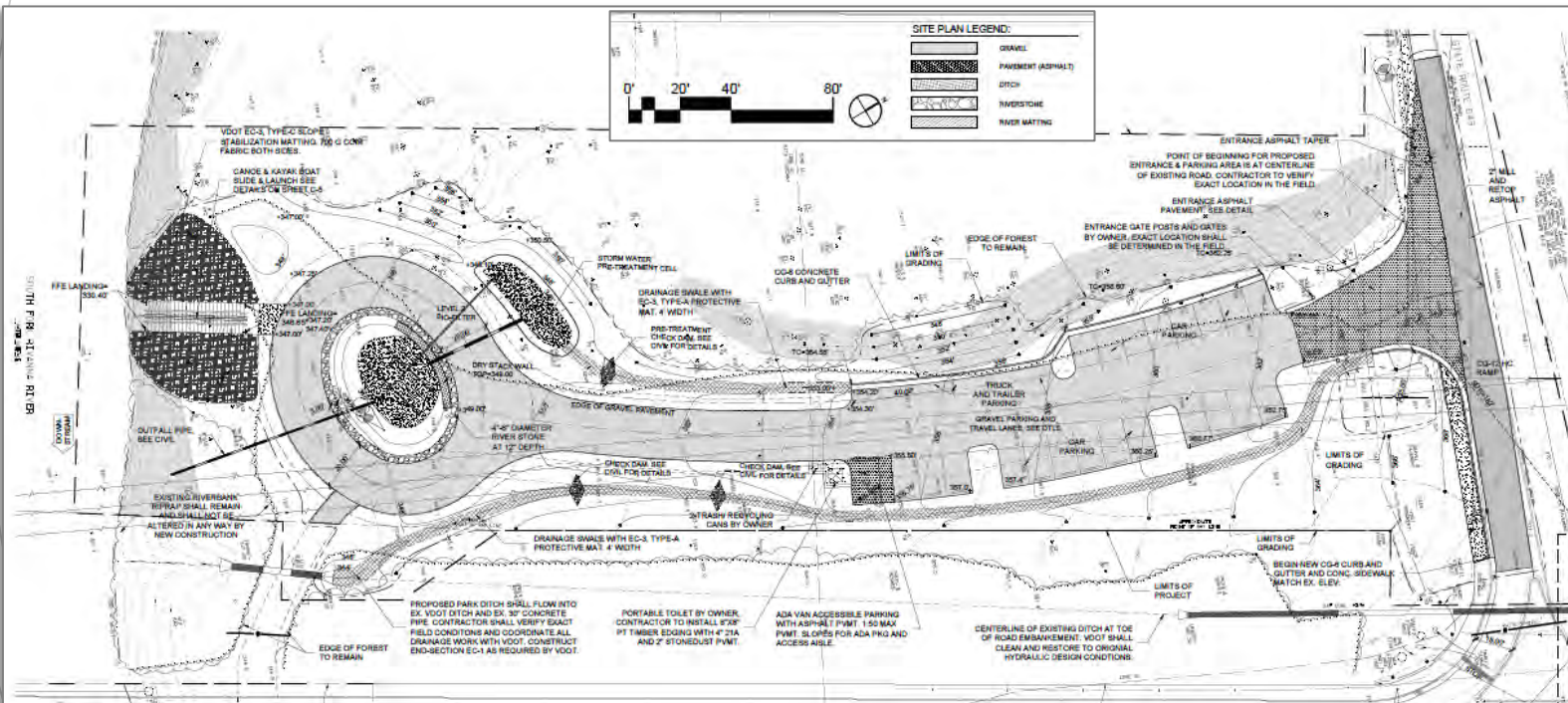
- boat slide
- circular drop-off area with limited parking near boat slide

- **Formalized gravel parking:**

- ~24 total spaces
- 2 trailer parking spaces
- 1 ADA van accessible space

- **Non-permanent (portable) toilets**

- **Signage**



**It was once his family's farm — the largest Black-owned farm in Albemarle County — but now we all own part of it**

by PHILIP COBBS  
MARCH 14, 2024



## Buck Island River Park:

- **Planned new river access and river park** approximately halfway between Milton Landing and Crofton
- 122 acres of land donated in 2016
- Potential program/amenities:
  - boat slide (or other river access)
  - circular drop-off area (with limited parking near boat slide)
  - parking
  - multi-use trail network (with ADA)
  - site furnishings – picnic tables, benches, waste bins, etc.
  - bathrooms or portable toilets
  - signage
  - resource management (CE)



# Other Active + Emerging Projects:

## Free Bridge Lane Trail

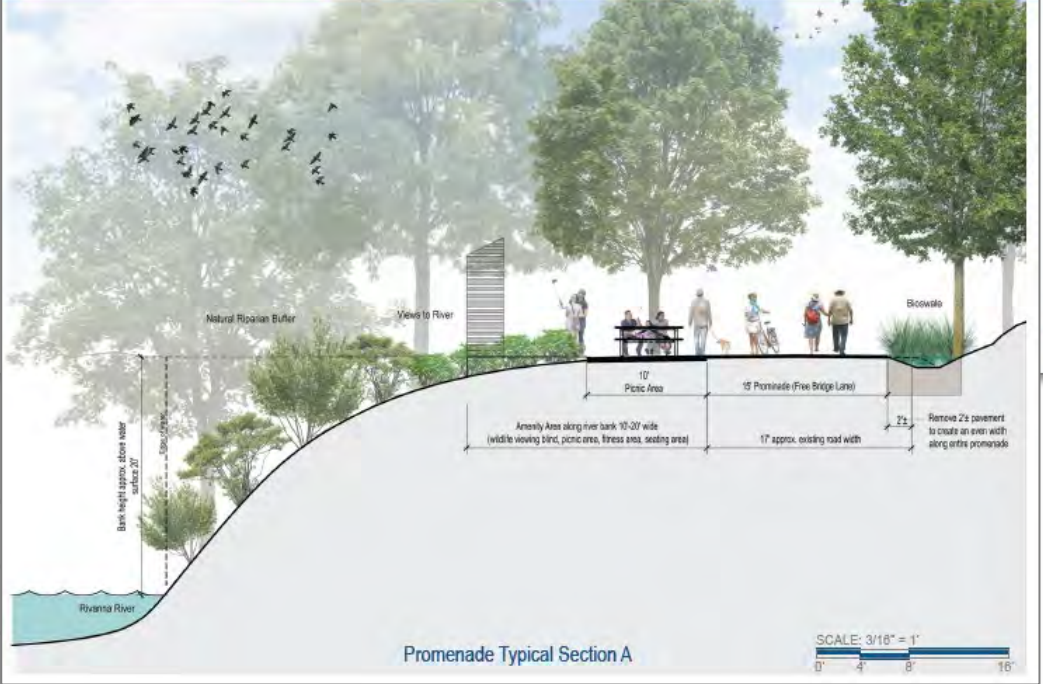
Feasibility Study  
April 2023



County of Albemarle  
Dept of Community Development

**FREE BRIDGE LANE - Sections**

April 2023 LPDA



Free Bridge Lane  
'Greenway Promenade'  
(Planned Pilot Project)

Paved Park Entrance Pathway @ VA-20 and Elk Drive  
(Darden Towe Park)





*Peter Jefferson  
Mill Ruins (1807)  
(Shadwell)*



*Scenic Rivanna River*



*Rivanna Blueway  
(Shadwell /  
Auburn Hills)*





“Our **vision** is to create unparalleled outdoor and recreation experiences right here at home.”

“Our **mission** is dedicated to providing a unique system of parks, trails, and recreational experiences, while being superior stewards of the environment.”



# City of Charlottesville Parks and Recreation



Rivanna River Conference  
September 2024

# City of Charlottesville Parks and Recreation



## Major Trails Project Status Charlottesville - 2024 -

**Active Trails (Near Construction)**  
 A - Lower Meadow Creek - .5  
 B - YMCA Link - 250 Bypass - .1  
 C - Upper Meadow Creek - 1 mile  
 D - Washington Park Ramp - .1  
 E - Rugby Avenue - .2

**Developing Trails (In design)**  
 A - River Link - .2 mile  
 B - Michie Drive/Hydraulic - .25 mile

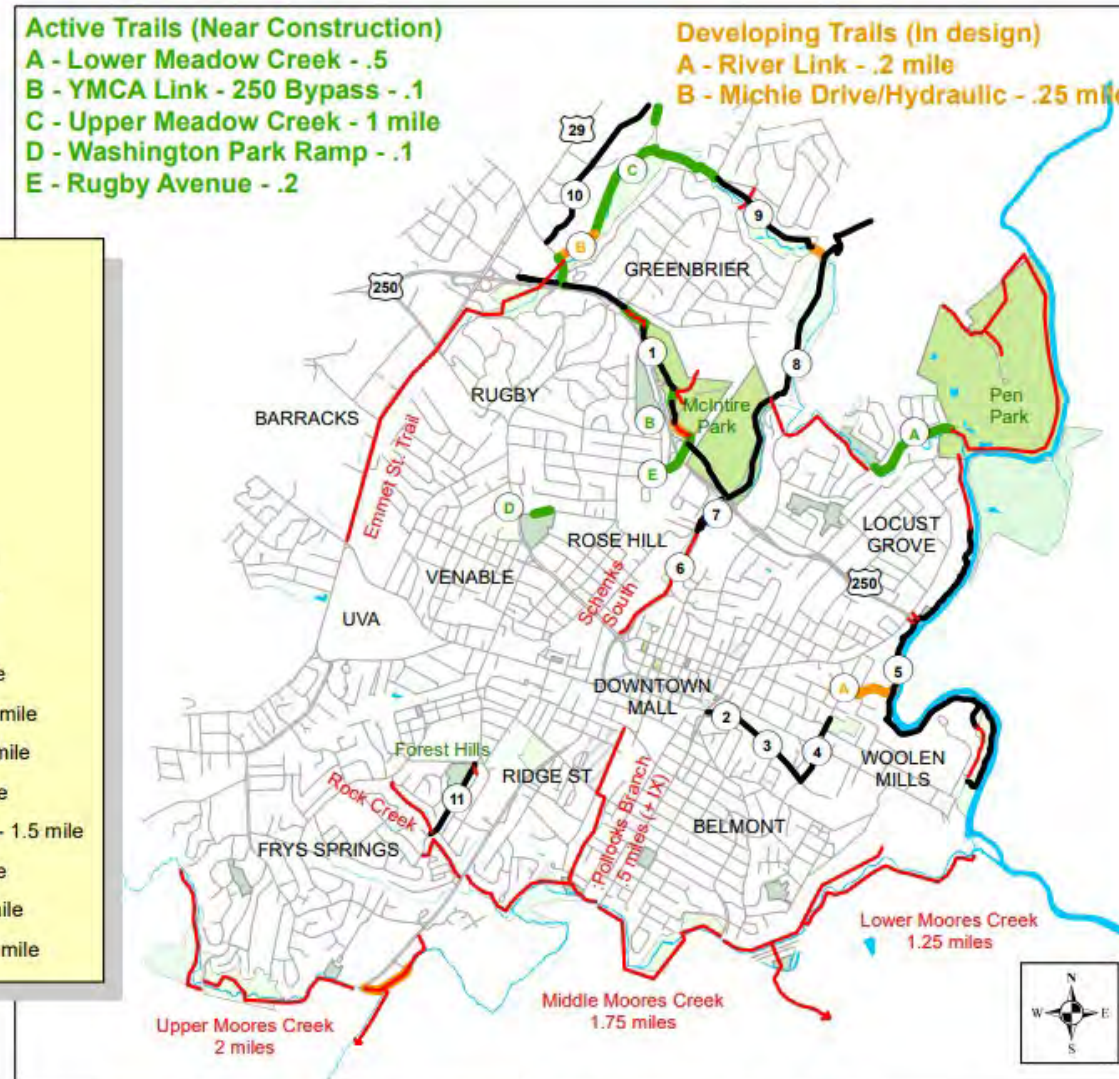
**Legend**

**City Trails STATUS**

- Active
- Developing
- Proposed Trails

**Existing Trails**

- 1 - 250 Bypass - 1.5 mile
- 2 - Water Street - .25 mile
- 3 - Coal Tower - .25 mile
- 4 - Meade Avenue - .3 mile
- 5 - Rivanna River Trail - 2 mile
- 6 - Schenks Branch - .25 mile
- 7 - McIntire Road - .25 mile
- 8 - John Warner Parkway - 1.5 mile
- 9 - Meadow Creek - .5 mile
- 10 - Hillsdale Drive - .75 mile
- 11 - Forest Hills Trail - .25 mile



This map is for planning purposes only and is not official, nor does it provide legal information

# City of Charlottesville Parks and Recreation



- Working to extend paved trail north to Meadow Creek/Pen with willing property owners
- RTF style natural trail thru Riverview Loop and O High St.



# City of Charlottesville Parks and Recreation



River navigation  
signs on bridges  
for users and  
EMS response

Trail  
improvements



# Plant Identification Tags

The QR codes alongside the river trail provide information about native and invasive plants.

They link to the Piedmont Discovery Center website.

Scan the code with your mobile device to learn about local flora.



QR Code for May Apple



## May Apple

May Apple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) Common names:  
Mayapple, Devil's Apple, Hog-apple, Indian Apple,  
American Mandrake, American [...]





# Why the Rivanna?

# Overview of the CACVB

- The Charlottesville Albemarle Convention and Visitors Bureau promotes the region to visitors in order to support local business and generate lodging, sales and meals tax
- Dually funded by a portion of the Transient Occupancy Tax from the City of Charlottesville and the County of Albemarle
- Core activities include public relations, advertising, visitor services, research and destination development

# National Outdoor Recreation Participation Trends



- The Outdoor Recreation Participation Base grew 4.1% to a record 175.8 million participants in 2023
- Growing ethnic/racial diversity in the overall population is mirrored by growing diversity in the outdoor recreation participant base
- The female participation rate reached 51.9% in 2023, up from 50% in 2022

-via Outdoor Industry Association's 2024 Outdoor Participation Trends Report

# The Outdoor Recreation Economy in VA



- Outdoor recreation contributed \$11.3 billion to the Virginia economy in 2022
- Under this \$11.3 Billion, \$3.8 Billion are travel and tourism expenditures
- In 2022, it was found that outdoor recreation employs over 124,000 Virginians

-via US Bureau of Economic Analysis

# Impacts on the Local Economy

- In 2023, visitor spending reached \$956 million combined between Charlottesville and Albemarle
- \$158.7 million of this was in the category of recreation
- Recognizing these trends, the Virginia Tourism Corporation made the Drive Outdoors Grant available



-via Virginia Tourism Corporation

# Drive Outdoors Grant

- In the Fall of 2022, the CACVB was selected to receive the Drive Outdoors Grant from the Virginia Tourism Corporation
- The goal of the grant was to enhance outdoor recreation development, assets, and entrepreneurial opportunities
- Partnered with Rivanna River Company who utilized funds to secure adaptive paddling equipment
- Grant required a community gathering of stakeholders

# Bringing Stakeholders Together



- A gathering of outdoor recreation stakeholders was held in Scottsville
- Competitive analysis and research of destinations
- Discussed immediate opportunities as well as goals for the future

# Who Was There?

- Parks and recreation
- Conservation
- Advocacy
- Local outfitters and guides
- City, county, and town staff
- State and local tourism





# Defining Primary Lures and Long-Term Game Changers

- The primary lure for visitation as it pertains to outdoor recreation in our area was determined to be the Blue Ridge Gateway (Shenandoah National Park & the Blue Ridge Parkway)
- Areas of enhancement were identified as greater asset connections as well as digital trail and blueway guides
- The final ask of the group was determining a long-term game changer
- The group consensus was a **River Park System**

# A River Park System Task Force

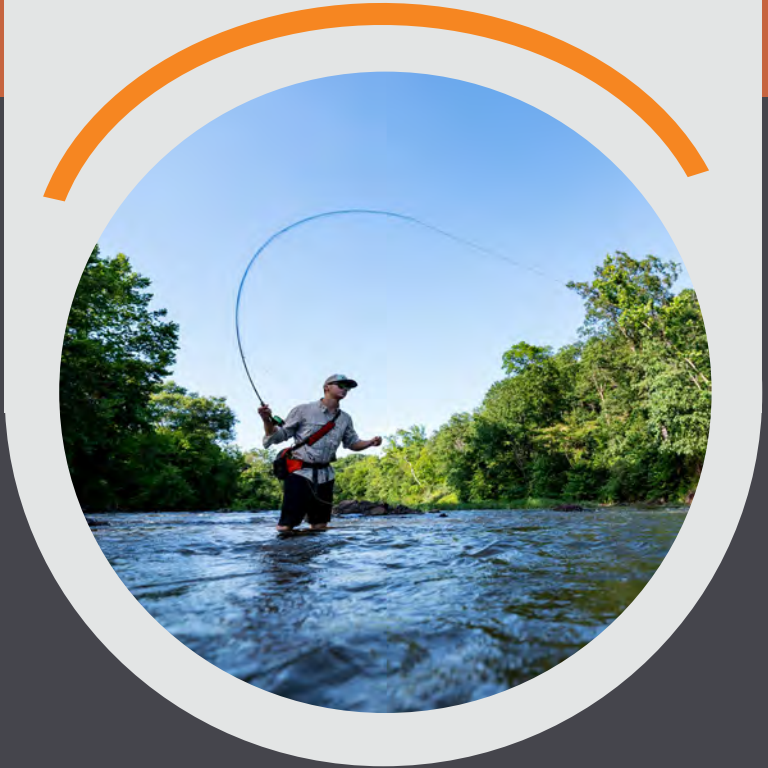
- This meeting prompted additional discussions
- A focus on the River Park System became apparent
- This group continued to meet, as well as provide updates at events like the Active Mobility Summit



Credit: Hugh Kenny

# Why the Rivanna?

- Virginia Scenic River & National Recreation Trail designations
- Proximity to population & amenities
- Shared borders with the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County (future opportunities regionally)
- Current foundation of recreation infrastructure
- A diverse portfolio of activities



# Why the Rivanna?



Credit: Tim Padalino

- The Rivanna River is integral to the story of our region
- It not only serves as a place for active and passive recreation, but also a home for education:
  - History & Culture
  - Agriculture
  - Conservation
  - The Arts

# Why the Rivanna?

- This area has also become the home of staple community events such as:
  - Rivanna Riverfest
  - Rivanna Roots Concerts
  - Loop De 'Ville Trails Festival
  - Wintersong



# Tourism Master Plan

- First Tourism Master Plan for our area
- Provides a 20-year view for our community
- Balances quality of life and economic sustainability that honors our landscapes, highlights our culture, and makes everyone feel welcome



# Tourism Master Plan Research

- Natural Beauty was identified as one of the region's greatest assets
- 84% of prospective visitors surveyed associate our area with outdoor recreation
- The local industry considers outdoor recreation attractions both a great strength and a high priority for the future of the region
- The greatest opportunity for outdoor recreation is connectivity

# Strategic Plan – The Next 3 Years

- Support destination-wide outdoor recreation improvement efforts by auditing web listings across multiple platforms to assess the existing representation and sentiment of the industry
- Craft a destination stewardship plan (or strategy) with the goal of fostering responsible use of outdoor recreation assets and advancing a culture of caring among our stakeholders
- Identify and promote visitor experiences that remove barriers and provide equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their (dis)abilities



# Thank You!

**Chris Ridder – Destination Development Manager**

**Courtney Cacatian – Executive Director**

**[development@visitcharlottesville.org](mailto:development@visitcharlottesville.org)**