



LAND USE & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes – February 23, 2017

Attendees:

Kyle Ashmun	Ecosystem Services
Jenny Biché	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Deirdre Clark	John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District
Steve Cook	Virginia Department of Health
Lynn Crump	Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
Michelle Edwards	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
Bryan Hofmann	Friends of the Rappahannock
Peter Hujik	Piedmont Environmental Council
Beverly Hunter	RappFLOW
Kyle Settle	Culpeper County
Jessie Thomas-Blate	American Rivers
Celia Vuocolo	Piedmont Environmental Council

American Rivers' Dam Removal Assistance

Jessie Thomas-Blate, American Rivers

Ms. Thomas-Blate delivered a presentation on American Rivers' dam removal program (see attached). Her organization is partnering with Friends of Rappahannock (FOR) and Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) to restore rivers in the Rappahannock-Rapidan region, and is seeking feedback from the committee on how best to conduct outreach to local landowners.

Ms. Thomas-Blate explained that reasons to remove dams can include improving water quality, fish passage, ecosystem health, and boat access, as well as to decrease liability. Many dams are no longer serving their original purpose. Some in this area of the country were built for use by mills, while others were built for flood control but are not effective, or are failing.

Removal can cost less than repairing a dam. Costs of dam ownership include liability, maintenance, inspections, and repairs. There are funding sources for removal, but usually not for repair. Cost is the primary factor owners remove dams.

In 2016, American Rivers removed 76 dams across the country. In Virginia, American Rivers has removed 34 dams total since the program began. American Rivers, the Virginia Department

of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Army Corps of Engineers and Friends of the Rappahannock worked together to remove the Embrey Dam in Fredericksburg. Since removal, migratory fish numbers have increased substantially, with fish being found 100 miles upstream of the dam site. Dam removal opened up 71 miles of spawning habitat on the mainstem Rappahannock River and 35 miles on the Rapidan River.

The Chesapeake Fish Passage Prioritization Tool (http://maps.tnc.org/EROF_ChesapeakeFPP/) assesses the potential ecological benefit of removing or bypassing dams, and includes 2078 dams in Virginia. Ms. Thomas-Blate noted that only regulated dams are included and the data has not yet been ground-truthed, which is what American Rivers hopes to do now for high-priority dams in the Rappahannock-Rapidan Region. American Rivers sent letters to owners of approximately 300 dams in Virginia for which an address could be found, but received a poor response. They tried inviting the 50 owners along the Rappahannock River to a free paddle event with food, but received no response and had to cancel.

Ms. Thomas-Blate stated that her organization is now looking for feedback on the following:

- Who to talk to? What community leaders need to be on board?
- Do you have relationships with any of these people?
- What community events should American Rivers participate in?
- What messages will resonate with dam owners in this area?

Deirdre Clark suggested reaching out to downstream landowners who stand to be impacted by dam failure. Jenny Biche mentioned that Hazard Mitigation Plan updates are happening now in Virginia, so an effort to remove failing dams is timely. Ms. Clark asked whether the program had a stream order limit, to which Ms. Thomas-Blate responded no.

Kyle Settle asked if there is a minimum size limit for dams to be included in the program. Ms. Thomas-Blate replied no, but the database does not include culverts. However, American Rivers is interested in dam removal and downstream culvert combination projects, which can be a very efficient use of program resources.

An attendee asked whether funding was available for dam removal. Ms. Thomas-Blate stated that American Rivers can provide:

- Financial assistance, with the amount dependent on cost and priority
- Technical assistance, and
- Simplified process for the dam owner.

Beverly Hunter asked whether the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is involved. Ms. Thomas-Blate replied that American Rivers will meet with VDOT if a VDOT culvert is involved, but the Department does not own a lot of actual dams.

For additional information on American Rivers' dam removal effort or to provide recommendations, please contact Jessie Thomas-Blate at jthomas@americanrivers.org or (202) 243-7030.

Stream Restoration Prioritization Map

Kyle Ashmun, Ecosystem Services, and Celia Vuocolo, Piedmont Environmental Council

Mr. Ashmun and Ms. Vuocolo provided an overview of the Upper Rapidan and Rappahannock Eastern Brook Trout Initiative and the draft stream restoration prioritization map. Their presentation is available on the committee webpage at <http://www.rregion.org/envcmte.html>. Since 2015, Ecosystem Services has been working with PEC and FOR on this initiative, with funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Trout Unlimited, and Patagonia.

The brook trout is an indicator species, meaning the health of a given population of brook trout can be used as a surrogate for the health of the overall aquatic ecosystem. Even though this initiative focuses on improving the brook trout's habitat, it will also improve the habitat of many other species and overall water quality in these rivers.

PEC sent out a survey to land owners to determine what types of restoration projects would be of greatest interest. The majority answered fish passage and stream crossing projects. 133 crossings and 255 structures were then assessed, with 35% private and 65% VDOT. 40 crossings were not assessed. Of those assessed, 15% of the structures have an outlet drop greater than one foot and 20% of the crossings have a severe channel constriction, making them a barrier to fish passage. Project partners are now working to address the top 30 priority projects, starting with Bottom Branch in Rappahannock County and Kinsey Run in Madison County, which have been funded by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants.

Project Partners have created a GIS prioritization map with weighted criteria to rank 113 sites in Rappahannock, Madison and Greene Counties, with a goal of identifying sites to improve/restore EBT habitat. Criteria examples include:

- Impediment vs. Blockage
- Landowner Interest/Willingness
- Crossing Stability/Structural Condition
- Existing EBT population status (Allopatric vs. Sympatric)
- Re-introduction of Brown Trout
- Proximity to TMDL impairment
- Water Quality (ph, temp, pollutants)
- Proximity to potential habitat restoration upstream & downstream
- Implementation Cost

A recent pilot project included a combination of stream crossings, removal of blockages and stream restoration. The biggest landowner issue voiced so far has been maintenance concerns, to which project staff informed the landowners the project would actually result in less maintenance.

Ms. Clark asked if project staff are coordinating with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Mr. Ashmun replied yes, they would like to coordinate with the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District as well.

The prioritization GIS map will be available in Fall 2017. Project partners are now seeking additional supporting data and comments from other organizations. Next steps include design and implement Jump Start Projects outside of time of year restrictions (October-March), and eastern brook trout population mapping (Temperature Monitoring and Fish Sampling) with DGIF and other interested parties. Project Partners are also seeking to further develop the public outreach component and establish additional partnerships.

For further information concerning this project, please contact Kyle Ashmun at Kyle@ecosystemllc.com or (443) 875-7804, or contact Celia Vuocolo at cvuocolo@pecva.org or (540) 347-2334 ext. 7086.

Chesapeake Bay TMDL Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) III Update

Michelle Edwards, RRRC

Ms. Edwards presented highlights of the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) WIP III Outreach Meeting she attended on January 30 (see the attached excerpts from DEQ's presentation). DEQ is required to submit the draft Phase III WIP to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by August 2018 to comply with the requirements of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL. DEQ is now holding stakeholder meetings at its regional offices as part of the initial outreach.

Future stakeholder engagement plans include two rounds of regional engagement work sessions in mid-late 2017, and a final engagement round in early 2018. EPA is scheduled to release draft WIP III Planning Targets to the states in June 2017, with final targets expected in December 2017.

Currently, there is limited information about what will be asked of local governments, although DEQ's plans appear to rely on a continuation of current programs and policies. As during the WIP II process local governments and other stakeholders will be asked to identify any unreported pollutant reductions that are already being achieved or planned, and develop strategies to assist in reducing pollutant loads. DEQ will be reviewing local programs and initiatives to identify gaps and optimize existing programs and projects.

When asked whether a grant program will be available to assist localities in providing the requested information, DEQ staff stated during the outreach meeting that they hope to be able to provide some sort of funding. Whether it will be similar to the grants offered during WIP II is unknown, and there are no guarantees that any financial assistance will be made available. Ms. Edwards will continue to update the committee as additional information is released.

RRRC Initiative Updates

Regional Food Policy Council – Michelle Edwards, RRRC

In conjunction with its local foods marketing effort, RRRC received technical assistance funding from the Path Foundation to develop a brand name and logo for the region's locally grown food and beverages. A consumer survey was conducted earlier this month and public input sessions

are planned for March 7th to assist the branding consultant in developing the regional brand. A flyer for the input sessions was distributed to attendees (see attached). Two sessions with identical content will be held at the Culpeper Police Community Room and Fauquier Hospital Conference Center.

The Council's next meeting will be held March 21, 2017, at 6:30 pm in the RRRC Conference Room. The branding consultant will present the results of the branding effort during the meeting, including consumer survey results and the recommended brand name and logo. While only appointed members may vote, meetings are open to the public and participation in discussions is encouraged. For further information about the regional Rappahannock-Rapidan Food Policy Council, including upcoming meetings, please contact Michelle Edwards at (540) 829-7450 or medwards@rrregion.org, or visit RRRC's Regional Food System webpage at www.rrregion.org/foodsystem.html.

Tween Rivers Agri-artisan Trail – Jenny Biché, RRRC

As part of its USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program Grant project, RRRC hired an intern who has been assisting with social media, photographing farms in the region for use in marketing, and creating a newsletter for the Tween Rivers Trail, as well as assisting with consumer surveys for the regional local foods marketing effort. The University of Virginia student, who will be employed throughout the spring semester, will also be assisting with interviews of Trail members.

On January 26th, the Regional Tourism Committee held their quarterly agri-tourism workshop, this time on social media. Thirty-eight people attended the presentation by the Virginia Tourism Corporation's Digital Marketing Director.

The next workshop is planned for April 25th at Rockhill Farm in Culpeper County. From 9:00-11:00am the Regional Tourism Directors will hold a session on building Visitor Packages that can increase business through collaboration. From 1:00-3:00pm, Dr. Kimberly Morgan, Assistant Professor at Virginia Tech, will provide an overview of Market Maker, a national database for the agricultural industry. The online portal provides a user-friendly search tool to connect buyers, farmers/ranchers, fisheries, farmers markets, processors/packers, wineries, restaurants, etc. Cost to attend is \$20 for one session and \$30 for both.

Additionally, a networking event for Trail members is planned for June 8th. Ms. Biche noted that there are now 64 Trail sites, a significant increase from the original 32 when the Tween Rivers Trail was launch in January 2015. Ms. Hunter asked if a map of the Trail sites is available. Ms. Biche replied that a map is available on the trail website.

For additional information on the Tween Rivers Trail, please visit www.tweenriverstrail.com, or contact Jenny Biché at jkbiche@rrregion.org or (540) 829-7450.

Member Roundtable

- **Peter Hujik and Ciela Vuocolo, PEC**– Peter is currently working on an agricultural easement on the Rapidan River. Additionally, PEC will be holding a Water Quality

Monitoring Training on May 6th in Orlean in partnership with FOR and John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District.

- **Deirdre Clark, John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District**– the District is trying to determine how to deal with the 70% reduction in state cost-share funding for agricultural BMPs.
- **Bryan Hofmann, FOR**– the annual By the Rappahannock – For the Rappahannock event is scheduled for April 9th, 1:00-4:30pm at Marriot Ranch in Hume (see attached flyer). Cost is \$35, or free to those who participate in the morning tree planting. Additionally, the Wild and Scenic Film Festival will be held at German Community College's Daniel Technology Center in Culpeper on March 18 at 1:30 pm (see attached flyer).
- **Kyle Settle, Culpeper County**– the County will be hosting a TMDL Forest Retention meeting on April 25th in its board room. The meeting is part of the Rappahannock River Basin Commission's Healthy Watershed Forest Initiative.
- **Beverly Hunter**– Ms. Hunter won a USDA PRISM grant as a private citizen to educate people in Rappahannock County about invasive species.

Next Land Use & Environment Committee Meeting:

The next Land Use and Environment Committee meeting is scheduled for May 25, 2017 at 10:00 am – 12:00 noon in the RRRC conference room. Please provide any suggestions for future meeting topics to Michelle Edwards at medwards@rrregion.org.