

CURRENTS

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Summer 2009

Preserving and Promoting the Natural and Cultural Resources of the Dan River Basin through Stewardship, Recreation and Education

DAN RIVER BASIN ASSOCIATION

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Meetings of the DRBA Board of Directors

are held on the third Wednesday of January, April, July, and October. All DRBA members are welcome to attend. The next Board meeting will be at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 15 at the Eden City Hall.

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On the Cover...

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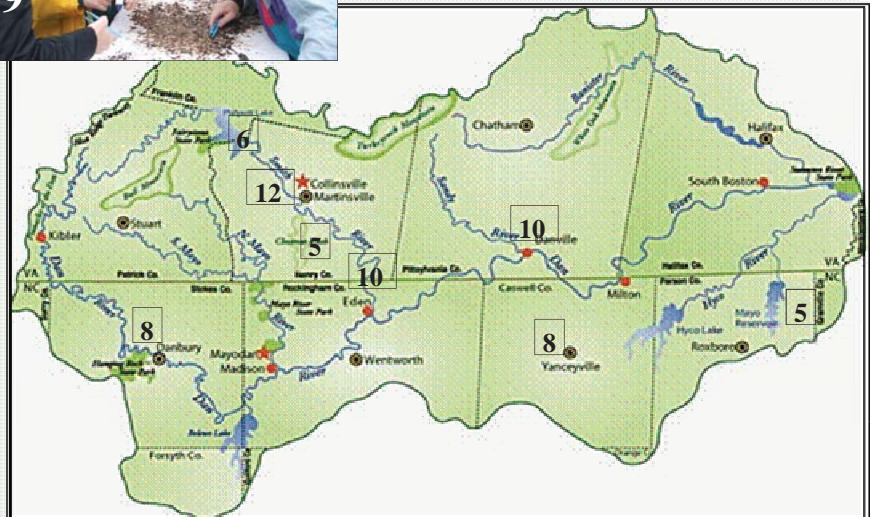
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Greetings from the Director

Dan River Guide... It's here!

An Insider's Guide to the Dan River in North Carolina and Virginia, described by Lindley Butler as "brilliant," is now available on DRBA's web site.

Sized for travel and printed on waterproof paper, the full-color guide follows the river's winding course through 125 miles of rural Piedmont North Carolina and Virginia. It features more than 200 color photographs and 52 strip maps that follow the river from northwestern Stokes County to Milton, NC. Each map reveals fascinating facts, river information and local highlights.

"The river guide unlocks our little-known region and showcases our considerable assets—our small towns, stunning natural beauty, and fascinating history," says Butler. "Other places have river maps, but this is way beyond that. There's nothing like this anywhere else."

The guide first leads visitors through the striking scenery, rocky outcrops and cliffs of Stokes County, including river outfitters, rapids, fishing, special natural areas and other features. The Rockingham County maps reveal the historic navigation structures that channel the flow for year-round boating.

As the gradient lessens and the river greets Virginia, the guide includes the City of Danville's parks, trails, historic tours and five dams. Leaving Danville, the Dan crosses back into North Carolina, reaching the historic river town of Milton in rural Caswell County, the ending point for the guide.

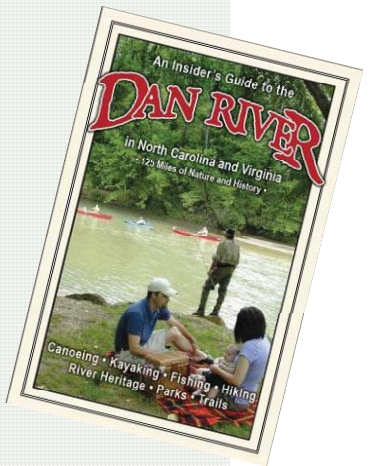
Throughout the guide are notes regarding places to fish, float, picnic or watch wildlife. Major highlights include river towns and places to explore local history. The guide also features farms, orchards, wineries, art markets and bicycle trails, as well as web links for information for visitors.

The companion Smith River Guide will be published this summer. DRBA hopes to publish future river guides for the Mayo and Banister and sections of the Dan that lie upstream in Patrick County, Virginia and downstream in Halifax County, Virginia.

To order your full-color waterproof guide for the Dan River, please visit the DRBA store at www.danriver.org. All proceeds from the sale of the guide support work to preserve and promote the natural and cultural resources of the Dan River Basin.

This project received support from the Golden LEAF Foundation and the Virginia Environmental Endowment, as well as DRBA's members and donors.

Katherine Mull



PRESIDENT'S SPACE

What a busy quarter for DRBA!

Our members and guests enjoyed getting back on the water with First Saturday Outings on Mayo Lake, the Smith River and a hike on the Danville Riverwalk—all great adventures! We welcome new DRBA Board member Kevin Moore, elected at the March Annual Celebration, and Robin Light, who has joined our staff as Office Manager in the Eden office.

The rapid pace of project work continues across the basin. "An Insider's Guide to the Dan River in North Carolina and Virginia," a year-long effort, is now available at www.danriver.org, and its sister publication, the Smith River Guide, is nearing completion.

These two resources are a 'must-have' for all who enjoy paddling the Dan and Smith Rivers.

I am honored and humbled by the confidence of DRBA's Board of Directors having entrusted the office of President to me. As we move forward, the growth that DRBA has experienced will continue to require the board's guidance. Our efforts will focus on the development of our organization as a sustainable resource in a difficult economic environment.

I welcome your collective wisdom and experience to ensure DRBA's continued success.

Wayne Kirkpatrick



Fieldale Trail Phase II Grand Opening

Some 25 people braved a cool, cloudy day for the grand opening of Phase II of the Fieldale Trail on March 28. Extending 1.3 miles downriver from the first 1-mile section, which opened July 2007, the new portion, sometimes tucked between a towering cliff and the river, is a peaceful, wooded greenway graced with canopies of rhododendrons, large sycamore trees, and abundant wildflowers.

Speaking at the event, both State Sen. Roscoe Reynolds and Henry County Supervisor Jim Adams praised DRBA, its Rivers & Trails affiliate, and Henry County for their collaborative effort on the trail, which they see as an economic development tool as well as a path to a healthier lifestyle for the community.

DRBA's Project Manager Jennifer Doss thanked the Dominion Foundation, the project's major funder, and Frith Construction who, by using small equipment and sustainable building techniques, created "a trail having a minimum impact on the environment while having a maximum level of interest." She noted that the Fieldale Trail is part of the proposed 45 mile "Smith River Trail System" from Philpott Dam

to confluence with the Dan River, as well as the "Beaches to Bluegrass Trail" across Southern Virginia.

Bryant Brooks of Dominion Foundation praised all involved in creating "this special place" and indicated that sometimes the easiest part of a project is helping pay for it.

Doss also thanked Boxley Materials, Patrick Henry Correctional Unit 28, Dave Wilson, Joe & Ellen Jessee, Kay Slaughter, and the agriculture department of Magna Vista High School for their support. For granting use of their land, she thanked The Lester Group, Mr. James Stone, and Henry County Public Service Authority. She added, "The Dan River Basin Association is blessed with many volunteers who are working hard to help transform Martinsville & Henry County into a recreational destination."

Several walkers and members of the Henry County Bike Club, which holds regular 4th Saturday rides on the Fieldale Trail, were the first to initiate the new trail. Already the trail is experiencing heavy use. When asked, users rave about the trail and are incredibly excited about the planned future extension.

Ellen Jessee

Mayo Lake in April

April 4 at Mayo Lake in Person County promised to be a 70ish, no-wind day, so I left my windbreaker in the car. All was A-OK until I paddled out of the cove, the wind picked up, and I was thinking I would be just perfect with that windbreaker on. OK, lesson learned, you can always stow it if you don't need it.

Fortunately we were hugging the shoreline, exploring all the little coves. One kept getting narrower, until branches intermingled overhead, creating an intimate little place. I just love little places like this. I guess I expect to see critters enjoying their wet, cozy little environment.

Signs of early spring were evident. The maples were loaded with seed, red seeds for the red maple, and yellow for the silver maple that looked like a mass of yellow blooms until I paddled up for a closer inspection, and lo and behold, maple seeds. Herein lies the value of these group outings. They make you more attentive to what's around you. You question more, everybody does, and someone usually has an answer.

Back on shore, we took lunch at one of the pavilions, then went for a short hike. The park seemed underutilized, but I can tell you it is a little gem and would recommend it to anyone.

Jeffrey M. Bliss



DRBA Earns Two Awards

DRBA received two awards this spring, from the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH) and the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce (MHCCC).

VMNH honored non-profit groups, businesses, and individuals at the 22nd annual Thomas Jefferson Awards in April, given for contributions to and support of the natural sciences. DRBA was the proud recipient of the Matthew Fontaine Maury Distinguished Service Award, for providing exemplary service in the development of the museum. The award was accepted by DRBA staff, Brian Williams and Jennifer Doss

Dr. David Jones, a VMNH board member and founder of the local Trout in the Classroom project, described the extensive work DRBA has done since The Harvest Foundation grant led to its work in Martinsville and Henry County. Included are developing a new system of riverside trails, taking over the Trout in the Classroom project, creating Smith River access points, heritage projects and more. DRBA has “promoted the ideas of the Virginia Museum of Natural History,” Jones added.

Keynote speaker for the evening was Jay Gilliam, master trainer for Virginia Save Our Streams. Mr. Gilliam spoke about the need for education and cooperation to protect our natural resources. He pointed out that local people should not look solely to

government to solve water quality issues; everyone should be working together toward the common goal of “clean and healthy water for all.”

In addition to the VMNH honors, DRBA received the 2009 Tourism Achievement Award presented by MHCCC. A luncheon at the Bassett Country Club honored businesses both large and small for their various contributions to the local economy. DRBA and its Martinsville Henry County Rivers & Trails Group were recognized for their work in developing the Smith River Trail System, river access points, and numerous programs to enhance quality of life and attract tourists.

Jennifer Doss



Brian Williams and Jennifer Doss, third and fourth from left, display the Matthew Fontaine Maury Distinguished Service Award presented by the VMNH at the Thomas Jefferson Awards Program

DRBA Congratulates Philpott's New Water Monitors

Philpott Lake now has three certified volunteer water monitors watching out for it.

Linda Drage and Robb Herbst of Friends of Philpott and Mary Lawson of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are leading the way to help make sure future generations have access to healthy and safe water.

These three volunteers have completed the certification requirements of Virginia Save Our Streams and are now trained to independently assess the ecological health of the area's streams.

So, just how do they do that? The numbers and kinds of bugs taken in a sample from the streams provide the information to determine the biological health of the water. “With the right training, almost anyone can learn how to do it,” says Jenny Edwards, DRBA staff. “It’s a lot of fun—like solving a living puzzle.”

According to Wayne Kirkpatrick, DRBA President and workshop leader, “The volume of accurate and current information about the water quality of our streams that is readily available to the public is not

large. Their work to provide additional data is much appreciated. On behalf of the Virginia Citizens for Water Quality and DRBA, I thank them for their efforts to become certified monitors.”

“Volunteer water monitoring is a growing trend,” Jenny says. “We welcome anyone interested in learning more about it. The workshops are free and open to the public.”

In addition to Philpott Lake, DRBA is working with high- and middle-school teachers to monitor three sites near the proposed site for uranium mining in Pittsylvania County. The next target area for training volunteer teams is Halifax County.

DRBA's volunteer water monitoring initiative is funded by DRBA members, Virginia Environmental Endowment, and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Project partners for Philpott Lake are the Friends of Philpott and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Jenny Edwards

Uranium Studies

The Uranium Mining Subcommittee of the Virginia Coal and Energy Commission was appointed in November 2008 to oversee studies of uranium mining and milling in Virginia. The subcommittee is considering two studies – a technical study and a socioeconomic study. The National Academy of Sciences has yet to decide whether it will undertake the technical study. The subcommittee has not discussed the socioeconomic study publicly; nor has the subcommittee discussed funding options for either study.

Both studies should focus on real-life experience at modern mines, mills, and tailings sites and identify both available evidence and knowledge gaps. Proponents have claimed that uranium is mined safely all over the world and have touted the benefits that uranium mining will bring to our communities. We need to see actual sites that demonstrate these claims, if such sites exist. Regulations, however stringent, are not evidence of safe operations. Computer modeling alone is also not an adequate basis for deciding the best policy for the Commonwealth. We need evidence.

On May 21st the subcommittee amended the technical study draft to clarify that the study is *for the purpose of assisting the Commonwealth to determine whether uranium mining, milling, and processing can be undertaken in a manner that safeguards the environment, natural and historic resources, agricultural lands, and the health and well-being of its citizens.*

The subcommittee also unanimously approved the addition of this critical task:

Analyze the impact of uranium mining, milling, processing, and reclamation operations on public health, safety, and the environment at sites with comparable geologic, hydrologic, climatic, and population characteristics to those found in the Commonwealth. Such analysis shall describe any available mitigating measures to reduce or eliminate the negative impacts from uranium operations.

The subcommittee approved the amended study description by a vote of 7-2. The vote repeated the split over a controversial amendment which would have added explicit language regarding tailings management and assessment of available methods of remediation in the event of a leak. Some subcommittee members thought the study already addressed tailings; others considered tailings a glaring omission in the study description. There would have been no harm in clarifying the language, but the majority rejected the amendment.

There may be communities where uranium mining, milling and tailings disposal are done in a way that protects the well-being of people and the environment and will protect them for the necessary thousands of years. There may be communities where uranium mining sustains economic well-being beyond a boom-bust cycle. There may be communities where mine dust, heavy metals and other contaminants in groundwater, and the stigma of radiation and mining do no harm to health, recreation and tourism, established businesses and schools, and economic development. The technical and socioeconomic studies should identify these communities if they exist. We have the responsibility to see them for ourselves before we consider lifting the moratorium on uranium mining in the Commonwealth.

Find information about the Uranium Mining Subcommittee here:

<http://dls.state.va.us/groups/cec/Uranium/meetings.htm>

To see a description of the technical study, click on *Final Scope of Study*.

Learn more about the National Academies' study process here:

<http://sites.nationalacademies.org/nrc/PoliciesandProcedures/index.htm>

Katie Whitehead

Caswell County Heritage Trails

Year One work on the Heritage Trail Master Plan for Caswell County has been broken into two components:

"Boots on the ground" planning for the senior center and other trails, and

Big picture data collection, analysis, and workshop preparation

With boots on the ground, a majority of the trail routes identified by the Piedmont Triad Council of Governments have been flagged and are ready to begin construction.

Despite some unavoidable delays caused by soil conditions, heavy spring rains, and maternity leave for the grant administrator, construction on the Stream Walk Trail, our "Priority One" trail segment, will commence on the first available dry day. The original plan for a short and straight trail leading to the stream has been revised, relocating the trailhead where the Outer Loop Trail is to begin, adding over 300 feet to the original trail, and incorporating a boardwalk to accommodate stormwater runoff.

These changes have added to the cost of the Stream Walk Trail. To resolve this dilemma, the new route is a "meeting in the middle" that eliminates the need for an Outer Loop Connector that would have included a bridge. DRBA is also pursuing additional funding sources to cover the cost of another bridge along the Senior Center Outer Loop. From an experiential standpoint, there has been no compromise.

Moving from boot level to the big picture, ongoing research includes gathering local and regional GIS data, trail networks (existing and planned), open and natural space inventories, and other relevant layers of information. When compiled into readable and usable maps, the collected information will provide useful graphic aids for working with stakeholders and the public during workshops to envision and prioritize heritage trails for Caswell County.

Most importantly, making connections in the community has been vital in the "welcoming" period of this first five months. A variety of approaches for meeting the people of Caswell County and the region have ranged from one-on-one meetings with City/County officials and Board members to setting up a booth and speaking with the general public at events. The most fun and interesting method, however, has

been stopping by local restaurants and crossroad general stores: the pulse of the community usually beats at these locations in rural communities.

News Flash: At the end of June the first 800 feet of Stream Walk Trail, including Boardwalk, were constructed!

Next Steps:

- 1.Begin construction on over one mile of Mountain Bike Trail utilizing volunteers and members of the Southern Virginia Mountain Bike Association
- 2.Seek funding for School-Stream Connector
- 3.Heritage Trail Master Plan public workshops.
(Fall/Winter 2009)

Chad Hall



Volunteer Mike Stanley helps to cut down trees in the corridor as trail material is being delivered

Memorial and Tribute to Ben Lackey



Ben's wife, Jo Lackey

Two words—persimmon pudding! Never have these two words meant so much to the DRBA family as we honored the memory of Ben Lackey at a service held at the Danbury Town Park in April.

Friends and family joined together on the beautiful spring day to remember Ben, a member of the DRBA Board of Directors, who died in a farming accident at his home in 2007. DRBA President Will Truslow and Mike Vaughan of the Rockingham Naturalist Club spoke to the crowd of folks gathered to dedicate a plaque at the base of an American Holly Tree planted in memory of Ben.

Others shared their stories—not only of Ben's kindnesses, of his conser-

vation efforts, of his spirit and of his dedication to family, friends and the farm he cherished—but of his famous persimmon pudding! His loving wife, Jo, spoke of the man she shared a lifetime with, contributing the laughter, tears, and love he shared with all who knew him.

At the conclusion of the program, we sampled pudding made by Ben's recipe, which is printed on the back page of DRBA's Fall 2008 issue.

We have missed Ben these many months—Godspeed.

Water Quality News

Trout in the Classroom (TIC), the Tub of Bugs, and stream monitoring programs continued to grow this spring. Sponsored by Dr. David Jones for its fourth year, TIC saw 26 trout tanks successfully “adopted” in schools in Franklin, Henry, Patrick and Pittsylvania counties and the City of Martinsville. In all, they raised about 2,500 trout for release into the Smith River.

Stocking the fish in the river is only one benefit of the program, which raises awareness of the value of our natural resources, encourages stewardship for our rivers and teaches our students that a waterway is a common thread between people, communities, and the world. The students learn that view shed alterations and pollution sources, as well as cleanups, buffer management, and recreation influence the quality of the water and our experiences with our streams.

Catfish in the Classroom will be coming to Danville in the fall. Meanwhile, additional classrooms request TIC tanks for the new school year. As the programs expand, more volunteers are needed to monitor tank health and present watershed programs to the students. Check with your local school to become a TIC mentor. Additional stories and photos are posted at

www.danriverbasinadventures.blogspot.com/.

The Tub of Bugs, a favorite for all ages, has been at 27 events this spring, teaching how the presence of macroinvertebrates aids us in determining the health of a stream. During a special event at the JEB Stuart Birthplace Trust, elementary school students learned about watersheds and participated in *Stream-The Movie*.

With coordination by DRBA Program Manager Jenny Edwards, new stream monitoring groups are forming, including PHCC biology students of DRBA member Rebecca Adcock. Additional groups are planned for Meadows of Dan near the river’s headwaters and Halifax County groups in the east, including the River Traders Bait and Tackle Shop, Halifax County Government personnel and Rangers of the Staunton River State Park.

The Dan River Basin has abundant water flowing in beautiful streams and rivers. DRBA is working diligently to address its mission of promoting and preserving our natural resources by providing water quality education and stewardship opportunities for our citizens.

Wayne Kirkpatrick

Kirkpatrick Wins DAR National Conservation Medal



Wayne Kirkpatrick, a volunteer and current President of Dan River Basin Association, recently received the National Conservation Medal from the Society of the National Daughters of the American

Revolution. Kirkpatrick volunteers hundreds of hours each year, bringing the Trout in the Classroom Program to students in 26 classrooms in Henry, Patrick, Franklin and Pittsylvania Counties. He also trains residents on how to monitor rivers and streams in their communities, providing data to conservation groups that conduct studies to improve water quality. Kirkpatrick was nominated by the Patrick Henry Chapter DAR. He is shown accepting the Conservation Medal from Margaret Smith, Conservation Chairman for Patrick Henry Chapter DAR.

Brenda Hundley

Marrowbone to Mitchell in May

DRBA's May 2 outing was our first river trip of the year. Korinne never turns down a canoe ride provided it's short. When her little arms get tired the trip stops being fun for both of us. We offered my kayak to a friend to see if a kayak was his cup of tea.

A ride with DRBA was a great way to run an unfamiliar stretch of water. There were people of all ages, all levels of experience and all walks of life. The shuttles were well planned and parking was pre-arranged. Point and sweep persons were assigned, and everyone was helpful and pitched in at the put-ins and take-outs.



The dam at Martinsville had released extra water, a cushion between the boats and the rocks. I thought it was just right. The multi-colored flotilla of 30 or 40 boats reminded me of a full clothes line on a breezy day.

The highlight for me was watching one of the kayakers pull out a bubble maker and scatter bubbles into the air and over the river. I expected the bubbles to pop when they touched the water. Instead they floated on the water for several seconds, creating a whimsical backdrop to the peaceful setting.

After a break, Korinne switched into the kayak, and Bob took the stern of the canoe. I no longer had control over where Korinne went. To her credit she never got hung up, and she never fell out of the kayak. After about 30 minutes, she had had enough. She said, "This isn't as easy as you two make it look." In the process of switching boats, Korinne lost her footing and slipped waist deep into the river. As Bob and I grabbed her arms to pull her out, I noticed the sweep paddler sitting close by to provide help if needed. My mind's eye snapped a picture. It was a good day on the river spent with gracious people. Life is good.

Carl Smith

June 6th Outing...Danville Riverwalk

Tom Edmonds, trip coordinator, alerted members that DRBA's river trip on Saturday, June 6 from Angler's Park in Danville, VA to Milton, NC was cancelled due to high water levels. DRBA members studied river gauge reports and noted heavy rainfall at the headwaters of the Dan.

About a dozen would-be paddlers showed up that morning to observe the river firsthand. Several members opted for a short hike on the Riverwalk Trail, a paved 8-mile trail used by dozens of cyclists and lined by tall Sycamores and Box Elder. A ballet of Tree Swallows dove in spirals over the Dan while logs and other debris raced downstream.

In the park groundhogs and eastern cottontails grazed unfazed by human intrusion. Reptiles included a black rat snake and a large river cooter (turtle). An irruption of box elder bugs caught our eye with their bright red and black markings.

Back at the Wi-Fi accessible picnic shelter, a local fisherman surmised it would take barely two hours to float to Milton today. He pointed to the high water mark etched clearly along the banks as the waters receded.

Hurrah for the life force of our home river that feeds and enriches the land around us.

Lucy Berry

MEMBERSHIPS AND DONATIONS

March 2009 – May 2009

MEMBERSHIPS

Sponsor

Dr. Roy Truslow

Steward

Greg and Phyllis Gendron
Allen Trelease

Corporate

Triad River Runners

Friend

Jeff Bliss
Clark Graves
Mike Linville
Alidean Roberson
Andrew, Julie, and
Alexandra Talbert
Lee Plummer Templeton
Allen and Jenny Walton

Organization

Fayette Area Historical
Initiative
Rockingham County
Historical Society

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Swannie Chastain
John Hall
George McManus
Lynn Pritchett
Carl Smith and
Robin Whiting-Smith
Lisa and Clark Tyson
Kermit Via

Individual

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Jim Belcher
Jim Corum
Michael Davis
Mary Edwards
Shari Hopkins
L. Alex Jordan
Judith King
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William Truslow

Friend

Danville Running &
Fitness Club
Wayne and Betty
Kirkpatrick

Other

Great Outdoor Provision
Company
Seniors Unlimited

Smith River Adopt-A-Trail Program

Everyone loves walking and biking trails, but as more trails are being built in the area, upkeep can put a strain on our county and city maintenance crews. Thanks to the Smith River Trail System's Adopt-a-Trail Program, volunteers are helping to maintain and enhance trails for the community to enjoy.

One Adopt-a-Trail group, "Friends of the Fieldale Trail," has built and installed bluebird boxes along the trail, initiated a recycling program, and worked with other volunteers to build an additional 1,700 feet of trail.

What is it? The Adopt-A-Trail Program provides opportunities for volunteers to assist DRBA in supporting Henry County (VA) and Eden (NC) Parks & Recreation departments by coordinating the monitoring, maintaining, and enhancement of trails and trailhead facilities along the Smith River Trail System.

Who can adopt a trail? School and youth groups, scout troops, church, community and service organizations, businesses, families, individuals or groups can adopt a trail to help preserve our land and provide safe, enjoyable access to the outdoors.

What can volunteers do? Activities include keeping the trail surface free of sticks, rocks and other debris; pruning small limbs from the trail corridor; cleaning drainage ditches; and clearing debris from bridges and stairs. Other responsibilities include litter clean-up, maintaining the trailhead, and reporting vandalism, trail hazards or safety issues.

Why should you participate? Adopting a trail

allows you to be actively involved in conserving and improving the resource for all to enjoy. The effort brings you closer to the environment and your community. Enjoy the time outdoors and the personal satisfaction gained through volunteering on a local trail.

Where can you volunteer? Trails now available for adoption include the Smith River Greenway in Eden, and in Martinsville/Henry County the Uptown Spur Trail, two trails in Doe Run Park, and three trails in the Gravelly Nature Preserve.

How to get started: Contact Jennifer Doss at 276-634-2545 or jdoss@danriver.org to register, choose a trail, and learn about exciting volunteer opportunities. Once adopted, the section of trail will receive a sign with your team's name, and each team member will receive a volunteer T-shirt to wear while working on the trails.



Friends of Fieldale Trail at a trail-building day

Jennifer Doss

DRBA Outings

July 18

Jones Lake,
Third Saturday Outing

August 1

Dan River, NC 89
to Dan River Company

September 5

Dan River, Draper Landing
to Berry Hill

October 3

Smith River, Island Ford
Landing to
Eden Wildlife Access
(NC Big Sweep and
Mountains-to-Sea Trail)

Dan River Basin Association
413 Church Street,¹² Suite 401
Eden, NC 27288-3242

TO:

Visit us on the web at www.danriver.org

FAHI and DRBA Historic Graveyard Project

Fayette Area Historical Initiative (FAHI), a DRBA organizational member, is beginning a project to preserve the history of African American cemeteries in the Martinsville-Henry County area. DRBA is lending technical, grant writing, and field assistance. The Virginia Environmental Endowment, impressed by DRBA's work to document and preserve the family cemetery of former slaves Mr. John Burgess and Mrs. Jane Burgess, is funding the effort to expand that work more fully.

The idea for an online registry came from other web-based cemetery projects. But what makes this registry unique is that it will include an inventory of natural features located in the cemeteries *and* offer public events on the historic bonds that African Americans have with the natural world.

Besides conducting graveyard clean-ups and recording natural inventories, the project will include educational programs and community discussions on topics such as how historical landscape preservation can help protect rivers and green space; African-American farming and land stewardship practices; meaning of African-

American burial rites; and rich environmental ethics of the African Diaspora as expressed in myths, folklore and spiritual traditions.

"Documented cemeteries are important steps toward historical preservation," says Curtis Millner, Chairman of the Board of Directors, FAHI. "They are historical with stories to tell to locals as well as tourists and visitors." Jump starting the project are extensive research and documentation by local historian Beverly Millner, as well as information and a map of the Sandy Level Baptist Church cemetery provided by Jackie Keen.

In the antebellum period, funerals were rare times when African Americans could practice and affirm their cultural rituals and maintain a sense of identity, community and family. Some burial practices, such as items placed in and on the grave, or the direction feet were pointed, came from the African past. At these times people held in bondage could escape the gaze of the oppressor and commit loved ones to the earth with basic human dignity.

"Landscapes and wild places have been the staging ground for the creation of

our identity and community," says Jenny Edwards, DRBA staff. "Our human story is written there; and nowhere more so than our final resting places. This is where loss and grief find a shared sacred moment with family, friends and other loved ones. At what time is the expression of who we are and what we have meant to each other more important? What could be a more compelling reason to connect to the earth?"

The mission of FAHI, a non-profit museum, is to collect, preserve, and interpret the African American experience in Martinsville-Henry County. The museum is open. Tuesday – Thursday 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. and Friday and Saturday by appointment. Financial donations are appreciated and can be mailed to FAHI, 504 Fayette Street, Martinsville, VA 24112.

Jenny Edwards