

CURRENTS

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Recreation • Education • Stewardship



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Currents Newsletter

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Cover photo

Photo credit Krista Hodges

Photo location Streamside Trees in the Classroom
planting day at Salthouse Branch
(Philpott Lake)

From the Director ”

Tiffany Haworth, Executive Director

As the end of the year approaches, I find myself thankful. Thankful to be associated with DRBA and making a positive impact every single day. Thankful for DRBA's staff and board of directors who are the most dedicated group of people I have ever met. I am so fortunate to be in the company of such compassionate and knowledgeable people every single day.

I am also sincerely grateful for you – you are one of the thousands of supporters, volunteers and partners who generously give their time, energy, skills and treasure to DRBA.

You know we can't do this work alone and you also believe in our mission to ensure that our natural and cultural resources are protected and preserved for future generations. Thank you. Thank you for believing in DRBA's work and being inspired to take action.



Pictured here: DRBA VA Program Manager, Brian Williams, and his wife Patty, who volunteered to plant flowers and mulch at the Fisher Farm Park enhancement project in Ridgeway, VA.

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WATER SAFETY FOR ALL!

Throughout the summer, DRBA was able to host six classes for local residents to become safer on the water. These classes were given at no-cost, thanks to a grant from the Duke Energy Foundation.

Classes were led by Outdoor Women by Jo Proia, an ACA Certified Kayak Instructor located in Summerfield, North Carolina, with the help of DRBA NC Program Coordinator Anna Wheeler.



“About 15 or so years ago DRBA introduced me to the joys of easy river paddling. That First Saturday Outing on the Mayo River ignited a passion for rivers in me that I am so grateful for today,” Proia said. “Their welcoming and safety oriented approach to showing folks the value, beauty and history of our Dan River Watershed affected me deeply that day and the effects will last a lifetime.”

These classes were offered throughout the Dan River Basin in NC including Hanging Rock Lake in Stokes County, Lake Reidsville in Rockingham County, and Farmer Lake in Caswell County. Classes included skills for safe entry into your boat, basic paddle strokes, weather considerations, and general water safety.



The key to all water safety is injury prevention, and wearing a lifejacket (PFD). One River Kayak Safety Class was held during the Dan River State Trail Weekend which allowed those who were ready to take a step off the lake onto moving flatwater a try with an experienced instructor.

The paddle was from Leaksville Landing to the Boat Landing in Eden and included a history lesson about the batteau navigation system and the Leaksville Covered Bridge. To continue the enthusiasm of paddling after the classes, DRBA shared important safety gear such as a dry bag, waterproof flashlight, the Dan River Guide, hats and dry-fit shirts for their next adventure.

Students from all ages, backgrounds, and experiences joined DRBA for the classes. One woman was 75 and learning how to kayak so she could join her friends on their lake paddles with confidence.



This went along with other safety initiatives in NC including the Water Safety signage in Eden and Madison at Klyce Street, Leaksville Landing, and Madison River Park.

While many people are ready to go at an access point and have done their

education, these signs can be another reminder of the importance of understanding dynamic rivers such as the Dan River.

Signs included information about wearing your lifejackets, creating and sharing a trip plan, and avoiding downed objects in the river (strainers).



With funding from the Dan River State Trail, rack cards were printed for distribution at local outfitters, festivals, and municipal buildings. Thanks to volunteer Johanna Vivianco the rack cards were translated to Spanish for further distribution to our local communities. Safety for all is key for us to continue our efforts in creating equitable river experiences for the Dan River Basin.

“To have the honor to teach river and water safety classes for DRBA this past season was a pinnacle of my paddling instruction career,” Proia said. “Working with Anna is a real joy and she makes it fun too as she works so hard! Thank you DRBA for the opportunity to share water safety with our watershed.”

Scan the QR code to stay on top of DRBA events!



DRBA'S FESTIVAL SCENE



EDEN RIVERFEST

RiverFest is an annual event that celebrates Eden, North Carolina's art, history, and river heritage. On September 21, DRBA volunteers and staff joined multiple music artists, dozens of businesses, other non-profit organizations and the largest crowd ever at the 21st Annual RiverFest.

We shared DRBA's upcoming events, multiple projects in the works, and, thanks to a grant from Duke Energy and equipment borrowed from the Harvest Foundation, we gave attendees the opportunity to take a virtual kayak trip down the Smith River. Looking forward to being a part of the 22nd Annual RiverFest next year!

STOKES STOMP

The DRBA booth at the 50th annual Stokes Stomp Festival attracted interest from adults seeking more information about Citizen Water Quality Monitoring (CWQM), teachers looking for ways to enhance their pupil's understanding of river ecology, and children curious about the aquatic macroinvertebrates on display.

DRBA Board Member Kathryn Converse, who was stationed at the booth, was able to have good conversations with the about 52 folks that stopped in.



SMITH RIVERFEST

The 16th annual Smith River Fest was held this year on August 24th at the Smith River Sports Complex in Axton, VA. DRBA held the very first River Fest and later began a partnership with Henry County Parks and Recreation, City of Martinsville, YMCA and Henry County Tourism to grow the festival into the successful event it is today. We had a record attendance at over 2500 people who enjoyed the music, races and vendors.

The kayak/paddleboard demo pool was once again hosted by DRBA and staffed by DRBA board and volunteers. The pool is one of the most popular attractions at the event each year and stays busy all day. DRBA was also responsible for helping with the River Race, the Helgramite Hustle Mud Run and the Blue Ridge Boys and Girls Club Duck Race. A huge thank you to all the volunteers that make this event a premier river festival event that DRBA helped create.



SOVA LATINO FESTIVAL

On September 14, DRBA volunteers shared watershed and safety information with dozens of visitors during the 5th Annual Festival Latino of Southern Virginia. The festival provides opportunities for nonprofits, schools, and first responders to connect with the Latino community while showcasing food, music and dancing of the diverse Latino culture in our region. The food was delicious and the crowd was engaged!

DRBA also attended FarmFest in Stokes County. The staff at the Francisco FarmFest booth provided information about DRBA's mission, activities and educational programs to attendees of the annual FarmFest. Additionally, the DRBA booth was mentioned on air with the local Stuart radio station, WHEO, who was broadcasting from the festival.



TONS OF TRASH REMOVED •••••

Over 40 volunteers removed close to 1,200 pounds of trash from the Smith River, tributaries and roads in Martinsville and Henry during the Annual Smith River Cleanup event held on August 17th.

“It is amazing how hard these volunteers work during the 3- hour event and we are so grateful to each and every one of them who generously donates their time to try and reverse the impact of the people who litter in our area,” DRBA Virginia Program Manager Brian Williams said. “We have all ages come out to help keep our river healthy for people and wildlife. These volunteers are truly making a huge impact for every person who lives in Henry County and Martinsville as well as the thousands of people who live downstream.”

The volunteers met at the Sports Complex at 9:00 a.m. in Axton, VA and chose the option whether to volunteer on water or with land crews. Volunteers were provided gloves, trash bags, trash pickers and safety vests before heading out to start collecting trash. The groups collected trash until about noon before heading back for lunch and raffle drawings at the Sports Complex.

“A lot of the litter and debris washes in from the roads and goes directly into the Smith River. A clean river and a clean community doesn’t just mean healthy fish and wildlife and cleaner drinking water for our citizens. It can also have an impact on economic development and be a factor in companies deciding whether to locate in our region.”

Henry County Beautification Coordinator Tracy McKoy



“No one is getting paid to keep our waterways clean. The only people that are doing this are these very special volunteers who give several hours on a Saturday morning to do it,” said Tiffany Haworth, executive director of DRBA. “Many people don’t realize that when they don’t throw trash in a trash can, it will ultimately end up in the river.”

“If the folks who live in Martinsville and Henry County simply take a moment to throw their trash where it belongs, then these volunteers would not have to pull close to a ton of litter and debris from our local waterways,” Haworth added.

DRBA holds multiple cleanups each year -- stay on top of current events on the DRBA social media pages to participate and do your part in keeping our rivers clean!



Henry County staff and Henry County Adult Detention Center Workforce Crew then collected the trash from the different sites and hauled the trash to the Transfer Station after the event. The biggest items collected were tires and the most popular items were plastic bottles and cans.

Boxley sponsored the lunch this year for volunteers and Angler’s Choice, Hugo’s, Rural King, Henry County, Henry County Public Safety, Rooster Walk, DRBA, and Lisa Simons provided raffle prizes.

••• CLEANING UP IN NORTH CAROLINA

Our river gets so much love, but with love, we need more care!

DRBA Friends and family joined to make a difference this summer on the Dan River. The annual Dan River Cleanup pulled a total of 500 lbs of trash out of the river from Madison River Park to 704 Access in Downtown Madison.



The Eden Purina plant joined DRBA for their Purina Cares week and spent time along Matrimony Creek cleaning up trash around the trail from the recent flooding.

While flooding impacts the trail with sand, erosion, and fallen trees, what people don’t think about is the trash that flows down from local neighborhoods and creeks nearby.

Thanks to our volunteers, three tires, five basketballs, and three trash bags were removed from the site and picked up by our generous partners at the City of Eden. Be sure to pick everything up outside when heavy rains are coming to prevent pollution!



A FAMILY LEGACY IS CREATED —

Fisher Farm Park

Sharon Tahirkheli and her brother Michael Nichols wanted to do something special to honor their parents Cody and Virginia Nichols.

Cody and Virginia were long-time residents of the area, living less than a mile from the Smith River for more than sixty-five years. Cody, even at the age of 87, joined his great-grandchildren to walk the trail at Fisher Farm Park near Marrowbone Creek.

Cody and Virginia were thrilled to support efforts to preserve the areas around the Smith River.



"Our parents were enthusiastic nature lovers," said Michael, who lives in Northwood, New Hampshire. "They took a keen interest in the development of parks and recreational opportunities in the Smith River region."

Sharon and Michael decided to provide a gift in memory of their parents to the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) to enhance Fisher Farm.

"It has been exciting to work with DRBA to make this trail and garden a reality," said Sharon, who resides in Fairfax, Virginia. "Our parents would have been delighted with the outcome."



With Sharon and Michael's gift, DRBA constructed a nationally certified Monarch Waystation with signage that helps educate park visitors about the importance of pollinators and protecting local natural resources.

Pictured here: The park's monarch waystation.



"A Monarch Waystation is a habitat that provides monarch butterflies with the resources they need to survive and reproduce. Milkweed is the host plant for monarch larvae, and nectar plants provide energy for adults," says Krista Hodges, Education Outreach Manager. "The Waystation is a beautiful way to honor the Nichols family while also providing rest and replenishment for our critical pollinators."



DRBA staff and volunteers helped build a trail, landscaped steps, and a new deck overlooking Marrowbone Creek with their generous gift. Interpretative signage was installed explaining the importance of the watershed and protecting the environment.



"We are very excited to have partnered with the Nichols family and Henry County to enhance an already well-loved park," said Brian Williams, DRBA's Virginia Program Manager. "The funding provided helped add a safe trail and provide access to an area of the park that was not easy to reach and it gives visitors an opportunity to learn more about the Marrowbone Creek watershed while enjoying a shaded walk in the woods."

A ribbon cutting was held at Fisher Farm Park on September 17, 2024 for family members and local officials.



Pictured here: DRBA volunteer Patty Williams at a workday for Fisher Farm Park.

To stay on top of volunteer opportunities, follow the link to DRBA's Facebook page for any updates!



----- THE FIRST NC TRAIL CONFERENCE -----

DRBA NC Program Coordinator Anna Wheeler and NC Recreation Assistant Keith Elliott joined partners to visit Winston Salem, North Carolina, to learn all about what's going on with trails throughout the State at the first Great Trails State Conference, hosted by the Great Trails State Coalition and Recreation Resource Services through North Carolina State.

This conference included technical trail classes that were taught by the Professional Trail Builders Alliance (PTBA), community development presentations, and models of collaboration opportunities.



Staff met up with partners to rekindle connections, bring big ideas forward to our community and were even able to speak about projects happening in the

Dan River Basin. Anna was part of a panel discussion about water trails regarding the Dan River State Trail with other blueways including the Haw, Roanoke, Yadkin, and French Broad.

Lindsay Pegg presented with the NC Department of Commerce about the Creating Outdoor Recreation Economy (CORE) Plan for Rockingham County. This conference is a great leap for the trail community in NC and we hope to attend again next year to learn more.

“I was privileged to have attended the first ever Great Trails State Conference and see and meet the people who have helped make North Carolina THE Great Trails State.”

Keith Elliott

MAYO RIVER STATE PARK: AN UPDATE

We are officially underway with the Master Plan development for the Mayo River State Park, Virginia.

Virginia's future Mayo River State Park is located in southwestern Henry County near the Virginia-North Carolina border. The Commonwealth has acquired a total of 637 acres of land between the North Mayo River and the South Mayo River, which converge just south of the state line in North Carolina.

It's been a long process from the initial land purchase by the state, to actually opening up some trails and installing a parking lot thanks to the funding from the EcoAmbassador Council.

The state of Virginia requires a master plan be completed before the legislature allocates any funding for infrastructure.

The first stakeholders meeting was recently held on August 14th at Fairy Stone State Park. Of the approximately 20 attendee's, 4 of the advisory committee members were either staff or DRBA board members.

The master plan will cost approximately \$320,000 and should be completed within 24 months according to the planning division's timeline.



T BUTLER

An interview one of DRBA's first founders



Q: Why did you first start DRBA?

A: More than twenty years ago, Jeff Johnson, Lindley and I were out paddling on the river and I remember we stopped and all at once were enthralled with the view. I can't remember who said it first, but we all agreed that day that we needed to enlarge the group of river enthusiasts in the area and make more people aware of the beauty and value of our local natural and cultural resources.

We gathered a group of like-minded people together and with the support of the Roanoke River Basin Association, we named our organization the Dan River Basin Association and decided it would have three areas of focus – recreation, education and stewardship. Temporary officers were selected shortly thereafter and the group got together at the Madison/Mayodan Recreation Center and we chose a president, Jeff Johnson, and others as Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. We also had a small group of members of the board of directors.

A year or so later, DRBA received its IRS status as a nonprofit organization and we began our journey to protect and preserve the Dan River watershed.

2 Q: What were the biggest challenges when DRBA started?

A: The biggest challenge was finding enough people and funding to do what we wanted to accomplish. Trying to connect with people from two states was not easy. Forrest Altmann was a valuable resource because he knew a lot of people. In the beginning, we spent a lot of time on the river together, thinking about what we could do to take care of our watershed and how we could protect it. Back then, saving and preserving our rivers wasn't on people's minds.

3 Q: Is the DRBA of today the same DRBA you imagined in 2002?

A: I couldn't even imagine back then how amazing DRBA would be today. I am thrilled to see how it has grown and the impact it has made. Over the years, the DRBA team of staff and board have been remarkable with enormous dedication and amazing skills. The time, treasure and energy given by members, volunteers and donors is also phenomenal. Without them we could never have accomplished the amazing things we've done or will do in the future. The fact that almost 1,000 volunteers help us every year is testament to the good work DRBA does.

4 Q: What is your favorite DRBA memory over the past 22 years?

A: Spending time on the river with my dear husband Lindley and serving brownies after each First Saturday Outing. Every Friday night I would make brownies and put them in the seat of the truck to get warm and hand them out to those who came out to join us.

5 Q: What is the biggest threat you see right now to our natural and/or cultural resources in the Dan River Basin today?

A: The way that the Dan River flows along high banks and wide corridors, there's room for industries to build along the waterways and although we welcome industry, we don't want it to ruin our natural resources. I think working hand-in-hand with industry to ensure the support and commitment to environmental protection is one of the biggest threats today.

6 Q: Where do you see DRBA in the next 22 years?

A: I see DRBA keeping up the good work that's been done up until now and continuing hopefully for decades to come. I'm not sure it's possible to improve on what we have done and are doing. It's hard to improve on perfection.



7 Q: What are you most proud of that you (as part of DRBA) and/or DRBA has accomplished?

A: I am so proud of everything that DRBA has accomplished over the past two decades. But if I had to choose, I would say I am most proud that DRBA has inspired an army of people and partners to protect and preserve our natural and cultural resources and found ways to engage them effectively to make a real difference.

I am also extremely proud of the educational programming DRBA does in the region. It is astounding that we reach almost 10,000 youth each year. These youngsters are going to be the leaders who keep up this good work for generations to come.

And, I am so proud of the way we handled the coal ash spill of 2014. So many people were telling us what to do, but we worked ethically and made a huge impact on how coal ash is handled forever. Everyone, DRBA staff and board, had a job to do and each one did it beautifully. It was so important that we worked with Duke Energy, not against them, in relation to the coal ash spill clean-up. DRBA has always sought partnerships, not adversaries, and this was key to making the response to the spill effective.

Pictured left:
T Butler with
DRBA Staff
Brian Williams.

8 Q: Why did you choose to become part of the River Legacy Circle?

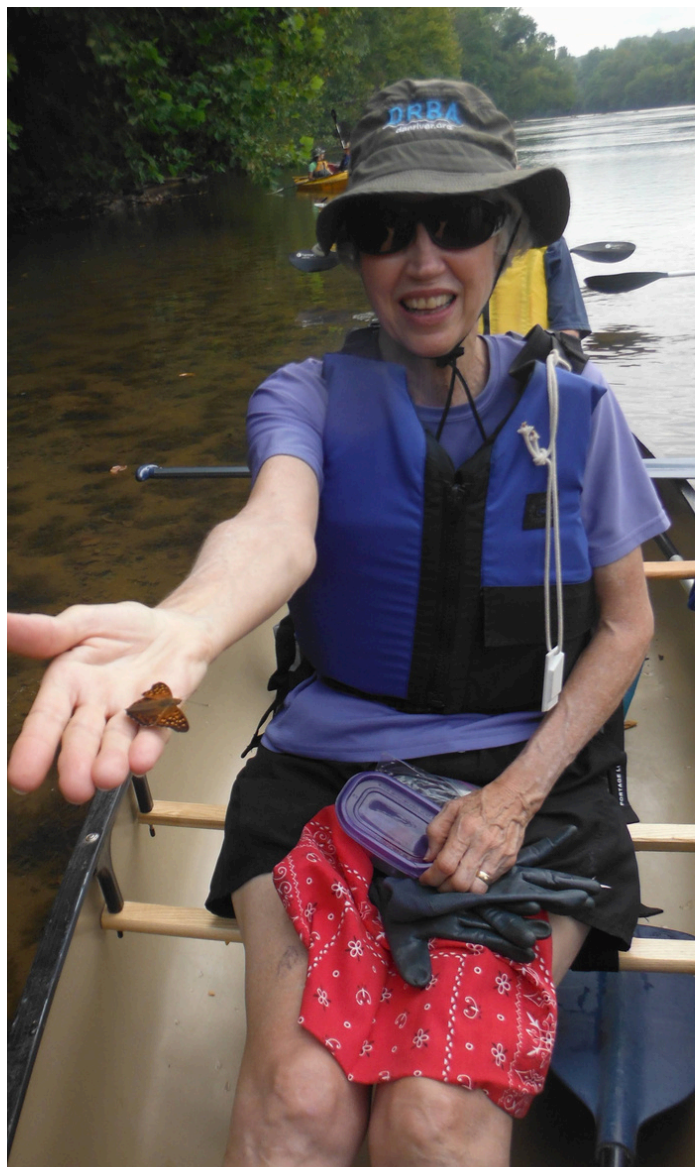
A: I believe wholeheartedly in what DRBA does and I have seen the impact first-hand. I love the idea of going special places and seeing new things. We also get a chance to meet new and interesting people from all over the watershed. I've made many lifelong friends with people from Virginia and North Carolina that I would have never met without being part of the RLC.

9 Q: Any additional thoughts?

A: I have tremendous gratitude to all of the people who have contributed to make this organization the success it is today. I remember the first trip to the national River Rally conference. Just a few of us went to it. The first question every single other conference attendee asked us was, what threat were we trying to fight when we started DRBA.

We answered that we weren't fighting against anything, we organized DRBA to preserve what we had. No one we talked to had ever heard of that reason to start an environmental nonprofit and probably thought we'd never be a success.

Well, more than two decades later we are only getting more successful by working for the rivers, not against industry. This core philosophy has remained with us today. If you keep pointing your finger in someone's eye, you just get a sore eye.



EDUCATION IN THE BASIN

DRBA continues to make a splash around the basin with educational programs and initiatives that embrace and showcase our mission of stewardship. Volunteer Environmental Educators (VEEs) have committed to nearly 30 programs and over 50 volunteer hours this fall.



Fifth grade students from Snow Creek Elementary investigated the Monarch Waystation that was installed this summer, thanks to generous support from the Roanoke Women's Foundation. The students are participating in the culmination of the Educating the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards project with DBRA that included planting a nationally certified Monarch Waystation, weather monitoring station and rain barrel installation at the outdoor classroom. Students were successful in their investigation of the Monarch Waystation by finding a Monarch chrysalis that had formed under a picnic table in their outdoor classroom.



Pictured here: Snow Creek students at Monarch Waystation.

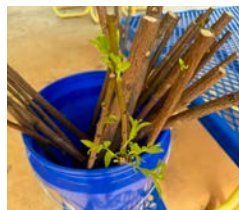
As part of the Green Leaves Investigation Project generously sponsored by the Virginia Environmental Endowment, native black willow tree cuttings were delivered to Franklin County elementary schools in September through DRBA's Streamside Trees in the Classroom, a partnership program with the US Army Corps of Engineers at Philpott Lake.

Fourth grade students took care of the trees in the classroom over a four week period and then took a field trip to an approved location around Philpott Lake to plant them. During the field trip in October, students participated in hands-on activities and games that helped them learn about the importance of protecting our rivers and streams through riparian buffers.



Streamside vegetation, or riparian buffers, help to buffer pollutants out of stormwater runoff before it enters our waterways. Students planted their trees along the water's edge at Philpott Lake where they also assisted with Philpott Lake's mission of flood control.

Pictured here: The sticks that students planted while participating in STIC..



DRBA worked over the past twelve months with Meadowview Elementary, Patrick Henry Elementary and Martinsville Middle School to build lasting environmental education programs that align with Virginia Standards of Learning

guidelines and provide authentic hands-on opportunities for students. This was all made possible with a generous sponsorship from Jones and DeShon Orthodontics and Roanoke Valley Orthodontics.



DRBA has provided hands-on programs such as Trout in the Classroom, Streamside Trees in the Classroom and other programs and presentations over fifteen years for Martinsville City and Henry County Public Schools. The programs focus on improving academic success in STEAM, inspiring environmental awareness and teaching an appreciation of the natural world for preschool through high school. DRBA's programs connect students to their local watershed and how they can make a difference in their own communities.

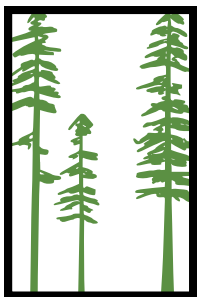
“ Nature Journal by student Isaac Dominguez

Tree sap or water falling from the trees,
This is a list of all things I hear and see.
The distant chirps from the birds so high,
The water from the river that's floating by.
The breeze on my face makes me feel free.
The silence of the forest gives a sense of serenity.

My friends give me warmth in the cold,
cold climate,
They were so loud they broke the silence.

”

STAY ON TOP OF DRBA'S ACTIVITIES!



DRBA will hold another Trails on Trails Hike at Mayo River State Park on November 22 -- so get ready to bring your pups for an exciting adventure that helps humans and dogs

both get out in nature and exercise while breathing in the fresh air.

The Trails on Trails Hike series started as a way to bring awareness and focus on dog-friendly hikes in Rockingham County all while sharing responsible stewardship practices for dog owners.



If you missed the November First Saturday Outing on Nov. 2 at Jamison Mills Trails, check out the Dec. 7 FSO on the Tobacco Heritage Trail in South Boston, VA. This FSO will take

advantage of the rail-to-trail 5.2-mile round trip walk between South Boston and the Berry Hill resort. The hike begins at 10 a.m. at the Cotton Mill Park Trailhead and the trail has a compacted crushed stone surface.

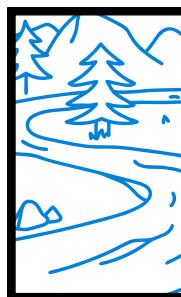
DRBA was able to do a preliminary walk on the rail bed in 2008 ahead of improvements made for hikers, cyclists and equestrians.

The trail is part of a system that is planned to stretch 150 miles across Southern Virginia at its completion.

FSO participants are asked to bring lunch and water, dress in layers of synthetic fabric or wool, wear hiking boots or walking shoes, and be prepared in the event of rain.



Pictured: DRBA's November FSO.



DRBA offices will be closed on the following dates:

- Nov. 28 and 29
- Dec. 24 and 25
- Jan. 1

Scan the QR code for the calendar of events!



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7/1/24 - 9/30/24

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The Community Foundation of the Dan River Region
State of NC Dept of Natural and Cultural Resources
Danville Parks and Recreation
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The Harvest Foundation

Thank you, Donors!

To support DRBA, scan the QR code.



THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND OF DRBA!

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



Mark your calendar for the December 7 First Saturday Outing at the Tobacco Heritage Trail! To view DRBA's calendar of events, visit danriver.org/events or scan the QR code.



You can protect nature from anywhere,
anytime. Give today.

www.danriver.org/donate