

CURRENTS

www.danriver.org | Vol. 25 | Issue 1 | 2025



Recreation • Education • Stewardship



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Currents Newsletter

Design/Editing Monique Holland

Cover photo

Photo location Fall Creek covered in snow

From the Director ”

Tiffany Haworth, Executive Director

Some people start a new year making resolutions.

DRBA starts a new year making an annual Action Plan. This plan lists all of the projects, events and programs we plan to start and/or complete during the year.

DRBA's 2025 Action Plan right now has 155 items and typically the list grows longer as the year progresses. We know we can't accomplish this plan alone. We will work with thousands of volunteers and hundreds of partners and donors this year to accomplish this plan that will have a tangible, positive impact in our region.

I hope you will consider a resolution to join us and ensure the protection of our local natural and cultural resources.



Pictured here: DRBA staff at the annual DRBA Holiday Party.

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A BENCH FOR THE BASIN:



Turning Plastic into Purpose

Let's face it—even if we use reusable grocery bags, we still end up with plastic film in packages, around bread, or wrapped around items like toilet paper and paper towels. Plastic bags, film packaging, and similar items are notoriously difficult to recycle.

They clog machinery, take decades to degrade, and often end up polluting rivers, streams, and other natural areas.

However, these materials are not without value and Trex, a company known for creating eco-friendly decking and outdoor furniture, has found an innovative way of using those pesky plastics.

Formed in 1996 through the buyout of a division of Mobil Corporation, Trex went public in 1999. Today they offer the industry's widest array of high-performance composite products, which are available in more than 40 countries around the world. With the largest market

share of composite decking in North America, a growing international footprint and \$1.2 billion in annual sales, Trex leads the industry on a global scale.

As the first company to combine the durability of recycled plastic with the natural beauty of reclaimed wood in a high-performance decking product, Trex leads the way in applying this proprietary technology to a wide variety of outdoor applications for low-maintenance, luxurious outdoor living.

By combining sawdust and plastic film, Trex creates wood-like products that last up to 50 years without staining or painting. Trex offers a recycling program that rewards organizations with a free bench.

Through this program, Trex fosters partnerships to provide durable, long-lasting benches while promoting recycling and strengthening community collaboration.

With the NexTrex® program, you not only know exactly where your recycled plastic film is going but also how it will be used. Together with our commercial and community partners across the country, we are able to divert plastic waste from ending up in landfills and give it new life as beautiful and sustainable Trex® decking.

Emily Whitacre, Recycling Programs Coordinator



Pictured here: NexTrex bench example.

How can you help?

To earn a Trex bench, DRBA needs to collect 1,000 pounds of qualifying plastics over a year period, starting now until January 6, 2026.

This may sound like a daunting task, but with community support, it's more than achievable. And anyone can participate if they support DRBA, recycling, and keeping plastic waste out of our rivers, landscapes, and landfills.

Here's what you can collect:

- Plastic grocery bags
- Bread, cereal, produce bags
- Mulch, soil, salt bags (as long as they are clean and dry)
- Wrap around bottled water, paper towels, or toilet paper
- Bubble wrap
- Ziploc-style food storage bags (clean and dry)

Simply gather your clean and dry plastics, weigh the bags using a food scale (or you can ask the local post office or use a produce scale), take a picture of the weight with the bags, and drop them off at places that have plastic bag recycling bins like Target, Walmart, or Food Lion. Wondering how to keep track of your contributions?

After your drop off, go to my.trex.com and sign in Username: DanRiverBasin Password: Cleanrivers. Go to Recycle Collections, and Add New Drop-Off. Fill out your drop off location, city, state, and weight and hit Submit Drop-off. You then will be asked to submit your photo of the weight. And you're done!

Submit as much weight as you can during this year period and we will make our goal! By participating in this challenge,

we're not only working toward a beautiful new bench but also taking an active stand against plastic pollution. Together, we can protect the Dan River Basin's ecosystems and inspire others to rethink waste.

Stay tuned for updates on collection points, scales, and progress. Let's make this project a success—one plastic bag at a time!



Scan the QR code to visit the Trex website!

DRBA'S FIRST

Director of Environmental Education



DRBA is proud to appoint Krista Hodges as the organization's first Director of Environmental Education. Hodges served as the Education Outreach Manager for DRBA for the last nine years. Prior to that, she was the Education Outreach Coordinator for four years.

"We are thrilled to name Krista Hodges as DRBA's Director of Environmental Education," said Executive Director Tiffany Haworth. "Krista's deep understanding of environmental education, her determination to provide high quality programs to youth in the Dan River basin, and her dedication to the natural world and to our mission make her an exceptional choice."

DRBA's menu of environmental education programs and requests to provide them to schools have grown exponentially since Hodges started in 2011.

It began with the award-winning Trout in the Classroom and now includes nearly a dozen offerings including Green Schoolyards, Monarch Waystations, Streamside Trees in the Classroom, Forest School, Epic River Experiences to name a few.

Hodges established the DRBA Volunteer Environmental Educators program in 2023 and has expanded the reach of education programs, planning to further those efforts to the far corners of the Dan River basin. DRBA now has two dozen dedicated and knowledgeable education volunteers to help make that goal happen.

The Dan River Basin has so many amazing watershed-based learning experiences to compliment what they are doing in the classroom. I look forward to making these experiences available to all youth in the Dan River basin.

Krista Hodges, DRBA

EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION - - -

Thanks to a generous grant from the Roanoke Women's Foundation, DRBA partnered with Snow Creek Elementary in Franklin County to provide all students in grades K-5 with real world environmental science projects, presentations and activities over the past two years.



This unique learning opportunity for students encompassed award-winning programs such as a nationally certified Monarch Waystation, weather monitoring station, Trout in the Classroom, Streamside Trees in the Classroom, a rain barrel system, outdoor classroom, a girls'

after-school science program and classroom presentations. DRBA worked closely with staff and administration at the school to build lasting environmental education programs that align with Virginia Standards of Learning guidelines and provide authentic hands-on opportunities for students.

"The Roanoke Women's Foundation was pleased to award [DRBA] a grant for \$30,000 in 2022," Sue Weinstein Nussbaum of the Roanoke Women's Foundation said. "The leadership and staff of DRBA have utilized the funds over the past two years to cultivate knowledge and to interact directly with the surrounding environment. [DRBA] is developing future stewards of our environment by reaching elementary school students and building behaviors that result in the care of our natural habitats."

DRBA is the only environmental non-profit in the area, which perfectly positioned DRBA to provide this innovative learning opportunity for the elementary students. Starting with early nature experiences, as early as

kindergarten, and continuing to provide those experiences into upper elementary grade levels leads to motivating the next generation of environmental stewards.

DRBA's education staff and Volunteer Environmental Educators provided programs and presentations to students focused on topics like erosion and erosion control, water conservation, and introduction of wildlife that depends on the waterways for survival. Students learned about their local watershed and how pollution can impact waterways through in-classroom presentations and by investigating aquatic insects.

My students were able to get first-hand experience in nature, they were able to see nature up close, and they have been able to sit back and realize the importance of preserving what they have learned to love. Having an outdoor classroom beside a weather station and a monarch waystation is a pretty cool opportunity for adults and students alike.

Carrie McCrary, Snow Creek Teacher



PARTNERING TO BUILD TRAILS



DRBA worked in partnership with the newly-formed Friends of Caswell Trails, an Adopt-a-Trail group with key partners including Flying Disc Golf Course owner Tony Waldron and Hosanna Pennell from Piedmont Triad Visitor Center, to make trail magic happen!



The Orchard Lake Trails and Sunline Trails were barely recognizable from their once-pristine state. The trails covered multiple creek crossings with bridges that had become slippery and knocked out. The Senior Center had stopped using them for their walks due to hazards, and the mushroom class at Piedmont Community College used caution when visiting the trails for fieldwork.



"I had met a lot of people who wanted something done to the trails in Caswell County since they had fallen into disrepair over the past decade," said Hosanna.

The NC Year of the Trail initiative spurred multiple partners to have a conversation about reinvigorating the trails in Caswell County. With a quick turnaround, the group contacted DRBA, and we were off to the races searching for available funding.



Pictured here: Walkers test out the new nature trail.

Thanks to a Danville Regional Foundation's "Make it Happen" grant, the group was able to launch the project with a six month completion date.

Many emails and planning meetings ensured the project's timeline would work. If you know trail work, it doesn't always move that quickly!

The new Friends group was established, signage, kiosks, and building materials were ordered. There was one final step - find the volunteers to do it all!

Tony talked to the American Legion Post 89 and VFW Post 7316, who build wheelchair ramps for the local community, and they agreed to assist. The first day, Tony thought that they would only help for one day and he'd have to find people for the rest of the bridges. But with an amazing community spirit, each one would ask, "when's the next workday?" until the last piece of wood was secured on the bridges.



We are so thankful to DRBA Friends who make projects like this happen through volunteering, advocacy, and donations. To keep connected to the Friends of Caswell Trails (FCT), reach out to us!



Pictured here: A ribbon cutting was held celebrating the completion of the project.

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

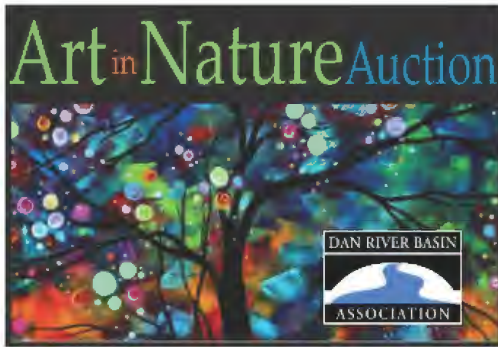


DRBA'S PROJECTS FOR 2025

With more than 155 projects in DRBA's 2025 Action Plan, it would be impossible to describe every project, program and event that will be accomplished in 2025. Here are just a few highlights.

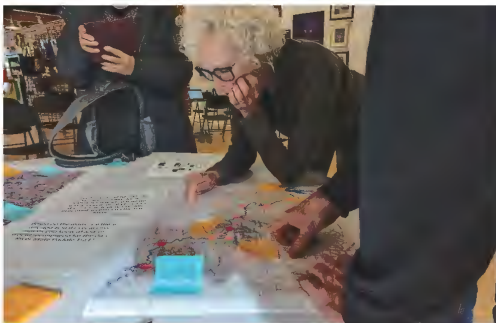
Events this year will include the monthly First Saturday Outing events and our Annual Meeting on March 1, 2025. In early summer, we will host a public event that will showcase strategies to protect and conserve property and waterways.

We will host several River Legacy Circle and Friends of DRBA events and more than a dozen community workshops, cleanups, and webinars this year. Later in the year, DRBA will hold our Art in Nature Auction.



Several recreational projects will be completed like the Watershed in Bassett, VA, the Great Road Trail in Fieldale, VA and renovations to Jacobs Creek Batteau Landing river access and the High Rock Trail in Rockingham County, NC.

We will also complete the Dan River Trail Master Plan and begin the Southern Blueways Master Plan in 2025.



Advocacy will focus on possible dam removals in Patrick County, VA, and on collaborating with partners to ensure our rivers and the ecosystems around those rivers remain healthy through work at the local, state and federal levels.

We will continue to host free training sessions to teach volunteers how to test the water quality of our rivers and streams, and we will provide supplies for them to monitor our local waterways monthly.



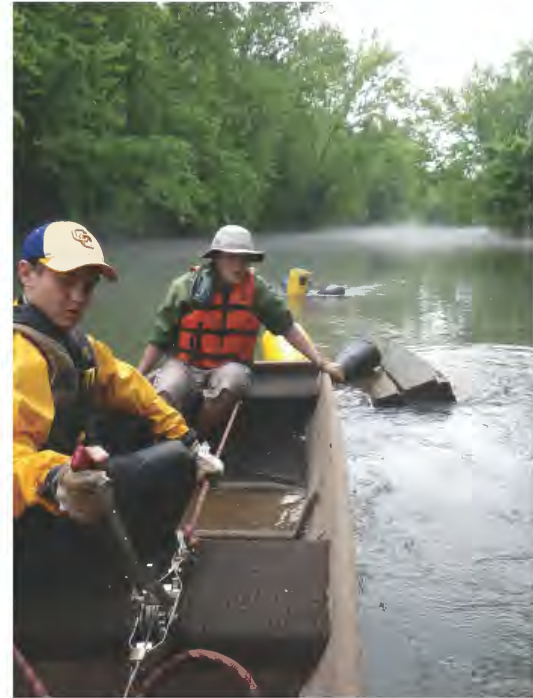
Safety is always a priority, and we will host another year of Kayak Safety Classes and post safety signage along waterways in North Carolina.

Award-winning environmental education programs will continue such as Trout in the Classroom and Streamside Trees in the Classroom serving almost 10,000 youth in 2025.



We will also distribute more than 200 free Budding Scientist Kits to youth in Danville, VA containing science-based tools and resources that encourage kids to get out and explore as young citizen

scientists, and will partner with the Patrick County Chamber of Commerce to pilot the River Rangers program to provide tools for kids to explore the Mayo River Rail Trail.



Stewardship project plans include completing three nationally certified Monarch Waystations in 2025, the most we've ever done in a year, bringing the total number constructed in our watershed to seven in just four years.



These are just a few of the amazing things you will accomplish when you support DRBA in 2025 with your time and treasure, thank you!

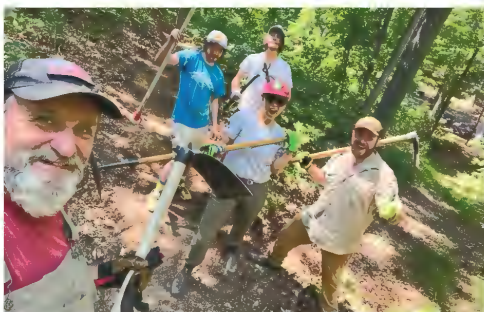
RETIRED, BUT STILL A CHAMPION

Williams retires from DRBA after 16 years of service -----

Brian Williams, DRBA's Virginia Program Manager, announced his retirement after 16 years with the organization effective December 31, 2024. Although he will no longer be on staff at DRBA, Brian will continue to make a difference throughout our watershed.



Brian was born in Knoxville, TN and has lived in Tennessee, Georgia, Florida and Virginia. He is married to Patricia Williams and has a daughter and 3 grandchildren who live in Florida. Brian studied Wildlife Biology at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia and eventually went to work at the Zoo in Atlanta, GA. Taking a job in Southwest Florida, Brian worked on a tropical fish production facility while volunteering with non-profit organizations to help protect the Everglades. He moved to North Florida where he continued his volunteer work on water quality issues as a project cave diver working on state permits to map the underwater springs of Florida's state parks. Moving to Virginia in 2006, Brian began volunteering with the newly created Trout in the Classroom Program and was hired by the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) in 2008. Over the course of the next sixteen years, Brian has accomplished more for our region than can possibly be captured in one story.



Brian is an avid photographer and videographer. If you have seen anything published by DRBA, it probably has a photograph or video taken by Brian. He has won numerous well-deserved awards for his photography, and DRBA will continue to use his beautiful photos forever. Brian also has an engaging YouTube Channel focused on outdoor recreation.

Brian loves working with youth and helped expand DRBA's Trout in the Classroom to be the largest single TIC program in Virginia and North Carolina. Over the years, he has reached thousands of youth with his educational programming and/or snake demonstrations.



Hundreds of people can point to Brian as the first person to take them out on a river trip. He knows the waterways and land of the Dan River watershed probably better than anyone else in the world. He spent 18 months paddling the Smith River, mapping points of interest, preparing text and photographing over 55 miles of waterway. He used the data to author the "Insiders Guide to the Smith River," the first ever guide book for the Smith River now used as a Heritage / Tourism and paddling guide. He collaborated and helped construct all 15 river access sites/canoe ramps along the Smith River and dozens of others on rivers in the Dan River basin. Brian partnered with local and state resources to plan and construct more than 20 miles of trail in Henry County and the other counties in our watershed. No public trails existed in Henry County, VA before Brian and DRBA began work in the county.

In 2012, Brian organized the largest cleanup on the Smith River in a single day with more than 200 volunteers and 30 miles of river cleaned up in just 9 hours. He then

planned cleanups annually on the Smith River for the next 12 years. Brian is also the co-creator of the Smith RiverFest, an annual river celebration held in Henry County, VA which is still going and in its 17th year.



Brian worked closely with Virginia State Senators and Congressmen to partner with the Army Corps of Engineers and Dominion Power to gain special recreational water releases from Philpott Dam encouraging paddling events on the Smith for economic development. He also worked with State and local government and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources to improve the health of the trout fishery on the Smith River. Brian won the national River Network awards, River Hero in 2013, but he has always been a river hero in this region. The results of his efforts are substantially cleaner and healthier waterways, healthier citizens, and community leaders that acknowledge river protection as a priority. But the most important result of his work is the fact that future generations will continue to protect their natural resources and honor their river because of the seeds he planted while working at DRBA.

"I would like to note that since my tenure with DRBA I have done nothing alone, it has all been through partnerships and collaborations and with the support of the incredible DRBA family."



CJ IDOL

An interview with one of DRBA's pivotal partners

Idol holds a bachelor's degree in History and Religious Studies from North Carolina State University, a master's degree in Anthropology with a focus on Historical Archaeology from East Carolina University, and a graduate certificate in Museum Studies from the Harvard Extension School.

He worked as an archaeologist for the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research and New South Associates, in various roles at Old Salem Museum and Gardens and Körner's Folly and is currently the Executive Director of the Museum and Archives of Rockingham County (MARC). He also chairs the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission.

"I seek innovative ways to engage the public in history by making it accessible and dynamic," Idol said. "This has primarily been accomplished through my work in archaeogaming, looking at how video games use and represent archaeology. This approach has expanded to look at ways video games can use and represent museums."

Q: When did the partnership between DRBA and the MARC start and why is it important?

A: I think the partnership with DRBA started from the very beginning of the MARC. We share some founding members, particularly Lindley and T Butler. DRBA has been an important partner because our mission is larger than the typical history museum. In addition to preserving and presenting the cultural resources of Rockingham County, we are charged with doing the same for the county's natural resources.

2 Q: How does DRBA benefit the MARC?

A: A museum like the MARC will typically attract those more interested in the history of the county, myself included. Having an organization like DRBA to work with has been invaluable in making sure I am able to holistically approach the MARC's mission.

I was able to learn so much about the natural history of Rockingham County, through working with Anna Wheeler and Keith Elliott. Projects like reintroducing the Roanoke Loggerhead have really expanded my conception of what things the MARC should be presenting in our exhibits and programs. There are so many other species of flora and fauna that have been lost that need to be discussed by the museum.

3 Q: Why do you choose to partner with DRBA?

A: When I started at the MARC the partnership with DRBA was already in place and we were about to launch the Butler Legacy Fund. The importance of this fund was immediately recognizable.

Given the overlap in our missions but with different stakeholder bases, being able to pool our resources to bring more recognition to the historical importance of the Dan River and its tributaries only makes our efforts stronger.



The MARC also owns historic property on the Haw River and Troublesome Creek. Without a partner like DRBA, it would be difficult to understand how best to utilize these properties. Even though the properties are not in the Dan River Basin, being able to rely on DRBA for advice and counsel on how to leverage these properties to achieve the MARC's mission has been vital to making these properties engaging to the general public.

4 Q: What initiatives do you think stand out or are you most passionate about?

A: My background is in archaeology and historic preservation so I am passionate about preserving the historic landscapes that have developed over the years. As I have worked with Anna Wheeler and DRBA, I have come to better appreciate the role of waterways in these landscapes. I have been especially struck by the work DRBA has done to highlight the importance of the Dan River as part of the historic landscape of Rockingham County and beyond.

Cont. on Page 9

I was vaguely aware of this before working with DRBA but seeing and participating in the work has really opened my eyes to the importance of these areas as cultural resources. The more work we can do to highlight how humans have interacted and changed the waterways over time, the better.

This becomes a key educational tool for outdoor enthusiasts to learn more about history and encourages historians to better consider the role of natural history in their work.

ALL ABOUT MARC

Through the tireless passion of the Rockingham County Historical Society, County Commission and fellow advocates, the Museum and Archives of Rockingham County (MARC) was founded in 2012.

The Rockingham County Historical Society Museum and Archives is dedicated to preserving, disseminating, and exhibiting the history, culture, human and natural resources of Rockingham County, North Carolina, for the benefit of present and future generations

With exhibits and varied programs from law and order to Bluegrass, natural history to Civil Rights, the MARC welcomes visitors from all over North Carolina and beyond; engaging, educating and preserving the rich and diverse history of Rockingham County. The museum's extensive collections and archives, including many court and genealogy records, have also proven an invaluable community resource to academics and casual researchers alike.

Ranked the number 1 cultural heritage experience for the County, MARC continues to go from strength to strength, striving to achieve its vision.



The MARC team is made up of Executive Director CJ Idol, Director of Development Tiffany Jones, Operations and Programs Manager Cameron Stewart and a whole board of directors.

The MARC encompasses much more than just the historic 1907 courthouse which houses the archives and most of the exhibits. The MARC historic complex includes the National Historic Registered 1816 Wright Tavern, 1905 Post Office, High Rock Ford Park Revolutionary War site with trails and river access and Troublesome Creek (Ironworks), the site of the first grist mill in the county. Together, these sites serve the museum's mission to protect not only the county's historic but natural resources for the benefit of all.



Pictured here: CJ Idol and his wife, Karen Idol

The 1907 Courthouse is on the National Register for Historic Places and preserves several courtrooms and decorative styles from the original craftsmen.

1816 Wright Tavern is also on the National Register for Historic Places as the only 2-storey wooden dog-run tavern of this elaborate style in North Carolina. It was the first building of the Rockingham County Historical Society (which would become MARC) and hosts a variety of exhibits and programs, all within the painstakingly restored interiors, period pieces and outbuildings.

The old 1905 Post Office is in use as MARC's temporary administrative offices. In the early days of the old Rockingham County Courthouse this small wooden building was one of them. Originally used as Wentworth's Post Office, inside it still boasts pigeon holes, lock boxes and the counter from an even earlier 19th century post office building.

The MARC is open Tuesday by appointment, Wednesday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and closed from Saturday to Monday.

Admission earns patrons a one-hour guided tour of the 1816 Wright Tavern and historic outbuildings. MARC members and children under four get in free, a party of up to six people costs \$18 and adding additional people is \$3 each.

For more information visit the MARC website or scan the QR code.



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

MIGHTY MAYO RIVER TRIP MARKS ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Paddlers from all over come to the boiling hole for its beauty and to sharpen their technical skills on the Mayo River -- very few decide to do it in January!

"I started making my paddle trip in January because nobody wanted to paddle with me during the summer," says Joe Berry, event coordinator for the Mighty Mayo River Trip (MMRT) through the Carolina Canoe Club (CCC). "After I changed the date, plenty of people have joined me throughout the years."

The MMRT is a yearly event, usually the 3rd weekend in January, that focuses on inviting skilled whitewater paddlers to practice their coldwater paddling and to give back to a community that means so much to them.

Since its inception, the MMRT has focused on the community impact of the boaters, "you are the river stewards," said Brian Williams, retired VA Program Manager for DRBA, "we must have people like you that advocate and take care of the river, no matter where you live."

CCC's stewardship director also holds a cleanup before and after the paddle trip. The trip has run throughout the history of Mayo Beach, before it was owned by the State Park, when trash could be found everywhere. The efforts of the MMRT participants have sustained the beauty of the local beach.



This year, paddlers rallied to donate supplies to LOT 2540, a local food bank that serves free weekly meals for Stoneville and beyond. Hundreds of pounds of donations and dollars were gifted to the cause during this year's trip.

The snowy, icy river prompted the group to work out some extra man-power for ice picking before the trip to allow paddlers to get through the ice along the river. The setting was nothing less than scenic, Mayo River beauty. Bald eagles glanced at a few friends, the ice floating nearby reminding us of the beautiful snow we'd had the week before, and friends new and old spent time together along a beautiful waterway.

The 20th anniversary didn't stop there -- Mayo River State Park Rangers led a guided hike from Mayo Beach to Byrd's Landing to watch the paddlers experience the technical turns of the rock. Park Superintendent Sam Koch shared historical information about Deshazo Mill, Byrd's Ledge, and how the state park came to be created.

For the past 20 years this has been a classic event on the Mayo River. We are grateful to partners who understand the importance of DRBA in the community and celebrate the river, just like we do every day.

STAY ON TOP OF DRBA'S ACTIVITIES!



DRBA will hold the Dan River Cleanup in Danville, VA on April 12 and the Dan River Cleanup in Madison, NC on May 17 coinciding with Danville's Festival In the Park from May

17-18. Festival In the Park is a non-profit organization that encourages and promotes the practice of the arts established with City of Danville Parks & Recreation Department in 1973. Over the years, the festival has developed traditions of food vendors,

crafts, live music, children's activities and rides. Danville's longest running festival has also seen things come and go from running events, pigs in the park, car shows, jumping dock dogs and more.



Looking further into the future, Dan River Weekend will be July 31 to August 3 and the Smith River Cleanup will be August 16, just the week before Smith River Fest at the Smith River Sports Complex. Held

annually, Smith River Fest provides the opportunity to run, paddle, cast and bike your way to fun and is truly a celebration of all things associated with the Smith River and our great outdoors.



Scan the QR code for DRBA's calendar of events!



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10/1/24 - 12/31/24

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AD5K

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Hale)
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Kroger
Reidsville Area Foundation
Smith River Valley Canoe
Club

Butler Legacy Fund

Donations
Lisa Price
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Thank you!



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 April 12 Dan River Spring Cleanup in Danville, VA!
To view DRBA's calendar of events, visit danriver.org/events or scan the QR code.



You can protect nature from anywhere,
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