

CURRENTS

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Recreation • Education • Stewardship



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Cover photo

On the Dan river in Eden, NC
Taken by Lucas Conkle

From the Director ””

Tiffany Haworth, Executive Director

Winter has a way of slowing things down... or at least that's what people say.

At DRBA, the cold months are anything but slow. As an organization with staff across 2 states and multiple counties, we are skilled at collaborating online and this continues to serve us well. With laptops, a solid Wi-Fi connection and strong partnerships, we keep working no matter the forecast or road conditions.



This winter, much of our energy has been focused on planning. We are pulling together partners and funding applications for the implementation of the Outdoor Recreation Master Plan in Rockingham County, NC while also developing a brand-new outdoor recreation master plan for Martinsville/Henry County, VA. At the same time, we are working with dozens of partners across the region on a Southern Virginia Blueways Master Plan and laying the groundwork for improved river access, recreation and conservation for years to come.

Behind the scenes, we are also finalizing details for a full slate of upcoming events. Plans are coming together for a stream barrier workshop, our annual business meeting, our annual celebration, and the Dan River Conservation Summit. In addition, we are lining up partners and logistics for several river safety paddle classes this summer and expanding our environmental education outreach in Rockingham County.

So, winter may keep us off the trails and rivers for now, but it never slows us down. Thanks to you and our hundreds of partners, we're using these colder months to plan and prepare so that when spring arrives, we're ready to get back outdoors and make it all happen.



Sign up to receive DRBA's E-Newsletter and stay informed on upcoming public input meetings in the basin region.

An exciting ending to 2025!

SUPPORT DRBA
\$25K BY 12/25

You did it!

What an incredible year! Together, we achieved something remarkable. Our end-of-year campaign was a resounding success, raising over \$80,000! This far surpassed the initial goal of \$25,000 and it is all thanks to you.

\$80,000 to:

- Build trails, parks and river accesses for people of all ages and abilities
- Ensure that everyone in our basin has access to quality environmental education
- Purchase supplies to clean-up our trails and rivers and provide monthly water quality monitoring
- Advocate at the local, state and national level to protect our natural resources and promote conservation

More than eighty Friends of DRBA donated to our 2025 campaign, and over half of those generous folks were returning donors from 2024. Even better, many of our Friends increased their donation from the previous year. We were also thrilled to learn that we gained ten new Friends into the DRBA family in 2025!

Along with our end-of-year campaign, we also brought back some popular DRBA threads that featured the turtle and the caddisfly. Over \$1,000 of DRBA threads were sold! Just think of all of those people walking around showing off their love of the Dan River Basin Association.

DRBA completed more than 180 projects in 2025 and we already have more than 170 projects planned for 2026. We hope you will join us at our Annual Celebration on March 21 to learn more about our 2025 successes that you made possible and our exciting plans for 2026.

Along with our end-of-year campaign, we also brought back some popular DRBA threads that featured the turtle and the caddisfly. Over \$1,000 of DRBA threads were sold! Just think of all of those people walking around showing off their love of the Dan River Basin Association.

But here's a sneak peak at 2026:

- Outreach to our communities through festivals and events
- Trout in the classroom programs for schools in NC and VA
- Stewardship workshops and trainings
- Safety signage throughout the basin
- Outdoor safety classes
- Environmental education for landowners

Thank you for being the driving force behind DRBA and for your generous support to protect and preserve our beloved watershed!



Limited edition turtle and caddisfly DRBA threads

2025 Art in Nature: Creativity & Conservation

Artistic advocacy was on full display at DRBA's Art in Nature Auction and Wild & Scenic Film Festival. This annual fundraiser highlights regional artists alongside global conservation stories, showing how creativity and storytelling can bring people together to celebrate and protect the natural resources that make the Dan River Basin such a special place. This event is more than a fundraiser, it's a celebration of creativity, conservation, and the idea that nature inspires all of us.



We were thrilled to have more than 60 guests join us this past November in Danville, Virginia at the Ballou Recreation Center. Guests had close to 200 items, submitted by regional artists, to browse at the auction. From stunning photography and handcrafted jewelry, to sculptures, paintings, furniture and creative up-cycled pieces, there was truly something for everyone. The variety and originality of the pieces reflected the incredible talent found right here in our region and the deep connection our community has to the natural world. During the event, we also presented a few films from the nationally acclaimed Wild & Scenic Film Festival, an award-winning film experience that showcases environmental films from around the world. This is an experience typically reserved for much larger cities, so we are thrilled to have brought it back this year for guests to experience.

We are deeply grateful to the artists, donors, volunteers, bidders and supporters who made this event such a success. Sponsorship support from the Eco Ambassador Council and Community Foundation of the Dan River Region helped make this event possible, providing funds for an accessible venue and refreshments; ensuring the free event was welcoming and open to all. Thanks to strong community support, the event raised nearly \$5,000 for DRBA, with 100% of proceeds supporting local recreation, environmental education and stewardship programs throughout the Dan River Basin.

Interested in donating artwork or a nature-inspired experience for a future auction?

DRBA collects items year-round and welcomes artists and craftspeople from North Carolina and Virginia to be part of this special tradition. Contact thaworth@danriver.org if you have an item you created, something in your private collection or an exciting nature experience you'd like to donate.

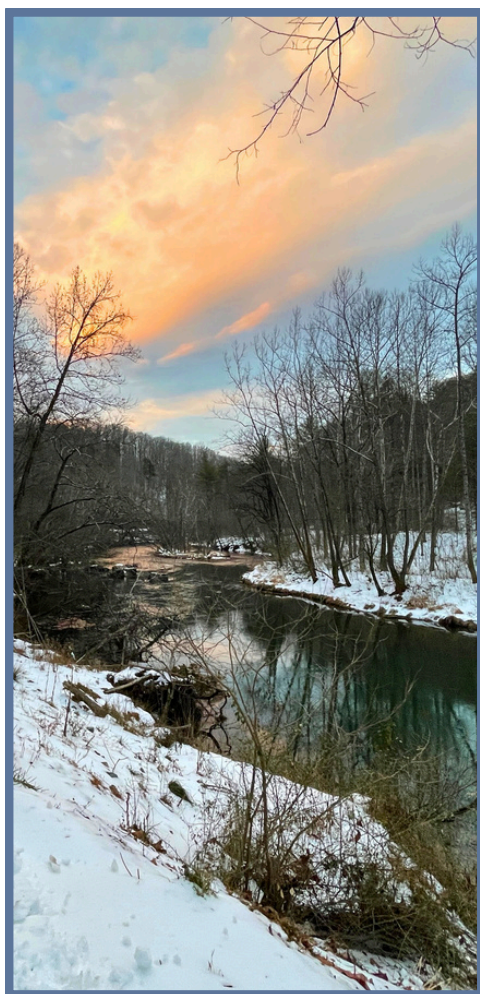
How to Prepare for a Cold Weather Hike in the Dan River Basin.



One of the many advantages of the Dan River Basin region is hiking lasts year round! At DRBA, we want all basin communities to have safe access to outdoor recreation opportunities; whether it is building trails or providing education. An important part of that education is preparation, which is even more important in the winter months.

Hiking in the winter has many advantages. The bare trees offer better views of the landscapes, bugs and sweating are greatly reduced, snow provides more opportunity for seeing wildlife tracks, and you have better chances for less crowds on the trail. But the disadvantages can quickly become dangerous if you are unprepared. Winter days are shorter, trails can be wet and slick from snow and ice, and the cold can drain your energy more quickly. Be prepared for a cold outing, ensure your safety, your party's safety, and plan ahead for any potential issues.

With the cold winter our region has had, we wanted to review how to prepare for a hike in cold weather.



Understand your limits

If you can hike 3 miles in the regular weather, be sure to go under those limits in cold weather. Your body is working harder than normal in the winter for less time.

Bring extra water and snacks

The weather works your body in a different way. Dry weather can easily dehydrate you and the cold weather uses fuel quickly. Also be mindful of what you pack and how you pack it, you don't want to have to thaw out a snack that was in your backpack. Good options are nuts, dried fruit, bread, and dried meats or cheese.

Wear layers

Clothes are integral to your comfort and safety when exploring the outdoors. Quick-drying base layers (wool preferred because it keeps you warm even when wet) under lightweight fleeces, under larger winter jackets will give you options exploring the outdoors. Mix and match on your journey to assist with your body heat. Bringing a wind breaker or rain jacket will assist in keeping the chill off.

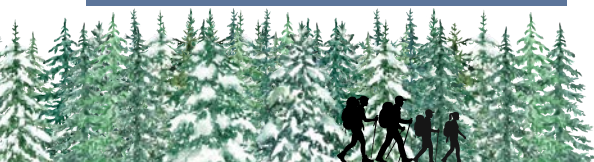
Proper shoes

The difference between a good time and a bad time could be between your shoe choices! Boots can protect them from the slips and slides and can offer more traction. In places with snow or sleet, spend time thinking about other traction devices such as yaktraks.

Have an emergency plan

Pack a first aid kit. Have a reliable way of reaching someone on the trail or tell someone where you are hiking and when you expect to be back. If it's a wet day or you are planning a long day, pack extra dry clothes just in case.

Check out DRBA's
Be Safe Outdoors page
for more safety information



DRBA's Water Monitoring Program Adapts to Include Regional Initiatives

Additional monitoring added to the Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Program for 2026

Since 2012, DRBA staff and volunteers have built and maintained a robust Citizen Water Quality Monitoring (CWQM) volunteer program, playing an instrumental role in assessing the quality of our waterways in the Dan River Basin region. This is a citizen science program where participants gain real-life skills in sample testing and data collection, no previous experience required. After completing training, volunteers adopt a section of a stream in the basin and monitor the health of the waterway for a minimum of one year (in some cases multiple years). This is a multi-tier program that allows volunteers to decide how involved they want to be. Volunteers can decide to monitor on a monthly basis or twice a year, depending on which monitoring protocol training they chose.



CWQM volunteer David Thies winter sampling at Dan River



CWQM E. Coli training



DRBA Director of Environmental Education Krista Hodges leads a CWQM training

Volunteers have gathered data through Virginia protocols for bacterial monitoring of E.coli and biomonitoring for aquatic macroinvertebrates with Virginia Save Our Streams (VA SOS), an award-winning education program that educates and motivates citizens to know more about water issues through water quality monitoring, clean-ups, and restoration projects. Volunteers have also helped to provide Level I data to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VA DEQ), which is primarily used for educational purposes or to identify potential water quality concerns.

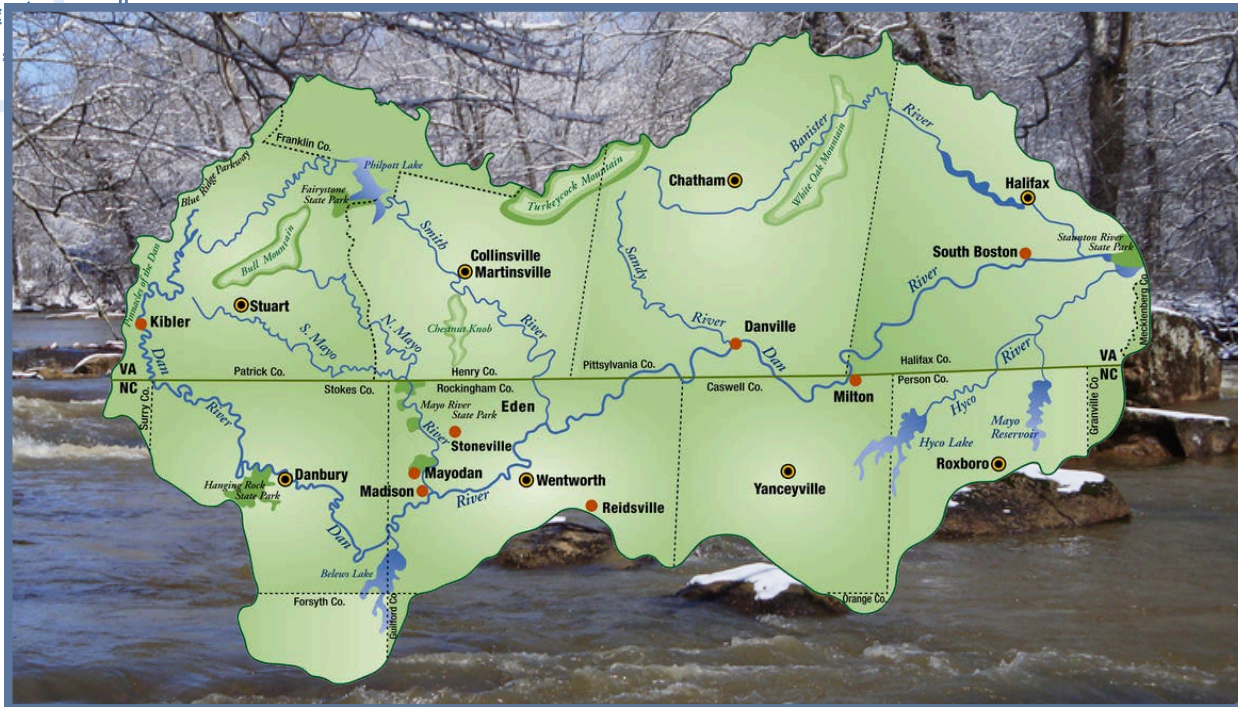
Water quality is a fundamental component to environmental, economic, and public health. Assessing and understanding water quality issues, such as rising salinity in freshwater and runoff pollution, is integral to proper resource management. DRBA has worked to educate communities about the importance of water quality protection, utilizing data that has been collected through our CWQM program. This year, we are looking to expand our impact by adding 2 new monitoring programs, Salt Watch and Nitrate Watch.



Test kits provided by the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA). *Photos credited to IWLA

The **Salt Watch** program, managed by the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA), aims to raise public awareness about the connection between road salt and public health, to identify waterways with high levels of road salt pollution, and to advocate for smarter road salting practices by sharing data results with private landowners, and local and state agencies.

Nitrate Watch equips partner organizations with nitrate test strips to monitor waterways or drinking water sources, share their results, and advocate for solutions. Nitrogen is an essential component for fertilizers and while it is an essential nutrient for plant growth, human activities produce more nitrogen than natural systems can handle.



Map of the Dan River Basin region, spanning southern Virginia and northern North Carolina and consists of six rivers and numerous streams, creeks, lakes, wetlands, and more

According to IWLA, fertilizers, manure and sewage all add extra nitrogen to the landscape. As this nitrogen moves through the environment, it becomes nitrate. The nitrate can then make its way to streams and sources of drinking water via surface runoff or groundwater saturation. Excess nitrate in water can pose serious problems for the health of humans and the environment. Similarly, road salt applied to melt winter ice washes into soils, groundwater, and storm drains, where it can persist for years and permanently contaminate waterways. Even small amounts have lasting impacts—just one teaspoon of salt can permanently pollute five gallons of water—making salt monitoring critical for protecting infrastructure, wildlife, and drinking water supplies.

For 2026, DRBA is proud to continue and strengthen our partnership with the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA), a national organization with a mission that aligns with DRBA's to include conservation, sustainable use, and enjoyment of our natural resources. VA SOS is housed under the Izaak Walton League of America, making it a natural fit for DRBA to partner with on their regional initiatives of Salt Watch and Nitrate Watch. DRBA's primary goal for our CWQM program in 2026 is to transition current and new volunteers to participate in Salt Watch and Nitrate Watch. DRBA and other organizations across the country, like IWLA, are excited to see interest grow in citizen science. This means that more data will be collected to understand the scope and scale of pollution in waterways in our communities. Data is also important as it increases the volunteer's knowledge and understanding of what's happening in a waterway that they care about in the Dan River basin.

Interested in becoming a Citizen Water Quality Monitoring volunteer?

Contact DRBA staff at drba.va@danriver.org to set up training. DRBA is planning to host a CWQM training and VA Save Our Streams training later this year.

Thank you volunteers, past and present, for your time and dedication.



DRBA Introductions

There's a new staff member we want you to meet



Alice Collins
Administrative Assistant

DRBA is proud to announce the hiring of Alice Collins as its new Administrative Assistant. She will work primarily in the Eden office with our Office and Finance Manager, Melissa Mericle, to manage the office, work with donor records, assist with coordinating events, and assure DRBA continues to run smoothly. “She is level-headed, super organized, and brings great knowledge and skills to the role. Her qualities will help keep DRBA organized and will make our day-to-day work flow smoother.” said Melissa Mericle, Office and Finance Manager of Dan River Basin Association.

A lifelong resident of Rockingham County, she has always felt deeply connected to the outdoors, spending much of her childhood exploring local creeks and camping at Philpott Lake with her family. She first became familiar with the Dan River Basin Association through local volunteer work and reconnected with the organization in 2025 after relocating her photography studio to Eden. “When the part-time position became available, I knew that I wanted to be a part of this amazing team. I am eager to not just learn everything about DRBA, I am also excited to be able to share that information with others and let them know how important their involvement is to our future,” said Alice about her new position.

Feature Creature

Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*)

Also known as the Woodland Box Turtle, this is considered the most common terrestrial turtle species in the eastern United States. One of 6 subspecies of Common Box Turtles, they get their name from the ability to “box” their entire body into their shell. Eastern Box turtles live in a variety of habitats, from forests to swamps to farms, and have a home range of about 2 acres. They are omnivores and a diurnal species, meaning they are most active during the day. Instead of hibernating, they brumate! Brumation is when reptiles enter a state of dormancy where they reduce their activity levels, but will still wake up from time to time. The average life span is typically 25-35 years, but they can live to be over 100.

How can you help?

- If you see a turtle in the road, safely move it in the direction it was heading
- Leave leaf litter in your yard—it provides food and shelter
- Record sightings with local organizations with citizen science programs or at [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)—it takes less than 5 minutes and helps researchers track populations.

If you find an injured turtle, please contact the closest wildlife veterinarian or permitted rehabilitator.



How to safely move an Eastern Box Turtle

1. **Prioritize your safety:** Watch for oncoming traffic
2. **Assess the situation:** What direction is the turtle heading? Is it injured?
3. **Use a hamburger hold:** If the turtle is uninjured, use both hands to hold the turtle like a hamburger with the head facing away from you.
 - a. If the turtle is injured, use a car mat to slide under the turtle for better support.
4. **Move towards the direction they were heading:** Never relocate a turtle, only move towards a safer spot in its location.

RIVER RANGERS ACTIVITY

Turtles are a unique animal that have a shell for protection. Each species has special identifiers to tell one from another and they can be based on many clues, from shell patterns to the shape of their nose. To ID a turtle, we need to know what to look for! Read each turtle's ID clues, then match the clues to a turtle photo to discover the species!

Eastern Box Turtles have a high, dome-shaped shell with an amazing pattern that has yellow and brown in it. The pattern matches the ones on their head, neck, legs, and tail.

Red-eared sliders are known for the bright red patches behind their eyes and yellow stripes down their neck and legs.

Painted turtles are very colorful, with distinct red striping along the edge of their shell.

Yellow-bellied sliders live up to their name with lots of yellow stripes and a large spot of yellow behind their eyes.



Answers on page 14

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8/25/25 - 12/31/25

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Donations

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Thank you!

To support DRBA,
scan the QR code.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR DRBA ACTIVITIES

First Saturday Outings- every first Saturday of the month

Join DRBA and friends on a hike or paddle somewhere in the Dan River Basin. FSOs are free, beginner-friendly, and open to the public. Follow DRBA on Facebook or sign up for the e-newsletter for updates.

*You **must** supply your own boat and lifejacket for paddle trips.

DRBA's Annual Celebration - March 21st

Free and open to the public, DRBA's Annual Celebration is more than a meeting, it's a celebration of community, conservation and the incredible positive impact you've helped accomplish across our region. Hear from staff about projects and a delicious project, and hearing from our keynote speaker, Louise Finger from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, who will share the story behind a newly completed, Eco Ambassador Council-funded project on the beautiful Mayo River.

Scan the QR code to register for the Annual Celebration



Volunteer Environmental Educator Training - March 25th, 1-3 pm

A key priority at DRBA is to educate youth and adults about the importance of the environment and our natural surroundings. Volunteering allows people of all ages and backgrounds to share their enthusiasm for nature and our local environment. Sign up for the training and be a part of educating the next generation of freshwater stewards.

Virginia Save Our Streams (VA SOS) Training - May 8th

VA SOS is a citizen science program presented by the Izaak Walton League. Volunteers help monitor stream health by collecting aquatic insects (macroinvertebrates) and testing water quality. Your data helps guide restoration efforts and protect Virginia's waterways!

For updates, sign up for DRBA's newsletter or follow us on Facebook.

Things to do in the Basin

Stream barrier assessment training

Stream barriers are human-made diversions in the river that negatively impact the water channel and fish populations. These can include unfit culverts, dams, and water diverters in our creeks and streams. Our hope is to assess the need for upgraded culverts and/or removal of stream barriers, to look into larger funding sources and share information with state and regional partners such as DOT and Planning Districts as they continue enhancing our region through planning and development projects.



Observe winter weather vs. summer weather

The seasons change- did you notice what was around your house during the snow? What about the difference from the summer flora and fauna? Take a chance to enjoy identifying birds in your local area or what the storm drains look like after a snow. Mindfulness in the winter continues to bring us joy into the spring and summer as you see your backyard change.

Plug into your community

Through facebook groups or community boards, see what your local community is up to. Environmentalism is a group effort and we can make change with small steps! Join your local tree board or look into the planning commission in your region. Do you have a hiking or paddling group that meets up nearby?

Explore somewhere new!

Winter is often the best time to hike. Bugs and sweating are greatly reduced and with the leaves off the trees you can see things that are obscured during the summer.


Answer key: Picture 1-Yellow-bellied slider, Picture 2- Eastern Box Turtle,Picture 3- Red-Eared Slider, Picture 4- Painted Turtle

THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND OF DRBA!

Dan River Basin Association

P.O. Box 305

Eden, NC 27289



**You can protect nature from
anywhere, anytime.**
Give Today at
www.danriver.org/how-you-can-help