

2025

# COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT



Eco  
Ambassador  
Council





# About the Eco Ambassador Council

In 2020, Carter Bank welcomed a new way for local businesses to make a lasting, collective impact across our region's natural and cultural landscapes: the Eco Ambassador Council (EAC). Launched through the leadership of Carter Bank and a group of founding business partners, the Eco Ambassador Council brings together business leaders from across the Dan River Basin watershed to pool resources, share ideas, and invest in environmental projects that protect and promote the places we call home.

The EAC is a business-led stewardship initiative that enables regional employers to go beyond sponsorship and donate strategically toward environmental and community projects that benefit both nature and the economy. Members make an annual investment that is combined into an Annual Fund, and then collectively choose which environmental projects to support each year. These projects range from trail development and habitat improvements to educational and recreational enhancements that draw residents and visitors alike.

What sets the EAC apart is its emphasis on shared decision-making and direct impact. Member businesses not only contribute financially but also help decide how those funds are used, aligning investments with community needs and regional vision. Members also benefit from increased visibility through shared marketing and recognition that communicates their corporate values.

Each year, nonprofit organizations, municipalities and civic clubs from across the 16-county Dan River region are invited to submit project proposals for EAC funding. These proposals reflect real, on-the-ground needs and opportunities from environmental restoration and public access improvements to education and community enhancement projects. EAC member businesses carefully review, discuss and rank the submissions, with several companies extending the process to their own workplaces by inviting employees to vote and help select the projects they will support in the coming year.

Once projects move forward, Council members remain actively involved beyond financial investment. Many contribute corporate volunteer teams, professional expertise and in-kind services to help bring the projects to life.

This hands-on approach sets the Eco Ambassador Council apart: members do more than fund projects. They show up, roll up their sleeves and work alongside community partners to create lasting impact. EAC investments are visible across the basin, supporting multi-use trails, river access points, accessible fishing docks, and environmental learning spaces like *The WaterShed*, an outdoor classroom that now serves thousands of students along the Smith River.

The EAC invites regional businesses to join in shaping the future of the Dan River Basin. As business leaders who live, work and invest here, they know the strength of our regional economies is tied to the health of our environment.

Each year, the Council shares its progress through a Community Impact Report, highlighting outcomes and amplifying the story of regional stewardship. This report reflects how collaborative, business-led action can protect natural resources, strengthen local economies and build a culture of environmental leadership across the Dan River watershed.

## 2025 EAC Members





## Our Investments

Project Name	Total Cost	EAC Funding	Community Raised
<b>2025</b>			
Fred Clifton Park Renovation	\$3,000.00	\$1,650.00	\$1,350.00
Woodland Trail Bridge ReBuild	\$4,000.00	\$2,750.00	\$1,250.00
South Mayo Structures Removal	\$75,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$55,000.00
Play it Safe: Safety Signage	\$25,000.00	\$6,930.00	\$18,070.00
Water Safety Education For all	\$15,000.00	\$9,460.00	\$5,540.00
	\$122,000.00	\$40,790.00	\$81,210.00
<b>2024</b>			
Art in Nature/Wild & Scenic Film Festival	\$4,500.00	\$2,200.00	\$2,300.00
River Rangers for Kids	\$2,500.00	\$1,100.00	\$1,400.00
The Great Road Educational Trail	\$19,000.00	\$9,900.00	\$9,100.00
Environmental Property Workshop	\$15,000.00	\$8,690.00	\$6,310.00
Adaptive Use Fishing Dock	\$35,000.00	\$22,220.00	\$12,780.00
	\$76,000.00	\$44,110.00	\$31,890.00
<b>2023</b>			
The WaterShed	\$99,850.00	\$35,750.00	\$64,100.00
Forest School Event	\$4,050.00	\$3,300.00	\$750.00
Gift Shop Start-Up (Philpott Lake)	\$6,700.00	\$1,650.00	\$5,050.00
	\$110,600.00	\$40,700.00	\$69,900.00
<b>2022</b>			
Future Site of the VA Mayo River State Park	\$38,000.00	\$18,000.00	\$20,000.00
I.C. DeHart Park Trail Renovation	\$15,000.00	\$8,000.00	\$7,000.00
Beaver Creek P&HCC Campus Trail	\$18,000.00	\$14,000.00	\$4,000.00
Connecting Fitness & Water Trail	\$8,800.00	\$4,800.00	\$4,000.00
Snow Creek Outdoor Learning Space	\$42,000.00	\$7,500.00	\$34,500.00
MC Martin Park Creekside Trail	\$17,000.00	\$8,500.00	\$8,500.00
	\$138,800.00	\$60,800.00	\$78,000.00
<b>Total Investment</b>	<b>\$447,400.00</b>	<b>\$186,400.00</b>	<b>\$261,000.00</b>

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## Fred Clifton Park Renovation

US-58, Stuart, VA 24171

On a clear autumn afternoon, Fred Clifton Park was transformed by the energy and generosity of more than 60 volunteers attending the Envita conference at Primland. Representing companies from around the world, these volunteers brought with them a shared commitment to eco responsible practices mirroring Envita's mission to help organizations manage materials sustainably, reduce waste and advance circular economy solutions. For many, this was their first visit to Patrick County, yet their connection to the landscape was immediate as they gathered at one of the region's most scenic overlooks to give back in a meaningful, hands-on way.

What began as a scenic overlook with tired infrastructure quickly became a shared point of pride. Throughout the afternoon, volunteers worked side by side to restore and enhance the park. More than five dozen large bags of garbage were removed, picnic tables were thoroughly cleaned and freshly painted, weeds and debris were removed and the overlook fence, where visitors pause to take in the sweeping valley views, was fully repainted. The visible improvements were completed in just one day, but their impact will be felt for years.

The park will also have new interpretive signage installed that will share the area's natural, geological and cultural story in Spring, 2026.

This project reflects the heart of the EAC's approach: pairing strategic funding with real participation. By bringing together global business leaders, local government and community partners, the renovation did more than improve a park, it strengthened a sense of shared stewardship and demonstrated how collaboration across borders and industries can leave a lasting, positive mark.

Located next to Lover's Leap, one of the most visited scenic stops along the Blue Ridge Parkway corridor, Fred Clifton Park is now better equipped to welcome residents and travelers who may have previously overlooked it.



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## Woodland Trail Bridge ReBuild

Spencer Penn Centre  
Spencer, VA 24165

On a crisp winter morning, the Woodland Trail at the Spencer-Penn Centre came alive with the sounds of hammers, saws and community spirit. Several dedicated volunteers, braving cold weather and guided by contractor company Tobax, worked tirelessly to rebuild the bridge near the ball field, a vital connector in the trail's loop that had become unsafe over time. The volunteers removed the deteriorated structure and constructed a safe, durable replacement, restoring full access to this cherished trail for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities.

Despite being less than one mile long, the Woodland Trail offers a one-of-a-kind outdoor experience, beginning at a vine-covered trellis and winding through a serene canopy of Tulip, Poplar, and Maple trees. Along the path, visitors encounter a meditative botanical garden, family picnic and play areas, the Butterfly Boardwalk and Observation Deck, and an environmental education playground that teaches about native flora and fauna. The trail's stable, permeable surface ensures accessibility for wheelchairs and assisted walking devices, making it an inclusive space for seniors, children and families.

With the bridge rebuilt, the trail loop is complete, allowing visitors to explore safely while promoting physical activity, mental wellness and connection with nature.

The Eco Ambassador Council's support restored a critical piece of this trail and stands as a visible symbol of collaboration and the EAC's commitment to accessible, educational and sustainable outdoor spaces across the Dan River Basin.



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## South Mayo Structures Removal

Stuart, VA

The South Mayo River Structures Removal project has successfully transformed nearly 10 miles of river habitat, improving public safety, ecological function and recreational access in Stuart, Virginia.

Thanks to the EAC's investment, leveraged with additional funding and substantial in-kind contributions from Patrick County and dozens of community volunteers, this project was completed with over a year's planning and four weeks construction. Volunteers helped remove debris and spread hay along the riverbanks to promote vegetation growth.

Two historic dams, the Clark's Gas Dam, built in 1916 to supply electricity to the Town of Stuart but long obsolete, and George's Mill Dam, a 140-year-old concrete structure associated with the former George's Mill, were removed using hydraulic hammers.

Clark's Gas Dam, a 3-foot-tall, 30-foot-long barrier, was broken up and repurposed to stabilize the downstream bank, restoring natural channel dimensions and slope. George's Mill Dam, standing 12 feet tall and 140 feet long, had posed serious public safety hazards, including at least six documented drownings. The concrete was removed from the river and used to reinforce the riverbank while the channel was returned to its natural profile.

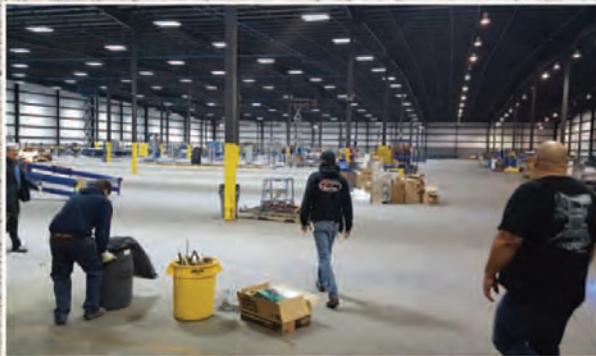
The two dams, along with two sets of railroad piers, had blocked aquatic passage, contributed to sedimentation and bank erosion, and prevented safe recreational use. Their removal now opens critical habitat for the state-threatened Orangefin Madtom, creates conditions for potential reintroduction of mussel species, and allows residents and visitors to safely enjoy the river.

By supporting an initiative that delivers measurable ecological, social and recreational benefits, the EAC helped restore the South Mayo River as a safe, accessible, and thriving natural resource.





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# Art in Nature Auction and Wild & Scenic Film Festival

Danville, VA

On a beautiful afternoon in early November 2025, Ballou Park in Danville came alive with creativity, community and conservation during the Dan River Basin Association’s (DRBA) Art in Nature Auction and Wild & Scenic Film Festival.

More than 60 guests gathered for the in-person return of this beloved event, which showcased over 200 unique items created by local artists, craftspeople and home hobbyists from across Virginia and North Carolina. From jewelry and ceramics to textiles and sculptures made from natural or recycled materials, the auction celebrated the region’s talent while reconnecting people with the landscapes that inspire their work.

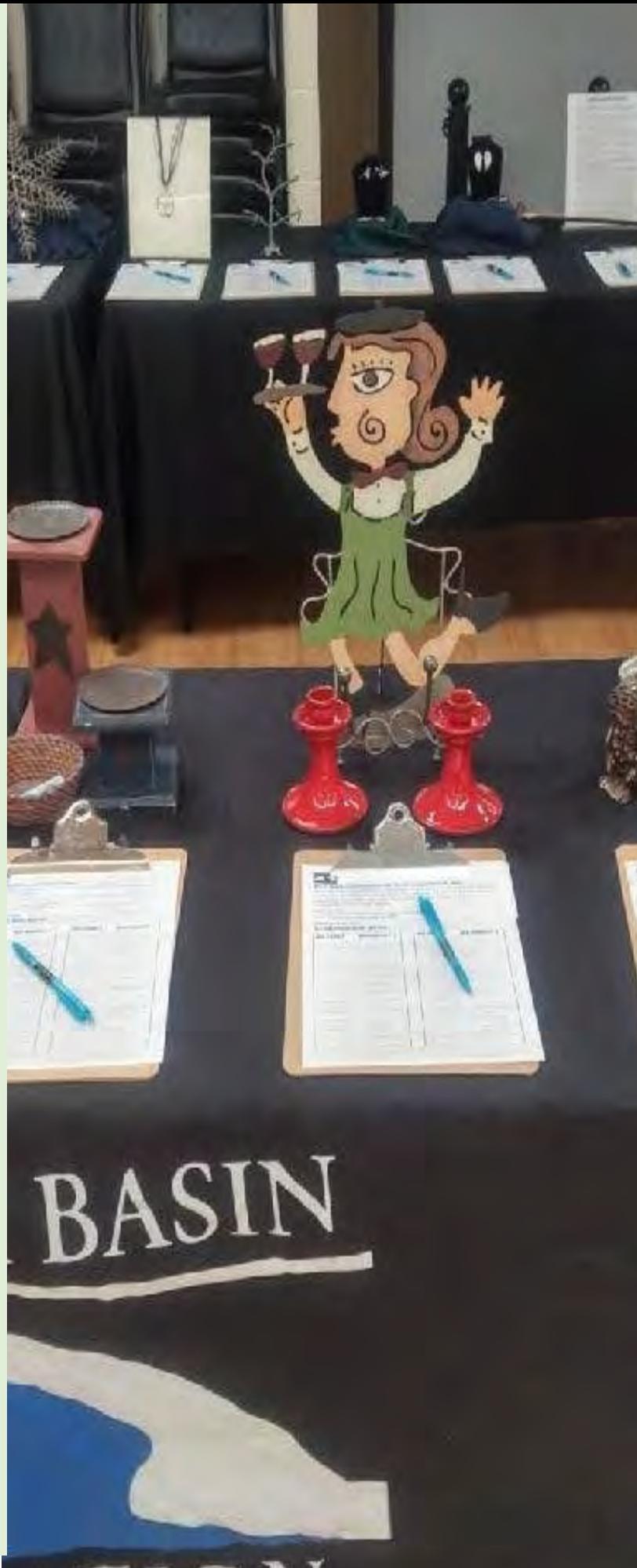
The event also featured the nationally acclaimed Wild & Scenic Film Festival, bringing award-winning environmental films from around the world to the region - an opportunity typically reserved for major cities. Guests were also given a special code to view the films again at their home over the weekend.

Together, the auction and film festival created an engaging, family-friendly experience that inspired conversation, learning and connection.

Thanks to strong community support, the event raised nearly \$5,000 for the Dan River Basin Association, with proceeds supporting local recreation, education and stewardship programs.

Sponsorship support from the EAC helped make the event possible, funding an accessible venue, refreshments and broad community marketing.

By highlighting regional artists and global conservation stories in a shared public space, the event demonstrated how creativity and storytelling can bring people together to support and protect the natural resources of the Dan River Basin.



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## Environmental Property Workshop

Protecting land is critical to a healthy environment and clean waterways and finding information from trusted sources is difficult and time consuming for property owners.

With support from the Eco Ambassador Council, the Dan River Basin Association is launching the first Dan River Conservation Summit, a one-day environmental property workshop designed to empower people across the region to better care for the land and water they steward.

Whether someone owns a small residential lot, manages a farm or forest, oversees a corporate campus or represents a school, church, or municipality, the way property is maintained directly affects water quality, wildlife habitat and community health downstream.

Scheduled for Spring 2026, the Summit will be a free, hybrid event offered both in person and virtually.

During the event, participants will choose from three workshop tracks - Land & Property Stewards, River & Stream Stewards, and Families, Youth & Citizen Scientists - with expert-led sessions covering topics such as conservation easements, forestry management, native versus invasive plants, riparian buffer restoration, water quality monitoring, family activities and citizen science. Sessions will be interactive and designed to answer real-world questions, helping attendees translate knowledge into action on their own properties and in their communities.

In addition to workshops, the Summit will feature vendor tables, interactive exhibits and a shared lunch highlighting conservation success stories.

The Eco Ambassador Council's sponsorship removes cost barriers and ensures broad community participation. By convening conservation professionals alongside the people who live, work and manage land throughout the region, the Dan River Conservation Summit demonstrates the EAC's dedication to shared learning and lasting care for the natural resources of the Dan River Basin.



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## The WaterShed

Trent Hill Road, Bassett, VA 24055

Along the banks of the Smith River in Bassett, Virginia, a long-awaited vision has finally come to life. For decades, more than 100,000 young people visited this site to take part in hands-on environmental education programs led by the Dan River Basin Association and its partners. Until recently, those lessons took place without shelter, seating or basic amenities, leaving students exposed to the elements while learning about the river they were standing beside.

That changed with the completion of the WaterShed, a dedicated outdoor education space designed to support meaningful, year-round learning. The site now includes an open-air pavilion, educational supply storage, picnic tables, a small amphitheater, renovated river access and restroom facilities, creating a fully equipped space ready to welcome future youth as they learn to value and protect their river.

The Eco Ambassador Council funded the project in 2023, with construction taking place throughout 2024 and early 2025. The WaterShed is the result of a collaborative effort among community partners, including the EAC, the Dan River Basin Association, Henry County, the Harvest Foundation, and the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia, transforming an open riverbank into a safe and functional outdoor learning space.

The project was completed in May 2025 and marked with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held alongside a Dan River Basin Association Trout in the Classroom field trip. During the event, local elementary students released trout fingerlings into the Smith River after raising them from eggs in their classrooms, highlighting both the conclusion of the project and its ongoing role in environmental education.

Now ready for students, the WaterShed stands as a lasting investment in environmental education, community partnership and the protection of local natural resources.



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## Great Road Educational Trail

3986 The Great Rd, Bassett, VA 24055

The Eastman Eco-Learning Station is an outdoor classroom located at the Great Road River Access along the Smith River and is used by teachers and educators to deliver environmental education programs to hundreds of students each year.

With funding from the Eco Ambassador Council, a previously unused area behind the classroom was developed into a 0.3-mile educational trail with seating areas, interpretive signage and tree identification markers. The interpretive and tree identification signage was designed in partnership with the Dan River Basin Association and the Virginia Department of Forestry, with a focus on the importance of riparian buffers and the role they play in protecting the Smith River, supporting wildlife and safeguarding the community's drinking water source.

Additional EAC funding also supported improvements to the outdoor classroom itself, including the installation of new steps and benches, making the space more accessible for youth with physical disabilities.

Completed in 2025, accessibility and learning enhancements at the site now support broader participation and expanded instructional opportunities.

While the enhancements primarily support youth education, the Great Road River Access is also a heavily used public access point visited by hundreds of community members each year. The educational signage now serves as a visible reminder to all visitors about the importance of preventing pollution, reducing litter and protecting local waterways through the preservation of riparian buffers.





## River Rangers For Kids

636 Commerce St, Stuart, VA 24171

Along the Mayo River Rail Trail in downtown Stuart, Virginia, a new hands-on learning opportunity is helping children connect with the river in meaningful ways. The Patrick County Chamber of Commerce, with funding from the EAC, has completed the installation of the River Rangers For Kids supply lending library at the river access point.

Located beside a Free Little Library in the parking area adjacent to the trail, the River Ranger kits provide young explorers with tools to study and enjoy the river environment. Each lending bucket includes waterproof identification sheets for bugs, birds, and animals; seine nets; binoculars; magnifying containers for aquatic species; and a logbook for recording observations. River-themed books from the Start with a Book River Rangers program are also available to encourage further learning.

The Mayo River Rail Trail is a popular community destination, known for fishing, wading and a natural beach area that offers easy water access. It is also frequently used by homeschool groups and families seeking outdoor activities. The River Rangers program builds on that use by offering structured, educational resources that promote curiosity and environmental awareness.

Completed in April 2025, the program has already seen strong community engagement. The kits were showcased during Kids Trout Fishing Day, where children used the tools to explore aquatic macroinvertebrates and learn how these species indicate water quality.

The program has received national recognition from the Stroud Water Research Center and was developed by Patrick County Chamber of Commerce Director Rebecca Adcock. Kits were assembled with assistance from Virginia Master Naturalists and plans are underway to expand the program to additional locations across the watershed.



# Snapshot: Successes from Previous Years



## **Forest School**

*Philpott Lake Visitor Center, Bassett, VA*

In 2023, the EAC sponsored the very first Forest School at Philpott Lake. Designed for families new to outdoor experiences, the event introduced children and parents to nature-based learning through interactive, hands-on environmental activities. The program addressed a key barrier to outdoor engagement - lack of confidence - while fostering curiosity, safety and connection to nature.

## **Outdoor Learning Space**

*Snow Creek Elementary School, Penhook, VA*

The EAC funded an outdoor learning space, completed in 2023. The space supports hands-on environmental education and helps students explore connections between personal health and planetary health. EAC's investment positioned the school as a regional model for outdoor education.

## **I.C. DeHart Park**

*Woolwine, VA*

Before EAC investment, I.C. DeHart Park lacked clear trail signage and basic amenities despite hosting a world-class mountain bike race each year. In 2022, the EAC funded a new trail kiosk, professional trail map, directional signage, biker changing station and trail markers across more than 12 miles of trails. The project improved safety and accessibility while helping residents and visitors better discover and enjoy this regional recreational asset.

## **Beaver Creek Campus Trail**

*Patrick & Henry Community College, Martinsville, VA*

The college expanded outdoor access across its 137-acre campus with the addition of the 2.3-mile Beaver Creek Campus Trail. Funded and supported by volunteers from the EAC, the new trail officially opened to the public in 2023. In addition to the trail, the EAC sponsored an overlook research deck that highlights the importance of wetlands, providing an outdoor classroom and educational stop for both students and visitors.

## **M.C. Martin Park**

*Danville, VA*

Once a neglected and overgrown site, M.C. Martin Park in Danville was revitalized through a collaborative effort supported by the EAC and local residents. Renovations included extensive cleanups, construction of a walking trail and overlook deck, installation of benches and restoration of the park as a welcoming community space. Completed in 2024, the park is now certified as a firefly habitat.

## **Philpott FIT Trail Renovation**

*Philpott Dam Rd, Bassett, VA*

Completed in 2024, the Philpott FIT Trail was revitalized after aging fitness stations became unsafe for public use. The EAC provided volunteer support to remove the deteriorated equipment and funded improvements including a new trail kiosk, expanded loop and updated directional and educational signage.

## **Philpott Lake Gift Shop**

*Philpott Lake Visitor Center, Bassett, VA*

Opened on Earth Day in 2024, the Philpott Lake Gift Shop was launched with start-up funding from the EAC to support youth environmental education. Located inside the Visitor Center, the shop's proceeds fund programs such as water quality testing, guided hikes and classroom-based environmental learning. Operated by park rangers and managed by the Dan River Basin Association, the shop has already generated support of regional education initiatives.

## **Adaptive Fishing Dock**

*Henry County, VA*

In 2024, Henry County opened the county's first adaptive fishing dock at the Monogram Smith River Sports Complex in Axton, VA. Funded by the EAC, the dock was designed with input from adaptive users and features a ramp and accessible deck for safe river access. It allows people of all abilities, including older adults and those with physical limitations, to enjoy outdoor activities and promotes inclusive access to the health benefits of time spent outdoors.

## Future Site of the Virginia Mayo River State Park

823 Pratt Road, Spencer, VA

The Virginia Mayo River State Park is progressing through its master planning phase, a key requirement before state funding can support infrastructure and visitor amenities. Early trail and signage projects, funded by the EAC in 2022, allowed the park to open to the public in 2023, though it had not yet received official state park designation pending a completed master plan. These initial improvements helped raise the park's profile, and in 2024, the Commonwealth allocated funding to hire a consulting team to develop the master plan. The EAC is among several regional stakeholders actively involved in the process. In 2025, the Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources visited the site with key local leaders.

The master plan is expected to be finished by fall 2026 and will guide future investments moving the park closer to full state recognition.

## Updates



## Water Safety Education & River Access Safety Signage

The Dan River Basin Association, with funding from the EAC, is expanding two complementary initiatives to enhance river safety and access across both North Carolina and Virginia.

The *Water Safety Education for All* program, modeled on a successful North Carolina initiative, will offer beginner-friendly kayak safety classes in Virginia starting in early summer 2026. Participants will learn trip planning, boat fitting, Leave No Trace principles and paddling techniques, and receive essential safety gear to explore rivers confidently.

The *Play it Safe – River Access Safety Signage Initiative* will install 24 permanent bilingual signs at key access points in Virginia, with an additional 25 signs on the North Carolina side through matching funds. Signs provide river conditions, emergency contacts, safe paddling practices and Leave No Trace guidance. Installation is expected in spring to early summer 2026.

Together, these projects promote safe, equitable and inclusive river recreation while fostering environmental stewardship.





The restored Mayo River now flows freely after the removal of outdated structures, creating a safer, healthier and more vibrant habitat for fish, wildlife and the surrounding ecosystem. This project highlights the Eco Ambassador Council's strategic investment in environmental restoration, demonstrating how targeted funding can have lasting, tangible benefits for both a healthy environment and the communities in our region.



## Benefits of EAC Membership

When businesses join the Eco Ambassador Council (EAC), they become part of a respected network of regional leaders working together to protect and strengthen the natural resources that support our communities and economy. EAC members don't just donate, they help drive meaningful, visible change.

- **Hands-On Impact:** Members collaborate to select high-impact projects that provide opportunities for employees to get involved creating pride and connection beyond the workplace.
- **Measurable Results:** Each year, the EAC publishes a Community Impact Report that documents project outcomes, recognizes member contributions and highlights the collective return on investment which is shared with members and the public.
- **Positive Visibility:** In today's values-driven marketplace, customers and employees are drawn to companies that give back. EAC membership demonstrates environmental leadership, community commitment, and corporate responsibility—strengthening your brand and reputation.

Joining the EAC is an opportunity to invest locally, engage your team and be recognized as a business that helps shape a healthier, more vibrant region. To learn more about becoming an Eco Ambassador Council member, contact Tyler Carter at [Tyler.Carter@carterbank.com](mailto:Tyler.Carter@carterbank.com) or (540) 493-0582.

2025

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