



COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT



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Council

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About the Eco Ambassador Council

In 2020, Carter Bank led the formation of the Eco Ambassador Council (EAC) and invited its partners in the region to become members and join together to invest in the protection and promotion of our natural and cultural resources in the Dan River Basin. Today, the business leaders and members of the EAC combine their community investment to support recreational, educational and stewardship projects and events that increase tourism and economic development in Franklin, Patrick, Henry, Martinsville City, Pittsylvania, Halifax, and Mecklenburg in Virginia and Surry, Stokes, Rockingham, Forsyth, Guilford, Caswell, Orange, Person, and Granville in North Carolina. All regional businesses who have the desire to pool resources and to share sustainability ideas for the benefit of their communities, their stakeholders, and their economy are invited to join the EAC.

2024 Members of the EAC



Our Investments

	Project Name	Total Project Cost	EAC Funding	Community Raised
2024	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
2023	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
2022	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
Total Investments		\$325,400.00	\$145,610.00	\$179,790.00



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Adaptive Use Fishing Dock

Smith River Sports Complex
1000 Irisburg Road, Axton, VA 24054

An adaptive fishing dock offers a safe and accessible way for people with physical or adaptive disabilities to easily access waterways for fishing or wildlife viewing.

Nationally, over 12% of people have a mobility disability and almost 20% have some form of physical disability. Locally, these statistics are similar.

Located at the Monogram Smith River Sports Complex, this adaptive use fishing dock is the first of its kind in Henry County. There were fifteen other river access points along the river that the dock might have been constructed at, but this site offered the most visibility with close to 30,000 people coming to the complex annually.

This dock was designed by the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) with the input of adaptive users and using the best practices in dock engineering. DRBA also ensured the site development plans included a focus on having minimal environmental impact.

Having accessibility to the outdoors for all people regardless of their physical abilities is good for everyone in the community. This adaptive fishing dock also benefits older citizens who may find it difficult to enjoy the health benefits of outdoor recreation.

Groundbreaking for the dock occurred in October, 2024 and the ribbon cutting was held in December, 2024.





UPDATE!

M.C. Martin Park

700 block of Memorial Drive, Danville, VA

The revitalization of the M.C. Martin Park had been a vision of the surrounding neighborhood of Westmoreland for several decades. Named M.C. Martin, a human rights activist and local banker, this small parcel of land served as a gathering place and a play area for the citizens in the area. But over the past two decades, the bridge that crossed the creek and gazebo disintegrated and the park had become a dumping ground for furniture, garbage and landscaping waste and was overgrown with weeds.

In June 2022, the EAC heard of the project and pledged a matching fund of \$8,500 toward renovation of the park. The Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) worked with the Martin family and community members over the following year and raised the other 50% of funds. In May, 2023, renovation began with several cleanups of the site, removing almost 900 pounds of litter.

In 2024, construction began of a walking trail and overlook deck and installation of benches and other park accessories.

The park was also certified by Firefly conservation and Research as a site with essential elements needed to create and sustain a healthy habitat for adult and larval fireflies.

On November 25, 2024 a ribbon cutting was held at the park to commemorate the completion of the enhancements and renovations to the park.

A community event is being planned for Spring, 2025 to usher in a new era of making this park a gathering place for local residents.



Art in Nature Auction & Wild & Scenic Film Festival



The Art in Nature Auction features local artists and home hobbyists from NC and VA who donate unique items made from nature, about nature and/or using recycled materials. All proceeds from the event help to support recreation, education and stewardship programs and activities throughout the region. The Wild & Scenic Film Festival (WSFF) features environmental films from all over the world, many of them award-winning, and all of them created to inspire civic action. Typically, the WSFF is only hosted in urban cities around the United States. The EAC has provided a sponsorship to bring both of these opportunities to the region in one event. Because of EAC funding, ticket sales will be more affordable and free tickets will be available to organizations and clubs that serve low-income and marginalized clients. This event is family-friendly and appropriate for all ages. The event is expected to happen in Fall, 2025.



Environmental Property Owners Workshop

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

The Dan River Basin Association (DRBA), a local environmental nonprofit organization which protects and promotes the region's natural and cultural resources, received a sponsorship from the EAC to provide a one-day, open and free event that would provide workshops for individuals, corporations, municipalities, schools, churches, and nonprofits to learn more about how to protect and sustain their property.

The event will help people find the answers that will help them be better stewards of the environment such as forestry practices, conservation easement options, native planting, invasive removal, riparian buffer, and stream monitoring. Workshops will be provided by experts such as land trust staff, Department of Forestry and arborists.

The event is expected to happen in early Summer, 2025.



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*Community Action & Responsibility for the Environment
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Gift Shop - Philpott Lake

Philpott Dam Road, Bassett, VA

Opened in April, 2024, the Philpott Gift Shop is more than a place for visitors to buy mementos of their time spent at the beautiful Philpott Lake in Bassett, VA. Proceeds from the sales help support regional environmental education programs and events.

Acquiring funding for environmental education is extremely challenging and sustaining funding for it is even more difficult. The Army Corps of Engineers at Philpott Lake wanted to help and offered the Visitor Center as a space to install a Gift Shop where the profits would be used to ensure all youth would have an opportunity to learn more about their natural environment.

All that was needed was start-up funding to purchase a retail kiosk and inventory to launch the project. The EAC provided that funding and the rangers at Philpott volunteered to handle the daily operations of the Gift Shop. The Dan River Basin Association manages the buying of the inventory and accounting for the shop.

The Gift Shop currently has six souvenir items which include keychains, stickers, dry bags, water bottles, stuffed animals, and t-shirts. The shop also sells water and soda.

The Gift Shop appropriately sold its first item on Earth Day, April 22, 2024. Since its opening, the shop has provided close to \$2,000 for youth environmental education programs that meet Standard of Learning (SOL) requirements such as Streamside Trees in the Classroom, guided flora and fauna identification hikes and water quality testing.



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UPDATE!

The Watershed

Trent Hill Road, Bassett, VA 24055

More than 100,000 youth have come to this site on the Smith River to experience environmental education programs provided by the Dan River Basin Association and other local organizations. Up until now, there was not a place for instruction, shade from the elements or even a place to sit for the students.

The Watershed project, funded in 2023 and started in 2024, is an outdoor space for environmental education programming which includes an outdoor pavilion, storage for educational supplies and restroom facilities along the Smith River.

The EAC is one of four other community partners investing together to make this project a reality. Funding has also been generously provided by the Harvest Foundation and the Community Foundation Serving Western Virginia and in-kind support has been provided by Henry County and the Dan River Basin Association.

Permits have been acquired. The site has been cleared and the concrete pad has been poured. The pavilion has been constructed and the restrooms are installed. The educational supply storage units have been constructed.

All that remains is the construction of four picnic tables and a small amphitheater for students.

The site will be ready for students and youth to learn more about the protection and conservation of our local natural resources in Spring, 2025.



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River Rangers For Kids

636 Commerce St, Stuart, VA 24171

The Patrick County Chamber of Commerce received funding from the EAC to create and install the River Ranger Kit supply box at the Mayo River Rail Trail.

Recently, the Chamber installed a Free Little Library in the parking area adjacent to the river access point and this new River Ranger Kit will add a resource that provides tools for kids to explore the river.

The Kit is a supply box that will consist of a waterproof bug, bird, and animal identification sheets, seine nets, binoculars, magnifying containers for aquatic species, a logbook for kids to record what they find and other related items. There will also be river-related books appropriate for youth from the Start with a Book River Rangers program that will be included in the Free Little Library.

The Mayo River Rail Trail is a pedestrian walkway located in downtown Stuart, Virginia, and follows the Mayo River. The river is an active stocking site and a favorite site for anglers. During warmer months, the river is a popular spot for the community to come and splash in the cool water. There is a natural “beach” area that has perfect access to the water. It is also a site frequently used for outdoor activities by home school groups.

This is a pilot project. Based on the durability and popularity of the River Rangers Kit, the project may be duplicated throughout the Dan River watershed.

This first River Rangers box will be installed at the Mayo River Rail Trail in early Spring and ready for use by May, 2025.





BUILDING MATERIALS



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***WITH AN EYE TOWARD THE FUTURE, WE LOOK FORWARD
TO GROWING WITH MARTINSVILLE & HENRY COUNTY
FOR MANY YEARS TO COME.***



Great Road Educational Trail

3986 The Great Rd, Bassett, VA 24055

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

The outdoor classroom needs accessibility enhancements such as steps and benches so that youth with physical disabilities can easily participate in programs. There is also space behind the classroom that could be used for learning if a trail was constructed, interpretive signage, tree identification markers and seated was added.

The EAC has provided funding to construct a 0.3-mile trail, signage and seating at the site in addition to new steps and benches for the classroom.

The tree identification and other interpretive signage will be designed in partnership by the Dan River Basin Association and the Virginia Department of Forestry with a focus on the critical need for riparian buffer and the benefits that it provides to the river, wildlife and the community's drinking water which comes from the Smith River.

Although these enhancements will be primarily focused on educating youth, this location is very popular and used as a public river access by hundreds of people every year. The educational signage will be reminder to everyone who visits the site about the importance of not littering and protecting local waterways by preventing pollution from entering the waterways through riparian buffer.

The trail is expected to be constructed and completed during the summer of 2025 and the steps and benches installed in the outdoor learning space before school starts in the Fall.



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EAC Successes from Previous Years...

Beaver Creek Campus Trail

Patrick & Henry Community College, 645 Patriot Ave, Martinsville, VA

Until recently, Patrick & Henry Community College had one trail, the P&HCC Loop Trail, on its 137-acre campus. The EAC funded and recruited their employees to build the Beaver Creek Campus Trail, a 2.3-mile trail that circles the campus and connects to the P&HCC Loop Trail which officially opened to the public June 1, 2023. Also funded by the EAC, along the Beaver Creek Campus Trail is an overlook research deck with interpretive signage about the critical role of wetlands that was constructed for students to learn about ecosystems and water quality and add a learning stop along the trail for visitors.



Forest School

Philpott Dam Rd, Bassett, VA 24055

There are hundreds of studies that show that kids who spend time in nature are more successful and that the barrier to many families spending more time outdoors isn't cost or time, it is lack of confidence. The EAC sponsored the first Forest School at Philpott event, held in October 2023 at the Philpott Lake Visitor Center. This event encouraged children and their parents to learn how to experience the outdoors safely through interactive booths related to a variety of environmental topics.

I.C. DeHart Park

2631 Charity Highway, Woolwine, VA

Prior to the EAC investment, there was only a hand-drawn map of bike trails at the entrance of the I.C. DeHart Park in Patrick County, VA. The park was in need of trail-head and directional trail signage, trail feature rebuilding and maintenance, and basic biker accommodations. Many residents in the area didn't even know about the extensive trail system even though hundreds of mountain bikers from around the world participated in the Bootleggers Blitz Mountain Bike Race, a World Cup format race sanctioned by USA Cycling, at the park every May. In June 2022, the EAC provided funding to install a new kiosk and professional map that illustrates the more than twelve miles of trails correctly, a changing station for mountain bikers, new trail markers and directional signs on roadways leading to the park and printed 1,000 brochures that have a map of the trail.



Outdoor Learning Space

5393 Snow Creek Rd, Penhook, VA

Outdoor learning spaces can be powerful teaching tools. Teachers can easily use these spaces to illustrate the interrelationship between personal and planetary health, foster creative systems thinking, and provide a space for cooperative, hands-on problem solving. The EAC provided funding to design and construct an outdoor learning space at Snow Creek Elementary School in Franklin County, VA. The ribbon cutting was held in November 2023. The EAC's investment also provided matching funds to acquire a \$30K grant from the Roanoke Women's Foundation to support environmental education for all grade levels at the school. Snow Creek Elementary School will be a model for other regional schools.

Trail Renovation

Philpott Dam Rd, Bassett, VA 24055

The Philpott FIT trail was a 1/2 mile, one-way fitness trail that had unsafe, decaying fitness stations. The EAC provided volunteer support to remove these stations and funding to build a new trail kiosk, add a trail loop and design and install directional and educational signage in 2024.



UPDATE!

Future Site of the Virginia Mayo River State Park

823 Pratt Road, Spencer, VA

This property along the Mayo River is both historically and environmentally significant. Several well-preserved fish weirs (fish traps) built by American Indians can be spotted while paddling the Mayo River here and Native American settlements can be traced back thousands of years on the property. In addition, this section of the Mayo River is famous for Byrd's Ledge, a beautiful waterfall that is said to have marked the spot where surveyor William Byrd decided the state lines of North Carolina and Virginia in 1728.

The idea to open a state park on this property was conceived by the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) in 2007. The Mayo River State Park in Virginia finally become a reality when the EAC invested in the project. Because of the EAC investment, DRBA was able to leverage matching resources and funds from Virginia State Parks and Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to plan and construct signage and trails. Groundbreaking for the park occurred in October 2021 and the park officially opened to the public at a ribbon-cutting event on Earth Day, April 22, 2022. But it still was not an official state park.

Before a park can receive state funding in Virginia, a master plan must be completed before the legislature allocates any funding for infrastructure. Since the ribbon cutting in 2022, DRBA and its partners have been strongly encouraging the Commonwealth of Virginia to include master planning for the park in its state budget.

Finally, in 2024, an investment of \$320,000 was included in the Commonwealth's budget to hire a consulting group to develop a master plan for the site. The first stakeholders meeting, which included members of the EAC, was held in August, 2024 at Fairy Stone State Park and a public input meeting, which attracted more than 100 citizens, was held at the Spencer Penn Center in October, 2024.

The master plan is expected to be finished by July, 2026 according to the planning division's timeline. Once the master plan is complete and accepted by the state, it is anticipated that several million dollars will be invested to build amenities at the new, officially recognized, Virginia Mayo River State Park.





The Eco Ambassador Council's support to renovate the M.C. Martin Park in Danville, VA inspired an art contest for elementary school students to create a design for the storm drain that is near the new trailhead of the park. This third grader won the contest and painted his design at the park.

Benefits of EAC Membership

Businesses that join the Eco Ambassador Council (EAC) align themselves with other leaders committed to taking collective action to preserve and protect our region's natural resources.

- **Direct Impact Engagement:** Members collaborate to determine the most effective ways to utilize their investment by selecting impactful projects and offering opportunities for employees to actively participate.
- **Community Impact Report:** Released annually, the Impact Report showcases the accomplishments and contributions of the EAC, and is shared with members and made available to the public.
- **Marketing and Publicity:** In today's social media-driven world, companies that prioritize social responsibility build strong reputations as "good" businesses. Consumers are more likely to support businesses that demonstrate a commitment to positive change. As an EAC member, your company not only showcases its values and dedication to protecting our region's natural resources but also increases its visibility to potential new customers.

To learn more about the EAC, please contact Tyler Carter
Tyler.Carter@CBTcares.com or (540) 493-0582