



# RIDGE AND RIVER NEWS

Newsletter of the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC)

Aug 2022

## EarthMagic recycles glass in a new way

A business in Buena Vista is diverting glass from the local landfill. EarthMagic Recycling takes clean glass containers and turns them into “sand” ranging in size from powder to thumb-sized chunks, all safe to handle. Entrepreneur Kathy Wirtanen developed the business over the past year, gradually increasing its size and efficiency, with an official Grand Opening on August 5. The operation is located in a former BV industrial space owned by the Advancement Foundation. EarthMagic’s only neighbor now is a mushroom farm, but other businesses are coming.



Wirtanen with the sorter.

To produce the sand, glass containers (including bottles from local cooperating vineyards) are individually stripped of their paper labels with a rotary tool, then are tossed into a crusher whose output is carried to a sorting machine that separates the particles into five sizes. The color of the batch is controlled by selecting the input glass, resulting in choices that include clear, shades of brown or green, and even cobalt blue.

The product can be purchased in small bags suitable for crafts or in larger batches up to the ton-sized bags being delivered to Natural Bridge State Park for a disc golf course and new trail footing. The sand can also be used as an additive to improve clay soils. The business logs glass weight sourced from the two cities and the county, and is on track to process more than a ton of glass in July. For more information, go to [earthmagicrecycling.com](http://earthmagicrecycling.com).

### See us at the Community Festival

On Saturday, Aug 27, the RACC booth and adjacent “Green Alley” with associated environmental organizations will be located by the Wells Fargo Bank.

## Old-Growth Forest dedicated in southern Rockbridge

In early May, a 1,620-acre stand of forest in Rockbridge County was officially added to the Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN), an event celebrated by representatives of the Network, RACC and the US Forest Service (USFS). The tract lies within the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests and encompasses a geological landmark called the Devil’s Marbleyard. It can be accessed from the Belfast Trailhead off Petites Gap Road just south of Arnolds Valley, and is now marked by a plaque at the trail kiosk.

Founded in 2012 by Joan Maloof, OGFN seeks to preserve and highlight old-growth forests across the nation. Network forests are both protected from future logging and made available for education and recreation. The Network currently includes 160 forests in 28 states. The Rockbridge County forest will join 10 other Virginia tracts already registered with OGFN and will be the first Network forest in Virginia located in a national forest.

During the fall of 2021, several RACC members became aware of OGFN through a webinar given by Maloof. She and other researchers have shown that, contrary to earlier assumptions, old-growth forests outperform younger stands as contributors to carbon capture, as well as supporting

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Invited guests celebrate official designation of Rockbridge tract as part of the Old Growth Forest Network.

## Uncas Trail gets improvements, opens to public dawn to dusk

Members of RACC's Owned Lands and Trails Committee and supporters have been working to complete improvements to the new Uncas Nature Trail in East Lexington. The trailhead can now be found on electronic maps (see below) with the name "Uncas Nature Trail" or the street address, 890 Shop Road. Small brown signs direct visitors to a new gravel parking area that can accommodate several cars.



**Bruce Dwyer trims brush on the Uncas Trail.**

A handsome trailhead kiosk was built by Devan Malore and will soon boast a map and a list of rules for trail users. The trail is well mowed, and walkers can follow it east along the bluff to access a route down to the shore of the Maury River across from the Chessie Trail. The committee is considering the strategic placement of benches to be constructed from local fallen timber.



### Annual Meeting: Save the date

RACC will hold its annual meeting on Oct 9 at Heartstone Lodge, located on Stuartsburg Road between Buena Vista and Lexington.

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is published quarterly and edited by Sally Nunneley.

Send suggestions, articles or letters to [racc@rockbridge.net](mailto:racc@rockbridge.net) or mail them to the address shown on the cover.

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complex animal habitats. Older trees are also better for stabilizing climate and reducing air pollution.

A RACC committee worked with Lauren Stull, District Ranger for the USFS, to find a suitable tract in Rockbridge County. The Belfast stand was once a part of Monacan lands, has not been logged since 1885, and is in a designated wilderness area that forbids future logging.

The one-mile trail to the Network forest's edge is accessible for almost all levels of hikers. As a cove forest, a type unique to the Appalachian Mountains, this stand has bowl-shaped valleys with some of the greatest plant and tree diversity of forests in the US. At present, parking for the trail is limited, but the USFS is currently developing a larger parking area across from the trailhead.

This article was written with the help of Lenna Ojure. More information on OGFN is at [oldgrowthforest.net](http://oldgrowthforest.net).

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## Welcoming new allies

RACC's board met in June with Adam Schellhammer, new Executive Director of the Valley Conservation Council. The board's August guest will be Emily Kohl, a Rockbridge resident who has been named Executive Director of Boxerwood.

Each has been invited to introduce him/herself, discuss the future direction of their organization, and consider possibilities for partnership with RACC.

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## *Donation supports RACC's work*



David Hinty, Jr, presented a major donation to RACC in appreciation of its work on recycling and the annual Community Cleanup. He is shown here with RACC's Executive Director, Barbara Walsh.

## W&L plans to use solar energy for 100% of electricity needs

RACC board member Jane Stewart is an Energy Specialist on the Washington and Lee staff and was instrumental in developing the university's plan to purchase 100% of its future electricity consumption from a large solar array in North Carolina. The long-term agreement partners W&L with solar energy developer SunEnergy1.

"We are very proud of the progress we've made on our sustainability initiatives in recent years," said W&L President William C. Dudley in a statement. "Thanks to the leadership of Steve McAllister and Jane Stewart, the good work of our university facilities staff and the guidance of the University Sustainability Committee, we have consistently surpassed the original targets outlined in our [2010] Climate Action Plan. This new partnership will significantly advance our commitment to attaining carbon neutrality, and we look forward to making further progress through a thoughtful review of purchasing, transportation and sustainable office and living practices."

W&L already has three solar arrays on campus, but Virginia utility regulations limit further expansion. Stewart determined that the university could purchase the desired amount of solar energy if it were sourced elsewhere and routed through the regional power grid. The solar farm will be located just over the Virginia border on former farmland, requiring no clearance of forest. Stewart says the goal is to add pollinator-friendly plants and landscaping under the photovoltaic panels.

## Does Rockbridge have a problem with PFAS pollution?

The RACC Watershed Committee has been actively investigating possible local contamination of water and sludge-fertilized farm fields with dangerous PFAS "forever chemicals." To date, it is still not known whether Rockbridge has a problem with these pollutants: Meetings with local authorities at the wastewater treatment plant and the landfill have not produced access to appropriate samples for testing.

However, the committee has obtained data on biosolids application to local farmland in the past three years and is seeking data for the past 16 years. The state of Maine has been very active in investigating PFAS problems there and has become a model for the work here.

Local investigation continues under the leadership of toxicologist Joe DiNardo with the cooperation of Extension Agent Tom Stanley and several scientists from Virginia Tech as well as a representative of W&L. The committee is also cooperating with the Farm Bureau and people from the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance.

Over the past several months, DiNardo has presented several seminars on this problem. To view recordings, go to [rockbridgeconservation.org](http://rockbridgeconservation.org) and entering PFAS in the search box.

More help on the PFAS issue would be most welcome. To be added to the RACC PFAS working group distribution list, please contact Barbara Walsh at 540-460-6661 or through the RACC website. If you'd like to join the VCN PFAS campaign listserv to be kept informed of state-wide efforts, email Lisa at [lisa@vcnva.org](mailto:lisa@vcnva.org).

## Wanted: Leaders and helpers

RACC is looking for nominees for leadership positions that will open at the end of this year. Specific needs include a co-treasurer and someone with GIS and computer skills, but anyone interested in serving on the RACC board is welcome to inquire. If interested, please contact a member of the Nominating Committee before the end of August:

Bob Biersack [bob.biersack@gmail.com](mailto:bob.biersack@gmail.com)

Julie Youngman [youngmanj@wlu.edu](mailto:youngmanj@wlu.edu)

Jane Stewart [110woodward@gmail.com](mailto:110woodward@gmail.com)

The slate for elective offices will be published to the membership on Sept. 9 and the election will take place during the Annual Meeting on Oct. 9; those elected will begin their terms in 2023.

RACC is a very active organization, and help is also needed for a variety of ongoing projects. Please consult the annual committee summary that will be distributed at the Community Festival and posted on line at [rockbridgeconservation.org](http://rockbridgeconservation.org).

## Try our refurbished website!

The address is still [rockbridgeconservation.org](http://rockbridgeconservation.org) but the layout and content are all new. Material is being added regularly, including a new blog.

# RACC Seminars scheduled for fall of 2022

## Carbon Sink Demonstration Project, September 21, 7:00 p.m.

David Yarrow will describe the synergistic benefits of creating carbon sinks for the land beneath our feet. He is the manager of a citizen-scientist project in Columbia, Missouri, that seeks to demonstrate this potential by documenting increases in organic content of farmed project test plots.

## Alternatives to Mowed Grass Lawns, October 21, 7:00 p.m.

Alternative ground covers can increase biodiversity and organic content in soils, improving water retention and eliminating the need for chemical inputs. Wren Frue, currently on staff of Valley Conservation Network, has worked as a restoration assistant at the Conard Environmental Research Area, a tall-grass prairie conservation and restoration project where she helped manage invasive species, assisted in cutting-edge research, and worked controlled burns.

## Challenges for Virginia's Native Bats, November 16, 7:00 p.m.

Leslie Sturgis is president of Bat Conservation & Rescue of Virginia ([www.VirginiaBats.org](http://www.VirginiaBats.org)). An experienced presenter, Leslie will facilitate an in-depth discussion of Virginia's native bats and the conservation challenges our bats face. She will give a brief overview of bats' natural history, discuss regional species, touch on local conservation issues and how to address them.

## Returnable Restaurant Carry-Out Containers, December 15, 7:00 p.m.

A representative from Perpetual, ([perpetualuse.org](http://perpetualuse.org)), a non profit organization promoting the transition from disposable to reusable containers, will describe the potential and challenges of creating an open-loop returnable container carryout system.

Telephone: 540-463-2330 \* Website: [rockbridgeconservation.org](http://rockbridgeconservation.org) \* Facebook page: Rockbridge-Conservation

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