



RIDGE AND RIVER NEWS

The Newsletter of Rockbridge Conservation

July 2023

From the President

About Habitat solar

On June 29, Rockbridge Conservation, Rockbridge Habitat for Humanity, and Give.Solar helped install a roof-top solar system on the fourth house in the Greenhouse Road community. This is part of a vigorous program throughout Virginia to put solar on Habitat houses.

It's easy to see the growth of roof-top photovoltaic systems in the Rockbridge area in recent years. More and more solar panels are appearing on homes, businesses, and other properties throughout the area. We are recognizing the benefits of replacing electricity generated at big fossil-fuel plants with clean energy from the sun, generated right at home.

One important factor limiting the adoption of solar is that the systems require a significant up-front investment, while the resulting stream of benefits, both financial and climatic, take time to add up. While some of us are lucky enough

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Friends of Woods Creek jump right in

Rockbridge Conservation is hosting a new affiliate, the Friends of Woods Creek (FOWC). A well-attended kickoff meeting in May established a steering committee consisting of Sandra Stuart, David Agnor, Betty Besal, and Chris Wise. Together they offer key knowledge of current issues along the creek, riparian buffers, geographic information systems, project administration, environmental practices, and the history of the creek.

David Agnor comments "Growing up in Lexington, Woods Creek was a wonderful area for kids to play. We would spend hours fishing and exploring for all the creatures living in or near the creek. Today, it's very encouraging to see how many residents - not just our kids - enjoy walking, running, and playing along the Woods Creek corridor."

Woods Creek originates on private property near Modine, off Rt. 251, and runs south through the Country Club golf course, joined by tributaries along the way. Once it reaches Ross Road below Kendal, it flows through the city to the campuses of W&L and VMI before emptying into the Maury River. A two-mile trail begins at Woods Creek Park and continues along the stream through the W&L campus; at VMI it leaves the waterway, continuing along the gravel road above the North Post playing fields to Jordan's Point Park.

FOWC set up committees to address the three areas of concern shown below and will also pursue grants to fund work on the ground.

Trail: Non-native, invasive trees and shrubs are overwhelming Woods Creek, blocking views of the stream while providing little support for native insects and the birds that feed on them. Furthermore, no natural mechanism controls the spread of such plants. A team of Master Gardeners is working on their eradication in cooperation with Public Works to cut and spray herbicides on these bad actors. Planning is underway to plant native trees and shrubs in selected locations and install appropriate signage to educate the public about these efforts.

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Community Cleanup: "Litter Eliminators" take the prize

The annual Community Cleanup in March drew 52 registered groups including about 420 people. The 34 groups who reported their hauls collected a grand total of 1680 bags of trash, which is 5 to 8 tons of refuse, tires and other objects. The champion team and winner of the famous Litter Cup for 2023 was the indefatigable Litter Eliminators (photo) led by Jenny and Larry Keel. Thanks to all who participated!



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to be able to make those investments, or can qualify for financing from banks and other sources, many people in the community don't have access to those financial resources. These are also the people who could benefit most from reducing their monthly electricity bills by half or more, as solar systems typically do

That's why Rockbridge Conservation has created the Solar Seed Fund to help with installation costs when Habitat homeowners decide they want solar systems on their homes. We're partnering with local Rotary clubs and Give.Solar, a Harrisonburg-based nonprofit that provides solar financial resources and expertise state-wide. The installations in June are the second and third examples here in Rockbridge, and plans are in the works to help the transition to solar for Habitat homes in both the Greenhouse Road community and in Habitat's new location near South Main Street in Lexington.

We're excited to be working to make the environmental and financial benefits of clean, renewable energy available to everyone in our community. to get more information about the Solar Seed Fund and our work with Habitat, email director@rockbridgeconservation.org.

— **Bob Biersack, President of Rockbridge Conservation**

Preventing waste: RC provides free consultation and equipment

The Waste Prevention Committee and other RC volunteers recently demonstrated at two local events the possibilities for minimizing the volume of waste that goes to the landfill: The first was the popular Bull and Oyster Fest (see photo), an annual fundraiser for the Rockbridge Area Health Center, while the second was the monthly Chamber of Commerce gathering, Business After Hours.

While RC is cannot staff recycling for other events, they showed what can be accomplished if appropriate receptacles are set up and someone is present at each disposal site to help the public use them correctly. More than 800 people attended the Bull and Oyster Fest, and all the aluminum drink cans and plastic bottles were directed to county recycling, while glass wine bottles were picked up by Earth Magic for conversion to glass sand, and oyster shells (38 5-gal buckets) went to improve the soil on the Wapners' Paradox organic farm.

RC has an inventory of recycling containers for loan to other organizations. Event organizers can obtain consultation and reserve containers by contacting melody.tennant@rockbridgeconservation.org.

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Watershed: FOWC will cooperate with existing RC programs in the Maury River watershed to extend the area of study and will consult with the Country Club to see what environmental practices can be improved. Betty Besal notes that FOWC wants to emphasize the importance of riparian areas -- the land beside Woods Creek and its tributaries. She says, "These areas are vital for cleaning storm water as it flows toward the creek, while the roots of plants growing there keep the banks from eroding. Grass also serves these functions, but trees and shrubs growing in riparian areas are the real work-horses." Work is already underway on restoration of eroded stream banks and removal of old, disused sewer pipes where necessary. Stormwater management is also under study.

Outreach & Education: Current efforts are directed toward creating public awareness of FOWC and educating stream-side landowners about issues along the creek. Priority will be given to projects under development by the Trail and Watershed committees.

The initial focus is on the trail and the urban areas of the creek; to that end, the Friends completed a Stewardship Agreement with the city for volunteers' work on public land and will establish liaison with W&L and VMI.

Anyone reading this is invited to join the effort to improve Woods Creek and its trail, a Lexington's treasure. Each of the three committees meets monthly, and anyone is welcome to join the email list to receive a monthly email bulletin. If interested, contact RC Executive Director, Barbara Walsh, phone 540-463-2330 or email director@rockbridgeconservation.org, or email Sandra Stuart, sandra.stuart@rockbridgeconservation.org.



RC Board member Chris Wise (orange vest) works at a recycling node during the Bull and Oyster Fest.

Lexington launches Healthy Green Neighborhoods Collective

In July, Lexington formed the Healthy Green Neighborhoods Collaborative to implement the Green Infrastructure (GI) section of its 2040 Lexington Comprehensive Plan. The goal is to create a more livable, healthy community.

Preliminary planning was done by a Working Group made up of citizens and pro-bono professionals, which recommended formation of the collaborative, a multi-organization partnership that is tasked with pursuing projects that benefit the city as a whole.

Green infrastructure includes an array of elements that promote healthy living through enhanced green spaces for walking and biking; improved air and water quality; increased biodiversity; lowered energy consumption; and increased tree canopy to provide shade and cooling.

The collaborative includes RC members, interested residents, representatives of other local conservation and health organizations, and relevant agencies and officials. It has begun work to implement elements of the city's plan. To learn details or to get involved, go to the [city's website](#) and search for Green Infrastructure Initiative, or email [RC](#).

Volunteers make solar happen



Volunteers lift solar panels onto the roof of a Habitat home on Greenhouse Road. A crew of expert installers then attached the panels to the roof and wired the system to the house's electrical system.

Recycle those plastic nursery pots!

Retailers such as Lowe's and Milmont will recycle the plastic containers for individual plants. Returning the pots should reduce making more plastic for next spring's garden treasures.

Uncas Trail opens to the public

The new Uncas Trail in East Lexington is now open to the public. The trailhead is accessed from Shop Road near Lexington Public Works and features a small parking area and a kiosk. The path leads southeast along the Maury cliffs and descends to the river opposite the trail.

New faces join RC scene

Megan Hess has joined the board to serve as co-treasurer with Larry Evans. She is an Associate Professor of Accounting and a core faculty member in Environmental Studies at W&L. Since moving to Lexington in 2013, she has served as treasurer for a number of local non-profits including Habitat for Humanity and the Hoofbeats Therapeutic Riding Center. She looks forward to helping advance Rockbridge Conservation's mission in our community.



Megan Hess

Also new is Kirin Lattomus, who has joined the RC staff as Communications Administrator. She moved here in 2018 after living in the Pacific Northwest. Her background in farming and working with educational non-profits led her to pursue a master's degree in Natural Resources at Virginia Tech, where she is currently enrolled. Her outside activities include hiking, camping, gardening, yoga, and various fields of artistic expression.



Kirin Lattomus

Shannon Spencer, the previous Communications Administrator, resigned that position and has been appointed to the board, where she continues to serve as a valuable resource for RC.

View RC's excellent seminars

Although the seminar series is on hiatus until September, past episodes are available at rockbridgeconservation.org by clicking on the link "Webinar Recordings."

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Caught Green-Handed

Rockbridge landowners honored for buffers along waterways

In May, twelve local landowners were honored for participating in the James River Buffer Program (JRBP), an effort to create forested buffers on properties along tributary streams to improve the quality of the waterways.

The JRBP is a partnership among the James River Association, the Virginia Department of Forestry, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, funded in part by the Virginia Environmental Endowment. The latter provides funding and labor for planting and maintenance of riparian buffers on private lands along rivers, streams, and creeks that flow into the Maury or the James. These buffers improve water quality by minimizing runoff of chemicals and other pollutants into waterways, prevent downstream flooding by absorbing water from storms, provide habitat for local wildlife, remove carbon dioxide from the air, and improve soil quality by retaining leaf litter.

The JRBP works with landowners to select native trees and plants for the buffers, does site preparation and planting, and maintains the buffers for three years – all at no cost to the landowners, who must agree to keep the area forested for 15 years or more. In just two years, the program has planted 14,550 trees covering 74 acres of land in Rockbridge County.

Caught Green-Handed is sponsored by RC's Waste Prevention Committee and the News-Gazette. Awards earlier this spring were presented to Kroger for installing energy-saving doors on their cold cabinets and to Earth Magic for innovative recycling of glass.

If you know of a local business, organization, or individual that deserves recognition for taking steps to improve the environment, send your suggestions to communications@rockbridgeconservation.com.

Telephone: 540-463-2330 * Website: rockbridgeconservation.org * Facebook: Rockbridge-Conservation

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