



RIDGE AND RIVER NEWS

The Newsletter of Rockbridge Conservation

December 2024

Letter from the President

Walsh, Comstock retire from RC

Both of Rockbridge Conservation's longest-serving staff members, Executive Director Barbara Walsh and Membership Director Jane Comstock will retire on Dec 31. Jamie Goodin has been named to succeed Walsh, while membership and communications work are being reconfigured on a trial basis.

Barbara served as Executive Director of the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (now called Rockbridge Conservation) from 2000 to 2024, bringing transformative achievements in conservation and community engagement. She was a major force in critical projects such as establishing Natural Bridge State Park and Moore's Creek State Forest, promoting solar energy and wildlife-corridor initiatives, advocating for sustainable forestry and agriculture, adopting better models for development, and building comprehensive water-monitoring programs.

Barbara also modernized the organization's operations and expanded communications and educational program outreach. She strengthened fundraising efforts, secured Rockbridge Conservation's endowment funds, and

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President Bob Biersack (left) and vice president Shannon Spencer (right) present a certificate of appreciation to Barbara Walsh at the Annual Meeting.

Jamie Goodin taking over as Executive Director

At its Annual Meeting, Rockbridge Conservation introduced its new Executive Director, Jamie Goodin, who will take the reins from the retiring Barbara Walsh on Jan 1, 2025.

Now 37 years old, Jamie grew up in Amherst, VA, a few miles east of Rockbridge County, graduating from Washington & Lee in 2010 with a business major. He has been working in the Rockbridge area for the past decade in various roles with local nonprofits and civic organizations, including Main Street Lexington, the Lexington-Rockbridge Jaycees, and Main Street Buena Vista. He chaired the Lexington Planning Commission as well as working in web development and digital content at Washington and Lee. In the private sector, he is the founder and CEO of a business development firm and in that role has worked with many local enterprises.

Goodin lives in East Lexington near the Uncas Trail and enjoys all kinds of outdoor activities including walking, running, and biking on local trails and kayaking on nearby streams, as well as sitting quietly and imbibing the beauty of Rockbridge, with particular appreciation of the Goshen area. Jamie has a small, very active Mountain Feist or "squirrel dog" named Desmond, and happily declares that he is a big fan of the Beatles.

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***Please remember
Rockbridge Conservation
in your year-end giving.***

RC relies on your generosity for its programs.



Meeting features good food, news of changes at RC, and awards

Rockbridge Conservation's Annual Meeting took place on Sunday, Nov 10, in RARA's Piovano Building. The meeting was organized by Vice-President Shannon Spencer along with several other board members and was attended by upwards of 70 people, including board members, committee chairs, volunteers, and general members. There were two pre-meeting activities, a tour of RARA's Neighborhood Grocery and a walk through Spencer's nearby yard, which is in transition to all-native plants.

At the meeting, attendees enjoyed a potluck meal accompanied by a brief talk by Jan Smith on the importance of native plantings. The meeting included organizational updates, elections, awards, a silent auction and a raffle. A total of \$1579 was brought in by the fundraising activities in addition to a number of membership renewals and donations..

During the business meeting, President Bob Biersack reviewed RC's activities over the past year, while Treasurer Megan Hess reported on the organization's sound financial standing and gradually growing membership. The election brought to the board were one new member, Rich Wallace (see story) as well as new terms for current board members Brian Jenkins, Jim Manley, Lee Merrill, Gretchen Sukow, and Craig Vinecombe. Chris Connors is leaving the board this year.

Conservation awards are always a feature of the meeting. This year's awardees were:

Nature Restoration & Preservation Award to Jim Jones. Jones has been the Park Manager for Natural Bridge State Park since its establishment in 2016 and has made the park a model of environmental stewardship. His initiatives have led to the park's designation as an International Dark Sky Park, the Recycle Right initiative, new hiking trails, a Children's Discovery area, the Base Camp interpretive center, and a disc-golf trail. With his encouragement, Friends of NBSP and staff rangers continue develop innovative programs for park visitors.



Conservation Educator Award to Jay Sullivan, a VMI professor of Mechanical Engineering who involves his students in projects with a conservation focus and real-world application. Examples are a solar-powered machine to remove plastics from a river and elephant-detering devices for farmers in Botswana. In 2019, he designed an 18' whale armature for a traveling program on ocean plastics pollution. Rockbridge Conservation also commissioned him to build a giant sea turtle armature that now accompanies Boxerwood educators as they bring the program to local schools.

Conservation Leadership Award to Tom Stanley, Doug Horn and Cristin Sprenger (VA Cooperative Extension) **and Erin Ling** (Virginia Tech) for their successful effort to expand Virginia's Household Water Quality Program in Rockbridge County. In addition to their pioneering work to improve private, rural water supplies, they have worked to inform the public about the sources and consequences of PFAS contamination. In accepting the award on behalf of the group, Stanley credited Rockbridge Conservation for raising public awareness of the water issues this group addressed.



Rich Wallace elected to Rockbridge Conservation Board

Richard L. Wallace was elected to the board at RC's Annual Meeting. He currently works at the Ecological Society of America (ESA) where he oversees a portfolio of internationally renowned journals in ecology and environmental science and practice. He is also a director of the Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative.



Wallace earned his B.A. from the University of Vermont, followed by M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from Yale University, all in interdisciplinary environmental studies. Following ten years working on federal programs for the protection of marine mammals, he taught at Eckerd College in Florida and Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, where he developed community-based programs in land stewardship; the college's Office of Sustainability; and degree-granting programs in marine science and food studies.

Wallace is a native of Brooklyn, NY and a delighted transplant to Lexington, where he lives with his wife, Shannon Spencer, their son, Jonah, a dog and a lizard.

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fostered collaboration with numerous other conservation organizations. Her leadership, environmental expertise, and commitment to making a difference significantly enriched RC's role in preserving local ecosystems and engaging the community in sustainable practices.



Jane Comstock

Jane Comstock joined RACC soon after moving to her home on South River in 1996, and immersed herself in water monitoring. The following year, she was elected to the board and later served a year as Executive Director until Barbara was hired. As the organization grew in membership, scope and financial complexity, she helped usher the office into the digital age. In 2009, she was hired as Membership Director and has served spectacularly in that position for 15

years, as she modestly says, "Helping an extraordinary group of devoted people to grow this fine organization."

During its nearly 50 years of existence, Rockbridge Conservation has moved forward by leveraging the experience and success of now two generations of outstanding leadership. Barbara and Jane have given us a strong base from which to move into the future and continue the conservation of this extraordinary place.

— **Bob Biersack**

Goodin *continued from Page 1*

Jamie is enthusiastic about stepping into his new role with Rockbridge Conservation and has already started attending committee meetings so he can hit the ground running in January.

Jamie says he admires Rockbridge Conservation for its record of community activism and that his overall goal as the new executive director is to "help local citizens appreciate and support the environment of natural abundance in Rockbridge so that it remains available for present and future generations."



Jamie Goodin

New Walsh Award presented to water-advocate Sandra Stuart

The RC board has established the Barbara Walsh Award to express its gratitude for the exceptional effort and commitment that she has demonstrated during her 25 years as Executive Director of RACC/Rockbridge Conservation. The award will be presented occasionally to recognize a Rockbridge Conservation volunteer who has shown an extraordinary level of effort over a long period.

Sandra Stuart was chosen as the first recipient of the Walsh Award for her sustained dedication and many successes over the years to improve and maintain water quality in streams throughout the region. Her activities have ranged from sampling macro-invertebrates in our streams and teaching others to do the same, to finding the energy, community agreement, and financial support to restore the riparian buffer the length of Woods Creek, as well as many other accomplishments.



Barbara Walsh (left) with Sandra Stuart, first recipient of Rockbridge Conservation's Barbara Walsh Award.

RC co-sponsored a Nov 19 webinar:

Is sewage sludge laced with 'forever chemicals' contaminating Virginia farmland?

It featured several speakers who explored parallel experience in rural Maine. View the video [here](https://rockbridgeconservation.org/2024/11/21/webinar-pfas-sewage-sludge-farmlands/) or at rockbridgeconservation.org/2024/11/21/webinar-pfas-sewage-sludge-farmlands/

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Working together to conserve the natural beauty of the Rockbridge area



Some of the people who enjoyed the Annual Meeting. (Photo by Spencer)

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