

CURRENTS

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Recreation • Education • Stewardship



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Currents Newsletter

Design/Editing Monique Holland

From the Director ”

For those of you who have been supporting DRBA for a while, you may notice this issue of Currents looks a bit different. I would like to extend a warm welcome to our new volunteer designer and editor of Currents, Monique Holland. Monique has years of design and editing experience working in the newspaper industry. We are so grateful that Monique has chosen to support DRBA’s mission with her expertise and skills. Welcome Monique to the DRBA family!

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Betty Kirkpatrick who held the title of volunteer designer and editor of Currents for many years. Betty not only took on the monumental task of creating Currents, but she also gave – and continues to give - countless hours of her time at DRBA events and outings as well. Thank you Betty for giving both your time and your generous donations to support the protection and preservation of our natural and cultural resources with DRBA, I hope you know how grateful we are to you!

Drop us a note and let us know how you like the new look and layout. Happy Winter and happy reading!

Tiffany Haworth, Executive Director

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REMEMBRANCE

DAN RIVER COAL ASH SPILL

On February 2, 2014, an estimated 39,000 tons of coal ash and 27 million gallons of contaminated water, stored in a lagoon beside the shuttered Duke Energy Dan River Power Station poured into the Dan River when a metal stormwater drain collapsed. DRBA had warned of the potential for a catastrophic lagoon breach more than five years before the incident in its Pathways Plan.

Coal ash is the residue from burning coal to produce power. It contains concentrated heavy metals at levels toxic to aquatic life and to all who consume river-dwelling creatures. The contaminated sediment coated the bottom of the river, in some places over 5 feet thick, suffocating aquatic invertebrates and causing an immediate environmental catastrophe. The long term effects are unknown as the toxins from the contaminated ash can bioaccumulate over time in fish, turtles, birds, and animals that live in or near the river over time.



Today, Duke Energy has completed excavation of the 25.6 million tons of coal ash at four high-priority sites including Dan River, Riverbend, Asheville and Sutton Steam Plant in Wilmington.

DRBA has continued its monitoring of the Dan River in addition to dozens of other waterways throughout the region.

Though the Dan River may look like it has recovered, if you dig deep into the sediment on the river floor you will still find an insidious layer of dark black coal ash that may never disappear.

Although the Mayo, Smith, and Banister rivers, as well as all upstream miles of the Dan River, were unaffected by the spill, public perception of the entire area was tainted by the accident. At the time of the spill, Wake Forest University Professor Dennis Lemly, an expert on coal ash, estimated the long-term economic cost of the Dan River spill to be up to \$700,000,000.

After the spill, DRBA staff and partnering organizations immediately got to work. This included monitoring the site and collecting data, developing a plan to address water quality and environmental impact, passing a resolution to address the disaster, encouraging municipalities affected to pass resolutions, making multiple presentations to possible partners on the incident, offering educational programs on the topic, informing affected farmers of the potential harm, launching its water quality monitoring program in affected areas, and working with researchers and educators on environmental studies related to the spill.

DRBA also initiated litigation to ensure remediation of the Dan River site which covered removing as much ash from the river as possible while also safely containing the remaining coal ash.

THE PATH FORWARD

As Duke Energy weans itself off coal over the next decade, those who spent their careers dealing with the ash hope that a combination of cleaner power and more environmental regulation can prevent a problem like coal ash pollution from arising again.

A step officials could take would be to require more natural buffer zones along waterways to separate the water from industrial sites and filtering out pollutants before they enter the water.

At the state level, NC Department of Environmental Quality is continuing to monitor ash sites and enforce the terms of the 2019 settlement by using lab tests to verify that each site meets the legal requirements for ash removal.



The combined efforts of DRBA and its partners were able to hold Duke Energy accountable and in May, 2014, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) entered into a \$3 million cleanup agreement with Duke to address the coal ash spill. In addition, the NC General Assembly enacted the North Carolina Coal Ash Management Act (CAMA) in 2014.

In 2015, DRBA encouraged Duke Energy to launch a Water Resources Fund through its corporate foundation which ultimately provided millions of dollars in funding to organizations making an impact in the Dan River watershed related to environmental education, recreation and stewardship.

Duke Energy eventually paid \$102 million for its federal environmental crimes and agreed to absorb \$1.1 billion in cleanup costs anticipated between 2015 and 2030.

Additionally, Duke Energy is working to recycle coal ash by reducing its carbon content. Three sites in North Carolina reprocess the ash, which can then be used as an ingredient in certain concrete and cement products.



MASTER PLAN COMPLETE

DRBA Supporting Outdoor Recreation

After 3 years of diligent work throughout Rockingham County, DRBA is happy to share the published Rockingham County Outdoor Recreation Master Plan.

Master plans are important to communities and our work because they ensure public and municipal input on a vision that speaks for all of us. Plans also assist in creating more robust grant applications to show a plan that has been envisioned with the public in mind.

With over 30 miles of trail, five parks, and seven river accesses on the plans for development and/or enhancements, this master plan is over 120 pages long!

All municipalities, local recreation groups, and Friends groups were heavily involved as stakeholders -- advising on asset development, priority projects, enhancement projects and initiatives that were integral while building the structure of the master plan.

While municipal and community leaders were the backbone of the project, much of the 'meat' of the plan was developed through public input meetings throughout Rockingham County.

During these meetings, participants were able to share their ideas and suggestions for development and/or enhancements for over 30 miles of trail, five parks and seven river accesses.

They also offered strategies for partners, funding sources, and opportunities for growth when the Master Plan is eventually implemented.

The Master Plan development, combined with other efforts DRBA has been part of - Year of the Trail, Great Trails State Coalition, Trail Town Weekend in the City of Eden, the Dan River State Paddle Trail - have provided municipal partners and community leaders a better understanding of the value of outdoor



recreation not only as a health asset, but as an economic and tourism driver for Rockingham County.

This plan is a living document that will be used over the next several years by the stakeholder group and other interested citizens to create a well-connected Rockingham County. Visit our Master Plan page on our website to see this plan!

You can also use your smartphone camera to scan the QR code to view the completed master plan.



The Eco Ambassador Council and the City of Danville Parks and Recreation Department partnered with the local community and family members of M.C. Martin to enhance this small park dedicated to Mr. Martin's legacy.

A short walking path, memorial benches, informative signage and an observation deck are being added. In November, a group of volunteers from the community, the Eco Ambassador Council and DRBA met at the park to continue the clean-up efforts and do some additional trail work and sign installation. A big shout out to

Danville Parks and Recreation for doing a rough cut of the Creekside trail and removing all the debris collected. A brand-new sign near the entrance provides information on Mr. Martin's accomplishments.

Maceo Conrad "M.C." Martin was a distinguished African American banker as well as community leader. During his 19-year bank presidency, he strived to provide all members of the community with the tools that he successfully employed to achieve success throughout his career as a banker – self-help and financial empowerment.



Our next step will be to add gravel to the trail and to construct the observation deck along the creek. We appreciate the strong support of the Eco-ambassador Council, Danville Parks and Recreation, the Martin Family and DRBA volunteers.



Pictured here: Westmoreland Community Leader Clyde McCoy showing the location of the old wooden bridge that spanned the park's creek over 50 years ago.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR EDUCATION

In 2018, DRBA and Eastman partnered to design the Eastman Eco-Learning Station. This exciting project was expected to be completed in two phases and would provide a learning site for hundreds of regional students to experience environmental education in an outdoor setting to enhance environmental literacy initiatives.

This site, at the Great Road River Access along the Smith River, is located along the “15 Magical Miles” corridor in the geographic region of the Small Towns Collaborative Initiative, a Harvest Foundation project. It is also a popular site along the Smith River Blueway.

Phase I of the project was completed in 2019 and entailed a boardwalk and interpretive signage. In 2022, Eastman funded the second phase of the eco-learning station with construction of an outdoor, open air pavilion. The pavilion will provide a space for students to conduct water quality monitoring and learn about river ecology.

The river access is currently used as a release location for DRBA’s Trout in the Classroom program every spring impacting hundreds of local students including the nearby Bassett High School.

Research shows that outdoor classroom experiences are more comfortable and conducive to learning when a shelter and support facilities are located on site. A shelter allows for year-round learning regardless of weather conditions. DRBA has constructed several outdoor learning spaces throughout the region, but Eastman Eco-Learning Station will be the first outdoor learning classroom along the Smith River.

In 2022, DRBA acquired matching funds to support the project through the Virginia Department of Forestry’s Urban and Community Forestry grant. The grant aligned with Eastman’s focus area for the outdoor learning classroom by providing local students with a safe, outdoor space to conduct hands-on activities and utilize year round.



Interpretive signage will be installed at the outdoor classroom featuring the Smith River ecosystem, importance of riparian buffers and Virginia watersheds. Teachers from local schools that participated in DRBA’s TIC program provided input on the signage that would be most beneficial to their learning experience.

Enhancements to the current river access will also include an all accessible ramp to the outdoor classroom and an all accessible parking space in the parking area near the classroom.

VOLUNTEER WITH DRBA



Another year is another opportunity to volunteer with DRBA! We are fortunate to have received grant funding to continue our Citizens Water Quality Monitoring Training in North Carolina! We will have two in-person training sessions throughout the year to train new individuals who are interested in monitoring our waterways.

DRBA hopes to increase our monitors in North Carolina this year and revitalize a missing piece of our reports over the past few years. Citizen science is an important part of historically research-based and innovation-funded science.

Participants will learn hands-on protocol for E.coli monitoring and water

sampling from our local rivers and streams. After training, volunteers can start monitoring a site in their community.

We thank all of our CWQM volunteers and hope to see a few more added this year! This is a year-long, commitment of a few hours a month recording e-coli and other water quality indicators in our creeks, streams, and rivers. If you are interested, please contact Krista Hodges at khodges@danriver.org.



DRBA installed an outdoor learning space at Snow Creek Elementary in Franklin County that will allow students and teachers to take learning out of the classroom. The learning space was generously sponsored by the Eco Ambassador Council, a coalition of regional businesses that combine their investment to support environmental protection and preservation opportunities.

The outdoor learning space is designed for fourth and fifth grade students and was installed last fall, nestled near the forest edge, and includes a shelter, picnic tables and native bushes planted by the students.



OUTDOOR LEARNING

SNOW CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

“

We are thrilled to support the environmental education efforts that are taking place at Snow Creek Elementary. Teaching our children about the importance of the environment and conservation is essential and we look forward to the many opportunities this new outdoor learning space will provide.

Tyler Carter, Eco Ambassador Council

”

The space will allow students the opportunity to practice and apply many of the concepts they are learning in the classroom.

The Snow Creek Outdoor Classroom is one component of a greater, multi-year DRBA project at Snow Creek Elementary generously funded through the Roanoke Women’s Foundation called “Educating the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards.” The project began in 2022 and will conclude in 2024.

The Educating the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards project provides an immersive environmental education experience to all grade levels by integrating environmental education programs into curriculum that is already taking place in the classroom.



Programs include classroom presentations on watersheds and natural resource protection, Trout in the Classroom and Streamside Trees in the Classroom.

This year, DRBA also plans to install a nationally certified Monarch Waystation and weather monitoring station near the outdoor learning space. To learn more about DRBA’s environment education programs, visit www.danriver.org/EE.

BUTLER LEGACY PROJECT

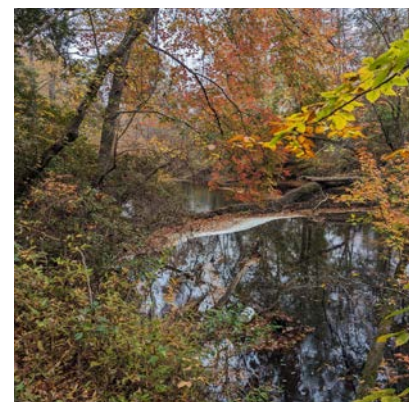
The Butler Legacy Fund was created in collaboration with the Museum and Archives of Rockingham County (MARC) and DRBA to recognize T & Lindley Butler’s enormous historic and environmental contributions to Rockingham County, NC and the surrounding region. The previous project finished up this July with the restoration of the Batteau exhibit at the MARC with an addition of the beautiful mural by Kitty Williams and Jack Stone, lighting on the Batteau, and updated signage about batteau navigation and use on the Dan River.

The joint project announced for this year will be at the High Rock Ford Historic Trail. This park runs along a beautiful section of the Haw River

and hosts multiple historic landmarks such as Nathaniel Greene’s campground and the oldest grist mill in Rockingham County. The current trail is a half-mile that crosses under High Rock Road and continues along the river in an out-and-back format.

This project would include an extension of the trail with loops at the end of the trail and added historical signage about the property and other amenities. Be on the lookout for volunteer days coming soon!

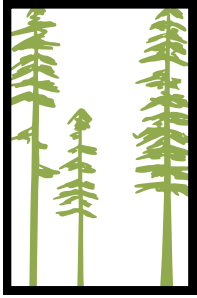
Contribute to this fund today to help us make this project a success:
<https://www.danriver.org/support-drba/join-donate/the-butler-legacy-fund>.



View link here!

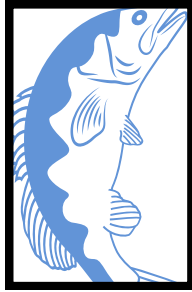


STAY ON TOP OF DRBA'S ACTIVITIES!



We are so grateful to all of our Friends who donated to DRBA's \$23K in 23 Days in 2023! We not only raised our goal, but at the end of the 23rd day, we had exceeded it by almost \$4,000!

The tremendous support we received was the perfect gift for the holidays. Thank you, thank you, thank you!



Did you know that the DRBA staff hold an annual retreat every second week of January to plan out the upcoming year? This year, the retreat was held over three days. The result? A list

of 182 projects we're ready to get started on! Save the date! DRBA's next Annual Business Meeting will be held virtually on Saturday, March 2, 2024 at 9:30am!



First Saturday Outings (FSO) are a monthly highlight for DRBA's recreation mission. Moving around the Basin, they provide guided explorations on the trails and rivers in the watershed. Last fall,

22 paddlers spent a beautiful day exploring seven miles of the Dan River starting at Drapers Landing and even saw some river otters. Don't miss the next FSO!

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Thank you!



To visit the DRBA donor page, scan the QR code.



THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND OF DRBA!

Dan River Basin Association
413 Church Street, Suite 401
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Mark your calendar for DRBA's Annual Business meeting and FSO both on March 2!
To view DRBA's calendar of events, visit danriver.org/events or scan the QR code.



You can protect nature from anywhere,
anytime. Give today.

www.danriver.org/donate

