



# COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT



Eco  
Ambassador  
Council



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# About the Eco Ambassador Council

In 2020, Carter Bank & Trust 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. They do this to preserve these precious resources now and for future generations.

The current geographic areas that the EAC members invest in are inclusive of the Dan River watershed which includes the 16 localities of Franklin, Patrick, Henry, Martinsville City, Pittsylvania, Halifax, and Mecklenberg 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 and actions for the benefit of their communities, their stakeholders, and their economy are invited to join the EAC.

## 2023 Members of the EAC



# Our Investments

The members of the EAC have combined their charitable giving and invested over \$100,000 into the region through nine projects in just two years. In 2024, the members will vote for new projects and activities that engage their employees, build a stronger economy and make a positive impact for every person that lives, works and plays in the Dan River region.

	Project Name	Total Project Cost	EAC Funding	Community Raised
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
		<b>\$110,600.00</b>	<b>\$40,700.00</b>	<b>\$69,900.00</b>
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
	<b>\$138,800.00</b>	<b>\$60,800.00</b>	<b>\$78,000.00</b>	
		<b>\$249,400.00</b>	<b>\$101,500.00</b>	<b>\$147,900.00</b>

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\*Community Action & Responsibility for the Environment  
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## Future Site of the Virginia Mayo River State Park

823 Pratt Road, Spencer, VA

Without the EAC's investment in the Virginia Mayo River State Park, the site would most likely have remained undeveloped.

In 2007, a feasibility study was requested by the General Assembly in House Joint Resolution 709, which directed the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to study the feasibility of establishing a state park along the South Mayo and North Mayo Rivers in Henry County. Years earlier, the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) was able to establish the NC Mayo River State Park on the Mayo River and believed a twin State Park on the Virginia side would create a boost for tourism.

This property along the Mayo River is both historically and environmentally significant. Hydroelectric dams were originally built to generate power for two cotton mills, Mayo Mills (which later became Washington Mills) and Avalon Mills. The Avalon mill structure was destroyed by fire in 1911.

Several well-preserved fish weirs (fish traps) built by American Indians can be spotted while paddling the Mayo River. Native settlements can be traced back thousands of years. 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 Mayo River State Park in Virginia finally became a reality in 2021 when the EAC invested in the project.

With the investment from the EAC, DRBA was able to leverage matching funds from the state to work closely with DCR to plan and construct signage and trail.

Employees from the EAC member businesses provided volunteer support to the project through planting, trail identification and signage installation.

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.

Currently, the park is waiting for Master Plan investment by the Commonwealth which will officially make it a Virginia State Park.





## M.C. Martin Park

700 block of Memorial Drive, Danville, VA

This project has been a vision of the surrounding neighborhood of Westmoreland for several decades.

The park is named for a human rights activist and local banker, M.C. Martin, who advocated for black rights. For decades this small parcel of land served as a gathering place and a play area for the predominantly minority citizens in the area.

Today, the bridge that crossed the creek and gazebo have disintegrated and all that is left are two picnic tables and a parking lot. The park lies between an apartment building and an established housing development. Over the years, it has become a dumping ground for furniture, garbage and landscaping waste and has overgrown with weeds.

The Westmoreland neighborhood and M.C. Martin's family desperately wanted to see this park return to a place where families and children could once again gather.

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 nine months to raise the other 50% of funds.

In the Spring of 2023, all of the funds were raised to begin renovation which included cleanup of the site, construction of a short walking trail and overlook deck, and installation of benches and other park accessories.

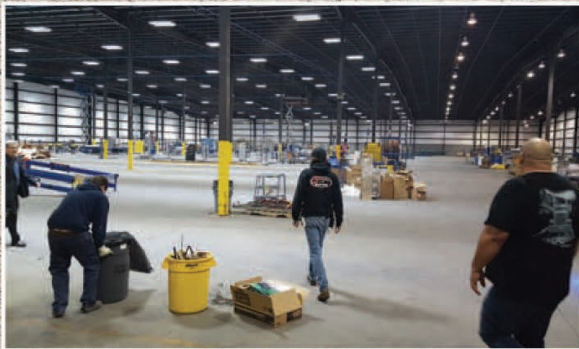
Fieldwork and planning were completed by May 2023. In June, two dozen volunteers helped remove more than 900 pounds of garbage. In September, a historical sign depicting the achievements of M.C. Martin was installed at the site. Another volunteer clean-up work day was held in November with more than a dozen volunteers in attendance.

The overlook deck construction will begin in April 2024. Benches and park accessories will be ordered and installed after the overlook deck is complete.

Because of the EAC, the renovated M.C. Martin Park is expected to open to the public in September 2024 and will once again become a safe and beautiful place for the residents of the area.



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## I.C. DeHart Park

2631 Charity Highway, Woolwine, VA

The I.C. DeHart Park trail system includes beautiful views and a few historic structures, including a Civilian Conservation Corp Camp. Evidence of Native American history such as arrowheads and other artifacts have been found on the property.

Prior to the EAC investment, there was only a hand-drawn map at the entrance showing the miles of Woolwine Mountain Bike Trails at 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 update this hidden gem and additional funds were provided by Patrick County Tourism.

There is now an updated map on the kiosk that illustrates the more than twelve miles of trails correctly. A new changing station for mountain bikers was constructed. The trails are safely marked for bikers and hikers and there are directional signs on roadways leading to the park. Brochures were designed and printed and are available to visitors both at the trail and at business sites in the region.

The brochure has gone through two additional printings since the Community Celebration event officially opened the enhanced trail system to the public in April 2023. Pickle & Ash Restaurant generously provided refreshments for the more than fifty guests.

“We are very grateful to the Eco Ambassador Council (EAC) for their generous investment in enhancing the Woolwine Trail System,” said James Houchins, Director of Tourism for Patrick County. “I hope to keep the spotlight shining on this amazing treasure in Patrick County.”

Because of the EAC investment, the Woolwine Trail System at I.C. DeHart Park has become a showcase and magnet for locals and visitors in the region.



## Gift Shop - Philpott Lake

Philpott Dam Road, Bassett, VA

Acquiring funding for environmental education (EE) 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 with the proceeds supporting ongoing regional environmental education programs.

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 operations of the Gift Shop to ensure all youth would have an opportunity to learn more about their natural environment.

The Gift Shop is expected to open to the public on Earth Day, April 22, 2024.

## 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.

Unfortunately, there is not a place for instruction, shade from the elements or even a place to sit for the students.

The EAC has invested in constructing the WaterShed, a place for learning and a new permanent home for outdoor learning programs. There will be an outdoor pavilion at the river's edge, a place to store education supplies and a restroom facility. This project is expected to start in Spring 2024 and be completed in early 2025.

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 pledged by Henry County and the Dan River Basin Association.



## 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.

At the event, guests were encouraged to visit ten interactive environmental activities and once they completed them, they were invited to enjoy a free lunch. The activities included learning about snakes and other potentially frightening animals one may meet in a forest, learning about the critical role of pollinators, how a watershed works and the importance of keeping waterways healthy.

Almost 100 people attended the event and 75 free lifejackets were given away. The Dan River Basin Association held a raffle for a rain barrel decorated by youth. Many of the participants stayed for the full four hours of the event, sometimes visiting booths two or three times to learn more.

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## Beaver Creek Campus Trail

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

Patrick & Henry Community College is located on a beautiful 137-acre campus adjacent to Beaver Creek and the Martinsville Reservoir. Most of the property is kept natural with hardwood forests and abundant flora and fauna.

Until 2022, the campus had one trail, the P&HCC Loop Trail, a short natural surface trail used for hiking and mountain biking. The trail loops through a wooded area and one can catch a glimpse of the reservoir at every turn and enjoy a rest at one of the picnic areas.

In 2022, the EAC invested funding to build a more than 2-mile trail, the Beaver Creek Campus Trail, that circles the campus and connects to the P&HCC Loop Trail. Patrick & Henry Community College maintenance department also invested in-kind support to help make the trail a reality.

EAC members didn't just invest money. They also recruited their employees, friends and family members as volunteers to actually build and finish the trail.

The new trail officially opened to the public June 1, 2023. More than 100 guests attended the event.

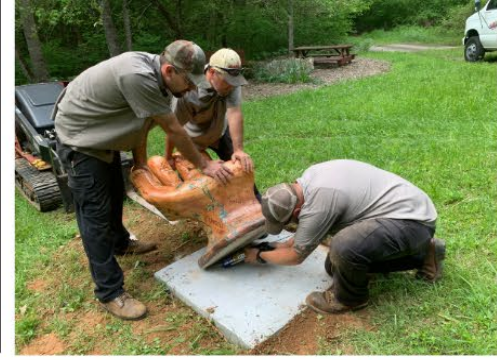
When walking on the Beaver Creek Campus Trail, one truly feels an immersion in nature. There is also an overlook research deck with interpretive signage about the critical role of wetlands that was constructed for students to learn about ecosystems and water quality and add a learning stop along the trail for visitors.

"Patrick & Henry is home to an outstanding variety of plants and animals. We are so pleased to be able to both extend the learning of our own students and provide such a valuable means for learning to our community by sharing this great resource. We invite you to come enjoy the beauty of nature on our campus," said P&HCC president Dr. Greg Hodges.



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## 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 is 1/2 mile one-way fitness trail with decaying fitness stations. The EAC has provided volunteer support to remove these stations and funding to build a new trail kiosk, add a trail loop connecting to the marina and the visitor center and directional and educational signage. This renovated trail will provide a continuation for hikers to learn about and explore the abundant flora and fauna at Philpott Lake. This project is expected to be completed in September 2024.

## Benefits of EAC Membership

The businesses that join the Eco Ambassador Council join other leaders who are taking collective action to preserve and protect our region's natural resources.

- Direct Impact Involvement - Members will have the opportunity to participate in how their investment makes an impact in the region by deciding which projects are implemented.
- Annual Report & Update - An annual report, highlighting the achievements of the EAC and projects in progress will be published and distributed to members annually.
- Marketing/Publicity - In the social media era, charitable companies earn a reputation as being "good" companies, and people are more likely to want to buy from - or do business with - them. As a member of the EAC, your business is spreading the word about your values and intentions, and helping you get introduced to new customers who are involved with the nonprofit organization.

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