APPOMATTOX RIVER CORRIDOR PLAN WORKING GROUP

Chesterfield County
Sara Habeck
Madeline Purcell

City of Colonial Heights
Lewis Johnson
Vicki Minetree

Dinwiddie County
March Altman
Bill Young, II

City of Hopewell
Susan Collins
Milton C. Martin

City of Petersburg
Leonard Muse
Ken Roy

Prince George County
William C. Kuthy
Harold Moye

Appomattox Scenic River Advisory Board
Dama Rice

APPOMATTOX RIVER CORRIDOR PLAN SUMMARY

PREPARED BY THE CRATER PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION
AND THE APPOMATTOX RIVER CORRIDOR PLAN WORKING GROUP

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The Appomattox River is a major tributary of the James River. It flows in an easterly direction across the Piedmont and Coastal Plain of south central Virginia between Appomattox Courthouse and its confluence with the James River in Hopewell. The river is an important regional resource that is unique and irreplaceable. The portion of the river in the Crater Planning District meanders through six jurisdictions: the Counties of Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, and Prince George, and the Cities of Colonial Heights, Hopewell and Petersburg, and is a valuable resource for commerce, industry, farming, and recreation.

In 1992, the Crater Planning District Commission, through its Coastal Resources Management Task Force, initiated the development of the Appomattox River Corridor Study, which addressed a variety of water resource issues. The study included an inventory of recreational, cultural and natural features, an examination of existing and future land use information, and it addressed water quality and wetland issues in the river corridor. This supporting information is presented in a companion report entitled Appomattox River Corridor Plan—Technical Background.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in providing river access along the Appomattox. The City of Petersburg was awarded a grant through the Virginia Transportation Enhancement Program for development of the Appomattox River Heritage Trail. It consists of the development of a walking and bicycle trail along the south bank of the river in Petersburg and on Pocahontas Island. Chesterfield County completed a Riverfront Plan, and one of its project recommendations was the Virginia State University (VSU)/Ettrick Riverfront Trail project. This trail along the Appomattox is proposed to link Randolph Farm (located at VSU) with the Village of Ettrick and VSU’s main campus. Chesterfield County formed an organization, “Friends of Chesterfield’s Riverfront”, to oversee the implementation of the Riverfront Plan. Prince George County is planning to develop a riverside park adjacent to the Riverside Regional Jail Facility. The City of Hopewell is looking into the potential for future tourism development in the historic City Point area.

In this region, as interest has grown in locating additional sites for public access to the river, there is a need to coordinate all of these efforts and to examine the Appomattox from a regional perspective. Therefore, a Conceptual Greenway Plan for the Appomattox River Basin was drafted in the summer of 1996. It attempts to link the various development proposals and existing elements together to establish the groundwork for an Appomattox River Corridor Plan.

The Appomattox River Corridor Plan consists of two parts; the Technical Background Report identifies existing conditions along the river and the Summary Report recommends an action plan to link people with the natural world and outdoor recreational opportunities, while also seeking to protect the critical environmentally sensitive areas.

**RIVERS, TRAILS AND CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

To formalize this corridor plan development concept, the Crater Coastal Resources Management Task Force determined that additional technical assistance is required.
was needed. In the fall of 1996, the Crater Commission was notified by the National Park Service that its Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program would provide technical assistance needed to support this effort.

Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) is a program of the National Park Service, which cooperates with states, local governments, and citizen groups to protect and restore river corridors and to establish trail systems. The goal of this outreach program is to share the expertise of the National Park Service with groups working to protect their river, trail and greenway resources.

The RTCA program is based on the principal of partnerships. By working together, residents, landowners, government agencies, and private organizations can meet the challenges of conservation. It works with all stakeholders to help them establish goals, resolve difficult issues, and reach consensus on how community resources should be used and managed. It leads the stakeholders through a visioning process and eventually moves a project from conception to completion.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

As more growth occurs, more pressure is being placed on the Appomattox River and its adjacent lands. Competing uses must find ways to survive compatibly, without significantly depleting the resources available.

The purpose of this corridor plan is to assist communities and stakeholders along the river in developing a consensus and building partnerships for their visions of recreation development, resource conservation, economic development, and water quality protection. With the assistance of the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, three workshops were held in 1997 to solicit stakeholders’ input. This plan documents the planning process and identifies recommendations for action that will lead to the realization of the Appomattox River Corridor Plan goals.

II. STUDY AREA

This plan was undertaken with the guidance of the Crater Coastal Resources Management Task Force, comprising the directors of planning from the Commission’s “Tidewater communities” (Counties of Chesterfield, Prince George and Surry, and the Cities of Colonial Heights, Hopewell, and Petersburg). In addition, Dinwiddie County’s planning director was invited to participate in this effort. The task force defined the study area and the specific width of corridor to be studied, and determined that the study would be limited to a section of the River approximately twenty-two miles long, between Lake Chesdin, three miles west of the Brasfield Dam, to its confluence with the James. The width of the study corridor generally sits within 3 50 feet of the edge of the 100-year flood plain (as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency) on either side of the River. However, the corridor width fluctuates depending on the River’s characteristics. (See map on page 4).

III. PLANNING PROCESS

The Appomattox River Corridor Plan was developed by closely working with members of the Crater Coastal Resources Management Task Force, the Appomattox River Corridor Working Group and the general public. The working group is composed of thirteen members; two members from each of the six river jurisdictions (one citizen and one public official) and a representative of the Appomattox Scenic River Advisory Board. Three public forums were held in 1997. Each two-day public forum workshop involved many stakeholders, including riparian property owners, community planners, natural resource specialists, river users, citizens and other local interest groups. The objectives of the three workshops were (1) developing a vision and setting direction for the future of the River Corridor, (2) formulating a concept by bringing together opportunities within the Corridor, and (3) identifying actions and turning the vision and concept into reality.

At the end of the workshops a vision statement, a set of goals, and a long list of actions were formulated. After further evaluation, thirteen actions were finally selected. Among them, two recommenda-
The vision statement, with its concomitant goals, follows:

**VISION STATEMENT**

The Appomattox River is a place of extraordinary beauty which connects surrounding communities into a partnership for prosperity and quality of life.

**GOALS**

**Healthy Ecosystem**
To protect the river and its ecosystem from harmful and irresponsible actions while enhancing the value of abundant natural resources.

**Private Interests**
To promote safe and responsible river usage and enjoyment for citizens who have vested rights as property owners, as well as for those desiring pleasurable rewards as visitors.

**Preservation**
To discover, enhance and promote the scenic natural beauty and historical and cultural attributes of the River for present and future generations.

**Education**
To develop an educational program which will foster and heighten an awareness and appreciation of the River as a resource.

**Economic Development**
- a. To promote the economic benefits of river access through appropriate land use and development decisions.
- b. To raise the quality of life in the region with well managed and balanced recreational, tourism and entrepreneurial opportunities.

**Public Interests**
- a. To promote a regional organization representative of all interests to work toward the protection and enjoyment of the River Corridor.
- b. To promote appropriate uses and safety of public properties and activities through comprehensive community involvement in decision making.
- c. To promote environmentally sound uses and care of the River and adjacent lands.
- d. To further identify and enhance recreational and tourism opportunities in the Corridor.

### IV. THE ACTION PLAN

The following Appomattox River Corridor Plan recommendations represent the consensus reached by the participants and the working group. They are intended to ensure that the Appomattox River is accessible to the residents of the region; the significant natural and cultural resources found there are protected, preserved, and enhanced; and the Corridor continues to remain a place where connecting communities become partners in maintaining prosperity and quality of life.

The primary focus of the recommendations is the initial organization of a nonprofit citizen group that will guide the implementation of the Appomattox River Corridor Plan. There are also ten key actions recommended that will enhance the Appomattox River and unite the communities along the river. Together, they will guide changes within the Corridor to achieve improved conditions in the use of land along the River, the quality of the water within the region, and quality of life of the citizens along the Appomattox River.

#### PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION:

To form a nonprofit citizen organization; **FRIENDS OF THE APPOMATTOX RIVER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RECOMMENDED ACTIONS</th>
<th>PARTNERS</th>
<th>TIME FRAME</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Develop a Regional Trail System</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Local Governments Public Institutions</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Improve Water Quality of the River</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Local Governments Virginia Department of Environmental Quality</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Establish and maintain an Appomattox River web page</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Local Governments</td>
<td>short term</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Organize an annual river cleanup campaign</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Local Civic Organizations</td>
<td>short term</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Expand Bateau Day celebration</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Virginia Canal and Navigation Society</td>
<td>short term</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Develop a brochure and self guided tour map to illustrate the river features and locations</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Local Governments Virginia Canal Association</td>
<td>mid term</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Start a Whitewater Festival</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Statewide Whitewater Groups Canoe Clubs</td>
<td>mid term</td>
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<td>8. Identify settlement patterns along the Appomattox and organize a regional archaeological program</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Virginia Department of Historic Resources University Archaeological Centers Local Governments</td>
<td>mid term</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Develop the rail and river boat tour loop</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Petersburg National Battlefield</td>
<td>long term</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Build a nature center</td>
<td>Friends of the Appomattox Local Parks &amp; Recreation Departments</td>
<td>long term</td>
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Friends of the Appomattox River should be a public interest organization with a mission to stimulate the many individual actions and public/private partnerships needed to implement the Plan. The board should have broad representation. The Friends group would be expected to actively participate in the public discussion, serve as keepers of the vision, and promote the public policies and actions supportive of that vision.

Friends of the Appomattox River should be governed by a board of six to twelve directors, one or two from each jurisdiction, to include, but not be limited to representatives of the following interests:
- riparian landowners
- business leaders
- civic association representatives
- Appomattox Scenic River Advisory Board

It is recommended that a new nonprofit organization called “Friends of the Appomattox River” be created. This organization would work with the citizens and local governments; it would be independent, nonprofit and mission oriented, and it would oversee and guide the implementation of the Corridor Plan. The organization may be an independent group or it may be affiliated with an existing citizen group such as Friends of Chesterfield’s Riverfront. This group is also a nonprofit organization which represents citizens interested in promoting and enhancing the Appomattox and James Rivers.

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- riparian landowners
- business leaders
- civic association representatives
- Appomattox Scenic River Advisory Board
• conservation groups
• historic organizations
• river recreation and boating interests

The new nonprofit organization should seek a two to three year funding commitment from private sector businesses, foundations, local governments, state and federal agencies. Additional funding needs to be raised through individual donations. Grants are also available for various projects. Many foundations and granting agencies prefer to fund the endeavors of nonprofit organizations.

With initial financial support from private foundations, businesses, local governments and other public sources, the nonprofit organization also should reach out to the entire community through a membership program. Individuals will be asked to sign up and support the activities of the "Friends". Membership activities could include special river tours, volunteer opportunities for cleanups, wildlife counts and special hikes. It will increase the public exposure to and ownership of the river and its riverfront. This will be an important component in building public support for increasing stewardship of the riverfront, and for continuing to introduce the citizens of the region to one of the region's greatest resources.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. DEVELOP A REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM

It is recommended that a regional trail system along the corridor be established. The system may consist of natural, bike and pedestrian but are excellent elements for a trail system planning process. They will help in identifying concerns and issues and can provide positive suggestions. A successful trail planning committee can evolve into a strong support group to assist various partners in acquiring, developing and managing the trail system.

There are significant public land holdings in the riverfront. These properties include the Petersburg National Battlefield, the U.S. Army Quartermaster Center and Fort Lee, two national cemeteries, the Federal Correctional Institute, Virginia State University, Central State Hospital, Southside Virginia Training Center, Riverside Regional Correctional Center and several state and local park and recreational sites. All of these public lands can be potentially linked through a regional trail system. The Friends Group should work with the public agencies to explore the variety of potential trail opportunities that exist in the region, with the determination to identify a potential site and then develop it as a demonstration project.

Funding for certain trail developments, such as bike trails and rail-to-trail projects, is available through the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). The Virginia Recreational Trails Fund Program is another funding source. It was established to provide and maintain recreational trails and related facilities. The program is administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. It gives preference to projects with the greatest number of compatible recreational purposes, and projects that provide for innovative recreational trails corridor sharing. The proposed Appomattox River Regional Trail System meets the above funding criteria.

This would be a long range project, but the system could be planned in phases. The Friends Group should develop a long-term trail plan that emphasizes a need for local and regional cooperation. Every trail recommendation should be accepted by the respective local governments and included in the local comprehensive plan and recreation and open space plan. The planned regional trail system may not follow the riverfront in all cases, which is acceptable as long as it provides the opportunities for river access in the future.

The Conceptual Greenway Plan for the Appomattox River Basin, that was prepared in 1996, sets a basic framework for a future regional trail system.
Another water quality initiative that the Friends Group could consider is to organize a Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Program. Such a program would consist of a network of private citizens who keep track of ambient, surface water quality in the river. The volunteers monitor dissolved oxygen, pH, salinity, air and water temperature, and turbidity to gauge the general health and quality of the water in the Appomattox.

Water quality monitoring is the repetitive measurement or observation of a waterbody over time. By measuring water quality repetitively, one can detect changes and trends in water conditions that occur due to natural events or pollution. Often, one or two years of data will not show trends in water quality and will not pinpoint sources of pollution. Therefore, monitoring is a long-term effort. Carefully obtained, objective monitoring is very valuable in developing information about a waterbody's baseline conditions. The citizen water quality monitoring program can help accomplish the following two objectives in the river corridor: a) it will supplement data collected by the state to maintain a profile of water quality conditions in the corridor, and b) it will provide a useful tool for educating the public and involve them in river conservation efforts.

It is important to maintain and improve the good water quality in the Appomattox. The Friends Group, along with all levels of government and environmental agencies, should assure that the high water quality of the Appomattox is maintained.

3. ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN AN APPOMATTOX RIVER WEB PAGE

It is recommended that an Appomattox River web page be established. The web page would contain all existing natural, historical and recreational resources, and should be updated regularly. This action could be implemented fairly quickly by the Friends of the Appomattox. Friends need to solicit donations and apply for grants to set up and maintain the web page. Some of the potential partners are Virginia State University, Richard Bland College, state and local tourism offices, and private computer companies.

4. ORGANIZE AN ANNUAL RIVER CLEAN-UP CAMPAIGN

This could be a kick-off project for the Friends of the Appomattox River. After the formation of the Friends group, a river clean-up campaign could be organized. It is a community involvement campaign designed to encourage citizens of all ages to assume a renewed pride in and responsibility for the Appomattox.

There are many ways a citizen or organization can get involved with a river clean-up campaign. One can pick up litter along a trail, shoreline, parks, etc., or erect bird houses or plant trees and other vegetation to help prevent soil erosion and create important wildlife habitats.

The Friends Group would be the sponsor of the clean-up campaign and involve other civic organizations and river user groups. It would also coordinate with statewide campaign efforts: Virginia's Fall River Renaissance campaign and Operation Spruce Up in the spring.

5. EXPAND BATEAU DAY CELEBRATION

Each fall Bateau Day is celebrated at the Appomattox Riverside Park. This site was formerly used as an amusement park in the early 1900's. A temporary museum is set up in a building at the park to pay homage to the past.

It is recommended that the annual Bateau Day celebration be expanded into a major festival. An interpretive program at the Appomattox Riverside Park could be developed to tell the story of the construction of the canal and the operation of Bateaux. Other activities might include a bateau construction demonstration, bateau rides at the park and an interpretive hike along the heritage trail system on the Upper Appomattox Canal.

The Friends of the Appomattox River need to work with the local governments, the Scenic Appomattox River Advisory Board and the Virginia Canal and Navigation Society to explore the feasibility of the Bateau Day celebration expansion.

6. DEVELOP A BROCHURE AND SELF-GUIDED TOUR MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE RIVER FEATURES AND THEIR LOCATIONS

Just like the web page, all natural, historical and recreational resources would be featured in a brochure and tour map. The Friends of the Appomattox River would work with local governments, tourism offices, parks and recreation offices, chambers of commerce, and river user groups on this project. This is a short-term project.

7. START A WHITEWATER FESTIVAL

The Falls of the Appomattox are a unique asset. There are numerous rapids along the upper portion of the Appomattox River. Canoe or whitewater trips could be launched below the Lake Cheedin Dam and travel through the following challenges: Picnic Rapids, Rock Garden, Jughandle Rapids, Spiked Dam, Battersea Dam, and Target Rock Rapids. Most of them are rated Class II or III whitewater rapids where rapids having some irregular waves and narrow passages occur. This section of the Appomattox is a nice stretch of river for whitewater rafting. It is recommended that the Friends group organize a whitewater festival.

The Friends Group needs to work with the Appomattox Scenic River Advisory Board, canoe clubs and the James River outfitters for advice and guidance on this proposal.

8. IDENTIFY SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND ORGANIZE A REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROGRAM

The Appomattox River Corridor is a place rich in history. From the Appomattox Indian village near the Falls of the River, the colonial settlement at City Point, the establishment of the Peter Jones Trading Post to the development of the Cities of Petersburg, Hopewell and Colonial Heights, there are a great number of opportunities for linking public access and natural resource areas with historic sites. The Friends Group should work with local governments, historic organizations, and the archaeological center located at the College of William and Mary to organize a regional archaeological program and investigate extensive settlement patterns and historical assets in the Corridor.
This is a long range project. There are many heritage sites along the River. During different periods of history, both City Point and Petersburg's Old Towne served as major transportation centers. The steam train could run from Southside Depot through Battlefield Park to the James River, stopping at the City Point Unit. The river boat could run from the wharves at the City Point Unit to the Petersburg Old Harbor which is near the Southside Depot. The river boat and steam train would be used to interpret the story of the Civil War and the history of the Lower Appomattox. The circled tour loops could be joined at any of the tour stops.

Friends of the Appomattox River needs to research and develop a corresponding interpretive program about the Lower Appomattox River. The Friends Group also needs to work with all affected entities: Petersburg, Hopewell, Norfolk-Southern Railroad, Fort Lee, and the Petersburg National Battlefield in developing a river-rail loop concept.

10. BUILD A NATURE CENTER
The Appomattox Nature Center could be an exhibition center for the existing natural elements relating to land, water, air, plant and animal life of the Corridor and the interrelationship of these elements. It has been emphasized that citizens will be more likely to be stewards of the River and appreciate the area’s unique environment if they are able to experience these resources personally.

In addition to an exhibition, the Center may include classrooms, riparian viewing rooms, outdoor observation decks, an outdoor laboratory, and a children’s garden. All of the programs in the Center should be designed to challenge visitors to question, explore and discover the living nature of the Appomattox River Corridor.

The children’s garden could have displays of flora and fauna indigenous to the Appomattox River area. It would be very interesting if the presentation would include small critters and their habitats. Similar to the concept of a petting zoo, the children’s garden would provide the opportunities of “touching” and “feeling” native objects.

For long range planning, the center could develop certain adventurous activities such as a simulated bateau ride on the Appomattox. Using high definition and animation technology, the gentle motion of a bateau ride down the Appomattox River could be recreated. The visitors would sit on a reproduction crate or hogshead and observe the seasonal changes within the riparian environment and they could listen to the rich history of human settlement on the River.

The nature center would provide the educational opportunities and environmental appreciation of the Appomattox. The location of this center needs to be determined and researchers and programs about the natural resources need to be developed. The potential partners for this project are local parks and recreation departments and area schools.

VI. CONCLUSION
This plan recommends the formation of a new nonprofit citizen organization, “Friends of the Appomattox River”. It may be an independent group or it may be affiliated with an existing group such as Friends of Chesterfield’s Riverfront. It further recommends that this new citizen organization oversee and guide the implementation of this plan. Ten actions are suggested in the Corridor Plan directly resulting from three citizen forums conducted during 1997.

It is envisioned by the Appomattox River Corridor Working Group that the Plan should first be presented to the public to generate support, and then to the governing bodies for endorsement and creation of a “Friends” group. The Working Group’s vision of the “Friends” group is that each locality would appoint one key person to the group, and those individuals could select other interested persons to its membership.

Thus, by the end of 1999 two objectives should be achieved: two objectives: a publicly supported Plan giving guidance for the future of the Appomattox River; and the formation of a “Friends” group composed of individuals committed to fulfilling the Plan.

The path toward plan implementation is exciting. It meets the original intentions of creating a regional approach to the Appomattox River, with a full list of achievable actions supportive of the Plan. It is also a product produced with a strong reliance on the interests and desires of the public, especially those having direct links to the Appomattox River.