# The Naturalist

April 2023 Newsletter | Volume 19, Number 4

Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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#### A Message from the President

by Connie Reitz

This is a safety message brought to you because sometimes we forget to remember the little things which guide & keep us safe. We all want to do our activities safely while having fun. It's not yet so humid that you can see the "air you can wear" but this will be coming. How can you be better prepared for the increased temperatures, elevated humidity level, and the critters which come out this time of year? Here are some of my thoughts for staying safe while having volunteer fun.

Know your limitations: Acknowledge your limitations. Set a timer to alert you to stop what you are doing, take a break, get water, or end the activity. You can come back next week. If an activity is scheduled for 3 hours but you can only do half of that, let the leader know you can participate for that length of time. Maybe doing the Globe Observer clouds observation and CoCoRaHS are the summertime activities for you.

Watch where you are walking: Are you looking at clouds or birds and forgetting how uneven the trail is? Or are you looking at plants and flowers and forgetting the low hanging branches? Is that a snake or a stick you are about to step on? Are you awaiting or recovering from surgery? The choice of your activities may change until your physical

abilities let you go out on the trail. Perhaps an activity which offers paved walks or trails is the better option. If you feel unsteady, let a fellow member know you may need some help navigating the area.

**Sun protection:** Make sure you wear skin protection from the sun's rays. Maybe you use SPF clothing. Wear a hat. Protect your eyes. Reapply the sunscreen. Drink more fluids and take breaks more often. Stand in the shade if that is an option.

**Ticks:** Wear clothing treated to repel these little critters. Tuck long pants inside your socks. Wear white socks so you can see these dark spots as they move. Yes, we all look like nerds, but we know what we're doing. Check yourself for ticks when you get home and check again the next day. Maybe get a pet opossum to clear the area for you.

**Hydration:** Drink more water and drink more often. If you notice you don't need to find a bathroom, maybe you're not drinking enough. Watch those around you. Are they taking breaks and drinking? Be a friend and encourage another volunteer to take a break with you and make sure both of you hydrate.

Watch out for each other: Notice those volunteers around you. Who is struggling or not taking breaks? Who has a water bottle and who didn't come quite as prepared as you are? Notice the flushed faces, the sweating, the heavy breathing, and those lagging. Walk someone back to their car to make sure they are safe.



Activities near water: Our area has lots of water—streams, rivers, bay, & ocean. If getting in the water is not listed as a part of the activity, do not get in the water. There may be strong current or hidden objects in the water which are dangerous for the strongest of all swimmers. If being on the water is included, wear a PFD.

**Be a leader:** If you're at an activity approved by HRC but duty of care is with another organization, notice what is being done well and not so well. Be the volunteer who sets a timer for taking breaks, for reminding others to hydrate or have a snack, for noticing poison ivy in an area, and alert others to any other hazards which aren't being noted.

**Be true to yourself:** To thine own self be true. You know what you can/should do better than anyone else. If the day of a planned activity isn't your best day, don't go. If you haven't slept well, eaten correctly, or just don't feel right, don't go. Don't put others around you in the position to ask you not to join the activity or injure themselves while trying to care for you. This is a no judgement zone. Be safe.

This isn't the list to cover every scenario, but I do want you to be aware of the increased risks which come with the hot and humid conditions coming in the next few months. Know your limits. Watch out for your fellow volunteers. Take care of you and those around you. Remember the small things we do to protect ourselves. Go back to the basics of risk management.

Thank you for reading. Now go outside and have a great time. **SAFELY!** 

Photo by Connie Reitz: Members of HRC participating in the 45th Annual JCC Litter Cleanup Day on April 15<sup>th</sup> wearing safety vests. This team did Powhatan Creek Park and both sides of Jamestown Road from the intersection of Jamestown Road to the park. Approximately 4 orange litter bags of trash were gathered. *Pictured, left to right:* Les Lawrence, Ron Hunt, Rick Brown, Robert Ambrose, Janet Crowther, Lisa Cumming, George Salwasser, and Coral Rankin.

#### Earth Day 2023:

#### Outreach, Awareness, and Stewardship

#### York River State Park (YRSP) Outreach

Members Jen Harrigan and Sarah Hodges (pictured top left to right) maintained an outreach table with materials from the chapter's Collections and Resources (CAR) at YRSP's Earth Day event on Saturday, April 22nd. Nancy Barnhardt (pictured top right) hosted an osprey watch for visitors using a scope focused over the river. Photos courtesy of Barb Creel, who also assisted with the event.





# STERN FOR THE LARTH

#### "Speak for the Earth" T-shirt Awareness

Connie Reitz, Alice Kopinitz, and Shirley Devan (pictured left to right) showed up to the April 20<sup>th</sup> Tree Steward wearing their 2023 Earth Day t-shirts. Thing 1, Thing 2, and their sister did not plan for this happy accident. The shirts purchased annually help fund the Nancy Norton Nature Camp Scholarship, which supports youth ages 12-18 at a residential nature camp in the Shenandoah Valley.

#### Charles E. Brown Park Earth Day Stewardship by Claire White

Connie Reitz, Janet Harper, Bill Harper, and Claire White (pictured left to right) assisted Jonathan Honchul from York County Parks and Recreation on Earth Day with trail work at this small wetland interpretive sanctuary located in the Lackey section of York County. (Photo courtesy of Janet Harper & J. Honchul)

Additional volunteers from Bruton High Key Club, alums of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and others assisted with the trail work. HRC's volunteers focused on clearing and widening the ½ mile hiking trail before helping spread mulch. They also had the opportunity to talk with the other volunteers about local plants and the Virginia Master Naturalist program.



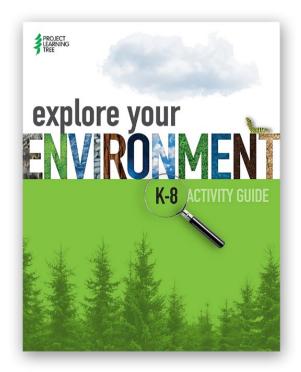
If you would like to visit, the entrance sign to the park (photo by Connie Reitz) is off Old Williamsburg Road, next to the Naval Weapons Station, before the post office. The trail is identified by the orange and black line on the York County Park map pictured on the bottom right. Large sawtooth oaks line the trail head, near the baseball field. and nine stone trail markers guide you along the trail through the wetlands that were developed in 1998 in accordance with the Clean Water Act. Great Run stream is traversed in two spots by small bridges. If you are interested in supporting the upkeep of this small trail, please contact the park at: Jonathan.Honchul@yorkcounty.gov





#### **Ten Complete Project Learning Tree Training**

By Judy Kinshaw-Ellis



Ten Historic River Chapter Master Naturalists completed Project Learning Tree (PLT) training on April 27th at the Williamsburg Library. The training focused on K-8 outdoor education lessons that encourage young people to explore the world around them. The group participated in lessons that could be used in a formal classroom setting, at a nature camp, or at a program in one of our area parks.

Attendees completed nine interactive exercises on the use of trees, the food web, and measuring trees in addition to investigating how sun, shade, and moisture affect our environment. Activities were differentiated so that participants could see how an activity could be adapted for different age groups and in different settings. The day of training passed quickly as those who attended learned a variety of ways to enhance Master Naturalists community outreach programs. Ellen Powell and Lesley Newman from the Virginia Department of Forestry led the activities and each attendee received the printed companion book (pictured above) as a part of the 6-hour training.



**Pictured left to right:** Claire White, Janie Moyers, Sherry Brubaker, Deena Obrokta, Kristie Hammond, Rob Nichols, Marie Robertson, Sarah Hodges, Kathie Glison (Northern Neck VMN Chapter), Pam Schnabel, and Judy Kinshaw-Ellis.

#### **Bassett Trace Nature Walks**







#### **Risk Management for VMN**

Have you completed your 3-year refresher?

On the "My Profile" dropdown menu of Better Impact select "Training" to access the latest risk management e-learning module. The module includes a 22-minute overview narrated by Michelle Prysby, Director of the VMN Program, followed by 5 assessment questions and additional resources.

Photos by Rick Brown (4/22) and Claire White (4/29)

April marked the beginning of Saturday guided "Bassett Trace Nature Walks" by Historic Rivers Master Naturalists. Several members who have participated in trail maintenance in Colonial Williamsburg trained to be official tour guides of the trails and vista behind the former home of the Rockefellers and Burwell Bassett. Visitors who have registered for the free tour are invited to take a leisurely one-hour stroll to learn about forest ecology, Virginia species, and the history of this unique tract of forest.

**Pictured top left:** On April 29th, Cheryl Roettger demonstrates using Merlin Bird ID to identify a bird call after visitors inquire about nature apps.

Pictured top right: On April 29th Judy Jones shows off two of her tour props. On the left is a large longleaf pinecone, on the right is a much smaller and more common loblolly pinecone.

Pictured bottom left: On April 22nd, Shirley Devan's tour included 13 visitors and a stop at tulip poplar (*Magnoliacaea Liriodendron tulipifera*).

**Below**: Pink "rhodie" along vista on April 29th. Many rhododendrons have just started blooming.



# Trees of Heaven: Using Some Elbow Grease on Those Elbow Joints by Tracy Matthew Melton

Over the last few years, I've been working with master naturalists and neighbors to remove invasive species from the W&M campus and Port Anne common land along College Creek and including several ravines that are part of its watershed. Initially, the focus was on Japanese stilt grass and Japanese honeysuckle, then also autumn olive and eventually mahonia and wineberry.

Working mostly in cold weather, among leafless trees, with a relatively limited understanding of local forests, I failed to note that some of those tree trunks that I was working around were the invasive tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). But when they leafed out in the spring of 2021, I saw that numerous large ones occupied the tree line along S. Henry Street, across from Eastern State Hospital. I had been feeling satisfied with our efforts but suddenly thought, are we just clearing a sunny, open space where these trees of heaven will thrive?



Subsequently, we've worked hard on those trees of heaven in that wooded area along S. Henry, between William Way and College Landing Park. We pulled up hundreds of small ones—up to six-feet tall—including the roots. Even some taller ones.

Last spring, I emailed the City of Williamsburg landscape supervisor who promptly had a crew remove three large trees of heaven, all heavily laden with tens of thousands of seeds. Still, dozens of larger ones remained, and they would produce perhaps hundreds of thousands of seeds every year.



How could we remove some of those larger ones? Trees of heaven are notorious for producing new shoots off the root if the tree is simply cut down. The solution can be worse than the problem. It has a very thick, orange taproot that reminds me of an elongated sweet potato. It can be as thick, or thicker, than the trunk. It most often doesn't grow straight down, though, but runs just below the surface at a 90-degree angle to the trunk, like a plumbing elbow joint, often for a foot or more, even farther on large ones.

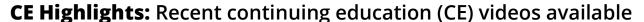
I bought a Kobalt fiberglass handle root cutting shovel and started experimenting. We found that the tree's

advantage is also a disadvantage. The thick taproot runs just below the surface, allowing it to send up shoots, even some distance from the trunk, but nothing is directly under the trunk. That structure can be leveraged (literally) to pry loose and pull up the entire taproot.

We found that we were able to remove not the largest but still large ones—up to thirty-feet tall with a trunk diameter of 2-5 inches—by using the following technique:

- (1) Cut the trunk at 3'-4' to retain enough trunk to manipulate but not enough to have a tall tree whipping back and forth.
- (2) Probe the soil to find the direction of the taproot and then dig out around that.
- (3) Wrestle the trunk back and forth to loosen the taproot.
- (4) Cut off roots running off that, usually just one to three, and pull those out.
- (5) Pull out the loosened taproot, often leaving little or no root in the ground. Approximately 15%-20% of roots run down deeper, and we have to cut those off, but at a deep level, leaving no root running sideways.

We have removed several dozen large trees of heaven by this method. I think only a dozen or so very large ones remain. I'm hoping that the city will remove those before they produce seeds. We will follow up to keep new shoots from growing larger. I've done similar work with Keith Navia and VMN and W&M grounds and landscaping student volunteers on the W&M campus. Hard work, but tree of heaven will take over a forest, with all the damage that entails.



A select list of recent CE opportunities available to watch on-demand is below. Click the title to be directed to the webpage or YouTube video uploaded by the organization. Be sure to record your hours in Better Impact.

#### From Virginia Master Naturalists State Program:

Pollinators in the woods? How wild bees nest and forage in trees and woody habitats, and what you can do to support them by Kass Urban-Mead, The Xerces Society (April 2023)

#### From The Williamsburg Bird Club:

Presentations by College of William & Mary graduate students awarded a Bill Sheehan/Ruth Beck Ornithology Research Grant by Liz Elliot, Moira Meehan, & Joseph F. Di Liberto (March 2023)

#### From Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS):

Mud, Glorious Mud: Following Muds' Journey from Land to Sea by Dr. Steven Kuehl, VIMS (March 2023)

#### From Virginia Living Museum:

Threats to Native Bird Populations and Conservation Action by Dan Cristol, College of William & Mary (March 2023)

From Blue Ridge PRISM (Invasive Sp. Management): All About Callery Pear by Dr. David Coyle, Clemson University (April 2023)

# **Lady's Slippers:** Our Unusual Wild Orchid

#### by Donna Benson

I was hiking with a Master Gardener friend on a woodland trail the other day and she leaned over and asked with a conspiratorial smile, "Can you keep a secret?" Standing tall in a layer of pine needles and oak leaves off the side of the path, she pointed to the beautiful blooms of a small group of Pink Lady's Slippers. What a rare treat!

Pink Lady's Slippers (*Cypripedium acaule*), one of our beautiful native orchids, can most often be found in the acidic, deep humus soil of mixed hardwood and pine forests from Maine to Georgia and as far west as Minnesota. They are most often pink, ranging from whitish-pink to magenta, but white as well as yellow varieties are sometimes found

Another common name often used is moccasin flower which, according to folklore, is attributed to the Ojibwe people. They tell the story of a woman who walked for miles one winter to source medicine for her sick village. As a reminder of her bravery, tiny slipper-like flowers grew where her moccasins left prints in the snow.

The plants survive through a symbiotic relationship and a bit of trickery. The seeds require interaction with the Rhizoctonia fungus in the soil which breaks open the seed coat. From the fungus, the plant receives nutrients until it grows large enough to make its own food. At that point, the fungus starts to extract nutrients from the plants' roots. A mutually beneficial arrangement for both. To reproduce, the orchid lures bees with a sweet fragrance through a slit in the flower pouch. Once inside, however, the bee finds no nectar and must squeeze by the stigma and pollen masses, hopefully resulting in pollination, on its way to the exit. Bees quickly learn to avoid this trap which accounts for fairly low pollination rates. As a result of these unique relationships, Pink Lady's Slippers can take years to reproduce and have a transplant success rate of less than 5%. So, if you're lucky enough to spot some of these native orchids on a walk through the woods, take a moment to appreciate their unique beauty and then leave them secret.











**Pictured clockwise from top:** (1) Marie and girls in Grayson Highlands, (2) trailing cedar on forest floor, (3) wild pony, (4) hackberry thorns.

# **Spring Break at Hungry Mother State Park**

#### by Marie Robertson

After stumbling across a Facebook post about The Channels hike in the Channels State Forest and wild ponies at Grayson Highlands State Park, I began researching the surrounding area for a potential spring break trip with my school-age girls. I decided to book a cabin at Hungry Mother State Park, since it was very accessible from I-81 and close to both locations. Here are a few highlights from our 4-night stay in southwest Virginia.

Hungry Mother State Park (HMSP) opened in June 1936 as one of 6 original Civilian Conservation Corps parks in Virginia. It is located in the Ridge and Valley region of the state, just outside Marion, VA. There are numerous hiking and mountain bike trails, fishing, a lake for swimming and paddling, and park-sponsored programming. On our first evening at the park, we participated in a Forest Therapy (Shinrin-yoku) session led by a local Master Naturalist and certified Shinrin-yoku therapist. Even my extremely energetic and talkative 2<sup>nd</sup> grader stood still and silent to follow the instructions. The forest therapy session left us feeling relaxed after a long day of driving. The session ended with a tea ceremony (local peppermint tea sweetened with native violet simple syrup) next to a bubbling brook.

On our first full day in the area, we took a 2-hour guided horseback trail ride through the Jefferson National Forest. For the girls, riding horses was the highlight; for me, the native plants I saw were the highlight: more Trailing Cedar than I could ever have imagined, club moss, striped wintergreen, native violets, rhododendrons, bloodroot, elderberry, golden ragwort and ramps. After an early dinner at our cabin, we hiked Molly's Knob trail (1.9 miles to the highest point in HMSP at 3,270ft) to enjoy vistas of the surrounding mountains, including nearby Mt. Rogers. On the way back down, we heard a wild

turkey calling as well as a chorus of frogs. Native plants seen on the hike included Pussytoes, Serviceberry, Dogwood and poverty oat grass.

Our second full day we drove to Grayson Highlands State Park, with the goal of finding the wild horses that live in the park. The drive was not only scenic but also showcased more bloodroot and Virginia bluebells along the

roadsides. In the Highlands themselves, there were many Dotted Hawthorn trees. After a short hike we found a group of 6 wild horses, including a foal. The views from a nearby rocky outcrop were spectacular. Once back at our cabin that evening, we went down to the lake and listened to the chorus of frogs. Thanks to her Field Biology class at Jamestown High School, our exchange student, Amelie, was able to identify some of the frogs by sound. We learned that the spring peeper, while small, is one of the loudest!

Our final day in the area was dedicated to hiking to the **Channels**: crevices between huge sandstone boulders that create a maze-like area on top of Middle Knob on Clinch Mountain. The channels between the rocks were likely formed about 10,000 years ago by ice and permafrost wedging that shattered and enlarged crevices. Some channels are so narrow that you cannot enter them, others can be entered and lead to more channels, and some have dead ends.

We began the 3-mile out-and-back hike at 9am when it was overcast and 60°F. The parking lot at the trailhead only has parking spaces for 10 cars, so early arrival is advised. Finding the trail head parking was one of the most challenging parts of this excursion, but thanks to internet research, I found great directions and details. My girls found it challenging to wake up early during spring break for this hike, and when we arrived at the parking lot and I excitedly exclaimed "There are Jewelweed seedlings here!" they let out an audible groan; I guess it was too early for native plant excitement. Along the uphill hike, I saw Mayapples, white trillium, rattlesnake plantain, and more mosses and lichens than I could count.

After 2 miles, the girls were all whining and the surrounding vegetation had changed into a rhododendron forest, punctuated with buckeyes just beginning to leaf out. When we finally reached the summit of Clinch Mountain and the Channels, we were all glad for a rest but too excited to sit down. The air within the Channels was very cool, like a natural refrigerator, but what really struck me was how the rhododendrons had rooted themselves in this very inhospitable terrain. Some of the roots stretched 12 or more feet into the crevices to reach soil. It was 2:30pm and 70°F by the time we reached the parking area, and we all had very sore feet, but everyone agreed that the 6-mile trek was worth it to experience the natural wonder of the Channels. Once back at Hungry Mother State Park, we soaked our feet in the cool lake water, and treated ourselves to popcorn at the local drive-in movie theater after dinner.





**Pictured (top to bottom):** (1) View of Channel formations, (2) standing in a rhododendron forest.

All in all, it was a fun, relaxing and interesting trip with something for everyone. Aside from the beautiful setting and outdoor activities, downtown Marion is delightful to explore and has significance as the hometown of the *Song of the Mountains* show (on PBS), which still records in the Lincoln Theatre. There are other fun family attractions, from mini-golf, to roller skating and the drive-in theater. Depending on the route you drive, there are many fantastic state parks to explore on your way there or on the way back.

Note: I booked our cabin at the end of January for our trip during the first week of April. When I checked back about a month later almost all the cabins had been reserved, and we were not even going during the main tourist season. So early booking is definitely advantageous, regardless of when you plan to go.

#### **Snapshot:** National Wildlife Refuge 4/29

by David Watt





I was at James River National Wildlife Refuge today performing trail maintenance and other tasks. While digging holes for tree identification signs, I brushed aside some leaves and noticed a clutch of eggs. My handy-dandy iNaturalist app suggested they were either spotted (*Ambystoma maculatum*) or marbled (*A. opacum*) salamanders. What I found most interesting is there are at least three eggs that are hatching- note the head poking through an egg near the center of the picture and a couple two eggs above that. I

thought this must be rare to capture this in the wild. It turned out pretty clearly from a cell phone photo.

#### **Upcoming "National Wildlife Refuge- FWS Opportunities"**

Listed as a "Trails and Trash" Opportunity in the Chapter's Better Impact Volunteer Management System

Monthly volunteer opportunities are offered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to perform maintenance and stewardship projects at nearby National Wildlife Refuges (NWR), marked by the bird icons on the map below. Volunteering at these locations presents a rare opportunity to visit a remote refuge that is often closed to the public. All interested volunteers must **pre-register no less than 48 hours prior** to the event by emailing Cyrus Brame, Wildlife Refuge Specialist (cyrus\_brame@fws.gov). You will also be required to sign a liability waiver before beginning work. Some aspects of the work often involve strenuous physical activity.

Trail WorkMay 20Saturday (9am-1pm) @ James River NWRNative Plant ManagementJune 14Wednesday (10am-2pm) @ Presquile (Island) NWRInvasive Species WorkJuly 15Saturday (9am-1pm) @ James River NWRTrail Work and PaintingAugust 26Saturday (8am-12pm) @ Presquile (Island) NWR

**Presquile (Island) NWR** Volunteer meetup (with boat transportation) at 4700 Bermuda Hundred Road, Chester, VA **James River NWR** Volunteer meetup at 4550 Flowerdew Hundred Road, Hopewell (North Prince George), VA



#### Barred Owls at Greensprings by Jim Easton

"It's always a treat to see owlets. For a few days in April, we had a great view of a Barred Owl nest along **Greensprings Trail**. One of the owlets had fledged, the other was just about to do so."







#### **On the Calendar**

See Better Impact Calendar and HRC Google Group for more opportunities.

May 10	<b>HRC General Meeting</b> 6-7:45pm at JCC Library (and Zoom)
May 13	HRC Field Trip 9am-12pm Chub Sandhill Nature Preserve *HRC Signup
May 18	CE Speaker 6pm Plastic Pollution (Clean VA Waterways) at VLM *Register
May 24	CE Speaker 7pm Jan Lockwood's Trip to Kenya with Williamsburg Bird Club
May 27	CE Bird Walk 8am with Williamsburg Bird Club at New Quarter Park
June 3	Clean the Bay Day 9am-12pm *Register with Chesapeake Bay Foundation
	May 13 May 18 May 24 May 27

The Virginia Master Naturalist Program is a statewide corps of volunteers providing education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities. Interested Virginians become Master Naturalists through training and volunteer service. The program is jointly sponsored by seven state organizations and based in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation within the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech.

#### Learn more about our chapter at historicrivers.org

The Naturalist is the monthly newsletter of the Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) of Virginia Master Naturalists. Other organizations may not publish material from the newsletter without express permission from the chapter. Newsletter contributions should be emailed to HRCeNewsletter@gmail.com by the end of the month. If you have a submission in the works, please notify the newsletter editor. Photos should include concise captions and credits to photographer(s).



#### **HRC Executive Committee**

#### President

Connie Reitz

**Vice President/Programs Chair** Shirley Devan

#### Secretaries

Barb Neis Janet Curtis

#### Treasurer

Adrienne Frank

#### **Additional Board Members**

**Immediate Past President** 

Ricklin Brown

Historian/Publicity/Media

Deborah Humphries

#### **At-Large Members**

Nancy Barnhart Shan Gill Bill Harper Janet Harper

Congrats! You found the hidden bonus bug. Kathi Mestayer shared the snap below of an early-spring treetop firefly. She has been watching them throughout April around 8:30pm up in the treetops.



### Chairs of Standing Committees

#### Membership

Judy Jones

#### **Basic Training**

Shirley Devan Barbara Neis Jennifer Trevino

#### **Volunteer Service Projects**

Jennifer Trevino

#### **Continuing Education**

Barb Creel

#### **Education and Outreach**

MJ O'Bryan Jennifer Harrigan

#### **Newsletter Editor**

Claire White

#### Field Trips

Sherry Brubaker

#### Hospitality

Donna Benson Marie Robertson

## Appointed Committees & Teams

#### Risk Management Team

Roger Gosden Patty Maloney

#### **Better Impact Contact**

Judy Jones

#### Collections & Resources (CAR)

Jennifer Trevino

#### Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI)

Adrienne Frank

#### Basic Training (William & Mary Coll of the Wild)

Linda Morse

#### Webmaster

Jeanette Navia

#### **Chapter Advisors**

Megan Thomas, VA DWR John Gresham, VA DCR