

The Naturalist

HRC-VMN Newsletter | Volume 22, Number 02, February 28, 2026
Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists

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Feature Photo: Red Maple flowers (*Acer rubrum*) at Greensprings, 02/27/26 by **Martha B. Moss**.

A Message from the President

by Janet Harper

I was really hoping for an early Spring, but I don't think it will happen. We just returned from Aruba where it was 80 degrees, so I'm having a bit of climate shock right now.

It is bittersweet for me to be writing my last message as HRC president. It has been my pleasure to represent the chapter for the last two years, and I feel that we have accomplished a lot together. I've enjoyed the opportunity to interact more closely with other members during this time and have learned a lot about our chapter. All the board members have been very dedicated in their roles and helpful and supportive of each other. I could not have asked for a better team to work with. You all rock!

The March elections will bring several changes in the board membership. Rather than leaving the board, I'll be moving into the "Past President" position and will help in any way I can. VMN has this position to help with continuity of the board. We all owe a big thank you to those members who are leaving the board after serving for two or more years! Brad Glasebrook (field trip chair) and Michele Garrard (Member at large) have been active members and are leaving their positions after two years. Thank you both for your service!

Janet Curtis has been a board co-secretary since October 2022, also having served as hospitality chair years ago! She was very supportive when I asked for changes to the monthly minutes to note any guests and to include the different committee reports. Her meeting minutes are always wonderful, and she helps keep me on track in meetings! Donna Benson has been on the board for 3 years, initially serving as hospitality co-chair for two years. Her willingness to step up last year when we needed a basic training co-chair speaks to her dedication to the chapter! The nominating committee was relieved and grateful when she said yes! I think everyone is aware of Claire White's exceptional work on the newsletter for the last 3 years as well as her contributions as CE chair this past year. In addition to her board duties, Claire has helped the chapter in many other ways. Thank you all for your dedication! You'll be missed on the board!

Our policies offer an option to serve a third year in a position to help improve continuity and prevent having to change so many positions each year. I'm very grateful to Marc Moyers for staying on a third year as treasurer. He has done a fantastic job of safeguarding and growing our finances, and we really appreciate his expertise. Long-time board member Adrienne Frank is also staying for a third

year as Volunteer Service Activities Chair. Adrienne has served many different roles on the board, and her experience has been invaluable to the board and chapter. We have a great chapter because we have so many dedicated people!

In closing, I am so very grateful for everyone's support and trust in me during my time as president. It has been my pleasure and honor to represent HRC. The time has flown by, and I look forward to finding other ways to contribute to the chapter. Much Thanks!

Janet Harper

HRC Reminders

Many members have their **Civil Rights Training** expiring in February. Please try to get that done before too long, so Tiffany Brown [VMN State Program Assistant] doesn't have to send a lot of reminders.

Also, have you paid your dues yet? HRC dues deadline is March 31. If finances are an issue for you, please contact Marc Moyers to request a waiver for this year. We don't want to lose any members related to this issue!

On the Calendar

See Better Impact and HRC Google Group monthly Continuing education (CE) emails for more opportunities.

Wednesday	Mar 11	HRC Annual Meeting 6:30pm at Quarterpath Recreation Center <i>Cohort XIX Graduation, Milestones, Recertification Pins, Board Elections</i>
Wednesdays	Mar 18/25	CE VA Native Plant Society Annual Workshop "Wetlands" vnps.org
Friday	Mar 20	Volunteer at James River NWR 9am-1pm Email cyrus_brame@fws.gov
Saturday	Mar 21	College Creek Litter Pickup 8-9am Reminders via Google Group
Saturday	Mar 21	Pop-up Wildlife Mapping at Warhill Trail 10am-12pm POC: Tory Gussman
Saturday	Mar 28	CE Bird Walk 8-10am with Williamsburg Bird Club at New Quarter Park

Weekly Wildlife Mapping: Hope to see you at one of the upcoming events at York River State Park (every Monday), New Quarter Park (look for Spring updates), Greensprings Trail (2nd and 4th Thursdays), Jamestown Island (1st Wednesday), and Yorktown Battlefield (Last Sunday). Check email for any last-minute changes.

Longleaf Pine Milestones by Dave Watt



Several Historic Rivers Chapter members braved the elements on four days spanning December to February to plant longleaf pine plugs (LLP) at the James River National Wildlife Refuge (JRNWR). After our "blizzard" forced Cyrus Brame, the Wildlife Refuge Specialist, to reschedule a couple events, we joined a total of 33 volunteers from the area and planted 2,000 LLP plugs in a recently thinned 10-acre plot. Shovels, dibble bars, and root-slayers (oh, my!) split the frosty ground, many places still lightly snow-covered, as the volunteers attempted to keep warm (thank goodness for electric socks and hand warmers). Cyrus also provided hot chocolate to warm everyone's innards.

This very long-term effort has resulted in 20,000 LLPs being planted in 200 acres. These trees now have the opportunity to grow over the next 400 years on lands purposefully set aside for nature and the benefit of future generations. Whether driving down Route 5 or taking the Jamestown-Surry ferry, you can pack a picnic, walk the trails, study the interpretive signs marking many of the trees, and check out the eagle viewing stand or the long-leaf pine demonstration area.

If anyone would like to volunteer at James River, there are opportunities to help build a new trail, maintain existing trails, pick up trash, control invasives, and plant trees at 4550 Flowerdew Hundred Road, Hopewell, VA. Contact Cyrus Brame (cyrus_brame@fws.gov) or Dave Watt (davidsharonwatt@gmail.com) when you want to be involved. Cyrus also has other volunteer opportunities.

From Pat Lytton (Cohort XIX): It was one of those almost perfect days that reminds us of the beauty and reasons we go out in nature. Planting the long leaf seedling plugs was just another benefit! The whole process was well organized and simple. I will certainly sign up again and am excited to see how this area transforms over the years. If you haven't been out to help consider doing so it was a great day and a lot of fun. Take the ferry back for more adventure!

From Jim Leech (Cohort XVI): Cyrus has shared a picture of me and a USFWS member (Allie) planting the 20,000th seedling (center left). This was my third or fourth planting event with the longleaf seedlings down at JRNWR. It is a great project... not only

HRC chapter members but also other chapters. Also good chance to meet and work with the members of the USFWS service. Cyrus does a great job organizing the events.

Photos provided by Rick Brown and Cyrus Brame (USFWS). Volunteers planting longleaf pines. HRC members who participated include Dave Watt, Rick Brown, Pat Lytton, Jim Leech, Dan Foster, & Mike Whitfield.

Back to Work at Brickyard Landing after the “Burn”

by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis



The VA Department of Forestry (DOF) completed a controlled burn in February at the Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer Demonstration Garden meadow area. Daniel Brooks, a HRC Advisor from the VA Department of Forestry, planned and coordinated the burn in cooperation with JCC Parks and Recreation. Burning the meadow should help to control weeds and invasives in addition to Sweet Gum and Persimmon seedlings. The area around the meadow had to be prepped to avoid risks such as the fire spreading into other areas. Wind and weather also impacted timing for the burn.

Right now in early March, it is sopping wet at Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer Demonstration Garden. Swales are holding stormwater, so it will soak in slowly rather than run off into the river. Volunteers cleared out the zinnia beds in January, so they will be ready for reseeding next month. The garden looks surprisingly good for the end of winter.

In March, we will be trimming back the grasses and perennials. We will also check for any winter damage to the young trees and shrubs. The meadow will also get some attention to help get it ready for spring.

Join us if you have the time. We have an amazing core group of volunteers, but we always welcome extra hands. *Volunteers get back to work on Mondays and Thursdays from 9 am to 11 am starting March 9.*

Pictured Above: (Top photos) Controlled burn of the Brickyard meadow by the Virginia Department of Forestry. Photos provided by JCC Parks and Recreation. (Bottom photo) View of the landing with the rock swale, plantings, and interpretive sign facing the Chickahominy River.

Education and Outreach Is for Everyone!

by Cynthia Ferentinos, Education & Outreach Co-chair



Even if you're only available on evenings or weekends or new to the chapter or prefer to work behind the scenes... all of us can contribute to educating others about nature, the Virginia Master Naturalist program and/or the projects that we do in our chapter. And it's fun! You get to volunteer with nice people and are able to make a difference by helping adults and children in our community learn about nature and how and why we should preserve it.

Education and outreach for our chapter provides an excellent opportunity for those who can only volunteer on the weekends or evenings. Last year we had 21 events that were for the public and 13 of these were on Saturday or Sunday and 3 were on weeknights. Please see the draft calendar of events to see which ones might work with your schedule! Additional opportunities will be announced later in the year (e.g., at the library, Freedom Park and York River State Park and the farmers market) but we don't yet have dates confirmed.

If you're a recent graduate of Basic Training or haven't done outreach in a while, no problem! Marie Robertson and I won't send you out unprepared. We can work together to come up with ideas and/or activities, schedule a time to go to the CAR (Collections and Resources) storage unit to select interesting items for the display table, as well as the HRC trifold and anything else you'll need. If you'd like a bit more preparation, we can work on talking points and we'll certainly be available to answer any questions that you might have. And ideally in terms of scheduling, we will pair you with a more experienced person until you feel more comfortable on your own.

Finally, if you need volunteer opportunities that you can do from home, we sometimes need assistance preparing crafts or other materials in advance of programs so just let us know if that would be of interest to you.

Please reach out to Marie or me to find out how you can help. We'll be sending out a SignUp Genius for events closer to the date, especially if we still need volunteers. However, it's very helpful to know in advance who might be interested so we can assess if we're likely to have enough coverage and we can involve you in more of the preparation.

Pictured above and following page: Cohort XIX open house visits to the CAR on February 21st. Claire White (mentor), and outreach committee members Cynthia Ferentinos and Ron Hunt led trainees through an optional exploration of the CAR inventory. Items of particular interest included a large paper wasp nest, water quality gear and macroinvertebrate sampling resources, and the bats box.



2026 Education/Outreach Calendar—Community Events

Let Cynthia and Marie, co-chairs, know if you're interested in volunteering for one of the following events.

Saturday, April 18, 10am-3pm

Earth Day Celebration

Machicomoco State Park, Hayes, VA

Topic: Native Plants

Saturday, April 25, 1-4pm

Opening of James City County Library (JCCL) Natural Playground

James City County Library (Croaker Rd)

Topic: Nature Passport Scavenger Hunt

Saturday, May 2, 9:30am-2pm

Virginia Native Plant Sale

Williamsburg Community Building

Topic: Native Plants

Saturday, May 2, 9am-12pm

Spring into Conservation

Freedom Park Interpretive Center

Topic: To Be Determined

Saturday, May 9, 1-4pm

Williamsburg Regional Library's KidLit Festival

Williamsburg Library (Scotland Street)

Topic: Native Plants

Sunday, June 21

Pollinator Palooza

Veteran's Park/Kidsburg Playground

Topic: To be determined

Ongoing, Summer

Nature Passport Programs

JCC Library Natural Playground

Topic: General or Specific Topics

Saturday, June 27

STEAM Maker Fair

James City County Library

Topic: Nature Apps & Citizen Science

Ongoing, July 24-August 24

HRC-VMN Photo Exhibit

Williamsburg Library Theatre Gallery

Topic: Through the Eyes of a Naturalist

Saturday, September 26

York County's 7th Annual BugFest

Grafton Middle School, Yorktown, VA

Topic: TBD

Saturday, October 24, 1-3:30pm

Williamsburg Regional Library's Fall Plant Share

James City County Library

Topics: Plants Support (drop off, labeling), HRC information table, Plants giveaway

Sunday, December 6

Williamsburg Christmas Parade

Starts at Kaplan Arena

Topic: To be determined

Cohort XIX Completes Training in February by Basic Training Committee

Cohort 19 closed out their 6-month basic training to become Virginia Master Naturalist members with a whopping 5 events in the month of February, and a 75-question open-notes take home exam. Due to weather and other scheduling challenges we pivoted to Zoom online meetings for three classes and met in person twice.

On Tuesday, February 3rd, Chuck Bailey from The College of William and Mary presented on “Climate & Weather” via Zoom. Chuck, pictured top left, highlighted the forces at work in the atmosphere driving weather locally and globally. Differences in topography across the state helped explain precipitation patterns. Local weather data from the last hundred years was presented in a variety of graphical representations to explore climate, long-term weather patterns.

On February 14th, all trainees were in attendance for the final field day in Colonial Williamsburg. HRC Chapter Advisor Daniel Brooks led the entire 5-hour class/field day, showing true dedication to our program. The morning consisted of a class on forests of Virginia and forest conservation in the Griffin Hotel followed by a guided tour of the adjacent Bassett Trace Nature Trail and a tree measurement demonstration utilizing the historic Shurcliff Cedar. Daniel reminded trainees that although the task can seem daunting to preserve our native forests, there’s hope especially when groups like ours come together and serve as volunteer educators, citizen scientists, and stewards to help conserve and manage natural resources and public lands.

The final in-person class was held on February 17th with two new activities: a revised interpretation class and a pizza party and gift exchange. Bill Weldon, committee member and retired interpreter, spent approximately an hour engaging trainees in cooperative activities and provided an overview of Freeman Tilden’s six principles of interpretation. Janie Moyers, committee member and hostess extraordinaire, brought the pizza and led the trainees through the interactive white elephant/mystery book gift exchange. Smiles, laughs, and conversation ended the class as a variety of nature related books were selected and “stolen” by trainees to take home. Their take home exam also went live at the conclusion of the evening.

Two makeup sessions were added to the end of the month due to the need to reschedule earlier in the training calendar. Betsy Washington of the Northern Neck Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society and a fellow Virginia Master Naturalist provided a 1.5-hour native plants overview via Zoom early on a Saturday

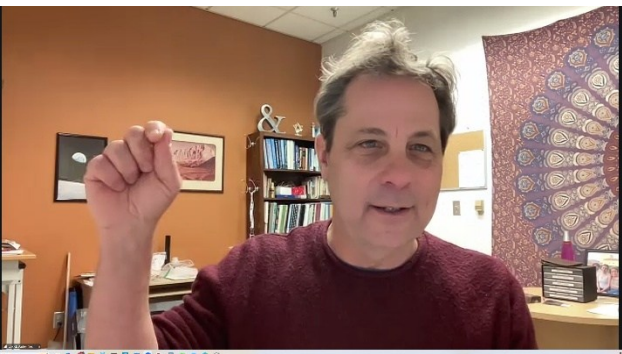


Photo above: (Top) Chuck Bailey presents via Zoom. (Center) Trainees and Daniel Brooks at the Shurcliff Cedar. (3) Janie Moyers and Robin Rose during the white elephant/ mystery book exchange. Robin’s book on the bay was stolen by fellow trainee Erin Schibani later in the exchange!

morning. Afterwards trainees had the option to stop in at the CAR (Collections and Resources) storage unit in rotating 45-minute shifts to explore the many materials available to members while volunteering.

The final Zoom class was on ecology with Steve Living from the Department of Wildlife Resources and VMN Chapter Advisor for the Peninsula Chapter. Steve's guiding principles of ecology were a great way to end this epic 6-month long training session:

- (1) Everything in nature is interconnected. You can never do just one thing!
- (2) Nature is dynamic! Plant and animal communities change over time.
- (3) Diversity = Stability

Celebrate Cohort 19's graduation with trainees on Wednesday, March 11th Historic Rivers Chapter Annual Meeting. Meeting starts at 6:30pm (later than our usual 6pm start) at Quarterpath Recreation Center. Cake, cookies, and conversation to follow.



Pictured left: The white elephant/ mystery book exchange on display at the February 17th pizza party. This activity/gift replaces the traditional "Eastern Forests" field guide older cohorts are familiar with. Shown, clues to the contents of each wrapped book gift.

HRC Wins Big with VMN End of Year 2025 Awards by Claire White

On February 3rd, the Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) State Program office released a 17-minute video and web article sharing the 2025 VMN Program Award Winners. These awards "aim to recognize the impressive conservation work of our thousands of volunteers in lots of ways, and one of those ways is with annual statewide awards to highlight especially noteworthy impacts." Historic Rivers Chapter (HRC) President Janet Harper (pictured left below) sent in three nominations for Chapter Advisor of the Year, New Volunteer of the Year, and Most Impactful Project. All three nominations became award winners. Read or watch the full awards announcement at virginiamasternaturalist.org/blog/celebrating-our-2025-virginia-master-naturalist-program-award-winners/. Excerpts from the HRC award nominations are below.



(picture above: Janet Harper and Daniel Brooks)

Chapter Advisor of the Year: Daniel Brooks,
Virginia Department of Forestry and HRC

Despite having been with the Historic Rivers Master Naturalists for only a little more than a year, Daniel's positive attitude and welcoming presence have had a significant impact on the group, and his friendly smile and kind demeanor are recognized and appreciated by the members. He generously shares his expertise and time to enhance

volunteers' knowledge through presentations and field sessions. Daniel is an outstanding educator, but his efforts extend well beyond that. His involvement is evident in his hands-on participation, working alongside volunteers to plant trees, remove invasive species, and maintain multiple sites throughout the county. His willingness to pitch in and help sets a strong example for others. Dan's leadership and generosity set a standard for others to follow.

New Volunteer of the Year: *Dan Foster*,
Historic Rivers Chapter



Dan became involved in more than ten projects while still a trainee. His most substantial impact has been in stewardship, especially as a trail steward for the Bassett Trace Trail and a co-leader for

the Paspahegh Town project at Jamestown Settlement, restoring gardens in the native village to better reflect plants historically used by Native Americans. His stewardship also extends to oyster gardening, litter pickups, and work on gardens and trails throughout the community. Dan has also jumped in to co-lead the chapter's next basic training course committee. With over 600 volunteer hours contributed in 2025 and his willingness to take on leadership roles, Dan's devotion to the program and the environment is clear.

Most Impactful Project Award: *Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer and Demonstration Garden*,
Historic Rivers Chapter

Many environmental education and conservation projects in Virginia are happening because a VMN volunteer envisioned them and made them a reality. This VMN Most Impactful Project of the Year award recognizes a project with significant leadership by VMN volunteers that had noteworthy impacts.

The Brickyard Landing project originally started in 2024 as a riparian buffer demonstration garden. Thanks to the combined efforts of many partners

and hundreds of hours of work, the Brickyard Landing area was transformed in 2025 into a beautiful and educational setting. Judy Kinshaw-Ellis and Donna Benson, both Extension Master Gardeners as well as Virginia Master Naturalists, led the project. Hands-on work was provided by other master naturalists, master gardeners, James City County Parks and Recreation staff, and community volunteers. Funding was provided by a Wetlands Watch/Coastal Resilience and Trees Fund Grant, Virginia Department of Forestry, Colonial Soil and Water District, and Ford's Colony Garden Club.

In addition to seeding the meadow, volunteers planted more than 200 trees and shrubs, 250 seedlings, and nearly 2000 grasses and perennials. The large once-open area now has several well-defined gardens, walking paths, dry riverbed swales to improve drainage, a meadow habitat for pollinators, a food forest planted in native plants that produce edible berries and nuts, and interpretive signs about riparian buffers and native plant habitats featuring text and photography by Historic Rivers Master Naturalist volunteers.

Impacts of this project include

- Enhanced riparian zones with reduced erosion and improved water drainage
- Transformation of the area into a beautiful park to encourage increased public usage and enjoyment
- Expanded education about native plants, riparian buffers, and pollinators through interpretive signage and guided plant walks led by local groups
- New habitat for insects, reptiles, birds, and mammals
- Strengthened collaboration among James City County Parks & Recreation, Extension Master Gardeners, and Historic Rivers Master Naturalists, fostering shared stewardship and coordinated efforts
- and a food forest to educate the community on plants they could grow

Go visit Brickyard Landing to see the amazing work of these volunteers!

VMN Award Reflections from Brickyard's Co-leads: Teamwork, Building Community and a Little Magic



by Donna Benson

It's always gratifying to have your work recognized, so it's rewarding to see Brickyard Landing honored by the Virginia Master Naturalists. While recognition is appreciated, it's never been the motivation behind this project. What truly matters is the transformation itself — taking a barren wasteland and helping it become a thriving natural habitat, literally buzzing with life. Watching that change unfold has been an incredible learning experience and reinforced something I deeply believe: damaged landscapes can heal.

None of this would have been possible without an extraordinary team. Judy has been an indispensable partner from the very beginning. Her vision and determination laid the foundation for everything we've accomplished. She is truly a force of nature — and, just as importantly, a lot of fun to work alongside.

Because we've worked so well together, we've also been able to build something beyond habitat restoration: a community. Volunteers show up from

the JCC/W Master Gardeners, the HRC Master Naturalists, Tree Stewards, county staff, and even friends and neighbors. They come back again and again, despite the heat and the hard work, because meaningful work has a way of drawing people in and connecting them.

That may be the most powerful lesson of all — that restoring land can also restore a sense of shared purpose. And in the times, we're living through, that feels especially important.

by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

Having the riparian buffer garden at Brickyard Landing named as the most impactful project of the year is rewarding, but seeing a mud-filled grass lot transformed into a garden has been magical. The camaraderie of our team and even those who stop by when they can has made this project successful, and it has been hard work.

In the summer of 2024, we had a small group who worked tirelessly pulling weeds, mulching, and hand watering. There were times when we doubted if the new plants would ever out compete the weeds. That first season laid the foundation for 2025 when the garden took shape, and the number of volunteers who worked regularly doubled. Our regular team includes about a dozen volunteers, but when we had big plantings, we would get dozens of people to help.

Donna as co-lead is a gem. I did not know her well when we joined forces in early 2023, but working with her has been a joy. In 2025, with travel and [my husband] Drew's health issues, Donna stepped in and did it all. She quietly takes the lead and does everything that needs to be done. It is so much fun to have a co-lead who shares the vision and love of this project.

Pictured: Judy (left) and Donna (right) in the zinnia bed at Brickyard.

Your Voice Counts in the Virginia Legislature by Linda Hughes

If you're like me there are several issues facing our Virginia State Legislature that really make you want to pick up the phone or pen and reach out to your delegate. Do you wonder what you can do as a Virginia Master Naturalist? Can you advocate on behalf of an issue? Can you visit your Virginia State Delegate? What can you do, if anything?

Well, official guidance written in Virginia Master Naturalist's Volunteer Policy Handbook is clear: The Virginia Master Naturalist Program is not a political advocacy group, and it is not appropriate for VMN volunteers to engage in political advocacy while serving in their VMN volunteer role. The volunteer must understand that while representing VMN, they are unbiased educators or helpers, not supporters of a viewpoint.

VMN policy guidance does tell members that: ...it is, of course, allowable to write letters to government officials as a private individual or make statements at public meetings as private individuals. An individual may state that they are a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer but may not state that you are representing the stance of the organization as a whole, a chapter, or its sponsoring agencies.

And the VMN Mission Statement, as you all know, states: The Virginia Master Naturalist Program is a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Three issues before the 2026 Virginia State Legislature come to my mind that indeed directly affect "the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the Commonwealth of Virginia":

(1) Three separate bills support Virginia's efforts to combat invasive plants and draw attention to the damage they are causing to our Commonwealth's farms, forests, health, parks, and economy.

(2) Another bill proposes the Department of Wildlife Resources develop a webpage to educate the recreational fishing community and the general

public about the importance of responsible recycling and disposal of fishing tackle. As a wildlife transporter, I have seen firsthand how carelessly discarded fishing line injures and kills many beautiful animals that become ensnared.

(3) Another bill proposes legislation that the Virginia Institute of Marine Science utilize funds to produce research for setting scientifically defensible and ecologically meaningful harvest limits for menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay. This research could help ensure a sufficient forage base for wildlife like striped bass, bluefish, and Ospreys, and protect the overall health of the ecosystem.

There are many other bills that might inspire you, as a private citizen, to act! The good news is you can search by subject, delegate, committee and more at <https://lis.virginia.gov/bill-search>! Again, as a chapter or a VMN volunteer, we are not permitted to officially "engage in political advocacy," but I would like to encourage our members to stay informed on the issues that may have bearing on the natural resources in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

While members or its chapters may not officially represent the Virginia Master Naturalist program in advocacy efforts, your voice as a private citizen remains powerful! You still can support an issue near and dear to your heart! As an individual, you may indeed advocate for more management of invasive plants in our commonwealth, urge for responsible disposal of fishing tackle, support research into ecologically balanced menhaden harvest limits, and so much more.

By participating in public discussions, sharing informed perspectives, and communicating with government officials, each person exercises their right to express personal views on matters impacting natural resources and public lands. Civic engagement is not only a cornerstone of democratic society, but it also enables individuals to contribute meaningfully as stewards of Virginia's natural areas. Your voice as a private citizen remains powerful.

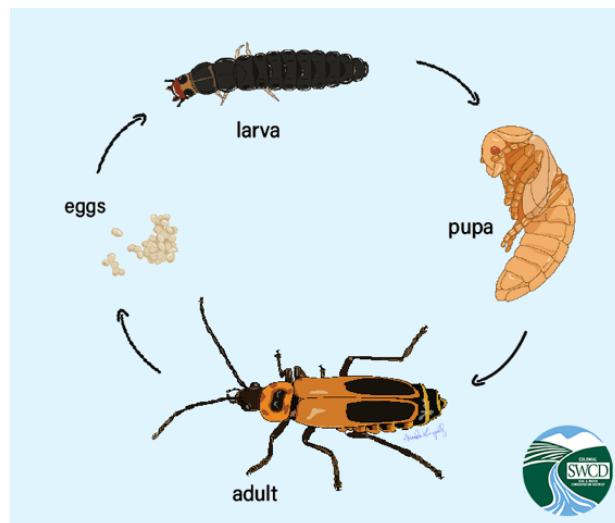
Shorter Shares from HRC Members and Beyond



#WOW (Wonderful Water) Volunteer Service Project at College Creek Beach

Keith Navia, Jeanette Navia, Anne Annala, and Robert Ambrose (left to right) collected 23 pounds of trash at College Creek Beach, along the Colonial Parkway on Saturday, February 21st. The next pickup will be on Saturday, March 21st at 8am.

When logging volunteer hours for this project in 2026 be sure to write #WOW in the description. This project counts towards the “Wonderful Water-2026 Service Theme,” sponsored by the Virginia Master Naturalist State Program Office. Learn more at virginiamasternaturalist.org/volunteer/wonderful-water-2026-service-theme/



Beneficial Bugs – Soldier Beetles—by CSWCD

Did you catch the Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District’s (CSWCD) latest article on “Beneficial Bugs”? Amanda Whispell, CSWCD Education and Outreach Specialist, tells all in this article about the amazing Soldier beetles that serve as pest control in their larval stage and pollinators in their adult forms. Learn more and see real pictures of these “leatherwings” in their [Winter 2026 newsletter](#) or at colonialswcd.org/post/beneficial-bugs-soldier-beetles

Save the Dates: Two Upcoming Spring Historic Rivers Chapter Field Trips

Save the dates for the following HRC Field Trips. Each trip will be approximately 4 hours long. More details to come after the March 11th Annual meeting via the chapter Google Group Listserv.

April 11: Vernal Pool Training at VCU Rice Rivers Center (Charles City, VA) with Susan Watson from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources.

May 16: Tour of Chub Sandhill Natural Area Preserve (Waverly, VA) with John Bunch, Virginia Master Naturalist- Historic Southside Chapter.



Workday at Upper County Park—by Adrienne Frank

Bad weather postponed our Chapter’s MLK Day of Service scheduled for Upper County Park back in January. Taking advantage of 60-degree weather on March 1st, sixteen very hardy volunteers spent more than two hours digging out large, old plant pots, flipping over, emptying, carrying, loading, and more. It was hard work! We calculated that we emptied almost 500 pots and set them aside for the Park staff to remove to the dump.

There are many more pots to be emptied. A second date for continued work is needed soon, otherwise the heat and critters might be of concern. We hope to have another workday on March 8th if the weather is good. Check the Google Group Listserv for updates. We’d love to have a member with a truck come out to help move pots.

HRC Email Addresses and Useful CE Links

Send your news and shares to the following HRC accounts for CE, the newsletter, and Facebook:

- CEHistoricRivers@gmail.com
- HRCeNewsletter@gmail.com
- HRCpublicity@gmail.com

Approved previously recorded CE can be found at:

- [youtube.com/@CEHistoricRivers](https://www.youtube.com/@CEHistoricRivers)
- viriniamasternaturalist.org/training/continuing-education/

Tick Surveillance Project

Interested in passive or active tick surveillance with the Old Dominion University Tick Lab? You can now earn VMN volunteer hours for your time helping the ODU tick team. For passive surveillance, volunteers are simply mailing in ticks found on themselves, their pets, or in the environment on an ad hoc basis. To participate in the active surveillance, contact Holly Gaff at hgaff@odu.edu. See the full Historic Rivers Chapter project description by logging into Better Impact volunteer management system. The official project website is sites.wp.odu.edu/tick-team

Currently VMNs in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula Chapters have an active surveillance project. See the VMN State February 9th blog post to learn more at viriniamasternaturalist.org/blog/vmn-volunteers-help-increase-understanding-of-ticks-and-tick-borne-diseases/

HB291 Delegate Anderson, HD-71st

Fishing tackle recycling and disposal; educational webpage, report.

HB291 will protect Virginia's beautiful wildlife by encouraging the public to dispose of their fishing equipment responsibly. Providing data-driven publicly accessible information is the first step to building a conscientious community that will work to preserve our Commonwealth for future generations to call home.



2026 Nature Legislation

Learn more about this “fishing tackle recycling and disposal; educational webpage” bill at lis.virginia.gov/bill-details/20261/HB291

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 including the Virginia Cooperative Extension and is based in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation within the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech.

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Learn more about our chapter at historicroivers.org

The Naturalist is the monthly newsletter of the Historic River 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).



Bonus Pic: Tortula moss at Greensprings, 2/16/26 by Martha B. Moss (via Flickr).

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