

## **The Virginia Roanoke River Basin Advisory Committee (VRRBAC) Report to Constituents, Legislature Members, and Localities**

The Virginia Roanoke River Basin Advisory Committee (VRRBAC) was established in the executive branch of state government as an advisory committee to the Virginia delegation to the Roanoke River Basin Bi-State Commission. The Roanoke River Basin Bi-State Commission was established and composed of members from the Commonwealth of Virginia and the State of North Carolina. The purpose of the Commission in short is to safeguard the Roanoke River Basin's natural resources for the citizens of the Roanoke River Basin. This duty includes providing guidance, making recommendations, identifying problems, disseminating information, and promoting communication, coordination, and education among stakeholders. NC has passed similar legislation. The advisory committees of both States are to assist the Roanoke River Basin Bi-State Commission carry out its responsibility.

The purpose of this report is to highlight accomplishments to date including pertinent recommendations. Problems faced by VRRBAC are also presented. It is requested that the Basin's Localities and State Senators and Representatives work to support the funding of VRRBAC and its objectives. Feedback to the Committee on your needs, concerns, and ideas will help the group achieve its mission. Additionally, recommendations of knowledgeable people to serve on subcommittees are needed.

### **Organizational Problems**

A delay in convening of the North Carolina Roanoke River Basin Advisory Committee (NCRRBAC) and therefore the Roanoke River Basin Bi-State Commission has curbed the activities of the Committee. In an effort to begin the dialogue with NC, the Committee has invited speakers from NC DENR, APNEP, and a NC local Community to discuss pertinent issues in the Roanoke Basin. Members have also attended the John H. Kerr 216 meetings and met with sponsoring representatives of NCRRBAC to share the VRRBAC experience. In order to move forward for the good of the entire basin, VRRBAC now believes that an effort should be made to bring both states together in a meeting of the Roanoke River Basin Bi-State Commission to begin developing long range strategies. To this end, the VRRBAC State legislative members have written a letter to North Carolina Governor Easley and Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Ross suggesting a Roanoke River Basin Bi-State Commission meeting be held in the Henderson-Oxford area.

A mechanism for funding exists but depends upon appropriations to DEQ, which have not been made. The lack of funding restricts the Committee, particularly at the grass roots and sub-committee level. A source of operating funds would enable the group to carry out its full mission and to better develop tangible products, such as position papers on the issues pertinent to the basin. Such action would help provide integrated management of the entire watershed, improve and maintain environmental quality, and protect public

## **VRRBAC Report to Constituents, Legislature Members, and Localities**

### **Page 2**

health in the basin. It is important that this body receive appropriate funding to accomplish its objectives.

#### **Achievements**

A goal of VRRBAC has been to open channels of communication. It is believed that a great deal of progress has been made in this regard. The Committee meets throughout the Roanoke basin in an effort to be accessible to all basin constituents. It is important that dialogue take place which is representative of all areas of the basin. There must be rural and urban cooperation on water issues. Speakers representing various groups, State Agencies, Local Governments, different geographic areas, and interests have addressed VRRBAC. Localities and State entities have provided meeting facilities for the meetings. Such participation demonstrates that VRRBAC has strong partnerships and support in the region. Broad public support of policy and regional consensus is the best way to bring about positive change associated with natural resource issues, including environmental and related health matters. Better efficiency of protection efforts will result as all partners, public, private, federal, state, and local officials, can share and leverage resources. Such coordination and consensus building in the entire basin on watershed management issues is essential to sound watershed decision making and management.

Sub-committees have been given direction to promote such an effort using broad-based input consolidated from as many interested parties as possible. The sub-committees formed are Agriculture and Forestry, Lake Interests, Municipal Interests and Permit Holders, River Interests, and Water. The sub-committees are to prepare position papers on important issues and bring them back to the full Committee for adoption. An effort is being made to bring the most knowledgeable people possible to the table, where the work must take place. The objective is to obtain membership that will represent stakeholders throughout the basin and maintain a geographical and urban/rural balance.

Since the inaugural meeting of VRRBAC certain characteristics and issues of the basin have become evident. The importance of natural resources to the economic vitality of the Basin is apparent. People reside in and come to the Roanoke River Basin area to pursue various interests including vacation, lifestyle, esthetics, boating, fishing, etc. These activities and personal values help drive the economic engine of the local and regional area. In addition, agriculture is vital to the region's lifestyle and economy. Clean water and ample flow and supply are recognized as essential to existing beneficial uses and future economic growth. There are interrelationships within the basin involving flow, as events in one section of the basin can impact other parts. Environmental, ecosystem, human health, power generation, aquatic life, and economic needs of the basin must be balanced. The generally good water quality of the Roanoke basin is valued and must be preserved. Issues and topics which are crucial to the well-being of the basin people include 1.) Inter-basin transfer of water, 2.) Water withdrawals, 3.) Regulation of flow and storage, 4.) Invasive species, 5.) Recreation and fishing, 6.) Water quality 7.) Lake vitality, and 8.) Solid Waste and Biosolids entering Virginia and the basin. VRRBAC has adopted several positions regarding the Basin's natural resources.

**Recommendations**

- **(2003) The Roanoke River Basin Scenic River Designation and responsibilities should be assigned to VRRBAC.**
- **(2003) VRRBAC should be represented on the John H. Kerr 216 Study Sponsors Advisory Committee.** This representation has been granted.
- **(2003) VRRBAC favors the development of a State-wide Water Policy, but only one that mandates local stakeholder input and is against the inter-basin transfer of water that is detrimental to the people of the basin.** A policy has been developed which meets these goals, with the exception that no decision has been made on inter-basin transfers at this time. The Water Supply Planning TAC did not specifically address this issue.
- **(2003) VRRBAC is against any inter-basin transfers that would have a substantial negative impact on the people of the basin. The overall consensus of VRRBAC is that the group must protect the water resources and growth potential. Water resources are recognized as essential for the economic vitality of the Roanoke River Basin. To transfer quantities of water outside the basin to foster growth in areas which cannot sustain themselves could result in preventing the basin from developing and sustaining its own needs.**
- **(2003) VRRBAC is opposed to any new water withdrawal until such time that the real and potential needs for the foreseeable future are determined. Furthermore when it is possible to do so, VRRBAC intends to ask the corresponding committee in NC to go on record supporting this same motion.**
- **(2004) VRRBAC supports the recent Virginia Initiatives for Invasive Vegetation and Invasive Species to deal with hydrilla, zebra mussels, snakeheads, etc. VRRBAC favors funding for these efforts to provide leadership, technical expertise, and corrective actions as appropriate to mitigate and prevent these ecological and economic damaging agents.**
- **(2004) VRRBAC supports a balanced flow regime for the rivers and lakes of the basin. We recommend all the governmental agencies, stakeholders, and private industry work together to balance all interests. These include but are not limited to FERC, ACOE, USF&W, VA DEQ, VA DCR, VDGIF, AEP, Dominion, local governments, environmental groups, and other stakeholders.**
- **(2004/2005) VRRBAC is concerned over the ever-increasing volume of solid and bio-solid waste entering Virginia and the basin. VRRBAC supports the current JLARC study on the effectiveness of the Bio-Solids program regulations and management thereof.**

- **(2004/2005) VRRBAC values the generally good water quality and recognizes it must be preserved and improved, especially to remove many streams from the impaired list. We note the programs and progress being made, especially in the Agriculture and Industrial communities. A large issue that needs to be addressed is storm water run-off from development, homes, driveways, highways, shopping centers, etc. Programs, regulations, and techniques such as LID are needed to address this problem. VRRBAC supports the TMDL process and the implementation of BMPs, and other strategies such as Conservation Easements, Low Impact Development (LID) Techniques, and Nutrient Management Plans to correct pollution problems. VRRBAC strongly supports additional funding to implement these practices which will reduce pollution to streams.**
- **(2005) VRRBAC strongly supports the appropriation by the General Assembly of funds to the DEQ for grants to localities and regional planning districts to meet the requirements of the new proposed State Water Supply Planning Regulation. Some funds were made available for this purpose.**
- **(2005) VRRBAC supports legislation providing money for controlling hydrilla at Lake Gaston. While hydrilla is not yet in Smith Mountain Lake, if it is identified there, then VRRBAC would support funding for Smith Mountain Lake as well since early treatment is a much more cost effective method of control. \$50,000 was made available to Lake Gaston during the 2005 General Assembly Session.**
- **(2005) VRRBAC believes a critical issue on all the lakes is concern for safety due to the lack of DGIF enforcement resources. VRRBAC supports increased funding for DGIF to address this shortfall as the issue has become critical and traditional DGIF funding for hunting and fishing are inadequate to cover enforcement for such large recreation areas. The Comp Board formula of one deputy for 1500 residents could also be reviewed to include consideration of additional local enforcement personnel for jurisdictions with large lakes.**

#### **Other Accomplishments**

- The River Interests sub-committee prepared a comprehensive report on the Roanoke River Basin, which included a map, a list of streams, issues, features, a list of impaired streams, a list of pertinent organizations, and a narrative summary.
- The Lake sub-committee has compiled information gathered from 3 public meetings held at Lake Gaston, Kerr Reservoir, and Smith Mt. Lake concerning problems at the lakes.

## VRRBAC Report to Constituents, Legislature Members, and Localities

### Page 5

- The Water and the separate Municipal Interests and Permit Holders (MIPH) members have served on the State Water Supply Planning TAC and have been tracking other pertinent developments such as nutrient criteria and environmental funding proposals.
- The MIPH committee is now working to develop a survey to inventory permit holders in the basin, identify their current and future needs, and ascertain their water withdrawal and/or discharge from/to the basin. It has also determined the BROOM computer model has potential to evaluate the impact of withdrawals.
- A VRRBAC website has been developed at <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/vrrbac/>
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