



Rockfish Valley Foundation

Enhancing the Quality of Life and Celebrating the People, Land, and History of the Rockfish Valley



FALL NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is meant to speak to the past, present and future of RVF. Like so many other nonprofit organizations, the Rockfish Valley Foundation was forced to change or cancel many of its events and plans because of COVID-19. However, the pandemic has emphasized the extraordinary importance of the Rockfish Valley Foundation facilities to our community. Our trail visitation has risen tremendously, the parking lots have been crowded, and Spruce Creek Park has been filled with children and their families. Our core mission of giving our community ways to be outdoors and to enjoy nature has been maintained through social distancing requirements. The importance of fresh air and exercise for our mental and physical health has been reinforced by these strange times.

CANCELLED ACTIVITIES BRING OPPORTUNITIES

We did have to cancel activities, but we made the most of the situation and turned them into opportunities:

- Our April 19th Earth Day Nelson Festival was converted into a digital Earth Day Art Athon contest for Nelson students where their art was displayed on our website for the month.
- Our August 23rd celebration of RVF's 15th anniversary was converted into a virtual Facebook celebration. The following are some of the videos we released from August 19th-26th to highlight our community and RVF's 15 birthday- to view them, please visit

rockfishvalley.org/blog/rvf-facebook-posts

- History of the Rockfish Valley Foundation
- History of the Natural History Center
- History of the Nelson Scenic Loop which RVF created in 2010
- Hurricane Camille's 51st Anniversary – the Ewing Story
- Geology of the Rockfish Valley – Chuck Bailey from W&M
- Tales of the Old Wintergreen Village – Gene and Wayne
- Installation of the fire risk sign on RT. 151



Chuck Bailey of W&M discusses the geology of the Rockfish Valley

- Our Presentation of the South Rockfish Valley Rural Historic District, a project begun by RVF in 2009 that was approved and recognized in 2016 by the U.S. Department of the Interior.
- We postponed the October 11th Old Wintergreen Day, an event celebrating our community's history, and rescheduled it for an exciting day in May 2021 which will include kite flying.

RVF HAS TURNED 15!

So much has happened over these fifteen years. RVF has added great value to our community with the Rockfish Valley Trail System, the Spruce Creek Park, featuring the children's play area, and the Natural History Center. The origins of RVF began with a Rockfish Watershed Forum in 2000 which then led to the formation of the Friends of the Rockfish Watershed, an organization which performed watershed studies and did incredibly valuable work. Their files and website information are now housed at RVF. (www.forw.org). We've come a long way!



The resources RVF has developed over the years are of incredible value to the community

RVF WELCOMES SUPPORT FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF VA

This year, RVF is grateful for three state grants to help expand our mission. With “nature as our game” and “rocks, water, plants, and animals” as our focus, we are starting three grant-funded projects that will enhance our facilities and environmental literacy education programs:

- Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund for Spruce Creek buffer study and work
- VA Dept. of Forestry for Rockfish River Stream buffer tree planting
- VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation for the environmental literacy *ENLIT* project

We all know the Chesapeake Bay Watershed is the most valuable water asset in Virginia. In Nelson County, the Rockfish, Tye, and Piney Rivers are all a critical part of this watershed. Water, beginning at the Spruce Creek headwaters, flows downstream to the South Fork of the Rockfish River and on to the full Rockfish River, then enters the James River at Howardsville, passes through Richmond, and finally reaches the Chesapeake Bay in Norfolk.

Unfortunately, silt, waste, debris, and excess fertilizers/nutrients can make the same journey. The commonwealth offers community grants each year to undertake projects that create awareness of the Bay and its needs. RVF has received four such grants and has applied for the 2021 grant. RVF will study and do conservation work along the Spruce Creek buffer in collaboration with the Nelson Middle School Ecology



Protecting rivers and streams like Spruce Creek is critical to preserving water quality throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Club. The improvements will support an ENLIT content module.

NATURE IS OUR GAME, *ENLIT* IS OUR NEW RESOURCE

The RVF focus for 2021 is to create environmental literacy content modules and make them available as online content at our facilities and on the trails. This is an exciting new prospect for education and will concentrate on rocks, water, plants, animals and the local culture and history of Nelson County. *ENLIT* is a recreational trails project that will create accessible educational content that supports a fun experience for different age levels to enhance environmental literacy.

Information on *ENLIT* will be displayed through signage and on our website, and it will be accessible to devices with digital connectivity along the trails and in the park. We will create this digital connectivity by installing high-speed internet access points. Teaching aids and devices will be installed as well. Likewise, *ENLIT* will allow us to create content that can be used by the Nelson schools, which is especially important as they have little funding for field trips, etc. RVF has received a DCR grant towards making this happen along with several community grants and one private foundation grant. It's a major project. The dividends from these grants will be access to the incredible amount of knowledge that has been collected about our Rockfish Valley community and its natural resources. **Visit rockfishvalley.org/blog/enlit to learn more.**

While developing ENLIT over the next year, RVF will seek content providers and programs from these environmental organizations and states agencies:

- VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
- VA Dept. of Historic Resources (DHR)
- VA Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- VA Dept. of Forestry (DOF)
- VA Dept. of Wildlife Resources (DOWR)
- VA Dept. of Mines and Minerals (DMME)

GO HUG A TREE, THEY ARE SUFFERING!

During its 15 years, RVF has undertaken many projects with the help of numerous state agencies. For example, DOF has been very concerned about pests and diseases that strike our forest, such as the chestnut blight in 1915, the Gypsy Moth, and the woolly adelgid. Today, we are concerned about the Emerald Ash Borer which will destroy all ash trees in Nelson if not treated. The RVF trails have many historic and very large ash trees. DOF provided a matching grant for \$1250 for ash borer treatment on the trails. The borer killed the beautiful ash tree in front of the NHC, pictured to the right, before it could be treated.

DOF is also focused on reforestation and protection of stream buffers and has offered a grant to replant trees and eliminate some of the invasive to help cure erosion along our stream buffers. DOF will maintain their work for three years after planting. This will be a beneficial



project for several reasons. First, it will support stable banks along the river to prevent erosion. Second, tree cover along the river will lower the water temperature and allow trout to spawn. Third, it will diversify the buffer, which is along the trails, which will increase enjoyment and environmental education opportunities.

Along with these state agencies, we have also been supported over the years by community foundations and grant makers including CACF, BAMA, CFCBR, CBRF and NCCF. Our community support has grown to over 250 annual donors which we hope will continually grow as our neighbors learn more about us, especially this year as the importance of the Rockfish Trails and Spruce Creek Park has been emphasized. Most importantly, none of this could have happened without our trustees, super volunteers, and interns who manage the facilities and trails and raise the money to make it all happen.

ROCKFISH RANGERS ARE BACK

Lastly, RVF has created the Rockfish Ranger program where children and teens can pick up a brochure at the kiosk in Spruce Creek Park and go on a nature discovery hunt to qualify to be a Rockfish Ranger. When the Natural History Center reopens, there will be new clues indoors that will be added to the discovery hunt!

YOUR DONATION IS NEEDED

Despite the pandemic, event cancellations, and the Natural History Center being closed, there is a lot going on at RVF. That meant that funds were still expended but no revenue was coming in. Even though the rent for the NHC is \$1, heat and electricity are still being used. It is exciting that the use of the trails and the park has more than doubled, but with that comes increased ground maintenance. The port-a-johns still have to be emptied and maintained. But if ever there was a year to see the value of the Rockfish Valley Foundation to the community, this is the year. If you love all that RVF has to offer the community, please consider a donation — and/or become a volunteer — so that we can continue doing what we do and grow. RVF is entirely funded by donors like you! We will continue to seek project grants to further the RVF mission but operations rely on community donations. Be safe and see you on the trails!

TO DONATE: visit rockfishvalley.org/blog/donation-options and/or text RVFDONATE to 44321.



Volunteers Bill and Becky Evans have risen to the task of emptying the dog poop can! Thank you!