



SPRING WILL BE HERE BEFORE WE KNOW IT.. RMNFun Group

Rivanna Master Naturalists

January 2026 Newsletter



DAVE SAYLOR

President's Corner

Monthly Highlights: RMN Annual Report and Annual Meeting

This month, I would like to highlight two significant areas: the RMN Annual Report and our upcoming Annual Meeting.

RMN Annual Report

Each year, the Virginia Master Naturalist office requests that every Chapter submit an Annual Report detailing their activities throughout the year. The RMN Leadership Team has been working diligently to compile our report. This document features a comprehensive summary of volunteer hours, including both the total hours contributed and a breakdown across key areas, and by the specific partners and projects that received support over the last year.

Our members devoted more than 10,000 hours to volunteer service in 2025, demonstrating the remarkable dedication of our organization to improving the natural environment. This achievement highlights the positive impact our members continue to make. The Annual Report will be available for review on the RMN website, and I encourage everyone to take the time to read through it.

Upcoming Annual Meeting

The RMN Chapter Annual Meeting is scheduled for Saturday, February 14th, at 2:00 PM, and will take place at Piedmont Virginia Community College. All members are invited to attend, as the meeting will include a review of the exciting and important contributions made over the past year.

During the meeting, members will have the opportunity to elect our incoming President-elect, Stacy Agar, and officially install our President, Sherri Fitzgerald, for 2026. A special highlight of the event will be an informative presentation by Jill Trischman-Marks, Executive Director of the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont.

For those unable to attend in person, the meeting will also be accessible via Zoom, with a link to be provided. I look forward to seeing everyone on February 14th!

With the year coming to a close, it is crucial that everyone records their volunteer hours in Better Impact. Accurate reporting of your hours plays a vital role in two ways. First, if you have completed at least 40 hours of volunteering in 2025, you will maintain your individual certification as a Master Naturalist in the upcoming year. Second, RMN uses the aggregate volunteer hours to report our impact to the organizations we support. Providing these organizations with precise data reflects the true extent of our volunteer efforts and the difference we make on their behalf.

RMN Leadership Team January Meeting Highlights

President Dave Saylor reported that the Annual Report has been completed thanks to the hard work of several committee members including Debbie Luzynski-Weber, Dave Smith, and Neal Grandy.

Catherine Buck, curriculum committee chair, reported that 27 people have been selected for this year's basic training class. Applicants were especially strong this year. Classes begin the first week in February.

The Leadership Team approved some funds for the Kestrel project headed by Sherri Fitzgerald. This will go for the purchase of kestrel boxes and monitoring equipment.

Ruth Stornetta invited members to attend a workday/potluck on MLK Day, January 19th from 1 to 3 pm. This is for removal of invasive plants at Pen Park. If interested please contact her at mailto:rs3j@virginia.edu.

There will be no Leadership Team meeting in February. You are invited to attend the Annual Meeting on February 14th at 2:00 pm at PVCC.

A Season for Civic Attention!

by RMN Anne Regn

The Virginia General Assembly (GA) convenes this week on January 14. Because 2026 is an even-numbered year, this will be a long, 60-day session during which thousands of bills will be introduced and considered before adjournment.

The GA maintains a robust [website](#) where you can watch live sessions of both the Senate of Virginia and the House of Delegates. Virginia's [Legislative Information System](#) (LIS) is the central hub for tracking bills and committee meetings. You'll also find links to historical information, the Code of Virginia, and the Virginia Administrative Code.

You may already receive alerts from organizations you support or follow advocacy updates on social media. Below are several reliable resources that make staying informed and participating on issues you care about easier than ever.

Two organizations taking the lead on data centers and related energy and environmental concerns are the Sierra Club and the Piedmont Environmental Council. The 2025 report, [Unconstrained Demand: Virginia Data Center Expansion and Its Impact](#), analyzes the rapid growth of data centers across the Commonwealth, detailing significant environmental, economic, and social impacts and recommending policy actions.

Hands down, the most comprehensive coordinated environmental advocacy effort in Virginia is the Virginia Conservation Network (VCN). This coalition of more than 160 environmental and conservation organizations collaborates to develop shared policy priorities (outlined in its [Common Agenda](#)) and provides extensive advocacy tools and resources.

Another valuable resource is the nonpartisan [Virginia Public Access Project](#) (VPAP), which organizes and clearly presents political and financial information. VPAP offers

tools such as:

- Bill tracking and [bill searches by issue](#)
- Profiles of new legislators
- Lists of [legislative committees and assignments](#)

VPAP's graphics are especially user-friendly. On a single page, you can view a bill's status, vote margins, how each legislator voted, and how votes break down by party, gender, and region.

For nonpartisan reporting, consider subscribing to [Virginia Mercury](#), an independent, nonprofit news organization with no paywalls. It provides in-depth coverage of the environment, state government, health care, and other key issues.

Environmental organizations play a critical role—but their impact is strongest when legislators hear directly from constituents. Your voice matters, and engaging with these resources helps ensure it is informed and effective.

Questions: [Ann Regn](#), Class of 2022

Looking for a top-notch day of continuing education?

Registration opens in mid-December for the popular [Woods & Wildlife Conference](#), scheduled for February 28 at Germanna Community College's Daniel Technology Center in Culpeper. Pricing is \$55 per person or \$100 per couple and includes lunch and refreshments.

For over 20 years, this conference has featured timely information, practical "how-to" sessions, and personal contacts to help private woodland owners keep their woods, and the wildlife that live in them, healthy and productive. There are both plenary and concurrent sessions, with a variety of topics to appeal to landowners of any size tract and any experience level.

For those who don't mind a longer trip, a Woods & Wildlife Conference is also offered on February 21 on Virginia Tech's campus in Blacksburg. (Session topics will differ, but the format and pricing are the same.)

submitted by
Ellen R. Powell, Conservation Education Coordinator
Virginia Dept. of Forestry, 900 Natural Resources Dr., Ste. 800
Charlottesville, VA 22903



Not much going on at Ruritan Lake these days. The geese haven't shown up yet, nor have the Grebes, just cold and without much wildlife. And no snow to play in since mid-December. Attached is a picture, taken a couple of years ago, of what the lake should look like, right now. Apologies to all the snow-haters out there!

From RMN Dave Volin



JUDY CUTRIGHT

by RMN Monica Adams

Judy Cutright has the energy of half a dozen people. She became certified as a Rivanna Master Naturalist (RMN) in 2024, and began volunteering even before she finished the certification training class.

As an RMN volunteer, she is a barn docent and conducts school tours at Ivy Creek; she gives Little Naturalist and Little Nature Explorers presentations at Ivy Creek and the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont; she belongs to the RMN Leadership Team and the RMN Curriculum Committee, and she is a

class liaison for the RMN training classes. Also, she is presently president of the local chapter of an altruistic non-profit organization, Alpha Delta Kappa, for female educators.



Judy was born and grew up with three siblings in West Virginia in a very special family that was devoted to nature. Her parents took their children and many of the neighborhood kids on hikes every Sunday afternoon. During family dinners each person shared the ups and downs of his or her day

She knew as a child that she wanted to be a teacher. She graduated from what is now James Madison University in three years, majoring in K-8 education and special education, which she taught for nine years. She received a master's degree in gifted education from West Virginia University (spurred by the fascinating questions her three children would ask her), and became ABD ("all but dissertation") in the classroom management and curriculum development Ph.D. program at the University of Virginia. She taught in the public schools, mostly gifted education, for forty-two years, starting out in West Virginia, where she was criticized for her dynamism by the superintendent of the school where she taught. She had been taking her students camping, spelunking, hiking; she directed them in Shakespeare plays, and involved the parents in special weekend programs... The superintendent informed her that he was getting complaints from the other teachers because "she made them look bad," and that she should stop her adventurous activities with the gifted children and stop putting on plays by "that dude," "whatever his name is." Judy resigned the next morning, went home, asked her own children (who were in third, fifth and seventh grades at the time) where they'd like to live, and eventually moved to Albemarle County. She started the gifted program at Broadus Wood Elementary School, and picked up where she left off, taking the children camping, directing them in Shakespeare plays, etc.

Judy now has seven grandchildren, including five teenagers, to whom she devotes her summers and much of the school year. One of her grandchildren, Michaela, a kind and considerate twenty-year old, lives with her most of the time and helps her with some of her programs. Judy loves children of all ages and is

passionate about education. She never stops. She honors every child's interests and believes in hands-on learning experiences. She also taught her students good manners, emphasizing to them that "classy intelligent people do not do things in public that draw negative attention to themselves."

She learned to drive a school bus (like the beloved fictional "Miss Frizzle"), so that she could take her classes on field trips. A few of the places she has traveled to with her students include the West Virginia Mountain Institute at Spruce Knob (where she led field trips for twenty years); Humpback Rock; Pittsburgh, PA; Wallops Island (near Chincoteague); Harpers Ferry (they canoed there from Maryland); and Europe (several times!). She has lively, fun memories of every trip.

Judy recognized that intellectually gifted children need advanced challenges; she provided them with lab activities in the mornings and field activities in the afternoons, without hesitating to incorporate scientific vocabulary. She noted with pride that her Little Naturalists (3-5-year-olds) have learned words like "nocturnal, diurnal, migration, hibernation, and estivation."

One expedition Judy remembers fondly was with second, third, and fourth graders to West Virginia. They were studying birds and migration, and took off at 3am for the Mountain Institute, where the twenty-plus children carried wild birds in their jackets from a long net to the banding station. What a thrill for the children, helping scientists carry wild birds tucked next to their chests! The kids had been advised to bring boots, warm jackets, and blankets; the Mountain Institute provided them with equipment for rock scrambling, caves, and other exciting educational activities.

I personally first met Judy Cutright on her front lawn when she lived in Earlysville, VA. She organized two-week Shakespeare camps for school children and produced two plays at the end of the two-week session. My own daughter had parts in at least three summer Shakespeare plays as a child; theater is very much part of her life as an adult. Judy's performances were always creative; she cast a slight, slim girl as Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream, who played the part with gusto. And the fairies were imps incarnate... As the mother of one of her Shakespeare players, I can attest that Judy Cutright brings out the best in each child. "I love it," she says, when someone compliments one of her presentations.



Tinctures for Winter Cold and Flu Season



These two honey tinctures are the best for winter cold and flu season. Remember to only use raw, unpasteurized honey. Once honey is heated over 105 degrees you start killing all the good enzymes and

antioxidants. Most honey in stores is pasteurized to prevent granulation, and this changes the flavor and ruins its beneficial properties. I am fortunate to be a beekeeper, and I know the quality of my honey.

The jar on the left is packed full of Echinacea flowers. Pack the jar tight with semi dry flowers, top off with honey and let sit for at least a month. I turn the jar every day or so. The taste that the flowers impart into the honey is amazing. Plus, you get all the immune boosting qualities of the plant as well as its other health benefits.

The jar on the right is full of Garlic. We all know of Garlic's medicinal qualities and this is a 'sweet' way to use it. When tincturing Garlic, you need to loosen the top daily for the first few weeks to burp the jar. After a few weeks, the honey will thin out as the fermenting process works and burping is no longer needed. For the sake of convenience, I used store Garlic, but our wild Garlic is as good or better medicinally.

Use these honeys in teas, on toast (my favorite is cornbread) or just eat a spoonful to get your cold and flu fighting relief.

KESTREL BOX TRAINING—IVY CREEK

JAN. 29—THURSDAY—5:30PM—

PT 2 FEB. 21—SATURDAY—12:30PM

IVY CREEK EDUCATION BUILDING — LIVE

Sharing their expertise in kestrel box installation and monitoring, Lauria McShane from the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative (VGBI) and Alan Williams from the Old Rag MN chapter plus others will teach us about American kestrel biology, habitat, and nesting periods, as well as strategies to meet the notable decline in grassland bird populations. This team will collaborate with RMN participants to establish a monitoring program, with Lauria overseeing protocols, landowner contracts, the Nestwatch App, and data collection methodology. This approach is modeled after grassroots citizen science efforts like the Black Bear Project...you become an educator as well as an enactor, working at various locations. *Good for CE and volunteer hours*

NOTE: You must be able to take both parts, Jan. 29 AND Feb. 21, to participate fully in the program, which will not be time-intensive.

Reserve your place or ask questions directly with RMN Prez Sherri at westcotefarm@yahoo.com or 310.614.7251 (text her first).



PEN PARK MLK DAY INVASIVES REMOVAL MEET AT PEN PARK PICNIC SHELTERS

MONDAY JAN 19 1PM TO 3PM



Help remove invasive species from the RMN 'adopted' plot, next to TNC's plot. Tree Stewards and Blue Ridge PRISM folks will also be on hand working in nearby areas.

Potluck afterward in picnic shelter, with a pit fire. Bring shovels, rakes, clippers, loppers, handsaws, good shoes, weather-informed gear.

Address questions to Ruth at rs3j@virginia.edu



ANNUAL VMN MONTPELIER MEETING
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 3RD
10AM TO 4PM
AT MONTPELIER'S CLAUDE MOORE HALL/POTTER STUDIO



What: Annual VMN Montpelier meeting
Why: 2025 review and 2026 plans & Micro-habitats
When: Tuesday, Feb 3rd
Where: Montpelier's Claude Moore Hall/Potter Studio
Draft Schedule: 10AM Opening comments
11:45 Lunch (bring your own)
12:00 Dr. Carolyn Copenheaver on Tree Microhabitats
1:00 Microhabitat field exercise
3:00 Data analysis & talking points (inside)
Current Montpelier VMN volunteers are encouraged to attend and bring potential new "cadre members"! Open to all VMNs with an interest in being involved.
Get a sneek-peak of what Tree Microhabitats are here:
<https://www.montpelier.org/venues/claude-moore-hall/>
Please RSVP by e-mailing VMN Montpelier coordinator,
Addison Gosling: addison.liming@gmail.com



INTERESTING UPCOMING ZOOM I Love a Rainy Night: The Rhythm of Forest Amphibians with biologist Laura Hedy. Learn about amphibian migrations. February 12, 7-8pm.

Submitted by RMN Anne Benham

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[LINK TO ALDO LEOPOLD FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER](#)

**POSTING ANNOUNCEMENTS
ON THE RMNGooglegroups listserv**

To post announcements, mention projects, and pass on information of interest to RMN members, please contact rivannamn.info@gmail.com.

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COME JOIN US AND SHARE YOUR ADVENTURES AND PHOTOS.

RMN **PRIVATE** Group - Rivanna Master Naturalists Private Group - Only RMNs can join and post. Join us to post your own pictures and see photos by others.

"Rivanna Master Naturalists Help" Page - This page is **OPEN TO THE PUBLIC** if they want to ask questions, see what we are doing, etc.

Rivanna Master Naturalists Public Page - Our public face to the world.

SEE SOME OF OUR POSTS FROM FACEBOOK BELOW

GOODLinks

Log In Your Volunteer Hours Click on BETTER IMPACT

Resources for Master Naturalists [Click Here](#)

Virginia Master Naturalist Webinars - Check out the available webinars at the VMN Webinar page for Continuing Education Credit

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Check out our website www.vmn-rivanna.org

The Virginia Master Naturalist program is open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/ affirmative action employer.



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