

The South River Current



Promoting interest and collaboration for watershed stewardship



Watershed Restoration: Perks of Protecting the River

Have you seen the South River from the sky? The latest installment of the South River Currents video series provides a bird's eye view of the river at Doom's Crossing and beyond. Morgan Shrewsbury, Environmental Programs Manager for Augusta County, shares the aesthetic, environmental, and recreational improvements added during dam removal at Doods. Austin Shank, Parks and Tourism Director for the town of Grottoes, takes us underground into the Grand Caverns in Grottoes, VA to glimpse the hidden beauty below. He reminds us that everything that worked to form the caves over the centuries has slowly made its way through and down the river. As the oldest show cave continuously running in our country, the mineral deposits have stories to tell. 215 years of tourism has prompted hundreds of thousands of people to explore the watershed. As you can see, the benefits of protecting the river reach beyond the general health of the community's water source. These economy-bolstering attractions also gain strength from a healthy river. Watch the new 4-minute video [here](#).



Did You Know?

- Rockingham County, Virginia is the "Turkey Capital of the World." There are two turkey statues, one at both ends of Route 11 (see picture).
- The holidays are alive and well in the Shenandoah Valley. Click [here](#) to find out about local events.
- Calling all photographers! The 2023 Annual Virginia Wildlife Photo Showcase is open! [Submit photos](#) of local wildlife by February 6, 2023.



Left: Darkness in the tunnel with a distant light; Right: Trickle of water down the inner wall

Connections: Sense-sational History

Have you ever walked through a place and felt a tangible profoundness, where somehow each step feels both ordinary and significant at the same time? There's a place that can provoke that sense right here in the Shenandoah Valley—the Blue Ridge Tunnel. Have you been? Right away when you enter you sense the musty, earthy rock that surrounds you and feel its dampness. The sound of silence takes over, accented by the echoing crunch of your feet on gravel and a distant trickle and drip. Then the darkness enfolds—a heavy blackness. You see the exit in the distance, but it offers no light. It's nearly 4,000 feet away. You pop on a light and examine your surroundings. The reality of this structure's immensity begins to settle in. You are walking through a man-made tunnel through a magnificent mountain that is over 170 years old. Four generations ago, slaves and Irish immigrants (some sick with cholera and a few soon to lose their lives) worked through the damp darkness day after day blasting out hard stone and earth from both sides of the mountain, hoping the chief engineer's calculations would lead them to each other. These men had no flashlights, no excavators, and no hard hats or protective equipment. It is a long, long tunnel. Your pace slows down – you're hardly closer to the end. The walls and ceiling at one end are natural stone, the other brick. Each stone and each brick were placed by hand. Although some small sections have been repaired, the lion's share of these walls is original. What if these walls could talk? You think about the generations of people who have come and gone, whose footprints you just tracked. The sunlight brings you back to the present, but you have the sense that you just connected with the past and might somehow be better for it. The Claudius Crozet Blue Ridge Tunnel is certainly a worthwhile trek for a crisp morning or open afternoon. Don't miss it!



The Coaling by Keith Rocco ([picture credit](#))

Take a Walk Back: Bygone Battlefields in Your Backyard

The South River Watershed is not a stranger to military history. Waynesboro was named after Sir Anthony Wayne, an American Army General who led soldiers to victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in August of 1794. Just 70 years later, the City was the backdrop for the Battle of Waynesboro on March 2, 1865, shortly before the end of the Civil War. There, Brigadier General George Custer led the Union to victory over Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal Early and his men. Perhaps less known is another battleground downriver, northwest of Waynesboro where the South River runs into the South Fork Shenandoah in Port Republic. There, Confederate soldiers led by General Thomas Jackson used the river and adjacent elevated land as a shield to out-manuever the enemy and force Union soldiers to retreat. The high ground, called The Coaling, was owned by the Lewis family, and named after their charcoal manufacturing business. The Palmer Lot at Middle Ford Wayside Marker indicates the place that General Jackson and his men crossed the South River and offers a brief description of the battle. For more information on battles fought in the Shenandoah Valley, click [here](#). For short video commentaries on the Battle at Port Republic, click [here](#).

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