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The South River Current



Promoting interest and collaboration for watershed stewardship



*A riverbank adjacent to Waynesboro wastewater treatment plant.
Left: after remediation was complete in 2018. Right: growth as of 2022.*

Watershed Restoration: Thoughtful Revegetation

History has taught us to consider the balance of the natural world as we innovate. Nature must be nurtured amid industrial growth. Remediation efforts along the South River were designed to address damage from past industry and restore the health of the river and the surrounding watershed. Recognizing that they had to disturb the current natural setting, the team conducted dozens of surveys before they started work. They counted the number of trees of each species at each site, measured the diameter and height of each, and noted the trees that were dead or had multiple stems. The team figured out which trees they could work around, like an old Sycamore in North Park, and used innovative remediation techniques to treat the soil around the tree without disturbing the tree. Then, rather than replacing all the trees they had to cut down with the same species of trees, the team included native plants that should typically be present in this region and habitat. Some native plants were chosen because they would be ecologically beneficial, providing root systems

that increase the structural integrity of the remediated banks. In a few short years, the trees and plants have grown into a healthy, natural habitat that complements the glistening river.



Did You Know?

- Waynesboro is home to a state champion shingle oak, and a national champion chinkapin oak stands in nearby Rockingham.
- Local workers use giant chainsaws (one pictured here) suspended from helicopters to trim tree branches along roads.
- Invasive Japanese knotweed continues to impact restored riverbanks (see July 2020 issue for more info). The remediation team has explored many methods of attack, including getting goats to see if they would eat the knotweed.



Sunset Park Photo and Plans from [Waynesboro.va.us](https://www.waynesboro.va.us)

Connections: Coming Soon to Sunset Park

Did you see the fireworks at the Sunset Spectacular event on July 8th? The high elevation of Sunset Park made it a perfect launchpad for pyrotechnics. Soon, Sunset Park will be more than just a fireworks-launching location. Plans are in the works to transform this closed landfill into an area for recreational use with hiking and mountain biking trails. Construction began in early 2023, and Waynesboro Parks and Recreation hopes to have the park open to the public later this year. From the top, visitors can enjoy great views up and down the valley. The State and Local Recovery Fund authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act is funding road access improvements, stormwater repairs and upgrades, a paved parking lot, overlook areas, restrooms, and a shelter. The Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition provided the design for hiking and mountain bike trails. Parks and Recreation will start trail construction once funding has been secured. If you are curious about the plans for the trails, click [here](#) to take a look. Follow [Waynesboro Parks and Recreation on Facebook](#) to stay up to date on park developments.



Legendary big tree hunter, Richard Salzer, measures a sweet birch in June 1987 at Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. Photo credit to [Virginia Forests](#).

Take a Walk Back: Treasuring Our Towering Trees

You never know what might come of a fleeting idea. On April 22, 1970, the Virginia Forestry Association (VFA) celebrated the first national Earth Day. Hoping to keep their 4-H Club engaged, VFA staff members decided to hold a state-wide big tree contest. Through press releases and magazine articles, they explained the national tree measurement guidelines and point system for big tree status and how to submit trees for consideration. The goal was to find the biggest tree of each species in Virginia and then submit them to the national champion competition. Parents of 4-H kids and tree lovers around Virginia became big tree hunters who searched all over the state for trees to nominate. Experts were called in to verify species and measurements. The first official registry of 42 big Virginia trees was published in the Fall 1971 issue of the Virginia Forests magazine. A once momentary summer activity became an official competition. Today, the Virginia Big Tree Program is coordinated by the [Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation](#) at Virginia Tech. Their mission remains the same—to increase the care and appreciation of all trees, big and small, and educate the Commonwealth about the value of trees and forests. You can read all about the 50-year celebration of the Virginia Big Tree Program in the [Virginia Forests magazine Spring 2020 issue](#).

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