

Report to Citizens on Community Water Supply Plan



As we approach the springtime growing season following a fall and winter with limited precipitation, we would like to take this opportunity to report to area residents on the status of the Community Water Supply Plan that was adopted by the City, County, Albemarle County Service Authority, and the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority, in June of 2006.

Major components of the 50-year plan include a new Ragged Mountain Dam to replace two old dams and increase the size and water storage of the reservoir, a new pipeline between the South Fork and Ragged Mountain reservoirs that will replace the aged Sugar Hollow Pipeline, rehabilitation or replacement of aged piping, pumping, and treatment systems, and expansions to water treatment capacity. The plan is a financially responsible solution to providing an adequate and healthful water supply to City and County residents for many decades to come and has been determined by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to be the preferred alternative as evaluated through state and federal environmental law.

Before commenting on the status of the plan itself it may be helpful to review the comprehensive public engagement process from which emerged strong agreement on the specific elements that should constitute the long-term water supply plan. While the water supply plan had been in development since the 1990's, urgent and focused efforts that resulted in the current plan began in 2003 following the serious local drought in 2002.

Since that time, there have been 12 major, well-attended public meetings (between 60 and 100 attendees per meeting) as well as numerous detailed briefings and updates to various community groups. During this extensive public dialog, 32 possible approaches were fully evaluated that included raising the South Fork reservoir by four feet, dredging the South Fork reservoir, and constructing a pipeline to the James River, among many other considerations. In the words of one engaged citizen, "It is a plan that evolved in a cauldron of arduous, painstaking work by government officials; public input and debate among scores of citizens; and state level oversight."

This very publically vetted evaluation process identified the Ragged Mountain Reservoir as the only hope of achieving all local objectives regarding capacity, cost effectiveness and environmental responsibility while also meeting mandatory regulatory criteria. Further, constructing a new dam at Ragged Mountain simultaneously addresses safety problems with the existing dams built in 1885 and 1908.

The concept of the adopted water supply plan, which is focused on meeting the community's need for capacity for the next 50 years through a larger Ragged Mountain Reservoir and a refill pipeline from the South Fork Reservoir, was endorsed in 2005 and supported by the following local organizations:

- Rivanna Conservation Society
- Piedmont Environmental Council
- Nature Conservancy
- Advocates for Sustainable Albemarle Population
- League of Women Voters Charlottesville/Albemarle
- Southern Environmental Law Center
- Citizens for Albemarle
- Piedmont Group of Sierra Club
- Friends of the Moormans River
- VA Department of Environmental Quality and supporting state agencies

The environmental aspects of the water supply plan were an important determining factor in shaping its final form. The adopted plan provides improved stream flows to area rivers, preserves 75,000 linear feet of stream with wide buffers in a permanent conservation easement, provides 200 acres of new forest and four acres of new wetlands, avoids impacts to rare, threatened or endangered species and preserves habitat and enhances water quality for the Buck Mountain watershed in perpetuity.

As we approach spring and summer and the peak demand time for water, citizens should be aware that the following activities are underway to guarantee full implementation of the community water supply plan:

- Geologic inspections for the foundation of the new Ragged Mountain dam have been completed
- Design for the dam has begun
- Design for environmental mitigation efforts has begun
- Work is underway with the City and County Parks and Recreation Departments for new trails in the reconfigured Ragged Mountain natural area

In addition, discussions are underway as to how the implementation of the plan will be phased, how costs will be allocated between the City and County, and what additional steps may be taken beyond this plan to effectively manage and preserve our existing reservoirs for the long-term. Such steps may include stabilizing upstream river channels to reduce sediment erosion, or maintenance dredging.

In closing, we the undersigned would like to strongly reaffirm our continuing commitment to the community water supply plan that was developed in close partnership with our area residents who participated energetically and productively to create a financially and environmentally responsible solution to our future water supply needs. We also encourage residents to continue water conservation strategies to limit demand on our local water resources on a long term basis.

Kenneth C. Boyd, Chair
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