

Creating homes for wildlife

BY TERRY BEIGIE
Record Editor

Whether driving on the east or west portions of South River Road it's easy to see why many people call Greene "God's country."

The river starts up in the mountains with the South River Falls and meanders through mature trees opposite farms and rolling hills. After it flows under Va. Route 230 it continues on alongside old home sites and additional farms before flowing into the Rapidan River. It's along this river that James "Jimmy" and Sally Hazel found their slice of heaven in the early 2000s.

The Preserve at South River was honored last year with the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District's Wildlife Habitat Award. It's 275 acres of forest and open land along the South River and is a licensed game preserve with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources.

Jimmy Hazel is very hands-on managing the property and can tell someone exactly what work was done to create the masterpiece that's laid out off the porch of his home, including Pocosin Mountain in the distance.

"My wife and I were born and raised in Fairfax,"



PHOTO BY TERRY BEIGIE/GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Sunflowers bring all the birds to the yard, even as many as 500 doves at a time, said The Preserve at South River owner Jimmy Hazel. Pocosin Mountain rises behind the trees.

said Hazel, 61, a former lobbyist and current vice rector of the George Mason University Board of Visitors. "I was working in Tyson's Corner; that was the lifestyle. We wanted to find a get-away place and it was more about the mountains than the beach for us."

Proximity to Northern

Virginia was important since his office was still in Tyson's Corner.

"Bath County is beautiful, but it's a five-and-a-half hour drive, so we looked for around two years," he said. "I just enjoy being outside, so we were looking for water with a view of the mountains. When we walked onto this

property, it took 10 minutes."

At that time the property was much different. Some hills and low ground were used for hay. The previous owner had clear-cut some hillsides.

"We were looking for a place where we could get out and enjoy the outdoors and I could manage

the property for hunting," said Hazel, as we pass rows and rows of sunflowers that attract many types of birds especially doves, the number one game bird in the United States. "I knew I wanted to get out and have a piece of ground that I could manage for wildlife—from a box turtle to a black bear."

On the hottest day of the year to date, Hazel offered the tour of the property—filled with native flowers, trees and warm-season

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grasses—via vehicle. There are paths mowed throughout the fields to make traversing it possible.

After the flooding in 2018, Hazel worked with Hilliard Management and Resource Environmental Solutions LLC to complete 250 feet of streambank restoration. Even though the river changed course on his property, without the Army Corps of Engineers approval it cannot be rerouted back to its original flow.

The waters of the South River didn't just come over the banks during the flooding two years ago, they leveled the river bank and took about 40-45 lateral feet of land, Hazel said.

"All of this area we're driving on had to be rebuilt," he said.

There was a sharp cut in the river that was turned into a gradual curve and vegetation added to the eroded slope. A tree trunk was added to offer additional stabilization with about 20 feet showing in the river and an additional 40 feet buried under the rebuilt land.

When he started creating his wildlife management area Hazel knew he could let Mother Nature take care of herself if he just steered her in the right direction. And he works to maintain it.

"I have a strict rule; I don't use a bush hog between the first of May and the end of August," said Hazel, noting how the plants create habitats for wildlife. "I was walking with the dogs last week and Scout got sniffing on something and not 10 feet from him was a doe bedded down in the thicket."

Virginia Working Landscapes at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in Front Royal does regular wildlife surveys on the property, and many others through the Virginia Piedmont, for pollinators and birds, since Hazel met Amy E.M. Johnson, PhD, the program director, at a seminar in Appomattox. Virginia Working Landscapes promotes the conservation of native biodiversity and sustainable land use, according to its website.

On four days throughout the year, Virginia Working Landscapes sends a team of two experts to record the different species of birds seen on the property and a different team to record the pollinators.

"In one day, they saw 83 different bird species," Hazel said. "I know a finch from a woodpecker and I



know the purple finch, but the subspecies I don't."

Hazel said he was excited to learn that there was a pair of nighthawks seen on the property.

"We get the occasional bald eagle that flies up through the valley and we get a lot of hawks and we sure have a lot of blue herons," said Hazel, who added that he hasn't seen the nighthawks himself. "One of my favorite (species) is the kingfisher."

There are two permanent spring-fed ponds, one he uses for fishing and one that's strictly for wildlife, in addition to two waterfowl ponds flooded seasonally for habitat purposes. The wildlife pond is surrounded by willows, which the redwing blackbirds like.

Hazel has patches of land planted with ragweed, which is the number one food source for wild quail; he has seen several on his property.

"A lot of people think ragweed is just that, a weed, and pull it up," he said. "A lot of other birds enjoy it. When I have a dense area of ragweed not only do I not mow it in the summertime, but I let it grow up and dry out so the seeds fall and then I have cover and I have food for wild birds."

Hazel plants about 40 acres with grain crops, including a wheat field, sorghum, buckwheat (which is a great flower for pollinators) and the sunflowers.

"There are not many birds around that don't enjoy wheat," Hazel said. "It's also here for the wildlife; it's tailor made for wild turkeys. Those are the four primary grain crops and I plant those, primarily for the birds, but the deer like the sunflowers as much as the birds."

To keep the river unpolluted, Hazel said he plants away from the river's edge and doesn't overuse fertilizer.

"I do controlled burns here on a pretty regular basis," said Hazel about how he controls invasive species on the property. "I do use some herbicides,



PHOTOS BY TERRY BEIGIE/GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Top, Jimmy Hazel stands above one of his warm-season grass fields at The Preserve at South River. Warm-season grasses make excellent habitat for numerous animals. Above, the South River (prior to recent rains) as seen from Hazel's front porch.

but I use them selectively. And I use it to kill woody stems; there's almost no other way to stop them."

One of the most unique sights for Hazel happened on the opening day of dove season last fall (first Saturday in September). He was sitting on an Adirondack chair beside the former sunflower field as gunfire went off.

"Part of that hunting is looking around for birds," he said. "I look to my left and all of a sudden coming out of the riverbed is a black bear—not 20 yards away. By that time about half the field was mowed down and the bear starts walking into the dove field. I started yelling to everybody that there's a bear in the field. He stayed around for 10-15 minutes walking around the field and then he walked back down the riverbank and left."

"I've grown up in Virginia. I've grown up hunting in Virginia. I've never seen a bear in a dove field before last year," Hazel added.

The other half of his property is mature hardwoods and he said both are necessary for wildlife.

"That sort of completes everything. If you let the open areas grow up and become mature hardwood forest, then all the songbirds leave. It's great for the pileated woodpeckers

and when you walk in the woods you can hear them," he said. "I don't manage the hardwoods as much as I manage the open ground, but I just love taking a long walk along the river in the woods. It's gorgeous."

The Hazels have two grown children and a grandson who all enjoy the property as well.

"That's been maybe the best part of this. When we bought the place the kids were 13 and 14 years old. They still come here all the time. This is where we do Thanksgiving and Christmas," he said.

Just as he's asked if he ever regrets purchasing the property, a deer pops out from the tree line.

"Oh no," he said. "This was something I wanted to do and I was looking for the right place. I've thoroughly enjoyed it for the past 18 years. I feel like I have achieved what I wanted to do, but I also like that it's always a work in progress."

For information about Virginia Working Landscapes, visit www.virginiaworkinglandscapes.org. For information about the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District, visit culpeperswcd.org.

Dogs follow their noses to help farmers fight pests

BY TERRY BEIGIE
Record Editor

Dogs have been by humans' sides for more than 15,000 years and we're still learning about all they can do. From sniffing out illnesses in humans to finding contraband at the airport, a canine's nose knows.

Farmers have long relied on dogs to help with their work—from guarding livestock to herding animals where the farmer needs them to go. And researchers at Virginia Tech are now working to see if dogs can help farmers sniff out invasive pests and diseases that threaten crops.

"We know dogs are really incredible scent detectors," said Dr. Erica Feuerbacher, assistant professor and director of the Applied Animal Behavior and Welfare Lab at Virginia Tech. "One of the things we hope is if we're successful we can train companion animals up to a level where they are beneficial in the sense that they're detecting diseases earlier than a human observer could or if they're detecting them faster—speeding through plots of land more quickly than a human could—then we could look to some of

these rural communities that are underserved to capitalize on some of the farm dogs already living with their owners."

This is the first project of its kind in Virginia and the goal is to hone a canine's skills to detect agricultural pests.

Feuerbacher and her research lab are starting with the spotted lanternfly, an invasive insect that's a danger to ornamental plants, grapes, fruit and other crops. Blacksburg is not infected with the spotted lanternfly so the team had to get eggs from Winchester and kill them for use in exposing the dogs to the scent.

"In order to get the samples, we had to kill the eggs so the smell might be a little different than when they're alive," said Hannah Decker, the graduate student teaching the dogs. "It's going really well. We had to take extra precautions because of the quarantine in Winchester but the dogs seem to be picking up really well on it."

Decker earned an undergraduate degree from a college in Montana in Anthrozoology, or the study of the human-animal bond. It was during her junior year there that she first taught



COURTESY PHOTO

Hannah Decker, the graduate student teaching the dogs, and Ollie.

scent work and she was hooked.

"I just fell in love with it," she said. "As far as pet dogs go, I think the hardest part is making sure they're motivated and it's especially difficult with pet dogs that don't have the same drive that working dogs do. But, now that school is back and I'm not traveling the next couple months, I'm hoping to get back and train and then go up to Winchester and test some of the pet dogs on real spotted lanternflies that will hopefully be up there."

Dr. Mizuho Nita, an associate professor at Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension specialist in grape pathology, said spotted lanternfly egg masses can be difficult to detect as they resemble pieces of mud sticking to the surface of objects. "The eggs may be hidden in a place where human inspectors cannot easily see," said Nita, who is collaborating with Feuerbacher on the project. "If the trained dogs can detect these eggs to assist human inspectors, that would help slow down the spread."

"We're also looking at powdery mildew, which is a mildew that grows on grapevines. The people in the vineyards can see it, but as soon as it's visible it's essentially too late to save the vine," Decker said. "So, what they do is spray pesticide everywhere to cover their bases. But, if we could get the dogs to come through and smell it and catch it early then it could be really helpful for the industry. The dog could show the workers where to spray instead of spraying everything."

Stefanie Kitchen, assistant director of governmental relations at

Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, said the benefits to farmers from this research are exciting.

"This type of research shows great potential for use on the farm," Kitchen said. "Dogs' natural talents are already being utilized to guard and herd livestock, and if they can be trained to sniff out invasive pests, they also could help farmers better protect their crops."

Feuerbacher said it can be a win-win for the owner and the dog.

"The dogs gets to do more fun things with its owner and have a more rich life and we help the community solve some problems and it's fun for the owner, too," she said.

It was Dr. Pete Coppolillo, executive director of Working Dogs For Conservation in Montana, who suggested to Feuerbacher that it would pretty neat to create a citizen scientist scent detection program.

"When I moved out here, and since we're an agricultural school, it seemed like that might be a really good approach for trying to get these dogs, including my own, who could have even more enrichment

in their lives," she said. "It's important to get the citizenry excited about science and feeling like they can do it."

Decker and Feuerbacher said farmers who are willing to allow the researchers and dogs on their land should contact them through email at enf007@vt.edu.

If the project is successful, Feuerbacher said they hope to establish protocols to train dogs that can be deployed in their communities and expand to other agricultural pests and diseases.

"I just think we underestimate what dogs can do," Decker said. "We just see them as companion animals, which is great and I absolutely love my pet dogs, but I definitely think we underestimate their abilities in all capacities."

People can follow the research on the Applied Animal Behavior and Welfare Project at Virginia Tech Facebook page, as well, @aabvt.



COURTESY PHOTO

Dr. Erica Feuerbacher, assistant professor and director of the Applied Animal Behavior and Welfare Lab at Virginia Tech, and her dogs.

Holidays will be different

Prepare mentally for new challenges

BY TERRY BEIGIE
Record Editor

As winter and the holiday season approach, many officials are warning this season will be different than any in recent memory. With confirmed coronavirus cases rising rapidly throughout the country, and the flu and winter cold seasons starting, the Thomas Jefferson Health District (TJHD) recommends people not mix households for Thanksgiving—something that's sure to be a challenge for many families.

"We are worried about what's to come this winter, not just with the potential increase for COVID cases, but everybody being isolated and being at home. While (staying home) the safest thing to do right now, it's not always the safest for our mental health," said Kathryn Goodman, communications and public relations manager for TJHD.

Goodman said she's hoping for really good weather on Thanksgiving and Christmas this year because that could allow people to see their loved ones outside, to help prevent spread of the coronavirus in a socially distanced setting.

"Getting together with multiple households in one place together, indoors, over a shared meal, is one of the riskiest things people can do this year," she said. "It's best that people celebrate with just their own household so they're limiting the exposure and potential for them to get COVID and for spreading COVID."

For those who do want to travel for the holidays, Goodman recommends quarantining up to 14 days prior to the holiday and for 14 days after the holi-

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day to be sure you won't spread the virus.

"We know that's not possible for a lot of folks, but we are asking that folks at least try as much as they can," she said.

For anyone who decides to get together, the mantra is the same as it has been: wear a mask, stay at least six feet apart, wash your hands frequently and stay home if you're sick.

Ryan Banks, director of the Behavioral Health Division at Rappahannock Rapidan Community Services (RRCS), said she's worried about people getting complacent with their health.

"The biggest thing that I'm worried about is just people's fatigue over having to do things so differently," Banks said. "I think that in the beginning, everyone thought that there was going to be a short turnaround on when this was going to be over. And now the realization that we're in this for a while, I think it's going to start to weigh on people a lot. And the choices that people make based off of that realization are going to be challenging and different; there are going to be some people that that's going to really put them in a much worse place. There are going to be some people that are going to decide that they're just giving up and they're not going to do any of the

things that they've been doing, up until now."

Goodman agreed.

"We want everyone to know that we understand there's COVID fatigue; we're tired, too," she said. "But it is certainly a marathon and not a sprint and unfortunately, it's not going away just yet. We know it's really hard; it's hard for me. This year we need to pull it back on celebrating with other households."

When it comes to protecting your mental health, which includes emotional, psychological and social well-being, Banks recommends paying attention to your "circle of control."

"It's really looking at the things that we have control over for ourselves," she said. "And being able to let go of the things we are not able to control. It really is an empowering mindset; rather than worrying about things that no matter what you do you're not going to be able to change."

Banks said holidays are often challenging even without a pandemic—there is extra stress caused from traveling, preparing large meals or hosting family members.

"I think the challenge is going to look different for different people, but holidays—I think—across the board are going to be difficult for everyone," Banks said. "Keep track of 'what do I have control over?' I think it helps, no matter what situation you're in. For people who have chronic mental health challenges,

they really need to make sure they are staying up with appointments, keeping up with medication and such. It's being very diligent, because again, that stays in our circle of control."

Banks also recommended people make plans—no matter how big or small—for them to have something to look forward to.

"You can also get creative with what you do with your family," she said. "My family is doing an online Secret Santa ... and we're mailing the gifts."

Shannon Wright, Region Ten interim senior director of rural services, agreed.

"We've been recommending to folks throughout this pandemic to find ways to stay connected, but with an eye to safety," she said. "Also, it's important to do things that help us stay well or feel well and prioritize them—such as getting enough sleep and staying active."

Wright said it's important to focus on what are the most important aspects of the holiday season to preserve and have conversations about how to make it happen with your family. For Wright's own family, it was important to just be together, and it didn't have to be on Thanksgiving itself, so they're planning to visit on a nice-weather day so they can be outdoors.

Goodman said the TJHD, which services the counties of Greene, Fluvanna, Louisa, Albemarle,

Nelson and the city of Charlottesville, is also worried about the strain on hospitals.

"We haven't seen too much flu yet and we don't know what to expect," she said. "We don't know what the effects of flu mixed with COVID are going to be, if someone gets infected with both at the same time. We certainly encourage everybody to get a flu shot this year. The other concern over flu season happening in a pandemic is how are the hospitals going to handle that?"

Goodman said the state is seeing an increase in community-spread COVID-19 cases from social gatherings over the past month.

"And we're worried that will continue to increase as we head into the winter and holidays," she added.

Goodman also suggests everyone download the COVIDwise app onto their smartphone because it's helpful in notifying people if they've been exposed and helps the health district with contract tracing. She said it's estimated that 17.95% of Virginians aged 18-65 with a smartphone that could support the app have downloaded it.

Visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/covidwise to download the app.

Mental Health Resources

Health officials know the holidays are going to be challenging for many local families and individuals and want them to know help and resources are available.

"There have been substantial increases in substance use and substantial increases in overdoses," said Shannon Wright, Region Ten interim senior director of rural services. "We met earlier today and even though overdoses are up, we suspect they would probably be up even more without Narcan. There are definitely people who are being saved from overdoses at home."

Additionally, Wright said there are significant increases locally for rates of depression and anxiety symptoms and PTSD and stressor-related symptoms.

Kathrin Hobron, statewide forensic epidemiologist with the Virginia Department of Health's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, said the number of overdose deaths in the state has risen steadily since 2013 and if the trajectory stays the same the state is likely to see the largest increase yet from 1,626 in 2019 to more than 2,000 in 2020.

"Fatal drug overdose has been the leading method of unnatural death in Virginia since 2013," she said in the October 2020 Fatal Drug Overdose Quarterly Report. "Fentanyl (prescription, illicit and/or analogs) caused or contributed to death in 59.3% of all fatal overdoses in 2019. Preliminary numbers from (second quarter) of 2020 suggest an enormous increase in fatal overdoses since the beginning of the COVID-19 national shutdown with a preliminary increase of 66.8% in 2020 compared with second quarter 2019."

In Greene County, Region Ten offers the Medication Assisted Treatment program for those suffering from opioid addiction. Additionally, Region Ten offers monthly REVIVE overdose

reversal trainings for utilization of Narcan, which is available upon completion of the trainings.

There have already been more suicides in Orange County year over year with five up to Sept. 30, 2020, and only three in 2019. Madison County has had one suicide this year with five reported in 2019. There were three suicides in 2019 in Greene County and while there were none by Sept. 30, Hobron said the 2020 numbers could change as investigations are completed.

Warning signs for mental health crisis include:

- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Extreme mood changes, including highs and lows
- Inability to concentrate
- Delusions
- Prolonged strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Substance use
- Physiological changes in weight, sleep or sex drive
- Thinking about suicide
- Unexplained and persistent physical issues (headache or upset stomach)

There is a regional peer-run warmline that is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week for those who need to talk at (833) 626-1490. For those who live in the Rappahannock Rapidan service area, there is also a crisis service phone line that is staffed at all times at (540) 825-5656. For those in the Region Ten Community Services Board area, call (434) 972-1800 for a behavioral health emergency, or call 911. Both RRCS and Region Ten offer substance use counseling, as well.