

OPED Piece for the NEWS LEADER

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We can finally celebrate some long-awaited good news about Middle River. Twenty-three miles of the river in Augusta County were recently taken off Virginia's "Dirty Waters List." The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality delisted the segment of the river near Frank's Mill and extending near New Hope because it now meets state standards for both E. coli and sediment.

The amazing improvements on the Middle River benefit everyone in Augusta who fishes, paddles, and swims its waters. This is thanks to a coordinated effort. All of us have been working to remove this river, and many others, from the dirty waters list for decades. It takes everyone—from improving sewage treatment, to farmers planting cover crops and fencing cows out of streams, to rain barrels and storm water retention.

This segment includes Augusta County Service Authority's largest waste water treatment plant. The Middle River Regional Waste Water Treatment Plant operates at the world's leading edge of technology, not only killing bacteria but removing nutrients as well. Our farmers have led the Commonwealth in fencing cows out of streams. Virginia banned phosphorus in lawn fertilizer. Landowners help fund practices that reduce polluted runoff from urban areas through storm water utility fees. And our children stock restored streams with trout through Trout in Classroom programs. These efforts and many more are the reasons this section of Middle River has been restored.

Congratulations! We did it! Thank you for doing your part!

A plan, backed up by sound science, and people working together can achieve great things. The progress made on the Middle River is just a small part of the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint—a major federal-state agreement throughout the six states in the 64,000-square mile Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Blueprint is restoring waters from Middle River to the Chesapeake Bay. There are now more underwater grasses in the Bay since scientists started measuring them in the 1980's. Dead zones, areas in the Bay with no oxygen are shrinking. Oysters, crabs and fish are setting records. Scientists tell us that we are now seeing systemic, consistent improvements in the health of the Bay.

Poague Run, a stream on the North end of Staunton was once a quagmire of manure and sewage. It's now clean and cold enough to stock with Brook Trout. One day, we are going to stock Brook Trout in the Middle River.

Clean water is a win for everyone, leading to healthier people and a healthier economy.

Together, we restored twenty-three miles of Middle River but there's much more to do. Middle River is seventy-one miles long with many tributaries such as Back Creek, Eidson Creek,

Moffett Creek, Lewis Creek, Goose Creek, Christians Creek, Broad Run and countless un-named tributaries.

Middle River begins on a farm on the North slope of a ridge in McKinley. It flows northward gathering the tributaries from Summerdean, Swoope, Verona, Fort Defiance, New Hope and Weyers Cave. The River is joined by North River and South River near Port Republic to form the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. From there it flows North where it joins up with the Potomac River at Harpers Ferry. From there, it flows another hundred miles, through our nation's capital before entering the Chesapeake Bay.

Help us celebrate the Middle River and the Chesapeake Bay on June 4 at Lucky Charm Farm in Weyers Cave. Senator Emmett Hanger and farmer Bud Shaver will lead a tour of trees planted along the River to capture nutrients and create wildlife habitat. The event will take place at 10am, on the East bank of the River on Craig Shop Road.

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