

**Albemarle County Natural Heritage Committee
Annual Report
March 20, 2012**

Our contributions over the past year include:

Policy & Program Recommendations:

- **Planning**
 - Participated in the Comprehensive planning process by providing comment at Many Plans, One Community and Livability Implementation Plan meetings.
 - Assisted in the development of a Master Plan for Biscuit Run State Park

- **Requests for input on proposed changes to programs and regulations**
 - Members of the Committee contributed to the development of a rural economic action plan that emphasizes agriculture, sustainability, and tourism.
 - Brought community experts and Staff together to collaborate on a regional native plant initiative that can be used for public projects, and which could potentially create a new agricultural market for native plants.

- Used field data to help identify native plants that would be useful for green roof applications and helped distribute propagation material to a local green roof plant nursery (Stone Crop) to help get more local plants on the market that can be used for restoration.

Education:

- Developed guidance on what species and habitats are important to emphasize in local environmental education programs.
- Staffed a table at Charlottesville Earth Week, which
 - Included community education on land conservation and species and habitats of Albemarle County.
 - Included a Monticello seed giveaway.
- Created an educational article on using native plants for green roofs:
www.piedmontdiscovery.blogspot.com/2011/07/ecosystem-living-and-gardening-part-i.html

Notable Biodiversity Discoveries and Events

- Began the reassessment process for previously documented sites
 - Including a rare Paper Birch Forest. See documentation here:
www.blueridgediscoveryproject.blogspot.com/2011/06/eco-antique.html
 - Returned to Monticello to document rare species and their site conditions.
- Documented a few new sites,
 - including a rock outcrop in the Southern Albemarle Mountains featuring our native cactus, and other unusual succulents.
- Created a model for data sharing between local citizen scientists
- One of our members, Devin Floyd, discovered a national champion tree, Black Haw

(Viburnum prunifolium)

Out of five primary tasks assigned to us by the Board of Supervisors, we continue to make good progress on most of those; however, the Biodiversity Action Plan development and implementation depends highly on the support and assistance of staff for the landscape analysis portion. We feel that significant progress could be made with the allocation of eight hours of staff time per month for GIS work and other staff input, as needed.

Secondly, given that we are tasked with *“Responding to Board, Planning Commission, and Staff requests for inputs on proposed changes to programs and regulations”* we feel we could be consulted more often. We would like to operate more like other advisory committees, by receiving a bit more direction from both staff and the Board.

Indeed our members made some very positive contributions to the rural section of the economic development plan and our proactive engagement on future changes to rural policy could be helpful to the county. Staff and the Planning Commission may lack clarity on where it is appropriate to enlist our comments or assistance. There may even be some areas outside of our current charge where we could be of more service to you and the county. We would be interested and willing to provide input of the following kinds of policy as they apply to biodiversity and natural resources:

- Rural and Urban Critical slopes
- Rural and Urban Stream buffers
- Rural economic vitality
- The ACE program Scoring System
- Rural area land use policy
- Storm water treatment, and the Chesapeake Bay TMDLs
- Urban stream protection
- Greenspace and parks
- Processes for gathering of public input on natural resources (For example, our inclusion in the Biscuit Run planning process, was very positive and we appreciated being invited.)

Lastly, we also have a significant number of open seats on the committee. To be successful we need the Board’s guidance on the issues that *you* would like us to work on, and need appointments to our committee that have the appropriate technical expertise, including experience with GIS, Conservation Science, and/or Natural history. Thank you for the opportunity to serve Albemarle County and assist you in protecting it’s most important places and natural resources.