

SHENANDOAH NATURALISTS

A NEWSLETTER OF THE SHENANDOAH CHAPTER OF THE VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALISTS PROGRAM

FROM THE EDITOR

BY LORI POTTER



Fall conjures up thoughts of crimson leaves, pumpkin pie, and family celebration. As we head into the latter end of Fall, I focus on finding more ways to have gratitude through my hikes.

I use my journaling techniques learned in my VMN Basic Training to remember my experiences on the trail, and I try to capture a few things I am thankful for each time.

As naturalists we all have something that draws us to the natural world. For me, it's the ecosystems found in the mountains. In August, I was able to successfully complete my quest of hiking all of the trails in Shenandoah National Park. My final hike was the Old Rag Loop. The billion-year-old rocks created an amazing sense of awe, and scrambling hand-over-hand is one my favorite ways to connect with the natural world.

In this issue, you'll hear from other chapter naturalists who share their love of nature in many different ways through our volunteerism and stewardship of our land and resources.

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MEET KATIE ENDERS, CO-EDITOR

I'm pleased to introduce my co-editor, Katie Enders. Here are a few facts about Katie:

*My earliest memories are of growing up in Ethiopia, and then on a small farm in Michigan;

*For the past forty years, I've been a teacher at the elementary, middle, and college levels, teaching mostly literature and writing;

*I've lived and traveled all over the world, but the Shenandoah Valley has been my home for the past twenty years—love it here!



*I'm happiest reading, writing, playing music (fiddle and cello), traveling, and getting my hands dirty in the soil.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY REBECCA HARRIETT

Happy Autumn! I absolutely love this time of year as we transition into fall. While I am not a big winter fan, I do enjoy the change of seasons, especially here in the Blue Ridge. That first crisp nip in the air, birds migrating on their way south, and the gradual change of leaves from green to yellow remind me of nature's power to heal and bring joy no matter the turbulence of our day-to-day lives. Listen and observe, as all good naturalists should, for peace and perspective.

Also for peace and perspective, the Chapter had a wonderful afternoon of fun and fellowship at our Annual Picnic. Although the skies were a bit overcast, it did not dampen our spirits for eating good food and sharing our VMN adventures. A BIG thank you to Hospitality Chair, Lisa Byrd, and her merry band of helpers in planning and coordinating this annual event with such joy and enthusiasm. After all her hard work, Lisa then presented the Chapter's continuing education program on the Chapter's expanded "Sustainability" Guidelines, again with her usual energy and passion. A shout-out also goes to Cary Gaunt, who unfortunately could not join us, but was co-author of the guidance for addition into the Chapter's Operating Handbook. They will host additional online training this winter on suggestions in implementing these sustainable actions into our projects and programs.

Thanks also to Laure Wallace and her assistants for conducting a "sightless" hike on the Sensory Explorers Trail (SET), challenging participants to utilize all of their senses when exploring the world around us. The photography group shared their stunning nature photographs, and donated over \$900 to the Chapter Treasury from the sales of their photographs at the Westminster-Canterbury Show this summer. Their next exhibition will be at the Blandy Dining Room this fall. Thank you for your Chapter outreach and donation! Thanks again to Jane Coogan for coordinating the Chapter VMN logo shirt/hat orders and distributing them at the meeting. If you placed an order and could not make the picnic, please contact Jane directly for coordinating delivery.

At the November meeting, we elected our new Board Officers for 2026: Julie Pineiro, President; Jennifer Adams, Vice-President; Cindy Glatkowski, Treasurer; and Evelyn Joran-Thiel, Secretary. They are meeting with their current incumbents for a smooth transition of responsibilities. Please join me in welcoming and supporting our new officers and the entire BOD for stepping up to guide our Chapter into 2026. The new term begins Jan. 1, 2026.

Finally, there are many volunteer service and continuing education opportunities listed on the Better Impact Calendar if you are in need of meeting your 40 hours of service and/or 8 hours of continuing education for 2025. These opportunities slow down during the winter, so take a look and find a fit. And don't forget to record your hours in Better Impact no later than December 31, 2025, to receive credit for your VMN certification. It also helps us in preparing the Chapter's Annual Report. Thank you for all you do for the Shenandoah Chapter!

THINKING AND ACTING LIKE AN ECOSYSTEM: VMN-SHENANDOAH CHAPTER SUSTAINABILITY GUIDELINES

BY CARY GAUNT AND LISA BYRD

October 2025

I want you to understand that we are part of the natural world. And even today, when the planet is dark, there is still hope. Don't lose hope. If you lose hope, you become apathetic and do nothing. And if you want to save what is still beautiful in this world—if you want to save the planet for future generations, your grandchildren, their grandchildren—then think about the actions you take each day. Because multiplied a million times, a billion times, even small actions will make for great change. ~Dr. Jane Goodall

“And even today, when the planet is dark, there is still hope.” These, some of the last words shared by preeminent scientist, activist, global inspiration, and naturalist, Jane Goodall (deceased October 1, 2025), embody the qualities we strive for in our Shenandoah Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists.

Through our work educating and inspiring others, conducting sound citizen science, caring for the natural world, and creating a community of volunteers, we are cultivating beacons of hope around the region. When we volunteer, whether as leaders or participants on another's project, we are making a difference. Never has there been a more important time for us to step up, to offer hope “when the planet is dark” and earth's systems are groaning.

How we plan, organize, and offer our volunteer opportunities, whether the Basic Training Course or one of our many events, can also make a difference. By modeling with our actions how to support “the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas” in everything we do, we have the opportunity to help people see and act differently in the world. This means not only organizing a great event or class, but also paying attention to our choices in all facets of advertising and implementing the event—how we reach out, how food and materials are used, and how we dispose of our waste, for example.

Think about it. In our education, outreach, and hands-on volunteering, we reach hundreds of people each year. If they see us walking our talk, they might be inclined to do so, too. That way the ideas spread. (If only they would spread as successfully as invasive species do!)

THE INTENTION BEHIND THE CHAPTER'S SUSTAINABILITY GUIDELINES

The potential to make a difference and educate others while doing so is what prompted the creation of the recently Board-approved Chapter Sustainability Guidelines we call, “Thinking and Acting Like an Ecosystem.” What started as a casual conversation between Lisa Byrd and Cary Gaunt while preparing for the 2025 Basic Training Course evolved into a proposal for the Board after presenting and revising the guidelines during the course.

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The intention behind the Sustainability Guidelines is to provide clear guidance on how to design, plan, conduct, and clean up our meetings, events, classes, and field trips in ways that support the preservation and restoration of nature. The guidelines are based on best practices used by reputable institutions around the world, including our sponsoring agencies (especially Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia). These recommendations are proven scientifically to make a difference in reducing harm to nature, our earth, and the biotic and abiotic world we love.

The guidelines move beyond a singular focus on waste management, although they do consider the “7-R’s” of a Zero Waste Strategy (see Figure 1), to include human well-being in addition to meeting the State VMN mission to “Provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within [our] communities.”



Figure 1. The 7-Rs of Zero Waste Management

THINKING AND ACTING LIKE AN ECOSYSTEM

We titled the guidelines “Thinking and Acting Like an Ecosystem” to remind each of us that we are integral and interdependent members of our ecosystem communities. Humans are not separate from nature; we are biological species connected to all living beings through the evolutionary tree of life. How we treat earth, and our local ecosystems, is symbolic of how we treat ourselves and our human communities.

As naturalists, we understand these connections, and we learn early in our training about ecosystems and the interconnection of earth’s systems. Therefore, these guidelines include, but go beyond, the 7-Rs of Zero Waste, to include human well-being and nature—the whole of the ecosystem.

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Five key ecosystem principles frame the Guidelines. Students study these during the ecosystem module of the Basic Training Course and its companion reading, “Commoner’s Laws of Ecology” (from Barry Commoner’s 1971 book, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology*):

Section 1. Community and Relationships: An ecosystem is a community of living organisms and the places they inhabit. It is essential to practice respect and care. Relationships matter.

Section 2. Interconnection and Interdependence: Everything is Connected to Everything Else. The living organisms of an ecosystem interconnect and are interdependent with each other and the physical environment. Every part of an ecosystem depends on the others, directly or indirectly. It is the same with our basic training course ecosystem and the ecosystem we create for all our events.

Section 3. Holistic or Systems Dynamics: There is No Such Place as Away. Individual needs must be balanced with the needs of the whole. We also try to understand the broader view or impact of our actions and decisions on ourselves, each other, and the world around us.

Section 4. Life Cycle Assessment: There is No Such Thing as a Free Lunch. We pay attention to the whole “cradle to grave” consequences of the products we purchase and use. We make decisions that have the least impact on nature, versus decisions that are faster, cheaper, but damaging to nature.

Section 5. Long Term Thinking: Everything is Always Changing and Everything Has Limits. We look beyond short-term gratification to the longer-term consequences of our actions and decisions.

Together, these principles and the guidelines they inform help our chapter think and act like an ecosystem. We recognize ourselves as part of a living community and members of the places we meet for class, visit on field trips, and inhabit in our daily lives. We understand that our actions matter.

The Guidelines address:

- Sustainable classes, meetings, and events
- Leave No Trace principles
- Sustainable waste management
- Earth-friendly purchasing
- Acknowledging ecosystems by introducing participants to them
- Human health and well-being as it relates to the kinds of programs we offer
- And more

HOW THE GUIDELINES WILL BE USED

The Board of the VMN Shenandoah Chapter approved these guidelines to be added to:

- The Volunteer Handbook and Policy Guidelines
- The Operating Handbook for the Shenandoah Chapter Virginia Master Naturalist Program.

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Lisa and Cary will also be writing articles and plan to develop a Training Webinar. Ideally, all Board members, Committee Chairs, and volunteers will become familiar with these principles and will incorporate them into the meetings and programs they plan. The Guidelines will be woven into the Basic Training Course so that new members to our chapter can begin to integrate these values into their learning and share them with others.

The Guidelines are being put into final format at the time of this newsletter's publication, but will be available by December 1st as a short document with background information and checklists for how to address environmental and human sustainability.

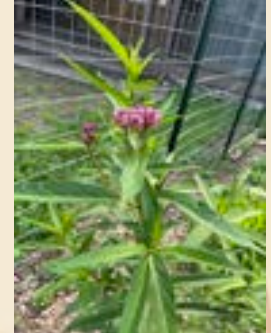
It is easy to feel overwhelmed and discouraged as our natural places and environmental protections are being threatened on an unprecedented national level, but we end this article with a quote from another change-making wise woman, cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

This is us, VMN Volunteers. The time is now. The new Chapter Sustainability Guidelines provide one path for the way forward.

What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.

~Dr. Jane Goodall

WINTER SOWING WORKSHOP



Winter Sowing is an easy and inexpensive method of starting perennial seeds in early winter. Join us for a Winter Sowing Workshop on Saturday, January 17, 2026, from 10:00a.m.-12:00p.m. at the Shenandoah University River Campus at Cool Spring in Clarke County. Sign up in Better Impact and receive Continuing Education credit for participating.

This workshop is limited to 15 participants. We'll provide hands-on demonstrations, potting mix, duct tape, and permanent markers. You'll need to bring the following: a clean gallon milk jugs (up to 3 max), utility knife, seeds, and a plant tag for each jug.

For questions, contact:

Cindy Glatkowski cindyward99@hotmail.com

Evelyn Joran-Thiel ejoranthiel@gmail.com

LIVING WITH BLACK BEARS

BY NEAL STRAKER

The Lake Frederick Conservation Club and Lake Frederick Community recently enjoyed an excellent presentation on black bears, hosted by two of our Shenandoah Chapter Virginia Master Naturalists, Bill Moore and Alice Straker. 127 people attended!

The presentation was part of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Living with Black Bears project, which provides valuable education on bear biology, behavior, and ways to prevent conflicts between humans and wildlife.

Bill and Alice shared that black bears are an important part of Virginia's natural heritage. While generally shy and not aggressive, bears can become frequent visitors to neighborhoods when they find easy access to food. This includes garbage cans, bird feeders, compost, and pet food. Once bears associate humans with food, the risk of conflict rises—for both people and bears.

The presentation emphasized simple steps to prevent conflict:

- Store trash in bear-resistant containers or wait to put it out until collection day.
- Remove bird feeders during the spring and summer, when natural foods are abundant.
- Keep outdoor grills clean and pet food indoors.

By making these small adjustments, residents help keep bears wild and discourage them from becoming dependent on human food. Bill and Alice reminded everyone about the importance of coexistence, and the benefits of coexistence to both communities and wildlife.

The afternoon presentation was not only educational but also inspiring. Thanks to the dedication of Virginia Master Naturalists and DWR staff, more communities across the state are learning how to safely share the landscape with one of Virginia's most iconic animals.

In addition to live presentations, DWR's Black Bear Project offers online resources, videos, and printable guides for families and neighborhoods. These tools equip Virginians with practical strategies to live responsibly in bear country.

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*Bill Moore and Alice Straker
September 17, 2025*

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For further information, visit the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources website and explore their Living with Black Bears resources at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/bear/living-with-black-bears/>

REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, FALL 2025

The VMN-Shenandoah Education Committee met on Sept. 25 to welcome three new members (all from the Class of '25!), to discuss feedback from last year, and most importantly to prepare for the 2026 Basic Training Course, which involves recruiting and inviting new members, planning for the spring course, and completing all the other fun tasks (6 pages worth!) that come with being on this committee. Alice Straker and Cary Gaunt will continue to lead as Committee Co-chairs, along with institutional guidance from Rebecca Harriett and Alex Newhart and the support of several subcommittees.

To address feedback from the 2025 Course members, instructors, and volunteers, a team was formed to focus on a "Course Refresh" for 2026. The Course Refresh is not intended to change an already successful Basic Training Course, but to update it to better meet new technologies, provide access to more recent readings and supporting materials such as

webinars and podcasts, and to address other comments that students and volunteers voiced in their evaluations.

Alex explained the current status and process of new member recruitment, and we discussed past and future marketing efforts, including updating the flyer, reaching out to partner organizations, using social media, and encouraging current members to spread the word (likely the most effective method since the majority of new members reported applying to the VMN program because of word-of-mouth recommendations).

Applications are being accepted from October 2025 and end with the first 30 applications received or until December 1, 2025. Please reach out to anyone you think would benefit from this program and would be excited to volunteer through VMN. Thank you in advance for helping the Education Committee recruit new members!

THE ROYAL ROAD TO RICHMOND, OR MY TAKE ON THE RICHMOND VMN CONFERENCE

BY CHRISTINE BUMGARDNER



I don't know why the GPS in my car likes to take me on the long and winding road, but I can't complain too much as the drive to Richmond's VMN Conference took me through lush, green fields and trees.

I arrived Friday night, just in time for the meet and greet. People were friendly, and I set up my tri-board. I have to say I had some presentation envy of some of the other chapter's displays. I was very grateful to those who said mine was cute.

I wasn't able to get on the list for any of the field trips, but all the sessions were really good.

On Saturday morning, I went to the first lecture, "From Sewer to Park". This plenary/keynote session was on the transformation of the James River. It was exactly as described. They talked about how the river was a literal sewer and garbage dumping ground until after the 1940s. It took several groups decades of work to make it into the park it is now. Sometimes the work was 'easy' and sometimes it stalled, but eventually, they were able to create a beautiful waterway and park that can be used for everyone. My main takeaway was that persistence works and even small improvements matter.

The next session was "A Search for Safe Passage." I

thought it would be about helping at-risk youth, but it was more about how to get people (especially students who are part of the Maymont Park's after-school workshops) to think about how to give wildlife 'safe passage' – it is easy to think of the bridge for larger animals like deer, but what about the salamanders? What about the rabbits and other small creatures? I think it was really interesting to try to be creative. Each group was given a map, then told to put up developments and highways. It left very few wild spaces. Then we had to get our animals safely across the highway. There was play dough and laughter. My main takeaway is that we can be more creative in solving some of our environmental problems, and a little play won't hurt.

Lunch was good because I had some interesting table mates, but the vegetarian food was a little disappointing. There is a lot more to vegetarian cooking than tofu and broccoli!

The afternoon session was a nature journaling workshop. I found it interesting. I feel I should be a better journalist, but I'm sadly not that great. The three speakers each had some insight into the nature of nature journaling. One of the speakers said that "you have to have the pencil miles" to be good at drawing. Another suggested going to one spot every week, and recording how things change from week to week, taking the time to really listen, feel, and look around you. I still feel my journaling isn't up to par, but I did feel a bit better about the process. My main takeaway was that journaling is not a one-size-fits-all, but there are lots of styles to choose from.

There was time to socialize, and again I met some amazing people. I think one of the reasons Master Naturalists are so cool is they are doing something that is helpful, and joyous. (I may be wrong but that was something I thought frequently.)

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The next morning, I went to a lecture on oyster restoration. I thought it was interesting how the Andrews started their project as a small group, and now have students and other volunteers working together. I hadn't thought of it, but oyster farming is big business, which is why there needs to be restoration, as the oysters of the past were over-fished. There are lots of other people helping in their own way, such as by having small oyster 'bags' on their property, and using empty oyster shells as buffers instead of concrete. There is a very large oyster shell recycling movement that is helping in a big way. My main takeaway was that nature is surprisingly resilient.



Christine Bumgardner
September 6, 2025

It was good to have such a hopeful start to the day, as the next session was on ocean debris, which was both hopeful and depressing at the same time. The session leaders discussed beach and other water cleanup efforts, as well projects to help end single-use plastics. They talked about the need for data collection not just to record what is happening but to use it to help convince people to enact and follow policies that will help reduce the amount of plastic waste. A win was the banning of balloons for celebrations, but since it isn't enforced, people still use them for birthday parties, etc. My main takeaway was that Stephen King was right, balloons are evil.

I'm glad I took the time to go. I learned a lot, and had a good time. If you can, I recommend that you go to the next one!

LIMBERLOST TRAIL: AN ACCESSIBLE TRAIL WITH UNIQUE GEOLOGY IN SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK

Getting There: Located in the Central District near mile marker 43 on Skyline Drive

Distance: 1.3-mile circuit hike

Difficulty: Easy, path is mostly crushed greenstone

Elevation Gain: 130 feet

Interesting Geologic Feature: Columnar jointing resulted from "an ancient lava flow that cooled, contracted and solidified" (source: NPS Information panel)

Note: No pets on this trail, though service animals are allowed

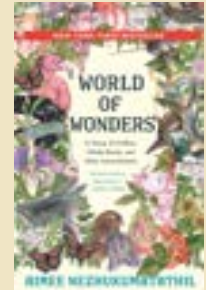


THE NATURALIST'S LIBRARY: CLASSIC & CONTEMPORARY READINGS

In this regular column we hope to share recommendations for books that we love. If you would like to recommend a book (or podcast or documentary or....) for others in the Shenandoah VMN Chapter, please send a short description and explanation of why you love it to Katie Enders at ktznders@gmail.com. Submissions may be edited for clarity.

Book Recommendation from Heather Roberts

World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments (2020) by Aimee Nezhukumatathil is a wonderful collection of essays about the natural world and the way its inhabitants can teach, support and inspire us. Each essay focuses on a specific plant, animal, or natural phenomenon, using it as a lens to explore the author's experiences growing up as a woman of color in America, her family life, and themes of race, motherhood, and environmentalism.



Book Review: *The Sea Around Us* by Rachel Carson (1951)

More than a decade before she shook the world with *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson published *The Sea Around Us*—a lyrical exploration of ocean science that reveals the roots of her gift as both writer and naturalist. Where *Silent Spring* motivated the modern environmental movement—helping inspire the creation of the EPA, the banning of DDT, and new protections against chemical pollution—*The Sea Around Us* shows us Carson in an earlier mode, weaving science and poetry to bring the ocean's mysteries to life.



For those who knew Carson only through *Silent Spring* (like me), it's fascinating to see how she honed her voice as a thinker, scientist, and storyteller. Some passages, particularly her accounts of geological history, remind us how much knowledge has expanded in the 75 years since. Yet her reflections remain strikingly relevant when read against today's challenges of pollution, rising and warming seas, overfishing, and ocean acidification.

This is not a book to consult for the latest science, but for its perspective, eloquence, and sheer wonder at the natural world. Even her acknowledgments carry a blend of humility, humor, and lyricism: "To cope alone and unaided with a subject so vast, so complex, and so infinitely mysterious as the sea would be a task not only cheerless but impossible, and I have not attempted it."

Carson ranges widely across the human history of ocean exploration and research, but her most moving passages come from firsthand experiences aboard the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Ship Albatross III. Here, her prose rises into poetry: "It is always the unseen that most deeply stirs our imagination, and so it is with waves. The largest and most awe-inspiring waves of the ocean are invisible; they move on their mysterious courses far down in the hidden depths of the sea, rolling ponderously and unceasingly." *The Sea Around Us* is a book to savor—best read aloud for the sheer beauty of its language and for the chance to share in Carson's enduring reverence for the sea.

SHENANDOAH CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP UPDATE – OCTOBER 2025

Chapter Membership: Our current chapter membership is 130 members.

Initial Certifications: The following members have completed the requirements for their initial certification as of July 2025:

Rick Ashbacker
Abbe Kennedy
Olivia Ondo

Brenda Rawlings
Nancy Sabella
George Wright

THESE MEMBERS WERE RECOGNIZED AT OUR SEPTEMBER CHAPTER MEETING. IF YOU WERE UNABLE TO ATTEND, SEE ALEX NEWHART FOR YOUR CERTIFICATE AND INITIAL MEMBER'S PIN.

MILESTONE RECOGNITION: THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS HAVE ACHIEVED THEIR NEXT VCE SERVICE HOURS MILESTONE PIN: 500 service hours

Jodi Davis
Cary Gaunt
Kathy Simmons
Alice Straker
Rob Williams

Christa Brusen
Elise McCabe

TRAINING REMINDERS

All Virginia Master Naturalist members are required to take two training sessions as part of our ongoing membership.

The **VCE Annual Civil Rights Training** covers the basics of civil rights in compliance with USDA NIFA's requirement for all extension volunteers to receive training annually on the topic.

The **VMN Risk Management Training** is needed for all Virginia Master Naturalist trainees. It also serves as refresher material for other volunteers. It should be taken every three years.

Training modules can be found in the My Profile tab of Better Impact. Look for the training folder. If you have any questions, please contact Alex Newhart.

The Virginia Master Naturalist program and the Shenandoah Chapter are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.



Shenandoah Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists

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Treasurer: Sue Bailey

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Newsletter Co-Editors: Lori Potter, Katie Enders

Chair, Volunteer Opportunities Committee: Susan Galbraith

Chair, Programs Committee: Julie Pineiro

Co-Chairs, Education Committee: Cary Gaunt, Alice Straker

Chair, Membership Committee: Alex Newhart

Chapter Advisor: Patrick McNamara

Blandy Partner Representative: Ariel Firebaugh

SCBI Partner Representative: Erin Shirley