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Color our region green: Join the effort

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THE commemoration of Earth Day reminds us to reflect on man's impact on our planet and to take steps to change the way we live to leave it healthy and safe for future generations. In 2007, the George Washington Regional Commission established the Regional Green Government Commission to provide leadership for a "green" development strategy--one that fosters an increased awareness of the benefits of a new way of thinking about these issues instead of the old model that too often presents false choices and zero-sum thinking.

Filled with many good people from the private and public sectors who want to make a difference, the RGGC consists of four subcommittees--Green Building, Green Waste, Green Earth, and Green Energy--all of which have accomplished a lot since the last Earth Day.

GREEN BUILDING

In partnership with the Fredericksburg Area Builders Association and Germanna Community College, we hosted a green summit last month to share best practices and new marketplace ideas.

With the help of GWRC staff, we secured a \$1 million federal stimulus grant to implement a regional home-energy efficiency and conservation program that will start this summer.

We promoted Spotsylvania County's property tax exemption for energy-efficient residential and commercial buildings.

GREEN WASTE/RECYCLING

We worked with localities, commercial centers such as Spotsylvania Towne Centre, and area military bases to find ways to increase the recycling rate throughout the region.

We partnered with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and regional hospitality council members to promote wider awareness and adoption of the "Virginia Green Lodging" program by area hotels.

Working with Landmarc Real Estate, a prominent property management company, we launched a program to educate residents about recycling in HOA-managed communities.

GREEN EARTH

Partnering with environmental organizations, we are developing a regional greenway map to provide a framework for interconnected natural trails throughout the region.

We are developing a "children and nature network" program that brings youth service groups together with local, state, and federal park operators, pediatric health care providers, environmental educators, and others to create more outdoor experiences for area youth.

We began to increase awareness of development patterns and their impact by using NASA data to illustrate the region's changing landscape over the past 13 years, which, among other things, shows the loss of 4.2 percent of the regional tree

canopy and a 43.4 percent increase in land covered by impervious surface area (rooftops, parking lots, roads, and driveways)--all of which contribute to urban storm water runoff that degrades the water quality of our rivers and streams.

We looked into ways to estimate the region's carbon footprint to establish a baseline for measuring the cumulative impact of changes we can make in how we live, and provide policy choices for government and business leaders.

GREEN ENERGY

We worked with a local energy consultant to advance solar technologies in the construction industry. We researched technologies and programs that are turning landfill and agricultural waste and sludge into low-grade oil and biodiesel fuel.

Through the work of dedicated people on these committees, we have made great strides to establish and promote sustainable programs that can transform the local economy with innovative ideas, and preserve and enhance our region's quality of life and its natural environment.

You can view our work on a new website ([GWGreen Govt.org](http://GWGreenGovt.org)) that also catalogs the federal, state, and local government and private sector energy and environmental programs that promote sustainable policies. Though it is still a work in progress, this pulls together information on best practices in environmental management, energy efficiency and conservation, and low impact development to inform consumers and businesses about smarter alternatives to how we grow and develop as a community.

As we go forward, the site will present new ideas, new programs, and any new public or private market incentives available to encourage the adoption of green technologies by area residents and businesses.

This summer, we will continue our work on these initiatives, and we encourage interested parties to contact us at 540/373-2890. In the meantime, please join us this Saturday, April 24, at Old Mill Park in Fredericksburg for the Friends of the Rappahannock's River Cleanup. The Rappahannock Sierra Club, Fredericksburg Clean & Green Commission, and other organizations are sponsoring a Free Family Festival beginning at 9 a.m. with live music, nature walks, information exhibits, and other activities.

We encourage you to stop by our information table to learn more about RGGC, the benefits of a greener lifestyle, and how you can contribute to shaping green programs for our region.

Hap Connors is chairman, Green Government Commission; Dan Dukes is Green Building chairman; John Broughton is Green Waste/Recycling chairman; Kevin Utt is Green Earth chairman; Bob Bennett is Green Energy chairman; and Kevin Byrnes is on staff at GWRC.