Page News & Courier "Water Matters" – February 14, 2008
Introduction to the Watershed Management Plan

Water has played a central role in the history of Page County and the Shenandoah Valley. Through drought and flood, water has shaped the landscape and lives of those fortunate to call the County home. Water also is fundamental to the overall health and quality of life in Page County. Clean, abundant supplies of water are a basic right and an essential resource for our children and their future.

But today, land use pressures threaten the health of our waterways and drinking water. In listing the Shenandoah as one of America's ten most endangered rivers (2006), American Rivers said the River is a victim of its own popularity. As population soars and farmland is replaced by development, the River is under siege from polluted runoff (non-point source pollution) and over-burdened sewage treatment facilities and water supplies.

These concerns underscore the need to protect our valuable and fragile water resources. To consider the issues, the Page County Water Quality Advisory Committee, appointed by the Board of Supervisors in 1998, expanded its membership with the purpose of creating a Page County watershed management plan. The group is comprised of landowners, farmers, developers and other community leaders, as well as local, regional, state and federal government partners.

Watershed management plans are a tool to take us from where we are today (dealing with impaired water quality) to where we want to be in the future (blessed by healthy rivers and ground water). They are designed to be dynamic, working plans, which can incorporate new information and evolving local issues as brought forth by local elected officials and citizens. With the active participation of all residents, watershed management plans can help shape and protect the future of Page County and its water resources.

The program is comprised of three inter-connected elements:

1) Education and outreach for County residents of all ages to increase the understanding of our water resources and inspire increased stewardship;

2) Watershed management plans to inform and guide land use decisions from the perspective of water resources; first for Mill Creek, a priority watershed due to its designation as an impaired stream under the Clean Water Act, and then for all of the other watersheds in Page County. (Note: both Mill Creek and Hawksbill Creek are listed as impaired watersheds due to coliform bacteria).

3) Land use practices, both voluntary and required, to protect water resources and the rights of all local property owners

The Watershed Management Plan Team published a document entitled "Managing Page County's Water…and its Future" which details the plan. The Board of Supervisors passed a resolution in support of this document at the December 2007 Board meeting.

This is the first in a series of articles addressing Page County's water resources. For more information or for a copy of the "Water Futures" document, please contact the Page County Water Quality Advisory Committee at (540) 743-4808 or canderson@pagecounty.virginia.gov.