

## Healthy rivers & streams tops list of long-term Rappahannock environmental priorities

*Tribe will also pursue indoor air quality monitoring and improvements*



Woodie Walker

The Rappahannock Tribe will increasingly cooperate with water quality scientists over the next few years, focused on assisting with the development and implementation of Virginia's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program. TMDLs are the plans by which the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) address impairments like bacterial contamination. TMDLs have a identification component, when waterways are tested for impairment and any pollution is noted. The second part of the

**To keep this work going, the tribe is writing a three-year plan with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that will strengthen our role in regional conservation efforts.**

TMDL is the implementation plan, which actually attempts to solve the problem. For example, a nearly seven-mile long stretch of Aylett Creek was identified in 2016 and 2018 as impaired due to excess E. coli. Aylett Creek is a tributary of the Mattaponi River, part of the Rappahannock homeland, which for environmental purposes we generally define as the Middle Peninsula and the Northern Neck from the Fall Line to the Chesapeake Bay. In this TMDL situation, the problem has been identified, and a remedy plan (the implementation plan) is needed. The tribe will provide comments to DEQ advocating for timely implementation of a plan reducing E.coli from livestock and human sources like malfunctioning septic systems, and any other identifiable sources of pollution in Aylett Creek and other impaired Mattaponi tributaries.

But sometimes providing comments to a cash-strapped conservation agency like DEQ just isn't doing enough, because the state is allowed 10 years (!) from the time of pollution **identification** to **implementation** of the plan to fix the problem. Lack of funding is usually blamed for the time lag. To help meet this specific need in another priority watershed, the tribe recently endorsed a \$918,000 grant application to secure funding for TMDL implementation in the Rappahannock River valley. The tribe joined with the Rappahannock River Roundtable, Friends of the Rappahannock (a Fredericksburg-based watershed advocacy non-profit), three Planning District Commissions, four Soil and Water Conservation Districts, four Virginia conservation departments, and other agencies and non-profits, to pay for things like TMDL implementation plans, reforestation projects, and septic repairs. The tribe's commitment is to assist with outreach and education opportunities. This 2021 Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Program grant is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Created by Congress in 1984, NFWF has grown to become the nation's largest private conservation grant-maker, working with both the public and private sectors to protect and restore our nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats for current and future generations.

In addition, the tribe will receive EPA assistance and training to monitor homes for indoor air quality. Concerns about gases, molds, and inefficient wood-burning stoves prompted tribal leaders to make this a priority concern, as well. This three-year plan is still in the draft stage, and will be presented to Chief Richardson and the Tribal Council for review at the proper time.