



**For Immediate Release**



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## **DAN RIVER BASIN ASSOCIATION EFFORTS ENCOURAGE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND OUTDOOR RECREATION**

**(Martinsville, VA)- January 10, 2008-**The Harvest Foundation has awarded the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) a one-year grant of \$216,076 for its “Community Connections through Rivers and Trails” project in Martinsville-Henry County. The project will promote nature and heritage tourism and will provide recreational amenities that are increasingly sought after by businesses seeking to relocate and attract an educated workforce to the area. Specifically, the organization will work to lengthen area trails, add access points to the Smith River and strengthen programming to promote the community’s environmental resources.

DRBA’s Martinsville-Henry County River and Trails (M-HCR&T) partnership with Henry County government will make the Smith River more accessible for fishing, boating or watching wildlife. Currently, Henry County now has five public river access points with two additional planned. The project will develop a connected system of trails, parks and greenways and create opportunities for people to get outdoors and lead healthier lifestyles. Planning is now underway to connect the Fieldale Trail to the Uptown Martinsville trail. As a project partner, the Southern Environmental Law Center will continue to coordinate and facilitate monthly meetings of the M-HCR&T Group and will provide planning, mapping and fundraising support for the project.

According to Ellen Jessee, DRBA’s chair of the Rivers and Trails group, “Studies show that trails, greenways and similar recreational amenities help attract businesses. When executives of a national association looking to relocate visited Eden, NC, they were impressed by the city’s new greenway trail along the Smith River. Recent visitors and business investors from Canada also noted that trails along the Smith River from Virginia to North Carolina would be a tremendous asset to the region.”

The Harvest Foundation’s investment has generated new matching funds from many other sources, including the Dominion Foundation, which contributed \$30,000 toward the construction of the Smith River Trail at Fieldale. The recently-opened Fieldale trail now attracts hundreds of users and many new programs with goals to double citizen usage within the next year. With a forthcoming additional \$50,000 grant from Dominion, DRBA will continue its work with Henry County to double the length of the trail. To experience the Fieldale Trail the public is invited to a beginner bicycle ride at 2 p.m. on January 13. This event will be sponsored by Activate Martinsville-Henry County.

“This initiative will help connect area residents with local, natural assets that encourage active and healthy lifestyles. This strengthens our vision of Martinsville-Henry County as a “community of choice.” It also presents an opportunity for river and trail advocates to learn, share ideas and gain support for their efforts to promote environmental stewardship, outdoor recreation, and active living,” says Richard Killingsworth, Executive Director of The Harvest Foundation.

The Harvest Foundation’s award to DRBA also provides critical support to the successful Trout-in-the-Classroom and Stream Monitoring programs. This past year, over 1,700 children and their teachers learned how to make sure that their local rivers and streams are clean and safe for drinking, swimming and fishing through the program. In addition, multi-user guides to the many natural, recreational and heritage features of the Smith River corridor will be created to promote tourism and highlight the area’s natural assets.

“DRBA’s leadership, dedication, and commitment have successfully established a network of regional sites that together have benefited the residents of Martinsville-Henry County and have become a model that is being shared throughout the region,” said John Estes, Program Officer at The Harvest Foundation. Estes added, “The Harvest Foundation is pleased to support these types of innovative improvements for the community.”

With this new Harvest Foundation-funded project, area residents will be discovering new places to get outdoors, enjoying healthier rivers and streams, and learning how to care for life-sustaining local waterways. The Rivers and Trails initiative will build momentum toward achieving a better quality of life, healthier lifestyles and recreational amenities needed to attract new businesses and new residents.

“It is really a privilege to have access to such beautiful trails in the community. My best memories growing up were along the trails of the Blue Ridge Parkway and to be able to experience the same environment as a learning tool with my son is such a great resource,” said Donna Bullard, local trail user.

*The Dan River Basin Association preserves and promotes the natural and cultural resources of the Dan River Basin through recreation, education, and stewardship. DRBA envisions an economically vibrant bi-state community with a regional identity, where people enjoy easy access to healthy rivers, parks, trails, and heritage attractions. For more information visit [www.danriver.org](http://www.danriver.org).*

*The Harvest Foundation supports health, education, and welfare initiatives that serve our vision of fostering a “community of choice” for Martinsville and Henry County, Virginia. The Harvest Foundation was established in 2002 from the sale of Memorial Hospital. For more information please go to: <http://www.theharvestfoundation.org/>.*

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