

So the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality has issued a Virginia Water Protection Permit and Clean Water Act Section 404 water quality certification for the proposed expanded Ragged Mountain Reservoir . . . .

## *Now What?*

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality ("DEQ") on February 11, 2008, issued a Virginia Water Protection Permit and Clean Water Act Section 404 water quality certification for the proposed expanded Ragged Mountain Reservoir. This is a very important step in assuring that our community will have a healthful, safe and reliable water supply over the next half-century!

Issuance of this permit by the DEQ embodies its conclusions that all reasonably available information has been considered and shows the proposed expanded Ragged Mountain Reservoir, together with the proposed Pipeline from South Fork Rivanna River Reservoir, to be the least environmentally damaging, practicable means of meeting that need.

Our DEQ reached these conclusions -- as has the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority -- following more than a decade of study, a dozen public meetings, and thousands of hours of expert evaluation and review. In short, the DEQ and the Authority have done their homework and on that basis are confident that this proposal is the best the collective wisdom of the community reasonably could produce.

Nevertheless, the Authority understands that some members of the public still have questions. And the Authority wishes to answer them clearly and as simply as possible.

## *We continue to respond!*

The Authority would like to assure that all of our citizens have the ability to be knowledgeable and well-informed, even though the DEQ has completed its permit process. Toward that end, here are some questions we have heard recently, and the answers to each:

***Will the expanded Ragged Mountain Reservoir cause our community to grow too rapidly?***

No. Having an adequate water supply does not cause a community to grow. The objective of water supply planning is to meet the demand that is reasonably likely to occur. It is not to set growth policies for the community. Efforts to limit the public water supply do not constrict growth and pose obvious public health risks. The Authority encourages citizens to address community growth issues with public officials through the appropriate processes -- including updates to Comprehensive Plans, zoning, and land use regulation.

***Will the community water supply plan result in the abandonment of existing water reservoirs?***

No. The only part of the water supply plan that proposes to abandon any existing water supply facility is the proposal to abandon the pipeline from the Sugar Hollow Reservoir to the Ragged Mountain Reservoirs after a new pipeline is built between the South Fork and Ragged Mountain Reservoirs. The existing pipeline was built in 1927, has lost much of its capacity, is prone to leaks, and is now near the end of its service life. Contrary to some rumors that have circulated, both the Sugar Hollow Reservoir and the South Fork Rivanna River Reservoir are critical to meeting the community's water needs, are included in the safe yield capacity for the entire 50-Year period, and will be carefully maintained and used.

***Should I be concerned about dam safety problems at the existing Ragged Mountain Reservoirs?***

Yes, you should be concerned. Pursuant to the National Dam Safety Program, the existing Upper and Lower Ragged Mountain dams (built in 1886 and 1908, respectively) have been evaluated and determined to be "unsafe" because their spillways can pass only a small fraction of the Probable Maximum Flood. While the Authority has taken operation and maintenance steps to reduce the risk, the Virginia Department

of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Dam Safety Division has established a tight schedule for correcting remaining deficiencies that require major new capital improvements to correct. The expanded Ragged Mountain Reservoir, developed from an alternative selection process that included multiple opportunities for significant public comment, is the only "fix" which could now be completed on time –if other alternatives are reconsidered today, the time required for the development and review of required permit actions would expose our community to this risk for at least several additional years, and would place us in violation of DCR requirements.

***Will there be access for public recreation at the expanded Ragged Mountain Reservoir?***

Yes. Public recreation at the expanded Reservoir will continue much as it has in the past. Although some existing hiking trails will be inundated when the Reservoir fills, those trails will be replaced by new ones. The Authority is currently working closely with the City and County Parks & Recreation officials and will be coordinating with the Ivy Creek Foundation and other interested groups on a plan that, with the approval of appropriate public officials, could actually enhance the existing public amenities while retaining the scenic natural setting.

***Will the community water supply plan adversely affect the quality of our drinking water?***

No. The plan will actually improve drinking water quality. The plan includes the pre-treatment of all water pumped from the South Fork Reservoir to the Ragged Mountain Reservoir for sediment removal, and the plan includes a significant replacement of outdated existing equipment at the Observatory Water Treatment Plant (WTP) with the latest state-of-the-art advanced treatment equipment.

***Why don't we dredge the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir instead of expanding the Ragged Mountain Reservoir?***

Dredging of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir was evaluated in detail for the purpose of providing additional water supply and was

determined by DEQ to be impracticable as a water supply alternative on the basis of reliable information. Further, dredging can not supply all of the water storage necessary to satisfy the 50-Year supply need, thereby continuing to require a new dam for the expansion of the Ragged Mountain Reservoir. The costs of dredging, even under the best assumptions, would be significantly higher than other water supply alternatives, and dredging does not solve dam safety problems at the existing Ragged Mountain Dams.

RWSA does recognize that some members of the local community remain interested in dredging for purposes other than water supply, including aesthetical value, reservoir recreational opportunities, water quality, and at least to evaluate the feasibility of using as fill material for an airport expansion project. RWSA is willing to use its understanding of dredging obtained through prior study to facilitate those further discussions, and RWSA strongly supports community efforts to understand the root causes of sediment carried by streams from erosion and identify sustainable ways to prevent erosion at its sources upstream of reservoirs.

***Couldn't we avoid building the expanded Ragged Mountain Reservoir by using the Luck Stone Quarry in Shadwell when it becomes available?***

No. The earliest estimate as to when the quarry might become available is twenty years from now -- and Luck Stone officials have told the Authority that it might not be available for decades after that. Furthermore, we have learned through an official of the Virginia Department of Health that they would strongly oppose an application to withdraw surface water for public water supplies within five miles downstream from the discharge of a wastewater treatment plant. The quarry location is less than five miles downstream from the discharge from the Moores Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, and is just above the discharge from a second wastewater treatment plant (Glenmore).

***Will the community water supply plan adversely affect flows in any area streams?***

Quite the opposite! The community water supply plan will provide mandatory minimum flows for the first time in both the

South Fork Rivanna and Moormans Rivers, and larger storage capacity for the system will mean that water withdrawals for our community will be made at times of higher stream flows. These mandatory provisions result from a collaborative study effort between the Authority and The Nature Conservancy that has been recognized in a national technical journal for its innovation. All of this will help stream flows to more closely approximate natural conditions.

***Will our water bills "skyrocket" as the community water supply plan is implemented?***

If you are concerned about the cost of water and an adequate supply, you should favor the community water supply plan. Throughout the water supply planning public input process, cost estimates were regularly updated as alternatives were progressively narrowed, and with every update alternatives relying on an expansion of the Ragged Mountain Reservoir were competitive or less expensive than the costs of every other alternative. The Authority also developed a financial plan four years ago and began preparing for these needs through graduated rate increases, making current planning very manageable. Further, the Authority has proposed options for phasing some of the improvements of the 50-Year plan, including an option that "phases" the South Fork pipeline, allowing costs to be incurred only as its water supply benefits are needed.

***After nearly 30 years of effort, our community has crafted a water supply solution that is consistent with local comprehensive planning goals, that enhances public health and safety, that satisfies all federal and state permitting requirements, and that practices sound stewardship of environmental resources. A solid majority of our citizens support this solution, and the Virginia DEQ has now issued a permit that authorizes its implementation. The path to a secure and long-term water supply is at last both clear and promising!***