

Fryingpan Creek, Pigg River, Poplar Branch and Beaverdam Creek Pre-TMDL TAC Meeting

October 7, 2021 1:00 p.m.

Waid Park- Rocky Mount, VA

Attendees: Lucy Smith (DEQ), Paula Main (DEQ), Royce Steiner (DEQ), George Devlin (DEQ), Gabriel Irigaray (RVARC), Eddie Wells (RVARC), Paul Chapman (Franklin County Parks and Rec), Ben Newbill (Franklin County Parks and Rec), Ronnie Wilson (Franklin County SW and ESC), Bill Tanger (FORVA), Cynthia Martel (Franklin County VCE), Allen Jackson (Blue Ridge SWCD), Michael Tabor (Blue Ridge SWCD), Tracy Culbertson (Peaks of Otter SWCD), Terri Bollinger (Peaks of Otter SWCD), Jessy Lacks (Pittsylvania SWCD), Amber Eanes (Pittsylvania SWCD)

Attendees introduced themselves and stated their role in the watershed.

Lucy introduced DEQ's water quality improvement process including the projects that have already been completed in the watershed (i.e. Pigg River Bacteria TMDL and IP).

Q: What has happened with the Pigg River Bacteria TMDL?

A: The TMDL and IP have been completed and approved. There have been BMPs installed in the watershed but the waters are still listed on the dirty waters list.

Lucy described what constitutes a healthy benthic macroinvertebrate community and that bug communities are good at telling us that there is a problem but we need to do more investigating to understand what pollutant is causing the problem. This is called the stressor identification process.

Q: Are we talking about toxics coming from a business?

A: DEQ regulates industries through permits. We ask that they continue to monitor for the pollutants. If pollutants are exceeded then DEQ will go through an enforcement process.

Q: Smith Mountain Lake has PCBs, correct? We do not want to call a stressor one thing and actually miss the true pollutant.

A: Correct, yes this is why we have these meetings to see if the stakeholders know of some pollutant or sources that DEQ does not.

Fryingpan Creek:

DEQ reviewed the benthic macroinvertebrate and water quality data collected on Fryingpan Creek. Sediment was deemed to be the most likely stressor.

Q: Why are scores higher in the fall?

A: (per George Devlin- DEQ biologist) Seasonal variation is common but we typically capture more midges in the spring and they will mature over the summer so we have less of those in the Fall. This will allow fall numbers to typically be higher. A reference site would have higher stonefly larvae in the fall. Water quality parameters can also be driving changes including lower water levels and warmer water.

Q: What is VSCI?

A: Virginia Stream Condition Index

Q: What years were the studies done? 2018 was a wet year could this be a contributing factor?

A: 2011, 2013-2014, 2017 and 2018. Possibly but scores are consistently low for Fryingpan Creek despite the year. Our biologists are trained to sample when the community has reestablished and the flows are generally back to base flow; however this was tricky to do in 2018 and our biologists were not able to sample as many sites as usual.

Fryingpan Creek Summary: Habitat is not great. The banks are unstable and incised and scoured creek. Too much sediment in stream.

Q: What can you do when the sediment is just there?

A: This source will be incorporated into the model. But we can add BMPs where we can. We can look upstream for cattle or look for opportunities for instream restoration.

Comment: In looking at map, most of the riparian area is forest. Not a lot of opportunities for increasing riparian buffers.

Q: Do you know the slope?

A: Fairly low gradient but some riffle habitat. Most of the biologists determined it was low gradient.

Q: What is the change of CFS after a rain?

A: (George Devlin- DEQ Biologist)- Put in artificial fish in 2003 summer. Fish were out for 30 days and were 50% covered with sediment. Banks have been eroded for a long time.

Lucy: It is important to remember that the benthic scores only need to increase a little to be considered healthy and we can target tributaries for BMPs too.

Comment: Much of the watershed is changing over to no-till

Q: Do you soil sample?

A: No, not typically

Pigg River:

DEQ described the benthic macroinvertebrate data and water quality samples taken. The most likely stressors were deemed total habitat and sediment.

Comment- One stakeholder lost 30 feet of property in the past. One year the river takes it and the next it piles it back.

Comment- Log jam of about 250 tons of woody debris on the Pigg River

Observation from the group- Banks are falling down everywhere

Q: How much of the erosion is the natural evolution of the Pigg River?

A: We have a measurement for how stable the stream is and the results for the Pigg River were fairly normal. However, this measurement does not do a good job of representing historical sedimentation.

Observations from the group:

- Dams lifespan are typically 50 years
- Lifespan of sediment was filled in behind the dam that was taken out.
- Banks are a large source of sediment.
- Farmers have largely started no-till practices
- Implementing hardened crossings

Beaverdam Creek:

DEQ described the benthic macroinvertebrate data and water quality data collected at Beaverdam Creek. The stressors was determined to be sediment.

Comment from SWCD: A few BMPs have been done in this watershed, including at the horse farm upstream but in general there is not a lot of interest in this watershed.

Question from DEQ: Do you think that if an Implementation Plan is done, would people be interested in BMPs?

A: Potentially, if there is money available.

Poplar Branch:

DEQ described the Poplar Branch benthic macroinvertebrate data and water quality data. The stressor was determined to be hydromodification, which is less of an actual stressor and more of a contributing factor. Therefore, a TMDL cannot be done for small farm ponds. DEQ is looking for feedback on the best direction to go with this stream: A. develop TMDL for possible stressors of TP or sediment, B. Work on watershed plan, C. Focus implementation efforts in the watershed to the Poplar Branch watershed

Q: Where is Poplar Branch?

A: Franklin County, it joins Snow Creek.

Comments: There is a lot of Beef Cattle in the area and there are stills in the area.

- Slippery banks- too slick to get out
- A lot of Tobacco in this area in the past
- Relatively high gradient but pools are full of sediment but not terrible
- Someone used a stick of dynamite (18-20 years ago) to clear a pipe and everything (sediment and wood) drained downstream
- Sediment doesn't appear to be a huge issue
- Ambient staff and biologist observe abundant sediment in some reaches

Q: How much do you look at soils?

A: When we model the watershed, we will incorporate a soil erosivity factor and other soil characteristics

Comments: Mostly farmers in the area and some harvested land that could use fencing BMPs or nutrient management plans

- Small beef farmers do not have any money
- Poplar Branch is a no participation area so far but could use some extra attention or targeting through the TMDL process
- A lot of this area has been logged.
- Suggestion to do the TMDL and see what is needed, maybe the implementation plan could generate more interest and funds
- Practices help the farmers with the bottom line, not just the environmental responsibilities
- BMPs are spread from word of mouth. As soon as funds are available they are gone.
- A Flyer at Jed's would generate interest in these meetings- right at Poplar Branch
- There is a group of farmers in the county- One gentleman is going to try and find the name and contact information

Poplar Branch action item: Feedback from the group suggested that sediment may be an underrepresented stressor to Poplar Branch and would recommend moving forward with a TMDL to address this pollutant source. The hope for this project would be to better understand where there are needed BMPs and ignite interest in the watershed.

The group decided that a watershed tour would be helpful to understand the watershed more and see possible pollutants/ sources. Lucy will schedule several days for these tours.

The next steps- Review stressor analysis report and provide comments. Lucy will revise the report to reflect the decision for Poplar Branch. November will be the 1st public meeting and then 2 additional TAC meetings in the winter and then a final public meeting in the Spring. Implementation planning development will begin in the Summer.