



George Washington & Jefferson National Forests
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VOLUNTEERS CONSTRUCT ACCESSIBLE FISHING PIER ON JACKSON RIVER

Thirty-two volunteers recently participated in a project to build a new accessible fishing pier at Johnson Springs Canoe Access on the Jackson River. The site, located in Alleghany County on the James River Ranger District of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, is one of five sites on the river where anyone can fish from the bank, but none were suited to fishing by disabled persons, especially those confined to wheelchairs.

Dan Genest, a public affairs specialist with Dominion Virginia Power and an avid trout fisherman, saw an opportunity to improve accessibility on the river by combining that need with Dominion's program to encourage its employees to use a work day per year for volunteer projects. Genest contacted the Forest Service and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the project began to take shape. Johnson Springs was identified as the best site for the pier. An existing design was adapted to the site.

Dover England, president of the Roanoke Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU), a national conservation organization, also recruited eight TU members from as far away as Roanoke, Salem and Richmond to participate. Trout Unlimited's John Ross worked closely with Dominion, which donated several thousand dollars for the materials and provided a backhoe, auger truck, and bucket truck to assist with construction. In addition, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries provided help from three employees and a volunteer from the Staunton area.

Improvements to the site included trimming limbs to make casting easier, and constructing a ramp to provide access from the ground to the pier. The walkway was also covered with crushed gravel to

accommodate wheelchairs, and heavy rip-rap rock was hand-placed to protect the stream bank from erosion.

“This was one of the best volunteer projects I’ve seen”, says James River district forester Sharon Mohney. “The Dominion, TU, and VDGIF people pretty much handled all of the preparation and organization for the two workdays. Once everybody understood what needed to be done, I was able to stand back and let the volunteers handle everything.”

Although a small amount of finish work remains to be done, the pier is complete and ready to be used. “The pier location was selected to be out of the main current of the river, even when water is high”, says Mohney. “However, we were able to place it very close to the river bank, and we hope that folks who normally don’t get a chance to fly-fish on a river will be able to come and enjoy it.”

The Forest Service estimates that, in addition to the funds provided for materials, about 600 hours of volunteer time was donated, valued at about \$11,400. Mohney noted that the project also received a lot of help from area businesses, especially Boxley Materials Company in Alleghany County, and Neathawk Lumber Inc. in Lewisburg WV.

Volunteers are critical toward accomplishing the Forest Service mission. Each year, volunteers dedicate thousands of hours to conserve resources and provide recreation and visitor services on the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Various volunteer groups and Eagle Scout candidates assist Forest Service employees with the maintenance of hiking trails and other critical projects. “We are always interested in working with volunteers,” says Mohney. “These days, we’re especially looking for people to adopt sections of trail, but there are all kinds of things people can do. We try to match the interests and abilities of volunteers with work that needs to be done.”

To learn more about volunteering on the James River Ranger District, contact Mohney at 540-962-2214.

(Continued)

Captions for photos:

DomSetPost.jpg: With the help of a backhoe, Dominion Virginia Power employees set a post for the accessible pier.

DiggingRampHoles.jpg: Three employees and a volunteer from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries dig the holes for the posts that will support the ramp leading to the accessible pier.

PassingRipRapRock.jpg: Volunteers from Trout Unlimited and VDGIF employees set rock in place to protect the river bank.

FinishedPier.jpg: The finished product - volunteers demonstrate how sturdy the pier is.

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