

DRAGON RUN WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

NOVEMBER 2003



Photo credit: Teta Kain

This project was funded by the Virginia Coastal Program of the Department of Environmental Quality through Grants #NA17OZ1142-01 and #NA17OZ2355 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA or any of its subagencies.

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**DRAGON RUN STEERING COMMITTEE,
MIDDLE PENINSULA PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION**

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MIDDLE PENINSULA PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION**

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Gloucester	Rick Allen	Elizabeth DeHardit	Jerry Horner
King and Queen	Keith Haden	William F. Herrin	Russell Williams
Middlesex	Jack Miller	Robert Major	Davis Wilson

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The Dragon Run Steering Committee

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Executive Summary

As one of the Chesapeake Bay watershed's most pristine waterways, the spring-fed Dragon Run flows forty miles along and through nontidal and tidal cypress swamp situated in portions of Essex, King and Queen, Middlesex, and Gloucester Counties. The Dragon Run plays a central role in the Middle Peninsula's culture and identity. Natural resources - forestry and farming - have been the bedrock of the watershed's economy. These land uses, together with extensive swamps and unique natural resources, are the main reasons that the Dragon Run remains wild and secluded.

The Dragon Run's unique character evokes strong feelings to protect the pristine watershed in both long-time residents and first-time visitors alike. Yet, opinions differ about how to address the threats of encroaching development and habitat fragmentation. An innate difference in point of view between property rights advocates and conservationists centers on how to maintain a pristine watershed into the future. Yet, substantial common ground exists for proactively preserving the Dragon Run for future generations that safeguards both natural resources and traditional uses of the land and water, including the property rights of landowners.

The Dragon Run Watershed Special Area Management Plan (SAMP), a partnership between the Virginia Coastal Program and the Dragon Run Steering Committee of the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission, is designed to address both the differences of opinion and the common ground that exist concerning the future of the watershed. The Steering Committee believes that the best approach is to bring stakeholders to the table for proactive discussions of the issues. The Steering Committee and its Advisory Group, representing a broad cross-section of the community, have proactively developed a mission, goals, objectives, and action plans to address the priority issues facing the Dragon Run.

This watershed management plan for the Dragon Run watershed represents a body of work by citizens, stakeholders, and decision-makers to achieve a common vision for the future – the preservation of the traditional uses and unique resources in the pristine Dragon Run. It is a symbol of regional cooperation and coordination that crosses jurisdictional boundaries. It is not a static document. Rather, it is a modifiable guidebook that harnesses the passion and energy for the Dragon Run of those who live, work, and play in its watershed.

MISSION

To support and promote community-based efforts to preserve the cultural, historic, and natural character of the Dragon Run, while preserving property rights and the traditional uses within the watershed.

GOALS

1. Establish a high level of cooperation and communication among the four counties within the Dragon Run Watershed to achieve consistency across county boundaries.
2. Foster educational partnerships and opportunities to establish the community's connection to and respect for the land and water of the Dragon Run.
3. Promote the concept of landowner stewardship that has served to preserve the Dragon Run Watershed as a regional treasure.

ACTIONS

<i>Underway/Completed</i>
1. Memorandum of Agreement
2. Establish Baseline Watershed Information
3. SAMP Project Awareness Campaign
<i>Recommended</i>
1. Land Use and Resource Preservation
A. Designate a Unified "Dragon Run Planning Area"
B. Implement Tools to Preserve Farm, Forest, and Natural Resources
C. Address Public and Landowner Access Issues
D. Control Invasive Species
2. Education and Landowner Stewardship
3. Encourage and Support Sustainable Economic Development
4. Monitor Plan Implementation