

March 16, 2011

Roanoke River/Explore Park Access

A New Ballgame:

Well, Explore Park finally broke off relations with the Vander Maten gang in 2010 and recognized that his mad scheme was not going to happen. It only took 5 years!

Back in 2005, the vote was 8 to 1 for a contract with Vander Maten. I was the "1" against it.

So now Explore Park is working on Plan B. That is a whole new approach that is dictated by the fact that Explore has no money.

One of the elements of Explore's new plan is the development of the Rutrough Point, which is the point where Rutrough Road meets the Roanoke River and Back Creek comes in as well. We have developed detailed plans which call for the creation of a parking lot and an improved boat ramp.

Public Access Still An Issue:

Nonetheless, the Explore board still maintains that it can shut down the public access to the river.

This matter has been a contentious issue since well before 2000, when the attorney for Explore opined in December 6, 2000, letter to the director of Explore that recreational boaters, including members of FORVA, "do not have a right of way over the property." The attorney went on to say that, "At the most, the individual has enjoyed a mere license to cross the property which is revocable at the board's pleasure."

Subsequently, in a March 1, 2005 letter to recreational boaters, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) declared that "In conclusion, it appears that Route 618 (Rutrough Road) is a public road running to the Roanoke River." The Explore board is in denial over this.

The Explore attorney maintained in a letter on April 16, 2008, regarding a related matter that, "...your actions may force the Authority to restrict access to the area through the construction of a fence and/or the posting of the property."

So it is likely that we are going to court to get a Declaratory Judgment to resolve the matter. It would appear this is the only way to clear up the question.

Access Improvements:

I am somewhat optimistic that the improvements at Rutrough Point can be made regardless of the court case. The parking lot is entirely on Explore property and should not be an issue. Even the improvements to the public access have to have approval from the Explore Park board and the board can remove them if it so chooses.

We have designed a set of steps with a canoe/boat slide in the center. We think we have the volunteer labor and free materials to build the ramp, using old railroad ties.

The parking lot is another matter as that will take seven to ten thousand dollars to create. We will be trying to find some volunteers and donations for that as well.

So stay tuned as we start a whole new ballgame at the confluence of the Roanoke River, Back Creek and Rutrough Road.

If you want to work on any of the issues, just let me know. Bill Tanger Cell 540-266-0237



Bill Tanger, Chair, FORVA