

**A REPORT ON
THE NORTH AND SOUTH MAYO RIVERS
TO
THE GOVERNOR
AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



House Document No. 3


**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Richmond, Virginia
1980**

TO: The Honorable John N. Dalton
Governor of Virginia
and
The General Assembly of Virginia

The report contained herein is pursuant to House Joint Resolution No. 219 of the 1979 Session of the General Assembly of Virginia.

This report, prepared during the spring and summer of 1979, constitutes the Commission of Outdoor Recreation's response to the legislative directive to study the North and South Mayo Rivers in Patrick and Henry Counties to determine their suitability for designation as components of the Virginia Scenic Rivers System.

Respectfully submitted,


Rob R. Blackmore
Director

Commission of Outdoor Recreation

Mr. M. Lee Payne, Chairman
Mr. Robert H. Pratt, Vice Chairman
Mr. O. Gene Dishner
Mr. Dee E. Floyd
Mrs. McCluer Gilliam
Mr. Harold C. King
Mr. James F. McInteer, Jr.
Mr. Thomas W. Richards
Mr. Fred W. Walker
Mr. Rob R. Blackmore, Director

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 219

Offered January 11, 1979

Directing the Commission of Outdoor Recreation to study the north and south forks of the Mayo River in Patrick and Henry Counties for possible inclusion in the Virginia Scenic Rivers System.

Patrons-Terry, Philpott, Swanson, and Slayton

WHEREAS, it is the declared policy of the Commonwealth that the waterways of Virginia are natural resources, the conservation of which constitutes a beneficial public purpose; and

WHEREAS, it is also State policy, through the use of the Scenic Rivers Act, to preserve certain rivers or sections of rivers for their scenic value; and

WHEREAS, the Mayo River has never been studied to determine its potential for inclusion in the Scenic Rivers System; and

WHEREAS, the local governing bodies of Patrick and Henry Counties have requested immediate consideration of the Mayo River for inclusion in the Virginia Scenic Rivers System; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Commission of Outdoor Recreation is directed to make a study of the north and south forks of the Mayo River in Patrick and Henry Counties to determine the suitability of the Mayo River for designation as a Virginia Scenic River.

The Commission shall complete its study and report to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before December one, nineteen hundred seventy-nine.

INTRODUCTION

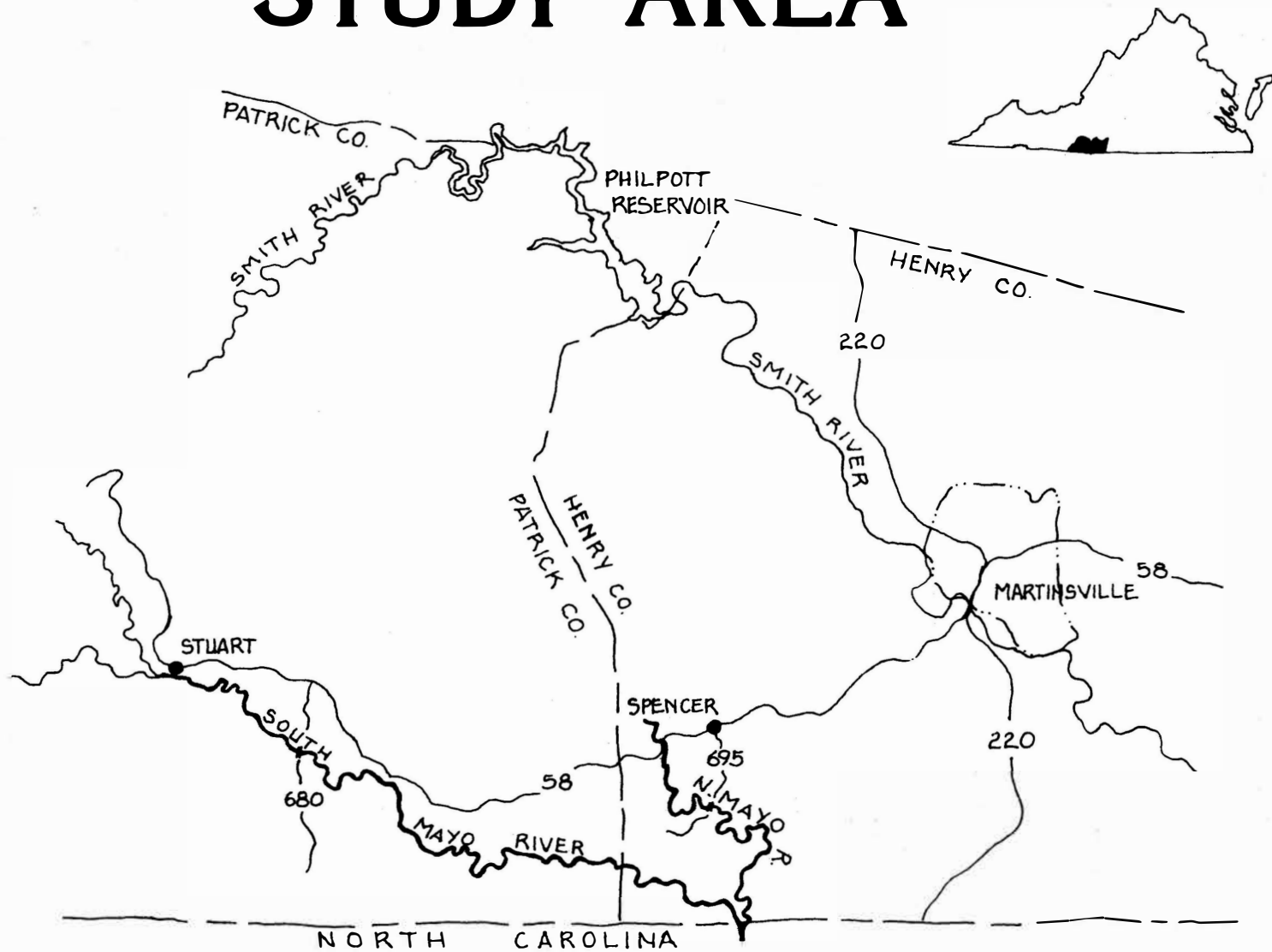
A 1969 report by the Commission of Outdoor Recreation entitled "Virginia's Scenic Rivers" recommended the establishment of a State Scenic Rivers System. The enabling legislation for such a system was enacted by the 1970 General Assembly in the form of The Scenic Rivers Act, Title 10, Chapter 15, Sections 10-167 through 10-175 of the Code of Virginia.

The Scenic Rivers Act states in part: "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Commonwealth of Virginia that rivers, streams, runs and waterways including their shores and immediate environs which possess great natural and pastoral beauty constitute natural resources, the conservation of which constitutes a beneficial public purpose."

Virginia House Joint Resolution No. 219 directed the Commission of Outdoor Recreation to make a study of the North and South Mayo Rivers in Patrick and Henry Counties to determine if they are suitable for inclusion in the Virginia Scenic Rivers System. The resolution, however, did not request a complete Scenic River Study Report. Therefore, this study involved only those factors necessary to determine resource quality, and did not involve alternative resource uses, the development of a conservation plan or the formulation of specific designation recommendations.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the South Mayo River from its headwaters to State Route 680 and the North Mayo River from its headwaters to State Route 695 did not merit further consideration. Extensive agricultural development and the elimination of most of the riparian vegetation has significantly altered the natural, scenic and recreational attributes of these river segments. Unless otherwise stated, the remainder of this report deals with the lower 25.5 miles of the South Mayo and the lower 7 miles of the North Mayo River in Virginia.

MAYO RIVER STUDY AREA



HISTORY

Archeological evidence indicates that the Mayo River basin was inhabited by both prehistoric and historic Indian tribes. The southern fork of the ancient Great Warriors Path, used by many major Indian tribes along the east coast, traversed both the North and South Mayo River.

The first documented exploration of the region occurred in 1730 when William Byrd conducted a survey establishing the Virginia-North Carolina border. It was Byrd who first named the river Mayo.

Settlement in the vicinity of the Mayo began about 1750 as residents of previously settled portions of Eastern Virginia began to move west. Early residents farmed the fertile bottom land along the more accessible reaches of the Mayo. The homes these early residents built ranged from simple log structures to large Georgian plantation houses. Several mills were built along the river and served as important centers of commerce and social activity for area residents. Fort Mayo was constructed in 1756 during the French and Indian War to provide protection for area residents. Although the remains of this historic structure have not been located in recent times, it is thought to have stood in the vicinity of what is now the community of Stella along the North Mayo River in Patrick County.

VEGETATION

The North and South Mayo Rivers flow through a very remote sparsely settled region of Virginia. Much of the length of both rivers wind through steep walled, heavily forested valleys. Oak-Hickory is the principal forest cover type. White Pine-Hemlock and Elm-Ash-Cottonwood associations are also found in scattered areas of both stream valleys.

Mountain Laurel, wild azalea and dogwood are the primary understory species. The thick woodlands along these rivers harbor several rare plant species, including Panax quinquefolium (ginseng), Panax trifolium (dwarf ginseng) and Stewartia ovata (Mountain Camellia).

The combination of steep topography and thick vegetation preclude inland views a majority of the time.

FISH AND WILDLIFE

The headwaters streams of the South Mayo River hold good populations of wild trout and on several lower headwater stretches the Game Commission operates a put-n-take trout stocking program. The main-streams of both the North and South Mayo Rivers are considered warm water fisheries. Although no official data exists on the warm water sport fishery, the rivers many rapids and riffles, rock and gravel bed and clean water provide good habitat for smallmouth bass, rock-bass and sunfish. Where the stream is readily accessible its banks show signs of light to moderate use by local fishermen.

The river corridor is heavily wooded and provides good wildlife habitat. Deer, racoon, opossum, muskrat and groundhog are among the more common furbearing mammals occupying the ridges and floodplains along the rivers. Numerous game and nongame species of bird life can also be found in the riverside fields and forests.

WATER QUALITY AND FLOW

Water quality in the North and South Mayo Rivers is good and both are classified as IV-B by the State Water Control Board. This classification applies to waters which are generally satisfactory for use as public or municipal water supply, primary contact recreation, propagation of fish and other aquatic life and other beneficial uses.

Available data indicates that the North and South Mayo Rivers are almost identical with respect to average flow. Although the flow of both streams is sufficient to support fishing and swimming during the prime outdoor recreation season, canoeing is generally possible only during the late winter and spring months when water volumes are higher than average.

RECREATIONAL RIVER USE

Recreational use of both the North and South Mayo is relatively light and limited primarily to canoeing, kyacking, fishing and hunting. There is very little evidence of recreational use along the banks of either stream. Primary access to both streams is via privately owned land or public road crossings. There are two bridges across the North Mayo and three across the South Mayo. However, none of these bridges appear to be heavily used by recreationists.

Both the North and South Mayo are canoeable an average of four months a year, during the late winter and spring. The lower five miles of the South Mayo, from Virginia Route 695 to Route 691 in North Carolina, and eight miles of the North Mayo, from Virginia Route 695 to Route 691 in North Carolina, are the most popular stretches, primarily because of the Class II and III whitewater and the scenic and remote surroundings.

There are no publicly owned canoeing access areas or other recreation facilities on either the North or South Mayo.

RIPARIAN LAND USE

A majority of the lands along the river are heavily forested. Although an occasional corn field, pasture or logging operation is visible from the river, most of the corridor is void of man-made intrusions. This lack of development is due primarily to low regional populations and the steep topography bordering the rivers throughout much of study segments. Rather than constituting an objectionable intrusion, most of the pastures that are visible, provide a pleasant variation in the typically enclosed view which predominates the river-scape.

Only 12 structures are visible from the water along the 25.5 mile study segment of the South Mayo River. All of these structures, five houses, five barns and two log cabins, are farm or recreation related. Two houses are visible along the 7.5 miles of the North Mayo under study, and both are farm houses. None of the structures which are visible from these streams constitute significant visual intrusions.

EXISTING LAND USE CONTROLS

Other than the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code, which regulates the placement of permanent structures within a river's floodplain, neither the North nor South Mayo is protected by land use controls. Patrick and Henry Counties have both adopted comprehensive plans. According to these plans, neither county anticipates or recommends any significant changes in land use in the immediate vicinity of either river. To date, neither county has adopted a zoning ordinance for use in the implementation of their comprehensive plan.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The purpose of the Scenic Rivers program is to provide for the identification, preservation and protection of certain rivers or sections of rivers whose scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic and cultural attributes combine to make them resources of statewide significance. The North and South Mayo Rivers, due largely to their location in a remote area of the State, exhibit only limited evidence of man's presence. The narrow, heavily wooded valleys which enclose the rivers provide exceptionally good habitat for game and non-game wildlife species alike. Both rivers are accessible and provide good fishing and canoeing opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Based on these findings, it is the determination of the Commission of Outdoor Recreation that the North and South Mayo Rivers, from a resource quality standpoint, qualify for inclusion in the Virginia Scenic Rivers System.