

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Stafford
Program Title: Rappahannock River Mile Marker System
Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Thomas C. Foley
Title: County Administrator
Signature: Thomas C. Foley

1. Program Overview

The Rappahannock River Mile Marker System program was created by members of Stafford Fire and Rescue's Swift Water Rescue Team and the Watershed Manager for the City of Fredericksburg to allow the numerous recreational users of the river a way to identify their location in the event of an emergency better. Large, easily visible signs were placed on the "river left" side of the river at documented mile marks. The signs were created to complement the terrain and not to detract from the scenic view. Members of the Swift Water Rescue Team and the River Steward used existing equipment and personal equipment – canoes, kayaks and an inflatable boat to carry the signs and tools to install them. They also worked with the Fredericksburg Police Public Information Officer and members of Stafford's Community Engagement Program to create a video to accompany an outreach campaign on using the signs.

2. The Problem or Need for the Program

The Rappahannock River runs along the border of Stafford County and the City of Fredericksburg. It is a heavily used recreational resource for both the County and the City. People kayak, canoe, float and pilot motorized boats on the river. This particular stretch of the river runs for miles along the Rapidan River to its confluence with the Rappahannock River and along the Rappahannock. Much of the riverside is heavily wooded. Recreational users who find themselves in trouble have issues explaining their location to public safety personnel. When asked for identifying landmarks, most say they see lots of trees. This drawback has made it difficult for both Stafford Fire and Rescue teams and City of Fredericksburg personnel to reach those in need of assistance. Stafford Fire and Rescue estimates that each call requires an average of four hours to run, involving multiple responders at the cost of around \$16,000. It prevents

responders from being available to work other calls and leaves other areas of the County understaffed. Moreover, with the busy nature of the Rappahannock, the costs for the rescues could rack up hundreds of thousands of dollars in one summer. Members of Stafford Fire and Rescue's Swift Water Rescue Team decided there had to be a more efficient and cost-effective way to find those in need of help.

3. How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

- a. Innovation** – The Swift Water Rescue Team had heard of a similar program along the Shenandoah River used by the National Park Service. The team worked with staff from the City of Fredericksburg Police and the Friends of the Rappahannock to design the Rappahannock River mile marker program from scratch. In particular, the design of the signs was innovative because they were made to be visible but not to detract from the scenic view along the river, most of which land is in conservation easements. Personnel worked together to devise a delivery and installation method for the signs along the river, most of which is unreachable by road. They had to figure out how to carry all the supplies and signs in canoes and kayaks and climbed trees to install them. As well, a video was filmed to unveil the new system to the public and how to use it. Using social media and websites to distribute the video was more innovative than just a simple map.
- b. Partnering** – This was a tremendous opportunity to partner with another locality and a community organization. Members of Stafford's Swift Water Rescue team worked with the City of Fredericksburg's Watershed Manager, a policeman who is responsible for patrolling the riverfront on both sides of the river, for conceiving and implementing the plan. As well, they worked with the Friends of the Rappahannock, a

group that works at the local, state and federal level to conserve and protect the river.

All three entities partnered to balance the pristine natural appearance of the watershed with the safety of its users.

- c. Model for Other Localities – This process would be relatively easy to replicate for anyone with miles of shoreline to monitor. It was a simple matter of gaining consensus among stakeholders, ordering and installing signs and getting the word out to the public. The cost was low, and from start to finish, the project took about 13 months.

4. Description of the Program

Members of Stafford Fire and Rescue - Swift Water Rescue Team were looking for a better way to locate recreational users in trouble on the Rappahannock River. They teamed up with the City of Fredericksburg to install a “mile marker” system to aid people to pinpoint their location. They also filmed and distributed a “how-to” video aimed at educating boaters, floaters and others.

The Rappahannock River is the longest free-flowing river on the East Coast and comes together with the Rapidan River at what is called “The Confluence,” about 10 miles upriver from Stafford and Fredericksburg. A significant portion of the riverbanks is densely forested. Emergency operators would receive phone calls from people in distress. When they asked them where they were and what they could see, all they could say was, “Trees and water.” Calls on the river cost an average of \$16,000 because they take an average of four hours to run with multiple responders, searching over miles of terrain. The Swift Water Rescue Team decided there had to be a better way to locate those in distress more accurately and quickly.

Stafford reached out to Officer Joe Young of the Fredericksburg Police Department, who is the City’s Watershed Manager and patrols both sides of the river on easements owned by the City.

Stafford County, VA

The Swift Water Rescue Team pointed out that the Friends of the Rappahannock have a comprehensive trail guide to the river that identifies mileage along the river, but that users of the river have no way of knowing what mile they are on or passing. Officer Young and members of Stafford's team began researching how they could accomplish signage for miles.

They found that the National Park Service uses mile marker signs along the Shenandoah River, like mile markers on a highway. The signs help recreational users more accurately pinpoint their location, saving time and money and protecting the health and safety of responders tromping through the wilderness.

The Swift Water Rescue Team and Officer Young worked with the Friends of the Rappahannock to come up with a system of adhering signs safely to the trees along the river that would not detract from the scenery or damage the trees. They then spent several days kayaking and canoeing and physically attaching the signs themselves.

They canoed and kayaked down the river with tools and supplies, stopping to climb trees and place the sizeable brown metal signs with white lettering. The signs are located on "river left" if you are floating downstream on the Rappahannock. Emergency personnel asks users of the river to familiarize themselves with the mile signs and to mentally note their location via the mile markers as they move along the river. These markers start at Mile 14 on the Rapidan to the Confluence and run from Mile 138 at Kelly's Ford to Mile 99 at Muddy Creek on the Rappahannock.

They made a "how-to" video to help people understand how to use the signs. The video is from the perspective of the river, so viewers get a feel for what the signs look like from the water. The

video was disseminated via each locality's website, the Friends of the Rappahannock website and social media.

5. The Cost of the Program

The reflective signs were designed and manufactured for \$1,976. The rubber mounts for the trees were an additional \$350. In total, \$2,326 marked 48 miles of river.

6. Tangible Results or Measurable Outcomes of the Program

Members of Fire and Rescue report that the signs have helped immeasurably in locating those in distress upon the river. The signs aid with response times and reduce the cost of each run by requiring less personnel for decreased time, literally looking for a needle in a haystack. As well, it has freed up precious rescue resources to run other calls. Recreational users report the signs are useful for helping them to determine how far they have to go to their put out a spot ahead of darkness and storms. The signs give both public safety personnel and recreational users more of a sense of safety for everyone on the water

7. Brief Summary

Stafford's partnership with the City of Fredericksburg and the Friends of the Rappahannock to devise the Mile Marker System upon the Rappahannock River is worthy of an achievement award because it has improved safety for the many recreational users of the river. The Swift Water Rescue Team and the Watershed Manager had worked together enough to realize the problem with trying to locate lost folks upon the heavily wooded river. They collaborated to come up with a solution and worked together to implement it. It has benefited both localities and all recreational users. It has saved money for both localities and conserved precious emergency

resources. Their partnership is a model for how localities and community groups can work together for the betterment of the community.

Supporting Information

[Mile Markers on the Rappahannock River Video](#)









