



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your 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: Henrico County
Program Title: Land Lovers
Program Category: Agriculture, Environmental, & Energy

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Program Overview

The Land Lovers Series was established in Henrico County Public Libraries in 2022 in response to the need to raise public awareness and sensitivity to local environmental challenges and to increase participation in the County's Land Lover Award. An educational and motivational tool, the award recognizes efforts to improve and maintain the environmental sustainability of Henrico County properties.

In this new partnership program, presentations are offered at regular intervals throughout the year, free of charge to area residents and business owners on the topics of local ecosystem diversity and best management practices for water quality and soil health. Presenters are selected based on their ability to speak to these topics with special attention given to practical application.

The series aims to provide knowledge, skills, and motivation for residents to help address community environmental challenges. Participation has grown with a 66% increase since the program started, with nearly 200 attendees overall.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Similar to localities across the state, Henrico County is faced with the need to raise public awareness and sensitivity to environmental challenges. The Land Lovers Series was created to address this situation.

One way the County draws attention to the local environment is with its Land Lover's Award. An educational and motivational tool, the Land Lover's Award recognizes residents' efforts to improve and maintain the environmental sustainability of Henrico County properties. The Land Lover's Series is named after the Land Lover's Award to increase participation in the awards program. The awards are held annually by the Keep Henrico Beautiful Committee, and recipients are selected from a pool of nominees who demonstrate the use of

sustainability practices to improve and maintain their properties.

How The Program Fulfilled Award Criteria

The Keep Henrico Beautiful Division of Henrico County Public Utilities was organized in 1980 to improve environmental quality through the development of comprehensive educational programs to reduce litter and littering. In subsequent years, the mission expanded to offer area residents of all ages not just litter prevention and recycling programs, but also environmental education resources and volunteer opportunities. Since January 2022, Henrico County Public Library has partnered with Keep Henrico Beautiful to bring an ongoing lineup of programs called the Land Lovers Series to a primarily adult audience. These programs support the mission to educate and inspire residents about environmental best practices.

Caring for the environment is an important issue facing all localities. One way counties can amplify positive effects is by educating and inspiring residents to incorporate best practices in their own lives and yards.

Programs such as the Land Lovers Series offer practical, affordable, and easy-to-use ideas. Most notably, this series works with multiple partners to provide subject matter experts covering a wide array of topics. The Land Lovers Series provides a model for other localities to use, with flexibility to customize for the particular needs of a community.

How The Program Was Carried Out

Conversations about a possible partnership between Keep Henrico Beautiful and Henrico County Public Library began in July 2021. Planning began in earnest the following month. The two groups worked together to raise awareness of community environmental challenges and to increase participation in the annual Henrico County Land Lover Award program. Henrico County Public Library provided accessible venues and a structured approach to provide direct access to ongoing adult educational programming and resources for area residents

and businesses. The proposed topics included environmental sustainability, local ecosystem diversity, and best management practices for water quality and soil health, with an emphasis on practical application.

Startup funds were allocated for paid presenters, calendars were reviewed, and potential topics and presenters were jointly identified, with Keep Henrico Beautiful taking the lead for a planned three-part program series starting in January 2022. Initial discussions were also based on how to schedule programs effectively for the needs of the community. Much thought was given to venue selection (which library locations and neighborhoods) and when or what time of the day. These discussions resulted in the decision that the Land Lovers Series programs would be offered in turn at all library locations county-wide, and, where feasible, a select number of them would be offered twice, repeating the information for two audiences located in different neighborhoods. To make the programs even more accessible, they would be offered at different times and days. Some would be scheduled on Saturday mornings, while others on weekday evenings and afternoons.

In early spring 2022, the first of three presentations launched with “Composting for Beginners” in January, “Milkweed for Monarchs” followed in February, and “Pollinator Gardens” in March. The composting and milkweed programs were each offered twice at Henrico County Libraries, located 40 minutes from one another. Attendance numbers were strong overall in these pilot sessions, so the decision was made to continue the series. Evaluating program performance by using attendance statistics and audience feedback allowed for refinement and adjustments to be made to the upcoming schedule for fall 2022.

Programs presented in fall 2022 included “Tree Planting and Maintenance” in September, “Bats Among Us” in October, and “Native Plants for Backyard Habitats” in November. All three programs focused on wildlife native to Virginia and on learning about the role of diversity in our regional ecosystem. The strongest attendance was

seen in the two native plants program offerings.

Spring 2023 programming consisted of a presentation by the “Bluebird Society of Virginia” in February, “Invasive Species in Your Landscape” in March, and “Vermicomposting” in April. Again, all three programs had consistently good attendance, and, based on audience feedback, there were indications that the series was beginning to develop a following.

The signature program in fall 2023 was “Capital Trees is Making Henrico a Greener Place.” Capital Trees is a local non-profit that works in partnership with Henrico County to cultivate additional green spaces in our jurisdiction. This program was offered in-person and virtually to make it accessible to as many interested parties as possible. Recommendations on native trees and tips, and techniques for successful site selection and planting were covered. Other programs this season included “Biodiversity in Your Landscape” and “Over the Garden Fence.” The latter took a closer look at previous Henrico County Land Lover Award-winners and explained award eligibility and how to make a nomination for the annual award.

By 2024, the pattern of offering three Land Lovers Series programs in the early spring and three each fall had been established as a successful model. The programs are promoted each season as a trio, allowing attendees to look forward to upcoming events. Spring 2024 offerings included “Living with Black Bears” in late January (provided by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Conservation), “Container Gardening with Native Plants” in March, and “Snakes, the Ecosystem, and Us” in May. Programs scheduled for Fall 2024 consisted of “Rain Gardens” in September, “Native Bees and Bringing Back Pollinators” (with the Xerces Society) in October, and “Wildlife Rescue with AWARE” in November. The program with AWARE, an acronym for Alliance of Wild Animal Rehabilitators and Educators, was offered twice and received the highest numbers of attendees to date.

Live animals were present, including possums, turtles, and birds, and speakers covered strategies for assisting stranded or injured wildlife.

Since the inception of Land Lovers Series programming, the priority has been to identify presenters with high-quality credentials, current information, and excellent communication and public speaking skills. Program topics are developed based on participant feedback, local and national trends in environmental sustainability practices, and availability. The plan is to continue the series indefinitely as a means of increasing environmental literacy among area residents.

The successful program continues to this day and is among the library's most popular programs, as Keep Henrico Beautiful and Henrico Library deliver regularly scheduled informational workshops and classes dedicated to local environmental challenges, offering possible solutions and encouraging civic engagement on the subject.

Financing and Staffing

To develop a continuously ongoing program series, Henrico Library and Keep Henrico Beautiful have been intentional about budgeting with both current and future costs in mind. This is in addition to always demonstrating conscientious spending on behalf of Henrico County residents. For program presenters, a focus on local resources eliminated the need to pay for travel expenses. Fortunately, Henrico County is a suburb of the capital city of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Richmond. The state's Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) and Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) are headquartered in nearby Richmond and can often provide a high level of expertise for programs. In particular, the Virginia Master Naturalists, sponsored by the Virginia Cooperative Extension, DWR, DCR, and others, have offered programs related to environmental

sustainability free of charge. Henrico County Master Gardeners and Keep Henrico Beautiful staff members have also been a free source of high-quality programs. Paid presenters have been chosen from local non-profits and locally-owned small businesses. Charges per local presenter typically fall in the range of \$100-\$150 per visit for a 60-minute educational program.

There were no hard expenses for the Land Lovers Series during fiscal year 2024-2025. The series had six presenters, none of whom accepted payment. In other years, the average costs have been \$400. Typically, there is payment for two presentations out of seven scheduled programs.

Other than scheduled staff time for planning and implementation, there are no other costs due to the fact that promotion is through the Library's and Public Works' regular channels, such as the library website, newsletters, event calendars, the print program guide, and fliers or posters. The social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram are also used. Presenters are provided with image files to share with their followers, and often, County-wide internal promotions are tapped to announce Land Lovers Series programs.

Program Results

Designed to increase environmental literacy, and, as a potential result, raise awareness and participation in the Henrico County Land Lover Award, the Land Lovers Series has experienced measurable successes in a few ways. During the pilot phase of season one in spring of 2022, the three programs resulted in 76 total attendees. In spring of 2024, total attendance was 91, and in fall of 2024, it had risen to 126. Additionally, feedback from program participants in informal surveys shows that most find the selected topics relevant and interesting. Attendees' remarks include appreciation for access to local expertise and a desire for continuous learning. The Q&A sessions scheduled after each Land Lovers Series program are always lively and serve as a means of highlighting local concerns and providing a safe space for community dialogue. All in attendance learn from

listening to others and often help in answering. The collaborative spirit and willingness to share ideas and information amongst the attendees are among the visible strengths of this type of community program.

By the spring of 2023, there were indications that the programming series was beginning to develop a following. Program attendees asked for upcoming event information by name, recognizing and using the phrase “Land Lovers.” Notably, the local Master Naturalists, Riverine Chapter, observed the quality of the presenters and topics addressed in the Land Lovers Series. They shared Land Lovers programming information with their members and recommended the vermicomposting workshop as part of their training program.

The success of the Land Lovers Series is ultimately based on the ability of this programming to raise awareness about environmental processes and human impacts, in addition to fostering an appreciation of local biodiversity so that area residents and businesses are empowered to make informed decisions. Every effort is made to provide expert resources on relevant conservation and environmental sustainability topics. To further connect program participants to the community, one another, and encourage environmental stewardship and civic engagement, details about participating in the Henrico County Land Lover Award process and volunteer opportunities, such as the annual James River clean-up project, are shared at each meeting.

The connections and support the Land Lovers Series provides for the Land Lovers Award continue to grow. One of the recent winners learned about the contest through the classes. The two efforts complement each other well—recently, one of the award winners presented a program.

Executive Summary

The Land Lovers Series began as a collaboration between Henrico County Public Utilities' Keep Henrico Beautiful Division and the Henrico Library in 2022. The program successfully addresses the need to raise public awareness and sensitivity to local environmental challenges. It also works to increase participation in Henrico County's Land Lover Award. This successful program offers three classes at Henrico libraries each spring and fall, for a total of six per year. The presenting partners build and leverage relationships within the community to cover a variety of environmental topics. Not only does Land Lovers bring the public together, it allows the County to make connections with other entities, such as the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). It helps build community by engaging with other groups such as Henrico County Master Gardeners and Virginia Master Naturalists. These relationships often result in cost savings when presenters provide a high level of expertise at minimal or no charge.

The Land Lovers Series has quickly gained a following with people asking for it by name. Since its inception in the Spring of 2022 to the Fall of 2024, attendance has increased 66 percent with nearly 200 attendees overall. The classes are among the library's most popular, covering topics such as the importance of native plants, how to sustain pollinators, and living in harmony with wildlife. The Land Lovers Series can easily be replicated, scaled, and customized for a community's needs. The topics related to native plants, trees, pollinators, and wildlife, are broad enough to be of interest in any locality, and could be adapted with information for a specific area. By following the Land Lover's model, other localities could reach out to potential partners and successfully engage residents and businesses to adopt environmental best practices and start their own "Land Lovers" awards. In just a little over two years, the program is starting to come full circle by raising awareness of the Land Lovers Award. Recently, a Land Lovers award-winner presented a Land Lovers program. Just as Land Lovers classes support sustainability, the program itself is proving to be sustainable.

LAND LOVERS SERIES

Henrico County Public Library

