The End

Joan Blankenship, Conservation Director Retired

It has been a long time since I sat at a meeting with Gary Martel, traveled the many miles to Broad Street and then made a longer drive to Henrico. Mix a few trips to Lake Gaston, Smith Mountain Lake, Lake Anna, and Claytor and you can see that I spent quite a bit of my life on the road advocating for anglers throughout the commonwealth. This was one piece of my job and it wasn’t the fun part.

One fact is that I have never been a lone ranger and all of my work is possible because of a great team that included John Copeland, DWR, Ivan and Janet Morris, Mike and Pam Bryant, John Ayers, Ed Rhodes and an assortment of great personalities that have stuck with me through the years.

For years conservation took the back seat for everything else until Noreen Clough came along. Then conservation directors became voting board members and a stronger role started to emerge. We were visible. Sponsors appeared. Gene Gilliland took over after Noreen’s untimely death and conservation became even more important and visible. More grants were available.

The fun part was the Shimano cages, the work with John Ayers at Patrick Henry Community College, the AFTCO Clean-up, great support from Appalachian Power and FOCL with the help of Elizabeth Parcel, Laura Walters and Jeff Arnold. Friends of Reservoirs and Mossback grants were stretched through matches and partnerships. The last Mossback that has my signature on it will go into Claytor Lake under the supervision of John Copeland and FOCL.

No summary would be complete without the eelgrass. I just loved growing it and if Scott Smith hadn’t said that I couldn’t move grass from one lake to another, it would never have happened.

It is time for me to leave. The next team already has a good relationship carved out with the Department of Wildlife Resources as Mike Bednarski has already held the conservation director position. Anyone with an interest needs to talk to Mike.

Here are some of the pieces to consider. Fish conservation at tournaments and Steve Woodroof knows this task well. He would also make a good team leader.

Second, grants writer. There is a lot of money that gets left on the table for conservation. This is fun.

Third, Conference attendee at the Bass Master Classic. Lots of fun when you don’t have to deal with COVID.

Fourth, AFTCO ramp clean up. A perfect fit for our high school anglers.

Finally, the legislative action for budding lawyers that starts in August of every year. Bruce Dungan and Ed Rhodes kept me informed and to them I owe a really special thank you for saving me hours of wading through proposals that go nowhere.

I have lasted in this position longer than anyone and the special people in my life have already received a call from me. This decision was not made quickly. It is my turn to go fishing.