The Problem with the Outer Beltway

VDOT is pushing to create a new major highway in Northern Virginia referred to (among other names) as the Outer Beltway. PEC’s take? This mega-highway would cut through a National Park, open up over 100,000 acres to residential development, and has the potential to actually increase traffic congestion on I-66 and Rt. 50. The good news is—after years of trying to get more press coverage and citizen engagement on the issue—we may have reached a turning point.

The Outer Beltway (coined the “North-South Corridor” by VDOT) isn’t just a bad deal for the residents of Prince William and Loudoun Counties—it’s a bad deal for people who live in neighboring counties, and for Virginia taxpayers as a whole.

- It would cost at least $1 billion, and associated connector roads to the west side of Dulles could cost $500 million or more.
- It doesn’t address the overwhelming east-west traffic problem faced by Northern Virginia residents and travelers (and there are better ways to fix north-south traffic).
- It would spark higher levels of residential development within the Prince William Rural Crescent and the Loudoun Rural Transition Area, adding more traffic to already congested commuter routes I-66 and Rt. 50.
- It comes with extensive negative impacts—to the environment (think runoff and air quality); to the existing communities (it would split neighborhoods from schools, increasing noise and air pollution); and to historic resources, including Manassas National Battlefield Park.

The Impact on the National Park

As proposed, the Outer Beltway would cut through the western edge of Manassas National Battlefield Park. This has proved to be an important sticking point, because it means that VDOT needs permission to proceed from the National Park Service. But this is also where it gets complicated, because while the Park Service is clearly interested in protecting the battlefield, it is also obligated to comply with 1988 federal legislation that directs it to “develop plans for the closing of those public highways (known as Rts. 29 and 234) that transect the park.”

The Virginia Secretary of Transportation, Sean Connnaughton, and VDOT are using this situation to pressure the National Park Service to accept the Outer Beltway. They claim that if the Park Service insists on to the west side of Dulles could cost $500 million or more. Planners to the park. They also obligated to comply with 1988 federal legislation that directs it to “develop plans for the closing of those public highways (known as Rts. 29 and 234) that transect the park.”

Growing Opposition

PEC has been keeping an eye on this proposed project for decades, but we relaunched in early 2011 when the Commonwealth Transportation Board made it clear that the road was going to be a priority for the McDonnell Administration. Since then, we’ve been writing, talking, and sometimes jumping up and down—trying to bring attention to this wasteful proposal.

In late 2012, VDOT finally put some more detailed lines on the map for the “N-S Corridor,” and then soliciting citizen input on the plan. Since then, there’s been

The Piedmont Through the Viewfinder

they say a picture’s worth a thousand words, and that couldn’t be more true than when it comes to the beauty of Virginia’s Piedmont. No one knows this better than our regional photographers. With this region’s mountains, rolling farmland, forests, meadows, rivers, waterfalls, wildlife, plants, interesting towns and history—it’s enough to make anyone have to grab a camera and start shooting.

PEC will continue to celebrate the Piedmont’s photographers of all skill levels with the opening of our 4th Annual Photo Contest this July. We’ve been delighted with the success of our past three contests, and we are excited to see this year’s submissions.

Support PEC

Make a donation or get in touch with PEC at:
Post Office Box 446
Warrenton, VA 20188
540.347.2334 (general)
540.316.9972 (donations)
pec@pecva.org
or make a secure online donation at www.pecva.org

Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!

Photo by David Anhold

www.pecva.org

pec@pecva.org

Meet regional photographer David Anhold on page 5.
The Problem with the Outer Beltway

The real reason this project is being pushed seems much simpler and fairly classic: a major road would bring major profits to the developers who have purchased land along the route.

Better Alternatives

PEC staff have crafted an alternative plan to the Outer Beltway, and we welcome your feedback. Our proposal focuses on fixing the current east-west routes for commuters, and it provides lower impact fixes on local roads as well as additional connections to help local residents. It would preserve Prince William’s Rural Crescent and Loudoun’s Rural Transition Area, and it would improve access to Dulles. Our proposal prioritizes long-promised, but much-delayed improvements like:

- Improving the interchange at Braddock Road and Rt. 28
- Expanding the interchange at I-66 and Rt. 28
- Extending VRE to Gainesville and Metrorail to Centreville
- Targeted use of roundabouts to keep people from sitting at key intersections in Loudoun and Prince William.

At a VDOT meeting in early June, over 600 citizens attended—with a majority opposed to the Beltway. Photos by Br West

A Conservation Ethic...

Marie Ridder

by Katherine Vance

To say that Marie Ridder, 88, is an accomplished woman is an understatement—and as I drove to meet her for our interview, I was both excited and nervous. Marie has been a highly successful journalist and editor who would later devote her career to social and environmental issues. She worked for Lady Bird Johnson in the ’60s as her liaison to White House poverty programs, and became the deputy director of Head Start. Marie also worked for the Department of the Interior and was appointed to Secretary of the National Parks Advisory Board. She serves or has served in numerous conservation organizations, including the Virginia State Parks Commission, the Virginia Council on the Environment, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and PEC. She helped acquire the first state park on VA’s Eastern Shore at Kiptopeke, and spearheaded funding for important studies of migratory bird patterns to prioritize land conservation. Marie also chose to permanently protect the rest of Kiptopeke, and spearheaded funding for important studies of migratory bird patterns to prioritize land conservation. Marie also chose to permanently protect the rest of Kiptopeke, and spearheaded funding for important studies of migratory bird patterns to prioritize land conservation. Marie also chose to permanently protect the rest of Kiptopeke, and spearheaded funding for important studies of migratory bird patterns to prioritize land conservation. Marie also chose to permanently protect the rest of Kiptopeke, and spearheaded funding for important studies of migratory bird patterns to prioritize land conservation.

It is only with an informed and engaged citizenry that we can keep publicly funded infrastructure and eminent domain from being used for needless, damaging projects. We hope you’ll weigh in with your local, state and national officials about the need to take this project off the priority list.

Add Your Voice

We’ve created an email campaign for our federal and state elected officials. Take a moment to write by visiting our webpage: www.pecva.org/outerbeltway
Alex Ramey of Culpeper grew up in suburban neighborhoods without exposure to the wilderness. She laughs and says that her closest contact to the “wild” as a kid was a single tree in her backyard. “It’s not that I didn’t like being outside,” Alex explains, “but I had never really been in wild places. I know a lot of people have felt a connection with the outdoors since they were really young and went fishing with their grandpa or something, but I never had that.”

Today, that has all changed. Alex just finished her first year at Roanoke College, and she has officially declared herself an environmental studies major. She is also co-president of Earthbound, the environmental education club on campus—where she organizes and leads hikes, field trips to nature preserves, tree plantings, and helps with campus-wide recycling. Alex is passionate about the environment, and is the kind of student who goes to her environmental studies professors to see how she can be even more involved—creating new projects and initiatives on her own time.

“We rely on a healthy environment to be healthy ourselves,” says Alex. “We need clean water, clean air and healthy ecosystems... From a personal level, I think people need nature to be fulfilled. I have seen what it has done to me—to be outside, to go hiking, to watch a sunrise over a mountain. I think it is almost a spiritual thing that people have lost touch with.”

So, how did the kid who didn’t feel a connection to the environment grow into a young woman determined to help protect it? The answer is Envirothon.

Envirothon is an annual academic competition for high school students in which the students develop solutions to real-life environmental issues. Alex joined the Envirothon group at her high school because they desperately needed another member. "My biology teacher practically begged me to join," she laughs. "I thought it could be fun, and I wanted to try something different.”

The experience changed Alex. She and her teammates focused the pollution issues in the Chesapeake Bay, and she was taken in by learning about this real-life problem facing her region. “Over time I realized that I was developing a passion for what we were doing,” she remembers. “I had never really known what I wanted to do when I grew up, but that totally changed... I want to find something that caters to this new passion for nature and my desire to promote change.”

Alex is optimistic about the future, and about her generation’s ability to take on some of the issues facing us today. Yet, she knows it will never be easy: “Making change is really hard,” she says. “Our environmental issues are some of the most difficult problems that you can come into contact with. But, that’s what I want to do.”

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What Is a Comprehensive Plan, and Why Should We Care?

Six of PEC’s nine counties are in the process of updating their Comprehensive Plans, or will be doing so soon. It can be easy to tune out these updates, but revisions to the ‘Comp Plan’ can mean drastic changes to the look, feel, and functionality of your county town, and day-to-day life. This is because the Comp Plan is the community’s most important document regarding land use, growth, development, transportation, and resource utilization.

This document is a community’s road map for the future. It projects needs and trends over the next twenty years, and every locality in Virginia is required to have one. A Comp Plan covers topics as basic as where to place crosswalks, and as detailed as specific policies to address energy conservation. Although this Plan is not legally binding, it’s intended to guide all local policy and to serve as legal justification for a City or County’s decisions on proposed projects and development.

State law requires that Comp Plans be reviewed, and potentially revised, every five years. During this revision process, there’s often a temptation to allow for a major increase in new residential development and expanded non-agricultural commercial activities in the rural area—particularly during a down economy.

Due to the importance of these documents, and the potential impact of revisions, PEC follows this process closely in our nine-county region. Our staff contribute comments and suggestions at public meetings, and we keep citizens informed as to what proposed changes could mean for their community. Most importantly, PEC works to assure that the revision does not eliminate or alter current policies that PEC has long supported and worked hard to maintain. PEC wouldn’t be able to do this without citizen participation, so stay tuned and be sure to attend public meetings concerning your locality’s Comp Plan.

Comprehensive Plan Updates in Our Region

**Albemarle County**—PEC is concerned about recent efforts to expand non-agricultural commercial activities into Albemarle’s Rural Area. On July 23rd, the County Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the draft Comp Plan. PEC will track this issue and provide comments at the hearing. We will keep you informed as to how you can provide input. We hope to see you at the hearing!

**Questions?** Contact PEC’s Jeff Werner: jwerner@pecva.org

**Clarke County**—The County’s initial Comp Plan draft was out for public review and comment through June 14th. PEC provided comments and will be following the process through to the Board of Supervisors’ vote to adopt the Plan. Some good news: the draft features strengthened resource protection measures and a new objective highlighting the importance of conservation easements.

**Questions?** Contact PEC’s Gem Bingol: gbingol@pecva.org

**Fauquier County**—Fauquier will be reviewing and potentially revising multiple parts of the Comp Plan— including the Rural Land Use, Natural and Historic Resources, Telecommunication (regarding cell phone towers), and Opal Service District Plans. The Rural Land Use and Natural and Historic Resource Plans provide the framework to preserve our scenic landscapes and rural character. We encourage residents to stay informed, because there’s often pressure to remove important preservation tools.

**Questions?** Contact Julie Bohthouse, PEC’s Fauquier County Land Use Officer: jbothhouse@pecva.org

**Loudoun County**—While Loudoun is not currently going through a full Comp Plan review, the Board of Supervisors is being petitioned to amend the current Plan. The petitioners would like approximately 425 acres of Loudoun’s Rural Policy Area to be rezoned to permit higher density development. PEC is very concerned about this piecemeal development. PEC is very concerned about this piecemeal rezoning to permit higher density development. PEC is very concerned about this piecemeal rezoning to permit higher density development.

**Questions?** Contact Julie Bohthouse, PEC’s Fauquier County Land Use Officer: jbothhouse@pecva.org

**Orange County**—PEC feels that the current draft being considered in Orange is a severe departure from the standing Comp Plan. The impacts this draft would have on housing values, future tax rates, and Orange’s rural character are extreme. If it’s approved, many productive agricultural lands will be targeted for increased density and non-agricultural commercial activities. Also, expanded economic development areas encourages new residential, industrial and commercial—ignoring a backlog of vacant properties currently zoned for development and thousands of unbuilt, approved housing units. The County will host meeting dates in the near future, and we will keep you updated.

**Questions?** Contact PEC’s Dan Holmes: dholmes@pecva.org

**Rappahannock County**—Rappahannock’s Comp Plan is currently being updated. While many members of the community have made suggestions and comments, there is still at least two more opportunities for the public to weigh in. As it stands, the County’s Plan provides a strong vision of protecting the County’s natural and cultural resources. We hope you will join PEC in telling the Planning Commission that the County should continue down this path.

**Questions?** Contact PEC’s Don Loock: dloock@pecva.org

Reading Between the [Power] Lines

Dominion Power has come back to Fauquier County with yet another transmission line proposal. The plans for this new proposal are still vague, but Dominion is floating two different ideas:

1. **Rebuilding a 230 kV line from Remington to Warrenton within the existing right of way, and upgrading an overloaded line near Gainesville from 115 kV to 230 kV**

2. **Create a new transmission corridor from east of Warrenton to the Gainesville substation near Vint Hill**

We are very concerned about this second idea. Though they have yet to put any lines on a map for this proposal, Dominion has created a study area in northern Fauquier County that encompasses two Civil War battlefields, a Historic District, six schools, numerous neighborhoods, and over 25,000 acres of rural land in the Cedar Run watershed. PEC is concerned that Dominion wants to build new lines across historic countryside without adequately exploring less intrusive solutions.

Dominion spokespersons claim that there is a need in the area for the new lines, and PEC is planning to work with engineers to evaluate their claims. At a minimum, Dominion must analyze whether there are lower voltage solutions that can accomplish the same reliability goal with less impact on the surrounding communities.

Dominion has created a citizens advisory group to help a routing consultant locate sensitive areas. The group has met three times and will continue to meet throughout the summer. We will keep citizens informed as this issue progresses.

For more information about this issue, contact Rob Marmet, PEC’s Senior Energy Policy Analyst: rmarmet@pecva.org or (540) 347.2334

The comp plan is a community’s road map for the future—with a plan for future land use, growth, development, transportation and resource utilization. Photos by Katherine Vance

www.pecva.org
PEC’s Piedmont Memorial Overlook

In 2000, PEC purchased over 1,200 acres of Ovoka Farm (in Paris, VA) to ensure that this beautiful property—and the vista enjoyed by a young George Washington—remains rural for generations to come. All of the land is now protected by conservation easements and back in private ownership. However, PEC retained ownership of 50 acres at the top of the ridge called the Piedmont Memorial Overlook.

PEC will care for this 50 acres in perpetuity—a beautiful site that overlooks one of the most protected landscapes in the Eastern United States. PEC has three main goals for this land: to act as a memorial site for this region’s conservationists; to be a showcase and demonstration site for good habitat management practices; and to provide the public access to a spectacular overlook along the Appalachian Trail.

PEC received a grant from the USDA to improve wildlife habitat on the property, and we’ve been busy ever since! We started renovating a fescue pasture into a native grass and wildflower meadow, as well as working to remove and control woody invasive plants on the property. And in May, PEC began a second round of bird, pollinator and vegetation surveys as part of Virginia Working Landscapes.

PEC will be hosting all sorts of outreach events at the Piedmont Memorial Overlook—such as bird walks, wild edible walks, land management demonstrations, history hikes, and more. In the meantime, hikers along the Appalachian Trail and the Whitehouse Ridge Trail can enjoy the views provided by this high overlook to the Piedmont. Stay tuned for more events and updates on this beautiful corner of the world!

PEC Receives ESRI Mapping Grant

PEC was excited to receive a geographic information systems (GIS) software and training grant from Earth Sciences Research Institute (ESRI) this spring—valued at more than $100,000. PEC uses ESRI’s ArcGIS software to produce high-quality maps and to analyze potential project impacts. This helps us convey important information to the public, partner groups and decision-makers about land use proposals, active campaigns (like uranium mining or the Outer Beltway), as well as land conservation successes and opportunities.

This grant provides a major upgrade to our current platform, and it will allow us to continue to innovate. Stay tuned for more interactive maps online that take advantage of this software.

A big thank you to ESRI’s Conservation Program for their continued support of non-profit work in the Conservation field!

To view PEC’s existing map library visit: www.pecva.org/maps

The Piedmont Through the Viewfinder

Continued from cover

Meet Photographer David Anhold

David Anhold regularly shares his photos with PEC, and we love how he captures the beauty of this region—from gorgeous panoramas to close-ups of insects. Anhold is a landscape architect based out of Albemarle County, but he’s always had an interest in photography and shoots as a hobby.

“I think it’s an outgrowth of my work as a landscape architect,” he says. “It’s a natural fit...Photography helps me notice that there is beauty around us all of the time. You just have to look.”

Anhold and his wife live at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and he loves to grab his camera and run up to the Blue Ridge Parkway when he sees a storm rolling in to get some dynamic landscape shots. His go-to is a view of Rockfish Valley from a Parkway overlook. Yet, he also likes to get low and look more closely at the macro world. “With this crazy world we live in,” he laughs, “there is something interesting at every level.”

Photography has instilled a deep appreciation in Anhold for this region’s natural resources, as well as an awareness of the need to protect them. “As a photographer who enjoys the outdoors,” he explains, “I know that we are blessed to have beautiful and bountiful natural places around us, and I absolutely see that we should protect these resources.”

Check out more of David Anhold’s work by visiting his Flickr page, www.flickr.com/danhold, and visit PEC’s webpage for more information about our photo contests: www.pecva.org/photocontest

Photos by David Anhold

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**On the Ground**

**FAUQUIER**

**Historic Warrenton Farm Property Protected**

Marion Poynter permanently protected her historic 47-acre farm property, called The Meadows, by donating a conservation easement this spring. The easement is held by PEC, and it was the first easement recorded in Fauquier County in 2013.

The property was a part of a grant from the King of England given to the Blackwell family in the mid-1700s, and the oldest part of the historic house was built in the late 1700s. The Blackwell-Carter Family Cemetery, where at least four generations of the Blackwell and Carter families are buried, lies just southeast of the house.

Poynter bought the property in 1983. “I didn’t know about the historical aspect of this house and property when I bought it,” she explains, “but now I find it the most interesting part. This is a reference to what used to be, and that’s fascinating and something worth preserving... since the property is on a scenic byway and close to town—it could be very appealing to developers. I wanted to be sure that didn’t happen.”

This easement will not only protect and important historical resource, but also the water quality of the streams on the property. These streams flow into Airlie Lake, which provides drinking water for Warrenton. They also flow into a tributary of Cedar Run, which is a part of the Occoquan watershed and provides drinking water for much of Northern Virginia.

“As I understand it, you can’t call yourself a Virginian unless you’ve been here for at least four generations,” laughs Poynter. “So, this is my way to be an adopted part of Virginia history... There are few things that you can really control after your death, but this is something that I can really ensure will continue on.”

Marion Poynter permanently protected her historic farm property this year. Photo by Katherine Vance

**A view from The Meadows in spring.** Photo by Katherine Vance

**ALBEMARLE**

**Despite questions and bumps in the road, VDOT continues to push the Western Bypass**

It’s been a year since Skanska-Branch was awarded the contract to build the Western Bypass. According to VDOT’s plan, environmental reviews were to be completed by November 2012—initiating the design work by Skanska-Branch. Construction is supposed to start in March 2014, and the road would be completed in late 2016. However, it’s now June 2013 and VDOT is no closer to moving forward than they were two years ago. In short, this project was never ‘shovel ready,’ as claimed by proponents.

Groups like the U.S Army Corps of Engineers and the EPA have raised significant questions about VDOT’s environmental review of the project. They are calling for a re-evaluation that includes comparison of alternatives, like Places29, which were not considered when the Bypass was first studied. Yet, VDOT continues to pressure the Federal Highway Administration to approve their current, inadequate review.

To top it off, the cost-cutting design submitted by Skanska-Branch has serious flaws. Project proponents insisted it would save travel time through the area, but a VDOT analysis of the Southern Terminus indicated little, if any, time savings. Design problems at Northern Terminus are also emerging. Solutions will not be cheap, and VDOT has not said where the additional funds needed would come from. They’ve also been silent about the impacts these changes will have on local traffic and neighborhoods.

This project is now almost a year behind schedule. With upcoming elections, VDOT and the McDonnell administration only have six months to get federal approval for this flawed project, as well as secure millions of additional funding needed to address those flaws. It is critical now for the community to continue to press VDOT for answers about this flawed project. We must continue to ask local, state, and federal officials to listen to the Army Corps and the EPA—insisting that VDOT complete a proper reevaluation; only possible through a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

We will be sure to keep the community informed of opportunities to help ensure that this wasteful project does not move forward.

For more information and to take action, visit our webpage: www.pecva.org/westernbypass

Mike Kane, PEC’s Loudoun County Conservation Officer, outside the new Middleburg office.

**LOUDOUN**

**New Middleburg Office and a Big ‘Thank You!’**

To better serve our Loudoun constituents, PEC opened the doors of a small, new office in Middleburg this spring. The office is located above the Middleburg Common Grounds coffee shop at 114 West Washington Street, directly across the street from the U.S Post Office. Be sure to stop by sometime and meet Mike Kane, PEC’s Loudoun County Conservation Officer.

We’d also like to thank the over 4,000 people who came out for this year’s EarthDay@Loudoun.

The event was a great success, and our staff had a blast getting to meet and chat with those who came by our stations. We hope to see you at next year’s event!
Madison’s Mountain Heritage Day—Celebrating our region’s story

In early March, PEC and the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) hosted a free, public “Mountain Heritage Day” at the historic Edgar Meadows’ Cabin in Syria. The open house event was a great success—with over 250 people stopping by throughout the day.

The purpose of the Mountain Heritage Day was to highlight what life was like in Madison County’s mountain communities in the early 1900s. Those at the event could hike around the area, or just relax and enjoy the warm fire, good food, great local music and good company. Local families provided historical exhibits inside the cabin to celebrate and remember those who lived in the mountain communities—before they were forced off of their land in the mid-1930’s with the creation of the Shenandoah National Park.

The descendants of these families who attended the event to share their family histories and stories included Doug Graves, whose family lived in the Grave Mills area; Kathy Slaughter of the Breeden and Slaughter families; PEC’s Kristie Kendall of the Shotwell and Tanner families; and Ellen Early and her father Alvin Meadows of the Meadows family—who grew up in the cabin where the event was held.

“I was so excited to see so many people there from all over the county, and there were more relatives than I ever expected,” says Ellen Early. “Mom and Dad get tired pretty easily and aren’t willing to stay in one spot too long. So, at about 3 p.m., I asked Dad if they were ready to go and he said, “In a little bit.” His response blew me away. I was overcome with joy to see them enjoying the people, stories and music so much. They both have asked when we can do it again.”

Looking for other great events in Madison? Mark your calendar for the commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of The Battle of Jack Shop on September 21st. PEC is co-hosting this exciting event, and more details are available at www.pecva.org/jacks-shop.

PEC’s School & Community Garden Awards

PEC believes that school and community gardens are great ways to strengthen local communities, teach children (and adults!) where food comes from, help people get outside to connect with nature, and improve individual health. For all of these reasons, we want to award school and community gardens throughout our region with prizes ranging from $300-$500.

Does your school have a garden? Do you know of a successful community garden? Nominate gardens in your area by November 10th, and the winners will be announced on December 10th.

For more information about eligibility and how to nominate a garden, visit www.pecva.org/gardens.

Meet Maggi MacQuilliam

PEC’s New Conservation Officer

PEC is excited to welcome Maggi MacQuilliam back to our staff! Maggi joined PEC in 2008 as our Land Conservation & Stewardship Coordinator, and worked in this position until 2011 when she left to pursue a Master’s degree in Community Development and Planning. Upon graduating this spring, Maggi rejoined us as PEC’s new Land Conservation Officer for Southern Fauquier and Culpeper County—where she works with landowners, counties, and conservation organizations to protect critical land and resources in the region.

Maggi grew up on Wildcat Mountain in Fauquier County—surrounded by hundreds of acres of land protected by conservation easements. “I grew up fishing at Carter’s Run and listening to farmers catch up over breakfast at the Livestock Exchange,” Maggi remembers. “Times like these solidified my love for the land and for my community, and I learned that we had something worth saving. I’m excited to give back to this area that has given me so much, and I’m looking forward to working with landowners to conserve our working farms, forestland, clean air and fishing streams—for my nephew’s generation and beyond.”

Do you live in Culpeper or Southern Fauquier and are interested in conserving your land? Contact Maggi: mmacquilliam@pecva.org or (540) 347.2334

PEC Gifts Land to Grymes Memorial School

PEC was thrilled this March to announce the transfer of nine acres of land, just outside the Town of Orange, from PEC’s ownership to that of the neighboring Grymes Memorial School.

“This beautiful land, with scenic views of the Blue Ridge, rounds out our campus nicely,” says Penny Work, Head of Grymes Memorial School. “We will use the land as an outdoor classroom and as playing fields for our students. We can’t thank PEC enough for their vision and generosity. This gift will benefit generations of children in Orange County.

“What would it be like to grow up without wild places to run around in and explore?” remarks Peter Hujik, PEC’s Land Conservation staff in Orange. “Kids need nature. Statistics show that children are spending more time inside, but a growing body of research confirms what many have long known—spending time outdoors is beneficial and important in a child’s development.”

The nine acres were a part of a 268-acre farm property known as Andrewsia, which PEC received as a donation from the Artery Group in 2009. PEC subsequently conserved the property with a conservation easement in 2012—ensuring that the land will remain rural for generations to come.
Dear Friends,

The outcome is only guaranteed if you don’t try. This may seem a simple and obvious statement, but it is profound in just that way that simple and obvious statements often are.

We all have stories of when we have tried to accomplish something despite all odds. I’ve been a volunteer basketball coach for my daughters’ teams over the years, and I spend a lot of time and energy pushing the players to try things that they don’t think they’re capable of. It’s amazing watching them overcome their apprehension and decide to give it a try, and the most satisfying moments are when they make a play during a game that they have struggled with in practices.

All of us at PEC work on the premise that you have to at least try, even when faced with daunting odds. With respect to land conservation, PEC has been warned that the goal of protecting one million acres of the Piedmont region is impossible. When I became PEC’s President in 1996, I was told that the only way additional land could be conserved—beyond the existing 88,000 acres of donated conservation easements—was through direct purchase of the land or development rights. Yet, here we are in 2013—on the way to surpassing 370,000 acres of land under conservation easement. That’s nearly double the amount of land in the Shenandoah National Park.

PEC and our partners have fought a lot of battles over the decades, including numerous battles that we were told we couldn’t, or shouldn’t, fight—like when Disney wanted to build a theme park near the Manassas Battlefield. When foreign companies came to the Piedmont in the ’70s and ’80’s hoping to mine uranium, and when they came back in 2007. When VDOT has pursued transportation projects that will do more harm than good to the surrounding communities—such as the Western Bypass in Charlottesville, the Outer Beltway in Loudoun and Prince William, and the proposal to make Rt. 50 a four-lane highway all the way to Paris. When we began working to help bolster the local and regional food economy—while the country was at the peak of the growth of super-sized meals, and mega supermarkets.

“This is a done deal,” I’ve been told time and time again. “Why would you invest your time, energy and resources into this? There are bigger forces at work here, and PEC is too small to have an impact.”

The answer? As our board member Marie Ridder put it, “Because someone has to fight. Someone has to try.” It’s why we—and you!—are here. And it’s why we’re fighting for the future of the very things that we love.

Today, Virginia’s Piedmont is a better place because of the work we’ve done, and we won’t win all of the battles that lay ahead. But, with the help of our partner organizations and an active citizenry, we will continue to work and fight—even when it may seem hopeless. In every individual and community there is enormous potential, and PEC’s role is to help articulate the vision and direct action.

The Piedmont View is the only place we want to call home—the things that PEC was founded to protect—we will be there.

We haven’t always won these battles, and we won’t win all of the battles that lay ahead. But, with the help of our partner organizations and an active citizenry, we will continue to work and fight—even when it may seem hopeless.

I’d love to hear your stories of times when you or your organization took on daunting fights against all odds. You can share these stories with us by emailing pec@pecva.org.

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President