

# Land Conservation Update

A Publication of **The Piedmont Environmental Council**

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## Interested in protecting your land?

PEC's conservation staff can help you explore your options.

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[www.pecva.org/conservation](http://www.pecva.org/conservation)

## Expanded Land Conservation Incentives in 2013

### A Great Year to Preserve Your Land

At the end of 2012—as part of the “Fiscal Cliff” bill—Congress temporarily renewed a significant tax incentive for private landowners who voluntarily protect their land. As a result, conservation-minded landowners now have until December 31, 2013 to take advantage of a temporarily expanded federal income tax deduction for permanently protecting their land by donating a conservation easement.

A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement between a landowner and a land conservation organization (such as a public agency or a non-profit organization, like PEC) to permanently protect natural, scenic, and cultural resources on their land.

When landowners donate a conservation easement, they maintain ownership and management of their land. They can still sell the land or pass it onto their heirs—all the while

ensuring that the property will be protected for the benefit of future generations.

This temporary expansion of the federal income tax deduction makes 2013 a great year to donate a conservation easement.

#### Through the end of 2013:

- Easement donors can deduct the value of their donated conservation easement at the rate of 50% of their adjusted gross income per year (the deduction is typically limited to only 30% of income)
- Farmers and ranchers can use the deduction at the rate of 100% of their income
- Landowners can use the deduction in the first year and carry over any excess for an additional 15 years (the carryforward was previously limited to only 5 years)

Continued on page 3

A peach farm blooms in Albemarle County. Our land provides us with scenic views, clean drinking water, productive farmland, wildlife habitat, and a sense of historic and cultural heritage. *Photo by David Anhold*



# PEC's Sustainable Habitat Program

Helping landowners, helping wildlife

Land conservation has been central to the work of The Piedmont Environmental Council for over 40 years now, but conserving land is not just a matter of the number of acres saved. It's also a question of how land is cared for. PEC is committed to conserving and restoring the essence of our natural spaces—the living, breathing ecosystems around us—the butterflies in our gardens, the brook trout in our streams, and the bobcats in our forests.

PEC created the Sustainable Habitat Program three years ago to help landowners in urban, suburban, and rural areas take stewardship of their property to the next level. We are proud to say the program has been a great success.

Through our habitat program, PEC offers a number of educational workshops and nature walks that are led by regional

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 "We would like to see landowners all over the Piedmont working together—looking beyond their property lines for a common goal."  
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James Barnes,  
 PEC's Sustainable Habitat  
 Program Manager



There are numerous funding options for landowners considering habitat restoration projects on their property. Visit [www.pecva.org/conservationfunding](http://www.pecva.org/conservationfunding) to find out what funding might be available to you.  
 Photo by Bruce Jones

and national experts. These popular events cover a range of issues—from invasive plant removal to fostering grassland bird habitat.

To further help landowners interested in creating native wildlife habitat on their property, PEC created the "Sources of Conservation Funding" website. This great resource provides landowners with a searchable database to sift through the myriad of local, state, and federal funding sources for conservation practices and best management programs. There are many options for landowners, including numerous funding sources for habitat restoration. Visit [www.pecva.org/conservationfunding](http://www.pecva.org/conservationfunding) to find out what conservation funding may be available to you.

## Looking beyond property lines

PEC's Sustainable Habitat Program Manager, James Barnes, often works with landowners in the Piedmont on a one-on-one basis—helping them find ways (and funding) to improve their properties by restoring wildlife habitat and water quality. However, to make a lasting difference in habitat restoration in the Piedmont, landowners will need to start looking past their property lines.

"Most of the land in this region is under private ownership," Barnes explains, "and many of the species in decline—like bobwhite quail—have habitat needs beyond the scale of an average landowner. Conservationists need new ways to coordinate the work of neighboring landowners if we are going to make a difference for these species."



PEC is committed to conserving and restoring the living, breathing ecosystems of our natural spaces—from butterflies in our gardens to foxes in our forests. Photo by Bruce Jones

One example of such an effort is the **Lower Thumb Run Wildlife Habitat Corridor Project**—an innovative model for multi-landowner wildlife habitat improvement in the lower Thumb Run watershed. "We're trying to get landowners in Fauquier to work together," Barnes explains. "From a big picture perspective, I hope to come up with model that works beyond just Thumb Run. We would like to see landowners all over the Piedmont working together—looking beyond their property lines for a common goal." For this reason, James is encouraging neighboring landowners to schedule meetings with him together.

Protecting our wildlife, wildlife habitat, and native plant life is crucial for successful land conservation. To learn more about the Thumb Run project, or other habitat projects, visit [www.pecva.org/habitat](http://www.pecva.org/habitat).

For more information about our Sustainable Habitat Program, please visit [www.pecva.org](http://www.pecva.org) or contact the PEC Land Conservation Officer for in your county (all officers are listed on page 1).

## Give to PEC

PEC is a grassroots non-profit organization. We were founded in 1972 by citizens of Virginia who wanted to conserve what makes this region a wonderful place to call home. Four decades later, PEC has helped make the Piedmont one of the most successful places in the U.S. for private land conservation.



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# Bob & Shirley French

## Continuing a Legacy of Conservation

Landowners who are looking for reasons to conserve their land should chat with Bob and Shirley French of Earlysville, VA. The Frenches began their journey in land conservation 40 years ago, and today their legacy includes 21 conservation easements spread across New England and Virginia.

"We have forgotten how to give in this country," Bob says. "We need to learn how to give again, and how to give back to the land."

Bob donated his first conservation easement on his family farm in 1975—before state or federal tax incentives were

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 "We have forgotten how to give in this country. We need to learn how to give again, and how to give back to the land."  
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Bob French

available. He did it because he felt "it was the right thing to do."

"I inherited a love for the land from my grandparents," Bob explains. His grandfather owned a hardwood lumber business, and he instilled in Bob a deep commitment to the land and an appreciation for conservation. Bob chose to follow in his grandfather's footsteps, in both passion and profession.

In Virginia, Bob and Shirley have protected over 1,100 acres of timber land with a conservation easement on Fox Mountain, in western Albemarle County. They have also helped reach out to other landowners in the area—emphasizing the importance of land conservation.

"As a family with multiple generations working in the timber industry," says Rex Linville, a Land Conservation Officer for



Photo courtesy of Bob and Shirley French

PEC, "the Frenches have credibility with landowners who fear that conservation easements may hamper the productivity of their land, for uses like forestry and agriculture. In fact, conservation easements are often used specifically to protect productive land, so that it isn't chopped up into housing lots—making it available for agriculture and forestry by future generations."

## Expanded Land Conservation Incentives in 2013

Continued from page 1

Virginia also has the best state income tax incentive in the nation for landowners who choose to preserve their land with a conservation easement. Specifically, conservation easement donors in Virginia are eligible for a Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credit—which is equal to 40% of the value of their donation.

In addition to being able to use this tax credit to pay their own Virginia income taxes, conservation easement donors can sell the credits to other Virginia income tax payers for cash. The ability to sell these credits is particularly important to "land rich, cash poor" landowners who may not have enough income to use all their credits to offset their own taxes. At the end of 2012, the demand and market price for these tax credits were stronger than ever.

The expanded federal incentive,

coupled with Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit program, has contributed to the protection of hundreds of thousands of acres of productive farmland, scenic open space, important forest resources, and significant natural areas throughout the Commonwealth. In fact, in the nine-county region where PEC works there are now more than 357,000 acres protected by conservation easements—representing 16.8% of the total land.

"The entire community wins when thoughtful landowners conserve their land this way—protecting wildlife habitat, clean drinking water, scenic landscapes, recreational spaces, and productive agricultural lands," says Heather Richards, PEC's Vice President of Conservation and Rural Programs. "Conservation easements have become an important tool in the region

for protecting our watersheds, farms and forests, and now there are over 357,000 acres of permanently protected private land in the nine county region of the northern Virginia Piedmont."

Conservation easements are an important tool for protecting wildlife habitat, clean drinking water, scenic landscapes, recreational spaces, and productive agricultural lands.  
 Photo by Katherine Vance





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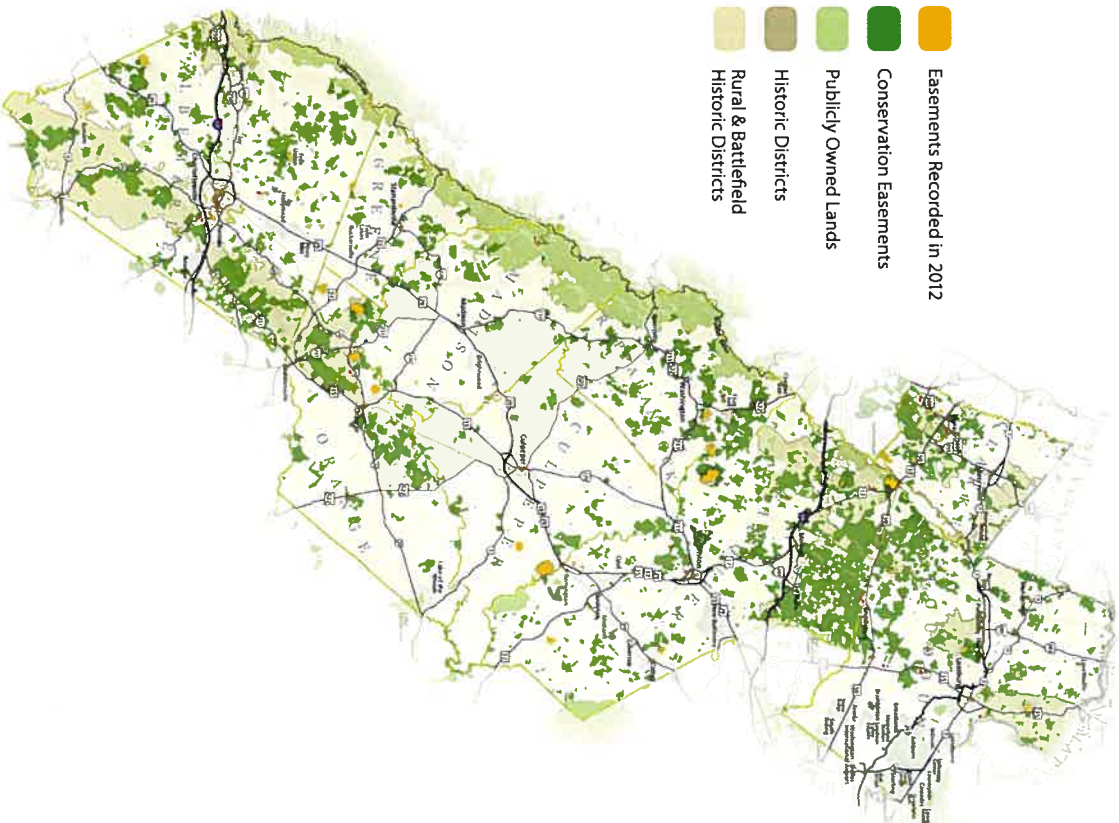
**INSIDE**

Expanded tax incentives make 2013 a great year to conserve your land

PEC's Sustainable Habitat Program offers resources to help you improve your land

Meet Bob & Shirley French, a couple who has been conserving productive land for four decades

# Protected Lands in Virginia's Northern Piedmont



Virginia landowners have used voluntary, private land conservation to protect over 357,000 acres in the nine-county region served by The Piedmont Environmental Council. Together, we are working to preserve this beautiful part of the country that we all call home.