

# Land Conservation Update

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## Farm Family Leaves a Legacy

by Cindy Sabato

Along the western slope of the Bull Run Mountains in Fauquier County, the Elgin family's been working the land for nine generations. Dean Elgin's great grandfather, and great-great grandfather before him, raised and sold beef cattle. His own father switched to dairy farming and passed the dairy farm on to Dean and his three brothers. The Elgin brothers carried on the business together until about 20 years ago, when they found themselves in a situation all-too-familiar on many small family farms: unsure if they'd be able to keep the land to pass on to the next generation.

"We were under a lot of financial strain from the debt incurred by the dairy enterprise. Also, we'd gone from being one family of four brothers to four different families all trying to run one business. And we each had a dream to go out and do our own thing independently," Dean said.

Dean and his wife Carina were also all too aware of the changing landscape around them. Just over the mountain, development pressures in Loudoun and Prince William counties were converting farmland into residential subdivisions at an astonishing rate.

enjoy the beauty. It's one of the prettiest places in the world."

A search for ways to save the farm led Dean to the Piedmont Environmental Council, which helps connect landowners to various land conservation options. "We knew that the Elgins' wanted to keep their land open and in the family, but donating a conservation easement—particularly in the days before the Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credit—was not feasible for the family. We needed an alternative," said Mike Kane, PEC's director of conservation.

"Fortunately, we were able to team up with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF), our long time conservation partner in the Bull Run Mountains. Together, we were able to test a new model: using funds from the new Virginia Land Conservation Foundation to purchase a conservation easement on the Elgin farm," said Kane.

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Carina and Dean Elgin at Mountain Hollow Farm. Photo by Hugh Kenny

"We didn't want that for our property," Dean said. "Everybody on this side of the mountain has an appreciation for open land, scenic views, the ability to get on a horse and ride and



### Interested in Protecting Your Land?

*The Piedmont Environmental Council's conservation staff can help you explore your options. For more information, please contact your local PEC land conservation staff member.*

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“For the Elgins, and for a lot of family farmers, the financial benefits associated with permanently conserving the land, whether through incentives like Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credit or programs that purchase easements, are the perfect way to continue to farm it and keep it in the family.”

Dean may have had to do a little convincing of his more skeptical older brothers, but their bold action paid off. The payment for the conservation easement allowed the



*Cattle at Dean and Carina Elgin's farm.  
Photo by Hugh Kenny*

Elgins to pay off the dairy farm debt, divide the property among the four brothers, and most importantly, according to Dean, “it allowed us to stay on the farm and keep it in the family and keep the land open, keep the property intact and beautiful. It was a life preserver for us that was thrown out and we’re still hanging onto it. You take care of the land and the land takes care of you.”

Today, Dean and Carina still live down the same dirt road between Middleburg and Aldie, in the same 1750s stone house the Elgin ancestors lived in, and Dean still raises beef on land he hopes to pass on to their three daughters.

“There’s something special about knowing that your great-great grandfather worked the same land that you live on,” Dean said. And their little piece of the mountain will forever remain “one of the prettiest places in the world.”



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## Support Conservation

Since 1972, The Piedmont Environmental Council has proudly promoted and protected the natural resources, rural economy, history and beauty of the Virginia Piedmont. PEC empowers residents to protect what makes the Piedmont a wonderful place, and works with citizens to conserve land, protect air and water quality and restore wildlife habitat.



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## What's Happening Around the Region?

by Michael Kane

Public agencies and private foundations continue to make land conservation and stewardship a financially attractive choice for landowners in the Piedmont region. Landowners interested in the long-term stewardship, productivity, and conservation of their property are invited to talk with PEC about the following funding options:

- Under the 2018 Farm Bill, funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) increased from \$250 million to \$450 million per year. PEC is working with landowners in our region to secure ACEP funding, helping farm operators conserve the land, keeping food production local, and providing families funding to expand the farm or address other needs.
- Thanks to a substantial grant from The Volgenau Foundation, PEC has funding available to preserve working farmland and historic lands in Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties. PEC is pairing the Volgenau Foundation grant with funding available through state and federal conservation programs, with the goal of helping landowners preserve an additional 3,000 acres in the region.
- Loudoun County launched a new program in 2019 to help landowners with the costs associated with conserving their land. The program reimburses landowners up to \$15,000 for legal fees, surveys, appraisals, and other expenses related to donating a conservation easement to a public conservation agency or non-profit private land trust.
- Under rules adopted in 2019, Virginia landowners may now be eligible for reimbursement for 100 percent of the cost of land management practices that improve land stewardship and protect water quality. More than 70 such practices qualify, including fencing to keep livestock away from streams and livestock water systems. PEC staff can help landowners get started with this process and, in some instances, will offer short-term loans to landowners for the up-front cost of these practices.
- The cap on an individual's usage of the Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credit increased this year from \$20,000 per year to \$50,000 per year. We anticipate that this will help bolster the secondary market for tax credits and that, as a result, conservation easement donors may see slightly better credit prices when they sell their Land Preservation Tax Credits.

*\*A special thanks to The Volgenau Foundation for their support of this mailing and for land conservation and stewardship in the Rappahannock River watershed.*



# Land Conservation in Virginia's Piedmont

In total, conservation easements in Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties protect approximately:



1,742

miles of streams



10,308

acres of wetlands



26,456

acres adjacent to scenic rivers



199,256

acres of prime farmland soils



198,443

acres of forests



111,503

acres along scenic byways



126,432

acres in the viewshed of the Appalachian Trail



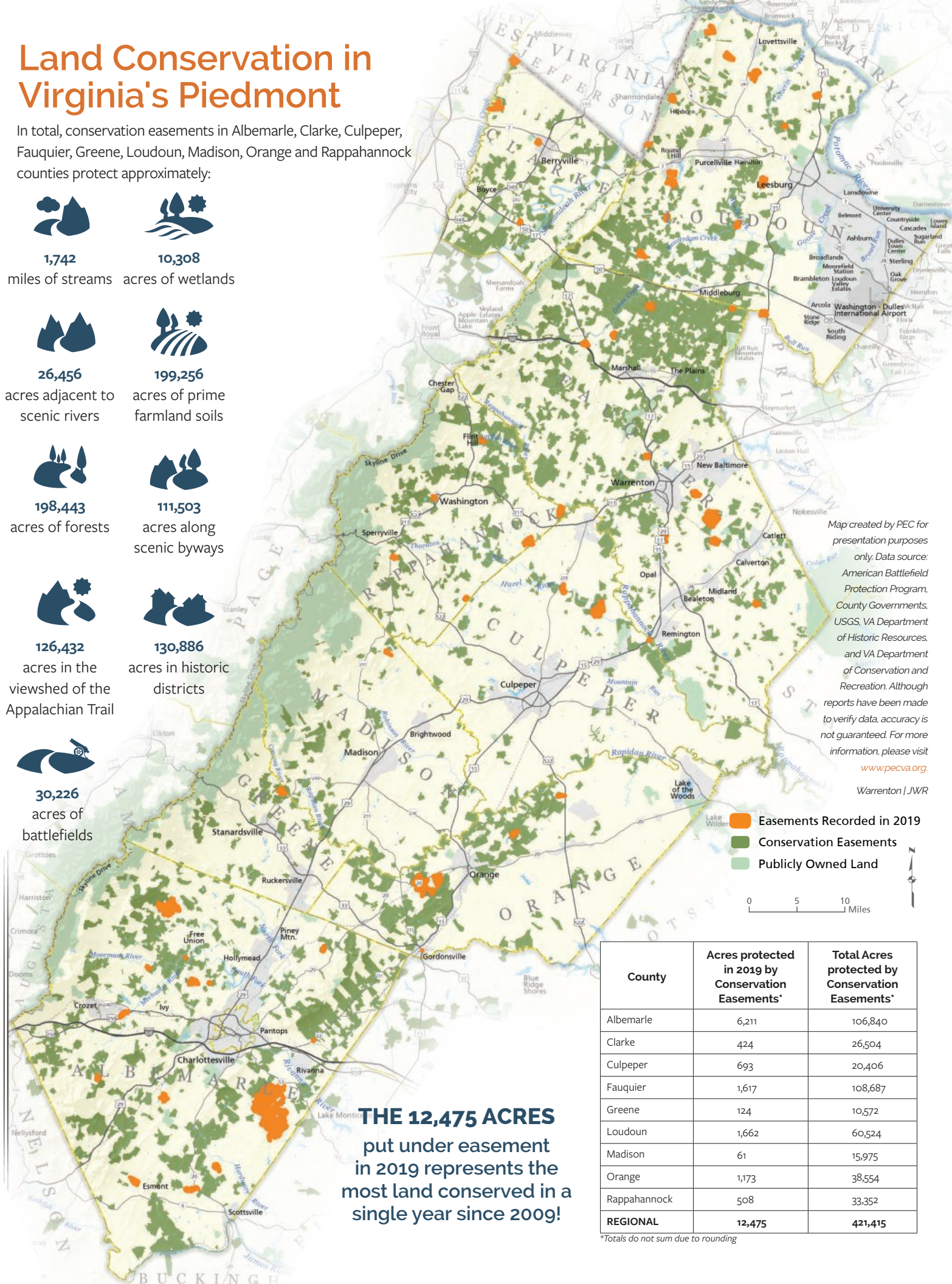
130,886

acres in historic districts



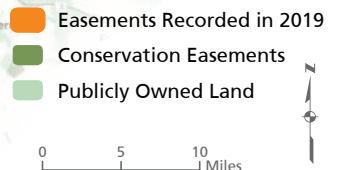
30,226

acres of battlefields



Map created by PEC for presentation purposes only. Data source: American Battlefield Protection Program, County Governments, USGS, VA Department of Historic Resources, and VA Department of Conservation and Recreation. Although reports have been made to verify data, accuracy is not guaranteed. For more information, please visit [www.pecva.org](http://www.pecva.org).

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**THE 12,475 ACRES**  
put under easement  
in 2019 represents the  
most land conserved in a  
single year since 2009!

County	Acres protected in 2019 by Conservation Easements*	Total Acres protected by Conservation Easements*
Albemarle	6,211	106,840
Clarke	424	26,504
Culpeper	693	20,406
Fauquier	1,617	108,687
Greene	124	10,572
Loudoun	1,662	60,524
Madison	61	15,975
Orange	1,173	38,554
Rappahannock	508	33,352
<b>REGIONAL</b>	<b>12,475</b>	<b>421,415</b>

\*Totals do not sum due to rounding





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## Inside

Farm Family Leaves  
a Legacy

Sources of  
Conservation Funding

Protected Land in  
Virginia's Piedmont



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

"We are blessed to have springs, fields, and forests bringing a diverse array of plants and animals to our property. By placing our land in conservation easement, we could ensure **all of it is protected** for our children and grandchildren to enjoy."

**-Samantha Adhoot, Rappahannock Landowner**



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