



CELEBRATING  
**50**  
years  
1972-2022



Piedmont  
Environmental  
Council

ANNUAL REPORT · 2022



## Dear Friends,

This past year, as we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Piedmont Environmental Council, we took stock of the effects of our collective efforts toward meaningful conservation and better communities in Virginia's Piedmont. Together, we have conserved hundreds of thousands of acres. We have improved public access to land and water and helped create new

trail connections throughout the region. We have stood up against ill-conceived development proposals, and helped guide growth in the Piedmont's towns, villages and cities. Indeed, we have much to celebrate!

We also have so much more to do. Situated amid some of the most economically dynamic regions in the U.S., the Piedmont faces extraordinary development pressures that have become even more relentless and complex in recent years. What we commonly call "the cloud"—our Internet-based information and communications system—has descended on the Piedmont with

a veritable blizzard of data center proposals. New proposals for residential development in our rural areas have also intensified, hand in hand with calls to expand roads, water and sewer connections and other sprawling infrastructure. At the same time, the combination of federal and state funding opportunities has never been more supportive for conserving the Piedmont's lands.

As you turn these pages, you'll see how we've responded to these opportunities and challenges. Piedmont landowners partnered with PEC and other land trusts and conservation agencies to permanently protect 6,651 additional acres of land last year, bringing the total amount of land protected by conservation easements in our service area to 439,782 acres. PEC helped communities in Culpeper



VOLUNTEER TREE PLANTING AT BONNY BROOK FARM.  
*Photo by Pete Smith*

and throughout the Piedmont respond to poorly planned development and protect their historic lands and farmland. We also adopted a new strategic plan that will guide PEC's course over the next five years and beyond. As a result, we've updated our mission statement: *To protect and restore the lands and waters of the Virginia Piedmont, while building stronger, more sustainable communities.*

The women and men who founded PEC were determined to shape a better future for the region, grounded in rural conservation and in smart growth focused in the Piedmont's existing communities. While we've had tremendous success in realizing this vision, much work lies ahead. With your continued support and involvement, we will protect the Piedmont's natural resources and open spaces, and make it an even better place.

Sincerely,



**Chris Miller**  
President



**Jean Perin**  
Co-Chair, Board of Directors



**George L. Ohrstrom, II**  
Co-Chair, Board of Directors

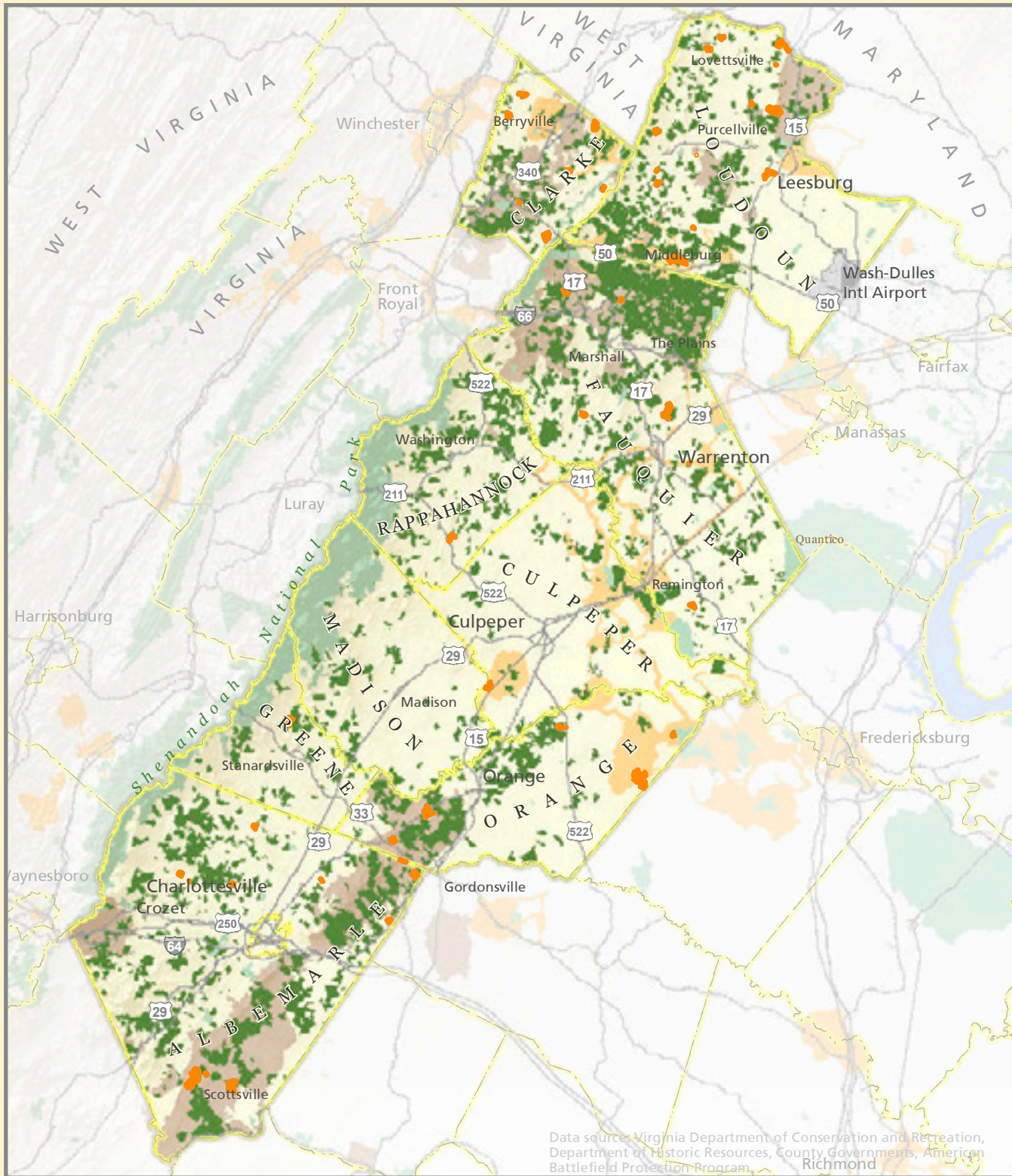


VIEW FROM HILLSBORO, VA.  
Photo by Marco Sánchez

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# The Piedmont Region

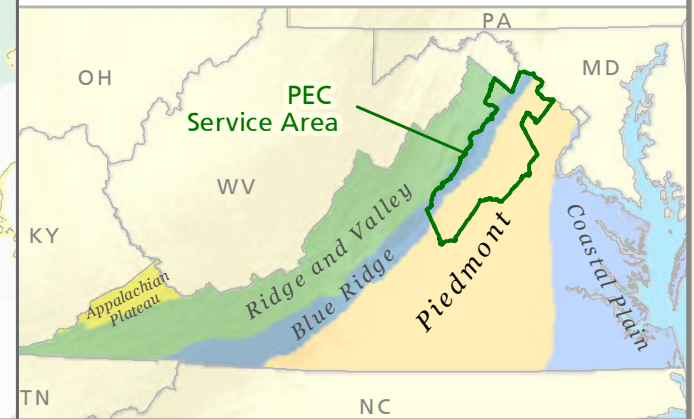
- Easements Recorded in 2022
- Conservation Easements
- Publicly Owned Lands
- Battlefield Areas
- Historic Districts

0 10 20 Miles



Virginia's northern Piedmont remains an exceptional place, despite development pressures. Residents have been strongly supportive of protecting its scenic beauty, agricultural economy, thriving communities, and unparalleled significance to America's history.

## Physiographic Regions of Virginia



Data source: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Historic Resources, County Governments, American Battlefield Protection Program

Richmond



# Land Use Policy as Seen from Space

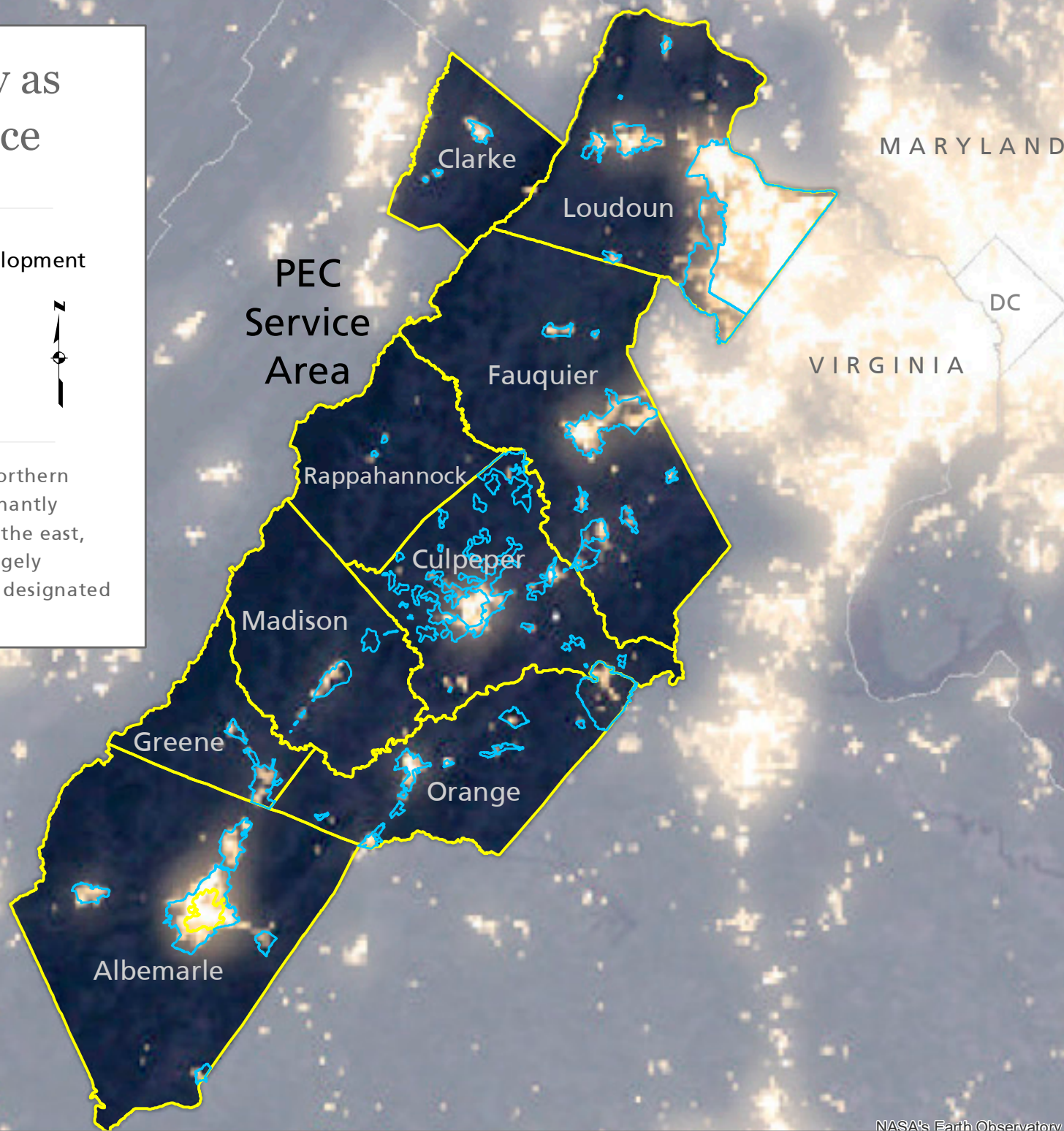
 Areas Designated for Development

 PEC Counties

0 10 20  
Miles



Night sky images show Virginia's northern Piedmont continues to be predominantly rural. Contrasting with counties to the east, development in the Piedmont is largely contained within the growth areas designated by each locality.





A group of people, mostly seen from the back, are standing in a grassy field. They are looking out over a lush green landscape with rolling hills and dense forests under a clear blue sky. The people are wearing casual summer clothing like t-shirts and hats. A wooden railing is visible in the foreground on the right side.

# land conservation

VOLUNTARY ACTION • SAVING PLACES PEOPLE LOVE • PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES

PEC SUMMER FELLOWS AT GILBERTS CORNER  
*Photo by Hugh Kenny*



## Conserving a Piece of Heaven

From the top step of the wrap-around porch at Hans and Anne Wachtmeister's Fauquier County home at Belmont Hill Farm, one has the sense of standing atop a mountain looking across heaven. Beyond the lush green rolling hills at the center of this working cattle farm, a visitor can look across the landscape to the west and south and see the Town of Warrenton, the Warrenton



Training Center, the Clifton Institute, and the protected lands of Wildcat Mountain miles and miles away.

In 2022, the Wachtmeisters ensured the permanent protection of Belmont Hill Farm by donating a conservation easement. Their decision to conserve the 381-acre property was a slow and steady one. "It took a couple of years to work through all this," says Hans. "It was a process, there is a lot to take in. But the people at PEC were so wonderful about all of that, answering all the questions and explaining it all."

"Belmont Hill Farm has long been a conservation priority for PEC for many reasons," explains PEC's Maggi Blomstrom, who worked with the Wachtmeisters to develop and complete

THE WACHTMEISTER PROPERTY. Photo by Hugh Kenny

the easement, which PEC holds. "This working cattle farm has such high visibility across this entire part of the county and from several state scenic roads. And within a one-mile radius, the farm is surrounded by roughly another 745 acres of protected land. So its protection enhances the conservation impacts of all of them."

Hans and Anne are also working with PEC and Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes to restore grassland bird habitat, as part of our Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative. They are already seeing the benefits, with the return of wild turkeys, quail, and, says Hans, "woodpeckers you never used to see."

Belmont Hill Farm is part of what was known as Whitehall Farm, around 700 acres of farm and forestland that Hans' father bought in the 1940s after moving



HANS AND ANNE WACHTMEISTER. Photo by Hugh Kenny

from Sweden. Hans grew up here, returning to the property after a long and distinguished teaching career. Hans' late brother's family still owns and farms roughly half of the original Whitehall Farm property, also conserved, while Hans and Anne, now retired, create new memories, many with their children and grandchildren, here at Belmont Hill Farm.

### 2022 Highlights

- ▶ With support from The Volgenau Foundation and other donors, PEC's **Rappahannock-Rapidan Conservation Initiative** expanded land protection in the upper Rappahannock watershed by more than 2,350 acres, including farmland and other critical lands.
- ▶ At the request of neighborhood leaders, PEC helped coordinate numerous community groups and obtained a grant from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation's Get Outdoors program for the creation of the **Fifeville Trail** in Charlottesville. This trail connects residents of a low-income housing development and adjoining neighborhoods directly to Tonsler Park, eliminating the need for residents to walk more than a half-mile along Fifth Street, a dangerous road with fast-moving traffic and insufficient sidewalks. The trail system also connects the Fifth Street corridor to the Cherry Avenue business district, UVA Hospital and other jobs and basic community resources.
- ▶ PEC's **accreditation as a full-service land trust** was renewed in August 2022. PEC was first accredited in 2011, and the renewal by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission signifies its continued confidence that the 11,000+ acres of land PEC holds in easement will be protected forever.
- ▶ PEC held **131 meetings and site visits** with landowners and their professional advisors, and organized or participated in 39 events—including virtual land conservation meetings, community-based workshops and outdoor events.

### 6,651 Acres Protected in 2022

County	Acres protected in 2022* by Conservation Easements	Total Acres* protected by Conservation Easements
Albemarle	1,715	111,305
Clarke	816	27,602
Culpeper	155	21,430
Fauquier	735	110,561
Greene	140	10,787
Loudoun	1,675	67,866
Madison	0	16,365
Orange	1,309	40,203
Rappahannock	106	33,662
<b>PEC Region</b>	<b>6,651</b>	<b>439,782</b>

\* Numbers are rounded

A photograph of a man in a suit speaking at a podium in a large hall with a tiered audience. The hall has blue seats and large blue acoustic panels on the walls. The man is standing at a wooden podium on the left side of the frame, gesturing with his right hand. The audience is seated in blue chairs, filling the tiered seating area. The walls are light-colored with large blue acoustic panels. The ceiling is dark with recessed lighting. The overall atmosphere is professional and formal.

# thriving communities

.....  
GREAT PLACES TO LIVE • CIVIC ENGAGEMENT • MANAGING TRAFFIC AND TAXES

WARRENTON TOWN HALL.  
Photo by Hugh Kenny



## Stevensburg residents shape their future

**A**t PEC, we value the power of community engagement. We believe that local decisions matter and that informed and involved communities are vital to achieving positive outcomes. During the fall of 2022, residents in Culpeper County provided a case in point.



LOOKING WEST TOWARDS  
STEVENSBURG AND ROUTE 3.  
Photo by Hugh Kenny

For many years, Culpeper has maintained a strong rural character in the face of development pressures. Recently, these pressures have been particularly intense in one part of the county, Stevensburg. Stevensburg is home to a tight-knit agricultural community and contains the village of Brandy Station, the site of one of the most significant cavalry battles of the American Civil War.

The Stevensburg area has been eyed as a potential location for data center development, abetted by a tax incentive program to develop new industrial facilities at Brandy Station. In

early 2022, Culpeper County approved a controversial rezoning of 243 acres of farmland, along Rt. 3 near Stevensburg, for Marvell Development, a subsidiary of Amazon Web Services. Later that same year, AttoTek Inc submitted an application for a data center campus on a farm near the heart of Brandy Station. This proposal would have necessitated the construction of a new transmission line through several miles of private property, spreading its impact throughout the Stevensburg District.

With the help of local community leaders and organizations, PEC informed the residents of Stevensburg and Brandy Station about the potential impacts of the AttoTek Data Center campus. Residents of Brandy Station showed up with such force at the public hearing

that the Planning Commission unanimously recommended denial of the data center application, and the developer ultimately withdrew the application. By raising awareness within the community, PEC was able to help facilitate a Comprehensive Plan amendment so that the historic and agricultural resources of Brandy Station were properly recognized and the tax incentive was removed.

Fresh off of that win, local residents are advocating for additional land conservation surrounding the nearby Culpeper Battlefields State Park, a 1,700-acre public park approved by the General Assembly in 2022 to commemorate the Battle of Brandy Station and other pivotal battles fought around the nearby Rappahannock River.

### 2022 Highlights

- In the **Town of Gordonsville**, PEC helped secure a transformative grant from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to revitalize its signature park and connect it with green spaces in the historic downtown area. Combined with matching funds from local donors, the grant will enable Gordonsville to build a new public pool, pavilion and playground at Verling Park and develop a network of walking paths that connect with Firemen's Fairgrounds, which is owned by the volunteer fire company and used for firefighter training, community events and baseball.
- More than 200 community members from across Orange County, including two planning commissioners, joined us on Oct. 25 for a town hall meeting on **Wilderness Crossing**, a 2,600-acre proposed development in rural Orange near the Wilderness Battlefield. PEC and other partners in the Wilderness Battlefield Coalition sponsored the event, and we continue to monitor the proposal and advocate for better alternatives to this sprawl-inducing and environmentally harmful project.
- PEC collaborated with the Move2Health Equity Coalition to produce a report that sheds light on how people get around Charlottesville and provides recommendations from residents about how to make it **safer and more practical to walk, bike and ride transit**. *Getting Around Charlottesville: Results from the 2021 Move2HealthEquity Community Mobility Survey* is based on surveys of more than 400 local residents and is being used to guide Charlottesville's plans and investments for improving walking, bicycling and transit. View the report at [pecva.org/mobilityreport](https://pecva.org/mobilityreport)



WEST MAIN ST. IN CHARLOTTESVILLE. Photo by Hugh Kenny





# strong rural economies

THRIVING FARMS • LOCAL FOOD • INNOVATION • HEALTHY, WORKING LAND

OCTOBER GREENFIELD PRESENTING TO A CROWD.  
*Photo by Hugh Kenny*



## Growing healthy food and engaging volunteers at Roundabout Meadows

During the past nine years, PEC has been managing our lands at Roundabout Meadows near Gilberts Corner to restore its soils and streams, connect residents to agriculture and promote the Piedmont's rural economy. Our efforts continued to blossom in 2022 at the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows.

In its fourth season, the Community Farm provided a consistent supply of fruits, vegetables and eggs to Loudoun Hunger Relief (LHR), the largest food bank and pantry in Loudoun County. The produce grown on the farm goes directly into the community through LHR's pantry and is shared with

approximately 15 other partner organizations. Our 32 fruit and vegetable crops were as diverse as the community we served, and selected based in large part on surveys of LHR clients. Since its start in 2019, the farm has donated more than 100,000 pounds of food to LHR and its partners.

The farm also welcomed more than 1,000 volunteers last year. Volunteers of all ages pitched in with every aspect of the farm's operations, from planting seeds in our greenhouse in the winter to planting, harvesting and packing fruits and vegetables in the spring, summer and fall. An additional 500 students visited the farm during the year to learn

about regenerative agriculture, land conservation, and soil health. We were also thrilled to welcome visitors back to our Community Farm Open House and Family Day at Roundabout Meadows on June 18. We did this all while shifting to new farming techniques focused on balancing vegetable production with sustainable soil building practices.

The Community Farm is one building block in our long-term vision for the conservation and restoration of Gilberts Corner. In 2019, PEC acquired the iconic Gilberts Corner property. Under the leadership of Dana Melby, PEC is developing plans for further revitalizing Gilberts Corner to make it a vibrant



LOUDOUN HUNGER RELIEF STAFF VOLUNTEERING AT PEC'S COMMUNITY FARM. Photo by Hugh Kenny

agricultural hub for Loudoun County. Dana recently became PEC's Gilberts Corner Farm and Lands Manager, and handed the reins of leadership of the Community Farm to Teddy Pitsiokis. Previously the manager of the Highland County Virginia educational campus and farm for the Allegheny Mountain Institute, Teddy brings to PEC a rich, diversified background in farming, nonprofit work, and food systems education.

### 2022 Highlights

- ▶ PEC worked closely with Del. Michael Weibert to secure the unanimous passage of HB996, a bill that **helps prevent the loss of family farms and forest land** by ensuring eligible landowners can participate in Virginia's use-value taxation program. HB996 specifically addresses and overcomes a barrier in the law that had prevented many heirs' property landowners from being able to participate.
- ▶ In partnership with the John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District, PEC developed educational articles and videos about funding and assistance programs available to farmers in Fauquier County to **improve soil health and water quality**.



SOUTHERN FAUQUIER FARMER JOE GRAY, FEATURED IN PEC'S FIRST JOINT VIDEO ON SOIL HEALTH AND WATER QUALITY. Photo by Hugh Kenny

- ▶ Through a new **meat cutter training program**, PEC collaborated with the Rappahannock Center for Education and American Farmland Trust both to expand the supply of locally grown beef and to prepare local residents for skilled jobs in the industry. Students who successfully complete the training are invited to participate in a paid internship at a local processing facility. Eleven individuals have completed the training so far, and nine students are enrolled in the 2023 program.
- ▶ PEC has provided strategic support to the George Washington Carver Agriculture Research Center in its longstanding efforts to **create a hub for local food entrepreneurs** at its Culpeper campus. These efforts bore visible fruit in 2022 as the Carver Center began construction of its Food Enterprise Center, a new 6,000 square-foot shared-use commercial kitchen and food business incubator.



# Celebrating 50 Years of Protecting the Piedmont



The men and women who founded The Piedmont Environmental Council in 1972 were determined to shape a better future for the region. Since then, the Piedmont has become a model for sustainable growth, with more than 25 percent of all of its lands permanently protected. Local governments throughout the Piedmont have some of the strongest land use zoning and rural protections in Virginia, guiding growth toward towns and villages while protecting farmland and forests. In the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, a division of PEC, has successfully advocated for 25 years for walkable, bikeable, and transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the region to grow and provide opportunities for all.

PEC took time in 2022 to celebrate what we have done together – and plan for our future. On a hot Saturday in May, PEC's Board and staff gathered with more than 160 friends, family, and supporters on the gentle rolling slopes of Clarks Mountain to celebrate PEC's 50th year of protecting the Piedmont. From engaging and informative workshops, to a locally-sourced tasting menu, to table displays featuring PEC's accomplishments and ongoing efforts in the region, to the poetic and inspirational

words of keynote speaker Terry Tempest Williams and PEC President Chris Miller, the day offered something for everyone.

Early in October, PEC welcomed ET Projects for two extraordinary nights of community art at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation's Rokeby Airstrip in Upperville. Led by MacArthur "Genius" Award Winner Elizabeth Turk, ET Projects staged a collaborative performance event, *Ridgeline*, incorporating 600 guests and volunteers into a



mesmerizing art experience accompanied by the live music of multi-Grammy award nominee Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen. The next evening, *Ridgeline* became a community collaboration carried out by several hundred local schoolchildren and their families.

Titled *Ridgeline* for its location at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the interactive performances opened with a moving solo by Orange County resident and Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre alumna Demetia Hopkins, and then turned participants into artists, dancers, choreographers, neighbors and friends.

As each person carried LED-lit umbrellas with canopies showcasing images inspired by regional endangered flora, these gatherings became a dance of light and, from afar, a vibrant field of plants and flowers swelling and swaying

with grace and joy at sunset.

In December, PEC's Board of Directors approved a new strategic plan that will chart our course for the next five years and beyond. Our strategic plan sets an ambitious goal of conserving 100,000 additional acres by 2030. With the achievement of this goal, 30 percent of the Piedmont's lands would be permanently protected, reaching a critical threshold for sustainability, biodiversity and climate resilience. PEC will also strengthen our capacity to advocate for sound local land use plans and regulations that protect open spaces and focus growth in existing communities, and we will expand our leadership on climate solutions such as reducing vehicle miles traveled and planning for climate resilience.







# history and beauty

SENSE OF PLACE · SCENIC VIEWS · BATTLEFIELDS · HISTORIC DISTRICTS

MOUNTAINS IN GREENE COUNTY.  
*Photo by Hugh Kenny*



## Shining a light on **undertold stories**

For decades, PEC has collaborated with communities across the Piedmont to preserve and restore their historic resources. That effort has ranged from helping map historic schools, churches, and other special places to developing applications for eligibility and listing on the Register of Historic Places. At the regional scale, PEC is a founding partner and supporter of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership, which sponsored the enactment by Congress of The Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area.

In recent years, we've expanded our collaborative work with a focus on shining a light on undertold stories

of people and communities of color. In the Southwest Mountains area of northeast Albemarle County, for example, PEC has been working with researchers, community groups and landowners to document the history and associated historic resources of African American communities. This effort could inform future updates to the Southwest Mountains Rural Historic District nomination or lead to the creation of independent rural historic districts that focus on African American communities, many of which still exist today.

Similarly, PEC has expanded our inventory work for the Rapidan River-Clark Mountain Rural Historic District to include communities of former

enslaved families in Culpeper and Orange Counties. PEC is looking for all opportunities to focus on undertold stories, particularly those of African American communities.

PEC has also been advocating for more equity in Virginia's historic preservation efforts. 2022 marked a turning point for these efforts, with the establishment of the Virginia Black, Indigenous and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund. PEC, Preservation Virginia, and the Virginia Conservation Network led advocacy for this new state fund, which will help preserve and interpret historic structures, cultural landscapes and archeological sites important to



PEC HOSTED A STAKEHOLDER MEETING ABOUT THE SOUTHWEST MOUNTAINS RURAL HISTORIC DISTRICT IN OCTOBER. Photo by Hugh Kenny

underrepresented communities. With \$5 million allocated for its first year, and administered by the state Department of Historic Resources, the BIPOC Historic Preservation Fund will launch its first grant round this spring.

### 2022 Highlights

► The Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County and PEC received Fauquier County's 2022 Award for Preservation Excellence for our interactive, online story map documenting the **African American experience in Fauquier County**. The story map provides digital access to information about the history and contributions of Fauquier's African American communities, schools and churches established before and after the Civil War.

► In May, Madison County officially unveiled the digital records of thousands of County documents detailing the history of **early 20th-century communities in the Blue Ridge Mountains**, prior to their displacement for the establishment of Shenandoah National Park. PEC Intern Victoria Garnett assessed, organized and scanned the County documents to create this digital archive. All of these records, in addition to documents from Rappahannock and Rockingham counties, are now publicly accessible at the James Madison University website, *Histories along the Blue Ridge*, via [pecva.org/snp-digital-records](https://pecva.org/snp-digital-records).



ALDIE ASSEMBLAGE AS SEEN FROM ABOVE. Photo by Hugh Kenny

- PEC is leading the effort to establish the new **Rapidan River-Clark Mountain Historic District**, a nearly 40,000-acre historic landscape in Orange and parts of Madison and Culpeper Counties. In 2022 we completed most of the field work needed for the historic district nomination, including surveying the historically African American community of Buena, near Rapidan, in Culpeper County.
- PEC is finalizing the purchase from Loudoun County of the **Aldie Assemblage**, a 6.42 acre property along Route 50. PEC hopes to preserve the historic tavern building, forested slopes that mark the terminus of the Bull Run Mountains, and land that fronts Little River, part of the Goose Creek and larger Potomac watershed.





# clean water

SAFE AND RELIABLE SOURCES • HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS • PLACES TO RECREATE

PEC FELLOWS ENJOYING A DAY ON THE RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER.  
*Photo by Hugh Kenny*



## Plantings for the Piedmont

Starting from their headwaters in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Piedmont's streams flow into rivers like the Rappahannock and Potomac, which provide drinking water for millions of urban, suburban and rural residents and are part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. For decades, PEC has worked with landowners in these watersheds to advance land conservation and beneficial land management practices for drinking water and the restoration of the Bay. Recently, we've stepped up these efforts with a focus on restoring riparian buffers—wide areas of vegetation along stream banks that help absorb and naturally filter water and runoff, keep water temperatures cool and restore native wildlife habitat.

Since 2016, PEC has worked in partnership with Friends of the Rappahannock through our joint Headwater Stream Initiative to provide free technical

assistance, trees and labor for restoring riparian buffers to private landowners in the Rappahannock River watershed. In 2022, PEC expanded this effort to the Potomac River watershed and launched Plantings for the Piedmont, which connects landowners in our entire service region with resources to reforest riparian buffers.

Throughout the upper Potomac and Rappahannock watersheds, PEC now offers no-cost riparian buffer restoration services to qualifying landowners. In the James River watershed in Albemarle and parts of Greene and Orange counties, PEC connects landowners to services offered by the James River Association and its partners.

During the spring and fall planting seasons, PEC and our partners at Friends of the Rappahannock organized 29 tree planting events in the Potomac



PEC STAFF BRI WEST PLANTS A TREE WITH HER DAUGHTER. Photo by Hugh Kenny

and Rappahannock watersheds. During the 13 that PEC led, 170 dedicated volunteers joined us to plant 6,302 trees along the banks of waterways constituting 31.4 acres of new riparian buffers.

### 2022 Highlights

- ▶ With funding from Orvis, the Trout & Salmon Foundation and an anonymous donor, PEC collaborated with Trout Unlimited and a private landowner to remove and replace the last barrier to fish passage on **Bolton Branch in Rappahannock County** with a low-water ford. The new crossing at this coldwater stream, a haven for Eastern brook trout, enables trout to swim all the way up to the stream's headwaters in Shenandoah National Park.



COMPLETING WORK ON BOLTON BRANCH. Photo by Sophia Chapin

- ▶ More than **26 miles of streams were protected** by conservation easements in 2022, bringing the total number of stream-miles protected by conservation easements in our nine-county service region to 1,819. This conserved land along Piedmont streams is vital to protecting our drinking water sources and restoring the Chesapeake Bay.
- ▶ Fauquier County's **Upper Rappahannock River Water Trail** received the Governor's 2022 Environmental Excellence Gold Medal Award for its contribution toward implementation of the Virginia Outdoors Plan. PEC was a core partner in this collaborative project, which resulted in the opening of two new public access points and three new non-motorized boat launches along the Rappahannock in Fauquier.
- ▶ PEC is helping accelerate the pace of water quality improvements through offering zero-interest loans to farmers to install agriculture best management practices. In 2022 we provided a \$98,341 loan to a farm in the upper Goose Creek watershed in Fauquier to install **stream fencing and alternative watering systems** for their livestock.





# habitat restoration

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WILDLIFE CORRIDORS · BIODIVERSITY · POLLINATORS · NATIVE PLANTS

A LONE GRASSLAND BIRD RESTS AMONG THE FIELDS.  
*Photo by Hugh Kenny*



# Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative takes flight

Virginia's scenic countryside was once enriched by a vibrant chorus of birdsong, including those of our iconic grassland birds like the eastern meadowlark, often seen serenading from atop fence posts, and the red-winged blackbird. However, many of our grassland birds are in sharp



decline, as native grasslands in Virginia and throughout the United States have been steadily converted to agricultural lands over the last century.

PEC and Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes (VWL) joined forces to stem the decline of grassland birds through launching the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative (VGBI), which collaborates with agricultural landowners to make small changes in farming and haying practices that can bring big benefits for grassland birds.

In 2022, VGBI rolled out an incentives program for Piedmont landowners to alter their haying and grazing practices in favor of protecting grassland birds during the spring nesting season. In just its first year, landowners controlling 500 acres enrolled in the incentives program. Many other landowners reached out to us to share the exciting news that they were

PEC STAFF OCTOBER GREENFIELD COLLECTING DATA ON LOCAL BIRD POPULATIONS. *Photo by Hugh Kenny*

beginning to implement these haying and grazing practices on their own, even without the financial incentive. This voluntary participation contributed an additional 1,300 acres to the list of Virginia agricultural grasslands observing best management practices that provide sanctuary for birds.

Already, landowners, land managers and farm employees alike have noticed a difference. "I've been hearing more bobwhites than ever before," said Patty Lane, an employee of Eldon Farms in Rappahannock County.

Now we have developed new partnerships on the other side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and will be working with landowners to expand the incentives program to five Shenandoah Valley counties. With renewed funding from the Cornell Laboratory's Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative, as well as a new grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, VGBI plans to enroll 1,000 acres across 20 properties in 2023.

## 2022 Highlights

- ▶ PEC and VWL engaged **Rappahannock County High School students** to build 30 American Kestrel nest boxes, which we then installed on private properties across the Piedmont and Shenandoah Valley for the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative. These included several properties participating in PEC's Plantings for the Piedmont program.
- ▶ In April, PEC staff showcased our Potomac Planting Program and the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative at an event hosted by the **Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance (BRCA)** at Sky Meadows State Park and the Piedmont Memorial Overlook. The BRCA is dedicated to preserving and protecting a highly threatened portion of the Blue Ridge Mountains stretching from the Shenandoah National Park to the Potomac River.

- ▶ PEC and the Virginia Department of Forestry conducted a prescribed burn of half the meadow at the **Piedmont Memorial Overlook**. The rotational burn helps improve the biodiversity and structure of the meadow, curbing the spread of invasive species and creating the right conditions for native plants to provide food and shelter for wildlife.

A PRESCRIBED BURN TAKING PLACE AT PIEDMONT MEMORIAL OVERLOOK. *Photo by Hugh Kenny*





# energy, transportation & climate

INCREASING RESILIENCY • REDUCING VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED • STORING CARBON



THE NEW DULLES SILVER LINE METRO STATION. PEC AND THE COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH ADVOCATED FOR THIS METRORAIL EXTENSION INTO LOUDOUN.

*Photo by Hugh Kenny*



# Planning for climate change in Albemarle

The climate is changing across the Virginia Piedmont, and Albemarle County is taking a lead with bold steps to plan for those changes. In partnership with Albemarle, PEC has developed a series of tools to help residents learn more about the local risks associated with climate change, and to help the county evaluate those risks and plan accordingly.



In 2022, Albemarle County collaborated with PEC, Resilient Virginia and climate modeling engineering firm Sobis to complete a *Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment*. The

DR. IRENE MATTHIEU  
PARTICIPATING IN  
INFORMATIONAL VIDEO.  
Photo by Hugh Kenny

assessment identifies which natural hazards exacerbated by climate change will affect our region, who and what in our community will be most exposed to these hazards, and where there is greater vulnerability to adverse impacts.

One of the most important findings of the assessment is that the temperature in Albemarle County has been increasing at an accelerating rate and will continue to rise. Since 1980, the rate of warming has tripled. The region is now about 3.5 degrees warmer than it was 100 years ago. The region also gets almost seven more inches of rain per year than it did in 1920, and this is expected to continue increasing. This increased rainfall is coming in the form of more intense individual storms and puts the county at a greatly increased risk of flooding and associated property damage. But the occurrence of droughts is also expected to increase, as more rain falls from individual heavy storms and dry periods extend longer.

The assessment demonstrates that the local impacts

of these hazards will be felt by all — but not equally. People below the poverty line, communities of color, children and the elderly will experience the harmful impacts of climate change more severely. For example, the county's current urban heat island was mapped onto several indicators of economic and household vulnerability by census tract to identify areas of the community for outreach by County staff during climate resilience planning.

Albemarle County and PEC worked with a Virginia-based environmental communications firm, Green Fin Studio, to convey these and other scientific findings to the public. These include a series of topically-focused videos with local experts. PEC is now working to make sure that findings in the assessment are factored into the development of the Albemarle's Comprehensive Plan, developing recommendations that we hope, based on our assessment of local climate impacts, can serve as a model for other counties in the Piedmont.

## 2022 Highlights

- ▶ The biggest source of increased energy demand in Northern Virginia is **data centers**, which have been proliferating across the Piedmont. In Warrenton, we collaborated with Citizens for Fauquier County and Protect Fauquier to shed light on the impacts of the proposed Amazon Web Services data center on Route 29 in the town's business district. While the Town's vote to approve the data center was deeply disappointing, PEC will continue to advocate to develop stronger tools for the region to plan for data centers.



DATA CENTERS IN PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY.  
Photo by Hugh Kenny

- ▶ PEC advocated for the passage of a bipartisan bill to **improve the utility-scale solar permitting process** in Virginia. HB206 provides a path toward reasonable mitigation standards for utility-scale solar projects that significantly affect wildlife, historic resources, prime agricultural soils, or forest lands. PEC is now serving on the stakeholder group advising the state Department of Environmental Quality on the development of these standards.
- ▶ The **Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG)**, a division of PEC, won a historic vote at the Washington region's Transportation Planning Board to reduce emissions from transportation by 50% by 2030 and pursue climate strategies that include more housing near transit, walk and bike access to transit, and better bus service. The vote was a direct result of CSG's two-year campaign, coordinating the support of 47 partner groups and advocacy by CSG's supporters.
- ▶ In 2022, PEC continued to advance **distributed solar** as a policy priority within the Virginia Conservation Network. We were a vocal advocate for legislative initiatives to enhance local and state incentives and remove unnecessary barriers to installation.



# The Piedmont Foundation

Photo by Hugh Kenny

Established to hold and manage special funds in support of PEC, the Piedmont Foundation assures PEC's capacity to respond to key opportunities and challenges as they arise and to fulfill our core mission over the long term. A separate 509(a)3 charitable organization governed by an eight-member Board, the Foundation accepts gifts of cash, securities, property and appreciated assets. The Foundation also offers opportunities for tax-advantaged planned gifts, including trusts, bequests and life income plans.

Currently, the Piedmont Foundation manages funds in the following categories:

- ▶ **Conservation Stewardship Fund (Board Directed)**
- ▶ **Legal Defense Fund—"Evergreen" (Donor Directed)**
- ▶ **General Endowment Fund**
- ▶ **Piedmont Memorial Overlook Fund**
- ▶ **Albemarle County Land Conservation Officers Endowment Fund**
- ▶ **Albemarle General Endowment Fund**
- ▶ **Backer Endowment Fund**
- ▶ **Land Conservation Officers Endowment Fund**
- ▶ **Backer CRUT Fund**

## ▶ **Land Conservation Fund (Donor Directed)**

Within this fund, the following Regional Land Conservation Funds have been established:

*Bull Run Mountains Land Conservation Fund*  
*Clarke County Land Conservation Fund*  
*Culpeper County Land Conservation Fund*  
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**With much gratitude,** PEC presents the names of individuals, families, foundations, businesses and organizations that supported the Piedmont Environmental Council during 2022. Although we do not have the space to honor everyone, we are extremely grateful for the generosity of each of our members. We offer sincere thanks for your ongoing commitment to promoting and protecting the Piedmont region.

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WILLIAM DOVE CELEBRATES HIS NEW EASEMENT WITH PEC'S MAGGI BLOMSTROM. Photo by Hugh Kenny





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ELIZABETH TURK, THE ARTIST AND MASTERMIND BEHIND THE RIDGELINE PROJECT. Photo by Hugh Kenny





# The Bill Backer Legacy Society

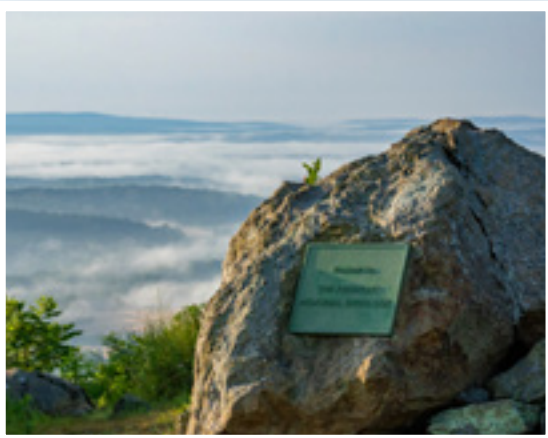
**N**amed for the avid conservationist and former Piedmont Foundation President Bill Backer, the Legacy Society recognizes donors who have made planned gifts to the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) or to the Piedmont Foundation, a charitable organization established to hold and manage special funds in support of PEC's mission.

Planned gift options include making a bequest through a will, codicil, or trust, or recognizing the Piedmont Foundation or PEC as a beneficiary of an IRA or retirement plan. Gifts of property and other assets are also possible.

A gift to the Piedmont Foundation can be applied to the General Endowment Fund or one of the county conservation funds. The General Endowment provides annual

income to PEC to help offset the operating budget. Gifts to the county conservation funds provide the resources to participate in conservation activities specific to individual counties.

Gifts made to PEC can be directed to specific activities or left to the discretion of the Board of Directors to allocate where funding is most urgently needed.



PIEDMONT MEMORIAL OVERLOOK IN AUGUST.  
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PEC's 2022 Summer Fellowship Program welcomed twelve fellows from across the country to learn about local conservation issues from PEC staff. The fellows teamed up to complete six joint practicum projects on topics ranging from private lands management to food justice. The 2022 Fellowship was PEC's first "hybrid" program, featuring six weeks of online discussions and two weeks of site visits and in-person learning in the Piedmont. *Photo by Hugh Kenny*





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DAVID VAN ROIJEN, JANET AND ED MILLER AT PEC'S "COCKTAILS AND CONSERVATION" EVENT AT FOXINGTON IN ALBEMARLE. Photo by Hugh Kenny

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THE VIRGINIA GRASSLAND BIRD INITIATIVE TEAM. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: CELIA VUOCOLO (QUAIL FOREVER), OCTOBER GREENFIELD (PEC), JACOB GILLEY (AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST), DR. AMY JOHNSON AND JUSTIN PROCTOR (SMITHSONIAN'S VIRGINIA WORKING LANDSCAPES). *Photo by Hugh Kenny*



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Please bring any errors or omissions to our attention by contacting [nseilheimer@pecva.org](mailto:nseilheimer@pecva.org).

## In Memory



Photo courtesy Loudoun Times

### Judith Randal

**PEC BOARD TERM: 2006 - 2008**

Judith Randal was a long-time supporter of PEC and a trail-blazer for women in journalism. A strong believer in education and the importance of sharing the success of PEC in conservation, environmental policy, and civic engagement, Judith supported the development of the PEC Fellowship program, now in its 17th year, to provide direct experience for college and graduate students.

A renowned journalist, Judith received numerous national awards for her science and health writing and served as president of the National Association of Science Writers. Judith and her husband William Hines covered space exploration and related issues during a period when Julian Scheer was directing communications for NASA and the Apollo program. Her engagement with PEC grew out of her close friendship with Julian and his widow Sue Scheer, both former PEC Board members.

A resident of Lovettsville, Judith was actively involved in the Loudoun community. In addition to being appointed by the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors to the Board of Directors for the Health Systems Agency of Northern Virginia, Judith served on the Loudoun Health Commission for more than 10 years, and on the Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging. She was an avid supporter of environmental groups locally and globally.



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\*\* Elected to PEC's Board in 2023

# 2022 Financial Report

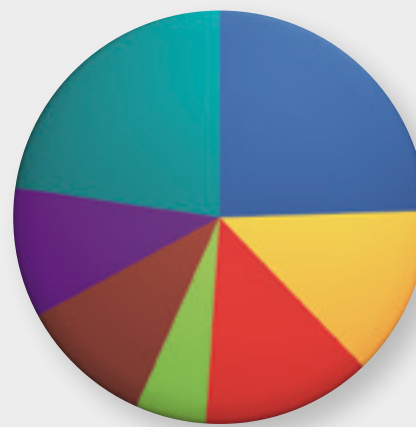
## Sources of Organizational Support



● Individuals	\$ 3,332,432	49.4%
● Piedmont Foundation	1,755,428	26.0%
● Foundations, Businesses and Institutions	1,545,350	22.9%
● Government	113,097	1.7%
Total	\$ 6,746,307	100%

The above figures include the activities of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, a division of PEC. They do not include the activities of the Piedmont Foundation. Copies of the consolidated financial statements of PEC and the Piedmont Foundation, and of PEC's IRS form 990, may be found at PEC's website at [www.pecva.org/donate](http://www.pecva.org/donate). For more information, please contact PEC's accounting office at (540) 347-2334.

## Program and Operating Expenditures



● Conservation, Stewardship and Habitat	\$ 1,684,206	24.5%
● County Issues and Planning	912,032	13.3%
● Policy*	911,124	13.3%
● Farms and Food	378,214	5.5%
● Outreach and Education	723,597	10.5%
● Advancement	700,570	10.2%
● Administration	1,560,654	22.7%
Total	\$ 6,870,397	100%

\* Reflects regional and state-level work on policy related to transportation, energy, air quality, water quality, telecommunications, land conservation and land use



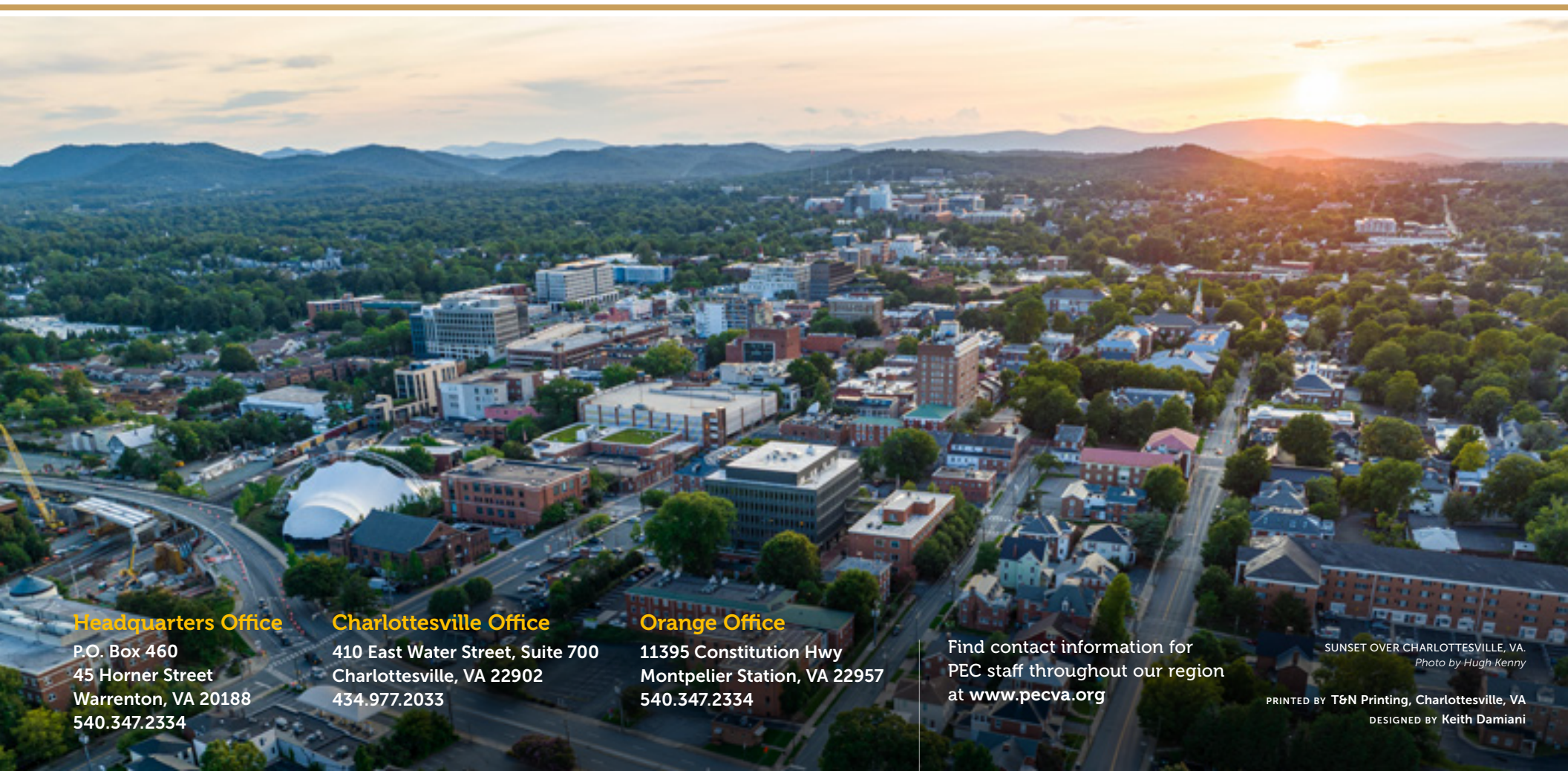
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Find contact information for  
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SUNSET OVER CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.  
*Photo by Hugh Kenny*

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