

IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE **2** A Community Forest Grows



PAGE **3** New Guides Released



PAGE **6&7** Out and About



Story Map Brings History to Light

By Cindy Sabato

In 1860, free and enslaved African Americans made up half of Fauquier County's entire population. Black communities like Morgantown, two miles south of Marshall and where Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County President Karen Hughes White and Board Member Angela Davidson were raised, grew out of emancipation. They held powerful meaning as community centers where African Americans could freely do what they could not when they were enslaved: worship, conduct commerce, obtain education, own land. Brister Grigsby, great-great grandfather to Davidson and Hughes White, became one of Morgantown's early residents in 1872, when he bought land from the estate of William J. Morgan, where he, his wife Nancy Glascock Grigsby and their three sons were once enslaved. Over the years, their farm and family grew, and Davidson represents one of four generations of Grigsby descendants still living there today.

Pivotal historical periods that followed emancipation both drove and led many African Americans from these once-thriving communities, taking along with them much of the "oral history" records of the time and place. Descen-

dants of these residents now make up less than 10 percent of Fauquier's population today, and as rapid development has laid new upon old, only remnants of their many communities are still visible.

The one-room Morgantown Elementary School stands in disrepair right where it served Black children from 1891 until winter break of 1963, when the also-segregated Northwestern Elementary School opened in Rectortown. The former Morgantown Colored Baptist Church still serves its congregation along Free State Road as Mt. Nebo Baptist Church. These are two of just a few dwellings left in a community once flourishing with Black-owned stores, family farms, midwives, a furniture maker, a blacksmith, a plasterer. But the contributions of these Black communities remain.

The Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County (AAHA) and The Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) have teamed up to take important African American contributions like those in Morgantown to the web, documenting the African American presence in Fauquier County in the form of a story map. A story map is an interactive scrolling website that integrates maps, photos, video, text, and other features to tell a complete narrative story



Aysa Davis, Karen Hughes White, Angela Davidson, and Christine Lewis stand in front of the 1st Baptist Church, founded in 1870 and rebuilt in 1899. Photo by Hugh Kenny, PEC

Visit our new story map at
www.aahafauquier.org/storymap

or timeline.

With information AAHA gleaned from oral histories, deed research, church records and anniversary books, school board minutes, insurance and appraisal records, slave census records, county rolls, voting records, Freedmen's Bureau papers, and so much more, the story map gives an overview of the important role churches, schools, and communities played in African American society. Within the story

map, PEC built a geographic map of Fauquier County with icons representing locations that visitors can click on to see a photo and read a short description. A "read more" cue leads to an interactive webpage with additional history and photographs.

"It gives people a really good visual of where everything was, what it looked like 100 years ago, what they look like today, and also a good historical record of

Continued on page 5

Signs of a Scenic River

By Cindy Sabato

In western Albemarle County, the cold, pristine waters of the Moormans River spill over a towering Sugar Hollow Dam and wind eastward for 14.3 miles. Flowing gently at first through historic Sugar Hollow and White Hall, it gathers strength and speed from Doyles River, Wards Creek, and other streams before joining the Mechum River at Brinnington to form the Rivanna River. Eventually, the Moormans' waters reach the James River and the Chesapeake Bay.

"The Moormans has always been a very special river. It has a rocky bottom, so it runs clear and hosts brook trout upstream. There are game corridors along the river. It has a lot of scenic value and is a unifying focus for the community. People love to fish, enjoy sitting on the rocks, and like to canoe it when the water is up," said Sherry Buttrick, who for some 30 years owned property overlooking the Moormans at the Millington Bridge.

Back in the late 1980s, Buttrick and 27-year-old PEC staffer Kat Imhoff led an

intensive, two-year, grassroots effort that culminated in 1988 with Virginia Scenic River designation for the Moormans, a nod to its superior natural and scenic beauty, fish and wildlife—including the endangered James spiny mussel—and historic, recreational, geologic, and cultural features. A ceremonial ribbon cutting by then-supervisor Charlotte Humphris and a parade that included horses, dogs and a child on her tricycle marked the occasion.

Honoring the Moormans

Fast forward a little more than three decades to 2020—the 50th anniversary of Virginia's Scenic Rivers Program. It was a year of pandemic, when more people than ever before sought out beautiful outdoor places like the Moormans for the healing and restorative powers of



Albemarle Supervisor Ann Mallek pulls the cover off the new Moormans Scenic River sign at the Millington Bridge, as PEC Senior Conservation Fellow Kat Imhoff steadies the ladder and Supervisor Liz Palmer looks on. Photo by Hugh Kenny

nature. Donna Bennet, a local resident and member of the informal advocacy group, Friends of the Moormans, said the added crowds took a big toll on the Moormans' trails, riparian vegetation, and the river itself, sounding an alarm about the continuing need for strong stewardship. Discussing the

Continued on page 5

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A Community Forest Grows on the Edge of Charlottesville

By Peter Krebs

Since the beginning of the pandemic, people have gravitated like never before to the outdoors, in search of the physical and emotional benefits of nature and fresh air. Charlottesville-area greenways and open spaces have seen unprecedented visitorship. That’s why the creation of the new Heyward Community Forest is so timely and so important.

Two Years, Two Acquisitions and a Multigenerational Legacy

In 2019, the Piedmont Environmental Council and the Virginia Department of Forestry helped the City of Charlottesville acquire 142 acres next to the Ragged Mountain Natural Area. The city contributed \$37,500, and PEC secured a U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Forest Program grant of \$562,500 to buy the land from owner Louisa Heyward. The land was worth a lot more than that, and Louisa generously agreed to donate the remaining value.

Later that year, PEC began working with the Rivanna Trails Foundation and the City of Charlottesville to purchase another piece of land that adjoins the community forest. Owned by Stan Makielski, these additional five acres would fill a public access gap by adding trails, connecting areas, and increasing parking options, while keeping private development out of the natural area. PEC coordinated the project and helped raise funds once again through USDA’s Community Forest Program, as well as the Bama Works Fund, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) Preservation Trust Fund, and a private donor. This purchase closed on March 12, 2021 and is now part of the larger community forest.

Both of these properties that now make up the Heyward Community Forest were once owned by Stan’s father, Stanislaw Makielski, Sr., a founding instructor at the University of Virginia School of Architecture. Stan Jr. said his father planted trees so that, “years from

now, when he was long gone, people would still enjoy them. There’s a lot of love in that land and it’s wonderful [that] it is now saved.”

These forward-looking, early land stewards’ vision has come to pass in the form of a fabulous community forest for the public to enjoy.

Part of a Larger Whole

Nearly 150 acres of new park land is always something to celebrate, but the Heyward Community Forest is the keystone of something even bigger—much bigger. It sits in the center of a large conglomeration of publicly accessible lands, including the existing Ragged Mountain Natural Area, Camp Holiday Trails, Birdwood Golf Course, Boar’s Head Inn, and two other previous donations from the Heyward family—UVA’s Foxhaven Farm and Albemarle’s future Hedgerow Park. Together, these all add up to more than 2,200 acres of various forms and degrees of recreational use. That’s almost three times larger than Central Park!

Characterized by diverse, often unusual ecosystems, these areas are—or soon will be—connected by a network of trails with designated sections that will be protected from human intrusion. The Heyward Community Forest, right on the edge of Charlottesville and near (or even connected to) multiple Albemarle neighborhoods, will improve public access to these 2,200+ acres of ecological, recreational, and educational resources.

Inspiring Collaboration

Just as the Heyward and Makielski acquisitions contribute to a broader landscape of public access and habitat preservation, they also have inspired broader collaboration for the greater good.

Soon after the Heyward property acquisition was finalized, Charlottesville led a community forestry program that galvanized a number of organizations,



Charlottesville Parks and Recreation is working with community groups to build a system of trails connecting the Heyward Community Forest to surrounding neighborhoods and natural areas. Photo by Peter Krebs, PEC

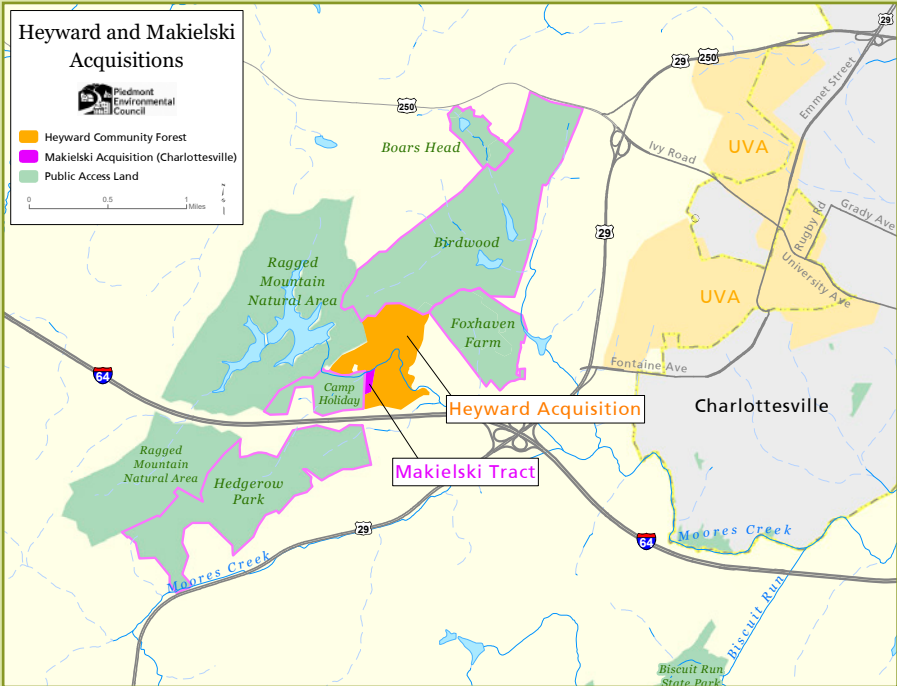


Aerial photo of the area around Ragged Mountain Reservoir. Photo by Hugh Kenny, PEC

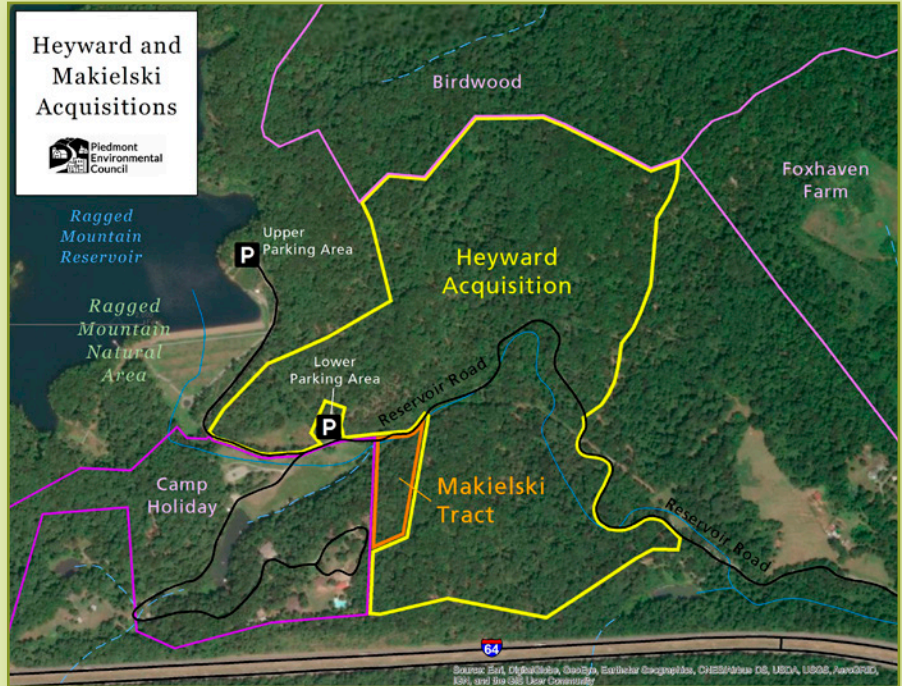
including Charlottesville Area Mountain Bike Club, Charlottesville Area Trail Runners, Rivanna Trails Foundation, and UVA, to raise money and supply volunteers to build and maintain trails within the Heyward Community Forest. Similarly, habitat restoration and protection efforts are underway with assistance from the Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards, the Center for Urban Habitats and many others.

This work and collaboration is

coming together because it includes all the ingredients we know lead to success: engaged and organized citizens and groups, conservation-minded landowners, a local government committed to parks and open spaces, and an organization that can act as an intermediary, offer technical expertise and maintain a multi-year focus. It will be exciting to watch the project grow and become an ever-more valuable resource for the community.



Map showing the location of the Heyward and Makielski acquisitions. Watsun Randolph, PEC



Map showing the connected suite of public or semi-public lands. Watsun Randolph, PEC

Helping people find local food with new *Buy Fresh Buy Local* guides

By Cindy Sabato

With the spring growing season well underway, PEC is very excited about the release of our 2021-22 *Buy Fresh Buy Local* guides for each of PEC’s three *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapters—Loudoun County, Northern Piedmont, and Charlottesville area. Mailed in May to more than 300,000 homes and businesses, each guide offers a convenient, one-stop source for local farms, farmers markets, CSAs, wineries, breweries, and other local food producers.

“On the heels of a year that has amplified the value of local food systems, these guides make it so easy for people to find locally grown and produced meat, dairy, eggs, produce, beverages and more in the Piedmont—an area rich with a bounty of local food and drink. The guides also bolster PEC’s mission by helping promote local farms and by supporting the region’s rural economy and local food economy,” said PEC Local Food Systems Coordinator Matt Coyle, who has led production of the guides.

The **Northern Piedmont guide** lists more than 200 food producers and distributors in Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison, Orange and Rapahannock counties. Among its listings are 136 local farms and orchards, seven farmers markets, 29 wineries and breweries, 19 restaurants and caterers, and 12 retailers. The **Loudoun County guide** features more than 250 local food producers and distributors, including 220 local farms and orchards, seven farmers markets, 28 wineries and breweries, 29 restaurants and

caterers, and 10 retailers. The **Charlottesville Area guide** lists more than 220 food resources in Albemarle, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa and Nelson counties. They include 220 local farms and orchards, 13 farmers markets, 25 wineries and breweries, 20 restaurants and caterers, and 12 retailers. Each guide also highlights two local businesses and includes a fruit and vegetable availability calendar, fact sheet explaining various common food labels, and a travel map showing locations of many listings in the area. Clarke County food producers are represented by the Shenandoah Valley *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapter.

The free *Buy Fresh Buy Local* guides, which are published every other year, were made possible with the support of community and food industry sponsors, including Finest Butcher, Wegmans, 4P Foods, and Farm Credit, along with dozens of local community and food industry sponsors for each area.

“We are grateful to our sponsors who helped make *Buy Fresh Buy Local* possible and available to so many. And we hope *Buy Fresh Buy Local* will encourage families to look to our own local producers for a wide range of healthy, delicious food, dairy, wine, and more, and even ask their local grocers to provide more locally-produced fruits and vegetables, rather than depend on a vulnerable global food supply chain that is less friendly to the environment and less supportive of our local economy,” Coyle said.



Matt Coyle’s daughter Rowan gives *Buy Fresh Buy Local* her nod of approval. Photo by Matt Coyle, PEC

- Download the *Buy Fresh Buy Local* guides at www.pecva.org/buylocal
- Search our new, interactive *Buy Fresh Buy Local* website at www.buylocalpiedmont.org
- Find out about other *Buy Fresh Buy Local* chapters and sources at buylocalvirginia.org
- Learn more about PEC’s local farms and food program at www.pecva.org/farmsandfood



Every 5 Years...

The Land Trust Accreditation Program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. The Piedmont Environmental Council is pleased to announce it is applying for renewal of accreditation. A public comment period is now open.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant’s policies and programs. Independent accreditation provides assurance of quality and demonstrates PEC’s ability to protect the working farms, forests, and diverse natural, historic, and scenic resources of the Virginia Piedmont.

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how The Piedmont Environmental Council complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices.

To learn more about the accreditation program, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org. Submit your comments on PEC’s renewal application at: www.landtrustaccreditation.org/about/291, or by emailing info@landtrustaccreditation.org, or by mail to: Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments, 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866.

Comments on The Piedmont Environmental Council’s application will be most useful by September 19.



Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

What months do eastern meadowlarks nest in hayfields?



Photo by Flickr Creative Commons, Matthew Paulson

ANSWER

All of the above.

Peak nesting season for eastern meadowlarks is May 15 - July 1, with an important extended breeding season through the end of July, with other later-season grassland nesters, such as red-winged blackbirds and dickcissels. Eastern meadowlarks are a true icon of our eastern farmlands—a landscape cherished by many, but heavily impacted by suburban development. Although meadowlarks are not currently listed as threatened or endangered, they are what ornithologists call “a common bird in steep decline,” with populations that have plummeted by almost 90 percent since 1966. Conservation efforts are underway to help stem the tide of these declines, including a new local Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative that PEC helped launch. (Source: Virginia Working Landscapes)

On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

› Comprehensive Plans

Charlottesville is revising its comprehensive plan in conjunction with a new affordable housing policy and an upcoming zoning code rewrite. Due to significant public input, including extensive comments from PEC, the city extended the May public comment period to June 13. The planning commission will discuss next steps, including a process for rewriting the zoning code, at a June 29 work session.

Albemarle County has been working to develop a timeline for its comprehensive plan update. To adequately address affordable housing, climate action, and equity, among other matters, planning staff have recommended a 3-year process. PEC is urging the county to finalize the climate action plan and housing policy first, as these documents are critical in shaping the comprehensive plan update.

› Rezoning Updates

Updated applications have been submitted for the Breezy Hill and RST Residences rezonings. At a community meeting in May, the applicant for Breezy Hill made clear they are now seeking higher density development than is recommended in the Village of Rivanna Master Plan. The RST proposal includes improvements to the affordable housing component and incorporates much-needed public transit stops.

Clarke

› Zoning Ordinance Update Project

The Planning Commission is completing its review of the ordinance update project, with revisions to the zoning and subdivision ordinances and definitions article. A public hearing for the new ordinances will be held by the commission on July 2. Summaries of the proposed changes can be found on the county's website. PEC is tracking updates and believes the proposed changes should build upon the existing ordinances that require environmental protections.

Culpeper

› Maroon Solar

The Board of Supervisors voted to deny a conditional use permit for the 1,700-acre Maroon Solar proposal near Racoon Ford. PEC opposed this project because of its potential to adversely affect natural, historic, and scenic resources in the area. Discussion about codifying Culpeper's existing solar policy into a formal ordinance are at the planning commission level.

Fauquier

› Thoroughfare Gap Tower

A "balloon test" in April provided a glimpse of the visual impact of the 199-foot-tall monopole tower proposed by Rangel Communications off of Rt. 55. PEC supports increased broadband and cell service,

but not the proposed location of this tower, at the convergence of three historic districts, where it will be highly visible from Chapman's Mill, the Bull Run Mountains, and the scenic byway entering Fauquier County.

› Bealeton Marsh Solar

In April, the first utility-scale solar proposal under the newly adopted ordinance was evaluated for consistency with Fauquier County's Rural Lands Plan. PEC voiced our opinion that it was not consistent, as the site-specific evaluation showed that 100% of the land to be under panels is prime agricultural soils and under active agriculture lease. In addition, much of the surrounding landscape is protected for agricultural production under the County PDR program and Ag and Forestal District. We are pleased that the Planning Commission agreed, and the Board of Supervisors upheld that decision in May.

Greene

› Comp Plan Review

In its comprehensive plan review process, the planning commission this spring held public work sessions on the "Future Land Use" and "Agriculture and Forestry" chapters. PEC's feedback has been focused on our desire to maintain the existing growth area boundaries, better encourage new development inside the growth areas, and add specific metrics and strategies to the "goals and implementation" part of each chapter.

› RSA Update

In a surprising development, Orange and Madison counties in April granted Greene consent to leave the Rapidan Service Authority. Greene has been seeking to leave the RSA since last August, to establish its own water and sewer service, and had filed several lawsuits in pursuit of that outcome. Agreement from the bondholders, a vote of the RSA Board of Members, and public hearings will be needed prior to Greene's formal departure.

Loudoun

› Solar Array Workgroup

PEC staff initiated a solar workgroup with the Preservation and Conservation Coalition to offer recommendations for the zoning ordinance rewrite. Landowners are receiving solar array solicitations and contract offers, but the county does not have any guiding policy or an ordinance to regulate utility-scale solar arrays. The workgroup recommends against permitting large-scale solar arrays until the zoning ordinance rewrite is complete with specific criteria. Meanwhile, the group is meeting with the Board of Supervisors and county officials to outline general topics for consideration.

› St. Louis and Aldie

The Board of Supervisors recently voted to separate the Aldie Assemblage and St. Louis real estate transactions. Offers to purchase the Aldie Assemblage are currently being considered. A June public input session is giving St. Louis residents the chance to guide board decisions on their community's future.

Madison

› Cell Towers Proposed

The Board of Supervisors has proposed two 199-foot cell towers, at Hoover Ridge Park and along Nethers Road near the Hughes River, to improve coverage for the county's emergency services. The tower at Hoover Ridge Park was approved in May, and an SUP application for the Nethers Road tower is expected in the coming months. Acknowledging the public safety benefits of these towers, PEC has asked the county to consider options to limit their impacts to important scenic viewsheds.

Orange

› Massive Rezoning Proposed

The Wilderness Crossing rezoning proposes a mix of residential, commercial, office space, light industrial, institutional uses and parks on 2,602 acres. It would represent one of the largest developments in Orange and set the tone for future growth. For size comparison, Lake of the Woods contains 4,256 lots on 2,600 acres. The developers have said the project will take about 30 years to build out, but have yet to release specific details. In addition to the large size of the rezoning, PEC is concerned about the inclusion of a proposed reservoir, realignment of Route 20 through the Wilderness Battlefield National Park, impacts to water quality and the Rapidan River, potential contamination from extensive gold mining activities, and associated tax implications for county residents as a whole. We expect this application to go before the Planning Commission in Summer/Fall 2021.

Rappahannock

› Rezoning Applications

PEC believes the current applications to rezone land owned by Mt. Airy Field, LLC from five-acre to two-acre minimum lots is inconsistent with the county's comprehensive plan. Sperryville has no similar zoning elsewhere, and PEC is concerned that, if approved, this rezoning would set a precedent for the redevelopment of medium-scale lots in the rural village of Sperryville and beyond.

In April, PEC addressed two recent zoning variance requests near Huntly, both adjacent to headwater streams that are important habitat for eastern brook trout. The variance requests for these small parcels are at odds with the conservation values for the surrounding landscape, and we are concerned that future land use decisions for similarly sized properties in this neighborhood could add up to a "death by many cuts" to a sensitive trout stream.

› Fish Passage

PEC's Bolton Branch pilot project for flood resiliency and improved fish passage will be completed with VDOT crews during this summer. Larger culverts will replace a restrictive low-water ford on Mill Hill Road where it crosses Bolton Branch, a headwater stream that connects over two miles of in-stream habitat for native brook trout. Learn more and watch our video at pecva.org/trout.

Story Map Brings History to Light

Continued from cover

the sites and communities,” said Hughes White’s granddaughter, Aysha Davis, who has provided the technical savvy to populate the story map with AAHA’s collected history, stories and imagery. PEC lent its experience and expertise with story mapping, photography, and grant writing to the project, while the Fauquier County GIS Department provided geolocation assistance for many points on the map, and The PATH Foundation provided a grant that helped make the project possible.

“I am lucky to come from

a family of force that knows our history ever since I can remember. But a lot of people don’t have that. So this project is meaningful to me in the sense that I’m making the information forever accessible. This is especially important for my generation, because we’re so used to hopping onto Google and getting information in five seconds. We need to make sure all of this is easy to get to,” Davis said.

The story map is intended to be a resource for scholars studying the formation of counties, town and county planners making decisions for

their localities, educators in the classroom, and young children through seniors all. “Having gone through the school system myself, I think it’s important that children are able to connect to persons, places and things, and to have information that reminds them of who they are and gives them a sense of self-worth and humanity,” said Hughes White, who added that even within her own generation, elders often sheltered descendants from the full details of family history.

Davidson hopes it will also help preserve what remains of communities in Morgantown’s historic district, which, with just four remaining original structures, is described in its National Register of Historic Places application as having one of the best preserved collections of African-American, Reconstruction-era buildings in the county.

“Increasing development and rising property values are impacting our communities. I think all of us, my age and younger, are wondering how long these communities will remain intact. I’m afraid if we don’t get this history documented, it will be lost. And

I think if new owners buying these properties know the history of what’s taken place there, they will take pride in these historic communities in which they’re living.”

While researching church histories for the story map, AAHA Community Outreach Coordinator Christine Lewis, who grew up in the Haiti community of Warrenton, said she hopes the story map will help remind people of today that there were very vibrant communities here before them—as it’s unexpectedly done for her.

“We had a real sense of community in Haiti, and other African American communities nearby—Alexandria Heights, The Pike, Warrenton—were also my stomping grounds. I could go down to the middle of Haiti, do something I had no business doing, and a neighbor would come out and shake her finger at me. I didn’t realize they had those same kinds of communities in the rural areas, like Ashville and Rosstown. It was the churches in these communities that really brought the people together.”

Davidson said the story map has given her “a whole new sense of pride in families that came through Reconstruction to today. Throughout much of the history, everything was segregated, and you get the impression that the African American community was hurt by it, but yet, we didn’t let

that hold us back. Segregation forced us to use our own ingenuity about what our communities needed. There was a certain amount of self-sufficiency, as well as efficiency, in these communities.”

Looking forward, AAHA is already thinking about ways to add new African American contributions to the story map, including cemeteries and burial sites, buildings, businesses, baptism sites, and landmarks pertaining to the underground railroad. And they hope other community members will recommend additions as they realize they have photographs or other artifacts that can be shared through the story map.

“The outpouring of support from the community, from the descendants of former slaveholders and from white churches sharing records that documented the enslaved who attended church with their slaveholders—that has touched me. It’s connecting our histories and realizing that all of this is our history, not just one versus the other,” Hughes White said. “Because we’re stronger together than we are apart. And Fauquier becomes the winner, because Fauquier will have a more complete and integrated history, because Fauquier’s history is strong, and is bold, across all ethnic groups.”



Historic photographs like this one, of The Plains Elementary School at Foster Hill, help illuminate Fauquier County’s history. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Signs of a Scenic River

Continued from cover

problem, Bennett and Imhoff, now PEC’s senior conservation fellow, lamented that signs once proudly announcing the Moormans’ scenic river designation had long disappeared. Working with VDOT, a generous private donor, and locally-based Performance Signs, Imhoff made it a personal mission to replace them.

On April 5, 2021, with blue skies and warm sunshine above their heads and the rush of the Moormans below their feet, community members and local leaders joined with PEC staff on Millington Road bridge to unveil the first of six new signs. Though pandemic-related social-distancing necessitated the crowd be small, the significance of the moment was palpable. Many folks in attendance called the banks of the Moormans home, others were part of its initial journey toward scenic river designation. Reporters from the *Daily Progress* and *Crozet Gazette* were there to document the event.

“It’s terribly important to us,” said PEC board member John Birdsall, who owns land along the Moormans. “I don’t live on the Moormans anymore, but two of my daughters do, so I’m

really happy to have the signs here. I think back to the late 80s when this designation was made and I thought it was a really good idea.”

Standing high on an eight-foot ladder alongside Imhoff, preparing to pull the covering off the first sign, Albemarle Supervisor Ann Mallek said, “I’m glad we are making sure the people of today have an appreciation for the natural resources of the county. Listen to the song of this water. I stop and listen every time I can, because that’s what is connecting us to this wonderful environment.”

What’s next for Albemarle’s Rivers and Streams?

The new signs are timely. With 59 percent of Albemarle’s streams and rivers found by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to be impaired by bacteria and other pollutants, Albemarle’s Comprehensive Plan has a strong focus on protecting and improving its water resources. The county in January 2021 kicked off a year-long public-engagement phase of its Stream Health Initiative, focused on the county’s rural area. This process will ultimately culminate in a community-developed set of

recommendations to Albemarle’s Board of Supervisors at the end of the year.

“It’s a very collaborative process because landowners are 100 percent of the role. We need a lot of landowner buy-in and tools to help them complete projects improving their own properties,” Mallek said. PEC is advocating for the continued prioritization of land conservation, especially along waterways, as well as appropriate land uses, streamside buffer plantings, and reduction of hardened, impervious surfaces near streams, rivers and lakes.

Mallek said Friends of the Moormans has played a key role in elevating water quality issues for county leaders. The group was founded by Bennett and her husband Jim, along with Carroll and Bob Gilges in the 1990s, when the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) began diverting every drop of water from the Moormans to feed Charlottesville’s water supply. Imhoff’s work on the scenic river signs has breathed renewed life into the group, which is now working to build support for the county’s Stream Health Initiative.

“As people are deconstructing nature to tidy up their



Aerial view of the Moormans River below Sugar Hollow Road, looking west toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. Photo by Hugh Kenny

world, we’ve been lobbying the county for more education about maintaining riparian buffers and about scenic river designation. One of our first steps is these new signs,” Bennett said. Friends of the Moormans is also working with Shenandoah National Park to improve parking near the reservoir to better protect surrounding natural areas and to install information kiosks at Moormans River trailheads.

“The inspiration that Friends of the Moormans has provided over the years, by constantly stirring the pot, has really encouraged local officials and local government. We would be nowhere without enthusiastic, engaged community members who are involved and passionate,” Mallek said.

Standing with Mallek on

that ladder at the Millington Road bridge, Imhoff commended the county for “thinking a lot about the scenic resources of the county and why they matter. People forget what’s in their own backyard and lose track of those natural resources that are designated at a state level as important. The Moormans is a drinking water source for much of Charlottesville, so it’s a great reminder to think about the Moormans when you open your tap at home.”

Once the crowd and cameras dispersed that sunny spring day in April, Mallek and Imhoff headed off to uncover the remaining five signs along a winding Sugar Hollow Road as it criss-crossed the rapidly rushing water below: *Moormans River — A Scenic River*.

Out&About

First PEC Quarterly Keynote Speaker Series



▲ Kicking off our new Quarterly Keynote Speaker Series on March 30, around 40 viewers tuned in to a candid conversation with D.C. Central Kitchen CEO Mike Curtin about the important role local food systems play in addressing food insecurity. D.C. Central Kitchen uses career training, job creation, and sustainable business practices to strengthen local food systems and reduce disparities in health and economic opportunity.

Rush River Trail Access



▲ PEC, PEC’s Krebsler Fund for Rappahannock County, Friends of the Rappahannock, and Rappahannock County Recreational Facilities Authority all partnered this spring to help the Appalachian Conservation Corps (ACC) build a new section of trail that will improve public access to the Rush River Trail. Built in one-and-a-half days, the 235-foot, steep, switchback trail reconnects to existing trails in the park. We are excited to expand the capacity of regional projects for clean water and public access to trails, and we plan to bring back the ACC crews for more great work in the Upper Rappahannock River watershed and greater Piedmont region in fall 2021.

Headwaters Streams Initiative Tree Plantings

PEC staff and volunteers engaged in numerous tree plantings this spring as part of our joint Headwaters Stream Initiative with Friends of the Rappahannock. The initiative provides free technical assistance, project design, materials, and labor for the planting of native trees and shrubs in riparian zones on properties in the headwater counties of the Rappahannock River Watershed. Spring 2021 was the initiative’s largest planting season to date, totaling 9,278 trees for just over 30 acres and 2.5 miles of riparian buffers. These new streamside buffers will help improve water quality, create wildlife habitat, and help mitigate erosion, flooding and runoff pollution going into the streams that feed the Rappahannock River. Through the joint initiative, we helped plant 2,540 trees in Culpeper, 970 trees in Fauquier, 298 trees in Greene, 2,770 trees and shrubs in Rappahannock, and 2,700 trees in Madison. Learn more about this work at pecva.org/buffers.

Riverview Park Boat Launch Repairs



▲ This spring, PEC teamed up with Charlottesville Parks and Recreation, the Rivanna Conservation Alliance, and the Rivanna River Company to update the boat landing at Riverview Park. The landing was badly damaged by flooding in 2020 and 2021, but now, visitors can safely access the river to swim and boat as the warm weather arrives!

Gems of the Piedmont Webinar



▲ More than 70 people joined PEC and National Sporting Library and Museum for our webinar, *Brook Trout: Gems of the Piedmont*. Historically abundant throughout the East, the beloved eastern brook trout has been declining over the past century. This talk was about the state of Virginia’s brook trout and PEC’s work with partner organizations, local landowners and state and federal agencies to ensure the survival of this iconic species.



Cycling for Sustainable Cities



▲ At our May 7 virtual event, researchers Ralph Buehler and John Pucher spoke about their new book, *Cycling for Sustainable Cities*, which describes ways to make city cycling safe, practical, and convenient for all ages and abilities. They talked about trends and policies, and shared examples from across America and around the world with cases similar to our own communities.

Arbor Day in Gordonsville

Along the western gateway into Gordonsville, 18 new sugar maple trees stand 10-12 feet tall at the intersection of Spotswood Trail and Blue Ridge Turnpike. Planted in April, they were the vision of a generous anonymous donor with a passion for trees. Town to Trail, a working group of The Piedmont Environmental Council, connected the donor with multiple partners, including landowners Bruce and Jacqueline Gupton, Grelen Nursery and Friends of the Rappahannock. This tree planting is part of a larger effort to re-establish the tree canopy that historically lined Gordonsville streets, as changing climate conditions lead communities across the country to rediscover the importance of trees in urban settings.



Photo by Peter Hujik

Out&About



UPCOMING Events

Event details subject to change. Please check pecva.org/events for the latest information.

Quarterly Keynote Speaker Series: Conservation & Collaboration

Webinar | June 24 • 6:30 PM

Together with the Shenandoah National Park Trust and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute's Virginia Working Landscapes (VWL), PEC presents the 2nd virtual Quarterly Keynote event. Featured speakers include VWL Program Director Dr. Amy Johnson, Shenandoah National



Free Event! Park Superintendent Patrick Kenney, and PEC President Chris Miller. Learn more about how these three organizations are working together and register online at www.pecva.org/events.

Dark Skies Summer Events at Rappahannock County Park

When > June 12, July 24, & August 7 • 8:00 PM
September 11 • 7:00 PM

Where > Rappahannock County Park, 7 Park Lane, Washington, VA 22747

Join local star-gazers for a trip around the galaxy at the International Dark Skies Association-awarded Rappahannock County Park. Rappahannock League for Environmental Protection has partnered with PEC's Krebsner Fund for Rappahannock County to create dark-sky friendly lighting on buildings throughout Rappahannock County, so that the stars shine more brightly in Virginia's Piedmont. RLEP hosts these monthly night-sky events throughout the summer, with presentations and telescopes provided by local astronomers. To learn more about Rappahannock County Park dark skies events, visit <https://rappahannockcountypark.weebly.com>.

Free Family Event!

Community Farm Volunteer Days

When > Now through October

Where > 39990 Howsers Branch Dr. Aldie, VA 20105

PEC's Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows is open for volunteers of all ages and groups of up to 25 people. Our goal this year is 35,000 pounds of produce, all donated to Loudoun Hunger Relief to help Loudoun's food insecure community find fresh, healthy, local produce. Volunteers help plant, transplant, harvest, sort and package fruits and veggies for delivery.



Saint Paul VI Catholic High School students help plant row crops at the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows in June 2020. Photo by Marco Sánchez

For more information about PEC's Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows, visit pecva.org/farm, or contact Farm Manager Dana Melby at dmelby@pecva.org. Sign up to volunteer through *Loudoun Cares* and *Let's Volunteer*, at www.pecva.org/farmvolunteer, and to receive emailed volunteer information and updates.

Save the Date: Annual Farm-to-Table Dinner & Virtual Auction

When > Saturday, October 2

Where > St. Brides Farm, Upperville, VA

This year, our annual fundraising event will take place in-person and feature an online auction. Enjoy locally-sourced food and beautiful views of the Piedmont and St. Brides Sculpture Collection and bid on 30+ auction packages. Later this summer, invitations will be mailed to PEC members and ticket sales will begin. However, you may sign up as a sponsor and reserve your seats now. For more details, please contact Kendra Atkins at katkins@pecva.org or (540) 347-2334 x 7005.

Happening Now!

Solarize Piedmont

MAY 3 TO JUNE 30

If you've been curious about getting a solar system for your home, farm or business, but haven't priced it out, now is a good time to sign up for a free quote! Our Solarize Piedmont campaign with the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP) makes the process of getting solar easy with pre-vetted installers who offer per-watt pricing that's been negotiated in advance.

To get started or learn more, visit pecva.org/solarize.



Dear Friends,

The emergence of the Brood X cicadas this year weirdly coincided with our reentry into in-person interaction and engagement after more than a year of Covid-related restrictions and social distancing and a time of historic political and social change.

Over the past few weeks, we happily supplemented webinars and online meetings with a number of in-person gatherings and events, with plans to add more face-to-face activities as we move toward September. PEC staff are now able to work out of our offices in Charlottesville, Orange and Warrenton, as determined by their comfort level. And with the experiences of the past year, they now have at their disposal the efficiency and expanded reach of remote-work tools to complement the benefit of working on site.

Right now, we have tremendous opportunities to accelerate work on conservation, to improve public access to nature on land and on the water, to strengthen local food systems, and to move toward more sustainable infrastructure for water quality, energy and transportation. The challenge is identifying the projects that make the most sense and advancing them for consideration of approval and funding. And while it may feel as if we've not seen each other in a long time, PEC staff have been very busy working with many partners to move projects and policies toward those broader goals, as you can see from the articles in this issue of *The Piedmont View*.

The Heyward Community Forest public access improvements is one example. The story map from the Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County highlights the breadth of cultural and historical

resources in our region, bringing people in touch with carefully curated information. Thousands of trees are being planted as part of PEC's partnerships with Friends of the Rappahannock in the Headwater Stream Initiative and with Albemarle County and Friends of the Moormans River. The Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows has hundreds of volunteers helping us meet expanded demand for fresh produce, while our efforts to donate and deliver milk, eggs, and meat to food insecure households continue through our Farm to Food Bank initiative.

In this socially-distant last year, we've worked especially hard to let you know about our work and opportunities through a variety of communications tools at your disposal. This quarterly publication, *The Piedmont View* is one; and we couldn't be happier to welcome back the "Out and About" and "Upcoming Events" sections that recap past events and invite you to upcoming ones. The 300,000 *Buy Fresh Buy Local* guides mailed and delivered this spring to every household and business in the Piedmont region is another, as is a mailer focused on conservation options that went to rural landowners in the Piedmont.

But many people now go to the internet and social media for their information. PEC communications staff have produced about 40 new videos capturing the



A Brood X Cicada in historic St. Louis, Loudoun County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

places and people that PEC is working with across the region. These are available on our YouTube channel and many have been posted on Facebook and Instagram. We continue to post new ideas and information to the PEC website, where you can find some of the latest PEC-related news under a page aptly named "The Latest." And we encourage you to sign up for email alerts and information, which provide urgent updates and action opportunities as they arise.

Most importantly, we look forward to seeing you in person once again and working with you on the ground.

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President



Photo by Matt Ha



INSIDE

The Heyward Community Forest Grows in Albemarle, new *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Guides have been released, Solarize Piedmont runs through June 30, Upcoming Events, and more!

Beaver dams help maintain healthy streams by altering hydrology. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

QUESTION:

What months do eastern meadowlarks nest in hayfields?

- a) May
- b) June
- c) July
- d) All of the above

ANSWER ON PAGE 3

A photograph of a meadowlark bird perched on a tall, thin grass stem. The bird has a yellow body with black and white streaks on its wings and back. The background is a soft-focus field of tall grasses.

Photo by October Greenfield

The logo for the Piedmont Environmental Council, featuring a stylized green house icon with a tree inside, next to the text 'Piedmont Environmental Council' in a bold, sans-serif font.

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