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Post Office Box 460  
Warrenton, VA 20188  
540.347.2334  
pec@pecva.org

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## Taking on State Law

### IN DEFENSE OF FAMILY FARMS

By Cindy Sabato

It's reasonable that Mike and Tina Roebuck want to hold on to the 112-acre Madison County farm that's been in the Roebuck family for nearly 150 years. The place holds decades of memories for Mike, who fondly remembers walking the woods and learning to make soap and sassafras tea from his great-grandmother Mary Roebuck. His brother Kenny grew up there and for years helped farm the land with their grandfather Harry Roebuck Sr. "They had 200 head at one time," Mike remembers, "that's how they paid the bills."

But a clause in a Virginia state law contained an unreasonable requirement that nearly cost the Roebucks the farm, quite literally. And when PEC heard about their predicament, our state policy team went to work. "By getting a short clause in Virginia's land use taxation code changed, we've made it easier for families like the Roebucks, whose land is co-owned by many, to keep it all in the family," said Dan Holmes, then PEC's state policy director who led the effort.

#### The Beginnings

PEC Historic Preservation Coordinator Kristie Kendall met the Roebucks while documenting historic African American sites along Elly Road in southeast Madison County, to be added to the state's inventory of cultural resources.

"No one quite knows for sure, but it's thought that after Emancipation, Noah Roebuck — Mike's 3rd great-grandfather — opened a shoemaker shop and used skills he developed while enslaved to save up the \$646.60 he needed to buy more than 200 acres of land on July 28, 1881," Kendall said.

Noah's original log cabin is long gone, but the house his grandson (and Mike's great-grandfather) George J. Roebuck Sr. built, still (barely) stands today. George's wife, Mary, was the last person to live there full time, before her passing in 1974. After that, Mike's Aunt Julia, one of George and Mary's 10 children, stayed at the home on visits back from Florida, up until about 2008 or 2009. Harry Sr. and Kenny farmed the land until Harry was



Harry White Roebuck Sr., with wife Virginia (foreground photos), farmed the land that's been in the Roebuck family for nearly 150 years until Harry was 91 years old.

91 years old; he died in 2011 at 98. A rose bush marks Noah's (and his wife, Rody's) final resting place at the entrance to the Roebuck family cemetery, where every family member buried is known or remembered, personally or by way of oral history.

As was common in those days, Noah gifted or sold some of his land away, and George Roebuck Sr. was the last formally-deeded property owner of the existing 112 acres. From him, the Roebuck land has passed down informally, without a will, to no fewer than 25 of his descendants, including Mike.

As one of many co-owners,

Mike received notice in 2016 that the family's 112 acres was up for auction. "The family members who supposedly were paying taxes on it weren't, and hadn't been since 2013. There were a lot of back taxes due," Tina said.

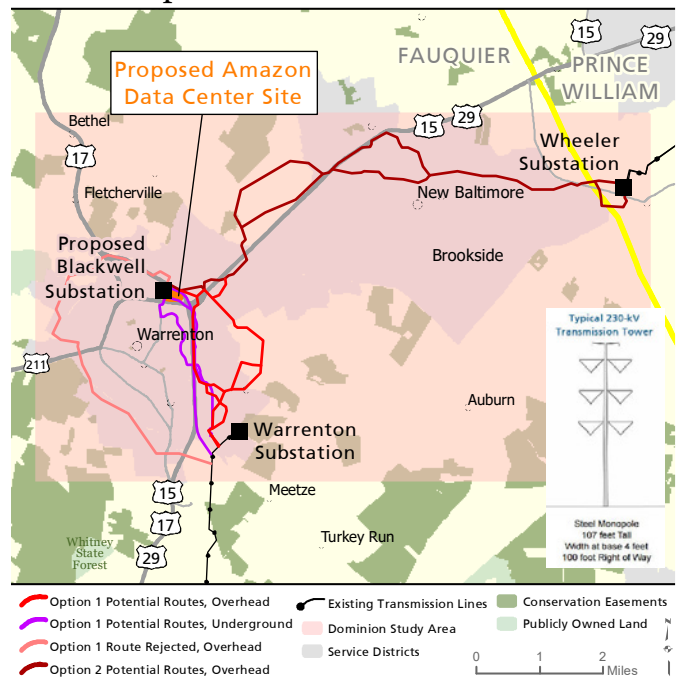
Mike and Tina were compelled to step in. "This land has been in our family for over 100 years. There is a lot of family history and memories, and for me and my brother a lot of sentimentality. Kenny was raised by our grandparents and farmed every inch of the land with our granddad. We just couldn't let it go," Mike said. He and Tina dug deep

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## Dominion and Amazon Set Sights on Warrenton

By Julie Bolthouse

### Potential Transmission Interconnection for Proposed Amazon Data Center



For presentation purposes only. Overhead and underground preliminary routing options sourced from maps posted to [dominionenergy.com/blackwellroad](http://dominionenergy.com/blackwellroad). Map by Watson Randolph/PEC

The following article is based on email alerts from PEC's Julie Bolthouse and Kevin Kask. To learn more, visit [pecva.org/blackwell](http://pecva.org/blackwell).

Two of the biggest corporate interests in Virginia have eyes on Warrenton. Late in 2021, Amazon bought a 41-acre parcel for a potential new data center. The property on Blackwell Road, behind Country Chevrolet, on the northeast side of Warrenton is zoned Industrial and allows data center development with a special use permit approved by the Town of Warrenton. This spring, Amazon submitted its special use permit application to the Town and a "load letter" to Dominion Energy, requesting service for a specified power load to support the proposed data center. The large load request triggered Dominion Energy's plans for a new substation and 230-kV transmission line to serve the potential data center. Dominion has shared many

transmission line route options from the two closest substations—one in Warrenton, off of Meetze Rd, next to the Central Sports Complex; the other is the Wheeler Substation, in Prince William County near Vint Hill (see map). Dominion representatives have been very clear that **the Amazon data center is the reason the utility company would be obligated to build a new transmission line** to the north side of Town at this time.

With an average height of around 110 feet, an overhead 230-kV transmission line to Amazon's Blackwell Road site would have the effect of industrializing any corridor it runs through. And from our initial look, all possible routes to the proposed Amazon site

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# The Land That Sustains Us

## PEC Celebrates 50 Years

On Saturday, May 21, PEC staff gathered together with more than 160 friends, family, and supporters on the gentle rolling slopes of a mostly-conserved Clark Mountain to celebrate PEC's 50th year of protecting a special place: the Virginia Piedmont. Fierce heat and humidity did little to dissuade the enthusiasm during the five hours of festivities up at Mistwood Farm, near Rapidan, Virginia.

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.

### Rave reviews for workshops highlighting PEC initiatives

Two concurrent workshops elucidated PEC's holistic approach to conservation. The first, "Blue Ridge to the Bay," was expertly led by Maggi Blomstrom, Don McCown, Peter Hujik, Linnea Stewart and Laura O'Brien. These staff wove a comprehensive tapestry of the importance of landscape-scale conservation in the Upper Rappahannock River watershed. "This was simply one of the best presentations, on any subject, I have ever attended," commented Loren Hershey, of Oakton.

PEC Wildlife Habitat Restoration Coordinator October Greenfield gave a riveting



Photos by Hugh Kenny

talk about grassland bird decline on working landscapes and how we are working to bring them back through the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative — a partner initiative with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute's Virginia Working Landscapes, Quail Forever and American Farmland Trust.



"I am in awe as a fellow citizen of these United States here and celebrate your 50 years as a community and organization. May you have 50, more than 50 more, and 50 more beyond that."

— TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

### Celebrating our shared home with Terry Tempest Williams

Combined with the vastly infinite blue sky above, the mountain-view setting was the perfect backdrop for our guest keynote speaker, Terry Tempest Williams. In a lyric address that began with a reflection to one of our region's most high-profile victories — "I wanna thank you personally, for your spirited leadership beginning with Manassas and the Disney campaign... from the west, we were watching you, and you succeeded with an interdisciplinary conversation that took place between conservationists and farmers and historians. And it mattered to us. And it also showed us not only what is possible, but necessary." — Williams' message resonated with all. Her powerful words moved all who listened — some, to tears. Although no one

could say it quite as eloquently as Williams, the one word summary of her remarks would have to be "hope."

Carole Napolitano, a dedicated conservationist who has engaged with PEC through a variety of conservation initiatives, echoed this sentiment. "[It] was a theme of the event and certainly at the core of Williams' address... and the uninterrupted view of the mountains from Mistwood inspired hope for the preservation of our precious lands and the resources they represent."

At the end of the day, it was clear to all that the Piedmont represents more than hope — it's symbolic of the good that can happen when community action meets love of land.

# Histories Along the Blue Ridge

## Digitization of Shenandoah National Park condemnation records in Madison County

By Kristie Kendall

Three days of rain gave way to sunshine on a May Sunday afternoon, perhaps a perfect symbolism for the official unveiling of a long-awaited project nearly 90 years in the making. A crowd of more than 50 people filled the Madison County Administrative Auditorium for the occasion.

When Shenandoah National Park was established in 1936, thousands of people in eight counties were forced off their land by eminent domain. The county-by-county condemnations of properties and land produced thousands of documents detailing the history of early 20th century occupation of the Blue Ridge. For decades, these records remained in county courthouse basements and storage rooms, largely inaccessible and unsearchable.

The May event celebrated the digitization and public availability of thousands of Madison County deed book records, court proceedings, individual case files and more. All are now accessible and searchable online at the James Madison University website, Histories along the Blue Ridge, which is accessible from [pecva.org/snp-digital-records](http://pecva.org/snp-digital-records).

PEC approached Madison County Clerk Leeta Louk in 2021 about the possibility of digitizing Madison's collection. The Madison County Historical Society offered to fund the project, which allowed PEC to hire intern Victoria Garnett, who had archival experience. Between July 2021 and January 2022, Victoria assessed, organized and scanned thousands of pages. Each of the 361 tracts of land in Madison County that were assessed for inclusion in the Park had a land file, with multiple documents including assessments, a survey and claim form. Additional documents from the court case include the proceedings themselves, muniments of title and depositions.

Mildred Fincham Jackson was among those in attendance at the Madison County records unveiling. She was just three years old when her family was moved off the mountain. These records attest to the strength and determination of families like Mildred's, who had resided in the mountain for generations. They also breathe life back into the wilderness of Shenandoah and remind us that before Shenandoah National Park



Leeta Louk, Madison County Clerk, stands with Victoria Garnett, PEC Digitization Intern, and Kristie Kendall, PEC Historic Preservation Coordinator, as they review the condemnation records in July 2021. Photo by Judy Mahanes

became the resource we all enjoy today, these mountains had a history of human occupation spanning more than ten thousand years.

The now-completed Madison County project advances an overall goal of digitizing the records from lands taken in all eight counties — Albemarle,

Augusta, Greene, Page, Rappahannock, Rockingham, and Warren—to create Shenandoah National Park. JMU previously digitized Rockingham County records in 2017, and PEC completed Rappahannock County records in 2020. We hope to further the work in other counties in the future.



# Taking on State Law

## IN DEFENSE OF FAMILY FARMS

Continued from cover

into their retirement savings, paid the back taxes, and have been paying the full fair-market value taxes ever since. “But with depleted savings and no financial help from other family members, they needed a new avenue for protecting the Roebuck farm.

### The trouble with the land use taxation law

Virginia state law allows counties to offer Use Value Taxation programs, commonly referred to as “land use taxation.” These programs tax land at its actual production value — in the Roebuck’s case, agriculture — rather than at its full, fair-market value as real estate. For farmers, whose wealth is typically tied up in land rather than cash, the program can be a real “landsaver,” lowering annual property taxes by a substantial amount. By Mike and Tina’s estimate, land use taxation could lower their tax burden by more than half.

But when they tried to enroll the property in that program, they discovered that language in the Virginia law requires signatures from all known co-owners of the property. That’s where things got complicated.

“In this situation, at some point, a hostile entity had come in and for \$25,000 bought two shares of ownership from family members who were in a financial bind. And by refusing to agree to land use taxation, it appears

this entity was trying to force a foreclosure on the property, by putting a tax burden on Mike and Tina that was unsustainable,” Holmes said.

“Use valuation was formed so we wouldn’t lose farms to inappropriate taxation. But for this stupid code section, this family would not be struggling, trying to keep up with the tax bill while simultaneously paying the legal bill associated with fending off a hostile outside attempt to gain control over the property,” Holmes said.

Part of PEC’s mission is to advocate for strong state policy that supports working farms and land conservation values. “Once we looked into it, we could see an easy fix, and we felt PEC was best positioned to argue for this legislation based on the fact it played into so many key elements of our mission, including farmland preservation and the rural economy, not to mention being heartbroken by what we saw in this particular case.”

### Just a bill on Capitol Hill

After identifying the section of code creating the barrier, PEC’s policy team began championing a change through the legislative process. “It should not be the case where a single landowner, who shares interest in a property that may have as many as 25 or more landowners, should have more power than the rest combined and be able to prevent that family from getting the tax

relief it needs to continue use of the land,” Holmes said. “I don’t think our legislature ever foresaw these circumstances or that this would be an outcome.”

“We conceptualized a potential legislative fix—changing the language to ensure that majority interest would rule. We ran our idea through then-Secretary of Forestry and Agriculture Bettina Ring, since hers was the department that oversees the law we were dealing with. Were we missing anything? Did she share our concern about the problem? And she was interested,” Holmes said.

“We had a follow-up conversation with the Secretary and other members of the legislature to go over our proposed language and, given its agricultural tie, handed it off to Delegate Michael Webert for his consideration,” he said.

Webert ultimately filed HB996—Land Use Assessment: Parcels with Multiple Owners—on behalf of PEC. From there, after some tweaks at the House subcommittee level, it received overwhelming bipartisan support both in the House and the Senate before landing on the governor’s desk to be signed. Along the way, PEC staff had boots on the ground in Richmond and elsewhere, promoting the bill, sharing it with partners and others in the conservation community, giving testimony on its behalf.

“The minute people understood the concept of the bill — to ensure people wouldn’t lose their farms due to inappropriate taxation — and that it affects any person who shares a piece of property with other owners, it sold itself. It was an



easy fix to a problem that should never have existed in the first place. And that’s the best kind of legislation to be part of,” Holmes said. “The rural economy is part of our mission, and when you start to lose that industry, we all see the results of what happens to the associated rural land.”

### Enhancing heirs’ property protections

HB996 goes into effect on July 1, when Mike and Tina will once again try to enroll the Roebuck farm into Madison’s land use taxation program. “That will give us some relief, at least for a while,” Tina said, referring to the requirement that land use taxation must be renewed every five years. After that, they face other hurdles ahead.

The historical record is replete with stories of involuntary loss of heirs’ property land, stemming from a combination of two main things: unscrupulous others acquiring ownership shares from family members in financial need and forcing these properties to auction, and a process of clearing title so complicated and costly that it

frequently exhausts all available resources before reaching conclusion. “But knowing the family history on the land, we can’t not try,” Tina said.

PEC was part of a coalition that supported efforts in the General Assembly in 2020 to pass the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act, which ensure that heirs’ property family members get the first opportunity to acquire their historically family-owned land if it must be sold, and that if they can’t, the land be sold at fair market value, rather than auction. Our advocacy for HB996 further enhances protections for heirs’ property owners by requiring just a majority of property owners to sign off on land use taxation.

“It was heartwarming to hear their family story and heartbreaking to hear how the system has failed them because it’s an heirs’ property,” Kendall recalls of her first meeting with the Roebucks. “This was a ‘stop what you’re doing and help’ kind of situation. Of all the work I’ve been doing at PEC, this is one of those stories you never forget,” Kendall said.

### MEET PEC

## Nora Seilheimer

Director of Advancement

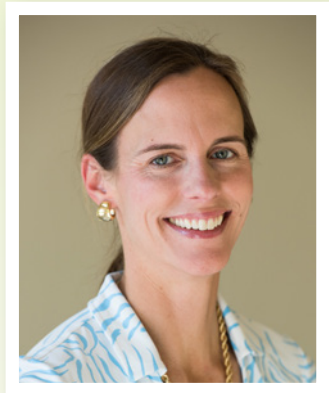


Photo by Stephanie Gross

County. She helped organize the campaign that stopped the Charlottesville bypass in 2012. In addition to that experience, Nora also brings 20 years of success in grassroots organizing, developing fundraising programs and advising nonprofits, and eight years on PEC’s Board of Directors.

Nora is excited to have a more direct role in building community among PEC’s supporters. “Throughout my career, it has been very rewarding to work with donors who are committed to making the world a better place through their philanthropy. PEC’s loyal members and donors are committed to conserving the Piedmont and I look forward to working with them at this critical time,” she says.

Nora lives with her family on their conserved southern Albemarle farm and will be working out of PEC’s office in Charlottesville, Virginia.

By Sophia Chapin

“It is such a gift to live in this special part of the world, and I feel fortunate to be part of an effective organization that can draw on 50 years of experience to ensure that this region’s future is vibrant, beautiful and sustainable,” says Nora Seilheimer, who joined PEC this March as Director of Advancement. She will be providing leadership and strategic direction for PEC’s fundraising priorities and activities.

Like many of our supporters, Nora found her way to PEC through community involvement with conservation and land use issues in Albemarle

### MEET PEC

## Kevin Kask

Land Use Field Representative, Fauquier County

By Sophia Chapin



Photo by Hugh Kenny

Just over six months ago, Kevin Kask joined PEC and jumped right into the heart of a number of local land use issues. He has been crucial in supporting grassroots advocacy around impending, and oftentimes controversial, development proposals, like data centers in Prince William County’s rural area.

“I like being a big-picture kind of guy, looking how a project or proposal would have an impact,” he says, which fits in perfectly with PEC’s regional approach. Kevin holds a Master’s degree in urban affairs, but first studied music and geology at the undergraduate level. “I actually found out about urban planning through the show Parks and Recreation,” Kevin said, adding that he soon found himself intrigued by its interdisciplinary scope. “The environmental issues, but also the social and economic components,” he said.

Through his graduate research and other roles, Kevin started connecting the dots between the legal foundations of urban planning and its real-life implications on communities. “Planning and zoning is where the rubber hits the road and where we can start addressing social and environmental problems,” he says.

In a region like ours, with increased development activity accompanying new population growth and demographic changes, Kevin’s efforts to encourage better land use decisions at the local level — while keeping national and regional implications in mind — have become all the more important. Living in the sprawling suburbs of Northern Virginia, he certainly brings lived experiences to the work that lies ahead here in the Piedmont.




# Joining the Climate Conversation

By Kat Imhoff


In the immortal words of Bob Dylan: “The times, they are a-changin.” And by “times,” in this case, we mean the climate. The climate is changing across the Virginia Piedmont, and Albemarle County is taking a lead with bold steps to plan for those changes.


Climate is a global issue, but Albemarle leaders recognize that no matter what the rest of the world does, local governments have roles to play. For one thing, they have a responsibility to do what they can to slow changing climate conditions. They also will be on the front lines in responding to community needs when climate changes put people at risk — when lands flood more frequently or when people suffer health effects of rising temperatures.

Community

Rising average temperatures mean extreme heat in the summer will be paired with fewer, less predictable frosts, increasing health risks and costs of living.

While less snow might seem like a good thing, more mosquitos and ticks are not – they spread diseases like Lyme and West Nile.

**25-30**  
more days of mosquito activity by 2050

**19-23**  
more days of tick activity by 2050

Hot days increase the risk of heat-related illnesses and hot nights have metabolic consequences, especially for children.

To that end, the Albemarle Board of Supervisors crafted and adopted the first phase of its Climate Action Plan, way back in October 2020.

That plan focuses on how the County’s operations could support a reduction in greenhouse gas/carbon emissions, such as through mass transit initiatives, improving walkability, and embarking on cleaner energy usage. It also considers how Albemarle County leaders can anticipate exactly what hazards are likely to be made worse by the changing climate and weather patterns in the region and steps to protect people and communities.

### Where is Albemarle most vulnerable?

The County has partnered with The Piedmont Environmental Council, Resilient Virginia, climate modeling engineering firm Sobis, and Richmond-based marketing firm Green Fin Studio to analyze the risks and vulnerabilities of climate changes within Albemarle County. The study examines extreme heat, drought, flooding, fire, disease and pestilence, and the intersections of all of these hazards. It also views their impacts through the lens of people, the natural environment, our built environment and the economy.

For example, Albemarle County is experiencing hotter and longer summers that are creating several public health risks. Ticks and mosquitos species that

carry such diseases as West Nile and Lyme are flourishing in the area for longer periods of time. People living without the luxury of air conditioning bear long-term health challenges associated with excess heat. The study also underscores the importance of tree cover for cooling shade and habitat value, as well as for capturing carbon from the atmosphere.

Albemarle is also seeing more intense rainstorms alongside extended periods of drought. It’s easy to take for granted that our faucets will always provide enough safe water and that our homes are protected from floods, but the normal we’re used to is slowly changing. The alternating problems of too much and not enough water create new and serious challenges for water management.

The reality is that climate conditions are changing throughout the PEC region, and Albemarle’s climate risk and vulnerability report is applicable to other counties as well. Now is the time for all of us to arm ourselves with an understanding of what climate change means



Street flooding on Campbell Road in Crozet after a storm. Photo courtesy of Albemarle County Department of Fire Rescue

in each of our communities and to each of us individually.

Albemarle County has started updating its comprehensive plan accordingly, and we hope all counties will follow suit, using the lens of climate to inform local land use decisions. One place to start is PEC’s briefing paper, *Resources for Climate Action Planning for Albemarle County*, which is available on our website at [www.pecva.org/climate](http://www.pecva.org/climate). Over the coming months, PEC will share key takeaways from Albemarle’s risk and vulnerability report, highlighting what it means for planning efforts not only in Albemarle County, but throughout the region. Get ready to join the climate conversation!

## Dominion and Amazon Set Sights on Warrenton

Continued from cover

would have a detrimental effect on the gateway(s) into the Town of Warrenton, on historic and cultural resources along the route, and on residential neighborhoods.

Dominion’s community input process will include stakeholder meetings through August. **Currently, community open house events are scheduled for June 22, 4 – 7 p.m. at Kettle Run High School and June 23, 4 – 7 p.m. at the Fauquier County Fairgrounds.** Dominion plans to file an application with the State Corporation Commission (SCC) by fall 2022.

Stepping back, **we have a number of questions and concerns** we hope will be addressed relatively soon:

- The data center requires Town of Warrenton approval. What happens if the Town denies Amazon’s special use permit? Or, if the Town were to approve a smaller data center project, how would that impact Dominion’s proposal?
- Town zoning requires that data center buildings, mechanical equipment and the substation be screened from roadways. Amazon’s application does not include an analysis of its visual impact. When will Amazon be evaluating this?

- Data centers can use a lot of water. However, Amazon’s application does not include any details about its planned usage of public water supplies. When will Amazon provide information about this?
- This would be a multi-million dollar project, and our understanding from Dominion is that the entire project would be paid for by Dominion customers. Can Amazon be required to underwrite any portion of the project?
- Could locating the data center in other industrially-zoned sites, closer to existing infrastructure provide a less intrusive, and less costly, option? Remington Technology Park, for example, is a 234-acre, shovel-ready site located right next to an existing substation and already owned by a data center development company, Point One.
- Even if stakeholders make it clear that they prefer underground lines, how likely is it that the SCC, which has the final permitting authority, would truly consider underground routes given that cost is typically one of the primary considerations in routing decisions?



A 230-kV transmission line along Rt. 7 in Loudoun County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

This is not the first time we have seen Dominion build a new transmission line at the behest of Amazon, nor will it likely be the last. In 2018, after four years of controversy and intervention from the Virginia General Assembly, Dominion reached a settlement with Haymarket community members and committed to burying three miles of a transmission line to serve an Amazon Data Services project there. (Such intervention by the General Assembly, brought on by community pressure, may be required again to ensure the undergrounding of transmission lines to the proposed data center in Warrenton.) And later this year, we also expect to see a transmission line proposal in rural Culpeper to serve the data center recently

approved for Amazon Data Services subsidiary, Marvell Development.

We believe that Amazon, a company with a current market value of over \$1.5 trillion and net income in 2021 of over \$33 billion, *not Dominion ratepayers*, should bear the costs of building this transmission line. Furthermore, rather than accept that this Amazon project at the Blackwell site is a done deal, **we hope community members will urge the Warrenton Town Council to consider the broader impacts of approving a data center at this location and turn down Amazon’s proposal.** And if the Town decides to approve it, we hope that approval will be conditioned upon the associated transmission line being put underground.



# On the Ground

## Albemarle & Charlottesville

- The Albemarle County Planning Commission approved Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville’s rezoning application for the **second phase of its Southwood redevelopment project**, which involves converting the balance of the property (including the existing mobile home park) into a mixed-income community with up to 1,000 units and deep affordability. The rezoning is a precondition for federal grants that will be needed for substantial environmental remediation. The plan is expected to go before the Board of Supervisors later this year. In the meantime, PEC is working with Habitat, Albemarle County, and other partners to provide safe and welcoming connections to adjoining Biscuit Run Park.
- The Easton Porter Group is proposing an **expansion to Pippin Hill Vineyard in North Garden within the Southern Albemarle Rural Historic District**. The proposal would rezone a parcel of land from Village Residential to Rural Area and request a special use permit for the parcel containing the Historic Crossroads Tavern. Special use permits available to farm wineries in rural areas allow for substantial development activities; this transformation would add 11 guest cottages and have potentially harmful or disruptive effects. PEC remains actively involved in monitoring the process and assessing site impacts and will work to ensure consistency with goals expressed through the comprehensive plan for rural areas.

## Clarke

- The **County Farmers Market** began its 2022 season on Saturday, May 7. The market is held 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays in the parking lot of the Clarke County Public Schools’ administration building on West Main Street in Berryville. With around 30 vendors, market goers can expect to find locally grown fruits and vegetables, meats, baked goods, flowers and plants, and homemade arts and crafts.
- The County Planning Commission is reviewing a **new draft of the County’s comprehensive plan**, which helps guide growth and development decisions in the future. The draft comprehensive plan public hearing will be held on June 29.

## Culpeper

- In April, the Board of Supervisors approved the **rezoning of 234 acres of agricultural land near Salubria and Hansbrough Ridge** to light industrial to accommodate a nearly 450,000-square-foot data center complex proposed by an Amazon subsidiary. PEC, along with many local residents and a coalition of historic and open-space conservation organizations, strongly opposed this rezoning. Several neighboring landowners have filed suit against the County seeking to nullify the rezoning.

## Fauquier

- In April, PEC staff **showcased our Potomac Planting Program and the Piedmont 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.
- Prince William County is undergoing a comprehensive plan update that would designate approximately **1,800 acres along Route 28 for Industrial Employment Use**. This would deem the area appropriate for such uses as manufacturing, warehousing, distribution centers, and auto repair, replacing the rural/agricultural landscape that currently exists. We are particularly concerned about this potential, because based on traffic estimates, it could double the existing daily vehicle traffic and triple the existing truck traffic on Route 28 through Fauquier.

## Greene

- On April 12, the Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to deny a **special use permit (SUP) sought by Sojourner’s Glamping** that would have allowed for the construction and operation of a rural resort on 117 acres off Mutton Hollow Road. The proposed project, which met with spirited local opposition, would have included 144 glamping sites, a full-service restaurant, spa, event venue, and other amenities. PEC opposed this SUP over concerns that this facility would have adverse impacts on the rural character of this area of the County; we suggested that such a development could be more appropriately sited within the County’s existing growth areas.

## Loudoun

- Despite the spirited advocacy by PEC and community members for postponement of the **Route 15 North Comprehensive Plan Amendment** in favor of interim safety improvements, creation of a small area plan, and an economic development impact analysis on Lucketts businesses, the Board of Supervisors voted to forward the comprehensive plan amendment to the June 21 Board meeting for approval.
- In April, **PEC participated in a native tree planting at Middleburg Montessori School**, organized by the Goose Creek Association and Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District. Students were taught the importance of riparian buffers, as well as how to properly plant trees, from proper hole size to mulching.
- PEC’s **Catoctin Creek Conservation Fund donated \$1,000 to the Waterford Foundation to support poison hemlock removal efforts**. Currently, 11 acres of floodplain near Catoctin Creek (including a public interpretive walking trail) are infested with poison hemlock, which is known for its toxicity to livestock and people.
- Our **fourth growing season at PEC’s Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows** is well underway. Volunteers have been busy planting crops, helping expand our pollinator and wildlife habitat, and of course, harvesting fresh produce for donation to

Loudoun Hunger Relief. To get involved on the farm visit [pecva.org/farmvolunteer](http://pecva.org/farmvolunteer).

## Madison

- A Maryland developer has applied for a special use permit to construct a **glamping facility on a 38-acre agriculturally-zoned property on Fords Shop Road**. Pitched as the “Robinson River Nature Retreat,” the facility would include up to 70 glamping units and a large single structure containing a lodge, restaurant, wellness center and employee housing. County staff and several members of the Planning Commission have expressed concerns about the proposed density of the project, especially given that 10 acres of the property are in a floodplain and therefore undevelopable. In light of these concerns, the developer is seeking to acquire adjacent acreage to expand the project area. PEC staff will continue to closely monitor this proposed project.

## Orange

- Gordonsville has contracted with Land Planning Design Associates to begin **final design for the Verling Park**. The design will incorporate the two parcels that PEC purchased — thanks to strong community support — between King and Market Streets, that connect Verling Park and Firemen’s Fairgrounds. The design process, expected to be completed in early fall, includes opportunities for public input.
- PEC continues to monitor the **proposed Wilderness Crossing residential development** on the site of unreclaimed historic gold mines. As of this writing, the County has not scheduled a public hearing on the request to rezone the 2,602 acre property, but the applicant has continued to meet with County planning staff in efforts to move the project forward. Meanwhile, PEC has urged the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and Virginia Energy to hold a public briefing in Orange County to share what is known about the mercury contamination and how the harm can be mitigated. The issue, and PEC’s response, were highlighted this spring in a *Bay Journal* article and a *Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star* opinion-editorial.

## Rappahannock

- The Sperryville Community Alliance and its Sperryville Trail Advisory Committee have selected Racey Engineering to create a Master Plan and Invasive Species Management Plan for the **Sperryville Trail Network along the Thornton River**. Supported by funding from PEC’s Krebsner Fund for Rappahannock County Conservation, these plans will guide future expansions of the trail network, and the replacement of invasive species with native plants along the trail.
- At its May meeting, the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors voted to expand **access to broadband internet services** by joining a multi-county agreement with the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission and All Points Broadband. The project represents an attempt to reach the “last-mile” of properties without reliable internet access. PEC continues to monitor the progress of the project.



# Out&About

## Cville Bikefest + Riverfest



Photo by Peter Krebs

▲ Festive community celebrations returned to Charlottesville this spring. In April, bicycle racers from across the Mid-Atlantic took to the streets for the short-course, multi-lap Cville Criterium and Bike Fest on Preston Avenue. Between races, people of all ages and abilities enjoyed the opportunity to ride bikes on the car-free streets. Then in May, PEC sponsored the second annual Rivanna Riverfest, which included running and boat races, numerous educational walks and talks, environmental cleanup events, all culminating with music, food, and drink along the Rivanna River.

## Bluebell Walk along Cedar Run



Photo by Hugh Kenny

▲ Almost 50 people came out to Bonny Brook Farm on an unseasonably cold spring morning for the PEC Julian W. Scheer Land Fauquier Conservation Fund’s annual Bluebell Walk along Cedar Run in March. This year, visitors also got to see how these local landowners are partnering with PEC to plant streamside trees that will help improve water quality in Cedar Run. (See photo below.)

## Salubria/Hansbrough’s Ridge Tour



Photo by Hugh Kenny

▲ Nearly 100 people turned out on a cold, windy morning for a tour of the 18th century Salubria plantation and Civil War encampment Hansbrough’s Ridge. Hosted by PEC, Journey Through Hallowed Ground, American Battlefield Trust, and The Germanna Foundation, the tour informed community members about the Amazon data center complex proposed on the Magnolia Equestrian Center property next door.

## Many, many spring tree plantings to improve water quality



Photo by Pete Smith

▲ As part of PEC’s Headwater Stream Initiative and Potomac Planting Program, we joined landowners, farm managers, and dozens of volunteers on several planting projects this spring. At Lane Farm in Culpeper, we planted 568 trees along a tributary to Mountain Run, which scored a D+ in the Friends of the Rappahannock’s Upper Rappahannock River Report Card due to poor water quality and other issues. At the Volgenau Farm in Fauquier County, 550 trees went in along the Rappahannock River tributary, Thumb Run. And at Pohick Farm in Fauquier County, we planted 695 trees along a tributary and wetland area of Mitchell’s Branch, reforesting 3.9 acres.

## Prescribed burn at the Piedmont Memorial Overlook

► 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.



Photo by Hugh Kenny



## PEC Board of Directors tour in Orange County

▼ During the PEC Board of Directors’ two-day strategic planning retreat this spring, Gordonsville Mayor Robert Coiner talked to board members about Gordonsville’s Town to Trail projects.



## 2022 Fauquier County Preservation Award



▲ On May 31, Fauquier County and the Fauquier County Architectural Review Board presented their 2022 Fauquier County Award for Preservation Excellence to the Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County and PEC. The award recognized our interactive, online African American History Story Map Project, which digitized, for generations present and future, lives and communities often omitted from history books and public record. Learn more about the project at [www.aahafauquier.org/storymap](http://www.aahafauquier.org/storymap).

Out&About



# UPCOMING Events

Event details subject to change. Please check [pecva.org/events](http://pecva.org/events) for the latest information.

### Community Farm Volunteer Days

**When** > Now through October  
**Where** > 39990 Howsers Branch Dr., Aldie, VA

Our Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows is open and ready for volunteers of all ages and groups of up to 25 people. Volunteers help plant, transplant, harvest, sort and package produce for delivery and donation to Loudoun Hunger Relief. Our goal this year is to grow and harvest 50,000 pounds of fruits and veggies to help serve Loudoun’s food insecure community. For more information, visit [pecva.org/farm](http://pecva.org/farm), or contact Farm Manager Dana Melby at [dmelby@pecva.org](mailto:dmelby@pecva.org). Sign up to volunteer through Loudoun Cares and Let’s Volunteer, both accessible at [pecva.org/farmvolunteer](http://pecva.org/farmvolunteer).



### Solarize Piedmont

**When** > Now through June 30  
**Where** > Your house!

If you’ve been curious about getting a solar system for your home, farm or business, but haven’t priced it out yet, now is a great time to do so! Our Solarize Piedmont campaign, in partnership with the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP), simplifies the transition to solar energy by providing a one-stop shop for solar education, vetted installers, and pre-negotiated pricing and installation. Now through June 30, those interested in exploring their solar options can learn more and sign up at [pecva.org/solarize](http://pecva.org/solarize).



### Open Late Concert Series: Conservation Night

**When** > July 29, 2022 from 6 - 8 PM  
**Where** > Middleburg, VA

Bring your chairs or blanket and enjoy a free concert on the lawn of the National Sporting Library & Museum. The concert and museum admission are both free and open to the public from 6 to 8 p.m. The band for the evening is The Knuckle Dusters. PEC is a proud event partner. Learn more on NSLM’s website at [www.nationalsporting.org](http://www.nationalsporting.org).

### Save The Date! 50th Anniversary Farm-to-Table Dinner, Virtual Auction and Ridgeline Project

**When** > October 1, 2022  
**Where** > Oak Spring Garden Foundation

PEC is honored to return to the Mellon Runway to celebrate our 50th anniversary and unveil our vision for the future as outlined in a new strategic plan. As a special attraction, timed to coincide with sunset, visual artist Elizabeth Turk and her team will lead an interactive art project envisioned exclusively for PEC featuring native and endangered plants of the Northern Piedmont. For more information and sponsorship opportunities, visit [www.pecva.org/50th-runway](http://www.pecva.org/50th-runway).

### Pop Quiz

#### QUESTION

Why are prescribed, or controlled, fires so important to our lands?

#### ANSWER

d) Fire has shaped the structure of Virginia’s forests and wildlands for thousands of years, playing a vital role in keeping certain types of forests, grasslands, and other landscapes balanced.

Before European colonization, Indigenous peoples routinely burned the land for restoration and to alter it to their needs. But by the 20th century, Western societal norms dictated that fire be prevented at all costs. Without it, grasslands and open areas disappeared, forest understories became dense, limiting regeneration of oaks and pines, and fire-intolerant species replaced oak-pine woodlands. Critical wildlife habitat and food sources, like acorns, blueberries, and huckleberries, declined as shade-tolerant species began to dominate. Now, land managers have returned to Traditional Ecological Knowledge, recognizing the multiple benefits that “good fire” brings to the land. Prescribed fires, AKA controlled burns, are conducted by a team of fire practitioners under specific weather conditions to restore health and biodiversity to fire-adapted ecosystems.





Dear Friends,

On May 21, 2022, we came together at Sheldon and Rita Clark’s Mistwood Farm on the slopes of Clarks Mountain in Orange County to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of The Piedmont Environmental Council.

The location of the event was intentional. Our tents were set up on land protected by perpetual conservation easement, looking out across a large landscape of farms and forests nourished by fertile soils and the waters of the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers and their tributaries.

Hopefully, through our workshops on accelerating conservation in the Upper Rappahannock and the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative, displays highlighting PEC’s work across the Piedmont region, and conversations with guests, we communicated the incredible private and public effort that has contributed to this extraordinary setting.

Together with thousands of families, hundreds of partner organizations, and dozens of local, state, and federal agencies, we have accomplished something special, a model for the rest of the United States. People want to live, work, and visit here, attracted by a combination of small cities, vibrant towns, rural communities and incredible open spaces. Much of the areas of development are well planned and designed to strengthen existing places, consistent with the Strong Towns model. Beyond their boundaries lie vast areas of farms and forests. Nearly 20 percent of these acres — 433,132 acres in fact — have been protected forever through conservation easement.

A general concept that 30 to 50 percent of land area is necessary for natural ecosystem functions is gaining more and more scientific and policy consensus. Combined with nearly 150,000 acres of federal, state and local lands that include an expanding network

of trails and public access to rivers and streams, PEC’s service area has more than 25 percent of its land available for the rural economy, recreation, and nature. Our vision for the region since 1984 has included a goal of conserving one million acres, roughly half of the nine counties in PEC’s service area.

That success in conservation provides a great foundation for present and future efforts to improve water quality, restore forests and native habitat for wildlife, build sustainable food systems, and provide public access to nature and open space. As we continue conserving land, we need to support efforts of restoration and more sustainable land management.

For 50 years, PEC has remained committed to the pursuit of better local planning and conservation; the results are significant and even inspirational. We have embraced the complexity of issues and places where we work. Each has a different geology, its own history, its own ecosystem. By understanding the many layers of conservation values, we expand the toolkit of options for each landowner and each parcel of land.

We know that progress takes time and effort; we believe that success comes from relentless incrementalism, the constant effort to connect, piece by piece, the larger mosaic of rural historic districts, agricultural and forest districts, wildlife habitat cores and corridors, and the scenic byways, scenic rivers and trail networks that connect them.

It may surprise you to know that our region has grown in population at a rate faster than the state as a whole. But rather than sprawling suburbs, the Piedmont region has grown, for the most part, within the areas planned for that growth. And it has done so, while continuing to be a place that people want to come to — to live, work and visit.

Going forward, we believe that collaboration



Looking across conserved land in Orange County, from Clarks Mountain to the Blue Ridge Mountains. Photo by Hugh Kenny

over protecting rural working lands and open spaces and planning of communities within the Piedmont can bridge rural, urban and suburban perspectives. Neighbors may disagree on other issues, but protecting nature and improving quality of life for all is common ground. It will not get easier, as the past few years have proven. But every day, we find a way to engage and empower residents and communities of the Piedmont to make progress. Sometimes it’s a big, visible win, like defeating the Disney America project. Sometimes it’s the act of planting a single, beautiful tree. Each creates optimism for the future.

We hope you will join us in that work.

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President



Photo by Matt Ha



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL SUMMER 2022



INSIDE

Highlights from PEC’s 50th anniversary celebration, meet two new PEC staff members, Madison County property condemnation records are digitized, climate risk assessment, upcoming events, and more

Summer sunrise in The Plains. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

- QUESTION:
- Why are prescribed, or controlled, fires so important to our lands?
- a) They destroy venomous snakes and undesirable rodents that threaten native insect species
  - b) They replenish natural charcoal levels important in forest and grassland soil
  - c) They smell like marshmallows and chestnuts roasting on an open fire
  - d) They keep landscapes balanced by recycling soil nutrients and stimulating regrowth of native vegetation
  - e) They protect landscapes from the effects of hurricane-force winds and flash flooding

ANSWER ON PAGE 7



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