



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

SUMMER 2023

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Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit hits a milestone

By Cindy Sabato, Communications Advisor

In 1999, Senators Emmett W. Hanger, Jr. and Creigh Deeds co-sponsored legislation that led to the unanimous and bipartisan passage of the Virginia Land Conservation Incentives Act of 1999. That act ultimately led to Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit (LPTC), a program that provides landowners with tax credits in exchange for voluntarily limiting future development on their land and, in the process, conserving important natural, cultural, scenic and historic resources.

In late April, at the Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways conference in Harrisonburg, Senator Hanger proudly announced the permanent protection of over 1 million acres of land as a direct result of the LPTC. "The land preservation tax credit was a

joint effort coming out of the Commission on the Future of Virginia's Environment," Hanger said. "None of us imagined that it would be as big as it would be."

PEC President Chris Miller recalls, "We'd just defeated Disney's America, and on the heels of that, the [then-Speaker of the House Thomas] Moss Commission on the Future of Virginia's Environment found that water quality and sprawl were top concerns among Virginians. The Commission set about imagining a market-based plan for localities that wanted to protect their lands and waters through conservation."

A tax credit for voluntary land protection was part of that, and PEC was a leader every step along the way, Miller said. Tim Lindstrom, PEC's staff attorney at the time and a national expert on conservation easements and land use policy, was tapped to draft the original language that led to the legislation, he said.

Today, the LPTC has become the single-largest factor in Virginia's land conservation success, dramatically increasing the pace and scale of conservation in the Commonwealth. In the 35 years prior to its passage, according to Virginia Department of Conservation and Rec-



Land Trust of Virginia easement donor Kathy Wilt at her 12-acre farm in Loudoun County with her Holstein steer, Chase.

Photo by Natalie Burns, Land Trust of Virginia



Senator Emmett Hanger at the Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways conference, announcing the conservation of 1 million acres under Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit project. Photo by Hugh Kenny

reation data, roughly 175,000 acres had been permanently protected by conservation easements in Virginia. In the 22 years since, more than seven times that amount, totaling more than 1,275,000 acres, have been conserved statewide, making Virginia a national leader in private land conservation (see maps on page 7).

More than five times larger than the Shenandoah National Park, the 1 million acres protected through this nationally acclaimed program benefit all Virginians by providing clean air and safe drinking water, increasing access to nature, and supporting job-creating industries such as agriculture and forestry. In addition, the resulting land protection is critical to meeting an array of public policy objectives ranging from farmland protection and climate resilience to meeting the goals of the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort.

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Meet Ashish Kapoor

SENIOR ENERGY AND CLIMATE POLICY ANALYST

The Virginia Clean Economy Act of 2020 mandates that Dominion Energy deliver 100% of its energy from renewable sources by 2045. Unfortunately, the proliferation of high-energy-use data centers is moving the goalpost and making Virginia's clean energy goals much more difficult to meet. Understanding the importance of addressing the climate challenges before us, and the impact that choices about energy have on the lands and waters of the region, PEC has created a new Senior Energy and Climate Policy Analyst position.

Ashish Kapoor has joined the PEC staff to fill this important new role, and we sat down with him recently to learn more about how and why the transformation of our energy system is so important.



Ashish Kapoor, PEC's new senior energy and climate policy analyst. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Q: Why is a focus on energy so important for PEC and for Virginia at this point in time?

We are in unprecedented times. In light of climate change, it's never been more important to get a handle on how all the big-picture factors interact with one another: the climate, community, energy creation, and the transmission to get that energy to its users, whether they be homes, businesses or, increasingly, data centers. How we meet these challenges, while also protecting our land and natural resources for future generations, will ultimately be our legacy.

Q: What experiences are you bringing to this new role, and what is exciting to you about it?

I am a lawyer and consultant by training and, like many others, reevaluated my priorities during Covid. I grew up in western Pennsylvania, hiking and camping across the Appalachian trail, and now, as the father of two young daughters in Virginia, I felt more and more that I wanted to do everything I could to contribute to a better energy and climate future for them. My wife and I started a business aimed at providing non-toxic products for young children, and I decided to

jump headfirst into solar energy consulting. Working as a national sales consultant for a large residential solar company gave me the chance to talk with folks all across the country with intention. I got a very good feel for the anxieties people have around energy costs and climate, as well as the varying state and local factors that can encourage buy-in.

I come to PEC as a practical environmental advocate and a strong believer that building solar on built structures, like parking lots, rooftops, brownfields, and landfills, can help protect our farmland and resources while

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Support PEC

Make a donation or get in touch with PEC at:

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Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!



PEC's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan

Setting a course for the future of our work

PEC has long been a catalyst for shaping positive change in the Virginia Piedmont and relentless in pursuit of a sustainable and resilient future. We take a comprehensive, high-level view of trends in policy, economics, and social change, while working on the ground in communities at the most granular level.

That's why, in December 2021, as we began a celebration of PEC's 50th anniversary, our board and staff also launched an 18-month period of building a new strategic plan to lead us into the next 50 years. Created with input from members and supporters throughout the region, our 2023-2028 Strategic Plan articulates a refreshed mission statement that reflects the full breadth of our work, a vision for the Virginia Piedmont, a set of core values that guide our work, and four key focus areas outlining how we will continue and enhance our efforts.

Our Mission

Protect and restore the lands and waters of the Virginia Piedmont, while building stronger, more sustainable communities.

Our Vision

We envision a Virginia Piedmont where people act on a belief that conservation is essential to creating and maintaining vibrant, healthy communities. Our region is characterized by connected natural and cultural landscapes, thriving villages, towns and cities, clean rivers and streams, and working farms and forests. It's a beautiful place where residents across all walks of life participate in decisions about its future.



Our Core Values

The Virginia Piedmont is our home.

We value this region's people and lands, its history and culture, its beauty and its future.

We value a thoughtful and holistic approach to addressing the complex issues facing our lands and our communities.

Being both idealistic and pragmatic, we consider the best data and research, look for unintended consequences, and pursue creative solutions, always guided by our commitment to a sustainable future for the Virginia Piedmont.

We value the broad experiences, opinions and motivations of the Virginia Piedmont's diverse communities.

We are grassroots and nonpartisan, striving to understand on-the-ground policy impacts that help us deliver practical, fair and just solutions to real-world problems.

We value collaboration and partnership.

Our success depends on long-term trust, mutual respect and strong relationships with others at the local, regional, state and national level.

We value the power of community engagement.

We believe that local decisions matter and that informed and involved communities are vital to achieving positive outcomes.

We value public access to nature.

Fresh air, clean water, and outdoor recreation are critical to the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

We value a strong rural economy.

Without intentional planning and programs that recognize the value of open space and strength of the many industries it supports, the Virginia Piedmont will lose its local food systems, clean waters, wildlife, ecosystems and climate resilience.

We value smart growth that respects natural and cultural resources.

Well-planned towns, cities and villages are characterized by diverse housing options, nature-filled outdoor spaces, and walkable and bike-friendly connections to services, recreation and work.

Key Factors and Forces Guiding Our Thinking

Throughout PEC's strategic planning process, we considered the current and emerging social, technological, economic, environmental, and political factors influencing trends in the Virginia Piedmont.

- Real estate development pressure in the Virginia Piedmont, already significant, is likely to grow.
- Increased electricity demand, tied to explosive growth in data centers, is causing a new round of electric infrastructure expansions that is also heightening pressure to convert greenfield land to utility-scale solar.
- Public policy objectives like clean water, biodiversity, food security, and climate change mitigation and resilience are increasingly dependent on accelerating the pace of land conservation.
- Opportunities to enjoy this place we love to the fullest, from access to nature to housing and land ownership, is not equitable for everyone.
- The impacts of global climate change, already being felt in our communities, will intensify.

Our Focus Areas

Conserving and Restoring the Piedmont's Lands and Waters

- Accelerating land conservation
- Enhancing wildlife habitat
- Ensuring clean water
- Expanding public access

Creating Stronger, More Sustainable Communities

- Planning for now and the future
- Fighting bad projects and incompatible land uses
- Improving livability and strengthening communities

Shaping and Advancing Virginia's Clean Energy Future

- Supporting a smarter, cleaner, more distributed energy system
- Developing staff expertise and capacity to engage and collaborate

Setting an Example Through Land Ownership

- Protecting and enhancing natural, cultural and historic resources
- Showcasing sustainable land management practices

Farming for the Future

By Teddy Pitsiokos, Community Farm Coordinator

Teddy Pitsiokos joined the PEC staff in late 2022 as our new community farm coordinator. Over the past 12 years, he has worked on several farms in North Carolina and Virginia, and most recently managed the Allegheny Mountain Institute's educational farm campus in Highland County, Va.

At first glance, the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows looks like many other small vegetable farms this time of year: early greens protected by row cover, onions and garlic starting to bulb, peas climbing trellis netting, and dandelions beginning to fade. The sound of traffic and the sight of airplanes overhead remind me that I'm not in Highland County anymore. But what called me from the mountains to this place is something not entirely visible at first glance.

Planted, literally and not accidentally, at the edge of rural and suburban Loudoun County, this farm plays many important roles. It's one facet of the larger Gilberts Corner property PEC acquired many years ago with the help of many community members, to demonstrate the value of conservation and open space — for creating public access to trails and historic sites, producing local food to meet the needs of food-insecure communities, and showcasing agricultural best management practices for water quality and soil health. And, while even people who've never grown their own food know that farming starts in the soil, what makes this farm particularly meaningful to me is its particular blend of grounded, traditional work with forward-thinking goals in conservation, sustainable development, and community engagement.

Rooted in Community

Having worked on nonprofit, educational farms for the past four years, I can see that the heartbeat of this farm

is the volunteer community. Farming practices, crop lists, and staff members have changed since this place first took root five years ago, but the community focus of the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows has not.

Our work at the farm may be driven by our three staff members, but it's powered by volunteers who come to learn and to give back. Field trips abound, and the curiosity of school children regularly brightens the field even more than our barn red dahlias. Graduating seniors from Loudoun County schools have found the farm an exciting way to volunteer for their capstone projects. Sports teams, scouts, churches, and families come from Loudoun and surrounding counties to lend hands to a harvest that feeds the hungry. And this year, thanks to a grant from the Chichester Dupont Foundation, three interns will join us to learn about sustainable agriculture and community engagement while contributing to food production.

With a Mission to Feed

Before starting to work for nonprofit farms, I cut my teeth on market-style vegetable farms throughout the southeast, even running my own small farm business for five years. Along the way, I worked with incredibly productive farmers, whose systems, tools, and downright grit taught me how to be an efficient grower of many delicious foods. The feats of farmers across the world serve as a constant inspiration to me and a reminder of what's possible through dedicated hard work.

Since 2019, the Community Farm has

donated roughly 100,000 pounds of fruits, vegetables, and herbs to Loudoun Hunger Relief, which then shares it more broadly with their many food distribution partners. Our goal for 2023 is 50,000 pounds of diverse vegetables, with a focus on popular crops like potatoes, onions, and tomatoes.

For PEC, the Community Farm is an important door to our community. On these grounds once slated to become a strip mall, we are fighting food insecurity in Loudoun County while also giving urban- and suburban-based residents the chance to experience the sensation of soil between their fingers and learn the joys of sustaining life through farming.

And Farming for the Future

Another crucial part of our mission, and one that goes hand-in-hand with successful farming, is building soil health, and sharing what we learn with Piedmont farmers.

In the context of a working vegetable farm, building soil is accomplished through environmental practices and organic amendments. We rotate crop families around the farm to reduce pest and disease pressure and the need for organic pesticides and fungicides. By planting cover crops, we fix nitrogen and add organic matter to the soil. And to



Teddy Pitsiokos demonstrates tomato plant pruning to a tour group at the Community Farm. Photo by Cindy Sabato

speed the process of cycling nutrients and making the soil more fertile, we rotate our grazing hens throughout the farm.

This year we also invested in a new tractor implement to reduce compaction and improve overall soil structure in our growing areas. Extensive soil testing allows us to take a targeted approach to fertility amendments, reducing the chance of nitrogen runoff while maintaining the optimal growing conditions for our vegetables.

I often joke that good farmers are always thinking at least six months into the future. Farming is so entwined in our human condition, so chock full of history, that one could easily spend seven lifetimes doing it and still not learn everything. Like everyone at PEC, I am energized by opportunities to learn how to better serve my community. The main thing I'm looking forward to this season is to teach what I know and learn what I can about how we can work together to make sure the Virginia Piedmont continues to be a shining example of a beautiful, healthy place to live.

Community volunteers help sort and pack produce for donation to Loudoun Hunger Relief. Photo by Sophia Chapin



Volunteer at the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows

Now through October • 3990 Howser's Branch Road

Since its first season in 2019, the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows has donated over 100,000 pounds of produce to area food pantries.

This would not have been possible without the assistance of our incredible team of volunteers, who help us plant, harvest, sort and deliver fresh, healthy produce, herbs, and eggs to Loudoun Hunger Relief.

All ages are welcome! Learn more at: pecva.org/farmvolunteer

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

What is the best source for finding locally grown and produced food within PEC's region?

ANSWER

d) PEC's Buy Fresh Buy Local guides

The Piedmont Environmental Council has released our biennial 2023-2024 Buy Fresh Buy Local guide, offering a one-stop source for connecting consumers to fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy, meat and more, by way of local farms, orchards, farmers markets, wineries, breweries, restaurants, and retailers. The guides also provide a travel map of some of the locations patrons can visit, a fruit and vegetable availability calendar, a fact sheet explaining various common food labels, and a handful of local farm features.

The Northern Piedmont, Loudoun County, and Charlottesville Area guides have been mailed to over 310,000 households. Community members can download all three guides at: pecva.org/buylocal, or search online at buylocalpiedmont.org. Clarke County farms and farmers markets can be found in the Shenandoah Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local guide, produced by the Virginia Cooperative Extension, at buyfreshbuylocal.org/shenvalley.



Photo by Cindy Sabato

Meet Ashish Kapoor

SENIOR ENERGY AND CLIMATE POLICY ANALYST

Continued from cover

moving us toward a carbon-free energy future.

Q: Virginia’s Clean Economy Act requires that Dominion produce 100% of its energy from renewable sources by 2045. What are the challenges to hitting that goal?

Dominion’s latest Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), which is a required periodic assessment of future electric needs and what action is required to meet those needs, shows a massive increase in anticipated energy demand — on the level of two to three times what it is now. That is almost wholly attributable to data centers and, to a much lesser extent, electric vehicles. Whereas electric demand is decreasing nationally, and would be in Virginia too, Virginia’s increasing concentration of high-energy-usage data centers is pulling us in the opposite direction and rapidly eating away at the renewable energy gains we all have fought so hard for.

Q: What is it going to take to get there?

In order for Virginia to get to 100% renewable energy, getting a handle on data center load growth is paramount. We need a comprehensive and independent study of the effects of data centers on our climate goals, energy system, water resources, and air quality, and how these combined will affect our local communities and Virginia ratepayers.

On the energy generation side, the trajectory of increase in demand is simply not sustainable. On average, one data center using 30 megawatts (MW) of

energy would require 300 acres of land of utility-scale solar — and a lot more land, or batteries, taking into account the intermittent nature of solar energy. Northern Virginia has hundreds of data centers with countless more being planned, so that’s a tremendous amount of new electricity demand. Dominion’s IRP makes clear that the plan is to fill in the demand gaps with more gas and coal, further harming local air and water quality and pulling Virginia in the wrong direction on greenhouse gas emissions.

At the same time, we also need to remain thoughtfully vigilant about helping localities plan and site a growing number of utility-scale solar facilities to help power data centers and support Virginia’s clean energy future. We must ensure that impacts to our most sensitive natural, cultural and historic resources are avoided and that proper mitigation is implemented.

Q: What are some of the first items on your plate as you dive into this new position?

For the first several months, I am attending conferences on data centers, organizing a solar-on-the-farm workshop for later this year, working on the Solarize Piedmont campaign, engaging with the Virginia Conservation Network and the DEQ taskforce as part of HB 206, and advocating for various distributed solar solutions. The intersection of conservation, natural resources, energy supply and demand, and climate change puts PEC in position to advocate for meaningful solutions toward a clean energy



Ashish Kapoor (2nd from left) recently joined other PEC staff members and Dominion Energy representatives at a utility scale solar facility in Remington.

Photo by Hugh Kenny

future in Virginia.

Q: This is a tough field with a lot of challenges, viewpoints, and nuance. What gives you hope?

We need to appreciate the wins. Through community engagement, we were able to stop the variance that would have allowed data centers to run 4,000+ polluting diesel generators more often, in violation of local air quality permits. Only by working together can we successfully push against challenges to air quality, water resources, and land use, and guide Virginia into a clear and more sustainable future.

As challenging as the problems are, the potential solutions are just as exciting. There are possibilities for battery storage, microgrids, electric transportation, agrivoltaics that combine solar energy and farm use, distributed clean generation, and the like. It will take a multitude of potential solutions, and I’m hopeful that the stark realities of the energy situation

as expressed in the IRP will ultimately move us in the right direction before we get to a place where the damage can’t be undone.

Every day is a reminder how these big issues connect with our day to day. Seeing my older daughter play soccer, with the Blue Ridge mountains as the backdrop and massive 500 kilovolt transmission lines in the immediate foreground, is a reminder that all of these energy issues affect not only the global climate, but also the places where our feet touch the ground. I believe that people are increasingly waking up to that reality and pushing for institutional change while also making positive personal choices around energy — like being more energy efficient, installing rooftop solar, choosing electric vehicles — that will cumulatively make a difference.

Ashish Kapoor can be reached at akapoor@pecva.org.

It’s a great time to GO SOLAR!

July 5 - August 31

Our annual Solarize Piedmont campaign is coming soon! If you’ve been curious about getting a solar system for your home, farm or business, but haven’t priced it out, Solarize Piedmont is a great way to get a free assessment and installation with pre-vetted installers who offer reduced pricing that’s been negotiated in advance.

Solarize Piedmont, offered in partnership with the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP) is available to anyone who lives or has property in one of the following jurisdictions: Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties, and the City of Charlottesville.

From saving money on electric bills and reducing air pollution to combating climate change or becoming more energy self-reliant... there are many great reasons to go solar!

Learn more and sign up at: pecva.org/solarize



Farm-to-Table Dinner and Virtual Auction

Save the Date!

When > September 16

Where > 7443 Oakwood Drive, Warrenton, VA 20186

Learn more at pecva.org/oakwood

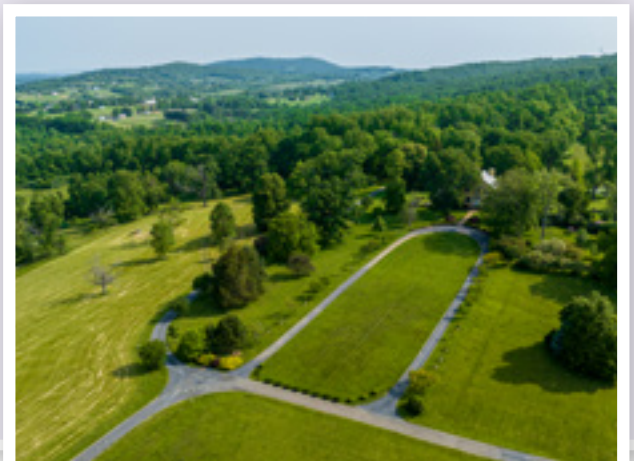
Save Sept. 16 for PEC’s annual **farm-to-table dinner & virtual auction** at historic Oakwood Farm, where Mrs. Caroline Collomb will host us for cocktails, a farm-to-table dinner, and dancing to DJ Domingo — all with and the most spectacular views of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Funds raised at this special event will support PEC’s work in its four focus areas, as outlined in the new strategic plan for 2023 - 2028: conserving and restoring the Piedmont’s lands and waters; creating stronger, more sustainable communities; shaping and advancing Virginia’s clean energy future; and setting an example through land ownership.

Paddle raise and virtual auction: As always, there will be a live paddle raise during the event, and our online auction will be open for bidding from Sept. 8 - 17.

Oakwood Farm, Warrenton, VA.

Photo by Hugh Kenny



On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

- ▶ PEC continues to be the voice for conservation and smart planning in Albemarle County and is working to advance these principles through all aspects of the **Albemarle Comprehensive Plan Update**. Along with the Sierra Club and Virginia League of Women Voters, we co-facilitated a forum on key issues to gather community input that we shared with the County's Comprehensive Plan Update team. We are also raising awareness of the public benefits and ecological and economic values of the rural areas with community groups and County leaders.
- ▶ The City of Charlottesville has a **new draft Zoning Code** that will be clearer and easier to understand. The proposed ordinance authorizes more mixed-use development in walkable areas and more density throughout the City. Public hearings and eventual approval are anticipated this summer. Learn more at cvilleplanstogether.com.
- ▶ Albemarle County's **new, 1,190-acre, mostly wooded Biscuit Run Park** is expected to open this fall in the county's development area and near where many people live, work and shop. PEC is pursuing multi-use paths through the park connecting the Southwood Community and Fifth Street Station.

Clarke

- ▶ In May, PEC's Clarke County Land Conservation Fund hosted an **educational program for county residents** at Long Branch Historic House and Farm. Fritz Reuter, owner of Virginica, LLC, reviewed biodiversity basics, such as the factors contributing to its decline and practical advice on how landowners can encourage a deep-rooted rewilding of their land.
- ▶ In February at the Blandy Experimental Farm, PEC President Chris Miller and our conservation and land use staff highlighted various **opportunities and challenges PEC is tackling** in our nine-county region.

Culpeper

- ▶ In March, the Culpeper Town Council voted to approve a **rezoning application for the Culpeper Technology Campus**, a nine-building, 600-megawatt data center campus within the McDevitt Technology Zone. PEC is not opposed to this location, but has made recommendations for certain aspects of this project and raised concerns about broader impacts to the Mountain Run Watershed.
- ▶ The Town of Culpeper is currently considering a **second data center campus, Copper Ridge**, next to the Culpeper Technology Campus site. While we're still learning more about this project, we are concerned about its visibility from the Culpeper National Cemetery and adjacency to the South East Street Historic District and other residential areas.
- ▶ In April, the Planning Commission voted to defer a decision on the **proposed utility-scale solar installation**, North Ridge Solar LLC, until

June. PEC is concerned about this project's potential for significant negative impacts on the Stevensburg area because of high erodible soils at the site and its proximity to the previously approved 1,000+-acre Greenwood Solar project, which could compound such negative impacts as erosion and flooding.

Fauquier

- ▶ At its April public hearing, the Planning Commission determined that **two utility-scale solar applications**, in Midland and Bristersburg, were noncompliant with the Comprehensive Plan. Appeals filed by both applicants will be taken up by the Board of Supervisors. The developers can only submit Special Exception applications for the projects to proceed if the Board grants their appeals. Details about how these projects will address potential impacts to soils, water resources, and historic resources will be determined at that stage.
- ▶ Data center applications have either been submitted or are anticipated in Remington, Catlett, Vint Hill and Warrenton. Currently, the zoning ordinance only permits data centers with any new power lines placed underground. A data center developer has proposed a zoning text amendment that would allow data center proposals within Business Park **zoning to utilize overhead power lines**. PEC opposes this proposal and continues to partner with community groups to raise awareness about the potential impacts of pending data center proposals, associated energy infrastructure, and data center development overall.

Greene

- ▶ In April, PEC staff participated in the **Greene County 'Nature for Everyone' Earth Day event**, where visitors learned about native and invasive plants, reptiles, bees, and land management and conservation programs available in the area.
- ▶ PEC, working closely with Preserve Rural Greene, **opposed three overly intensive tourist lodging projects** proposed in the County's rural areas. In response to community concerns, the Board of Supervisors recently asked County planning staff to review the tourist lodging section of the zoning ordinance and recommend changes to support public health, safety, and welfare while supporting property rights and tourism.

Loudoun

- ▶ July 26 is the expected date for the Board of Supervisors' public hearing on the **Zoning Ordinance Rewrite**. PEC has contributed throughout the three-year process and will continue until expected adoption in the latter part of this year.
- ▶ The **Prime Soils Zoning Ordinance Amendment (ZOAM)** will come before the Board of Supervisors for action at a date yet to be determined this fall. PEC will continue to provide input on behalf of much needed protections for our prime agricultural soils.
- ▶ In April, PEC participated in the **"Loudoun Together" summit of community leaders** on the challenges facing Loudoun County, including a discussion on how Loudoun's eastern and western communities can come together to preserve the county's future. PEC President Chris Miller gave a presentation on unconstrained development and long-term viability in Loudoun.

Madison

- ▶ A committee of residents and county officials has been reviewing **Madison County's Comprehensive Plan** since last November. Public meetings will be held this fall to share the committee's early draft for input, and then the final draft will be presented to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors in October or November for approval. PEC will continue to be engaged in the process and will promote the public input opportunities once scheduled.
- ▶ A twice-proposed, twice-delayed utility-scale **solar facility for 90+ acres behind Yoder's Country Market** on Rte. 29 is back before County decision-makers and is headed for a public hearing in early July. At presstime, the proposal contained some still-unanswered questions, including how the facility would connect to Rappahannock Electric Cooperative's nearby substation, whether the project would require new power lines and poles, and where that infrastructure would be located. PEC will continue to review this project as the details emerge.

Orange

- ▶ Despite overwhelming community opposition, the Board of Supervisors approved the **Wilderness Crossing development proposal** in April. Most alarming was a last-minute change that removed the cap on square-footage of data center/distribution center space, adding even more uncertainty to an already ill-defined and highly speculative development. In effort to stop the project, members of the Wilderness Battlefield Coalition have filed suit against Orange County, citing violations of state law and local ordinance. PEC staff has been deeply involved in challenging Wilderness Crossing since its inception and has developed extensive knowledge of the rezoning and its impacts. While not a plaintiff, we are actively engaged and supporting this legal challenge.
- ▶ In early June, PEC **transferred the two parcels it purchased in Gordonsville** as a gift to the Town to expand the footprint of Verling Park. PEC worked with the Town and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation to place a deed of dedication to open space on the parcels to secure them for public use into the future.

Rappahannock

- ▶ Following consultant recommendations and a contentious zoning dispute, the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission unanimously voted to revoke the **Board of Zoning Appeals' (BZA)** legislative powers over special use permits. The BZA will now only review appeals and variances; special use permits – now referred to as special exception permits – will be the jurisdiction of the Board of Supervisors. PEC staff continue to monitor this issue.
- ▶ An auto shop on Water Street in Sperryville caught fire and exploded, luckily leaving no one harmed but many without electricity. Due to the fire's proximity to the ecologically significant Thornton River, community members, local partners, and PEC staff are **initiating additional water quality monitoring** procedures to assess the potential impact.

Out & About

Enjoying a 50th Anniversary Auction Item



Photo by Gertraud Hechl

▲ The successful bidders from PEC's 50th Anniversary Celebration & Auction enjoy their Carriage Ride & Dinner at Old Denton. For details on our 2023 Farm-to-Table Dinner and Virtual Auction, see page 4 or visit pecva.org/oakwood.

Volunteer Tree Planting Events

► This spring, nearly 160 volunteers turned out at several tree plantings to help improve water quality in Clarke, Orange, Culpeper, Fauquier, and Rappahannock Counties. Shown here are a few of the 28 volunteers who helped plant 223 native trees and shrubs along a Potato Run tributary at J Team Dairy in Orange County, where we partnered with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay and Maola Milk. These planting projects will play a valuable role in enhancing water quality, protecting streambanks, and providing wildlife habitat throughout the Rappahannock and Potomac watersheds.



Photo by Hugh Kenny

Walkable Piedmont Communities



Photo by Hugh Kenny

▲ PEC and the Coalition for Smarter Growth hosted a workshop for local community leaders, government staff and stakeholders of Fauquier, Culpeper and Rappahannock counties. Here, Hillsboro Mayor Roger Vance, of Loudoun County, shares his town's successes in building consensus and implementing walkability and traffic calming projects. Thanks to the PATH Foundation for its support of the workshop and our Piedmont walkable communities initiative.

20th Annual Bluebell Walk



Photo by Hugh Kenny

▲ Margrete Stevens (front), owner and steward of Bonny Brook Farm in Catlett, Virginia along with her husband Mike, leads neighbors to Cedar Run for the PEC Julian Scheer Fauquier Land Conservation Fund's 20th Annual Bluebell Walk. From the steps of their historic farmhouse, visitors walked through farm fields where restoration is in progress in the forms of invasive species removal, native tree and shrub planting along the streambank, forest health assessment, and meadow management for grassland birds and pollinators. Over the past 20 years, the Bluebell Walk has become a cherished yearly cue that spring has arrived. However, this event was more than a simple walk through nature — it was a visible demonstration of how incremental, small efforts in our own backyards can lead to positive environmental outcomes.

Owl Banding



Photo by George Hansbrough

◀ PEC's habitat team of October Greenfield and Linnea Stewart banded six barn owl nestlings at Valley View Farm in Fauquier County in April. The nest box was installed in the silo in 2020 and has been occupied by nesting barn owls every year since! The owl in the photo was about 35-40 days old.

During the gentle banding process, we also measure its weight and wing length. Each bird gets a metal band with a unique 9-digit number, so if that bird is ever captured again, we can learn about its dispersal and movements, as well as its lifespan.

Choose Clean Water Lobby Day



Photo by Hugh Kenny

▲ PEC staff members joined more than 100 other members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition on Capitol Hill in March to urge support for the restoration of the rivers and streams that feed the Chesapeake Bay. Here, Maggi Blomstrom and Sophia Chapin (3rd and 4th from right) are among coalition members who visited the office of U.S. Representative Abigail Spanberger (VA-07) to discuss efforts to improve local water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit hits a milestone

Continued from cover

Important in Virginia's conservation success is that Virginia is one of only five states that makes its land preservation tax credits transferable, which Miller said was a move that came out of many conversations about how to help landowners and small family farmers whose taxable income wasn't high enough to benefit from the tax credits.

"There were a lot of families that wanted to conserve their land, but couldn't afford the transactional costs of donating an easement and did not have enough income to take full advantage of the new tax credit," Miller said. Again, PEC first worked with the General Assembly to enact the Open Space Lands Preservation Trust Fund, administered by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, to help cover the costs affiliated with doing an easement. We also successfully advocated to make conservation an option for those who couldn't use the tax credit, by enabling the gifting or sale of tax credits.

By allowing landowners with a wide range of economic circumstances to benefit from these tax incentives, the Land Preservation Tax Credit has accelerated the rate of conservation dramatically and vastly expanded the map of conserved land across the Commonwealth," said Ellen Shepard, executive director of Virginia's United Land Trusts. Ultimately, tens of thousands of acres are permanently protected in Virginia each year at a fraction of the cost it would take for the Commonwealth to acquire the land needed to meet its conservation and water quality goals.

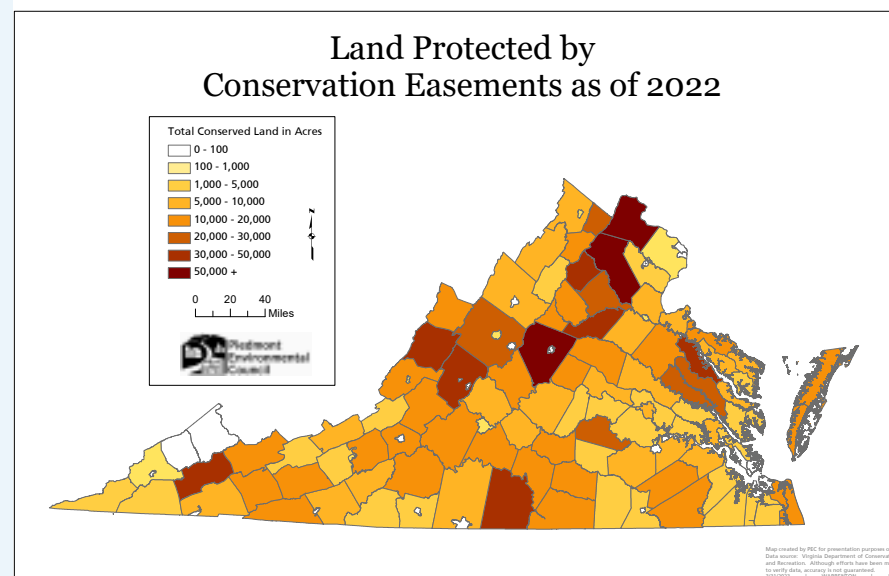
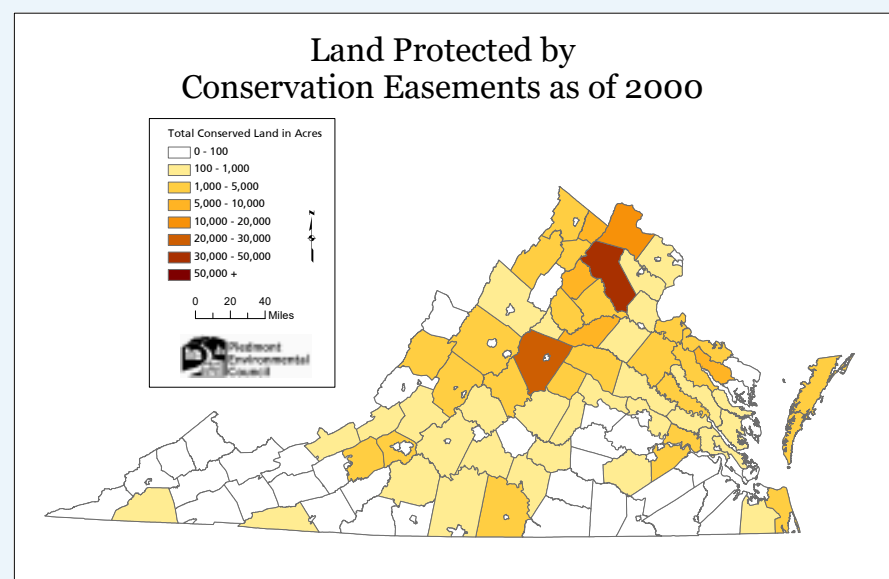
Clyde Evely, who with his wife Betty,

protected 57 acres in the historic Catawba Valley in Roanoke County and adjacent to the Appalachian Trail, said, "the land tax credit allowed us to keep the farm in the family and in farming. It has allowed us, as older farmers, to rest easy that we can meet our financial obligations." Betty added that as development pressures increase in their mountain valley, they are able to "maintain an active farming operation, preserve views for Appalachian Trail visitors, and upgrade fencing and other farm infrastructure."

Kathy Wilt remembers well growing up on her grandparents' 12-acre farm in Loudoun County, milking cows, feeding farm animals and tending to the garden. "This donation of easement was a very emotional decision, and it's satisfying that the land will be kept in open space for perpetuity. Due to its location within the Village of Taylorstown and the zoning, there was potential for high density development, so donating the easement is peace of mind that this will not happen," Wilt said.

"We wanted to do something for the greater good and it's always been important to us to protect nature. The tax credits helped us pay for the land, and it was the best investment we could have ever made," said Lynn Cameron, who protected 168 acres adjacent to Shenandoah National Park through the LPTC.

In its decades of work promoting land conservation, PEC recognized early on the need for improved incentives for land conservation to help offset the loss of economic value from easement donation. Today, PEC continues to be a primary



advocate for the Land Preservation Tax Credit within the General Assembly and state government. "The LPTC remains a top priority in PEC's state policy work and is the backbone of our on-the-ground conservation work," Miller said.

"I count myself fortunate for the opportunities I have had over the years to be involved in numerous areas that have

contributed positively to the quality of life we enjoy in the Commonwealth," said Hanger. "The work we did over 20 years ago in the Commission on the Future of Virginia's Environment is an excellent example of bipartisan efforts that will continue to pay off great dividends to future generations of Virginians in both tax incentives and land preservation."

UPCOMING Events

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

Birding Walk at Roundabout Meadows

When > Saturday, June 17 @ 8:30-10 AM

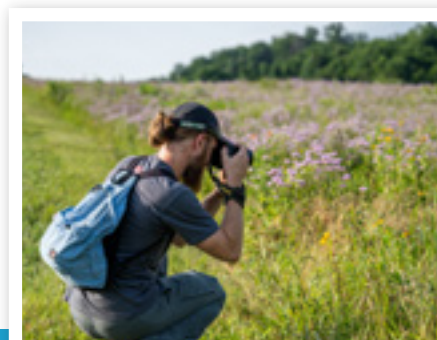
Where > Park at Mt. Zion Historic Park: 40309 John Mosby Highway, Aldie

PEC Wildlife Habitat Restoration Coordinator October Greenfield will lead us on a beginner-friendly bird walk at our Roundabout Meadows pastures and meadows in Aldie. The walk will cover approximately 1.3 miles through rolling pastures and across a small creek, so wear appropriate footwear and clothing for longer grass and uneven terrain. Registration is required at pecva.org/events.

Nature Photography Walk & Learn at Roundabout Meadows

When > Friday, June 23 @ 6:15-7:30 PM

Where > Park at Mt. Zion Historic Park: 40309 John Mosby Highway, Aldie



Bring your camera or smartphone for a one-mile walk with PEC's Hugh Kenny, who'll guide participants in how to take their best nature photos. This walk traverses a mowed walking path with occasional uneven terrain along the Old Carolina Road Trail. Registration is required at pecva.org/events.

Photo by Hugh Kenny

Land Conservation 101 & Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative

When > Friday, July 27 @ 7-9 PM

Where > Ivy Creek Natural Area, 1780 Earlysville Road, Charlottesville

As part of the Rivanna Master Naturalists' continuing education lecture series, PEC staff will share information about local land conservation efforts and land management for grassland birds. The educational event is free and open to the public.

Wildflower Walk at Roundabout Meadows

When > Friday, August 25 @ 4:30-6 PM

Where > Park at Mt. Zion Historic Park, 40309 John Mosby Highway, Aldie

Join PEC Tree Planting and Stewardship Coordinator Linnea Stewart and Gilberts Corner Farm and Land Manager Dana Melby for an afternoon walk along the Old Carolina Road Trail and through the meadow while learning about wildflowers and PEC's approach to restoring the meadow. Registration is required at pecva.org/events.

Farm-to-Table Dinner and Virtual Auction

When > September 16

Where > 7443 Oakwood Drive, Warrenton, VA 20186

For details, see page 4 or visit pecva.org/oakwood.

Save the Date!

Loop de Ville Festival on the Rivanna Trail

When > September 23-24

Where > Charlottesville

Celebrate and explore the emerald necklace surrounding Charlottesville and connecting numerous neighborhoods. This festival offers numerous supported hikes, bike rides, and runs around the full loop of the trail, as well as shorter portions of it, along with music, food, and fun for all ages. More details at rivannatrails.org.

Dear Friends,

Since the start of 2023, PEC has been introducing our 2023-2028 Strategic Plan to audiences across the Piedmont and beyond. It's a forward-looking plan that builds on the solid foundation of 50 years of community planning, conservation policy advocacy and thousands of projects to conserve and restore our lands and waters. It is filled with hope for a better future and built on informed and involved communities. **PEC values a thoughtful and holistic approach** to addressing the complex issues facing our lands and our communities. Being both idealistic and pragmatic, our staff and Board consider the best data and research, look for unintended consequences, and pursue creative solutions, always guided by our commitment to a sustainable future for the Virginia Piedmont.

On Mother's Day, I took my mom on a tour of the communities and lands that are part of the larger regional effort. Our drive started in southern Fairfax County, where I was raised and where my mom still lives in Hollin Hills, a National Register of Historic Places historic district of post-modernist homes built on a wood lot from a neighboring farm. The Washington Beltway led us to Interstate 66 westward through Fairfax County and into Prince William and Loudoun counties, some of the fastest-growing urban and suburban areas of the U.S. Along the way, we wound through the hardened corridor of data centers, distribution warehouses, transmission lines, and sprawling commercial and residential developments that characterize much of Northern Virginia.

As we journeyed further west, through Thoroughfare Gap in the Rural Crescent of Prince William County, then the Bull Run Mountain Preserve, and on into rural Fauquier County, the transformation to a landscape of forests, pastures and small villages and towns was striking. The next three hours allowed me to give Mom an overview of PEC's work with communities on a wide range of projects.

We talked about regenerative agriculture, improving

the return on investment for local producers through local farm markets and *Buy Fresh Buy Local*, about land conservation and planting forested stream buffers to improve water quality, and about supporting local affordable housing initiatives. Scenic highways and byways took us along the Route 50 traffic calming corridor, passing cyclists along the way, and up the long, winding, unpaved section of Carr Lane to where it joins Route 17 in the Crooked Run Valley. The views of Ashby Gap, protected by Sky Meadow State Park, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Piedmont Memorial Overlook and anchoring tens of thousands of acres of farms and forests protected by conservation easements, were stunning.

At PEC's Piedmont Memorial Overlook, we ate a picnic lunch in the sun, culminating with fresh strawberries from Wegmeyer farm at Gilberts Corner, land PEC leases out to enable innovative local production. We chatted with hikers from all over, enjoying the present, connecting with land, air, sounds and smells of nature. Later, as we walked through the wildflower meadows, we had the thrill of Indigo Buntings hunting from the Honey Locusts.

On the way home, sedated and content, Mom said, "thank you for sharing such a wonderful place. It gives me hope knowing that so many have worked so hard for something so beautiful that can be shared now and in generations to come."

As we returned to the fast-paced realities of Northern Virginia, all the challenges of the future lay before us. Traffic was heavy. Data center construction, new housing development, and expanded highways appeared all around us. And the air was hazy from the smoke of wildfires in Canada, increasingly triggered by a changing climate.

At PEC, we know there can be a way forward that includes varying scales of communities, connected trails,



PEC President Chris Miller with his mother, Suzanne Miller, at the Piedmont Memorial Overlook on Mother's Day. Photo by Chris Miller

rural roads and byways, all surrounded by farms, forest and open spaces that provide all of us with water, food, recreation, and solace. We need to find a way to balance the need for clean energy powering a growing economy with the equally important access to the natural world. Only by embracing the complexity of both and working hard to make the best decisions possible, can we move toward that balance.

I hope you will read our Strategic Plan and invest in our work to implement each of its elements. Now, more than ever before, your support and collaboration are critical to accelerating conservation, building inclusive and livable communities, and enabling a cleaner and more sustainable economy. And, come join us in enjoying special places that are protected forever!

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President

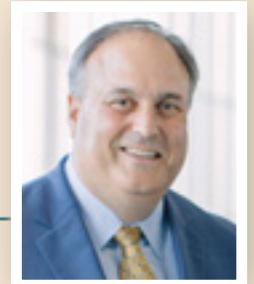


Photo by Matt Ha



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL SUMMER 2023



INSIDE

Our 2023-2028 Strategic Plan leads PEC into the next 50 years, a new farm coordinator brings big ideas to the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows, PEC staff out and about in the region, upcoming events, and more

Rappahannock County landscape. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

What is the best source for finding locally grown and produced food within PEC's region?

- a) Your local newspaper
- b) Yelp
- c) Your nearest grocery store
- d) PEC's *Buy Fresh Buy Local* guide

ANSWER ON PAGE 3



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