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Grassland Birds

A little knowledge can go a long way in helping these amazing birds survive and thrive

By Justin Proctor, Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative coordinator, Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes

Me: "It has to be right here!"

Bernadette: "It will be. Take your time, move slowly, and make sure you only take a step forward if you're certain you won't step on it."

Me: [After 10 minutes of methodically scanning the same 3 square feet of ground] "I can't find it. Seriously, this is either impossible or there is nothing here."

Trying to find a grasshopper sparrow nest in a hayfield is very much like...well...why not—like finding a needle in a haystack. It's on the ground, camouflaged with an overhead dome made from the same grasses growing around it, and the interior is barely the size of a ping pong ball. Thankfully, I was accompanied by an expert nest-finder.

Bernadette: [walks over and nonchalantly points at an inconspicuous clump of grass] "It's right there."

Me: [motionless with a bewildered look on my face] "....."

At first glance, you might look out over a field of brome or timothy grass and think that

spotting a few birds there would be easy compared to, say, finding one nesting 70 feet up in a dense forest canopy. It's just grass—where would they hide?! Well, it turns out that the uniformity of these grassy habitats creates an almost dizzying complexity. There's rarely a single point of reference to work from when you're trying to home in on that spot where you think you saw a bird disappear down into the grasses. If you're lucky enough to get close to that spot, you still have to confront the likelihood that upon landing, that grassland bird went for a little stroll to wherever its nest actually is. Once you've acknowledged the thousands of years of evolution working against you, it's probably best to break for lunch.

I've been fortunate to have worked with a number of different types (or guilds) of birds throughout my career, including aerial insectivores (think of fast-flying swifts and swallows), shorebirds (adorable plovers and sandpipers), and montane cloud-forest birds (tanagers, thrushes and trogons). But stepping foot into

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Grassland birds come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. What they all have in common is their dependency on grasslands (and therefore our working landscapes) for their survival.

The Piedmont Environmental Council and Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes launched the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative in 2021 with a mission to partner with farmers on their working landscapes to:

- stem the tide of grassland bird decline,
- improve the resiliency of the landscape, and
- positively impact the livelihoods that depend upon those lands.

To learn more about the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative, visit [pecva.org/grasslandbirds](http://pecva.org/grasslandbirds), or contact Justin Proctor at [ProctorCJ@si.edu](mailto:ProctorCJ@si.edu) or Maggi Blomstrom at [mblomstrom@pecva.org](mailto:mblomstrom@pecva.org).

The Trouble with Wilderness Crossing

A look at how PEC works on behalf of our nine counties

By Cindy Sabato, Communications Advisor

When it comes to policies and decisions that impact communities and quality of life for their residents, the most important voices are those of community residents themselves. And since 1972, The Piedmont Environmental Council has worked hard to be your eyes and ears on the ground and to encourage your voice in protecting the places and natural resources you care about.

When a development proposal crosses the desks of county planners and elected officials, like the massive Wilderness Crossing proposal in Orange County, our field staff review them closely, looking to see how these proposals might affect drinking water, traffic, taxes, natural, historic, and cultural resources, and more, sharing our findings with you, and helping you share your input with county leaders.

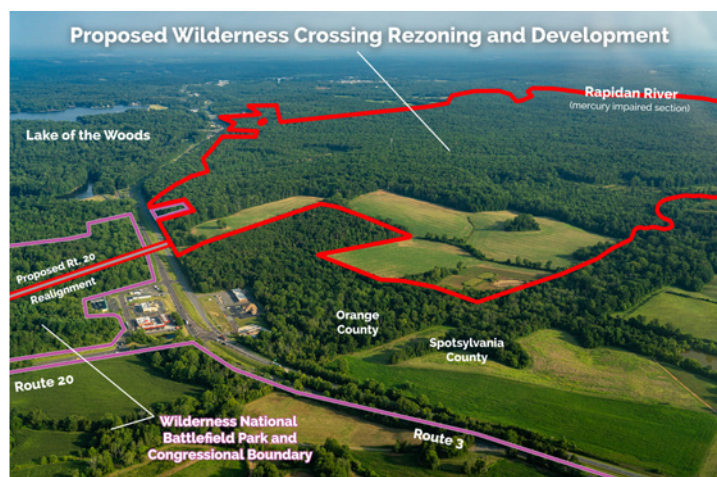
Wilderness Crossing is a 2,602-acre rezoning proposal bordered by Rt. 3, Spotsylvania County, and two miles of the Rapidan River. The majority of the site is currently zoned agricultural, with some zoning for commercial, industrial, and up to about 1,114 residential units. The developer requests the entire property be rezoned to Planned Development-Mixed Use (PDM), allowing a mix of commercial, office, light industrial development, open space, and six to 12 residential units per acre—which translates to **7,807 to 20,299 residential units**. Based on Orange's average of 2.36 people per household, those units could support up to 47,906 people. For comparison, in 2019, Orange County had 15,382 residential units and a population of 36,254.

If approved, Wilderness Crossing would be the largest rezoning in county history. "When reviewing proposals like this, we're looking for what is and *isn't* written in black and white: the possible outcomes and unintended consequences that developers sometimes obscure with pretty pictures and unenforceable promises. Wilderness Crossing is a great example," said Chris Hawk, PEC's Orange County field representative.

Public health risks from mercury contamination

During Virginia's gold mining era (1804 to 1937), the Wilderness Crossing property was the site of at least 27 large-scale mining operations, including 18 pit mines and nine shaft mines. In Virginia,

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If approved, the proposed Wilderness Crossing rezoning and development, outlined in red, would be the largest rezoning in Orange County since the Lake of the Woods in the 1960s.

Photo by PEC; flight courtesy of Southwings



# PEC Study Seeks to Aid Local Meat Processors and Farmers

By John McCarthy, Director of Strategic Partnerships

Aided by Virginia’s northern Piedmont climate, pasture conditions, and open space, raising beef cattle has become one of the region’s dominant agricultural land uses. Cattle farming contributes enormously to the local economy, quality of life and vitality of all the region’s communities, and the growing retail market for beef may even represent one of the best models for sustaining the success of the area’s small farms. Over the past year, that market has been simultaneously enhanced and challenged by pandemic-related supply problems.

When major national animal protein processors closed down due to the spread of Covid-19 among their workforce, consumers demonstrated in ever-increasing numbers how much they value knowing where their food comes from. Jacob Gilley of Heaven’s Hollow Farm in Madison County, raises beef cattle for sale directly to consumers. He said demand for locally-produced meat has vastly increased. “Our farm has been blessed with an increased interest in our local meats, as consumers became more aware of the fragility of the existing food system.”

But that growth brought challenges as well. Without national processors, local farmers turned increasingly to small, local processors, who found themselves operating at 125-150 percent of their normal capacity and stressed by storage limitations and labor needs. Gilley said small producers are accustomed to dealing with processing slots six to nine months away, but suddenly, wait times for processing cattle were 12-18 months with little flexibility.

“We hope we can continue supplying our customers moving forward, but we know that processing could be a bottleneck for expansion and a real challenge for our farm,” Gilley said.

These circumstances presented an opportunity for PEC to scope out the problem and look for some viable solutions, in keeping with our mission to protect and promote the Piedmont’s rural economy. We recruited the enthusiastic partnership of the American Farmland Trust (AFT), which shares our interest in sustainable agriculture, and with funding from the Prince Charitable Trusts, hired Fuller Consulting, a nationally-recognized expert on animal processing operations. Visiting the region’s seven USDA-certified animal processing facilities—in

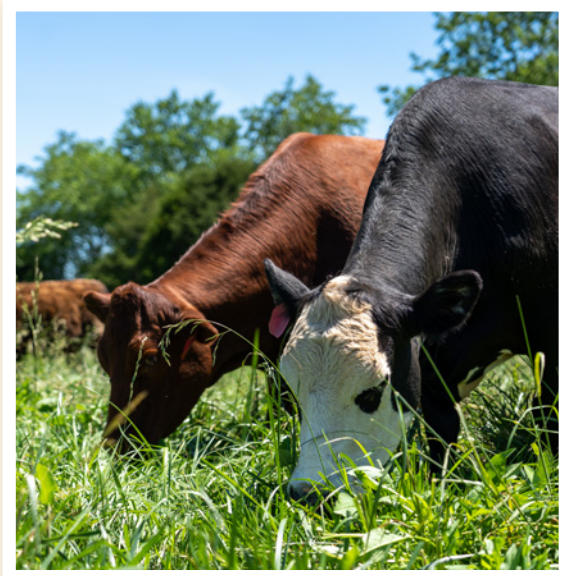


Photo by Hugh Kenny

Winchester, Stephens City, Middletown, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Bealeton, and Lynchburg—we documented operations, capacities, staffing, challenges and opportunities. The study has resulted in several significant outcomes.

### Expansion possibilities:

Fuller identified expansion potential at two facilities during our visits and subsequently provided detailed plans for equipment acquisition and process modifications that would increase production from 15 percent to as much as 50 percent. Fuller’s suggestions may even prove useful to both facilities in applying for USDA grants to expand smaller processing operations.

### Better access to processors:

PEC turned to Charlottesville-based Lightbulb Machine to help develop an interactive, online asset map of local processors, to provide a one-stop resource with meat processor locations, contacts, and operations information. Our hope is that this map, at <https://processing.pecva.org/> will streamline farmers’ access to producers, so they can get on with the business of raising high quality local beef for consumers.

### Increased labor force:

The high demand and short supply of trained meat cutters was a challenge for every processor interviewed. Bringing untrained people in to fill these relatively high-paying, highly-skilled jobs roles forces slowdowns in operations and compromises safety. AFT and PEC are now working with the Rappahannock Center for Education to develop a training program we hope will build a larger pool of skilled laborers and enable meat processors to expand operations and increase their capacity to serve the region’s cattle farmers. The program is expected to be offered in late fall 2021, and already, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Virginia State University have expressed interest in offering the program as well.

### What’s next?

The survey surfaced the potential for value-added agriculture in some specialized niches, such as a processing facility specializing in such products as beef sticks and jerkies, which Gilley thinks could be an option for cattle that are culled from local herds and lead to economic loss for farmers. The survey is providing some guidance for non-USDA-certified processors interested in certifying and that may be of use to them in applying for a separate USDA grant program just announced. And finally, building on the success of this local effort, Virginia Tech and Virginia State are embarking on a similar assessment of meat processors statewide.

“It’s great to see PEC, AFT, the Rappahannock Center for Education, Virginia Tech and other organizations in Virginia working together to overcome these very real challenges for not only local producers like myself, but for the entire local food system so that consumers can continue to have access to locally produced delicious, healthy and safe food,” Gilley said.

Ultimately, the goal of all of these efforts is to keep the Piedmont’s working farms strong and successful and to protect the open space we all love and the economy that depends upon it.

## Our 2021 Summer Fellows

For the second year, the Covid-19 pandemic turned PEC’s summer fellowship program into an entirely digital experience. But this time, with the chance to plan for that, we welcomed 14 talented fellows from Arizona, California, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Virginia. We also shifted class schedules to accommodate the four West Coasters and added more activities and scheduled breaks to avoid on-screen burnout. Over seven weeks, these bright PEC fellows acquired skills and information that will help them go on to careers in land conservation, land use planning, agriculture, historic preservation, public policy and related fields. They put together impressive final presentations on a wide range of topics, many of which are already helping PEC in work currently underway. Among them are: *Landscapes of Memory: Documenting and Preserving Community and Family Cemeteries in the Virginia Piedmont*; *Invasives in Your Yard: A Homeowners Guide to Invasive Plants*; *StoryMapping the Threat of Data Center Development in Prince William County's Rural Crescent*; *Environmental Justice in the Virginia Piedmont and Beyond*; and *Restoring Bolton Branch*.



## Pop Quiz

### QUESTION

What has caused the disappearance of most of the 14,000 heirloom apple varieties grown in the United States during the 19th century?



### ANSWER

e) b, c & d

In 1905, a U.S. Department of Agriculture report cataloged more than 14,000 varieties of apples growing in eastern United States orchards; more than 7,000 were cultivated in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley alone. But the shift toward monocultures and corporate farming in the 20th century, as well as suburban development, changed all that. Additionally, during Prohibition, cider orchards throughout Virginia and elsewhere were destroyed. By 2000, more than 11,000 American varieties were believed to have gone extinct. Today’s commercial growers sell around just 90 different types of apples.



# Summer at PEC's Community Farm

Our Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows ushered in its third growing season this spring and welcomed hundreds of volunteers through its gates. As we all continue to grapple with the Covid-19 pandemic, the Community Farm has served as a inspiring gathering place for community members to enjoy nature, give back and socialize with neighbors (in a safe manner!).

2021 has brought many new additions to the farm, including our first summer intern, several laying hens whose eggs will soon become part of our food donations, two American Guinea Hogs serving as farm ambassadors and agents of soil health and community education, and many new varieties of fruits and vegetables. We are working hard to surpass our goal of donating 35,000 pounds of produce to Loudoun Hunger Relief this year, and as of August, we have donated 30,000 pounds.



Volunteers from Paul VI High School harvesting beets. Photo by Dana Melby



Farm Ambassador Maple enjoys snacking on clover while helping improve the soils at the Community Farm. Photo by Hugh Kenny



Farm Production Assistant Mitchell Pittman harvests sun gold tomatoes with a volunteer. Photo by Pete Walton



Pollinator flowers. Photo by Mitchell Pittman

## Grassland Birds

Continued from cover

Virginia's grasslands has been an entirely new and rewarding experience. I had no idea the amount of life that's teeming amidst a field of grass.

The chance to explore this habitat with grassland bird researchers has been for me like lifting an opaque curtain to discover a bustling scene of activity. A family of eastern meadowlarks scavenging about for arthropods. A female bobolink quietly incubating her clutch of eggs. A covey of northern bobwhite quail hiding from a hawk passing overhead. And of course, that assemblage will change throughout the seasons to include short-eared owls and northern harriers hunting for field mice in late autumn, and horned larks plucking seeds from wheat grasses in the depths of winter. The more you learn and see what is happening in these grasslands, the faster you arrive at the pivotal question: Who else doesn't know about this? And that's where we start to run into a big problem....

Over the last century, our native grasslands—once a vast “sea of grass”—have been steadily converted into agricultural lands. Farmland now covers more than 8 million acres just here in the state of Virginia. This conversion has taken its toll on grassland bird species that need that habitat for safe nesting grounds during spring, shelter throughout harsh winter months, a stopover site to refuel during migration, and other parts of their

life cycle. With the advancement of modern agricultural machinery, widespread use of biocides, and increased consumer demands adding more pressure on these lands, grassland birds have experienced a steeper decline than any other guild of birds. Here in Virginia, our iconic northern bobwhite and eastern meadowlarks, for example, have lost more than 75 percent of their population.

Yet amidst these worrisome trends, nature can be incredibly resilient, and across the country, a suite of grassland birds continue to make a go of it on active farmlands that, while not these birds' native habitat, offer a *surrogate* habitat. Excitingly, research is showing us that with specific management practices, these working lands can serve the needs of grassland birds while still being fully functional farms. With the majority of Virginia's remaining grasslands privately owned and under agricultural use, the onus for grassland conservation has fallen largely on those landowners and producers. They have become the guardians of one of our most endangered ecosystems and the wildlife that comes along with it.

Creating a functional and resilient agroecosystem, however, can be a complex conservation challenge, and we're going to need all hands on deck to make it work well. And so in early 2021, The Piedmont Environmental Council and Smithsonian's Virginia Working Land-

scapes launched the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative, with a mission to partner with farmers on their working landscapes to implement best management practices that simultaneously **stem the tide of grassland bird decline, improve the resiliency of the landscape, and positively impact the livelihoods that depend upon those lands.**

I was offered the chance to coordinate the initiative—an amazing opportunity to work at the confluence of science, conservation, and agriculture, and to be a part of a much bigger team helping give Virginia farmers the tools and resources they need to be leaders in sustainable land management and environmental stewardship.

The Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative has since brought on as core partners the American Farmland Trust and Quail Forever, with collective expertise in science and research, best management practices, regenerative agriculture, technical assistance, and a long history of fostering good working relationships with Virginia's landowners. The initiative is offering a start-to-finish pathway to beneficial conservation practices tailored to each landowners' individual working



Small changes to farming practices can have a big, positive impact on grassland birds. For example, slightly adjusting the timing of hayfield mowing in the spring can ensure much higher rates of grassland birds fledging their young during the vulnerable nesting season. Grasshopper sparrow, photo by Bernadette Ridgely

landscapes. And to achieve larger-scale environmental protection, we are sharing knowledge and unifying messaging with regional partners, collaborators, and stakeholders.

Through these efforts to conserve grassland birds, we concurrently enrich our soils, improve the health of our watersheds, and build back biodiversity on our landscapes. We will not be able to recover all of the native grassland that has been lost, but we can adapt our hayfields, livestock pastures, and croplands to function as healthy and resilient ecosystems that are favorable to our native wildlife. This is the win-win compromise that we all want.



# A Voice for Historic Villages

Loudoun County can no longer leave historic villages out of community planning

By Gem Bingol, Field Representative

Over the last year, the future of two of Loudoun’s historic villages, Aldie and St. Louis, have been linked in uncertainty. In an attempt to protect St. Louis’ fragile water sources and remaining historic features from an impending development, the Loudoun Board of Supervisors proposed a multi-faceted real estate transaction that would, essentially, move the developer from St. Louis to county-owned land in Aldie that the developer wanted to build upon. The result was upheaval in both places as residents objected to the Aldie development and the linkage that threatened each community’s unique qualities.

### A Happy Outcome for Aldie

During the summer, another

Aldie resident and developer, Guy Gerachis, stepped forward with a cash offer for the county-owned land in Aldie. His proposal for the property was vetted and supported by the community. After an open call to consider all possible offers, the board ultimately voted to accept Gerachis Construction Group’s proposal. Details are to be worked out with a closing in the near future, but the purchase effectively decoupled the future of the two villages.

### Uncertainty Continues in St. Louis

Meanwhile in St. Louis, the developer resumed well drilling for his planned development. Residents started a petition, signed by many members of the St. Louis and greater western

Loudoun community, asking the board to protect their water and their future. The board held a special public input session in June, where residents and supporters spoke with passion about the need to keep working toward a solution for St. Louis.

The outcome for St. Louis is still unknown, but the board has prioritized a planning and zoning initiative for St. Louis as one of the top three projects for county staff to address in their workplan. In September, staff will propose a set of options for Board consideration and vote. Unfortunately, this action will neither address nor stop the original development that started it all, and no further public announcements have been made about how the county might address that issue. Nonetheless, there is hope in the community that a resolution is still possible, and residents continue to advocate for a solution.

### The Unique Challenges and Opportunities for Historic Villages

The plights of St. Louis and Aldie illustrate a common struggle for historic villages throughout Loudoun County—Lucketts, Philomont, Unison and others. Varied in size and density each has evolved organically, with long, deep roots that create a unique sense of place their residents recognize and value



Aerial photo of the village of Aldie. Photo by Hugh Kenny

but that isn’t readily apparent to outsiders. In many cases, zoning allows future development that could fundamentally alter their unique character with generic buildings and development patterns. Future development threatens the viability of some by putting undue pressure on limited groundwater and other natural resources. And they lack the benefit of HOA covenants and other restrictions that could protect residents’ long-term desires for these communities.

And yet, while Virginia requires every county to have a comprehensive plan and to review and revise that plan every five years, Loudoun has never included its historic villages, specifically, in community planning exercises during these processes.

With a mission that in part seeks to preserve and protect the region’s historic and cultural resources, PEC believes all of Loudoun’s historic villages must be specifically included in county plans. Without village-specific land use plans that holistically address growth potential, groundwater sustainability, infrastructure and residents’ vision for the future, the villages are left with uncertain futures and will have to deal with issues that arise

in an uncoordinated fashion.

In Lucketts, for example, current zoning allows excessive growth, and proposed road projects may have negative impacts on local businesses and residents. Unison, Lincoln, and Waterford, like St. Louis, face groundwater resource challenges. Residents of Philmont are concerned with protecting the horse show grounds—the site of 60+ years of annual horse shows and a cherished community asset—while ensuring adequate space for fire and rescue station needs.

### Advocating for villages

Routinely in our work, PEC supports the Loudoun Historic Village Alliance (LHVA), which speaks as a single voice for Loudoun’s many historic communities, to identify and highlight common issues faced by historic villages. Our hope is to equip and empower village residents to play an engaged role in their destiny within Loudoun County’s overall growth and development. Community planning is where that starts. We encourage residents to speak up for these villages in letters to the Loudoun Board of Supervisors and contact LHVA at [loudounvillages.org](http://loudounvillages.org) to get involved.



Residents of St. Louis sign a petition asking Loudoun’s board of supervisors to protect their water and the future of the village. Photo by Hugh Kenny

## The Trouble with Wilderness Crossing

Continued from cover

gold was extracted using mercury, considered by the World Health Organization to be one of the top 10 chemicals of major public health concern. Virginia’s Department of Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency have deemed the adjacent 2.2-mile section of the Rapidan River impaired due to mercury in fish tissue and have prohibited the consumption of fish from this section of the Rapidan.

The Wilderness Crossing application makes no mention of mercury contamination from past gold mining activities and offers no environmental study to ensure residents that the disruption of soil for the grading and construction of thousands of homes won’t further contaminate drinking water or the environment where thousands of people may live and work.

### Disruption to historic and natural resources

We also look at development proposals for potential threats to historic and cultural resources, national parks and public recreational spaces. Wilderness Crossing would sit about a quarter mile

northeast of the existing Rt. 3/Rt. 20 intersection. The developer proposes rerouting Rt. 20, so that it intersects with Rt. 3 at the planned entrance to Wilderness Crossing. This change in alignment would cost taxpayers and cause significant disturbance to hallowed ground, all so the developers can “direct traffic” to their development.

### Unexpected burdens for taxpayers

Most development proposals include hard numbers of planned residential and commercial structures and a phased construction timeline, which are used to calculate likely needs for schools, roads, sewer, etc. The Wilderness Crossing proposal includes neither, and its developers have said they want market forces to determine the buildout. The developer’s fiscal and traffic impact analyses are based on arbitrary numbers of residential and commercial units within arbitrary timeframes, none of which are expressly requested in the application. “Given its size and location within Orange’s growth area, the details are incredibly important. Without them, Orange County can neither

anticipate infrastructure needs nor realistically calculate the fiscal impacts of this development on county taxpayers,” Hawk said.

### Bait-and-Switch potential

“When a developer asks for open-ended zoning and submits a proposal with few specifics, as this one has, it’s often a sign they are attempting to increase the value of the land with no real intention of building that project,” Hawk said. In the world of land use planning, this is often called *speculative development*. Based on potential outcomes for taxpayers, we call it *bait-and-switch* buildout. It works like this:

**The Bait:** A developer buys land with limited zoning at a low cost and then gets it rezoned with more development rights, often presenting pretty pictures and touting various benefits to the community, such as revenue or land for schools or parks. (This developer bought this land 30 years ago and this is their third attempt at rezoning.)

**The Switch:** Some time after rezoning is approved, the developer sells the now-more-valuable land at a profit, usually without even breaking ground. The new owner can then use the new zoning to build something completely different (and often worse) than the community thought it was getting.

### Orange County today, Your County tomorrow

While Hawk is reviewing the Wilderness Crossing proposal in Orange, analyzing potential outcomes and asking tough questions, PEC’s other field representatives are doing the same in other counties as well. This is what we have done for the past 50 years... educate, engage, and empower residents of Virginia Piedmont communities to advocate for good local outcomes. If you live in Orange, we hope you’ll join us in holding county supervisors accountable for doing what’s in the best interest of the county. And whether you live in Orange or elsewhere, we hope you’ll lean on us for all of your land use questions.

Learn more about our position on Wilderness Crossing at [pecva.org/wilderness-crossing](http://pecva.org/wilderness-crossing).



# On the Ground

## Albemarle & Charlottesville

### › Affordable Housing

To better meet affordable housing needs within the development area, the Albemarle Board of Supervisors adopted an updated housing policy in July with intentions of later adding affordability periods, price range, and percentage of affordable housing per development. PEC supports long-term affordable housing options scaled for Albemarle and located near services/features that reduce economic burdens for residents (transit, jobs, etc.).

### › Event Venues

An applicant has requested a special use permit for 54 acres of Rural Area-zoned land along Rt. 29 within the Hardware Agricultural and Forestal District. Application approval would require either the application to be found compliant with district rules or the land withdrawn from the district three years early. PEC neither believes the application is compliant, nor supports early withdrawal from the district for non-agricultural or forestal purposes. We also have concerns about the event portion of the proposal, which would triple the existing 7,520 square feet of buildings in part for events up to 150 people.

## Clarke

### › New Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance Adopted

The board of supervisors recently voted to adopt new zoning and subdivision ordinances in an effort to modernize existing ordinances, provide a user-friendly format, and ensure compliance with the Code of Virginia. Residential density, lot size requirements, allowable development, and current zoning districts remain unchanged. The new ordinances are in effect and can be reviewed on the county website.

### › Septic Ordinance Revisions

County staff are drafting septic ordinance revisions based on changes to onsite system technology and other issues identified by the state health department. PEC is participating in workgroup discussions to advocate for groundwater protection and consideration for soils and geologic conditions.

## Culpeper

### › Solar Ordinance

After lengthy discussion, the planning commission is expected to finalize a draft utility-scale solar ordinance for board of supervisors consideration. PEC provided feedback throughout the development of this ordinance. We are pleased to see that the current draft regulates utility-scale solar via use permits rather than by creating a separate industrial zoning district.

### › Clevenger’s Village

Pre-construction meetings between the county and Lennar Homes began this summer for this mixed-use development for 774 residential units, 140,000 square feet of commercial space, and 700+ acres of open space. County-approved construction phases call for a six-year build-out, with no more than 150 building permits to be issued each year.

## Fauquier

### › New Boat Launch on the Rappahannock River

After years of work and partner collaboration, a new Rappahannock River boat launch is now open in Remington. PEC has been pursuing river access in Remington for nearly 20 years, and secured a \$20,000 grant from Virginia Environmental Endowment for construction materials for the new launch. We continue to work toward a community vision for nearby Rappahannock Station Battlefield Park.

### › Solar Proposals

In August, the county found a utility-scale solar application for a 3MW facility on 19.5 acres of a 48-acre farm off Meetze Rd. non-compliant with the county’s comprehensive plan, as 100% of the proposed panel location is prime agricultural soil, actively farmed, and would make continued farming on the parcel impractical. A larger project PEC is also watching would cover 1,000 acres of land that is mostly forested or used for agricultural purposes.

### › New Asphalt Plant Proposed in Midland

Allan Myers, one of the largest heavy civil contractor and materials suppliers in the Mid-Atlantic, has submitted an application for a new asphalt plant in Midland off of Midland Road. PEC follows this issue closely, with early concerns on truck traffic, adequacy of the Midland Road/Rt. 28 intersection, and air quality.

## Greene

### › Tourist Lodging

The issue of short-term tourist rentals in residential neighborhoods continues to be a source of heated debate in the county. They are allowed by-right in agricultural and conservation zoned areas, but require a use permit in residential areas. In July, the board of supervisors denied one such use permit request, while the planning commission recommended approval of another, both in Greene Mountain Lake.

### › Glamping Proposal

PEC is monitoring a proposal for 234 “glamping” units and an activity center on 116 acres in the Mutton Hollow area, with concerns about transportation impacts and loss of rural character.

## Loudoun

### › Short Term Residential Rentals

The county is drafting a zoning ordinance amendment, adding two categories of short-term (under 30 days) residential rentals as an allowed use. The *accessory use category* would allow limited whole-house rentals of an owner’s primary and tenant houses, while the *commercial use category* would allow whole-house rentals as the sole use of housing. PEC has expressed concerns this amendment could reduce the stock for standard rentals and affordable housing. The draft text is expected to go before the planning commission by the end of the year.

### › County Trail Plan

The board of supervisors recently adopted a master plan for an interconnected network of natural trails along stream valleys across the county. Intended for both recreation and habitat protection, the network

will connect with paved trails to enhance pedestrian access to natural areas. PEC has served as a member of the linear parks and trails subcommittee of Loudoun’s parks, recreation and open space board throughout the process.

### › AT&T Tower on Short Hill

To allow time for public hearings, the board of supervisors recently deferred action on a permit application for a 125’ tower atop Short Hill Mountain. The public hearings will take place in mid-September. PEC staff are working with partner organizations to inform concerned residents and elected officials about how the tower violates the county’s ordinances for ridgeline protection.

## Madison

### › Solar Proposal

The county is considering a rezoning request for a 92-acre parcel adjacent to Yoder’s Market to allow for the construction of a utility-scale solar facility. PEC’s concerns about this proposal include impacts to prime agricultural soils, changes sought by the developer to the county’s solar ordinance, and the potential precedent that would be set, opening the door for potential future conversion of agricultural zoning to industrial. An initial public hearing took place in early September.

## Orange

### › Art in the Park

PEC’s Town to Trail working group developed and introduced the concept for an art camp within the park in Gordonsville to the town, Virginia Museum of Fine Art, and Arts Center in Orange, which collaborated to host it. Six teenage artists worked with a local art professional to create large dramatically colorful butterflies with masonite and paint and install them on existing park poles, which they also painted. The Town to Trail group helped the town secure funds to expand the park and worked to acquire two parcels of land that connect the park to Fireman’s Fairgrounds.

## Rappahannock

### › Mt. Airy LLC Rezoning Application Denied

In a contentious July decision, Rappahannock’s board of supervisors voted against rezoning the Mt. Airy LLC property from RR-5 (5 acre minimum lots) to R-2 (2 acres lots). PEC commented that the application was not aligned with Rappahannock’s comprehensive plan, which focuses future residential and commercial development in or around the major villages.

### › VDOT Fish Passage Pilot Projects Begin

PEC is working with VDOT, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and local landowners to restore fish passages and make local road-stream crossings safer and more flood resilient. Following construction of an improved culvert series at the Bolton Branch/Mill Hill Road (VA Rt. 631) crossing near Huntly, Bolton Branch now connects over two miles of stream to its headwaters in Shenandoah National Park, the last intact habitat for Virginia’s state fish, the Eastern brook trout.



# Moving the Needle

## Next Generation Making a Difference in Key PEC Programs

By Sophia Chapin, Communications Specialist

### Josh Press-Williams Climate Action Planning Resources

Josh Press-Williams, who grew up in Charlottesville, returned to the city in early 2021 to help PEC tackle climate change communication. Working with Senior Conservation Fellow Kat Imhoff, Josh is co-authoring a briefing paper that details climate action resources for Albemarle County.

"The paper we're writing is to connect climate change, which has been abstract for a long time [...] at the local, granular level," he explains. "It's been really interesting to learn about how climate change is going to affect Virginia because it's not something I've learned before."

The call to action for Albemarle County and the greater Virginia Piedmont is to develop coordinated climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Some strategic areas of focus might include affordable housing, green transportation or rural land management.

In addition to highlighting the current progress of Albemarle, Charlottesville, and UVA, the paper helps residents 'think globally, act locally' on climate change. "At the local level you can see [changes] happen before your eyes—you can see that you actually have an impact. I think that's why [this project] is so meaningful to me," he said.



Photo by Hugh Kenny

The work in Albemarle is just one part of the climate change puzzle. "PEC has always been involved in climate change," Josh explains, citing PEC's commitment to land conservation, which helps absorb carbon from the atmosphere, and smart growth, which builds resilient communities.

Once the paper, titled "Resources for Climate Action Planning in Albemarle County," is complete, Josh will be out in the world pursuing other impactful opportunities: the Peace Corps and law school.

### Lachi Balabanski Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows

Lachi Balabanski awoke every morning this summer ready to start the day at Roundabout Meadows Community Farm.

A resident of Leesburg, Lachi began as a volunteer on the farm last summer. When fall and winter came around, he asked if he could stay on, and received a resounding yes; inspiring young people in agriculture is one of the driving forces behind Roundabout Meadows.

"There is nothing more noble than this—feeding people who need it and demonstrating regenerative agriculture techniques," says Lachi.

An anonymous donor offered to fund his internship, and for the last six months, Lachi has been fulfilling the daily tasks of mulching, planting, managing volunteers, and of course, restoring the soil that sustains the thousands of pounds of produce donated to Loudoun Hunger Relief.

"The work is hard, but extremely rewarding," Lachi said. "I'm just super grateful. If there is anything that anyone could take away from this, it is that I'm so grateful to be here everyday, it is just like a blast."

The only thing that seems to be the same every day is letting the chickens



Photo by Hugh Kenny

out in the morning and feeding the pigs, Maple and Clover, in the afternoon. But every moment was a learning opportunity for Lachi and for the other volunteers under his instruction.

Off the farm, Lachi is part of the All-Virginia Guitar Ensemble and loves viewing stars at C.M. Crockett Park with his telescope. He plans to study physics at Georgia Tech and pursue a career in agricultural physics—agricultural practices through the lens of physical science.

### Damien Sharp Southwest Mountains Black History

Damien Sharp helped PEC preserve history this summer by documenting historical African American communities in the Southwest Mountains Rural Historic District, which was designated in 1991 for its unique rural architecture.

Damien, who grew up in Fauquier County, has a deep appreciation for communities like his own that embrace, revitalize and preserve history. "My interest in historical preservation comes from a love of Warrenton," he said.

His days in the record rooms of Albemarle County's Circuit Court involved searching through deeds and other documents to trace the chain of families that owned parcels of land in communities like Scuffletown, Cobham and Bunker Hill. These historically African American communities were originally left out of the historic district due to the lack of inclusivity in preservation at the time, in spite of their contributions to the growth and development of the region.

"They're just as relevant as the parcels that are already included in the historical district. They're no less relevant—no less important—to the history of Virginia," says Damien.

Today, the population of the Southwest Mountains is predominantly white; the African American community moved north during the Great Migration in search of economic and social opportunity. By engaging in this research, Damien hopes that present-day Southwest Mountains communities will find new appreciation for the historic structures on their land.

Following his summer with PEC, Damien returns to a fellowship with Cornell Institute for Public Affairs concentrating in Government, Politics, and Policy.



Photo by Hugh Kenny

### Victoria Garnett Madison County SNP Digitization Records

"Preserving history is something that I've always been interested in doing," shares Victoria Garnett, who spent the summer digitizing and organizing thousands of records in the Madison County Clerk's Office.

The deed books, court proceedings and other property condemnation case files, mostly from the 1930s, are a brief glimpse into the lives of settlers from the parts of Madison County that were taken by the state for the creation of Shenandoah National Park.

Victoria's work completing the digitization of these records is part of a larger project to make the park's history of private land condemnation publicly available. Madison will be the third county with records digitized, following Rockingham County, done by James Madison University, and Rappahannock County, completed by PEC last year. The records are available through James Madison University's database: <https://omeka.lib.jmu.edu/erp>.

A self-described "history nerd," Victoria hopes to pursue a career in archival collections with her master's degree in Library Science from Old Dominion University. Her love of history

started with discovering her own; she can trace her family's presence in Madison back to the late 1700s.

Following her work on the digitization project, Victoria will be able to hike the national park—a place she has frequented for years—with fresh eyes. "I didn't know this history growing up, and I think that it's really important for younger kids, and teenagers, to learn about their community," she says. Victoria hopes that the digitization of these records will help foster a collective memory of the past for residents of Madison and beyond.



Photo by Hugh Kenny



# Remembrances



Photo by PEC

## Marcia de Garmo

PEC BOARD TERM: 1995 - 2011

Marcia was a friend, colleague, and strategic partner in all of what PEC has accomplished over the past three decades. Whether conservation, planning, transportation reform, or state environmental policy, Marcia was on the leading edge of advocacy and community organizing in Loudoun, the Piedmont, the Washington metropolitan area and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Marcia led the formation of the Virginia League of Conservation Voters, the Voters to Stop Sprawl in Loudoun County, and Citizens for Loudoun's Future. She was also a strong supporter of the Coalition for Smarter Growth and the Route 50 Corridor Task Force that conceived and supported the implementation of the Route 50 Traffic Calming Plan. Marcia's determination and energy were legendary, and her dedication remains an inspiration to many as a life given to service of the community.



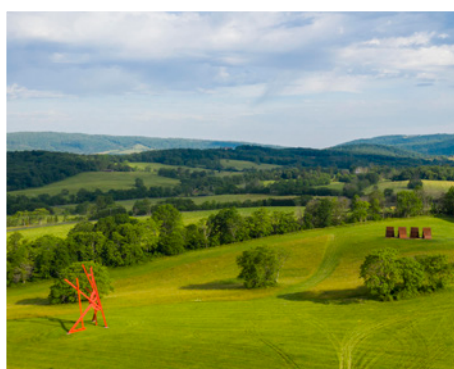
Photo by John Moring

## Margaret "Peggy" Richardson

PEC BOARD TERM: 2008 - 2021

Margaret "Peggy" Richardson was a strong supporter of PEC, of conservation, and of good government and good governance. As Chair of the Nominations and Governance Committee, she continually worked to strengthen the PEC Board of Directors and provide a structure of committees that encouraged board engagement. She provided valuable legal counsel through a series of policy, litigation, and conservation challenges ranging from transmission lines through her community to federal policy on tax incentives for conservation to the enforcement of conservation easements. What endeared Peggy to staff and board members, though, was her wise, calm, and friendly engagement with all. Her needlepoint in the midst of PEC Board meetings created a sense of intimacy and humanity that she extended to each of us as colleagues, family and friends.

## Upcoming Events



### 2021 Farm-to Table Dinner and Virtual Auction

**Gala: Oct 2; Virtual Auction: Sept. 23 - Oct. 3**

Our Farm-to-Table Dinner at St. Bride's Farm is nearly sold out! Contact Kendra Atkins at [katkins@pecva.org](mailto:katkins@pecva.org) or (540) 347-2334 ext. 7005 to see how you might participate. To learn more about the dinner, visit [www.pecva.org/events](http://www.pecva.org/events).

Once again this year, **the auction portion of this event is going virtual!** Join us online from Sept. 24 through Oct. 3 to place your bids for an incredible collection of items and experiences, including many that are unique to the Virginia Piedmont. Visit our Virtual Auction at [www.pecva.org/stbrides](http://www.pecva.org/stbrides).

### Quarterly Keynote Speaker

**Thursday, Sept. 23, 6 p.m.**

The third webinar in our *Quarterly Keynote* series will feature a conversation between PEC President Chris Miller and Campaign Legal Center Founder and President Trevor Potter, a nationally recognized expert on campaign and election law. Together, Miller and Potter will explore how current developments in election law and process could impact the Piedmont region and discuss ways we can all be better-informed and effective advocates. Register for this free online event at [www.pecva.org/events](http://www.pecva.org/events).

### Sporting Clays for Conservation

**Saturday, Nov. 6, 11:30 a.m.**

Practice your shooting skills while supporting a worthy cause! Join PEC for a sporting clay event at the beautiful Prospect Hall Shooting Club in Kearneysville, W.V. Competition will consist of teams of five on a 50-round course. The top three scoring shooters will receive prizes! Tickets are \$125 per person. For more details or questions, please contact Kendra Atkins at [katkins@pecva.org](mailto:katkins@pecva.org) or (540) 347-2334 ext. 7005.



### Annual Photo Contest

**Get Your Photos in by September 30!**

Submit your shots of breathtaking views, downtown streetscapes, people enjoying the outdoors, and native wildlife for our annual photo contest by Sept. 30. This year's categories are: **Beautiful Landscapes, Native Plants and Wildlife, People and Places**, and the **Youth Category** for ages 17 and under. Finalists will receive a one-year PEC membership and have their work featured in upcoming PEC print and online publications. The Youth Category winner will receive a \$75 gift card for iTunes, Google Play Store or Amazon; all other category winners will receive a \$75 gift certificate to a nearby *Buy Fresh Buy Local* restaurant! For contest details, visit [www.pecva.org/photocontest](http://www.pecva.org/photocontest). If you have questions, email us at [photos@pecva.org](mailto:photos@pecva.org).

## Other Ways to Give

As we approach the end of the calendar year, it's a good time to thank our annual members, who make our work possible from year to year, and to remember the myriad ways to support PEC's mission to protect the places you love in the Virginia Piedmont.

- **Cash Gifts** — A great way to give to many nonprofits. You can donate to PEC online at [www.pecva.org/give](http://www.pecva.org/give) or by mailing your donation to PO Box 460, Warrenton, VA 20188. You can also become a monthly sustaining member at [www.pecva.org/sustainer](http://www.pecva.org/sustainer).
- **Qualified Charitable Distributions from IRAs** — For those 70½ or older, a QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian, payable to a qualified charity. QCDs can be counted toward satisfying your required minimum distributions (RMDs) for the year, as long as certain rules are met. When you make this direct distribution to a nonprofit like PEC, it's not included in your taxable income.
- **Gift of Stock** — A gift of appreciated stock or other securities allows you to receive the full benefit of the market value of the stock gift without paying the capital gains taxes that would be incurred if you sold the stock.
- **Donor Advised Funds** — PEC is happy to accept contributions from donor advised funds. These funds are created with a financial institution and allow the donor to receive an immediate charitable tax deduction when the fund is established. Subsequent contributions to qualified charities can then be made from this fund.

As implemented in the CARES Act, those who do not itemize their tax returns may deduct up to \$300 (for single returns) or \$600 (for joint returns) of qualified charitable contributions in computing their 2021 adjusted gross income (AGI). Those who itemize can elect to receive a federal income tax deduction for qualifying charitable cash contributions of up to 100% of your AGI.

For more information or to give by phone, contact Kendra Atkins at [katkins@pecva.org](mailto:katkins@pecva.org) or 540.347.2334 ext. 7005. We hope you value the work of PEC and will help us to continue to protect the places you love in the Virginia Piedmont by making a donation today.



Dear Friends,

The past few months have laid bare before us some of the dramatic effects of the changing climate conditions in which we live. The intense storm events, devastating floods and hot, extended summers that continue to impact our community make it clear we need to plan for the future. The pressing question is how each of our communities, individually and collectively, do that, accounting for the changes already underway and taking steps to reduce, mitigate and adapt to their impacts. As PEC works with local and regional partners, we continue to integrate the changing climate into our long-range planning and are helping ensure that our communities and growth areas are prepared with strategies to respond.

In August, we were proud to serve as a lead sponsor of the 2021 Resilient Virginia Conference, which focused on tools to aid communities in the face of climate change challenges. We are also working, alongside Resilient Virginia, with Albemarle County’s climate change team on an assessment of climate-related risks and vulnerabilities in the county. This analysis, scheduled to be published in late November, will provide a model for how localities can examine climate impacts in their communities and begin to incorporate necessary changes both for carbon reduction and for adaptation to our changing situation.

PEC remains focused on the continued protection of the Piedmont’s open spaces, abundant water and natural resources. The implementation of evolving land management practices for farming and forestry can amplify

climate benefits while also protecting farm families’ livelihoods and our rural lands in the process. Farming and forestry are Virginia’s top economic sector; our prime soils and relative annual precipitation make prospects for the future very positive. Loss of these industries and the lands that sustain them to sprawling industrial and residential development reduces the ecosystem services these lands provide, including those related to climate resiliency.

Recognizing the importance of actively cutting carbon emissions in this region, we are stepping up our longstanding advocacy for transportation reform to help reduce Virginia’s largest source of energy consumption and carbon emissions. We must ensure transportation investments and planning efforts limit sprawl and support walkable/livable community design.

We are also working with partners to reduce per capita energy consumption and decarbonize the energy sector. How we accomplish the task matters. A focus on energy efficient buildings (insulation, lighting and appliances) can substantially reduce energy demand. In addition, PEC believes in empowering communities, residents, and businesses to become an active part of the solution through rooftop solar. For larger utility-scale solar projects, the focus should be



Aerial image of downtown Culpeper and surrounding areas. Photo by Hugh Kenny

on disturbed sites such as brownfields, industrial centers and marginal lands, preserving lands of high conservation value (forests, prime agricultural soils, habitat, etc.) where and when possible. The responsible path forward is one that minimizes impacts to lands and resources that offer significant environmental and climate benefits as we pursue a carbon free energy future.

As always, the problem is vast and the solutions complex. But our communities are strong, and your continued investment in PEC makes it possible for us to serve as an advocate for the Piedmont as we rise to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Sincerely,

*Chris Miller*

Chris Miller, President



Photo by Matt Ha



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL    AUTUMN 2021



INSIDE

PEC Study Leads To Beef Processor Training Program, The Need For Historic Village Community Planning, Fellows and Interns Move PEC Projects Forward, Upcoming Events, and more!

Ragged Mountain Reservoir in autumn. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

What has caused the disappearance of most of the 14,000 heirloom apple varieties grown in the United States during the 19th century?

- a) The great North American apple blight of the 1930s
- b) The rise of suburban development in the 20th century
- c) The 20th-century shift toward single-crop and corporate farming
- d) Prohibition-era destruction of cider orchards
- e) b, c, and d

ANSWER ON PAGE 2



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