

CONSERVATION EDITION

PAGE 2 Conservation Totals for 2020

PAGE 3 History at the Top of Bull Run Mountain

PAGE 5 The Long Road to Waterloo Bridge

General Assembly Update

Special, Regular, Special...what's next?

By Dan Holmes, Director of State Policy

The last six months has been a whirlwind of legislative action. The 2020 special session extended into mid-October, creating a mad scramble at its conclusion to prepare for the 2021 regular session. PEC was busy drafting bills and budget amendments, finding sponsors and having the conversations necessary to set up our initiatives for success before the new session began on January 13. The 2021 regular session was eventually extended into a special session that concluded on March 1. Throughout, there were countless virtual meetings with partners and legislators and virtual testimony to relevant house and senate committees. After all was said and done, I am pleased to report on a largely successful session.

The Budget

The introduced budget for FY2022 provided a strong foundation, including money for trails, food programs, water quality and more. Building from that foundation, we focused on two items.

The first was an amendment we worked on with Senator McClellan's office to fund important surveys of underrepresented historic resources throughout the state, ensuring that untold histories of African American and indigenous people are identified and documented in the state database. This effort was ultimately successful. The second item was an amendment offered by Delegate Gooditis to provide an additional \$2 million for the Farmland Preservation Fund, a measure she champions

every year. While not fully funded, her dedication paid off this session. The final budget included an additional \$750,000, bringing the fund total to \$1 million supporting local Purchase of Development Rights programs.

While still short of what's needed, additional funding was allocated to the Agricultural BMP Cost-Share Program (Ag BMPs), bringing its total to \$65 million. This funding is critical for meeting our pollution reduction goals for the Chesapeake Bay, supporting such measures as livestock exclusion fencing and streamside plantings. The legislature also allocated \$10 million for trails; accompanying language setting up project ranking criteria gives us hope this is not just a one-off funding measure.

But not all the news was good. We were disappointed with the General Assembly's new "earmark" approach to the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF), Virginia's primary conservation grant vehicle. By directing VLCF funding toward specific projects, legislators damage the program's integrity and insert politics into conservation funding decisions.

The Legislation

Legislative outcomes are also largely positive, with many of our initiatives sitting on the governor's desk, awaiting signature.

We are very pleased that our priority land conservation legislation, HB1760 (Webert/Gooditis) and SB1199 (Petersen), will soon be



The recent session of the Virginia General Assembly concluded on March 1. Photo by Marco Sánchez

signed into law. This legislation preserves the integrity of existing easements by ensuring that disputes over terms are decided in favor of the conservation purpose of the easement.

On energy, we continued to press for utility reform along with partners, supporting several pieces of legislation related to ratepayers and utility oversight by the State Corporation Commission. This suite of bills, including HB1914 (Helmer), HB2200 (Jones/Ware), and HB1984 (Hudson), made it across to the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, where they suffered the usual fate of good legislation before that body—they were summarily killed. PEC's Board chair summed it up best in a recent Richmond Times-Dispatch letter, when he said, "Blanket support of Dominion cannot, according to any view of public benefit, possibly be considered responsible, sensible lawmaking." On a brighter note, HB1925 (Kilgore) passed, providing incentives for conversion of brownfields and reclaimed minelands to solar.

Along with increased funding for Ag BMPs,

Continued on page 5

Honoring the Sacrifices Made for a Park We Love

By Kristie Kendall, Historic Preservation Coordinator

One unseasonably warm, early spring morning, I walked down Hungry Horse Lane in Rappahannock County with Earl "Kit" Hawkins and his wife, daughter and son-in-law. Eastern bluebirds, a staple in these Appalachian mountains, sang their lovely songs while the Hazel River flowed strong from recent rains. In less than a quarter mile, we turned to follow an old, steep mountain road called Sam's Ridge Trail. With a quick elevation gain of more than 1,000 feet, this trail in Shenandoah National Park is not for the faint of heart! But we were pushed by a desire to visit what was once the home—stead of Kit's grandfather, Milton "Mortimer" Hawkins, and the place where Kit's father, Earl Sr., was born and raised.

Long before Shenandoah National Park was established in 1935, generations of people pushed up into the Blue Ridge Mountains and called them home. Houses dotted the hillsides and hollows, churches and schools

served the population, and general stores and post offices brought services directly into the mountains. The advent of the automobile and creation of Skyline Drive marked the arrival of gas stations at the top of the mountain, and a few homes even had a telephone and electricity.

Mortimer Hawkins and his wife, Stella B. Nicholson, were among those families who made the mountains home. In fact, both their families lived in the Blue Ridge going back at least to the 1870s. Mortimer's father purchased the Hazel Mountain land we hoped to find from Calhoun Weakley in 1898, shortly before his own death the same year. Mortimer and Stella married in 1904, moved into the Hawkins house with Mortimer's mother, Mary, and raised their own family there.

Life on the mountain was not to last, however. By the mid-1920s, the Blue Ridge Mountains were selected as the location for



Earl "Kit" Hawkins (right) and family stand in front of what remains of the Hawkins' Hazel Mountain home in spring 2019. Photo by Kristie Kendall

Continued on page 7

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Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!



2020 Land Conservation Totals

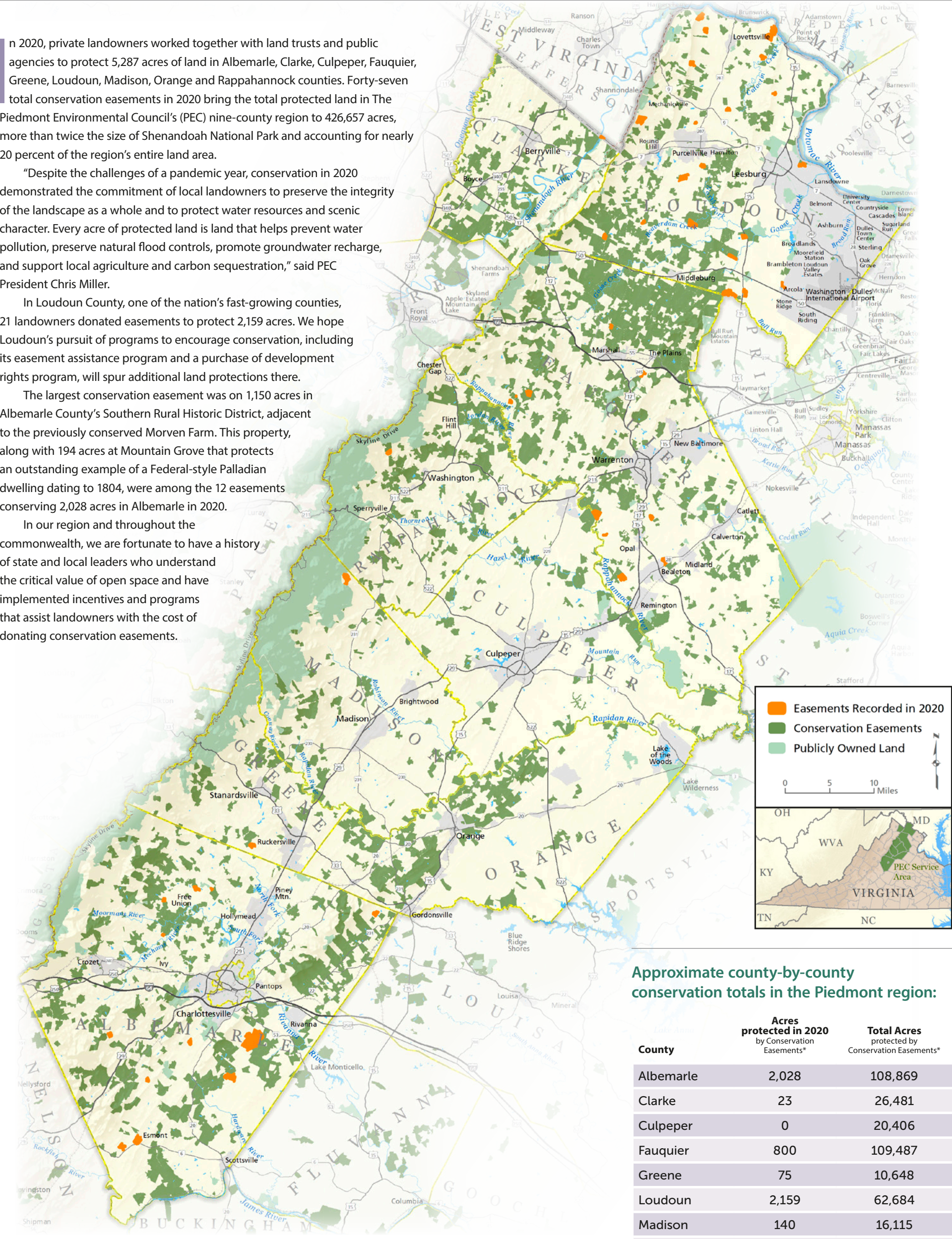
In 2020, private landowners worked together with land trusts and public agencies to protect 5,287 acres of land in Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties. Forty-seven total conservation easements in 2020 bring the total protected land in The Piedmont Environmental Council’s (PEC) nine-county region to 426,657 acres, more than twice the size of Shenandoah National Park and accounting for nearly 20 percent of the region’s entire land area.

“Despite the challenges of a pandemic year, conservation in 2020 demonstrated the commitment of local landowners to preserve the integrity of the landscape as a whole and to protect water resources and scenic character. Every acre of protected land is land that helps prevent water pollution, preserve natural flood controls, promote groundwater recharge, and support local agriculture and carbon sequestration,” said PEC President Chris Miller.

In Loudoun County, one of the nation’s fast-growing counties, 21 landowners donated easements to protect 2,159 acres. We hope Loudoun’s pursuit of programs to encourage conservation, including its easement assistance program and a purchase of development rights program, will spur additional land protections there.

The largest conservation easement was on 1,150 acres in Albemarle County’s Southern Rural Historic District, adjacent to the previously conserved Morven Farm. This property, along with 194 acres at Mountain Grove that protects an outstanding example of a Federal-style Palladian dwelling dating to 1804, were among the 12 easements conserving 2,028 acres in Albemarle in 2020.

In our region and throughout the commonwealth, we are fortunate to have a history of state and local leaders who understand the critical value of open space and have implemented incentives and programs that assist landowners with the cost of donating conservation easements.



Approximate county-by-county conservation totals in the Piedmont region:

County	Acres protected in 2020 by Conservation Easements*	Total Acres protected by Conservation Easements*
Albemarle	2,028	108,869
Clarke	23	26,481
Culpeper	0	20,406
Fauquier	800	109,487
Greene	75	10,648
Loudoun	2,159	62,684
Madison	140	16,115
Orange	0	38,554
Rappahannock	62	33,413
PEC Region	5,287	426,657

* Totals do not sum due to rounding

Map by Watsun Randolph

Map created by PEC for presentation purposes only. Data source: American Battlefield Protection Program, County Governments, USGS, VA Department of Historic Resources, VA Department of Conservation and Recreation. Although efforts have been made to verify data, accuracy is not guaranteed. For more information, please visit: pecva.org. Warrenton | JWR

History at the Top of Bull Run Mountain

By Cindy Sabato, Communications Adviser

Stretching 15 miles from the village of Aldie in Loudoun County south to New Baltimore in Fauquier County, the Bull Run Mountains have stories to tell.

The mountain range is home to 10 unique plant, forest and woodland ecosystems supporting uncommon and threatened plant and animal species. Its hills were the scene of the Battle at Thoroughfare Gap during the Civil War. The rocky ridges and quartzite cliffs on its western side, along with the shadow of its eastern toe and its hollows, are said to have once guided slaves fleeing bondage via the Underground Railroad. Its mountainside is dotted with many historic ruins—cemeteries, house foundations, fence lines, and the Chapman-Beverly Mill built in 1742 among them—that dole out clues about the families and communities that once called these mountains home.

Now, PEC’s Bull Run Mountains Land Conservation Fund is helping the Virginia Outdoors Foundation conserve an historic property that’s an important part of the mountain’s story and the mountain itself. The 10-acre parcel in the Catlett’s Branch stream corridor is associated with the Robinson and Corum families, intertwined, prominent Bull Run Mountain families dating back at least 120 years, with branches of both enslaved and free.

The property adjoins land that is already protected as part of the Bull Run Mountains Natural Preserve Area—a designation bestowed upon 2,500 acres of this mountain range by the Commonwealth for its natural and historic resources. It still holds remnants of the original family homestead; stone walls, formerly cultivated fields, and a stone quarry are still perceptible. This property is special in and of itself, said VOF Deputy Director Leslie Grayson, but especially as a piece of a much bigger matrix of life in the mountains.

“If you go back to the 1800s and early 1900s, this area was not so wild, but was actually very peopled. There is a fascinating emerging history of free Black, post-Civil War Black, and poor White families eking a living out of the rocks and thin soils. It was a tough life of hand-sawn lumber, hand-quarried rock, no electricity, carrying water, hard work and hard living. Through VOF’s long-term cultural history project begun in earnest in 2019, we are trying to understand the stories of footprints and physical remnants of the people who lived here,” Grayson said.

“PEC’s Bull Run Mountain Conservation Fund is a donor-designated fund created in 1999 specifically to help conserve and protect Bull Run Mountain properties at risk for development. The fund kicked off a long partnership between PEC and VOF and has allowed us together to conserve 875 acres of land to help round out the natural preserve area,” said PEC Conservation Director Mike Kane. “We have always hoped this property would one day become part of the preserve.”

The property is heirs’ land—meaning it was passed down through generations without a will—and was nearly lost recently when a contract buyer approached one of its 19 co-owners about forcing a “partition sale” of the land. Heirs’ properties are particularly vulnerable to partition sales, because with many “co-owners” and no clear title, they offer none of the asset benefits but all of the financial liabilities typically associated with land ownership. As more heirs are born and others pass away, ownership becomes increasingly murky and far-removed, while escalating legal and financial burdens associated with it become unmanageable.

In 2020, VOF learned of the impending sale of this property and worked quickly to negotiate with the heirs and the buyer to acquire the property for incorporation

PEC Conservation Funds

This map shows donor-designated funds created for on-the-ground conservation and restoration projects in specific geographic areas with The Piedmont Environmental Council service territory. The majority of the funds are held by the Piedmont Foundation, a separate 509(a)(3) charitable organization, established to hold and manage special funds in support of PEC’s mission. Learn more at piedmontfoundation.org

into the Bull Run Mountain Natural Preserve Area. PEC’s Bull Run Mountain Land Conservation Fund is providing \$25,000 of the \$130,000 purchase price, which will relieve the heirs of outstanding tax liabilities, compensate the family and buyer for appraisal, survey work and other costs already incurred, and pay outstanding legal fees associated with the partition suit.

“At the end of the day, the hope of Virginia’s recently passed heirs’ property legislation is that the land stays in family hands, and that isn’t what happened here. But this acquisition is important because this property was being sold out of the family and would have eventually become yet another residential parcel. Now, it will be possible to preserve the family history along with the land itself,” Grayson said.

“VOF is working hard to piece together the story of the communities that historically called the preserve home. This property will be a critical addition to the preserve, not only protecting many wonderful natural resources, but also protecting an integral part of the mountain’s African American history,” she said.

Bull Run Mountains Photo by Hugh Kenny

Volunteers Spring Up AT THE COMMUNITY FARM

Spring planting season is upon us at the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows. Last year, in response to the pandemic, what was supposed to be a slow and steady increase in production in the farm’s second season turned into so much more. Dedicated staff and 468 committed volunteers donated 1,100 hours of socially distanced service planting, harvesting, sorting and more. Together, we donated 25,000 pounds of fresh produce to Loudoun Hunger Relief.

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, food pantries saw need triple almost overnight and that need continues as the effects of the pandemic linger. We have set our 2021 produce goal at 35,000 pounds, and we

need volunteers now through November! We’ve already begun planting seedlings in the Phyllis Mills Wyeth Greenhouse; outdoor plantings begin this month and continue through summer. First harvests of the year are expected in early April through November.

We will follow all social distancing recommendations, and provided state mandates allow, we can accommodate up to 25 volunteers at a time. Volunteers can be families and individuals, school groups, scouts and clubs, businesses, churches, and more. Volunteers under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult. To learn more about volunteering and sign-up, visit pecva.org/farmvolunteer.



Padma Kolla and her son Anchit wash and package broccoli at the Community Farm this past autumn. Photo by Hugh Kenny

A Final Wish Granted

By Cindy Sabato, Communications Adviser

Carl and Elise Siebentritt’s 29-acre “mountain oasis,” two miles west of Lucketts along the Catoctin ridge and 3.5 miles northeast of Waterford in Loudoun County, was the hub and the heart of their large family for more than 30 years. Daughter Heidi and her husband held their wedding party there. Eldest son Carl III was married there and made it “home base” between overseas assignments with the State Department. Two other siblings, in Maryland and Georgia, moved their families in for a few years to help care for Elise and Carl in the years before each passed away. All 13 grandchildren and one great grandchild knew the woods like the backs of their hands from years of hiking, foraging, and camping.

“There’s a tree in front of the house that my youngest daughter would always climb,” Heidi said. “Everybody had their favorite spot; mine was the woods. On holidays when we would all gather as a family, we would walk through the woods no matter how cold it was. Like the ancient custom of walking the geographic boundaries of a village, it was sort of our way of claiming that place as our own.”

Carl, who ran the nuclear physics lab at Mount Weather, and Elise, a pastoral counselor and family therapist, moved to western Loudoun in 1988 to escape the rampant development happening around them in McLean. Conserving the property always loomed large in their minds. About four years before Carl passed away, the family all came together to talk about what he’d like to see happen to the property.

He didn’t want to leave until they “carried him out feet first.” He wanted to keep the land intact. And he wanted the property to stay in the family. Five of his six children had established lives elsewhere, and the house was larger than Heidi and her family were comfortable with, so they briefly considered a tiny subdivision of the property for a little family cottage. “But as we worked through where it could be sited and how it could be accessed, we realized we’d be destroying what we loved most about the property. We all came to the conclusion that while we might not be able to keep it in the family, we could at least keep it together with a conservation easement.”

Heidi immediately thought of The Piedmont Environmental Council, having worked with PEC’s conservation director, Mike Kane, at Loudoun County years before. Kane and PEC Field Representative Tracy Lind visited the property to meet Carl. He told them of foraging on the mountainside, which was full of morels and chanterelles, paw paws and berries. Every night after work, he’d walk the woods with his dogs. There were always turtles and fish in the pond, where the family often fished and kayaked

and swam. Before Elise became ill, the two walked the trails daily; later, they loved sitting on the deck watching the birds. “It was the wildlife, the streams, the pond, and the trees Carl wanted to protect more than anything,” said Lind, “and his stories really provided guidance on what direction the easement should go.”

As Heidi and Lind worked through the process of putting a conservation easement on the property, Carl passed away at the age of 96. But completing the easement was a unanimous decision for the family. “We all knew this was what Dad wanted. It was closure for us in a lot of ways; it would have felt like we were letting him down if we hadn’t followed through,” Heidi said.

Completed in 2020 with the help of a grant from PEC’s Catoctin Creek Fund, the easement now permanently protects the forest, streams and integrity of the property’s 29 acres. True to Carl’s wishes, no structures may be built within the forested area, and the forest must remain intact unless tree removal is needed to improve wildlife habitat or remove diseased or invasive plants. A 100-foot forested buffer must remain along the banks of the two intermittent streams that run down the mountainside and most of the pond. They left about 2.5 acres outside the forest protection area to accommodate a future owner’s need for a home and small accessory structures and so that new owners could use the pond for recreation just as they did.

The family’s decision to conserve this land is a great example of the outsized public benefits of conservation, Kane said. “Protection of the streams where they begin is particularly important here, because as they flow downstream to the Potomac River, they cross dozens of properties in areas with sensitive limestone geology, where pollution can jeopardize the safety and availability of water for people and livestock,” he said.

Carl and Elise’s mountain oasis is now being enjoyed by a new owner who was in no way deterred by the conservation easement. Some people worry that a conservation easement will make land harder to sell, but there are many people whose plans for a property align perfectly with protections on the land.

Currently, theirs is the only protected property in an area with fairly generous development rights, but Heidi said she hopes it’s only the first. “I know Dad talked with neighbors over the course of his ownership about not developing that area and about saving the woods in perpetuity somehow. So hopefully, our conservation will inspire others,” she said.

Kane said that Loudoun County’s recent pursuit of programs to encourage conservation easements could spur additional land protections there. In some cases, the county’s Conservation Easement Assistance Program, implemented in 2019, provides grant funding to help cover some associated costs, such as appraisals, real estate attorney fees and title searches. The county is also studying a Purchase of Development Rights program, whereby the county buys development rights from a land owner and retires them.

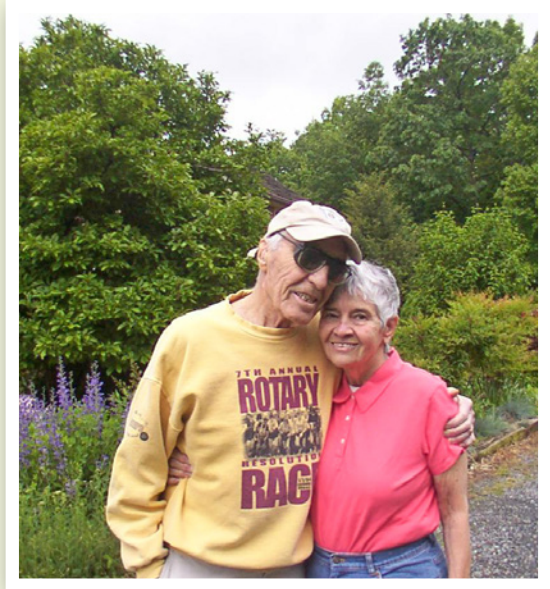
“I know my dad is tickled pink right now,” Heidi said. “Some of the last conversations I had with him were about where we were with the easement. There’s an American Chestnut tree there in the woods that was of special importance to him. To know that it will be there for the rest of its natural life, along with the pawpaws, the pond with its fish, mom’s meditation garden above the pond, that somebody will always be picking pears and figs—I know he would be thrilled.”



Carl Siebentritt loved to sit on the dock of the pond watching the fish and birds. Courtesy of the Siebentritt family



Granddaughter Ella sitting in her favorite tree in the front yard. Courtesy of the Siebentritt family



Carl and Elise Siebentritt at their Stumptown property. Courtesy of the Siebentritt family

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

Which of these native tribes are historically associated with the Upper Rappahannock River watershed?



Historical marker near the site of the Monacan village of Monasukapanough, erected in northern Albemarle County. Photo by Deeahbz

ANSWER

Monocan

The first colonists to arrive at Jamestown in 1607 immediately met with Indian people from a vast Powhatan autocracy. However, Siouan Indians of the Monacan and Mannahoac tribes lived in the Piedmont and Mountain regions. The Monacans were an agricultural people who traded with the Powhatans to the east and the Iroquis to the north. Their tradition of burying their dead in mounds differentiates the Monacans from neighboring Indian nations. Thirteen mounds have been identified throughout the region, yielding interesting information about the lives of these First Americans.

The Long Road to Waterloo Bridge

By Julie Bolthouse, Land Use Field Representative

When I saw “replacement” of the circa 1878 Waterloo Bridge—the oldest metal truss bridge still in service in Virginia at the time—on the Fauquier County Transportation Committee agenda back in October 2013, I knew exactly who to turn to.

Mary Root, chair of the Fauquier County Architectural Review Board, had been leading the fight to rehabilitate the also-historic Remington Bridge since 2011. Like most pony truss bridges in Virginia, the Remington Bridge was denied state status as a historic resource, making the case for rehabilitation particularly challenging, but Mary researched, raised funds and awareness, and persisted until the VDOT’s plans for the Remington Bridge changed from “replacement” to “rehabilitation.” I hoped for at least the same outcome for Waterloo.

Waterloo Bridge spans the Rappahannock River, historically a major route for moving agricultural goods from the Shenandoah Valley to the Port of Fredericksburg. Known for its distinctive iron and steel Pratt through-truss, the bridge was built at a river crossing that first served as a link to a bustling canal town and later became pivotal during the Civil War. Today, it links Waterloo and Old Bridge roads in Culpeper County to Jeffersonton Road in Fauquier County. Fortunately, unlike Remington Bridge prior to Mary’s efforts, Waterloo Bridge was already designated “significant as Virginia’s oldest surviving in-service metal truss bridge” by the Virginia Transportation Research Council. I just had to spread the word and make a case for “rehabilitation” rather than “replacement.” Mary got me started.

Eight months pregnant with my first child, I was very busy that December. I gathered background information, wrote letters and sent emails, made calls, and of course, did a little nesting to prepare for my son’s arrival. On Jan. 15, 2014, VDOT officially closed Waterloo Bridge and formally scheduled it for “replacement with a modern bridge” on the VDOT Six Year Improvement Plan (SYIP). The next day, my oldest son was born and I spent my maternity leave waiting and watching to see if any of the seeds Mary and I had planted in December took hold.

By May of that year, the “Save the Waterloo Bridge” Facebook page created by students at Kettle Run High School had more than 2,500 “Likes,” and I was fielding several calls a week with questions, suggestions and stories about the bridge. The air was filled with a deep

community-wide passion to save this bridge. PEC continued to push, attending meeting after meeting with VDOT and county officials. There were community meetings, a petition, yard signs, stickers, and Waterloo Bridge postcards mailed to elected officials. We even sent a recording of the rumbling sound of driving over the bridge to Virginia Water Radio for its “water sound” of the week and successfully nominated the Waterloo Bridge for Preservation Virginia’s “2014 Most Endangered Historical Sites.”

Our task was monumental, given VDOT’s pattern of delaying repairs to the point of deterioration, followed by closure and replacement or demolition of similar historic bridges. PEC raised money from Fauquier and Culpeper counties and private donors for a feasibility study that not only found Waterloo Bridge to be a great candidate for rehabilitation, but also estimated the cost of rehabilitation well below replacement cost. This pushed VDOT to do its own study and finally admit that rehabilitation could be done for around \$4 million—nearly \$2 million less than the cost of replacement.

When Waterloo Bridge joined Remington Bridge on the VDOT SYIP as a “scheduled rehabilitation” rather than “replacement,” we celebrated, but reservedly so. Remington Bridge had been sitting on this same list for years due to lack of funding, so this was only a small win.

Indeed, Waterloo Bridge sat on the “scheduled rehabilitation” list until 2018. That’s when Russell and Joan Hitt, longtime Rappahannock County landowners with a deep family connection to the bridge, heard the story from PEC and offered the one thing holding up the project: funding.

Mr. Hitt’s father grew up along the Rappahannock River near the village of Waterloo, on land that’s been in his family since 1802. His great-great grandfather Albert Hilleary Hitt “had to go down this road, the Waterloo Bridge, to take their grain and so forth to be ground at the mill there. It’s a long family tradition... I miss going up and down the road and across the bridge and



Contractors fly the restored metal truss Waterloo Bridge back onto its stone abutments. Photo by Hugh Kenny

hearing the tires rumble on the boards. It was kinda nice. Don’t have many of those today,” Mr. Hitt testified before the Fauquier County Board of Supervisors in 2016.

That crucial connection to his family’s homeplace led the Hitts to offer an incredibly generous private contribution of \$1 million—roughly one-fourth the total cost. With that pledge, the rehabilitation of Waterloo Bridge was to become a reality at last.

In April 2020, Waterloo Bridge’s 100-foot-long iron truss was hoisted off its old stone abutments for restoration. Seven months later, the rehabilitated truss was dropped back into place and crews worked to prepare the bridge for reopening. On Feb. 23, 2021, years of hard work, persistence, impassioned community involvement and the generous contribution of two private citizens paid off when the Waterloo Bridge reopened to traffic for the first time in seven years.

PEC was relentless in our efforts because the situation demanded it and area residents never gave up. Today, Waterloo Bridge remains the oldest operating metal truss bridge in Virginia. Russell Hitt passed away in September 2020, and was sadly never able to see the fruit of his contribution. But I am thrilled that his children and grandchildren, area residents, visitors, and my now-seven-year-old son, can again enjoy the historic bridge that Mr. Hitt loved so much for years to come.

General Assembly Update

Continued from cover

we were pleased to see the passage of HB1763 (Wilt) and SB1162 (Hanger). Some farmers are not able to avail themselves of the cost-share program for religious reasons. This bill allows the use of state tax credits for the same purpose, which should increase participation in the effort to restore water quality.

There was also some good news on local food and sustainable habitat. With the passage of SB1188 (Hashmi), the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program and Fund is on its way to being created. This legislation encourages Virginia farmers and food producers to donate, sell, or otherwise provide agriculture products to charitable food assistance organizations. It also creates a fund that provides money to food assistance charities to reimburse farmers or food producers for costs associated with harvesting, processing, packaging, or transporting agricultural products that are donated. On

the habitat front, HJ527 (Bulova) passed, creating a stakeholder study to develop recommendations for reducing the sale and use of invasive plant species in the commonwealth.

On the land use front, HB2213 (Guzman), which authorizes a study of Virginia’s gold mining regulations to ensure they are protective of the public health and the environment, passed, albeit without a temporary moratorium. While the focus is on a potential mine in Buckingham, the same gold-pyrite belt runs through a large swath of the Piedmont, including Orange, Culpeper and Fauquier counties.

Electric vehicles dominated transportation discussions, with four bills passing. Included in this package was clean car standards, a rebate program, increased charging infrastructure and grants to convert school buses to electric. The Virginia Bicycle Safety Act from Delegate Hurst

also passed. By requiring safe passing distances for motorized vehicles around bicycles and allowing for two riders abreast, this legislation will greatly aid in reducing bike-vehicle incidents. Lastly, and based on discussions during the session, we are hopeful a stakeholder review of the state’s permitting process for utility-scale solar projects will take place. That review would look for ways to reduce, and avoid where possible, impacts on agricultural, forestal and natural resources.

Conclusion

As you may have guessed, this short overview only scratches the surface of all that occurred. Please reach out to me at



PEC’s Dan Holmes testifies virtually from his kitchen before the Senate’s Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources Committee.

dholmes@pecva.org if you have any questions on legislative or budget measures that were not included here or seek additional clarity on any of the items in this article. We encourage you to thank those legislators who championed and voted for these and other conservations initiatives.

Please visit pecva.org/richmond for more information.

On the Ground

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Albemarle & Charlottesville

> Comprehensive Plan and Affordable Housing Schedules

At its Feb 3 meeting, the Albemarle Board of Supervisors (BOS) was updated on the proposed three-year schedule for the Comprehensive Plan update. County staff recommended a full overhaul, as the current document has undergone multiple revisions over the years.

Charlottesville endorsed its Affordable Housing Plan, a first step in updating the city’s comprehensive plan and zoning code rewrite.

> Growth Area Developments

By a 3-3 vote, the BOS denied the Breezy Hill rezoning request for 130 units on 80 acres in the Village of Rivanna. PEC urged denial, highlighting non-conformance with the density outlined in the Comprehensive Plan and Village of Rivanna Master Plan.

On Feb 17, the BOS unanimously approved the Premier Circle rezoning, paving the way for 140 affordable housing units and a commercial building on 3.75-acres at the Red Carpet Inn in Places 29 South. PEC’s public comments, expressing concerns about pedestrian safety, public transportation, and private road standards, were addressed by the applicant during the public hearing.

At the Mar 2 Planning Commission public hearing, RST Residences—a 370-unit residential development in Places 29 North—amended its rezoning proposal to include 75% affordable housing for 30-years targeting 30-80% area median income. While PEC was supportive of this change, we asked that the county and applicant work together to address our additional concerns about comprehensive planning, special exceptions, connectivity, private roads, public schools, and tree canopy.

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Clarke

> Short-Term Residential Zoning

To address various short-term residential rental concerns, the Planning Commission has been discussing amendments to zoning ordinance text. The proposed amendment is now being tabled until the county completes its subdivision ordinance update project.

> Easements Webinar

In December 2020, Clarke County Conservation Easement Authority and Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance partners hosted a webinar (“Conservation Easements in the Blue Ridge”) introducing four topics about the region—natural and recreational aspects, threats and challenges, conservation easements, and local land protection programs—with insight from three conservation easement landowners.

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Culpeper

> Maroon Solar Return, Utility-Scale Solar

In late-January, Strata Solar submitted a new conditional use permit (CUP) application for its proposed Maroon Solar project. Strata Solar had withdrawn its initial CUP application in November 2020, following concerted community opposition and a unanimous

recommendation of denial by the Planning Commission. The revised proposal remains at odds with the county’s solar policy, impacting forests, agricultural soils and historic resources and exceeding the recommended acreage limits. The Planning Commission considered the revised application at its March 10 meeting and is again recommending denial.

Concurrently, the Board of Supervisors continues discussions about creating an Energy Generation (EG) District that would permit utility-scale solar via CUP, limiting applications to 300 acres. PEC supports the codification of the county’s solar policy into a formal ordinance, but we are concerned that this proposed EG District could result in the rezoning of agricultural land.

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Fauquier

> New Canoe Launch on the Rappahannock River

The Town of Remington may have a canoe/kayak launch into the Rappahannock River by early summer! Lee District Supervisor Chris Butler has long championed this public access project with PEC and other conservation partners. PEC received a \$20,000 grant from Virginia Environmental Endowment to help Fauquier County Parks & Recreation buy building materials for the boat launch. To contribute toward this project, contact Maggi Blomstrom at mbloomstrom@pecva.org or (540) 347-2334 x7067.

> Thoroughfare Gap Tower

Rangel Communications is proposing a 199-foot tall monopole tower off of Rt. 55 where three historic districts converge, just south of the Bull Run Mountains and Chapman Mill. While PEC supports increased cell service in this region, it is hard to imagine a worse location than the site selected by the applicant.

> Warrenton Comp Plan

The Town will take public comments on the draft Warrenton 2040 Plan through noon on April 13; a final public hearing is scheduled for April 13. Our concerns about the plan include over-emphasis on residential housing, conversion of nearly all industrial- and commercial-zoned land to mixed-use with residential, a new western bypass at Timberfence and Southern Parkways, inadequate water and wastewater capacity, and a move away from rezonings and collecting proffers for capital improvements. We’re urging the Council to redraft the plan to address these concerns.

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Greene

> Comprehensive Plan Review

On Feb 17, the county kicked off the public participation component of its comprehensive plan review, required every five years. The county expects to review existing chapters, as well as add new chapters related to housing and broadband. PEC will closely monitor this process and provide feedback where appropriate, particularly on issues related to land use and preservation of open space. We encourage all Greene County residents to do the same.

> Gun Range Proposal

A gun range proposed for 16 acres off of Middle Mountain Road in Dyke will not be moving forward after the project applicant terminated his purchase contract for the property in late January. The applicant remains interested in pursuing this proposal

elsewhere in Greene County.

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Loudoun

> Countywide Trail Network

The county’s Linear Parks and Trails plan and Master Plan are both underway. Over 60 volunteers helped map existing public trails. Residents and visitors took a survey about their park and trail desires. The county will use these and other data to understand opportunities and challenges for creating the connected trail network. An ecological planner is helping with wildlife corridors adjacent to the trail system.

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Madison

> Ordinance Discussions

The Planning Commission is considering creating an accessory dwelling unit ordinance for the Agricultural and Conservation zoning districts, as well as revisions to streamline the wireless communication facility ordinance. PEC is monitoring both issues and will oppose any effort that would weaken the county’s existing review process for new cell towers and their impact on cultural, natural and historical viewshed.

> Farmland Protection

The Virginia Land Conservation Foundation awarded PEC state funding to conserve two family farms totaling over 1,000 acres in Madison and Orange counties. When complete, the two conservation easements will protect two miles of frontage along the Robinson River and almost one mile of frontage along the Rapidan River, over 500 acres of prime and statewide significant soils, and over 250 acres of forest.

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Orange

> Redfish Solar

Redfish Solar Partners submitted a special use permit application for a 6.472-megwatt solar facility on up to 45 acres in Locust Grove near the Spotsylvania border. The Planning Commission on Mar 4 continued the public hearing on this item until March 23 and pushed the item to its Apr 1 meeting. PEC supports small-scale solar, but urges avoidance of important resources and stresses the importance of battery storage.

> Interim District 3 Supervisor

The BOS chose Keith Marshall to fill the District 3 BOS seat left vacant after the passing of Teel Goodwin in December 2020. A special election will be held during the November 2 general election to permanently fill this seat.

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Rappahannock

> Historic Bridges

PEC recently learned that VDOT’s scheduled replacement of Jordan River Bridge has been put on hold and will likely not be scheduled for 2021. This is in large part to the great efforts of the North Poes Road/Flint Hill neighbors, who passionately voiced their concern about the replacement project for this community treasure. At the very least, VDOT and local elected officials should explore and determine exactly what it would take to save the bridge and make it safe again.

In Memory

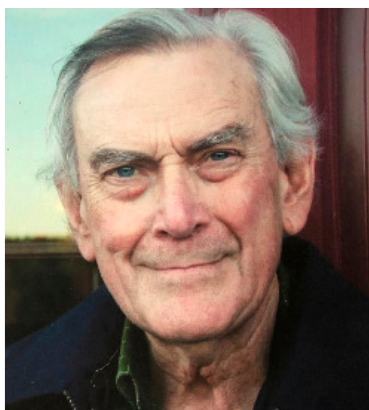
This winter, we were sad to learn of the passing of three former PEC board members. All three were passionate advocates for the natural resources, rural economy, history and beauty of this region, and all three will be sorely missed.



Phil Irwin

PEC BOARD TERM: 1972 - 1987

At recent PEC events, Phil Irwin would always take a moment to share how proud he was to be the last founding member of The Piedmont Environmental Council, having served on our original Board of Directors. Phil was a fierce advocate for conservation, a proponent of thoughtful land use planning and a dear friend of many. His dedication to the Piedmont was well known in his adopted home of Rappahannock, where he occupied a reserved seat at Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors meetings for decades.



Lynn Coleman

PEC BOARD TERM: 2004 - 2014

Born and raised in west Texas, Lynn Coleman loved the farms and forests of Fauquier and Rappahannock. At PEC, he was best known for his leadership role fighting Dominion's TrAIL transmission line project, as well as our successful campaign to overturn the National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor designation covering much of the east coast. A former General Counsel to the Department of Energy and a renowned energy lawyer in Texas, Washington, and internationally, Lynn had a deep interest in the environment, historic preservation and practical solutions to combat climate change.



Jean Brown

PEC BOARD TERM: 1995 - 2000

Jean Brown was a passionate advocate for rural Loudoun County and force of nature in support of public participation, serving on numerous advisory groups and boards in addition to PEC. Other organizations that benefited from Jean's leadership included Scenic Virginia, the Virginia League of Conservation Voters, and the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition. Also an advocate for small business, Jean helped launch the Loudoun County B&B Guild, and served on the County Historic District Review Committee and the Rural Economic Development Committee.

Honoring the Sacrifices Made for a Park We Love

Continued from cover

the country's next national park. Perhaps seeing the sad fate of their mountain community on the horizon, Mortimer and Stella, their children, and Mary, all moved out of the mountain to the Little Washington area, leaving their family home behind. And in the 1930s, the state used eminent domain condemnation to take nearly 200,000 acres of privately-owned land in eight counties for the creation of Shenandoah National Park. Thousands of people lost their land, homes, and for many, the only way of life they had ever known.

"Landowners with clear title were compensated, but some families did not possess a title to the land on which they lived. Many were tenants or caretakers for absentee owners, and a few resided on land that had supported their families for generations, but was actually owned by others. Compensation varied from property to property. Some received what they considered fair value for their loss, while many did not," according to the Blue Ridge Heritage Project website.

Until recently, descendants of these families have been unable to learn much about their families' experiences in the Blue Ridge. Little public information was available, and boxes of uncategorized records were housed in various locations. But in 2017, James Madison University began digitizing thousands of legal

documents related to condemnation of private lands in Rappahannock County for the park.

We saw a unique role for PEC, as part of our ongoing mountain heritage work, to continue the effort in other counties. With the support of Rappahannock County Clerk's Office, we raised money to buy equipment and hire a contractor, Debbie Keyser, to digitize the condemnation records in Rappahannock County.

Debbie, a former Rappahannock county administrator and a descendant of two displaced families, said, "it has been a privilege to be part of this project. The documents preserved and made available to the Shenandoah National Park descendants allows us to take a step back in time and learn details of our ancestors' lives. It is a treasure of historical family documentation."

Missy Sutton, whose ancestors once lived in the Sperryville area of the park, agreed. "As a descendant of William Jackson Rutherford, who was forced to leave his home when his 300 acres were condemned, I find comfort knowing the story of what happened is being shared far and wide via this digital collection. Today, Shenandoah National Park is a tremendous resource and one I enjoy—yet it's important to remember the sacrifices that had to be made for us to have this resource," she said.

As we stepped off Sam's Ridge Trail into the woods that spring morning, we didn't spot it at first—the Hawkins home. The brush and briars were tangled together in a huge, dense mess just below the trail where the house would have stood. Then suddenly, a ray of sunshine stole through the trees and illuminated an open area that looked rather like an old field. We made a beeline to that spot, and there stood the old stone chimney, just where it had for more than a century, a testament to the skill of the mountain people who built it by hand.

The condemnation records, which include tract assessments, detailed information about improvements, natural resources, title information, and other important details, provide incredible insight into the experience of families that lived in the Blue Ridge. By digitizing, we are not only enabling descendants and historians to access them, we also are permanently memorializing the tremendous sacrifice they made for a park that today provides such incredible access to nature and recreation. The records for Mortimer Hawkins' property included a survey showing the location of the house near a stream, allowing me to obtain a GPS point with which I was able to navigate through the backcountry and locate the remains of the house to show Kit and his family.

"What an incredible opportunity to connect with the past," Kit said, reflecting on our visit to his family's homeplace. "Seeing the chestnut logs that framed the foundation, the stone chimney that was still standing, and the daffodils, black raspberries and the old spring made it

seem like home."

Shenandoah National Park is an incredible natural and cultural area enjoyed by millions, but it came at a great cost that is not well known to many who visit the park today. Understanding the story of the mountain settlements, Appalachian culture, and its legacy is a crucial part of our national history. Completing the digitization of condemnation records in all eight counties will give a greater voice to this story and a means to access it.

To access the now-fully-digitized Rappahannock and Rockingham County condemnation records:

- Go to James Madison University's webpage, *Exploring Rockingham's Past* at omeka.lib.jmu.edu/erp
- Click on "Browse Digital Collections."

Records are organized into three categories: Court Proceedings, Muniments of Title, and Miscellaneous Documents, and can be searched by surname in all categories.

PEC is raising funds to hire another someone like Debbie Keyser—with a personal passion for this project and its history—to digitize condemnation records in Madison County. To support this effort in any way, contact Kristie Kendall at kkendall@pecva.org or 540-347-2334 ext. 7061.

Dear Friends,

The arrival of Spring 2021 brings with it a special sense of rebirth and reopening as we emerge from the incredible challenges we faced together in 2020. As the weather warms, the spring ephemerals emerge, the amphibians meet in cool pools, and bird migrations begin, we are also hopeful for the return to the places, people and events that confirm our sense of community and shared mission.

We are proud that PEC's Larson Native Plant Garden will be part of Historic Garden Week in Virginia on Earth Day, April 22. We look forward to sharing new and improved public access spots along the Rappahannock River. We are excited to report on the reopening of a rehabilitated Waterloo Bridge, and the progress of our efforts to restore cold water streams and improve native brook trout habitat. We will enjoy sharing the improved accessibility of the Old Carolina Road and trails at Roundabout Meadows and the continued progress of Verling Park and our Town to Trail work in Gordonsville and Orange. We are energized by the incredible response from new and returning volunteers to the Community Farm and the steady increase in local producers at

Gilberts Corner Market. We remain hopeful that we will join together to celebrate in person this fall at the PEC Gala at St. Brides Farm. And, the new Biden administration's ambitious goal of protecting 30 percent of land in America by 2030 opens up new possibilities and funding for our large landscape conservation work.

At the same time, the Piedmont shows signs of real damage and threats from a combination of the pandemic, climate patterns and a surge in development pressures. We need to redouble our efforts to address the need to reinvest in our communities, our land and water, and our shared effort to build a more sustainable and more equitable future.

Food security remains an issue for too many in our land of prosperity and plenty. In a region that produces food for export to the nation and the world, as many as 25% of families are not getting enough to eat. We hope you'll join us via Zoom on March 30, 2:30 - 3:30 p.m., for the first installation of our new quarterly keynote speaker series. Mike Curtin, executive director at the D.C. Central Kitchen, an internationally recognized example of systemic change in food systems, will lead us in a discussion about the important role that local



Bee at PEC's Larson Native Plant Garden in Warrenton. Photo by Hugh Kenny

food systems play in addressing food insecurity and how we can continue to improve in the Piedmont region.

Throughout 2021, we will draw attention to other critical issues facing us, from the need to expand public access to open space to the continuing need to restore native habitats and provide wildlife corridors. Some of you have received offers to lease your land out for large-scale solar installations, and it seems every day there is a new data center being proposed somewhere in the Piedmont. Finding the right locations for these features is an issue

facing all of our counties. And as we return to shared spaces, more and more people are seeking a part of the Piedmont, whether to visit or to stay more permanently, creating a demand for housing, for access and for entertainment.

Let's embrace the challenges and opportunities a new season and a new year brings!

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President



A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL SPRING 2021



INSIDE

2020 Land Conservation Totals, Preserving History in the Bull Run Mountains, the Rehabilitation of Waterloo Bridge, General Assembly Outcomes, Call for Farm Volunteers, and more!

Springtime lamb at Bean Hollow Grassfed in Rappahannock County. Photo by Marco Sánchez

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

Which of these native tribes are historically associated with the Upper Rappahannock River watershed?

- a. Chickahominy c. Monocan
- b. Mattaponi d. Pamunkey

ANSWER ON PAGE 4



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