



The Piedmont View

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CONSERVATION EDITION

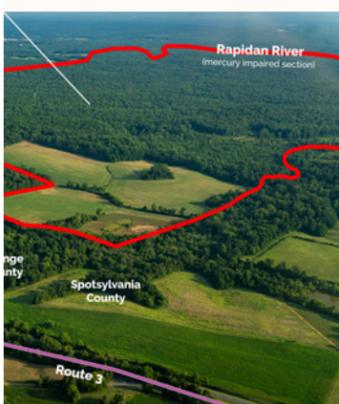
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Report from Richmond

The good, the bad from a busy session

By Adam Gillenwater, Senior Policy Manager

By the time you read this, the 2022 regular session of the Virginia General Assembly will be over—hopefully. However, as of March 10, House and Senate conferees had yet to reach an agreement on the state budget bills, making it likely that the session will run past its scheduled end date of March 12.

After two years with Democrats in full control of the levers of state government, the results of last November's election brought divided government back to the state capitol in 2022. As you might suspect, these political dynamics, combined with the ongoing challenges of conducting legislative business in the midst of a global pandemic, made for a barn burner of a session.

Gubernatorial Appointments

One of the first controversies to grip Richmond this session was Gov. Youngkin's nomination of Andrew Wheeler for Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources. Gov. Youngkin's nomination of the former coal lobbyist and head of the Environmental Protection Agency from 2019 to 2021 was met with immediate and spirited opposition from the environmental community, which called upon Senate Democrats to block his confirmation. Ultimately, Senate Democrats voted to do just that, but in a sign of just how acrimonious this situation became, House Republicans subsequently removed around a dozen

Northam-appointed members of various state boards. None of Governor Youngkin's other cabinet nominees, including his picks for Secretary of Agriculture (Matt Lohr) and Director of the Department of Environmental Quality (Mike Rolband), met with much, if any, opposition.

The Budget

As of press time, the House and Senate are still negotiating a final agreement on the budget, with the issue of tax relief looming large. Importantly, while far from perfect, the House and Senate budget bills made several notable investments in programs and initiatives that advance land conservation, outdoor recreation, and agricultural best management practices across the commonwealth.

The Senate biennial budget bill included meaningful funding increases for the state's three flagship grant funds — the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF), the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund (VFPF), and the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund. The House proposal, unfortunately, not only reduced funding for VLCF and VFPF, but also removed language and funding from the introduced budget that would have established a pilot program to assist historically underserved landowners in the resolution of heirs' property issues. We were



PEC Director of State Policy Dan Holmes testifying before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee meeting on HB206

pleased to see that both the House and Senate recommended robust funding to the tune of more than \$230 million for Virginia's Agricultural Cost-Share Program, which supports farmers in implementing conservation practices that protect soil health and water quality.

As for outdoor recreation priorities, the introduced budget included historic investments in Virginia's outdoor recreation economy, including \$233 million for multi-use trails and approximately \$70 million for maintenance and resource needs at Virginia's state parks. Unfortunately, both chambers significantly reduced the proposed trails funding to less than \$100 million and took different approaches to allocation. The House budget also took an ax to the proposed funding for state parks, while, in contrast, the Senate added more than \$100 million over the \$70 million recommended level to address maintenance backlog issues. In welcome news, both chambers included language to create a new state park in Culpeper County, the Culpeper Battlefields State Park.

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In the City or the Country—Public Access to Nature Matters

By Cindy Sabato

As the pandemic drove many Piedmont residents to seek respite and renewal in natural areas, parks, and trails like never before, it made one thing abundantly clear. We need more, well-distributed public access to parks and green spaces all throughout the region. Research shows that access to

nature, whether in urban communities or rural areas, not only improves individual health, but also the well-being of communities. Often, land conservation is the key to opening up new trails and parks for all to enjoy, and The Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) celebrated several such places in 2021.

ballfields, life-sized chess board, rec center, and courts for everything from basketball to tennis to bocce ball. Its close proximity to the neighborhood's business district along Cherry Avenue makes it a popular place for families and people of all ages to gather. On any given day, Tonsler is alive with activity.

Just 600 feet away, residents of Greenstone of Fifth, an income-qualified community of 202 townhomes and apartments, can see the park from their windows. And yet, to get there, they have to walk more than a half mile along a dangerous Fifth Street with fast-moving traffic and no sidewalks. Once upon a time, many still remember, they had quick, direct access to the park via Fifth Street S.W., which the city rerouted in the name of urban renewal, separating many of the area's

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The Fifeville-Tonsler Park Trail

At the center of Charlottesville, in the historically Black neighborhood of Fifeville, Tonsler Park is one of the city's busiest. Its tremendous recreational assets include an extensive playground, splash park,

Neighborhood and community leaders walk the route of the in-progress trail in September 2021. Photo by Sophia Chapin

Re-aligning Land and Nature at the Holden Farm in Loudoun County

By Cindy Sabato

“When you get older, you start thinking about what you’ll leave behind, or what you did to make a difference. One of the ways we feel like our lives could make a difference is by doing something like this. We really love this property and have so much history here, and we want to do right by it,” said Susan Holden, sitting alongside husband Patrick on the farm his parents bought in 1958.

In 2021, the Holdens partnered with The Piedmont Environmental Council to permanently conserve their rolling 35-acre farm just south of the historic Quaker village of Lincoln.

Patrick’s memories of this place go back to age six, when his parents permanently moved here from Alexandria in the late 1960s. He grew up on the farm with three of his five older siblings and helped run the cow-calf operation before heading to the west coast for college and the start of his career in environmental sciences. Roughly a decade or so later, he and Susan moved back as a young married couple to build a home on the family property, help run the farm, and care for Patrick’s mother, suffering from advanced multiple sclerosis by then. Their two sons are the third generation of Holdens to live on the land.

Patrick and Susan learned about conservation easement programs years ago, in part thanks to several neighbors, including the venerable Jean Brown, who together had already conserved 1,015 acres within a mile of the Holden’s home. “Both Patrick and I grew up spending a lot of time outdoors, feeling very close with nature and caring about the landscape a lot, and it has always been a goal to preserve this area just as we went on living

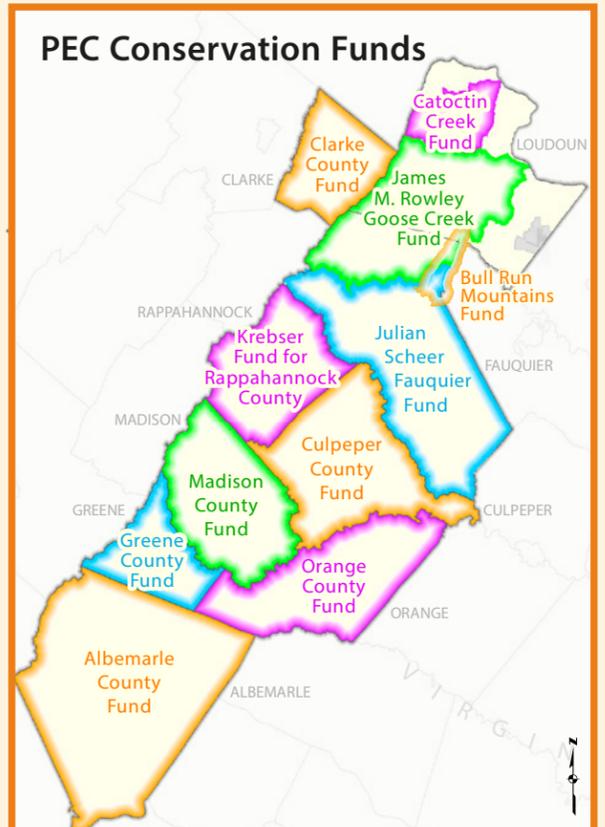
here,” Susan said.

The stars aligned last year, when a number of programs fell into place that not only made donating a conservation easement possible for the Holdens, but will also help them realize their dreams for the future of the land.

First, PEC’s John M. Rowley Goose Creek Land Conservation Fund was able to contribute \$5,000 toward the Holden’s stewardship costs, while Loudoun County’s income-based Conservation Easement Assistance Program may cover up to half of their easement costs. “Many people are familiar with the tax savings associated with donating a conservation easement, but there are quite a few expenses as well,” said Hallie Harriman, PEC’s land conservation field representative for Loudoun County. Those expenses include preliminary and post-easement appraisals used to determine the value of the donation for tax purposes, land surveys, attorneys fees, and a stewardship fee that conservation organizations use to care for the land in perpetuity.

Donating a conservation easement means relinquishing most development rights on the land, but within a certain proximity to their existing home, the Holdens’ easement allows for an addition onto the house and outbuildings such as a garage or equipment barn. “We wanted to allow for options that would make this property attractive to our children or to someone like us in the future,” Patrick said. “When we look across the fields, we take great pleasure in knowing it will never be developed and will always look much as it has during our time here.”

The self-described “original granola-eating tree huggers” have also made the decision to focus on managing



This map shows donor-designated funds created for on-the-ground conservation and restoration projects in specific geographic areas within 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

the property for wildlife habitat, “to bring the land back into balance with nature, to provide habitat for pollinators and birds, as well as maximize carbon sequestration,” Patrick said. For their 40th wedding anniversary last year, the Holdens made a plan to plant 40 trees on the property. To help them do that, PEC enrolled the property in its new Potomac Planting Program, which provides qualifying landowners with free technical assistance, project design, materials and labor for the planting of native trees and shrubs along streams and waterways.

“The Holdens’ farm is perfect for the Potomac Planting Program because it’s laced with 2,570 linear feet of small stream tributaries that flow into Crooked Run, which is part of the Goose Creek watershed that supplies drinking water to parts of eastern Loudoun County,” Harriman said.

Avid birders and bee-keepers, the Holdens also hope to bring back many of the grassland birds whose songs once filled the air and to provide new refuge for migrating monarch butterflies and other pollinators. “We’ve

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Holden farm, Loudoun County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Protecting a Historic Landscape in Orange County

Within the nationally recognized Madison-Barbour Rural Historic District, near Barboursville in Orange County, William K. “Wik” Dove II partnered with The Piedmont Environmental Council to permanently protect his 108 acres with a conservation easement. Enveloped by nearly 1,300 acres of other conserved lands, Dove’s farm adds to the more than 15,950 acres of permanently conserved land within the historic district’s boundaries.

The historic district is described as one of Virginia’s best-preserved cultural landscapes. A web of 18th- and 19th-century roadways offers expansive views of unspoiled pastoral scenery. Rolling, semi-mountainous terrain is interspersed with broad stretches of fields and pastureland. According to its historical marker, the district

dates back more than 12,000 years and contains nearly 200 prehistoric archeological sites. Once the site of a Siouan-speaking Manahoac village on the Rapidan River, its rich soil later drew colonists for varied agricultural uses, including livestock, vineyards, forestry and crops.

About 62 percent of Dove’s working horse farm contains notable agricultural soils that are considered Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. With 4,450 feet of frontage along a Beaver Run tributary within the Rapidan River watershed, it has tremendous water quality value downstream. And its 77 acres of forests, several springs, fields and open spaces all provide habitat for a variety of wildlife and plant species.

Dove’s decision to conserve his land will forever protect not only these important natural resources, but also



Wik Dove and PEC’s Maggi Blomstrom celebrate the conservation of Dove’s Orange County property.

Photo by Hugh Kenny

the scenic views enjoyed by the public from Brookman Road and the important historic contributions his farm holds within the Madison-Barbour Historic District.

A Potential Superfund Site?

By Dan Holmes

Last year, we told you about a developer's proposal for a 2,602-acre development across from Lake of the Woods on Rt. 3 in Orange County and next to Wilderness National Battlefield. With the potential for more than 20,000 residential units, Wilderness Crossing would be the largest land rezoning in Orange County history. PEC immediately dug into the project and voiced concerns.

With continued investigation, we found some unexpected and truly shocking information about the history of gold mining at the site. Of the five formally-named gold mines located on the proposed Wilderness Crossing site, which together consist of 15 different surface and shaft mines, none have been closed and cleaned up – a process called “reclamation.” Furthermore, the state is on record saying that the largest one, called the Vaulcluse mine, should be considered for potential inclusion as an EPA Superfund site.

An ongoing public health threat

Mine reclamation is a standard practice that protects public health, safety, and welfare by addressing on-site pollution, including toxic tailings (rock waste) left over after ore extraction. Tailings from past gold mining of this sort usually contain extremely high levels of mercury and other chemical elements such as arsenic, cadmium, and lead, to name a few.

The Vaulcluse mine has a tailings pit that is 60 feet deep and located in the middle of a tributary of Shotgun Branch. Since it was never cleaned up, the tailings pit is likely still leaching toxic chemicals into Shotgun Branch today and is an expected source of contamination in Wilderness Run, and ultimately, the Rapidan and Rappahannock rivers.

Regardless of the development proposal, PEC's priority is to see all of the mines closed and cleaned up as soon as possible, and soils, stream sediments, wells, and aquifers examined for mercury, cyanide and other toxins.

What's next for the Wilderness Crossing proposal?

The Orange County Planning Commission has asked many of the same questions we have. What is the current status of the mines and the soils around them? Can the site be fully remediated and cleaned up of toxins? Who is responsible for clean-up and who would pay for it? How would this contamination and any future remediation impact the proposed development?

We don't know when these questions will be answered, and it's not clear when a public hearing on the issue will take place. But, we've heard some local officials remark that this is a “state problem,” implying that they believe the county can move forward on the land use decision absent remediation. And in a letter dated January 26, the applicant encouraged the county to proceed with the rezoning, indicating an evaluation of the contamination and potential cleanup efforts can happen afterward. We deem this to be an unacceptable cart-before-the-horse suggestion.

Orange County officials have a duty to ensure that the public's health, safety, and welfare are protected in any decisions made with regard to the Wilderness Crossing application or any future applications for this land. That cannot be assured until answers are provided on the nature and extent of the contamination and any proposed remedies the applicant and landowner propose. As we have said all along, the county needs to



The Wilderness Crossing proposal site is bordered by Rt. 3, Culpeper and Spotsylvania counties, and two miles of the Rapidan River. Map by Watson Randolph/PEC

hit “pause,” at a minimum, allowing this important conversation to take place prior to rendering any decisions related to development of the property.

What can you do to help?

If you have a moment, reach out to the Orange County Board of Supervisors and encourage them to hold a public briefing with officials from the state. In addition, once hearings on Wilderness Crossing are scheduled, show up and weigh in, either in person or electronically!

PEC will continue to track the Wilderness Crossing development proposal and dig into the contamination issues at the site, updating the public as we discover additional information. In the meantime, we've created a blog post on our website with links to relevant documents, all of which are now accessible at pecva.org/orange.

Re-aligning Land and Nature at the Holden Farm in Loudoun County

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always had a pretty healthy meadowlark population, though not in the back field, and the bobolinks we still see sometimes. But when we first moved here, every night in the summer we could sit on the porch and hear the bobwhite quail. And I haven't heard a bobwhite quail in so long now. We just care about these species and are trying to create a good habitat for them,” Susan said.

They look forward to partnering with the Loudoun County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to convert nine acres of pasture land to native grasses and wildflower meadow, and with the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative to delay haying on a portion of the

property. Eventually, they hope their land can serve as an outdoor classroom for the First Day School children at Goose Creek Friends Meeting where they attend services.

Within the broader landscape, Harriman said “the property is an important piece of the bigger conservation puzzle and adds to a mosaic of publicly and privately conserved lands in Loudoun. It has running water, is located near a scenic byway, has agricultural soils of statewide importance, and holds some historic remnants, all situated within the Goose Creek Rural Historic District.” The area's known history goes back to the Manahoac tribes that first used the lands for hunting, foraging, fishing and harvest-

ing, and later the Quakers, whose superb stone masonry and smaller farm parcels still dot the region.

Observing the rolling hills from his front door, Patrick says “It still looks very much the way I remember it growing up, and when we're gone, this is our gift to the land. We feel very fortunate and blessed to be able to express our values through an action like this. My mother was very environmentally aware and concerned, and she would be thrilled.”



Patrick and Susan Holden at their farm in Loudoun County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

How many different species of owls can be found in Virginia?



Barred Owl.

Photo by October Greenfield

ANSWER

a. 8

Eight different species of owls can be found in Virginia. Four species are year-round residents: barn owls, barred owls, great-horned owls and eastern screech owls. The other four species, typically only here during the winter months, are short-eared and long-eared owls, snowy owls and northern saw-whet owls. These stealthy birds of prey with near-silent flight can be found (with a keen eye, that is) in a wide variety of habitats, from grasslands to forests to urban parks. One of the most common owls in Virginia is the barred owl, easily recognized by its distinctive, deep baritone, 8-9 syllable hooting call, described as “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?”

In the City or the Country— Public Access to Nature Matters

Continued from cover

most vulnerable residents from the jobs, food, shopping and cultural life of the central city. The land where Fifth Street once lay is now privately owned.

For the past year or so, PEC has been part of a community coalition led by the Fifeville Neighborhood Association to reconnect Greenstone to Tonsler Park and surrounding neighborhoods. In partnership with Woodard Properties, which owns the land in between, the coalition is building a new 1,500-foot, natural-surface trail that roughly follows the faint remaining traces of the former Fifth Street.

"The quick history," said PEC Community Organizer Peter Krebs, who's been involved since the beginning, "is that the Fifeville Neighborhood Association worked with the local planning district to get a small area plan created for the whole neighborhood. That plan envisioned small businesses and parks that residents could easily reach by foot, and it identified some 'quick wins.' This trail was one of them. Then, with a Heal Charlottesville grant from Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, the neighborhood association engaged with a whole fleet of other community organizations to find out from community members what an effective trail would be."

PEC and the Rivanna Trails Foundation secured a \$25,000 Get Outdoors Grant from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation to build the actual trail and worked with Woodward Properties for a trail easement that would make the Fifeville Trail a reality. Construction began last fall and is expected to be completed in spring 2022.

"The Fifeville trail is so important because it provides families with a direct connection to a park that is important both culturally and recreationally," Krebs said. "The trail itself is quite park-like, providing even more access to nature. With woods, a stream and restored historic bridge crossing, the mulched trail is an oasis of calm within a pretty bustling area of Charlottesville. And though not

technically ADA-accessible, it's built with accessibility in mind."

In addition, trail extensions to Fifth and 7½ streets will reconnect various nearby neighborhoods to Fifeville's economic and cultural core on Cherry Avenue and to Charlottesville's downtown and the University of Virginia. "A lot of people live south of this trail area and work north of it, so it's very much a home-to-work trail opportunity as well," he said.

In a community that's experienced years of exclusion from meaningful input around the future of Charlottesville, the Fifeville neighborhood saw this trail as a way to bring communities together in more ways than one.

The Upper Rappahannock River Blueway Trail

Outside Charlottesville, efforts to connect people to nature are happening in another way — by water.

The Rappahannock River is a Virginia scenic river providing world class outdoor recreational resources for swimming, paddling, fishing, hiking, birdwatching and more. And yet, its 55 miles along Fauquier County's southern border offered only one place to access the water. That was at Riverside Preserve near Orlean, on land previously donated to the county by Charles K. MacDonald and protected with a Virginia Outdoors Foundation conservation easement. But there was no boat ramp there, and the nearest one was 32 miles downstream at Kelly's Ford in Culpeper County.

2021 changed all of that. "Many studies have shown that river access is important for improving quality of life, and a Fauquier County study identified river access for boating, kayaking and swimming as the community's second highest priority, just behind trails for walking, biking and hiking," said Maggi Blomstrom, Rappahannock-Rapidan conservation initiative coordinator for The Piedmont Environmental Council.

PEC and many partners have for years envisioned an Upper Rappahannock River Water Trail, a navigable "blueway trail" with several publicly-accessible put-in and take-out points along the way, rest stops with sanitation facilities and adequate parking. In 2017, Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR) secured a \$45,000 PATH Foundation grant to formalize the effort, and led a coalition of partners including PEC, the John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District, Fauquier County Department of Parks and Recreation, and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources in creating a strategic plan outlining potential access sites, water trail maps, water quality reporting, interpretive signage, community engagement and education opportunities.

With strong advocacy behind it, the Upper Rappahannock River Water Trail became a Regional Featured Project in the Virginia Outdoors Plan, "which was instrumental in helping raise this project to the top of the heap when it came to investment priorities locally," Blomstrom said. Soon after, Fauquier County Parks and Recreation made the Rappahannock one of its highest recreation priorities. And by the end of summer, with support from many community funders and organizations, in-kind contributions, hands-on partnership, and volunteers, the three new boat launches had opened up the Rappahannock River to countless Fauquier County residents and visitors for the first time.

The first ramp opened quietly in June at the existing Riverside Preserve park seven miles west of Warrenton. Two months later, the second boat ramp — a timber-framed, concrete staircase and wooden canoe slide — opened to

great fanfare 20 miles downstream at Remington's Rector Tract, a conserved property previously donated by American Battlefield Trust. The third ramp opened in late summer at the end of Roger's Ford Road in Sumerduck, on the southern end of C.F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area, five miles below the existing ramp at Kelly's Ford. A grant from the Virginia Environmental Endowment helped fund construction of both the Remington and Roger's Ford boat launches. "The opening of these new access points represents an exciting step toward the realization of an Upper Rappahannock River Water Trail," Blomstrom said.

"2021 was an incredible year for public access on the Rappahannock River and I think we need to shout it from the mountain top, not just for the coming together of these new access points, but also for the incredible potential this water trail has as an economic engine to enhance tourism and give people a new way to experience our region," an enthusiastic Blomstrom said. "The Rappahannock River is a major artery and a free resource. And these new access points make the outdoors and swimming, fishing, and recreating accessible to people and families of all means. That's exciting!"



Community members load a canoe onto the newly opened boat ramp at Rector Tract in Remington in July 2021. Photo by John McCarthy

Report from Richmond

Continued from cover

The Bills

The more than 3,000 bills and resolutions introduced this session are a few too many for us to update you on here, but we highlight below several bills that PEC actively tracked or worked on this session.

On the **land conservation** front, the session added a new tool in the toolbox for preservation of historic sites in under-represented communities with both the House and Senate passing and allocating funding for the establishment of a Virginia Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Preservation Fund. In an admittedly more half-loaf outcome, SB31, which proposed several positive changes to the VLCF program, passed on a bipartisan basis, but not before it was amended to remove language recommending a \$40 million annual appropriation.

In the **climate and clean energy** arena, Senate Democrats stood firm to

block several bills approved by the House that would have rolled back recent efforts to move Virginia toward a carbon-neutral future. The Senate dispatched with HB2265, which would have repealed the Virginia Clean Economy Act (2020 legislation that set a deadline to end carbon emissions from utilities by 2050), as well as HB1301, intended to take the commonwealth out of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (the multi-state compact designed to limit carbon emissions through the auction of carbon dioxide allowances), which Virginia joined in 2021. We're also pleased that HB206, a bill that PEC spent countless hours shepherding, passed and is expected to be approved by Governor Youngkin. This bipartisan, compromise legislation promises to encourage more responsible siting of future utility-scale solar projects by requiring solar developers to submit mitigation plans to address significant adverse impacts to agricultural and forestal resources.

Beyond utility-scale solar, this session saw no shortage of bills related to other **land use issues**. PEC worked closely with Del. Webert to secure the passage of HB996, which will help prevent involuntary land loss of heirs' property by allowing the majority of owners to make decisions related to enrollment in Virginia's use value taxation program. We also supported Sen. Hanger's SB400, which directs the Board of Housing and Community Development to create regulations related to agritourism event buildings. The General Assembly approved this legislation, but added a reenactment clause, requiring it to pass during the 2023 session for most of its provisions to take effect. Lastly, concerted pushback from localities and the environmental community led to the defeat of SB255, which would have effectively gutted local approval authority for most new telecommunications towers.

Numerous other bills were of relevance to our work in the Piedmont. PEC was proud to support HB828 and HB830, which both passed unanimously. HB828 expands eligibility for dairy producers wishing to

participate in the Margin Coverage Premium Assistance Program, while HB830 directs the state to develop a five-year strategic plan to increase total combined throughput capacity of slaughter and meat-processing facilities. Unfortunately, the General Assembly approved SB657, championed by Sen. Stuart, limiting the authority of the Air Pollution Control Board and State Water Control Board to issue regulations and transferring their existing authority to issue permits to the Department of Environmental Quality. We were similarly disappointed that HB250, which would have studied copper, zinc, and lead mining in Virginia and placed a moratorium until July 1, 2024 on new permits for mines larger than 10 acres, died in committee. We've run out of space, but the list goes on!

To those of you who followed along with us during the session and reached out to legislators to advocate on specific bills, thank you! In many cases, it was your direct constituent advocacy that pushed our priority bills across the finish line. We consider the 2022 session largely a success, and we're already looking forward to 2023.

On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

The Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan review process has begun. The comp plan, which guides decisions on land use, transportation, public infrastructure, natural resource protection and more, is updated about every five years. The first phase of the process will examine growth management: whether, where, and how new development should take place in the city. PEC is monitoring the process and will keep you updated. In the meantime, we encourage you to learn more and can get directly involved by visiting engage.albemarle.org/ac44.

The City of Charlottesville is revising its zoning code as the final step in the city's multi-stage Cville Plans Together land use policy update. The city formally adopted a new affordable housing strategy and a new comprehensive plan in 2021. The zoning code will define many of the legal parameters for those aspirational documents.

Albemarle and Charlottesville are working to create safer environments for walking and biking. Several of these projects — such as a pedestrian bridge over the Rivanna River between Pantops and Woolen Mills and multimodal improvements to Avon, Fifth and Hydraulic streets — span significant gaps between the two localities. Learn more at campo.tjpcdc.org/smart-scale

Clarke

Clarke County has renewed its Agricultural and Forestal District (AFD) for another six years. This voluntary program helps the county maintain its largely rural character when participating property owners agree to certain land-use restrictions. The program also safeguards these lands from such threats as eminent domain for infrastructure and certain restrictive local ordinances. When the AFD comes up for renewal consideration, owners can choose to renew or discontinue participation in the program.

Culpeper

As part of our Headwaters Stream Initiative, Friends of the Rappahannock and PEC worked with the Ellis family to plant nearly 12 acres of native trees and shrubs for the benefit of water quality, flood resilience, and bird and wildlife habitat at their Clifton Farm, a conserved property located at the confluence of the Thorton and Hazel rivers.

Both the House and Senate budget bills include language to establish a Culpeper Battlefields State Park. If adopted, this would represent the culmination of a multi-year effort led by the American Battlefield Trust to establish a state park in Culpeper County inclusive of preserved properties at the Brandy Station and Cedar Mountain battlefields. PEC has been an active and consistent supporter of this effort believing it will enhance opportunities for public recreational access and historical interpretation in Culpeper County.

Fauquier

In January the County Board of Supervisors tabled until April a proposal for a 485-acre solar energy facility in Bristersburg. Located in the Elk Run Rural Historic District and adjacent to the Bristersburg Historic District, the property is zoned for

agricultural use, and PEC has several concerns regarding the location and impact of the project. Several other utility-scale solar proposals are also being discussed in southern Fauquier but have not submitted formal applications yet.

The Town of Warrenton has proposed expanding the town's boundaries more than 60% by absorbing 1,750 acres of mostly undeveloped county land along Warrenton's perimeter. PEC believes this expansion would trigger sprawl on the outskirts of Town, requiring expensive infrastructure expansion and new schools and drawing important resources away from needed improvements within Warrenton's existing boundaries.

The Town of Remington has received a grant from the Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment to expand upon the Remington Walks plan, first completed by PEC in 2017. Working closely with town officials, PEC supported this grant application and continues to encourage implementation of traffic calming and pedestrian safety improvements along James Madison (Bus. 29/15) and Main streets.

Greene

On December 15, the Planning Commission voted 3-2 to recommend denial of a special use permit for a 144-unit glamping facility proposed in the Mutton Hollow area. This permit application attracted significant interest from the local community, with nearly 100 residents attending the public hearing and many providing comments against the proposal. PEC opposes this permit application, with concerns over its potential adverse impacts on the rural character of this part of the county. This application has yet to be docketed before the Board of Supervisors.

In 2022, the county expects to complete its Comprehensive Plan review and to move forward with a zoning audit. County staff will create a baseline zoning ordinance and refine the proposal through public hearings and workshops. PEC has actively engaged in the comprehensive plan review, suggesting improvements to language around land use, natural resources and the environment.

Loudoun

County staff recently discussed with the Zoning Ordinance Committee the feedback they received on the first draft of the Prime Agricultural Soils and Cluster Subdivision zoning amendment. PEC and others said the first draft needs major revisions to better protect prime soils and offered many suggestions. Staff will revise the text and provide another draft for review before going to the planning commission for public hearing.

Plans have been submitted to develop 31 single-family detached homes along Route 50 near Gilbert's Corner, adjacent to PEC's Roundabout Meadows and the historic Mt. Zion Church. PEC staff are concerned about the potential impacts of this "Tanager Subdivision" on existing historical resources and about how the development's stormwater ponds and site layout could impact the Old Carolina Rd Trail. We are monitoring the application closely.

The county is proposing outdoor lighting for the Scott Jenkins Memorial Park ballfields in Hamilton. Outdoor lighting is currently prohibited at the park because of the nighttime light pollution impacts on the growth cycle of various plants at a nearby nursery. PEC asked the planning commission to consider alternative lighting and reduced hours of operation to minimize light pollution and dark sky

impacts.

Loudoun County supervisors will use \$200,000 of the county's year-end budget surplus to cover the surprise costs of environmental work in floodplains, after inadvertently placing floodplain property owners under more costly regulations. This money will be allocated to the Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District for livestock fencing and riparian planting projects. Learn more at www.loudounsoilandwater.com.

Madison

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is studying the socio-economic impacts of some of the projects it funded to improve road crossings for fish passage, including the Cedar Run crossing to Whiteoak Canyon trailhead in Shenandoah National Park near Syria. In 2019, PEC partnered with Trout Unlimited to replace a culvert near the trailhead with a bridge. National Park Service staff report the pandemic and other factors have driven a jump in visitor counts at Whiteoak Canyon from just over 3,000 visitors per year to well over 5,000 in 2020. The new bridge was installed just in time to accommodate the dramatic uptick in visitors, increase safety on the Cedar Run crossing, and improve aquatic habitat and fish passage.

Orange

PEC is assisting the Town of Gordonsville and the Rappahannock Regional Commission with a funding application to the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation for updated Gordonsville park infrastructure. If awarded, the Town would be able to continue developing a four-acre park network connecting Verling Park and Fireman's Fairgrounds with park-related infrastructure. The Town and PEC acquired four parcels over the past few years to more than double park space in the center of town.

At the 2,602-acre site of the proposed Wilderness Crossing residential development, where historic gold mine sites lay unreclaimed, KEG III Associates has offered a phased environmental evaluation strategy that would begin only after rezoning is approved. PEC has expressed concern that this approach sidesteps accountability related to public safety and environmental health. *Read more on Page 4.*

Rappahannock

The Town of Washington has requested a joint public hearing with the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors to discuss a boundary adjustment proposed for the mixed-use development project, Rush River Commons. The development, which has yet to break ground, is situated within both the Town of Washington's corporate boundaries and the County. The proposed adjustment would bring approximately three acres into the town from the county.

The Town of Washington has begun the review process for its Comprehensive Plan, last updated in 2017. This document, which must be reviewed every five years, represents the community's vision for the future and guides decisions on land use, development and town priorities. The town's planning commission held the first public feedback session Jan. 31 and will continue to solicit public input.

Get Involved!

The Land That Sustains Us, featuring Terry Tempest Williams

Now scheduled for Saturday, May 21, 2022, the return of PEC's Annual Meeting will take place at Mistwood Farm in Orange County as part of our 50th Anniversary Celebration! This beautiful setting on Clark Mountain will be the backdrop for workshops, a great meal featuring local ingredients, and a keynote speech by renowned writer and conservationist Terry Tempest Williams. Williams' books and numerous anthologies serve as a crucial voice for ecological consciousness and social change. She is currently writer-in-residence at Harvard Divinity School. We look forward to Williams' inspirational keynote as we reflect on PEC's first half century, celebrate our protected landscape and look to the future of conservation and restoration in the Piedmont.



Terry Tempest Williams
Photo by Zoe Rodriguez

Bluebell Walk on Cedar Run

Join PEC's Julian W. Scheer Fauquier Land Conservation Fund for this 14th annual celebration of spring! Saturday, Apr. 9, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. at Bonny Brook Farm in Catlett. Learn more and register at: pecva.org/events.

Volunteer at the Community Farm

Spring has sprung at PEC's Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows, and that means it's also volunteer season! Now through November, we need volunteers to plant and transplant both in our greenhouse and on four acres of vegetable production, feed our pigs Maple and Clover and our small flock of laying hens, collect eggs, and harvest and sort produce for donation to Loudoun Hunger Relief. Last year, we met our produce goal of 35,000 pounds, and this year, we've upped our ambitions to 50,000+ pounds to support food insecure communities in Loudoun County. To learn more about volunteering and sign-up, visit: pecva.org/farmvolunteer.



A volunteer at a past tree planting event.
Photo by Bri West

Wanted: Potomac Watershed Landowners

PEC is excited to launch our new "Potomac Planting Program" — an effort to improve water quality in the Potomac River watershed through the planting of native trees and shrubs along streams and waterways. Eligible landowners in Clarke, Fauquier and Loudoun counties will receive free technical assistance, project design, materials for their riparian buffers. If your property has a stream, creek, pond or wetland area, learn more at www.pecva.org/potomacplantings.

Plant Trees with Us!

Over the next two years, PEC needs volunteers to help us plant 20,000 native trees in the Rappahannock and Potomac river watersheds with our partners for improved water quality. Tree plantings happen each spring and fall, so if you'd like to get your hands dirty in this effort, email us at: trees@pecva.org.

In Memoriam



Photo courtesy of the Riddell family

Mildred Gulick Riddell

PEC BOARD TERM: 2007 - 2009

This winter, we were saddened to learn of the passing of former PEC board member Mildred Gulick Riddell, at the age of 97. The ardent outdoor education coach and advocate lived in Casanova, Fauquier County, at her late parents' Redwood Farm, where her passion for farmland, woodlands, streams, and flora and fauna began. She became a prudent environmentalist in the 1970s and was an early proponent of preserving riparian stream buffers to improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Mildred served on PEC's board of directors and was a strong supporter of PEC's Julian Scheer Fauquier Conservation Fund. She also served on the board of Citizens for Fauquier County and the advisory board of the Warrenton Antiquarian Society. Redwood Farm's almost 200 acres are protected as a conservation district by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

MEET PEC

Hallie Harriman

Potomac Watershed Field Representative

By Sophia Chapin



Photo by Hugh Kenny

Hallie Harriman considers herself a "tree person." She came to PEC in August 2021 with a master's degree in agricultural and environmental education and a bachelor's degree in natural resources conservation. Already, she's enthusiastically coordinated riparian buffer plantings and penned articles on the nitty-gritty of native trees and plants.

As PEC's Potomac Watershed Field Representative, Hallie covers Clarke, Loudoun and northern Fauquier counties, whose agricultural heritage reminds her of home in nearby Shenandoah Valley, where her conservation ethic was born. "I really enjoy seeing the natural bounty these counties still have and are working very hard to protect. This position checked off a lot of boxes for me: being outside, engaging with private landowners, working on conservation-based projects," she says.

Though every day is a little different, she most enjoys building relationships with landowners during property visits. "Being able to make connections with people makes me happy, and that's probably one of the best things about this job," she says. In addition to public outreach, Hallie also monitors conservation easements, is a lead for the Potomac Planting Program and Blue Ridge Conservation Alliance, and executes four of PEC's conservation funds.

In just a few months, Hallie has come to appreciate the region's history, especially as it relates to a sense of place. "I have my own stories, but there are also stories that landowners have of their family on the property." Those stories are as inseparable from the land as its natural history — and Hallie is glad to help others get to know both.

MEET PEC

Laura O'Brien

Rappahannock County Field Representative

By Sophia Chapin



Photo by Maggie McAden

"The first time I drove out to Rappahannock I thought: 'This is an incredible place,'" says Laura O'Brien, who grew up in the suburban sprawl north of Boston, Massachusetts and joined PEC's land conservation team in December 2021.

"From an early age I was interested in the preservation of land, especially in areas where development is constant," she reflects. In college, quickly taken with topics of environmental justice, she pursued more opportunities at the grassroots level. Now at PEC, she's excited to continue learning how to engage people civically on environmental issues, starting with the community first. "What really strikes me about PEC is the really wide breadth of projects and programs we have. There's no limit on how you can advocate for the community in the context of conservation."

A community-based conservation approach also speaks to the identity of Rappahannock County, her geographic area of focus. "It has all of these amazing assets: working lands, historic connections and really passionate people," she says. There's also the landscape level impact, or scenic beauty, which reminds her of Ithaca, New York, where she went to university.

"I immediately fell in love with where I went to school because it was so beautiful," she says. Appreciating the scenic beauty was the basis for a connection that soon included the ecological, cultural and historical aspects of the Finger Lakes region. That spark for conservation is a great place to start, and Laura hopes to encourage more of it throughout her time working here. "We're driven to protect things that take our breath away."

Dear Friends,

The last few weeks of winter and the first weeks of spring are an amazing combination of both the opportunity for renewed life and the threat of damaging wind, snow and ice. Spring ephemerals like the iconic Virginia bluebells are pushing through the soil toward their flowery show. Salamanders are crawling into vernal pools. Buds are popping out on fruit trees and grapevines. At PEC's community farm and produce farms across the region, planting has started in the shelter of the greenhouse where thousands of plants wait for soil temperatures to rise outside. All of these, though, are at risk from late season storms that can just as easily destroy what has begun.

PEC enters 2022 with the same sense of possibility and risk. Our work plan will increase momentum for conservation, capitalizing on expanded options for public access to open spaces, rivers and streams. We are launching new initiatives for soil health, local and regional food systems, native plant habitat and improved conditions for wildlife. Federal and state funding for conservation, trails, and greenways within the Chesapeake Bay region is flowing from several new sources. And our investment in beef processing and workforce training is buttressed by supportive federal, state and local policy to encourage local food systems.

We also look forward to coming together with you once again at a series of events and activities throughout the season ahead, including with our Bluebell Walk at Bonny Brook Farm along Cedar Run in Fauquier County, tree plantings in the Upper Rappahannock and Potomac watersheds and volunteer days at our Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows. Over the course of the year, we are excited to provide many other ways

to connect with you, our steadfast supporters and partners.

Our 50th annual meeting on May 21 will be a celebration of *The Land That Sustains Us*, at Mistwood Farm on the flanks of Clark Mountain in Orange County, overlooking the newly conserved historic Horseshoe Farm and the future Culpeper Battlefields State Park at Cedar Mountain and Brandy Station and the rest of the incredible Rapidan River watershed. Come enjoy an inspiring presentation by acclaimed author, conservationist and activist Terry Tempest Williams and a lunch featuring a tasting menu that highlights locally produced food from farms throughout our region.

All of this positive possibility, though, is against a backdrop of instability within the policy frameworks that guide our work.

The legislature just stripped permitting authority from our citizen boards that oversee environmental regulations and permitting. At the local level, the proposed rollback of rural area planning and policy in several counties, couched as a path toward more housing and economic development, is at odds with public surveys and comments received over many years. Tens of thousands of acres of rural lands are increasingly threatened by the surge in speculative development proposals for dramatically more housing, data and distribution centers and utility-scale solar projects. And in recent months, we have seen the re-emergence of the "outer beltway" concept despite repeated analyses that an expanded highway corridor would result in more sprawl and



Staff and volunteers from PEC and the Goose Creek Association come together to restore riparian buffers at Sky Meadows State Park. Photo by Sophia Chapin

more congestion.

Each of these policy changes has the potential to undo all that we have collectively accomplished to preserve the beauty, history and rural economies of the Piedmont region.

Now more than ever, the Piedmont region needs the community-based champion and advocate that is PEC, with more than 100 board members and advisors, 15,000+ members and supporters, and countless partners and community members who help inform our priorities and take important action when it's needed. Despite so much at stake, I believe that together, with perseverance and steadfast engagement, we can continue our good work in the Piedmont for this generation and the next.

We look forward to seeing you in the coming weeks and months.

Sincerely,

Chris Miller
Chris Miller, President

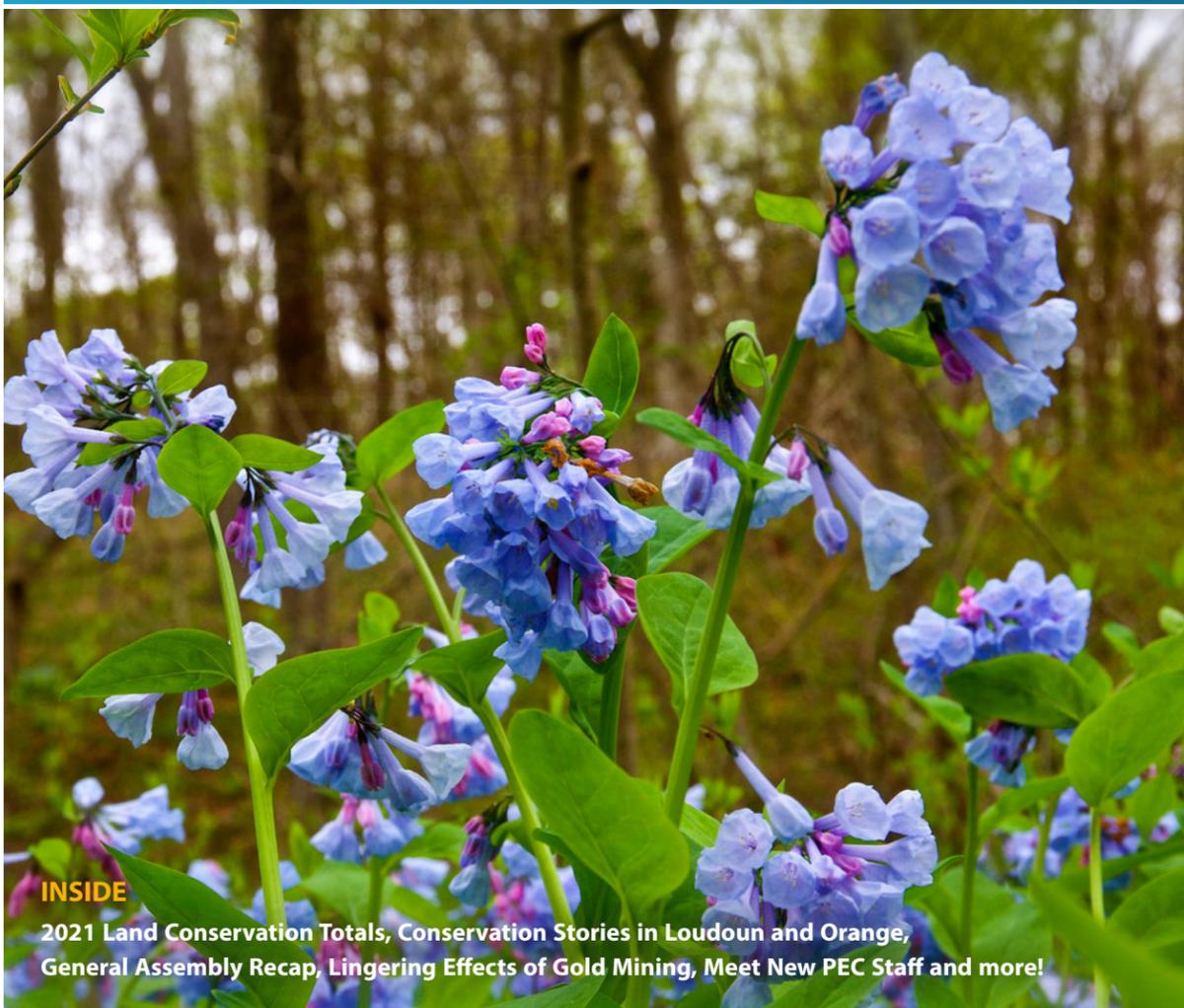


Photo by Matt Ha



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL SPRING 2022



INSIDE

2021 Land Conservation Totals, Conservation Stories in Loudoun and Orange, General Assembly Recap, Lingering Effects of Gold Mining, Meet New PEC Staff and more!

Bluebells along Cedar Run in spring. Photo by Mike Stevens

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

How many different species of owls can be found in Virginia?

- a. 8 b. 12 c. 4 d. 7

ANSWER ON PAGE 4



Photo by Hugh Kenny



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