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Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!



Connecting People and Place in a Built Environment

By Peter Hujik, Senior Field Representative

What happens when community volunteers, a regional conservation organization and civic leaders work together to revitalize a local park? Transformative change! Through the Town to Trail initiative over the past few years, Gordonsville has doubled its public open space and multiplied everyone's contributions, large and small. Urban conservation restores open space in the built environment where people live and makes access to outdoor recreation and nature more convenient.

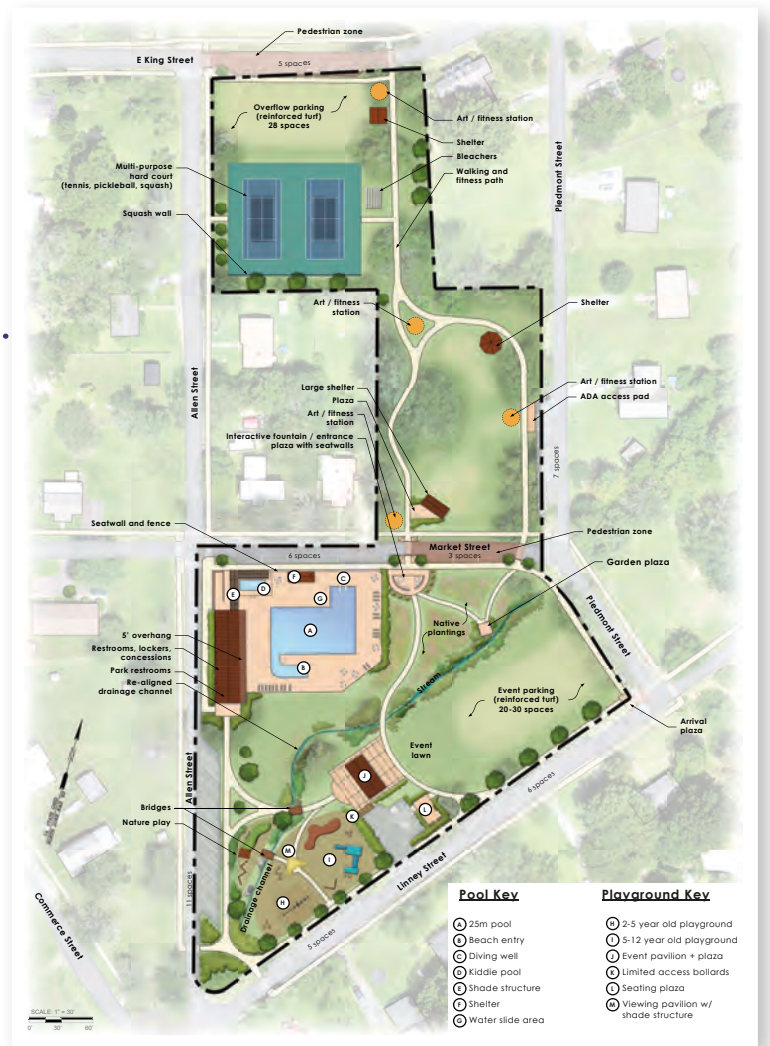
Ten years ago, I joined The Piedmont Environmental Council to help conserve the lands and waters of Orange, Madison and Culpeper counties. Since I felt it important to live in the area I was helping protect, my family and I settled in Gordonsville, a scenic town with a welcoming community and deep history. I was excited to work with residents and farmers to conserve land in this region.

A few years later, students

from the University of Virginia School of Architecture led a planning charrette in Gordonsville that culminated in their report: *Gordonsville Visions*. The report emerged from the students' conversations with community members and outlined specific planning concepts that aligned well with the town's comprehensive plan.

I was delighted by their emphasis on parks and open space, which echoed urban conservation trends emerging across the country, and I saw a gripping opportunity to leverage my real estate experience to conserve and expand the park in the town I call home. I shared with my PEC colleagues the community's vision for this vibrant park network that could restore the heart of town, and the idea catalyzed committed community members to form a volunteer working group that named the revitalization effort the Town to Trail initiative.

Town to Trail has become an example of residents rallying to address specific needs within their



The most recent Gordonsville Park Master Plan developed by Land Planning and Design Associates with input from the Gordonsville community.

community, while tapping into the support of established organizations. Supplying the energy and creativity to overcome obstacles and develop momentum, the

working group refined the vision for the park network, collaborated with the town on park design, and secured PEC sponsorship, which

Continued on page 7

Land Trust Accreditation Renewed

We are happy to announce that PEC's accreditation as a land trust — a mark of distinction in land conservation — was renewed in August 2022. PEC was first accredited in 2011, and this renewal by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission signifies its continued confidence that the 10,600+ acres of land that PEC holds in easement will be protected forever.

"It is exciting to recognize PEC's continued commitment to national standards by renewing this national mark of distinction," said Melissa Kalvestrand, executive director

of the commission. "Donors and partners can trust that the more than 450 accredited land trusts across the country are united behind strong standards and have demonstrated sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship."

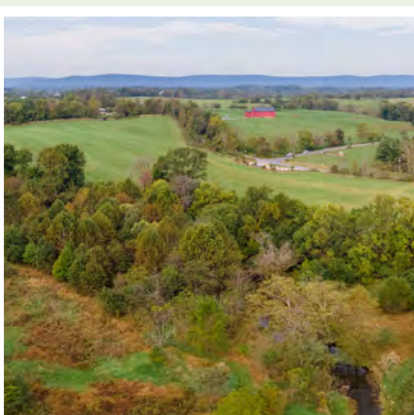
Each accredited land trust must apply for renewal every five years and undergoes a comprehensive review as part of its renewal application. "We are a stronger organization for having gone through the rigorous accreditation renewal process and are excited to continue conserving land for this generation and the next," said Michael Kane, director of conservation at PEC.

In PEC's nine-

county region, more than 433,000 acres of protected land benefit the public by providing clean air and drinking water, supporting agriculture, forestry, and recreation, and strengthening residents' quality of life and sense of place.

As part of a network of over 450 accredited land trusts across the nation, PEC is committed to professional excellence and to maintaining the public's trust in its conservation work. Accredited land trusts work with landowners to steward almost 20 million acres — the size of Denali, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Glacier, Everglades and Yosemite national parks combined! A complete list of accredited land trusts and more information about the process and benefits can be found at landtrustaccreditation.org.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission inspires excellence, promotes public trust, and ensures permanence in the conservation of open lands by recognizing organizations that meet rigorous quality standards and strive for continuous improvement. Established in 2006 as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, the commission is governed by a volunteer board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts. For more, visit landtrustaccreditation.org.



Ridgeline:

A community collaborative performance event

Early in October, as part of our 50th anniversary celebration this year, ET Projects’ newest collaborative performance event, *Ridgeline*, brought community and creativity together through performance, experiential art, and environmental activism in two extraordinary nights at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation’s Rokeby Airstrip in Upperville.

On Saturday, Oct. 1, *Ridgeline* was the signature highlight of PEC’s 50th Anniversary Farm-to-Table Dinner, incorporating 600 guests and volunteers into a mesmerizing art experience accompanied by the live music of multi-Grammy award nominee Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen. The next evening, *Ridgeline* became a community collaboration carried out by several hundred local schoolchildren and their families.

Titled *Ridgeline* for its location at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the interactive perfor-

mances opened with a moving solo by Orange County resident and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre alumna Demetia Hopkins, and then turned participants into artists, dancers, choreographers, neighbors and friends.

As each person carried LED-lit umbrellas with canopies showcasing images inspired by regional endangered flora, these gatherings became a dance of light and, from afar, a vibrant field of plants and flowers swelling and swaying with grace and joy at sunset.



Photo by ET Projects



Photo by ET Projects



Photo by ET Projects



Photo by Hugh Kenny



Photo by ET Projects

MEET PEC

Don McCown

Land Use Field Representative, Madison and Orange Counties

by Sophia Chapin, Communications Specialist

“Conservation is something I’ve cared about for as long as I can remember. I’m just so excited to finally have the opportunity to do this as my full-time job,” says Don McCown, who joined PEC’s land use team as the field representative for Madison and Orange counties in January 2022.

The 15-year Virginia Piedmont resident has lived the past eight years in Crozet, a designated growth area of Albemarle County, and before that, in Clarke and Loudoun counties. “Land use proposals in Orange and Madison are pretty quiet compared to other areas,” he says. “And when I go into these counties to talk about large development proposals, like a Wilderness Crossing, I’m able to share what I’ve seen firsthand.”



Photo by Marco Sanchez

Describing his move to PEC as his “second career change,” Don spent the past 10 years as a supervisor in Virginia’s magistrate system, steeped in criminal law. His prior work experience has translated well into his new role at PEC, where he spends a lot of time conducting outreach with the local community. “I’m trying to build and maintain relationships in preparation for when one of these big issues comes up for a vote, so that these counties can get it right.”

Outside of work, Don and his wife and children, 9 and 13, like to take day trips around the region. “We love where we live, and really just enjoy anything that gets us outdoors and into the countryside.”

MEET PEC

Montana Lanier

Meeting and Events Coordinator

by Sophia Chapin, Communications Specialist

“I want to be where the people are!” says Montana Lanier Ruffner, PEC’s new meeting and events coordinator.

Montana was born and raised in northern Fauquier with a deep appreciation for the value of rural areas. “I grew up on a farm right on top of Bull Run Mountains, half in Fauquier, half in Prince William,” she says, explaining that her childhood experience was being “raised by a village as ‘Middleburg’s kid.’”

Naturally, her admiration for the area, its people, natural environment and culture aligned perfectly with the mission of PEC. “I’m literally living in this little area where I’m watching the effects of uncontrolled development without thought or care,” she says, noting the landscape change around Gainesville and Haymarket.

With a focal point on area-connectedness, Montana is excited to bring in the next generation and strengthen PEC’s reach to help define a better, alternative future than one of sprawl. And “connection comes from events,” she says.

Since starting in May 2022, she has coordinated a family farm day, an “under 40” party, numerous county-specific informational meetings, and PEC’s 50th anniversary gala.

In her free time, Montana can be found paddling with her husband and dog, horseback riding, and hitting live music events in town with friends. She also volunteers with area nonprofits Great Meadow Foundation and Buchanan Hall, is a member of the Middleburg Business and Professional Association, and gives back to her alma mater, the Hill School. “The humanity and the community of it all. That’s why I do the work I do.”



Photo by Sophie Langenberg

Out&About

Southwest Mountains Meeting



▲ In October, PEC held a community meeting in Charlottesville to share our efforts to date researching and documenting the freetowns of the Southwest Mountains region of Albemarle County. Pictured here, Pastor Kelvin Hawkins of St. John Baptist Church and descendants Dennis Ragland and Reverend Dr. Rickey White of Union Run Baptist Church discuss a map of the area.

Warrenton Data Center Town Hall



▲ On Oct. 26, we co-hosted a second town hall meeting with partners Protect Fauquier and Citizens for Fauquier about the proposed Amazon data center. About 200 people, as well as a number of key elected Town and County officials, attended to learn about the impact the data center could have in the Town of Warrenton and Fauquier County.

Wilderness Crossing Town Hall



▲ More than 200 community members from across Orange County, including two planning commissioners, joined us on Oct. 25 for a town hall meeting on the Wilderness Crossing proposal. As part of the Wilderness Battlefield Coalition, we co-hosted this event with Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, Friends of Wilderness Battlefield, Germanna Foundation, The Journey Through Hallowed Ground, Preservation Virginia, American Battlefield Trust, National Parks Conservation Association, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and National Park Service.

Watershed Tree Plantings



▲ This fall, we held four volunteer tree planting events as part of our Potomac Planting Program and Headwater Stream Initiative. These programs provide free technical assistance, project design, materials, and labor for the planting of native species along creeks and streams in the Potomac and Rappahannock River watersheds. Shown here, two of 23 volunteers help plant 283 trees and shrubs along Long Branch, a tributary to the Shenandoah River. Other plantings took place at Clermont Farm in Clarke County, Bonny Brook Farm in Fauquier County, and the Lane property in Rappahannock County.

Fifeville Trail Opening



▲ Emily White (Virginia Outdoors Foundation), Anthony Woodard (Woodard Properties), Michael Holroyd (Rivanna Trails Foundation), Carmelita Wood and Sarah Malpass (Fifeville Neighborhood Association), and Peter Krebs (The Piedmont Environmental Council) prepare to cut the ribbon on the new Fifeville Community Trail on Nov. 5 in Charlottesville.

Halloween Bike Ride



▲ A frightfully good time was had at the second annual Halloween Bike Ride on Oct. 28 in Charlottesville.

On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

- With its completion of the draft growth management policy, the County will move into the **second phase of the comprehensive plan update** in early 2023, focusing on policies for natural, cultural, and scenic resources, the Rural Areas and Development Areas, and other policies such as housing, economic development and transportation. During Phase 2 of the update, PEC will continue to advocate that the County direct future growth into the existing Development Areas and protect the largely intact Rural Areas.
- Charlottesville’s new Comprehensive Plan calls for more density, with improved walkability, bicycle infrastructure, and transit — but lacks specific steps for achieving it. PEC teamed up with the **Move2Health Equity Coalition** and reached out to city residents to better understand how they get around town and how the plan can be improved. Read the detailed findings at pecva.org/mobilityreport.
- On Oct. 20, PEC staff and other partners participated in the Buffer Summit held by the Upper and Middle James Riparian Consortium at Wildrock. The focus of the consortium is to grow partnerships to **create healthy streamside ecosystems in the James River watershed**.
- **The County’s new Environmental Stewardship Hub** gives PEC and other organizations another tool to encourage local land conservation and stewardship actions that benefit climate, biodiversity, clean water and waste reduction. With resources for technical and financial assistance, the hub identifies ways residents can become better stewards at home, on their land and in their community.

Clarke

- On Oct. 26, **PEC’s Clarke County Land Conservation Fund** guidelines were updated to include support of environmental stewardship practices on public or private lands through revolving loans and/or financial reimbursements that are reasonably assured for repayment by working with the local Soil and Water Conservation District and/or Natural Resources Conservation Service. The approved revisions also authorize funds to be used in conservation outreach, education and grants.
- This fall, we held two volunteer planting events as part of our **Potomac Planting Program**, which provides free technical assistance, project design, materials, and labor for the planting of native species along water resources in the Potomac watershed. At Long Branch Historic House and Farm in Boyce, volunteers planted 283 riparian trees and shrubs along Long Branch, a tributary to the Shenandoah River. And at Clermont Farm, volunteers planted nearly 300 native species along Dog Run. For more information about PEC’s tree planting programs, visit pecva.org/buffers.
- On Nov. 16, PEC represented land trusts at a workshop hosted by the **Clarke County Conservation Easement Authority**. Attendees learned about donated and purchased easements, benefits of conservation, and appraisals, and heard other landowners’ stories.

- In November, the Clarke County Board of Supervisors held a public hearing to gather input on proposed **changes to boundary line adjustment rules** within the County’s subdivision and zoning ordinances. Only Agricultural Open-space Conservation Lots would be affected. Such properties comprise approximately 72% of land in the County, mainly in unincorporated areas west of the Shenandoah River.

Culpeper

- In September, the Culpeper Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend denial of a rezoning application that would have allowed for the construction of a **data center campus in historic Brandy Station**. PEC provided comments to the Commission and spoke at the public hearing in opposition to this application. The application was later withdrawn.
- The Board of Supervisors is in the process of reviewing a **new draft of the County comprehensive plan**, which helps guide growth and development decisions in the future. Several public hearings were held during earlier planning stages, and we anticipate at least one more, before the Board, in December or January.
- North Carolina-based Maroon Solar has reapplied for a special use permit for a **utility-scale solar installation** covering more than 650 acres in the Stevensburg District. North Ridge, a Northern Virginia firm, has also proposed a 200-plus-acre solar installation adjacent to the previously approved 732-acre Greenwood solar facility, also in the Stevensburg District.

Fauquier

- PEC co-hosted a second successful town hall, attended by more than 200 people and a number of key decision makers, on the impacts of the **proposed Amazon Data Center in Warrenton**. A second Planning Commission work session introduced new information about viewsheds, noise and energy infrastructure. The Commission heard the Special Use Permit application on Nov. 15, and in response to near unanimous community opposition, tabled any decision until it receives more information on the application, which it considered “incomplete.” The Town Attorney rebuked that decision, and at its Dec. 13 meeting, the Town Council will determine next steps for the application. The Planning Commission will hold another public hearing on it on Dec. 20.
- **Warrenton boundary line adjustment** discussions continue. The Town Council talked about creating a joint town/county working group solely dedicated to the boundary line adjustment. The existing Town County Liaison Committee held an initial meeting on the boundary line adjustment on Nov. 30 and scheduled another for Feb. 22. Meanwhile, Warrenton is now considering adding two more parcels to the boundary line adjustment for a proposed shopping center on the north side of Lee Highway at Airlie Rd. (Rt. 605), an area PEC and the community at large have long advocated for limited development.

Greene

- PEC recently engaged with community members and provided comments to the County on two **large-scale glamping resort projects** proposed by the same developer. The initial project was denied given the site location on the east slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The developer then proposed a new location near the Town of Stanardsville, and that project was approved. PEC also weighed in on the proposed expansion of the Lydia Mountain Lodge resort, which the County denied.
- Following the glamping proposals, we are **working with Preserve Rural Greene**, an organization concerned with overly intensive development within the rural areas of the County. We will continue to support Preserve Rural Greene as it continues to advocate for the protection of natural resources, working farms and forests, and the scenic and historic countryside of Greene.

Loudoun

- On Nov. 14, the Planning Commission took **public comment on the Prime Soils Zoning Amendment** and voted to move the amendment to a future work session, expected in January, for discussion. PEC is working with community and other organizations in support of the ordinance modifications.
- As of this printing, the **Zoning Ordinance Rewrite** is expected to go to the Planning Commission on Jan. 24, 2023 for part two of revisions.
- At its Sept. 14 public hearing, the Loudoun Board of Supervisors (BOS) voted 7-2 to finalize the **purchase and sale agreement for the Aldie Assemblage with PEC** for \$600,000. The negotiated agreement will be brought to a future BOS business meeting for final action. We anticipate the contract will be finalized by early 2023.
- The long-awaited **restoration of the historic John G. Lewis Memorial Bridge**, which carries Featherbed Lane (Route 673) over Catoctin Creek, is expected to be completed in early 2023. The bridge was originally built in 1889 on the Leesburg & Alexandria Turnpike (currently Route 7) over Goose Creek to replace an earlier bridge destroyed by flooding. In 1932, the bridge was dismantled and moved to its current location.
- A proposed **Loudoun Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program** for fiscal year 2025 is slated for discussion at the Dec. 13 meeting of the Finance, Government, Operations & Economic Development Committee. PEC currently partners with various PDR programs in other counties and strongly supports the development of a Loudoun program.

Madison

- At its Nov. 2 meeting, the Board of Supervisors unanimously denied a Maryland developer’s special use permit application for a **large glamping facility on agriculturally zoned property**. The proposed “Robinson River Retreat,” which PEC opposed, would have included up to 70 units, employee housing, and a lodge/restaurant building on an undeveloped 58 acres along the Robinson River. After hearing from a sizable group of nearby residents opposed to the

project, County supervisors ultimately found that the proposed rural resort did not conform to the zoning ordinance.

Orange

➤ The proposed 2,602-acre **Wilderness Crossing mixed-use development** where at least five historic gold mines lie unreclaimed (unclosed and not cleaned up of mercury and other toxins) continues to move forward. The developer submitted changes to its rezoning application in September and again in November. The earliest possible date for a Planning Commission work session is Jan. 5, and a public hearing would come sometime after that. PEC continues to work with historic preservation groups, watershed advocates, and concerned citizens, urging the County to postpone any decision on the project until the developer cleans up the property with state agency involvement. More than 150 residents attended our October community town hall about the project’s potential impacts on Rt. 3 traffic, the Wilderness Battlefield, the County’s water supply and taxpayers.

Rappahannock

➤ On Nov. 9, volunteers **planted over 200 native trees along a tributary of Kilby Creek** near Sperryville. This event was part of the Headwater Stream Initiative, a PEC joint program with

Friends of the Rappahannock that provides free technical assistance, project design, materials, and labor for the planting of native trees and shrubs along bodies of water in the headwaters of the Rappahannock River watershed. For more information about PEC’s tree planting programs, please visit pecva.org/buffers.

- With support from PEC staff, the Sperryville Community Alliance and Rappahannock League for Environmental Protection held an **Invasive Species and Trash Clean-Up Day at the Sperryville Trail Network** on Nov. 12. The Sperryville Trail Network is a publicly accessible trail that connects various areas of the Village of Sperryville. PEC’s Krebsner Fund provided funding for the trail’s new master plan and invasive species management plan. Also with PEC support, the Sperryville Community Alliance received a Community and Urban Forestry Grant from the Department of Forestry to fund the management of invasive species along the Thornton River.
- In December, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hosted an **educational workshop on fish-friendly and flood resilient stream crossings**, geared toward practitioners, planners, and conservation professionals. PEC staff were among the presenters, sharing our experience with aquatic organism passage improvement projects. To learn more about similar workshops in your area, reach out to Laura O’Brien at lobrien@pecva.org.

PEC
By the Numbers

We may have celebrated PEC’s 50th anniversary this year, but we didn’t slow down in the process! 2022 brought a relentless flow of challenges and opportunities that have kept our passionate staff busy like never before. Still, we managed to pull off plenty of great outreach in support of our mission to promote and protect the Piedmont’s natural resources, rural economy, history and beauty!

- Outreach Events: 80+**
- Landowner Meetings: 100+**
- Action Emails Sent: 42**
- Advocacy Letters Generated: 4,000+**
- Trees Planted: 6,800**
- Pounds of Food Donated: 35,000**
- Videos Made: 24+**
- New Facebook Followers: 461**
- Volunteers Engaged: 1,301**
- Press Mentions: 180+**

Why I Give

Year-end giving allows PEC to maintain our momentum going into the new year, and there are many ways to show your support before 2022 comes to a close. Many members continue to send contributions by mail, while others make one-time or recurring monthly gifts online. We also accept gifts of securities, gifts from donor advised funds, and Qualified Charitable Donations (QCD’s) directed from a donor’s IRA (for those 70.5 years and older). For more information on these giving options, contact Nora Seilheimer at nseilheimer@pecva.org or (434) 977-2033, x. 7008.

“I love volunteering at the Piedmont community farm. Being outdoors and learning about the land that is up the road gives me a sense of connection with this area and my community. When I volunteer, I know I am helping members of our underserved population get the food they need and deserve. As well as learning about the plants and harvesting times, I also get to meet so many great people who share my love for nature and conservation. I am so fortunate to have found an organization that cares about the environment and the impact it brings to our water, air, and soil for future generations. Thank you, PEC!”

– Cailin Andreas, Loudoun County



“Whether expanding trail networks or combatting invasives, encouraging sustainable farming or preserving historic homes and landscapes, PEC deploys its enormous talent, energy and commitment to assure that Albemarle sets the pace towards sustainable living in one of America’s most beautiful regions.”

– Dick and Randy Ruffin, Albemarle County

“We give to PEC because we strongly believe that running through open fields, splashing in creeks, and becoming careful observers of the natural world around us will help us, our children, and future generations, grow into better human beings. We hope to set an example for our children, as prior generations have done for us, of good stewardship so that we can continue to protect and responsibly enjoy this unique countryside for many years to come.”

– Melissa Winchester, Fauquier County



Thanks to supporters like you, PEC is able to carry out the holistic mix of conservation, planning and advocacy for which we are known. If you’d like to make an end-of-year donation, visit pecva.org/donate for instructions on secure, online donations, gifts of stock and other options. You can also send a check, made out to PEC, to **P.O. Box 460, Warrenton VA, 20188** or make a gift over the phone by calling James Bussells at **(540) 347-2334 ext. 7007**. Thank you and happy holidays!

2022 Photo Contest Winners

2022 was another great year for PEC’s annual photo contest! Photo entries are added to a gallery of images we use to share the immense beauty of the Virginia Piedmont and tell its stories visually. Our thanks to all the photographers who shared their talents with us, our professional judges who helped narrow hundreds of entries to finalists, and to the many community members who voted for our winners. By public vote, the winner’s of PEC’s 2022 annual photo contest are:



▲ BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES
Sunset Casts a Warm Glow, Cassidy Girvin, Charlottesville
Sunset casts a warm glow over Crozet at the peak of fall foliage.



◀ LOCAL FARMS AND FOOD
A Mother’s Love, Dorothy Kray, The Plains
A Texas Longhorn who adores her calf in The Plains, Va.



▲ NATIVE PLANTS AND WILDLIFE
Spotted, Joshua Rector, Upperville
A short-eared owl hides amongst the tall grasses only to be given away by its bright, yellow eyes in a field in Fauquier County.

YOUTH CATEGORY ▶
Raccoon Scaling a Tree, Simon Wray, Crozet
A Raccoon scales a tree in the woods in Crozet, Va.



Upcoming Events



As we head into the winter months, we are already planning out events and activities for 2023. Spring brings with it planting season at the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows, tree plantings in the Potomac and Rappahannock River watersheds, conservation easement workshops, our annual Bluebell Walk, and much more! We’ll also hold town halls and community updates on various development proposals as needed. Stay tuned to our events page at pecva.org/events!

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

The spotted lanternfly, *Lycorma delicatula*, is an invasive species that is a potentially serious pest of grapes, peaches, hops, and a variety of other crops. When and in which county was it first discovered in Virginia?

ANSWER

b) Frederick, 2018



Adult (wings closed) can be found in July–December



Adult (wings open) can be found July–December



Nymph (early stage) can be found late April–July



Nymph (late stage) can be found July–September

Courtesy Penn State Extension

Reflections

On Why I’ve Supported PEC for Nearly 50 Years

By Childs F. Burden, Supporter

I grew up on the north shore of Long Island, New York in the 1950s. During that decade, I watched development take over much of the agricultural and open space along Long Island Sound. I watched as the character of the land changed.

I do not recall that there was much protest or community effort to guide that change. Sadly, folks just seemed to accept change as inevitable. The sense of place we enjoyed evaporated, and that loss made a strong impression on me.

In time, I came to Virginia to attend “The University” and was immediately impressed by the strong feeling of tradition that exists there. The spirit of Mr. Jefferson hovers over the “academical village” as he called it, and each day the students are reminded of the school’s history and are refreshed and awed by it. I fell in love with the Commonwealth of

Virginia and determined to make it my home. After graduation, my wife Elaine and I moved to Loudoun County to be closer to Washington, D.C.

It did not take much time for us to appreciate the fact that the drive from Charlottesville to Middleburg was an unrivaled journey through a cultural landscape that is utterly unique to this nation. It is called the Piedmont of Virginia and it lies along the center of the state and stretches from the Blue Ridge to the fall line of the Rappahannock River. Along its path lies a rich variety of history, conservation resources and an impressive array of celebrated personalities and historic sites. Perhaps, most importantly of all, the Piedmont of Virginia holds the most beautiful landscape this nation has to offer.

I think back on my Long Island childhood home and how that area developed out without retaining the roots to its past. Then I think about

how the Piedmont region has grown but has managed to retain its historic and scenic integrity. Why has this been successful in the Virginia Piedmont?

I believe the success we have achieved is largely due to the core of dedicated residents here that take on the responsibility of getting involved. That involvement makes it possible for our growth to be managed in such a way that our sense of place remains largely intact.

Political courage and active participation have clearly made a difference in keeping our Piedmont region from becoming just “Any Place, U.S.A.” Equally important is the education of our residents about not only our heritage but the fragility of our environment. It is essential that we appreciate the heritage of our past and value the preservation of our landscapes. We are entrusted with a precious task — the managing of our future with the proper care and understanding that our future deserves.

This cannot be done by merely individual activism. It requires the leadership



Childs Burden at Mount Defiance State Park, site of the Battle of Middleburg fought on June 19, 1863.

of an organization that can alert us to get involved when threats arise, and they arise in a seemingly endless wave.

This is the reason I support The Piedmont Environmental Council. PEC is the leader when it comes to the protection of our precious water resources, and it is the leader when it comes to teaching us the value of the preservation of our conservation resources and, especially, the value of our agricultural landscapes. Most importantly, PEC stands ready to fight for the protection of the vibrant sense of place we all enjoy in this uniquely beautiful region of Virginia — the Piedmont.

We are here but for a brief span of years. While here, we are charged with the great responsibility of passing on what we have loved to the next generation. It is a worthy effort, and it is the reason that I strongly support the mission of The Piedmont Environmental Council.

We are entrusted with a precious task — the managing of our future with the proper care and understanding that our future deserves.

Connecting People and Place in a Built Environment

Continued from cover

enabled it to secure charitable donations for the initiative.

Growing Green Space

A key component to the initiative was strong and engaged local leadership. Gordonsville’s Town Council, enthusiastic about Town to Trail’s assistance in securing financial contributions, agreed to commit town funding to the effort and help realize the community’s long-held aspiration of refurbishing the park and more-than-70-year-old pool.

Gordonsville’s public pool was noteworthy in its heyday, when community volunteers and philanthropic-minded families developed the town’s first park and swimming pool complex. As one of the only public pools between Charlottesville and Fredericksburg, it enabled a diverse mix of children from across five rural counties, many from under-served communities, to learn to swim. It was an important skill for the activities of the day — exploring the Rapidan River and its tributaries, fishing, jumping off rope swings and canoeing. But 70 years later, the pool desperately needed an update, and the Gordonsville community recognized it was our generation’s turn to step up to the challenge.

Beyond the pool, a checkerboard of vacant and available properties held an opportunity to expand the park to an entire block and connect it to Firemen’s Fairgrounds, which is owned and managed by the Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company for training and community events.

Within a year, Town to Trail raised \$35,000 in private contributions from generous residents and neighbors — half the funding needed for the town to purchase its

first parcel and thus kicking off the project’s acquisition phase. Next, the town worked with CSX Railroad to formally acquire a large parcel already in use as park space, but not legally owned by the town. And after two years of intense work, the town fully owned all three parcels that make up the park block.

During this time, Town to Trail continued to raise additional funding that allowed PEC to purchase an oversized parcel the UVA students had identified as a priority in their Gordonsville Visions report, plus an adjacent property that came on the market later. These two parcels, which PEC will donate to the town, complete the connection of the park to Firemen’s Fairgrounds.

With each milestone, Town to Trail members paused to celebrate before quickly moving on to the next challenge. During the pandemic, we wondered whether we could attract the level of funding needed to complete the project. But fortified by one another and driven by a vision of a park network winding through town, we persevered. The obstacles were significant, but we had the benefit of others who’d blazed the trail before us — parents who raised almost \$70,000 (mostly from bake sales) for a new pool while their children were still young. The acquisition phase went on to attract about \$700,000 in private, municipal, and state funding, multiplying the bake sale proceeds ten-fold!

Moving into the Future

Developing project ideas to enhance the town was fun. Advancing the park network concept through the acquisition phase was a heavy lift. But the real work was just beginning. New park infrastructure, including a regulation-size pool, bathhouse,

pavilion, and playground, was estimated at about \$3 million, a sum that far exceeded what the town could afford. We now faced the need to secure funding on a whole new order of magnitude.

The Town Council recognized the need for professional park design and sought a creative design firm that could both visualize how the park project would fit seamlessly into the town and recognize the challenges small towns face. Charlottesville-based Land Planning and Design Associates was selected and became a key player, not only in design, but also in sharing valuable experience developing public funding proposals.

Town to Trail had been tracking federal and state funding sources, including the National Park Service’s Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which Congress had fully funded as outdoor recreation surged during the pandemic-inspired lockdown. In January 2022, the National Park Service announced a new LWCF funding cycle with grant proposals due in March. Fortunately, the town was well prepared to meet this deadline.

The stars were beginning to align. The Manning Family Foundation, which had already helped during the acquisition phase, now pledged \$1 million, positioning the Town unusually well for attracting additional pledges. With wind in his sails,



This aerial images shows the outline of the expanded Gordonsville park network. Photo by Marco Sanchez

Mayor Robert Coiner dedicated a weekend to make personal appeals for other commitments. Every dollar we requested in the grant proposal had to be matched by funding from other sources. By the time we submitted the grant proposal, we’d raised \$1.6 million locally, allowing us to submit an overall proposal of \$3.2 million, just above the amount estimated for the completed project.

The community anxiously awaited news of the grant proposal outcome through the nail-biting summer months. What a delight to learn in September that the Gordonsville park project was one of only six park projects in Virginia awarded! The mayor exclaimed in a Facebook post, “Best news ever!” I think we can all agree that he’s exactly right.

The next 18-24 months will be an exciting time for the community as park construction heads toward completion in 2024. We will keep you abreast of progress as the park’s construction phase unfolds. Gordonsville’s park project is a clear example of how collaboration and collective effort can unify a community toward a common goal. No doubt it will continue to do so as the new public gathering space emerges.

Dear Friends,

This is the time of year at PEC when we typically reflect back on recent accomplishments and express our gratitude to the staff and the many partners, supporters and members who’ve made it all possible. This year, as we celebrated our 50th anniversary, we’ve also taken stock of the effects of our collective efforts over the last half century toward meaningful conservation and better communities in Virginia’s Piedmont. Together, we’ve conserved hundreds of thousands of acres. We’ve improved public access to land and water and the connectivity of trails and greenways. We’ve stood up against ill-conceived development proposals, and participated in many habitat restoration projects. Indeed, there is much to celebrate!

This is also the time of year when we look ahead at challenges and opportunities in front of us. The coming year promises a surge of emerging issues that will challenge us and require your support and participation more than ever before. For example, heading into the 2023 General Assembly session, we see troubling signs that Virginia is looking to remove or severely limit local authority and control over land use and planning decisions, particularly around housing development.

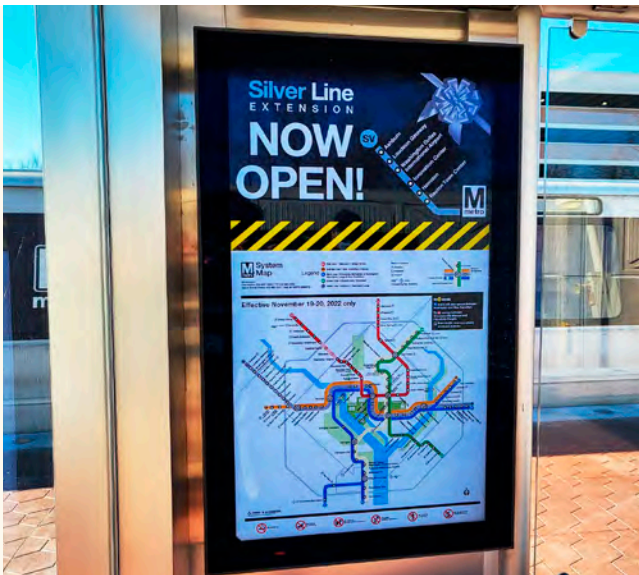
In its recently released Make Virginia Home plan, the Youngkin Administration suggests that a lack of housing is the primary constraint on Virginia’s future economic growth. Couched as a way of addressing the need for affordable housing, which we agree must be a priority, the Administration has said it intends to target local planning, zoning, and building codes through legislative reform and/or focused incentives. Ignoring a myriad of other factors contributing to a dearth of affordable housing options — from an absence of adequate requirements that

developers build it, to rising mortgage interest rates, corporations buying up housing stock, and labor and supply chain breakdowns that have interrupted construction timelines and increased costs — the governor is pushing for local regulations and permitting processes that are more developer friendly.

PEC has operated for 50 years on a philosophy of educating and empowering people to become engaged in decisions about their community’s future. When residents have a voice and the ability to weigh in on local decisions, there’s a better chance that outcomes reflect the best interests of the community.

Our concern is that in further reducing local authority over planning, zoning, and other requirements for new development, Virginia will return to the unsustainable, sprawling patterns of growth of the 1970s through 1990s. We know from experience that this approach actually perpetuates unaffordability and compromises farmland, forests and other natural resources at the same time. Instead, what’s needed is a collaborative effort involving a mix of solutions, including providing land specifically for affordable housing, resources to accelerate planning and design, funding for construction, incentives and requirements for long-term affordable housing, and ongoing assistance for low-income households, to help us make progress.

In recent years, Virginia has become a national leader in many aspects of smart growth, linking public investment in infrastructure and services to specific plans for future development. And yet, at a time when we can finally capitalize on long-term investments in the Silver Line extension of Metro and the improvement of passenger rail service along the 95 corridor, there’s a push for a more unfocused approach to development.





The opening of the \$3 billion, 11.5-mile Silver Line Extension into Loudoun County on Nov. 15, presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build residential, retail, commercial and public amenities centered around a new Metrorail line. Shown here: the Metro system map at the new Ashburn Metrorail Station.
Photo by William F. Yurasko / Flickr

Potential loss of local control over land use decisions is but one of many complex issues we expect to face in 2023. A renewed interest in uranium mining and metals mining is another. And of course, the continued expansion of various demands on open lands. As the details surrounding all of these issues take shape, PEC will continue to serve as an advocate for smart growth that respects natural and cultural resources, and as a voice for the role of local government and local residents in shaping a sustainable future.


Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL WINTER 2022/23



INSIDE
Ridgeline & Gala highlights; 2022 photo contest winners; PEC out and about this fall; donor perspectives; meet new PEC staff; and more!

The sun setting behind a snowy Old Rag in Madison County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

The spotted lanternfly, *Lycorma delicatula*, is an invasive species that is a potentially serious pest of grapes, peaches, hops, and a variety of other crops. When and in which county was it first discovered in Virginia?


a) Wythe, 1998

b) Frederick, 2018

c) Albemarle, 1975

d) Prince William, 2020

ANSWER ON PAGE 6



Courtesy U.S. Dept. of Agriculture



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