



# The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

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Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!



## Return of the Grassland Birds

By October Greenfield, PEC Wildlife Habitat Restoration Coordinator

Once upon a time, Virginia's scenic countryside was enriched by a vibrant chorus of bird-song, including those of our iconic grassland birds like the eastern meadowlark, often seen serenading from atop fence posts, and the bobolink, affectionately referred to as the "R2D2 bird" for its bubbly and robotic-sounding song. The cryptic grasshopper sparrow often goes unnoticed, with its insect-like buzz and camouflaged plumage, while the red-winged blackbird belts out songs from a high perch, showing off bright shoulder patches. In the spring, the symphony of our grassland birds is accompanied by a frenzy of courtship and nest-building activity amidst the growing grasses of meadows and fields.

But sadly, many of our grassland birds, along with their songs, are in sharp decline as native grasslands in Virginia and

throughout the United States have been steadily converted to agricultural lands over the last century. In fact, modern agricultural machinery, widespread use of biocides, and increased consumer demands have inflicted more intense human impacts on grasslands than on any other North American terrestrial ecosystem. Eastern meadowlarks have lost more than 75 percent of their population since the 1970s and rely upon private lands for virtually all of their remaining habitat in this country.

Now, the new Virginia (formerly Piedmont) Grassland Bird Initiative (VGBI), a partner initiative of the Piedmont Environmental Council and Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes begun in 2021, is showing promising signs of returning those birds to the Virginia landscape. With grant funding, the program pays farmers to adopt bird-friendly best management practices—specifi-



More than eight million acres of former grasslands in Virginia have been converted to agricultural lands. Photo by Hugh Kenny

cally, delayed spring haying and summer pasture stockpiling. In its first year, 10 property owners enrolled over 1,800 acres. Already, landowners, land managers and farm employees alike have noticed a difference.

"I've been hearing more bobwhites than ever before," said Patty Lane, an employee of Eldon Farms in Rappahannock County. "This incentive program has reached much further than the fields we enrolled. I hope better habits and understanding are occurring and that this will continue in future years."

After hearing about the simple ways to support grassland

birds, several other landowners reached out to VGBI partners to share the exciting news that they were beginning to implement best management practices on their own, even without the financial incentive.

### Delayed Haying and Summer Stockpiling

Delayed spring haying involves postponing the first cutting of hay until early- or mid-July, which allows the bulk of grassland birds to successfully raise at least one clutch of young. This practice can also benefit producers by

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## Along the Route 50 Corridor

By Evan McCarthy, formerly PEC Field Representative for Loudoun and Clarke counties

A couple of Christmases ago, I was flipping through a book about historic Middleburg homes and the surrounding areas. One story explained how the rural town was given its name. Travelers from Washington D.C. heading toward Winchester, the final outpost before the "Wild West," dubbed a midway point between the two areas — Middleburg. That same corridor, now known as Route 50, is a living example of how people moved through the northern Piedmont hundreds of years ago.

The beauty of the Route 50 corridor is not an accident. It has taken multi-generational involvement in local decision making to plan for and preserve this historic east-west passage. PEC has played a part in that by working with communities and partner organizations to identify threats and opportunities that could impact the corridor's scenic character and its function as a powerful economic engine for tourism revenue.

Earlier this summer, PEC hosted a community briefing

at Buchanan Hall in Upperville to inform Clarke, Fauquier, and Loudoun residents about several land use proposals along Route 50 and to give them a chance to share their thoughts.

### Mickie Gordon Memorial Park Cell Tower

A private development company has submitted plans for a telecommunications tower at Mickie Gordon Memorial Park, between Middleburg and the historic village of Aldie. Several community organizations, including PEC, and many local residents believe that at the proposed location, the tower could negatively impact the visual character area. We also believe the location isn't aligned with the County's comprehensive plan. During a public hearing in July, public comments focused on a variety of unaddressed issues, such as tower height restrictions, cell coverage analysis and alternative locations. Based on those comments

and the applicant's refusal to extend the project review deadline, the Planning Commission denied the permit. Since then, the applicant has modified the proposal, lowering the tower height to 130 feet from the originally proposed 185 feet. As of press time, the Board of Supervisors was scheduled to review the project at a Sept. 14 public hearing. While the height reduction is a step in the right direction, with community concerns still outstanding, PEC thinks the Planning Commission should have more time to work through the details for the best outcome on this proposal.

### Middleburg Boundary Line Adjustments

Two property owners along Middleburg's boundary lines are considering submitting applications to have their lands incorporated into the town, with the intention of increasing the

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A monopole cell tower in Fauquier County, similar to the one proposed for Mickie Gordon Memorial Park. Photo by Hugh Kenny



# Continuing the Climate Conversation

## An update from Albemarle

Kat Imoff, Senior Conservation Fellow, and Rob McGinnis, Land Use Field Representative

In our last issue, we told you about a report we published in partnership with Albemarle County and others, outlining the County’s climate-related risks and vulnerabilities. Now, the initial phase of the County’s Comprehensive Plan update is underway with a focus on reviewing and updating Albemarle’s growth management policy through the lens of climate action, as well as equity and population projections.

This update is the perfect time to talk about ways the County can address climate impacts. In particular, what must be done to protect people and communities from both the structural and public health effects of changing conditions at the local level? And what role can our corner of the world play in national and global efforts to slow climate change by reducing carbon emissions?

PEC is ramping up our activities and role within the broader Comprehensive Plan update process, developing recommendations that we hope, based on our study of climate threats in Albemarle, can serve as a model for other PEC counties.

### Protect the drinking water supply

Water in Albemarle, as everywhere in the U.S., is a critical resource requiring protection. The Rivanna River watershed is the main source of water for the urban areas of Albemarle, the City of Charlottesville and the University of Virginia. It’s imperative that the County assess population projections and ensure our communities have adequate water supply, present and future.

PEC is stressing to the County that it must, sooner rather than later, complete the connection of the Rivanna Reservoir to the Ragged Mountain Reservoir. This ongoing project, plus the raising of water levels at the Ragged Mountain Reservoir, is the result of a community-wide water planning process sparked by a severe drought in 2001-2002. The poor condition of the 100+-year-old pipeline from the Sugar Hollow Reservoir to the Ragged Mountain Reservoir only adds to the urgency.

Given that our drinking water originates in many rural areas of Albemarle, the County must also prioritize protecting these rural

lands against development and industrial uses that will compromise water quality.

### Preserve rural areas

In fact, protection of rural lands is an extremely important tool in climate mitigation and adaptation strategies more broadly. Not only do rural woodlands filter pollution from groundwater, they also sequester carbon from the atmosphere. Rural lands used to produce local food also support carbon emission reductions by lowering the energy and transportation impacts of importing food from the western U.S. and Central America.

We’re also asking what more the County can do to ensure that rural lands stay rural for the benefit of drinking water, the environment, and food security in the face of climate change. Is it expanding incentives for conservation easements? Eliminating barriers for local food production and distribution? Something else? We believe that Albemarle County must explicitly plan for forest and agricultural land protection in order to preserve and promote the very aspects of the County that have attracted past — and future — growth and development.

### Smart growth in urban centers

PEC has long advocated for sustainable, equitable, and green communities — what we refer to as smart growth. This is the principle that we can and must use when planning towns, cities and places for people to live and work. These communities are well supported by public transit, walkable and bike-friendly ways for people to get to services, recreation, and work, and safe outdoor public spaces.

In other words — communities where people can be less reliant on cars. Transportation is the top contributor to carbon emissions in the U.S., and smart growth is a crucial strategy for reducing carbon emissions and concurrently improving public health in areas most affected by air pollution.

Fortunately, since the 1980s, Albemarle County has been directing growth into its designated Development Areas already supported by existing services like water and sewer. PEC is advocating for more density in these areas and



Well planned communities include plenty of trails and green spaces for health and connectivity to recreation, shops and services. Photo by Marco Sánchez

nature-based, green infrastructure that helps mitigate climate impacts. For example, deliberate planting of a robust urban tree canopy can help combat the heat island effect, and green spaces with trails can connect neighborhoods to commercial areas. We’d also like the County to focus on improving transit access.

### What’s next?

This is just the beginning. PEC will be attending and participating in all phases of Albemarle’s Comprehensive Plan update. As this process unfolds, we will also continue to keep you informed and invite your participation.

To learn more, visit [pecva.org/climate](https://pecva.org/climate), and check out the following resources:

- Preparing for Resilience: An Overview of Albemarle County Climate Change Impacts
- Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment
- Video Testimonials
- Briefing Paper: Resources for Climate Action Planning in Albemarle County

To learn more and get involved in Albemarle’s planning efforts, visit [albemarle.org/climate](https://albemarle.org/climate).

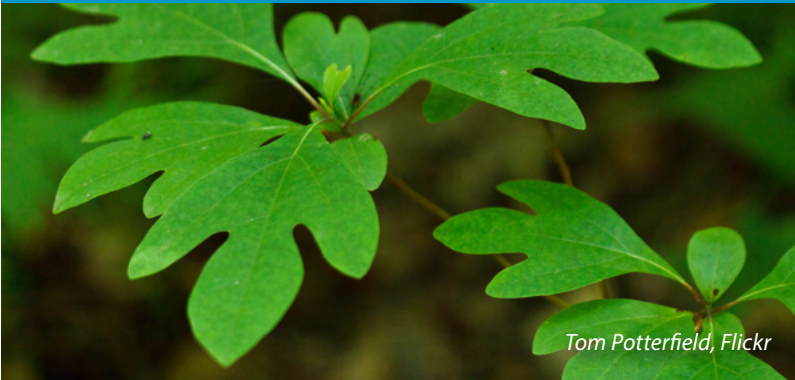
The connection between the Ragged Mountain Reservoir, shown here, and the Rivanna Reservoir must be an Albemarle priority. Photo by Hugh Kenny



## Pop Quiz

### QUESTION

What tree root was originally used to make root beer?



Tom Potterfield, Flickr

### ANSWER

#### Sassafras, *Sassafras albidum*

Often referred to as America’s “only native spice,” sassafras has long been used for various culinary and medicinal purposes. As early as the 1860s, sassafras root was used to give root beer its distinctive taste. You know the one—a spicy, vanilla-like flavor. Regrettably, safrole, a compound found in sassafras, was identified by the FDA as carcinogenic in 1960. Today, root beer is artificially flavored.

While sassafras is no longer used as a commercial ingredient, it still plays an important ecological role in forests by providing mid-level canopy habitat and food for wildlife. You can easily identify sassafras trees by their unique leaf shapes. Mature trees typically have “mittens” or “tridents” that are characterized by soft lobing. You can also take these same leaves, or snap a twig, to reveal a spicy aroma. To some, the scent is akin to Fruit Loops!



# 2022 Summer Fellows Return to the Piedmont

PEC's Summer Fellowship Program is much more than an internship. It's an eight-week program that engages college students and graduates in classroom discussions, field trips, and hands-on activities to gain practical knowledge and skills necessary to successfully transition into careers in conservation, urban planning, agriculture, historic preservation, public policy and other related fields.

For the past two years, the pandemic forced the program into the virtual world. But this year's program went hybrid, bringing together 12 fellows—from Texas to Florida to Ohio to New Hampshire—virtually for six weeks and here in the Virginia Piedmont for two weeks of on-the-ground learning and exploration. PEC staff were happy to once again engage in-person with the fellows, who shared some of their reflections with us as they headed home.



"It was delightfully unexpected to me how invested everyone at PEC was...how many people wanted to follow up, wanted us to reach out. This program has really exposed me to so many things that I haven't learned about in the classroom. And I think that's really valuable for young professionals and college students to see before they make big decisions."

— Sophie Creager-Roberts, Charlottesville, VA  
Syracuse University, '24

"This is an amazing program that I don't think many other organizations offer. I am now going into the world, I think, with a clear mindset of what I want to do with sustainability and with environmental protection. I really appreciated the small scale that PEC really pushed—I learned that you can do a lot just being local."

— Gabby Jadotte, Miramar, FL  
Colorado College, '22



"I think one of the most meaningful things I'll take away is importance of local, small-scale efforts when it comes to addressing environmental issues—how it's important to have relationships with community members—and how when it comes to addressing environmental issues, everyone has something to contribute."

— Elizabeth Hernandez, El Paso, TX  
McKenna College, '23



"I learned that there are many ways to engage with the environment. And I didn't realize how much of a role private conservation can play. It challenged my preconception, which I really appreciated, and definitely changed my professional goals in the sense that my horizons have been broadened."

— Mario Seaman, Chicago, Illinois  
Lawrence University, '21



A sunny day canoeing on the Rappahannock River from the Rector Tract in Remington to Kelly's Ford reinforced lessons about the importance of public access, best management practices and clean water. Photo by Hugh Kenny



After an introduction to the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative, PEC Wildlife Habitat Restoration Coordinator October Greenfield led fellows on a mid-morning bird walk at the Volgenau property, where they saw firsthand the results of best management practices for the benefit of birds and pollinators. Photo by Hugh Kenny



Following an overnight campout in the Shenandoah Mountains, a sunrise hike to Hawksbill Summit gave fellows a chance to see the impacts of land conservation on a large scale. Much of the viewshed from the park is in private conservation easements. Photo by Hugh Kenny

## Tax-Smart Ways to Support PEC

Many PEC donors have begun to use various methods of giving that not only help PEC, but also provide tax advantages that benefit the donor as well. You may wish to consider one of these donation options.

### ➤ Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD)

For donors aged 70.5 years and older, a QCD allows for contributions to eligible charities directly from an IRA account. When an IRA financial institution makes that direct contribution, it reduces the donor's taxable income by the amount of the donation. For IRA holders aged 72 years and older, the donation also counts as part of the required annual minimum distribution. Most financial institutions have online forms that facilitate a QCD.

### ➤ Giving Through a Donor Advised Fund (DAF)

This is essentially an account a donor establishes with a tax deductible contribution that can then be drawn upon for future charitable giving. DAFs can be easily set up through a community foundation or your financial institution to serve as a flexible charitable giving vehicle.

### ➤ Gifts of Stock

Making a gift of appreciated stock is easy and allows the donor to receive the total value of the stock at the time of transfer as a tax-deductible gift. The direct gift eliminates the obligation to pay capital gains tax on the appreciation of the stock.

To learn more about these other giving options, visit [pecva.org/giftassets](https://pecva.org/giftassets)



# Soil is Alive: How to Keep it Healthy

PEC's service region in the Virginia Piedmont has long been a pasture-based farming area, and we've collaborated with livestock producers on rotational grazing and other land management practices to improve soil health. We are even demonstrating these practices at Roundabout Meadows, our Loudoun County farm property. Healthy soil can make as big a difference for home gardeners as it can for large-scale farmers. We sat down with **Melissa Allen, District Manager at the John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District** to talk about the importance of and path to healthy soil.

**What is “healthy soil” and why should people care about soil health?**

There is a misperception that soil is inanimate, but it's not. Soil is actually alive and continually changing. Healthy soil is full of microorganisms and is its own little ecosystem that sustains the life of plants, animals and humans. Healthy soil filters contaminants from our water, regulates ground temperature, holds onto water and keeps it from running off the ground surface. It cycles nutrients, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus. It provides structure for buildings, for plants, for our gardens and our infrastructure.

**What causes soil to become unhealthy?**

Overuse. Repetition. Exposure. Like, are we constantly plowing it or turning it over? Do we have livestock on it too many days a year? Is it left uncovered through winter? Are we disrupting soil microorganisms with chemicals? Anything that doesn't mimic nature leads to unhealthy soil.

**What are some easy ways for folks to encourage healthy soil?**

The main thing is that we want to mimic nature. The Soil Health Foundation outlines five principles of soil health. The biggest one is keeping soil covered. Also, minimizing soil disturbance, continual live roots, plant diversity, and integration of livestock. All of these overlap in different ways.

**What do you mean by keeping soil covered, and how does someone do that?**

We mean avoiding bare soil. The top layer of soil is where your living, organic matter is - it could be two inches or six inches depending on the soil structure and soil type. But when it's left bare, a two-inch rainfall event can wash all that topsoil away. It could be wind erosion too. And once that topsoil is lost, it can take years to build back up. All that sediment ends up in our waterways and bay, affecting the larger ecosystem.

So, keeping soil covered protects it and the habitat it provides for the microorganisms that keep it healthy. For your basic garden at home, you could plant annual rye, winter wheat, vetches, crimson clover. Even covering with a tarp, a form of plasticulture, isn't a bad idea. At a larger scale, we recommend cover crops on farm fields, and we also encourage farmers to leave some residue from harvested crops, which serves to capture the raindrop, dissipates the force behind the raindrop and that lessens the potential for erosion.

**I've heard the phrase “no-till gardening” a lot lately. Is that what you mean by minimizing soil disturbance?**

There are three types of soil disturbance: physical, chemical and biological. Physical disturbance is, yes, tillage, equipment use, plowing. Every time we plow a field, we're disturbing that living topsoil and the microorganisms it holds. When we do that, we destroy the glue that holds the soil together and all the habitat that allows infiltration of water and nutrients. Every time you till, the soil has to rebuild all of that. Chemical and biological disturbance through improper and overuse of pesticides have the same effect.

**Where does livestock fit into unhealthy soil?**

That's biological disturbance, if the land becomes overgrazed. Overgrazing limits the plants' and crops' ability to harvest carbon dioxide and sunlight; in short, regrowth is limited. Rotational grazing helps to reduce the biological disturbance — moving cattle from a field and allowing the plants to regrow and harvest carbon dioxide and sunlight.

**You mentioned continual live root and plant diversity. What do these mean?**

Before human intervention, our grasslands naturally consisted of cool season grasses, warm season grasses, cool season forbs and warm season forbs. So there was consistently a diverse system of living roots on the land for every season. Whenever you have a plant in the ground, those roots are using up excess nutrients, providing water filtration, serving as a buffer, capturing that raindrop. Avoiding monoculture helps to sustain healthy soil.

**How could a landowner get started with some of these principles?**

Every county is covered by a soil and water conservation district, and we have an unprecedented amount of cost-sharing funding available this year to help landowners implement some of these best management practices, things like cover crops, waterways in a field, fencing, planting buffers along streams. One of the biggest ones right now is harvestable cover crops, which the farmer is allowed to harvest and sell. And another is for basic cover crops.

So, a landowner would need to call their local office and they would schedule a site visit to figure out if they're eligible, because there are some requirements. Then, they usually submit an application, and we work up a conservation plan and estimate of what it will cost.



Cover crops are part of soil health restoration efforts at PEC's Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows. Photo by Sophia Chapin

**Interested in getting started on your land's soil health journey?**

Learn more about soil health and its benefits:

- See what each of these soil health practices look like on the ground: [farmers.gov/conservation/soil-health](https://farmers.gov/conservation/soil-health)
- Read 14 compelling, easy-to-read stories about how different farm operations' soil health practices have resulted in improved productivity: [farmlandinfo.org/publications/soil-health-case-studies](https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/soil-health-case-studies)
- Find more soil health and cover crop resources at the Virginia Cooperative Extension: [ext.vt.edu/agriculture/soil-health.html](https://ext.vt.edu/agriculture/soil-health.html)
- Get involved in the Virginia Soil Health Coalition: [virginiasoilhealth.org](https://virginiasoilhealth.org)

Contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District for information about various cost-share programs (listed from north to south):

- Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District (Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah and Warren counties) [lfswcd.org](https://lfswcd.org)
- Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District (Loudoun County) [loudounsoilandwater.com](https://loudounsoilandwater.com)
- John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District (Fauquier County) [johnmarshall.swcd@vaswcd.org](mailto:johnmarshall.swcd@vaswcd.org)
- Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District (Culpeper, Greene, Orange, Madison and Rappahannock counties) [culpeperswcd.org](https://culpeperswcd.org)
- Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (Albemarle, Fluvanna, Louisa and Nelson counties) [tjswcd.org](https://tjswcd.org)

## 50 Auction Items for PEC's 50th Anniversary

Open for bidding Sept. 23 - Oct. 2

The Piedmont Environmental Council's annual Virtual Auction has become a well-known and well-loved part of our annual gala. In commemoration of our 50th anniversary, this year's Virtual Auction will feature 50 items and experiences—all generously donated—as interesting and diverse as PEC and our history. **The auction will be open for bidding from Sept. 23 through Oct. 2.**

International and overseas destinations include Antigua; Italy's Lake Como; Lyford Cay in the Bahamas; Salzburg, Austria; and Hawaii. Closer to home, we have trips to historic sites and homes in New Orleans, La. and throughout

PEC's nine-county region.

If you'd love to see the stunning, million-year-old rock formations of the Blue Ridge Mountains without hiking for hours, perhaps a tour of the Piedmont by helicopter might interest you. If flying isn't your thing, other excursions involve transport by carriage, canoe, horseback and limousine. See Virginia's iconic bluebells in the spring, an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, George Washington's Mount Vernon, James Madison's Montpelier and more!

For those who prefer the comforts of home, this year's auction also includes paintings, prints,

garden sculptures, scarves and two beautiful bronzes. Or perhaps you'd enjoy the custom-made fireplace bench, pair of fitted boots, or one of Mrs. Bunny Mellon's famous baskets. And, did we mention the high carat "Ancona" gold bracelet designed and donated by Elizabeth Locke to celebrate PEC's golden anniversary?

For a detailed description of the auction items, visit [pecva.org/auction](https://pecva.org/auction) or stop by the PEC Warrenton office at 45 Horner Street to pick up a catalog.



Elizabeth Locke "Ancona" bracelet



# On the Ground

## Albemarle & Charlottesville

- The **AC44 Comprehensive Plan update** is currently in *Phase 1: Plan for Growth*, which focuses on reviewing the current growth management policy through the lenses of *equity, climate action, and growth projections*. PEC is making climate-based recommendations for the County’s draft **Vision for Growth and Resilience** that will guide the next phases of the Comp Plan update (*see story on page 2*).
- A first draft of a **new Zoning Code for the City of Charlottesville** will be prepared this fall and available for review and comment in early 2023. Right now the City is finalizing a diagnostic tool and gathering preparatory feedback. Learn more at [cvilleplanstogether.com](http://cvilleplanstogether.com).
- Hexagon Solar is proposing the development of **Woodridge Solar**, roughly 650 acres of utility-scale solar arrays on 1,500 acres of land within the rural area of southeastern Albemarle. It is currently the largest proposed solar facility in the County. PEC is assessing the impacts of the proposal through site visits, review of Hexagon’s Special Use Permit application and briefings from the applicant.

## Clarke

- In June, PEC held a **Clarke County Informational Luncheon** at Audley Farm in Berryville, where attendees learned about local conservation successes, PEC’s Clarke County Land Conservation Fund, area partnerships and ongoing conservation efforts. We also highlighted several programs available for landowners, including the Potomac Planting Program and the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative.
- PEC staff attended the **Clarke County Easement Authority’s 20th anniversary celebration** at Long Branch Historic House and Farm in Boyce in June, along with area landowners, easement holders, county employees and community members. Food, drink and fellowship were enjoyed by all.

## Culpeper

- **The County’s first utility-scale solar proposal, approved in 2020, is Greenwood Solar**, a 732-acre solar facility located generally along Rt. 663 (Batna Road) and Rt. 661 (Blackjack Road) in Stevensburg. The company is now seeking site plan approval from the Planning Commission in September. We’re concerned about the cumulative impacts of this utility-scale solar site and the Marvell Data Center adjacent to it, especially considering that the Management Plan for nearby Culpeper Battlefield State Park has not been completed yet.
- The **AttoTek Data Center** is a speculative proposal in one of Culpeper’s designated Technology Zones. It is speculative because there is no identified data center user at this point, which leaves many unanswered questions about water and electricity usage, height, architecture, fuel storage, noise, and lighting impacts. The proposal would rezone 88 acres to allow a 765,000-square-foot data center and a nine-acre substation. This proposal will likely come before the Planning Commission in September.

## Fauquier

- Our June event in Warrenton, with the Goose Creek Association and the John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District, shared information about PEC’s **Potomac Planting Program and Headwater Stream Initiative** and other area tree planting programs and cost-shares that help landowners support cleaner waters.
- In partnership with Citizens for Fauquier County and the local citizen group Protect Fauquier, we hosted a community town hall to highlight shared concerns about the **Amazon data center and transmission line proposal** and actions residents can take to oppose it. The turnout was overwhelming — more than the room could hold — and a number of people had to access the recording online. We hope the level of engagement around this issue will keep the momentum going. The next Planning Commission work session is likely to be on Sept. 27.
- At its August meeting, the County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution initiating proceedings for the **Town of Warrenton Boundary Line Adjustment** by authorizing the County to request more information from the Town. The Board agreed to delay the public hearing proceedings to allow time for open public meetings and research and analysis of various options and impacts, to better understand what the Town wants to accomplish and how residents will be affected.
- In July, PEC’s Julian Scheer Fauquier Land Conservation Fund hosted a **Land Conservation & Management Workshop and Social**, along with PEC, the John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Fauquier County Agricultural Development Department. This event highlighted conservation options and funding opportunities for agricultural cost-share programs such as stream fencing, alternative watering systems and tree plantings for working farmland and residential properties.

## Greene

- In July, the Greene County Planning Commission heard and approved a request for a **Special Use Permit Amendment for expansion of the Lydia Mountain Lodge and Log Cabins**, despite opposition by many community members and PEC, which believes the proposal fails to align with the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed new facilities represent significant additions to previously approved development within the County’s Conservation District, which is characterized by rugged terrain, poorly drained soils and ecologically sensitive areas unsuited to intensive development. We remain concerned about the intensity and appropriateness of resort-scale tourist lodging and entertainment projects within rural areas in Greene and throughout PEC’s nine-county region.

## Loudoun

- In June, PEC’s **Catoctin Creek Conservation Fund** hosted a conservation-focused educational event at Wheatland Spring Farm + Brewery in Waterford. Speakers included PEC, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District and Virginia Working Landscapes. Attendees heard about conservation easements, agricultural cost-share programs and habitat restoration efforts within the Catoctin watershed.

- **Loudoun’s Zoning Ordinance Rewrite** has advanced to the Planning Commission for public hearing and revisions on the second draft. The rewrite draft is being divided into two parts for public hearing; the first set of chapters was available for comment on August 30, and the remainder is expected to be available for public comment later in the year.

## Madison

- A Maryland developer has revised his Special Use Permit application for **a large glamping facility on agriculturally zoned property**. The proposed “Robinson River Retreat” would include up to 70 glamping units, employee housing, and a large structure containing a lodge, restaurant and wellness center. After County staff and several planning commissioners expressed concerns about the proposed density, the project was put on hold in May. The developer recently acquired an option to purchase an adjacent 20 acres, and the application is again moving forward with the same number of units on the now-58-acre site. A public hearing could take place as soon as October. PEC staff will continue to closely monitor this proposal.

## Orange

- The **Wilderness Crossing mixed-use residential development**, being proposed for a 2,600-acre site where at least five historic gold mines lay unclaimed (not closed and not cleaned up of mercury and other toxins), continues to move forward. Orange County has indicated that an initial public hearing could take place as early as October. PEC is working with historic preservation groups, watershed advocates, and concerned citizens to urge the County and relevant state agencies to develop and commit to a plan to clean up the site before any rezoning decision.
- On Aug. 4, the Town of Gordonsville held a community meeting to solicit input on design for the **expanded four-acre footprint of the Verling Park**, including two parcels acquired by PEC through the generosity of local supporters. The landscape design firm retained by the Town presented a draft design and photographs of different options for components of park infrastructure, such as playground and park shelters with different architectural style. The meeting was well attended and the Town expects to finalize the park design this fall.

## Rappahannock

- The Town of Washington and the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors continue to negotiate the proposed boundary line adjustment and related concessions for the County’s first **mixed-use development project, Rush River Commons**. The first phase of the project broke ground in June, but the second phase is subject to the boundary line adjustment. PEC continues to monitor the progress of these discussions.
- **The Flint Hill and Sperryville Pedestrian Infrastructure Evaluation Report**, funded by the Virginia Department of Transportation, was released in July. The report identifies opportunities to enhance connectivity and safety in the two villages. PEC submitted a letter to the Board of Supervisors supporting the careful consideration of the recommendations included in the report.



# Return of the Grassland Birds

Continued from cover

spreading out labor requirements and producing higher-fiber mature hay, which is suitable for feeding dry cows, horses and retired animals. It can enhance these economic benefits by allowing producers to market farm products as "bird-friendly" and to maintain their eligibility for lower taxes through the state's Land Use Valuation program.

For Fritz Reuter at Little Milan in Fauquier County, delayed haying offers an ecological benefit as well. "We produce hay for mulch, which allows us to slowly move the needle toward restoring at least some of the native flora of our hay fields. Delayed cutting correlates nicely with the timing of when our native warm season grasses are most active—in the heat of the summer—and can outcompete dormant vegetation like fescue and orchardgrass," he said.

Summer pasture stockpiling involves removing cattle from select pastures during the spring and summer months, which not only nets the ideal grass height for nesting birds, but also results in better soil health and improved forage availability in late summer.

"Many of the grazing practices that are beneficial for grassland birds, also have positive impacts on livestock performance and profitability for livestock operations," said Jacob Gilley, owner of Heaven's Hollow Farm in Orange County and sustainable grazing coordinator for American Farmland Trust. "Extended grazing seasons with less reliance on harvested

feeds like hay reduces cost for producers on inputs like fuel, fertilizer, equipment repair and time," Gilley said.

## A Win-Win for Farmers and for Birds

The two simple strategies are beneficial not only for grassland birds, but for farmers as well. "Although at times they seem at odds, livestock agriculture and wildlife conservation can benefit one another," said Tim Mize at Virginia Cooperative Extension. "By delaying grazing or haying on some of our pasture land, farmers can be partners in the continued survival and sustainability of our grassland bird populations, while at the same time lowering their production costs. It just seems obvious to me that this is a win/win scenario for both," he said.

Sam Grant, who leases pastures at Francis Mill Farm in Loudoun County and participated in the summer pasture stockpiling program, concurs. "The best part of Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative participation was how little impact it had on my normal grazing schedule. I delayed grazing the field until mid-July with no negative impact, and the morning visits from the birders were discreet and pleasant."

With renewed funding from the Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative, the Virginia Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative plans to expand in 2023. It will add five counties in the Shenandoah Valley — Augusta, Frederick, Page, Rockingham and

Shenandoah (hence the name change) — and bring on new Valley-based partners, including the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative.

"Working with PEC and Virginia Working Landscapes will bring new expertise and perspective to our partnership, and the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative will provide a new avenue for Valley farmers to improve both the grazing and grassland bird habitat on their property," said the collaborative's project manager, Kevin Tate.

As the seasons transition toward fall, some of our grassland bird species are fueling up to migrate to their wintering grounds, and as some species depart, others will arrive, marking the return of Virginia's overwintering grassland bird species. As you drive past local farms in the coming months,

keep your eyes peeled for life within the grasslands, including the moth-like flight of short-eared owls, the distinctive white rump patch of northern harriers gliding low over fields, and songbirds like horned larks foraging on the bare ground beneath the standing vegetation.

Applications for enrollment in the VGBI incentives program will be accepted later this year. For more information about the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative, visit [vagrasslandbirds.org](http://vagrasslandbirds.org)



An eastern meadowlark sings from a perch in a hayfield. Photo by October Greenfield



Eastern Meadowlark nest in the grass. Photo by Bernadette Rigley

# Along the Route 50 Corridor

Continued from cover

number of dwelling units per acre allowed on these land — their "housing density" — and developing accordingly.

The first is a 33-acre property west of town, where the property owner wants to build 60 clustered, leased units — some age-restricted and some subsidized — while leaving some of the property as open space. North of town, on a 212-acre property along Foxcroft Road, the other landowner wants to build 66 clustered for-sale units — some multifamily buildings, some single-family homes — leaving 190 acres as open space.

Currently, without a boundary line adjustment, each of these two properties can be developed, by-right, into a variety of uses allowed by Loudoun's ordinances for agricultural zoned areas. The Foxcroft Road property, for example, could have a corporate retreat or 14 single-family detached homes spread across the entire 212 acres. Middleburg would have no control over the development type, design, or traffic flow, and any of the uses could be placed atop prime agricultural soils that ought to be preserved for farming.

## St. Louis Village Plan

Loudoun's Village Conservation Overlay District identifies 13 small villages and hamlets that contain unique scenic and historic characteristics that should be maintained and protected. But when the 2019 Comprehensive Plan was developed, an in-depth review of these historic vil-

lages and their land use needs was not part of that process. A recent development threat in St. Louis, one of the oldest African American villages in Loudoun County with a notoriously fragile water supply, has illuminated that omission and exposed zoning ordinances that put all of these historic communities at tremendous risk.

PEC, along with the Loudoun Historic Village Alliance, has been advocating that these villages should each have an updated vision for the future based on its current-day needs and challenges. Although Loudoun is in the midst of a zoning ordinance update, any zoning change for the villages must be preceded by comprehensive plan updates. Such updates must begin now so that appropriate zoning changes can soon follow.

Happily, our two-year effort to oppose the aforementioned development threat ended in a private conservation sale and the Board of Supervisors approved a community planning and zoning process for St. Louis to better manage the future of the village. That process, expected to take 18 months, began with a kick-off community meeting in April, followed by a Board-appointed task force meeting in July. While not a task force member, PEC will continue to offer support throughout the process.

## Other Projects

PEC is also paying close attention to

a handful of other proposals, plans and issues along the Route 50 corridor. The Loudoun Board of Supervisors is considering an offer by PEC to purchase the Aldie Assemblage, a six-acre property that has been at risk of significant development that would have compromised the historic features of the site and character of the village. On the western end, we are hoping for a conservation solution for a property listed for sale that is adjacent to other conserved properties providing the brilliant views eastward from our Piedmont Memorial Overlook at Sky Meadows State Park.

In the area of Gilberts Corner, we are tracking the Tanager Subdivision proposal adjacent to the historic Mt. Zion Old School Baptist Church. Built in 1851, Mt. Zion was used as a Union field hospital during the Battle of Aldie and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Concerned about the significant negative impacts the proposed 31 single-family detached homes could have on the historic resources around Mt. Zion and the Old Carolina Road Trail, PEC is monitoring this proposal closely.

Nearby, PEC Farm and Land Manager Dana Melby is in the early stages of



Despite the summer storm conditions, about 50 community members attended our event at Buchanan Hall in Upperville to learn about several land use projects PEC is monitoring or working on along the Route 50 corridor. Photo by Hugh Kenny

conceptualizing changes to the PEC-owned Gilberts Corner Market property. PEC intends to improve public ingress and egress at the farmers market, restore or rebuild the historic building at that site, and make way for an enhanced presence of local farmers and vendors.

I once heard someone say, "Gilbert's Corner is the dividing line. Everything west of it is rural." Maintaining the beauty and benefits of the rural area has been and remains the result of active civic involvement on topics like the proposals and issues we've described along Route 50 today. As I depart PEC to pursue another opportunity, community members with questions about these proposals can contact our field representatives Gem Bingol at [gbingol@pecva.org](mailto:gbingol@pecva.org) or Kevin Kask at [kkask@pecva.org](mailto:kkask@pecva.org).



# Out&About

## Community Farm Open House & Family Day



▲ After two years on a pandemic-related hiatus, we were thrilled to welcome visitors back to our Community Farm Open House and Family Day at Roundabout Meadows on June 18. During the event, PEC Farm Manager Pete Walton introduced visitors to our two American Guinea Hog farm ambassadors, Maple and Clover. *Photo by Bri West*

## Healthy Streets Healthy People



▲ During Charlottesville’s Healthy Streets Healthy People event, PEC intern Carreen de Cardenas (left) and Field Representative Peter Krebs (right) interviewed people about safe walking and biking in Charlottesville. *Photo by Wyatt Burttschell*

## Bolton Branch Stream Monitoring



▲ As part of our efforts to measure the effects of our trout stream restoration work, staff from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Friends of the Rappahannock, Orvis, and PEC conducted electrofishing surveys in Bolton Branch. *Photo by Hugh Kenny*

## Orvis GIVEBACK Days



▲ Orvis Arlington store manager Art Noglak presents a check to PEC Deputy Director of Land Conservation Valerie Peterson. Orvis’ generous donation supports the planting of thousands of native trees this fall to help keep streams cold, clean, and connected for fish and wildlife habitat and to protect Northern Virginia drinking water supplies. *Photo by Sophia Chapin*

# Upcoming Events

### Loop De’Ville

September 24 - 25

Celebrate 30 years on the Rivanna Trail — the 20-mile loop encircling Charlottesville. Coinciding with National Public Lands Day, there will be multiple walks, runs, and bike rides of various distances, plus stewardship events throughout the weekend and parties on both Saturday and Sunday. For more information about participating or volunteering, visit [rivannatrails.org/LoopdeVille](http://rivannatrails.org/LoopdeVille).

### Plant Trees with PEC!

Oct. 13, 31, Nov. 9, 12  
(all tentative, weather-dependent)  
Clarke, Fauquier and Rappahannock counties

Help us improve water quality and wildlife habitat by joining our Headwater Stream Initiative and Potomac Planting Program teams to plant native trees and shrubs! We’ll be scalping grass, digging holes, pounding stakes and planting some 950 native plants across four properties. For more information, please contact PEC Tree Planting & Stewardship Coordinator Linnea Stewart at [lstewart@pecva.org](mailto:lstewart@pecva.org).

### 50th Anniversary Celebration Farm-to-Table Dinner & Gala

October 1 • 5:30 - 11 p.m.

PEC returns to the Oak Spring Garden Foundation’s Mellon Air Strip to celebrate our 50th anniversary. As a special attraction, world-renowned visual artist Elizabeth Turk will lead an interactive social sculpture envisioned exclusively for PEC. Timed to coincide with sunset, Ridgeline is a unique piece featuring live music by multi-Grammy award nominee Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen and site-specific performances by dancer and Orange County’s own Demetia Hopkins and choreographer Lara Wilson. Guests join the sculpture with the opening and movement of 500 lit umbrellas symbolizing the endangered flora and fauna of the Piedmont. The evening culminates with a local farm-to-fork dinner under the stars. For more information, visit [pecva.org/50th-runway](http://pecva.org/50th-runway).



A constellation of umbrellas during Elizabeth Turk’s recent Shoreline project. *Photo courtesy of ETProjects Foundation*

### A Living Community Art Project: Elizabeth Turk’s Ridgeline Project

October 2 • 6 - 8 p.m.

The night after PEC’s 50th Anniversary Gala, Elizabeth Turk’s social sculpture comes alive again at the Oak Spring Garden Foundation Air Strip with a focus on the next generation! School-aged community members, and their families are invited to participate in an evening that blends art, science, dance, music, photography, drone operations, videography, agriculture and more! Learn more and register at [ridgeline.eventbrite.com](http://ridgeline.eventbrite.com).



# Dear Friends,

I often say that the beauty of the Virginia Piedmont is not an accident. And over the course of 2022, PEC has been contemplating and celebrating 50 years of collective effort conserving and protecting this place we love so much as we also plan for a more sustainable future. Our founding Board of Directors, representing communities across the nine-county service area, knew that the growth of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and the expansion of Virginia's economy would require thoughtful changes to towns and villages beyond the Capitol city's borders, careful management of new areas of development, and specific efforts to hold onto the important, and fragile, open spaces, natural resources, historic landscapes and beauty of the surrounding countryside.

As we highlight in each issue of the Piedmont View, the combined efforts since 1972 of PEC board members, staff, volunteers, and supporters have resulted in a strong foundation of community-based advocacy and direct participation in planning and conservation. On Oct. 1, we are celebrating those results through a combination of activities, including the upcoming Farm to Fork dinner, auction, and social sculpture performance of Ridgeline, led by world-renowned artist Elizabeth Turk. Each activity highlights what has been accomplished through the efforts of so many landowners and community leaders over the past 50 years and what is possible in the future. As PEC's communications team consistently documents, the Piedmont is a beautiful place and well worth our persistence and our perseverance!



Sunrise over southern Fauquier County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

During the past year, PEC's board and staff have been working on a new, updated strategic plan that will guide us forward, applying those traditions as we respond to the new challenges and opportunities of 2022. As the communities of the Virginia Piedmont plan for a changing climate and new economic development pressures, our staff work continuously to understand their potential impacts and to improve access to new and expanded support for conservation, restoration, and land management from governmental programs and private sector investment.

Our evolving strategies are grappling with the enormous investment in information technology industries in Virginia. The numerous data centers taking advantage of the fiber optic networks across

the state require a huge expansion of energy infrastructure and a new generation of electricity. How do we balance the advantages of expanded access to information, data and entertainment with the need to sustain natural systems that provide us with the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and the open spaces that we need for recreation and solace? We look forward, as always, in working with you to discover and implement the best ideas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Miller".

**Chris Miller, President**

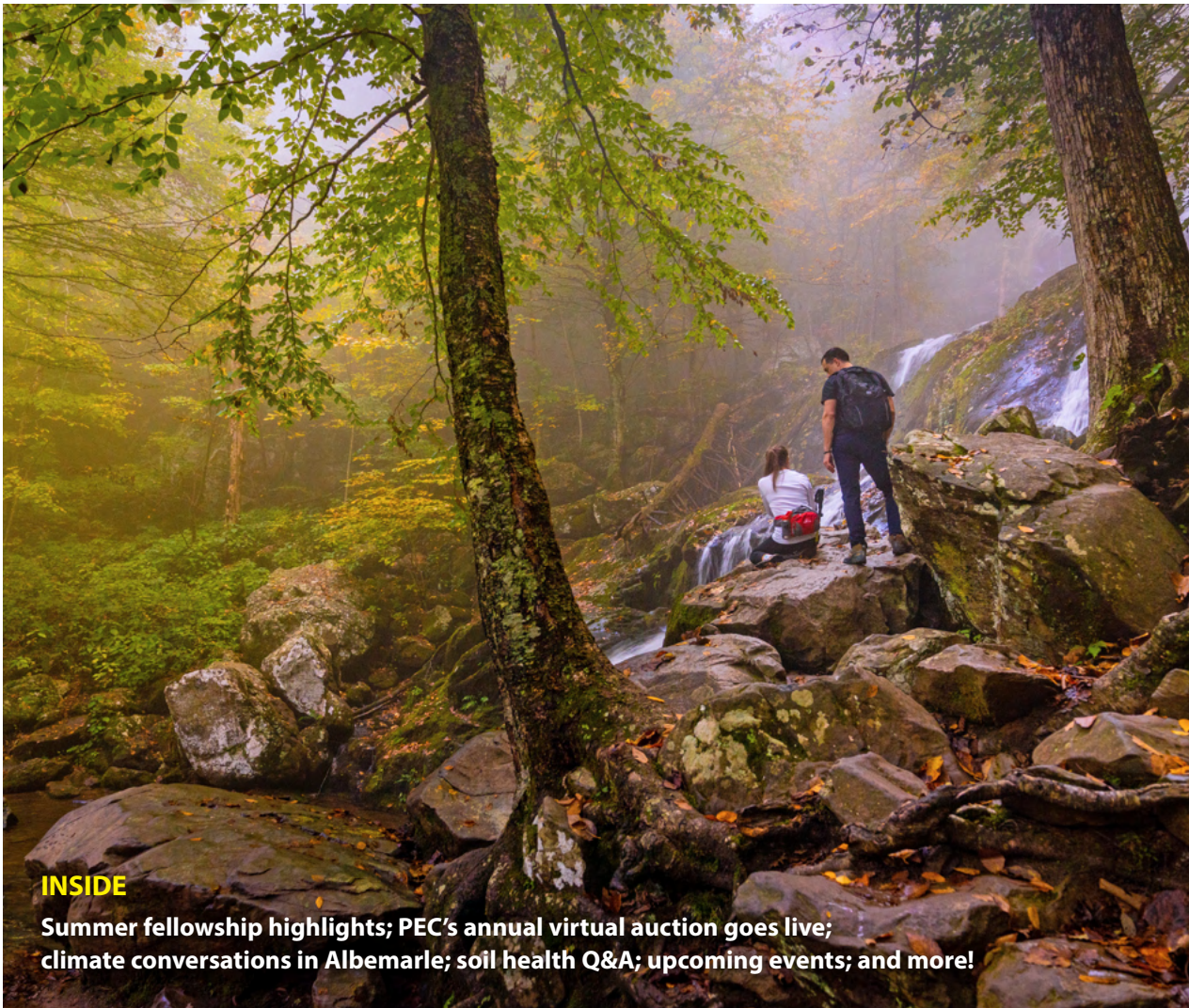


Photo by Matt Ha



## The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL    AUTUMN 2022



### INSIDE

Summer fellowship highlights; PEC's annual virtual auction goes live; climate conversations in Albemarle; soil health Q&A; upcoming events; and more!

Photo by Hugh Kenny

## Pop Quiz

### QUESTION

What tree root was originally used to make root beer?

- a) Red maple, *Acer rubrum*
- b) Shagbark hickory, *Carya ovata*
- c) Sassafras, *Sassafras albidum*
- d) Tulip poplar, *Liriodendron tulipifera*

ANSWER ON PAGE 2

Image by Dan Century, Flickr



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