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Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!





# **Feeding the Piedmont**

By Teddy Pitsiokos, Community Farm Manager .....

II of us here at PEC know that resilient food systems are crucial to building stronger, more sustainable communities. That's why we've made it a priority to support and promote working farms and to bring fresh, locally grown food to people throughout our region. Since 2019, our properties at Roundabout Meadows and Gilberts Corner have been a cornerstone of our work to promote a just, equitable food system while showcasing sustainable agricultural practices.

# A farm for our community

From April through October, PEC's Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows is a whirlwind of activity. Twice a week, dozens of volunteers visit our farm to connect and contribute to a common goal: feeding neighbors who struggle with food insecurity. During the rest of the week, PEC's three-member farm staff works tirelessly planting, tending and harvesting vegetables to distrib-

ute to our hunger relief partners in Loudoun and Clarke counties. We load thousands of pounds of food into trucks every week, and from there, it makes its way to 1,000+ families throughout the Piedmont, which is home to more than 50,000 food-insecure people.

Dozens of similar organizations throughout our region are committed to the same work, yet hunger in Virginia continues to rise, especially among children.

The detrimental effects of hunger are well documented, including poor overall health, behavioral issues and negative educational outcomes for children. For many of us, the solution is simple: grab a bite to eat! But for 1 million foodinsecure Virginians, the solution is far more complicated. And recent government spending cuts could make finding a meal even more challenging.

### Hunger relief funding cuts loom

Recent changes to hunger relief funding at the federal level



A group of PEC staff volunteering at Loudoun Hunger Relief, one of our food pantry partners. Photo courtesy of Loudoun Hunger Relief

are deeply concerning. The tax and spending legislation known as the "Big Beautiful Bill Act" signed into law in July includes big funding cuts to local hunger relief and food programs like those for schools and food banks. A shift of SNAP funding to states will cost Virginia about \$250 million per year. Over 814,000 Virginians receive SNAP benefits, and according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the

bill could result in 50,000 Virginians losing their food assistance.

What can organizations and individuals do to help fight hunger in our communities? Just as the causes of food insecurity are multi-faceted, so are the opportunities to help fight hunger.

Food banks and pantries in our region are seeing rising numbers of clients and need more volunteers and financial support.

Continued on page 7

# Why is Dominion trying to kill rooftop solar?

By Ashish Kapoor, Senior Energy & Climate Advisor

hese days, it's always refreshing to find things that most folks agree on. Solar on rooftops, parking lots and brownfields, along with smaller-scale agrivoltaics (combining agriculture and solar production on the same land), get pretty widespread support in the world of renewable energy and climate efforts. But Dominion Energy wants to undermine the economic viability of these popular energy solutions in Virginia by slashing the value of their most

critical element: net metering. In a case before the State Corporation Commission, The Piedmont Environmental Council needs your help to defend and protect this important framework that makes small solar installations truly beneficial to people.

The smaller-scale solar approach is known as distributed generation, and people tend to like it because it doesn't sacrifice prime agricultural soils and forests, it connects clean energy to the grid much more quickly than

large-scale centralized generation, and it can save individual families and businesses tens of thousands of dollars over time on electricity bills.

When you couple distributed generation with battery backup, you also gain energy independence — keeping essential needs like refrigeration or medical devices operational in the event of a grid outage. And homeowners can even make extra monthly income through programs that pay them to shift some battery load onto the grid during peak time. When enough homes participate, they function as "virtual power plants," providing collective power that decreases the need for new gas peaker plants to meet peak demand. These virtual power plants have saved utilities hundreds of millions of dollars in other states.

Though distributed solar sources currently only make up less than 2% of our energy mix in Virginia, the potential is vast. The National Renewable Energy Lab estimates Virginia could generate around 20% of its electricity

A rooftop solar installation in Virginia. *Photo by Hugh Kenny* 

with rooftop solar. Early modeling estimates by PEC's academic partners found that Virginia could generate 50% of its current energy needs with solar on every parking lot. And if Virginia made it easier to install small-scale agrivoltaics on the state's nearly 40,000 farms, the state could generate even more energy. Even tapping into just 10% of this collective distributed generation potential would create significant energy while financially benefiting homeowners, businesses and farms.

## Dominion's attack on distributed generation

So why — and how — is Dominion attempting to destroy the viability of a seemingly ideal form of energy generation? Simply put: money.

Most monopoly utilities make maximum revenue from centralized generation — like gas plants and large-scale solar — and energy infrastructure like transmission lines. Motivated by profits, Dominion's tremendous lobbying pressure has been a longstanding and powerful force against efforts to create a more distributed grid.

Continued on page 7



# A legacy of conservation and community at risk in Fauquier County

By Julie Bolthouse, Director of Land Use

rom their storied pasts to the present day, the Fauquier County towns of Remington, Bealeton and the many unique crossroad communities in the surrounding region have been characterized by their rural charm. And for decades, The Piedmont Environmental Council has been committed to collaborating with these local communities on conservation, land use planning, historic preservation and public access to nature. But as pressure for massive data center complexes spreads beyond Northern Virginia into the Piedmont's special rural communities, we worry the progress and investments we and many others have made toward conserving, enhancing and preserving these communities will be lost forever.



PEC opposed the Fau-1990s | PEC opposed the rauquier Forward plan that would have widened Virginia State Route 28 and replaced the agricultural economy through that area with suburbs. Instead, we advocated for an alternative vision of conservation and helped create the county's Purchase of Development Rights program, which pays landowners to relinquish development rights on their properties, thus supporting farmers, preserving the environmental and economic benefits of agriculture and preventing costly sprawl. Since then, Fauquier's PDR program has become a model for other places, creating an important tool for landowners who want to keep their land in farming. Photo by Hugh Kenny



PEC helped the county acquire Rappahannock Station Battlefield Park, preserving this critical battlefield for a future public park and recreation area near the town of Remington. PEC supported development of a master plan for the park and continues to advocate for walking trails and interpretive signage that will tell the important history of the town and this historic battlefield. Photo by Hugh Kenny



In support of Remington's effort to strengthen tourism and enhance pedestrian safety, PEC received a PATH Foundation grant to develop a plan called Remington Walks. This plan to rejuvenate Main Street with walking trails, town signage, pedestrian-friendly connectivity and more was developed with input gathered during community meetings and walking audits with residents. Remington Walks was adopted into Remington's comprehensive plan and has been a guide and supportive document for several subsequent projects, including a gazebo next to the town hall, completed trail connections to Margaret Pierce Elementary and an improved railroad crossing accessible for strollers and wheelchairs downtown. Photo by Paula Combs



PEC and numerous partners set about creating an Upper Rappahannock River Water Trail that provides much-needed public access at several points along this Virginia-designated scenic river. In August 2021, we helped cut the ribbon on the new Rector Tract public canoe and kayak launch a short walk from downtown Remington. Open dawn to dusk, this launch closes a 25-mile gap in public access to the river between Riverside Preserve and Kelly's Ford in Culpeper County. Photo by Hugh Kenny



Waterloo Bridge over the Rappahannock
River is the uppermost point of the historic Rappahannock Canal, an important historic resource and a unique community treasure. Built in 1878, it was closed in 2014 and slated for replacement by the Virginia Department of Transportation. Advocating for its restoration, rather than replacement, PEC invested in a consultant to put forward a restoration alternative, held numerous community meetings, pushed VDOT to consider other options, and, with the financial help of the Hitt family, was able to fully restore the oldest metal truss bridge still standing in Virginia today. Photo by Hugh Kenny



PEC established a native plant garden at C.M. Crockett Park in Midland. As a part of our efforts to promote native landscaping practices, we applied for a grant from Kortlandt Fund of the Northern Piedmont Community Foundation to purchase the native plants for the project. We also designed the garden and worked with the Fauquier Parks and Recreation Department and community volunteers to install it. Photo by Dan Holmes

he network of support to conserve, enhance, and preserve Remington and southern Fauquier extends well beyond PEC. The local churches, the Virginia Cooperative Extension, and John Waldeck established the Remington Community Garden. The town utilized a PATH Make It Happen Grant to build a new gazebo next to the town hall. And the Remington Community Partnership — run by the tireless Mary and Ray Root — has worked to document, preserve and promote the historic resources of the town. Countless people have led numerous other projects, but a comprehensive list

could take up the entire publication!

Remington and its surrounding areas are at the intersection of two very different futures. The tremendous work we've all already done together paves a path that retains the region's rural charm, agricultural heritage and economy, and promise of a vibrant place for visitation and recreation.

This progress is threatened by pressure from multiple data center proposals that could put more industrial development in the quaint town of Remington than all the commercial space in Fauquier County combined.

Together these projects would open a floodgate of new transmission lines, substations, construction traffic, air pollution, noise, and massive concrete computer warehouses that will crowd out other forms of investment and business interest and induce even more industrial sprawl.

Before our county leaders make major decisions that will forever alter a critical piece of Fauquier's rural identity and economy, it's important to revisit and remember the investments and community accomplishments made in the face of past development pressures that would have transformed this region.

# Randal Fellows immerse themselves in PEC's work

welve college students and recent graduates from around the country joined us this summer for the 19th annual Randal Fellowship, an eight-week immersion program in The Piedmont Environmental Council's work and exploration of conservation-related careers. With PEC staff as their instructors and advisors, our 2025 Randal Fellows learned about the role of nonprofit and local engagement in addressing complex and interdisciplinary environmental issues facing communities today.

In this hybrid program, Randal Fellows joined us from their homes across the U.S. for a series of virtual seminars and group activities on topics ranging from local land use policy to nonprofit communications, before coming together in Warrenton for three weeks of inperson seminars, field trips and group work. During their final three weeks, they pursued independent study to develop practicum projects on water quality, transportation design and walkability, GIS mapping and other topics.

The Randal Fellowship is named after the late Judy Randal, who supported the development of the program to provide direct conservation experiences for undergraduate and graduate students. She was a strong believer in education and the importance of sharing the success of PEC in conservation, environmental policy and civic engagement.



"I've already spent a lot of time in the environmental and conservation field, but now I know a bit more about what parts of conservation I might want to run with in the future. I really appreciated getting to see all aspects of a nonprofit, because there are also parts of financing, fundraising and communications, and all of these things that are important to the functioning of a nonprofit."

Kawther Said, Loudoun County, VA

Stanford University, Class of 2025

"It [the Randal Fellowship] gave me a very unique opportunity to learn about land conservation, environmental policies, and the work of a nonprofit because this was all something that was new to me but was very complementary to my studies that focus on engineering and environment and sustainability. So I found it really valuable to learn more about the policy and nonprofit sides of environmental movements."



– Luke Rossi, Natick, MA Brown University, Class of 2026



"It just meant so much to me that PEC was willing to give me this exposure and this experience with domains that I didn't know much about. I think the Randal Fellowship really helps life and work systems feel less rigid and it opens up the possibilities for people who otherwise might not consider this an option."

Odalys Benitez, Los Angeles, CA

Olin College of Engineering, Class of 2022



Randal Fellows toured our Roundabout Meadows property with PEC's Gilberts Corner lands manager Dana Melby (second from left in back), who shared our efforts to manage the pasture lands for cattle grazing while restoring native habitat and improving water quality at **Howsers Branch.** Photo by Douglas Stewart



PEC's deputy director of land conservation Valerie Peterson (front right) led the Fellows on a tour of the 596-acre Goodall Farm in Madison County. The farm is protected by a conservation easement held by PEC and the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District. One Fellow remarked, "Walking the property and meeting the landowners, who had grown up there, made all the concepts we had studied feel so much more real." Photo by Bryn Sonnett



A "Mock Board of Supervisors Meeting" enabled Fellows to get inside the workings of local government. Playing different roles as developers, county planners, advocacy groups and local residents - the Fellows learned how communities make decisions about development and how policies and regulations like comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances work. Photo by Douglas Stewart



### **Focus on PEC's Annual Photo Contest**

..... Get your photos in by **September 30!** .....

Submit your shots of breathtaking views, beautiful native plants and fungi, and local wildlife for our annual photo contest by Sept. 30. This year's categories are: Beautiful Landscapes and Streetscapes, Native Plants and Fungi, Wonderful Wildlife, and the Youth Category for ages 17 and under.

The winners of the "Beautiful Landscapes," "Native Plants and Fungi" and "Wonderful Wildlife" categories will receive a \$100 gift certificate to a nearby Buy Fresh Buy Local restaurant! The winner of the "Youth" category will have the option to choose between a \$100 gift certificate to a Buy Fresh Buy Local restaurant or a prepaid Visa card.

Visit pecva.org/photocontest for contest details. If you have questions, contact Hugh Kenny, Multimedia Communications Specialist, at hkenny@pecva.org or 540-347-2334, ext. 7024

"Fool me Once" by Dorothy Kray. Winner of the 2024 Wonderful Wildlife category.

# Annual Gathering at Eldon Farms draw record crowd, features conservation & agriculture best practices

By Lindsey Loving, Communications Specialist

Ithough The Piedmont Environmental Council's Annual Gathering this year got off to a rainy start, there was no stopping our mission of coming together in the name of conservation. On June 8, over 400 enthusiastic members of the community descended on Eldon Farms — a scenic 7,100-acre farm in Woodville in Rappahannock County — for a day of learning and fellowship.

For Eldon Farms owners Chuck and Dee Akre, PEC's Annual Gathering marked a major milestone in their work with world-renowned landscape architect Thomas Woltz and his Charlottesville-based firm, Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, LLC. Since 2022, they've been working together on a five-year plan to transform the well-known property into a destination for the community to learn about farming and conservation, gather for events and enjoy nature.

That work inspired the idea to hold this year's event at Eldon Farms. "Their work on 'the plan' was coming to a conclusion, so a reveal was needed, and they felt like this event was a good push to help them get across the finish line," said Montana Lanier Ruffner, PEC's meeting and events manager. "I think the Akres really want this property to feel like a gift to the community and be accessible for all. They're just incredibly lovely people."

Woltz was a natural choice to keynote the event. "[His] work plays into what

we're talking about across the board, with data centers and infrastructure, and how the nature corridor up the Appalachian Mountains, up the eastern part of the U.S., is what's regionally significant — and also globally significant," Lanier Ruffner said.

In his opening remarks, PEC President Chris Miller spoke to this global outlook. "Things are changing. And the forces of change are ... actually centered in the Virginia Piedmont... So we've got a globally significant conservation effort and a globally significant set of changes."

Miller described how, together, partnership and collaboration help protect and conserve the lands and waters of the Piedmont, pointing to Eldon Farms as a shining example.

Woltz then took to the stage. Having completed projects in 12 countries and 30 states, he is currently working with Eldon Farms and other properties in the Piedmont. "Eighty-one to 100% of the best soils in our nation are in private hands. So these are the regions that are urgent. Private land ownership is essential," Woltz said.

The sun finally peeked through the clouds, and attendees enjoyed the afternoon touring the farm or participating in workshops led by PEC staff on data centers and clean energy, conservation corridors in the Piedmont, and the importance of native plants in restoring the Upper Rappahannock watershed.

It was an exciting and inspiring day

Aerial view of the PEC Annual Gathering at Eldon Farms in Woodville, Virginia. Photo by Hugh Kenny





PEC President Chris Miller and Board Chair David Aldrich present the PEC Conservation Award for 2025 to Chuck and Dee Akre, with their family. Photo by Hugh Kenny

for everyone. First-time attendee and new PEC staff member Kim Votruba-Matook said, "I could sense curiosity everywhere. The guests were eager to learn and the entire event was set up for sharing PEC's work in a variety of ways." Attendees took home ideas and inspiration to continue the important work of conservation, one acre at a time.

To access video highlights from Miller's and Wotz's presentations, as well as photos and additional resources from the PEC-led workshops, visit pecva.org/eldonfarms. PEC is grateful to this year's Annual Gathering sponsors: Jean Perin, George Ohrstrom, II, Helen DuBois, David Aldrich, Joe Gale and Ryan Crabbe.



Thomas Woltz gives the keynote presentation at the 2025 PEC Annual Gathering. Photo by Hugh Kenny



Walking tour led by Eldon Farms Agribusiness Manager and Geneticist John Genho. Photo by Lindsey Loving



Panel on How to Meet the Demand for Native Plants — The Importance of Native Plants in Restoring the Upper Rappahannock. Photo by Hugh Kenny

### Pop Quiz

QUESTION

How many miles of roads are unpaved in PEC's nine-county service area of Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties and the City of Charlottesville?

ANSWEI

### e) 901 - 1000 miles

PEC's nine-county service region boasts over 900 miles of unpaved roads, including extensive networks of historic gravel roads that link our rural communities. These rural gravel roads are highly valued by the community for recreational activities such as walking, running, biking, and horseback riding, and they often possess historical and scenic significance. And, by preserving their unpaved state and limiting through-traffic, communities help maintain the area's rural character. PEC has long championed protection of rural and historic areas and sensible, low-cost fresh-air opportunities.



A fox kit along a gravel road in The Plains in Fauquier County.

Photo by Hugh Kenny

# On the Ground

#### **Albemarle & Charlottesville**

- As Albemarle County updates its Data Center Ordinance, PEC is strongly advocating that all proposed data centers larger than 40,000 square feet be required to go through a Special Use Permit process, which allows for public input on the possible adverse impacts from energy-, water-, and land-intensive infrastructure development.
- After a popular pilot program, Albemarle County has voted to permanently close Free Bridge Lane to cars, creating a safe riverside space for walking, running and biking. PEC and others are collecting ideas to transform the disused roadway into a vibrant park.
- > PEC has been involved every step of the way in the three-year update of the Albemarle Comprehensive Plan (AC44). We have advocated for Rural Area protections and smart growth planning in the Development Areas to prevent sprawl and promote healthy urban living through walkable, dense development. We anticipate the Board of Supervisors will adopt AC44 late this fall.
- > PEC is advocating for a county ordinance requiring testing of biosolids for PFAS, heavy metals, or other contaminates before spreading on agricultural lands in the Rural Area. We have also engaged the community on the health and environmental impacts of spreading biosolids and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality permitting process.

### Clarke

- On June 23, county staff wrapped up their Rural Lands Plan public listening sessions with an event focused on the Mountain Areas. As in the three previous sessions, residents expressed a strong desire to see Clarke County maintain its rural nature and hold steady to its own longstanding goals.
- ➤ At its June meeting, the Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted the new Double Tollgate Light Industrial District, which the county hopes will encourage economic growth in an appropriate region while maintaining the integrity of the county's agricultural lands.

### Culpeper

- On Sept. 2, the Board of Supervisors voted to remove data centers as a by-right use on all land outside the Culpeper Tech Zone — a data center tax incentive area where six new campuses are planned. PEC supports adding needed guardrails to future data center development in Culpeper.
- The DALRO data center developer has withdrawn its substation application after the Planning Commission recommended its denial.
- Strata Solar has resubmitted its application for the utility-scale Maroon Solar project, which the Board of Supervisors previously denied in 2021. No hearing date for this project has been set.
- On Sept. 9, the town of Culpeper held its final hearing on the Unified Draft Ordinance update. The biggest proposed change is a move to

form-based zoning, which in most cases emphasizes a building's visual character over how it will be used. PEC supports parts of the draft ordinance that would consider rooftop solar and EV chargers as a by-right residential use and restrict data center development to the area where projects have already been approved.

### **Fauquier**

- ➤ In June, the Planning Commission recommended denial of the Gigaland data center development proposal. After a tremendous outpouring of engagement from community members expressing concerns, the developers have withdrawn their applications for now, but do intend to submit new, scaled-down plans in early 2026. PEC will continue to monitor and inform the public about this project.
- > Four other data center projects spanning 632 acres and with buildings totaling 6.6 million square feet are in various stages of application or development in and around Remington. The Planning Commission will review the Convergent Tech Park proposal at a work session this fall. PEC is very concerned with this trend in data center development, which requires innumerable rezonings, comprehensive plan amendments and special exceptions.
- ➤ PEC is following several power projects. In June, the Planning Commission recommended approval of a Dominion Energy battery storage application, to be considered by the Board of Supervisors Sept. 11. Dominion Energy's Remington-Marsh Run 230-kilovolt-line project will go to the State Corporation Commission this fall. The Planning Commission will consider the Morrisville Substation Expansion project Sept. 18.
- Remington is about to receive well-deserved attention to flooding issues thanks to \$125,000 in federal funding and the Army Corps of Engineers for a stormwater modeling study.

### Greene

- ➤ In June, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution approving a reduced size for both the White Run Reservoir and the proposed water treatment plant. PEC has followed the county's water supply planning and engaged community members through multiple stages.
- In July, the Board of Supervisors approved a solar ordinance clarifying the different requirements for rooftop or ground-mounted solar installations for residential, business or farm use, versus utilityscale solar facilities connected to distribution and transmission lines.

### Loudoun

- ➤ PEC continues to track and comment on Loudoun's data center applications, including two approved in July and others awaiting review. We're also tracking related energy impacts, including PJM-requested diesel generator use and several transmission line projects: one facing litigation (Aspen to Golden) and one with an SCC hearing scheduled Sept. 18 (Golden to Mars).
- ➤ The county is providing more data center guardrails with Phase 2 of the Data Center

- Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Zoning Ordinance Amendment, as well as a new Electrical Infrastructure Plan. PEC will continue to provide input and inform the public about mitigating data center impacts.
- > PEC continues to encourage public input on the ongoing Western Loudoun Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Zoning Ordinance Amendment stakeholder sessions. Upcoming sessions are: Mountainside Overlay District Sept. 30; bed & breakfasts Oct. 22; and alcohol licenses and food service Nov. 5.
- ➤ PEC is also following other important county land use issues, including a troubling U.S. Route 15 bypass around Lucketts (meeting Oct. 8) and falling groundwater levels.

#### **Madison**

➤ The Economic Development Committee, formed by the Board of Supervisors after a May 2024 study on creating Technology Zones, held a town hall in August to report its findings on data centers and economic development. After touring data centers in Northern Virginia and Harrisonburg and talking to Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, the committee concluded that attracting large data centers to Madison County was unlikely given infrastructure limitations, but left open the potential to attract "smaller" data centers. Several committee members and the majority of the public commenters at the town hall voiced preference for less-impactful economic development opportunities such as tourism.

### Orange

- Biosolids company Synagro is seeking a state permit to spread PFAS-contaminated biosolids on farmland in Orange County. PEC believes that Synagro's permit request should not proceed without a public hearing to fully consider the impact of PFAS — also known as "forever chemicals" — in biosolids and the risks to farmers, residents and the environment. We have requested a public hearing and urged residents to do the same. At press time, a public hearing has not been set.
- On Aug. 2, the long-awaited, newly-renovated Gordonsville community pool opened, just in time for residents to enjoy a respite from the summer heat. The pool opening is a major milestone in a 10-year effort to expand Gordonsville's town park. With assistance from community members and a grant from Virginia Outdoors Foundation, PEC secured funds to buy and donate two parcels that allowed the county to expand the community park by connecting Verling Park and Fireman's Fairgrounds, resulting in nearly 10 acres of outdoor event and recreation space in the heart of the community. The planning and development of the expanded park is ongoing.

### Rappahannock

> The Planning Commission is holding a series of outreach meetings as part of its review of the county's Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2020. The goal of the meetings is to hear from citizens about ideas for future updates of the plan, which must, by law, be reviewed every five years.

# **Out**&About

### **Birds and Breath**



PEC Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative Assistant Lauria McShane and Amber Ellis of Find Your Nature led a guided grassland meditation and morning of nature connection at Panorama Natural Burial. Attendees learned about the importance of grasslands as a habitat and had the chance to experience the beauty found within them. Photo by Lauria McShane

### **Native Meadow Walk at The Piedmont Memorial Overlook**



▲ PEC's October Greenfield and Linnea Sherman, with Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes staff, led a native meadow walk at the Piedmont Memorial Overlook during the meadow's peak bloom. Participants learned about plant identification, meadow restoration and invasive species management. Photo by Hugh Kenny

### Healthy Streets, Healthy People



▲ PEC Community Advocacy Manager Peter Krebs talks with community members about local trail projects — like the future Three Notched Trail that will connect Charlottesville to Shenandoah National Park — at the Healthy Streets, Healthy People event in Charlottesville. Photo by Hugh Kenny

### Picnic & Paddle at Montfair Resort Farm



At this summer event, we met our neighbors out in nature to share news of our landscapescale conservation project adjacent to the Shenandoah National Park, the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative, and our efforts to create more public access to the outdoors, such as at Free Bridge Lane and the Three Notched Trail. Photo by Hugh Kenny

# UPCOMING Events

### **PEC Virtual Auction**

**When** > Sept. 19 - 29

**Where** > www.pecva.org/auction

Bid on unique items, art, cultural and recreational experiences and more. All proceeds directly support our mission to protect the lands and waters of the Virginia Piedmont.

### **Loop de Ville Trail Fest**

**When** > Saturday, Sept. 27 (Rain date: Sunday, Oct. 5)

**Where** > Rivanna River Company, 1520 E. High St., Charlottesville

Loop de Ville Fest is a full day of

guided group hikes, walks, runs and bike rides on the Rivanna Trail. PEC will be leading a 3-mile all-abilities walk along the Rivanna River. Learn more and register at *loopdeville.org*.

### **Volunteer Opportunity:**

### **Community Farm Fall Volunteer Days**

> Tuesday & Thursday mornings and the occasional Saturday

Where > The Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows, 39990 Howsers Branch Rd.,

Visit *pecva.org/farm* to learn more and sign up!

### **Volunteer Opportunity: Plant Trees with Us**

**When** > October - November

Where > Rappahannock and Loudoun Counties, other locations TBD

For more information, contact PEC Plantings for the Piedmont Assistant Ellie Young at eyoung@pecva.org and keep an eye on *pecva.org/events* for more details.

### **Conservation Funding Workshop and Social**

**When** > Wednesday, Oct. 1

**Where** > Powers Brewery, 9269 Redemption Way, Midland

### **Birding Walk at Roundabout Meadows**

When > Saturday, Oct. 4, 8 - 10 AM

Where > Old Carolina Road Trail, Parking at Mt. Zion Historic Park: 40309 Little River Turnpike, Aldie

### **Community Farm Heirloom Corn Grinding**

When > Saturday, Oct. 25, 11 AM - 2 PM

**Where** > Burwell Morgan Mill. 15 Tannery Ln, Millwood, VA

### **Corpse Botany Walk**

When > Friday, Oct. 31

**Where** > The Piedmont Memorial Overlook, Paris, VA

# Why is Dominion trying to kill rooftop solar?

Continued from cover

So, at a time when:

- Virginia imports more energy than any other state;
- our electricity bills are predicted to double in the coming years;
- data center-driven demand has pushed our grid to the breaking point and is forcing new, enormously expensive infrastructure; and
- data centers are polluting our air with high-emission diesel generators...

... Dominion is now proposing regu-

latory changes to net metering that will make distributed generation economically unviable.

Also known as "net energy metering" or NEM, net metering is a billing arrangement where customers who produce more energy than they use receive credit for excess energy that is sent back to the grid. Net metering is how solar installations "pay for themselves" after a certain amount of time, and what makes solar financially accessible to homeowners and small businesses.

How it works: If you have a rooftop solar installation on your property, when the sun is shining, the energy your panels produce is directly powering your home. Any excess energy that cannot be used in that moment goes back into the greater grid, and you get full credit for each unit produced. That credit is automatically applied later, perhaps to your evening usage or in the winter months when there is less sun. Those credits are good for an entire year.

In May 2025, Dominion petitioned the State Corporation Commission to cut that credit value by nearly half and increase the calculation frequency. These changes will severely undercut the value and practicality of rooftop solar to its owner and critically hamper distributed generation at a time when we desperately need every last electron.

# PEC's support for distributed generation

PEC is committed to shaping and advancing Virginia's clean energy future, while also continuing to work hard to conserve and restore the Piedmont's lands and waters. To this end, we have commissioned a "value of solar" report that demonstrates the true value of solar to every Virginia citizen: how rooftop solar and other distributed generation support conservation values and reduce the impacts of transmission lines, new large-

scale generation, and other costs borne by ratepayers on their electricity bills. The report will factor in the range of benefits that utilities do not acknowledge when proposing their reductions in net metering values.

Once complete, the value of solar report will lay the foundation for PEC's intervention in Dominion's net metering case with the SCC, as well as future local and state policy that can advance distributed generation. We will join Sierra Club, Solar United Neighbors, Clean Virginia, and Vote Solar to argue that the state retain its current net metering rates.

But we need your help. Early in 2026, this case will provide a tremendous opportunity for you to get involved through public testimony and public comment. Our upcoming value of solar report and related communications will give you the tools to express your support for keeping net metering rates as they are.

Whether you already have solar or plan to get it, or are motivated by conserving natural resources and agricultural and forested lands, your unique voice can play a tremendous role. Stay tuned for more information later this year so you can join the fight and help us expand, rather than diminish, the role of distributed generation in Virginia's energy future.



A small agrivoltaics solar installation at PEC's Community Farm that is the first in Virginia to grow crops under panel. Photo by Hugh Kenny

# **Feeding the Piedmont**

Continued from cover

Christ Church Cares food pantry in Millwood is serving more families than ever. Food Pantry Coordinator Mary Parham says, "The number of households we serve has reached about 45 to 50 per week, with some picking up for other families who cannot make it to our location. We only expect this number to increase as federal and state responsibility for this population diminishes and resources are made less available."

Anne Cushman at FISH of Berryville expects similar increases in need. "As we navigate through the new rules and regulations, FISH is asking local organizations and individuals to partner with us to better serve our clients," says Cushman. "Much like our partnership with PEC, whether it's fresh food or clothing or financial donations, every bit helps to make a big difference in the lives of our friends and neighbors in Clarke County."

Over the past three years, the team at PEC's Community Farm has pushed to take our food production and outreach to the next level. We grew and donated over 50,000 pounds of fresh produce in 2024, a tenfold increase from the farm's first season in 2019, and are working to sustainably increase production year over year. At the same time, we have engaged a record number of volunteers and built partnerships with educational institutions, nonprofits, corporations and community leaders to increase the reach of our mission. When we involve more of

our community members in the work of hunger relief, we empower each other to build stronger, more sustainable food systems and protect our vital agricultural resources.

# Holding onto valuable farmland

Local farms do more than supply fresh produce, meat and dairy to food banks. They also form the backbone of a resilient local food system that can withstand the increasing pressures of development and climate change. Virginia loses thousands of acres of farmland every year. As changing climate conditions — with more and longer drought periods and more intense rain events — threaten the viability of agriculture in other regions across the U.S., strong, abundant local farms in the Virginia Piedmont will be increasingly critical to feeding us all.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of our food systems, and disruptions to the global supply chain increased demand for local food, animal processors and food pantries. Many food-insecure people rely on large institutions like schools for meals, and when these closed during the pandemic, PEC rallied to connect local meat, dairy and egg producers with our local food banks to meet the increased need.

We learned that we cannot, and should not, rely on just a few globallyscaled producers for food security in our



Community Farm volunteers harvest thousands of pounds of cabbage for donation to local hunger relief organizations. Photo by Catherine Fisher

communities. After the challenges of the pandemic years, PEC has doubled down on supporting a sustainable and resilient local food system, seeding possibilities for a continued robust farming economy. Since our beginnings, we've partnered with landowners to protect agricultural lands from future development with conservation easements. More recently, we've ramped up efforts to leverage a federal Agricultural Land Easement program designed specifically to conserve and keep working agricultural lands in production. We champion soil health through the Community Farm, run the Gilbert's Corner Farmers Market where local farmers sell their goods, con-

nect farmers with cost-share programs to support sustainable land management practices, and promote local food through our biennial *Buy Fresh Buy Local* guides.

The fact is: food is an intersection for the majority of PEC's work, as the agricultural economy is the cornerstone of rural viability and environmental stewardship. Whether you volunteer with us on the farm, support conservation, buy local, donate to a food pantry, or advocate for hunger relief, we invite you to join us to build food security and fight hunger in Virginia, nationally and beyond.

# Dear Friends,

t our Annual Gathering at Eldon Farms in Rapphannock County this summer, we could look through the passing rain storms across hundreds of thousands of acres of verdant green carpet rolling down the Hazel River toward the Chesapeake Bay. The event was a tremendous reminder of the collective impact of individual decisions and actions, and a chance to celebrate huge progress toward ongoing protection of the Rappahannock watershed and a large part of the globally significant Appalachian region.

PEC, and each of you across our region, are all part of the continuous momentum for conservation. Wherever I travel, whether in the United States or overseas, I am reminded of the amazing collective effort we are engaged in and its importance as a model for community-based solutions.

And at the same time, we are confronted by the challenge of continuous forces of change. The Virginia Piedmont is at the physical epicenter of the global shift toward generative artificial intelligence and an explosion of data center development threatening our natural resources and conservation values.

PEC has been sounding a clarion call for the last several years, informing and educating a community of people kept in the dark as data center developers, utility companies and some local leaders negotiate behind closed doors and nondisclosure agreements. We've been driving a steady stream of policy recommendations that would bring transparency to the impacts of this growing industry, each year building on the momentum of the previous one. We speak at public hearings and serve as the single and consistently reliable source for details and information about data center proposals at the local level.

And recently, we launched Virginians for a Smarter Digital Future, an ambitious campaign that provides a much-needed counterweight to the skewed approach data center developers are using to overload residents and elected leaders with loud claims of speculative benefits of data centers while conveniently leaving out the details about how data centers deplete water resources, degrade air quality, mar the landscape, put our energy grid on the brink of collapse, and force every Virginian to subsidize the wealthiest companies in the world.

Our perseverance is paying off.

Our calls to mitigate the impacts of the highest concentration of data centers in the world are rippling outward and inspiring communities across the country. We find ourselves repeatedly sought after by national and international media outlets as headlines across the world speak to troubling impacts of the data center industry on our energy systems, water resources, and, especially, people struggling to scrape by in an everchallenging economy. We've mobilized more than 1,300 people to write to the State Corporation Commission calling for a new rate structure that unburdens the people of Virginia from the energy costs of data centers and the profits to be gleaned by Dominion Energy and data center developers from the energy buildout. Other states, hearing our messages, are passing laws that will temper the negative effects of data centers and protect

I'm proud that PEC is leading the vanguard when it comes to calling attention to the repercussions of hyperscale data centers and demanding better from the richest companies in the world. Our work has never been more relevant than it is in this moment: when the pressure of data centers and all of their electrical infrastructure threatens both our past conservation victories and our future conservation efforts; when the federal government is stripping away support for clean energy and protections for public lands while also proposing energy infrastructure on working



Eldon Farms with Shenandoah National Park in the distance. Photo by Hugh Kenny

farm and forest lands; and when neighborhoods are threatened with looming data center buildings, towering transmission lines and risks to water supplies and air quality.

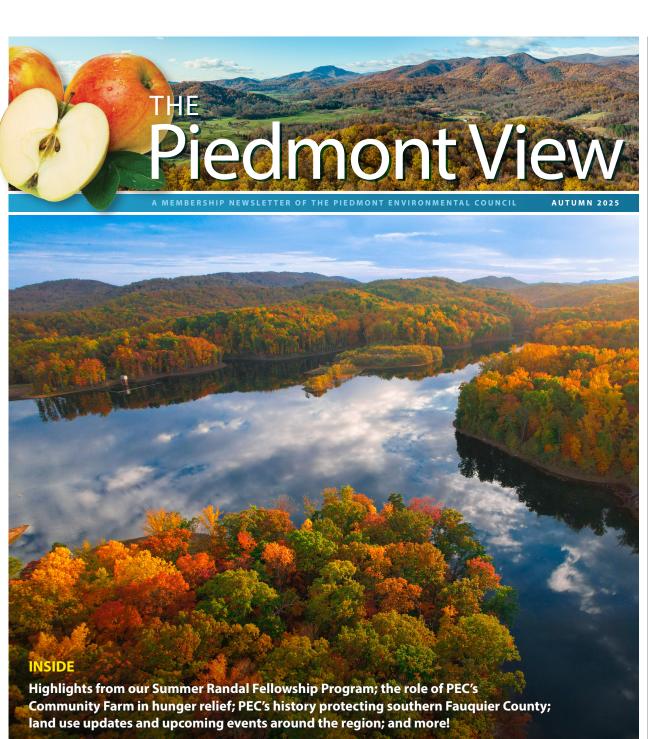
This progress is only possible with a community behind us, and our work is enabling Virginians across the commonwealth to more effectively engage local, state and national decision makers. Thanks to the support of members like you, our research, communications and direct actions are helping communities in the Piedmont and beyond stand up, make their voices heard, and balance the opportunity for transformational economic development with the sustainability of our most treasured places. Together, we can build momentum and reach a point where the investment in data centers and

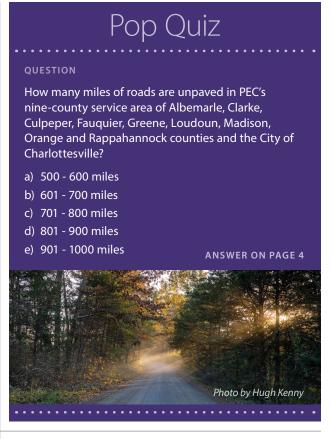
energy comes with an even more significant investment in community and conservation.

Sincerely

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