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Platinum Transparency 2025
Candid.

The PEC Leadership Felt ‘Round the World

By Cindy Sabato, Co-Director, Communications and Outreach

Finally, the world is hearing the alarm that The Piedmont Environmental Council has been sounding for years: that the unconstrained and unregulated explosion of the data center industry is forever changing the face of not only Virginia, but communities around the world.

Thanks to standard PEC persistence — made possible by the generosity of our supporters — the impacts of data centers and their associated energy needs are now kitchen table conversations everywhere. People, and the media, are finally talking about the threat of brown-outs; about electricity bills doubling or tripling; about increased noise and air pollution; and about communities becoming industrialized dystopias with gigantic warehouse structures linked by miles of transmission lines strung on 200-foot towers.

It hasn’t always been easy, but PEC has been able to lead the way because we saw what lay on the horizon more than a decade ago.

PEC Saw What No One Else Could

“Because we have a very specific focus, and staff working directly on land use planning within a nine-county service area, we were aware of [the impacts of]

data centers probably earlier than most people. But until about 2016, data centers were small, generally inside other buildings, confined to planned industrial and commercial areas, revenue positive, and their apparent environmental impacts were manageable,” said PEC President Chris Miller.

The first signs of trouble came in Loudoun County during the period from 2013 to 2018. Despite extended fights with a lot of community pushback, the county approved a natural gas peaker plant and then a significantly larger, new form of data center, both right next to the Goose Creek Reservoir. “This is when we learned that a component of large-scale data centers was backup generation with some 50,000 gallons or more of diesel fuel stored on site, in this case, next to the drinking water supply. That’s insane,” Miller said.

“And we were saying, ‘Hey, wait a minute. If data centers are moving out of industrial-zoned areas and demanding extra electricity, local governments need to analyze and prepare for the possibility of new power plants, transmission lines, and substations.’ We realized then that this is getting out from under reasonable oversight,” said Miller.



Our 2023 press conference announcing the launch of the statewide Data Center Reform Coalition and the Four Pillars of Data Center Reform. Photo by Hugh Kenny

The Challenges of Explosive Growth, Temptation and Secrecy

Seemingly overnight, artificial intelligence and crypto-mining became global obsessions, and the nature of data centers rapidly changed, growing from single buildings to campuses of dozens of buildings across thousands of acres. Each building has gone from 30,000 square feet to ten times that size. The energy each data center campus needs has increased from 15 megawatts to 300 megawatts, enough to power 300,000 - 900,000 homes. Virginia

now has 660 data centers, and Dominion Energy forecasts their peak energy load in 2045 will be more than 50 *gigawatts* — as much as the entire nation of the United Kingdom.

Providing all that power is going to take thousands of miles of new transmission lines, hundreds of new substations, and many massive new power plants along with hundreds of thousands of acres of solar. The cost of that buildout — \$90 billion to \$270 billion — will be spread across every Virginian who pays an electric bill,

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Wild & Connected: Shenandoah Borderlands property conserved

By Jessica Edington, Publications Assistant

A family retreat

Nestled on the eastern slope of Saddleback Mountain, a small cottage in the woods has been a family retreat for sisters Gayle and Cathy Soloe for decades, since their father first purchased the 89-acre parcel adjacent to Shenandoah

National Park in 1958. From the front deck, they enjoy watching the sunrise over the town of Standardsville and the rolling hills of Greene County.

“Being here and looking out at the horizon has a way of resetting your perspective and restoring calm,” says Cathy. “This

place has had a profound effect on the lives of all my children, who have had the privilege to grow up coming here where so much wildlife, from bobcats and bears, to walking sticks, to tadpoles and red efts, have taught them to appreciate the delicate balance of all living things and our duty to protect as much as we can.”

The Piedmont Environmental Council helped Cathy and Gayle place the Greene County property under a conservation easement in September, forever protecting the forestland they love.

Cathy says the impact of this “outdoor classroom” inspired her to become a biology teacher and environmental educator and

that her daughter has “followed the same path all the way to the AMNH (American Museum of Natural History) in New York.”

Gayle shares her sister’s fondness for their family refuge. “For much of my adult life, there has been a dog in the back seat of my car, and as soon as we leave the paved road and start the climb up the road, they have the purest excitement of being somewhere they can be free to run and dig and splash in puddles and streams and enjoy being themselves. I like to think that our property has the same pure effect on humans. It does for me,” she said.

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The Soloe sisters’ cottage is surrounded by forestland adjacent to Shenandoah National Park. Photo by Hugh Kenny

AC44 adopted: PEC’s engagement secures smarter land use planning in Albemarle

By Faith Schweikert, Communications Specialist

After four years of diligent work — including countless hours of community meetings, pop-ups, work sessions, surveys and public hearings — the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors adopted the newly-updated Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan, which will serve as a guide for future development in the county through 2044 (hence the nickname “AC44”). The Piedmont Environmental Council has been involved every step of the way to ensure the plan maintains foundational policies that protect people and the environment.

The Code of Virginia requires that every locality have a comprehensive plan and review it every five years. A comprehensive plan is a community’s most important guiding document for land use, growth, development, transportation and resource utilization. It serves as a blueprint and includes specific actions that can drastically impact the look, feel and function of a community. Those actions could include things like adding a bicycle lane to a specific roadway, providing guidelines for affordable housing, or recognizing the benefits of conservation.

Throughout our 50+ year history, PEC has weighed in on comprehensive plan updates across our nine-county service area, an approach that has been foundational to our success conserving and restoring the lands and waters of the Virginia Piedmont. Dedicating our staff resources and decades of expertise to local planning helps us build stronger, more sustainable communities.

A Comprehensive Vision

From the beginning, Albemarle County decided the entire update would be completed through the lenses of climate change and equity. Rob McGinnis, PEC’s lead land use advocate during the AC44 process, said many localities include policies to address droughts, flooding or local biodiversity stressors, but it’s rare to address the topic of climate change head-on.

PEC worked hard to ensure that climate-informed goals were woven throughout AC44, rather than siloed into only one section or chapter, as is often the case in comprehensive planning.

“The plan has infused within it a

tremendous amount of climate change-related policy that addresses the overarching drivers of these impacts, not just the first layer,” McGinnis said.

Given that climate action lens approach, PEC staff developed a Climate Action Platform for Albemarle to inform our advocacy and further outlined our vision for the county:

“PEC envisions an Albemarle County with the majority of its rural lands permanently protected, with intact natural and cultural landscapes, healthy waters, and working farms and forests. The County’s urban areas are vibrant, mixed-use, and walkable, with everyday access to open space, parkland, and recreational opportunities. Equity and climate action are north stars in planning and zoning decisions, and everyone has a chance to help determine the County’s future.”

To meet the challenges of AC44, PEC dedicated significant resources to engagement, including new staff in Albemarle County who worked closely with community members, partner organizations and local government to amplify this vision and advocate for language in AC44 that would support it. We contributed comments and suggestions at public meetings, kept citizens informed about what proposed changes could mean for their community, and worked to ensure the comprehensive plan update did not eliminate or alter policies that PEC has long supported and worked hard to maintain.

A Different Kind of County

Originally established to protect water resources — including drinking water — Albemarle County’s “Rural Area” comprises 95% of the land in the county, while the more urban and suburban “Development Areas” make up the remaining 5%. Maintaining a designated Rural Area distinct from designated Development Areas allows Albemarle County to not only protect clean water supplies, but also to contain around its urban center much of the residential sprawl that threatens to encroach on natural resources and rural communities, and to create walkable, connected communities by encouraging



U.S. Route 29 North runs through Place 29, a designated Development Area in Albemarle County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

density where services already exist. This is why PEC pushed for the county’s long-term Growth Management Policy in AC44 to remain substantially intact.

The past 45 years have brought many calls to expand the Development Area boundaries to accommodate new growth in the county rather than directing that growth into the existing Development Area boundaries. During the AC44 update, PEC staff spent significant time and energy opposing multiple land use policy proposals that would have extended development into the Rural Area.

“The big contradiction was the county stating it was not going to expand development into the Rural Areas, but adding these new tools that appear to contradict all that,” McGinnis said. PEC’s AC44 team was extremely concerned with this fundamental contradiction: on one hand the county was retaining its long-held Growth Management Policy, and on the other hand proposing multiple policies that opened the door to sprawl extending into the Rural Area.

One of PEC’s major successes was the plan’s renewed focus on the value of the Rural Area and land conservation after we repeatedly emphasized the benefits to all residents. These benefits include:

- improving climate resiliency by retaining forest and farmland that sequester carbon and mitigate the impacts of major flood events;
- ensuring ample, clean water resources for drinking, recreation and habitat;
- protecting public health and minimizing climate impacts from vehicle congestion and emissions associated with sprawl;
- enhancing biodiversity conservation;
- strengthening our local economy through local farm and forest products and tourism that relies on scenic and historic viewsheds;
- reducing cost to the county by minimizing the demand for infrastructure and services in the Rural Area.

To ensure the Rural Area received the planning attention it deserves, PEC staff advocated alongside community members in rural Albemarle that AC44 include a distinct and standalone Rural Area chapter, as well as a strong recommendation for the preparation of a future Rural Area Land Use Plan, which would give community members the chance to weigh in on a plan just for the Rural Area. Thanks to this advocacy, AC44 included both.

Language Matters

Even with all the community engagement and review, comprehensive plans are subject to interpretation, with all future land use decisions weighed against the comprehensive plan’s wording.

For this update, Albemarle County wanted to create a more succinct comprehensive plan, so every word in the document — including the level of clarity and specificity — mattered.

“When new draft language was released, I’d look at all the policy statements and all the goals and objectives and actions, and I’d look at it imagining sometime in the future that we would get a project,” McGinnis said. “What language would I be able to use to advocate for a good project or to advocate against a bad project? And is it in there? And for the most part, now, it is.”

In the end, Albemarle County now has a solid comprehensive plan that PEC feels good about using as a guide going forward. AC44 includes support for conservation and smart growth, more robust planning for the Rural Area, a largely intact Growth Management Policy, and more policies to make our communities stronger and more sustainable.

As PEC looks to the future in Albemarle County, we will remain focused on the wider implications of economic development for land use, smart growth planning, transportation, infrastructure, affordable housing, climate change, natural resources and quality of life in our community.

So now it’s back to work, ensuring that all the successes of AC44 continue in the right direction.



Albemarle County designated the Rural Area in 1980 in part to protect water resources. Pictured here, Beaver Creek Reservoir provides drinking water to the community of Crozet, a designated Development Area. Photo by Cassidy Girvin

The deeply involved work PEC has done in partnership with Albemarle County is the same work we do toward strong comprehensive plans in all our nine counties. Generous contributions from our supporters make it possible for us to have on-the-ground staff members paying attention to the details in each county and informing and engaging community members who speak out and drive positive outcomes.

Why I Give

Thanks to supporters like you, PEC is able to carry out the holistic mix of conservation, land use planning and advocacy for which we are known.

“We give to PEC because we believe that supporting their work is the best way to give back to Rappahannock and the surrounding Piedmont region that we love. They are peerless in the breadth and depth of their strategic and onsite work protecting and advocating for land, waterways, and communities — and preserving iconic viewsheds for our children, grandchildren and for generations beyond. PEC not only inspires, but gives us confidence that the Piedmont’s natural beauty and resources will endure. We are honored to play a part in that story.”

— John and Sally Mott Freeman, Sperryville



“I live in New York City and have close family in Haymarket. In the early 1990s, the plan for a Disney theme park just six miles from our farm was a genuinely terrifying prospect. We joined the protest efforts with PEC, and we have been supporters ever since.

Now we are grateful for PEC’s ownership of Gilbert’s Corner and the Community Farm.

I greatly admire the PEC staff for their dedication and effectiveness, and I make it a point to attend their programs whenever I can; the Eldon Farm event in June, for instance, was truly unforgettable. Everything PEC stands for makes sense to me.”

— Barbara Chacour, New York



Please consider making a year-end gift to PEC. Your support ensures that we can have the greatest impact on the region’s most pressing issues. Visit pecva.org/donate for instructions on secure, online donations, gifts of stock and other options. You can also send a check, made out to PEC, to P.O. Box 460, Warrenton VA, 20188, or make a gift over the phone by calling Kendra Atkins at (540) 347-2334 ext. 7005. Thank you, and happy holidays!

Why I Volunteer

Every year, hundreds of local residents volunteer with The Piedmont Environmental Council in many ways — from pitching in at our Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows to planting trees that improve the health of local streams and drinking water to supporting PEC’s events. Every volunteer plays a critical role in amplifying PEC’s impact and making the Piedmont a great place to live today and for future generations.

“Volunteering at the farm has become one of the best parts of my week. It’s a great way to step away from the usual routine, being outside in different kinds of weather and getting a little mud on my knees and dirt under my nails. Each day brings a new lesson, from how to plant properly to when a vegetable is perfectly ready to harvest. I love watching how quickly the farm landscape changes from week to week. It feels like a small miracle unfolding as I watch tiny seedlings grow into full, thriving crops through the spring and summer. Knowing that everything goes to local families in need makes it feel truly meaningful. And the people here are so inviting and fantastic. We share great conversations about gardening, cooking, travel, sports, and more while we work, and sometimes it’s just nice to enjoy the quiet and calm of the farm. Another great part is that I did not need any farming experience to join, just a willingness to pitch in, learn, and have fun outdoors. It’s such a fulfilling way to connect with others and give back to the community.”

— Aaron Mazzatenta, Ashburn



“I’ve enjoyed volunteering at the PEC Community Farm for the past two years. Volunteering at the farm is all about connections: to the land, our food and all the people in our community. It gives me such a sense of purpose planting seedlings in the ground, caring for them as they grow, harvesting and ultimately knowing that they will go to the people that will benefit the most from access to locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.”

— Tammy Mullin-Katz, Middleburg



We’re so grateful to Aaron and Tammy and all the many volunteers who truly make it a *Community Farm*. Volunteers are critical to PEC programs. We hope you’ll consider becoming a volunteer today! Visit pecva.org/volunteer or reach out to volunteer@pecva.org to learn more, or call Lea Justice, PEC Volunteer Programs Coordinator, at (540) 347-2334 ext. 7027.

The friendliest type of energy generation:

A conversation on agrivoltaics

By Jessica Edington, Publications Assistant

This fall, The Piedmont Environmental Council cut the ribbon on our new agrivoltaics project at the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows, a 42-panel installation that now generates 100% of the energy needed for the farm’s operations. The project, the first of its kind in Virginia, has rows of vegetables planted between the panels and serves as a demonstration project to study and show how the dual-use of land for both agriculture and energy generation can help meet clean energy goals while keeping land in farming.

PEC advocates for clean energy solutions that respect and preserve the region’s natural resources and rural economy. This project is meant to demonstrate energy independence for farmers and how smaller-scale distributed generation and battery storage can be a much larger part of Virginia’s clean energy system, all without sacrificing working farmland. The design is engineered for easy adoption by other farmers, and the raised beds make the project equally relevant to urban settings, parking lots, rooftops and other built environments.

PEC’s Senior Energy & Climate Advisor Ashish Kapoor and Community Farm Manager Teddy Pitsiokos sat down to tell us more about this groundbreaking project that has the potential to revolutionize the conversation around solar and agriculture.



Community Farm Manager Teddy Pitsiokos harvests the first crop of turnips from under the solar panels at PEC’s Community Farm. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Jessica: How did the idea for this project originate?

Ashish: PEC’s headquarters in Warrenton has solar panels on it, and we’re one of the facilitators of the Solarize Piedmont program, so this is part of a distributed generation journey PEC has been on. The project was born out of conversations about different scales of solar and the conflict thus far between prime agricultural lands and solar generation and wanting to move toward solutions. Agrivoltaics is one way to do both things on the same land. And that hopefully can recalibrate some of these conversations.

Jessica: What are some of the lessons you have already learned from the planning, permitting and installation process?

Teddy: One of the biggest things we’ve learned is the importance of having farmers working on the project from the outset versus just pasting agriculture onto existing solar sites. What makes it agrivoltaics is the collaboration between energy and agriculture experts and the design being farm-forward.

Ashish: On the permitting side, one of the hurdles we grappled with was local zoning that wasn’t written with projects like this in mind. On the installation side, we hit bedrock and had extra cost to dig through that. We also had to pay for transformer upgrades, which may be pretty common for a lot of rural users. All of these things can make a project like this feel more challenging for an individual. So we want to find out how we can lower those barriers and costs for other folks that are looking to do agrivoltaics.

Jessica: What are you hoping to learn from this project?

Teddy: In addition to documenting the process and measuring the energy and crop output, we will be testing the soil for PFAS and heavy metals. We’ll also make and share our plans to recycle the panels and responsibly decommission the project at the end of its life cycle.

Ashish: We want to know how we can make these sorts of agrivoltaics projects easier to do. What works in this region would be different in the western U.S., or maybe even a different part of Virginia. I want to shout out the National Renewable Energy Lab, which helped us with the original technical assistance grant in the early stages of this project through the Clean Energy to Communities Program.

Jessica: What impact do you hope that this demonstration project will have on the tension that sometimes exists between agriculture and solar?

Teddy: Personally, I’m hopeful that having farmers involved in these processes will help create smarter, more profitable and more sustainable land practices.

Ashish: I hope this project helps show that we’re all on the same team here. There are no inherent sides to renewable energy. Everyone likes the idea of generating energy from your own land, using it to charge a back-up a battery and having energy independence while keeping the land in agriculture. Preserving prime agricultural land, creating energy independence and adding more renewable energy to the grid don’t have to exist in direct conflict with one another.



In October, PEC supporters, board members and staff — including Ashish and Teddy — gathered to cut the ribbon on the agrivoltaics installation at the Community Farm. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Jessica: What potential does agrivoltaics have to help farmers?

Teddy: The biggest thing is land conservation and keeping land in farming. And then there is energy savings, energy independence and potential income streams. That’s what we’re talking about when a farmer says, “What is this going to do for me?”

Ashish: As utility bills continue to go up, primarily due to costs associated with escalating data center demand, farmers with agrivoltaics projects will be more insulated from that — saving more and more money as time goes on. The pure savings over time is one huge boon. Add battery backup, and a farmer can run their farm operations if the power goes down. The energy transition doesn’t need to be a threat to the farming way of life.

Jessica: What role can agrivoltaics play in land conservation?

Ashish: From a solar developer’s perspective, the cheapest way to build solar, and the best place to build solar, is on prime agricultural land... which creates development pressure on farmland. And the more energy we need because of data centers, the more farmland will be lost to solar. So the more we can build solar on rooftops, on parking lots and through agrivoltaics, the lighter the development pressure on prime agricultural land.

Teddy: I think it’s important to take the expansion of solar energy projects as a given. These projects are coming either way, and we have to do something to keep this farm actually farming. Agrivoltaics is one way we do that.

Jessica: How do you see agrivoltaics fitting into Virginia’s clean energy future?

Ashish: If we put a small 1-megawatt project on each of Virginia’s 39,000 farms, that would generate 39 gigawatts of energy. That’s more than the current peak load in Dominion territory. Even getting a fraction of that potential is significant. Other states like Massachusetts and New Jersey have already added significant gigawatts of energy to the grid through smaller scale solar that was boosted by smart policy. The smaller projects can get online a lot faster, too.

When we add batteries into the mix, like we have on this PEC project, things get even more exciting. Not only does that give farmers energy independence for their operations, but with “virtual power plant” arrangements where they can sell some energy from their battery back to the grid — a little bit from this farm, a little bit from that home, a little bit from this business — collectively, you can create a whole ton of energy when the grid needs it most. So, we don’t have to build that \$1 billion gas peaker plant that

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A conversation on agrivoltaics

Continued from page 4

we all pay for through increases in our electric bills. Instead, farmers, businesses and homeowners get a solid bill credit for their energy contribution.

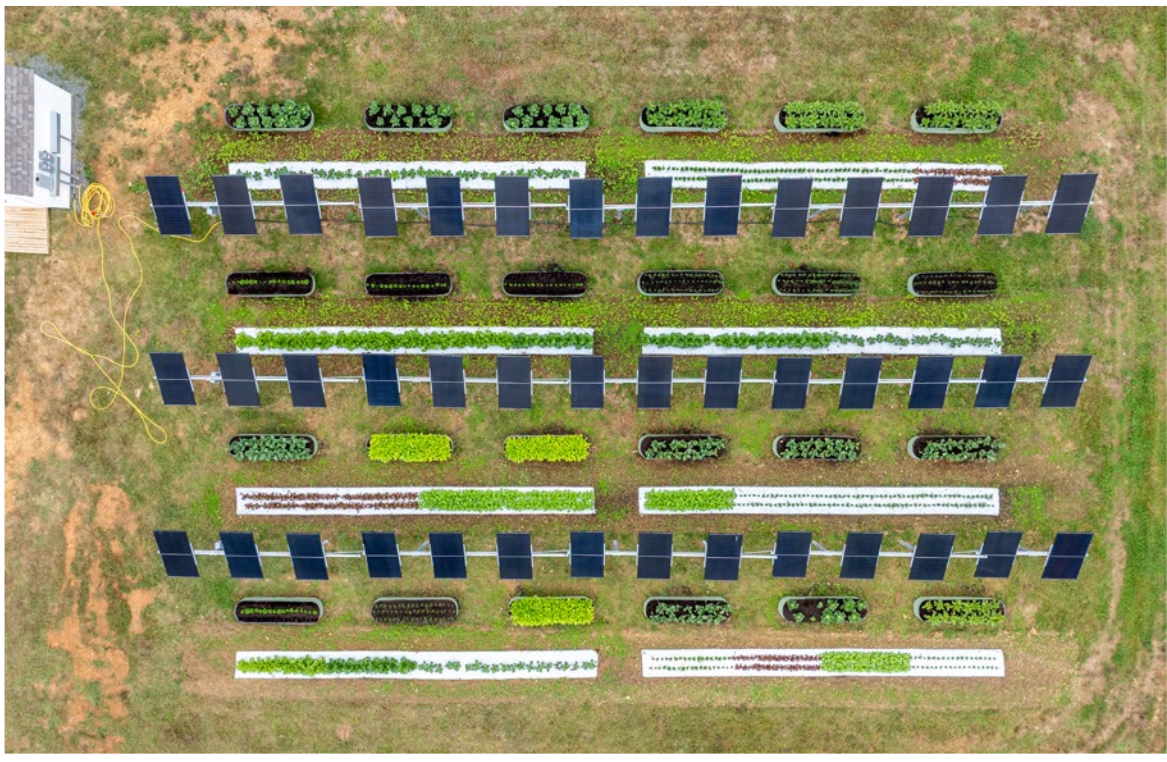
Jessica: How do you think policy could better support agrivoltaics?

Ashish: At the local level, making permitting and connection easier will remove some hurdles for projects like this. Boards of supervisors have already reached out and said, “This is interesting. How can we make this easier? How can we make sure that we’re not restricting these types of projects in future comprehensive plans or ordinance drafting?”

At the state level, protecting net metering, which pays full retail rate to small scale solar producers, is one of the core ways to incentivize agrivoltaics. Dominion is trying to cut net metering because it’s not as profitable for them, and that would knee-cap the value of all distributed generation, including rooftop solar and small-scale agrivoltaics. We need to rally and say, “OK, everybody agrees on the value of distributed generation. It conserves resources. It connects clean energy to the grid quickly and helps move along our journey in the Virginia Clean Economy Act. We should commit more resources to this type of generation.”



Senior Energy & Climate Advisor Ashish Kapoor addresses the audience at the official ribbon-cutting ceremony for PEC’s agrivoltaics project in October.



PEC’s crop-based agrivoltaics installation, the first of its kind in Virginia, serves as both a proof-of-concept and a demonstration project. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Jessica: What has surprised or excited you most about this project so far?

Teddy: Because I’m a farmer, I’m always surprised that some people feel uncomfortable on a farm. But for me, being around solar panels can feel unfamiliar or a little bit alien in a way. And if you think about a power plant, it’s not a friendly place: it conjures images of smoke stacks and pollution. Out at our agrivoltaics installation on the farm, it feels a lot friendlier to be in there with the plants around you. It’s the friendliest type of energy generation. So no matter which world you come from, agriculture or clean energy, you can come into this space and feel safe. There’s something familiar, but there’s also something new and cool to learn.

Ashish: What both surprises and excites me is that so far, I have found agricultural producers and farmers to be more excited about this project than large scale

solar developers. That shows me that we’re really onto something that’s benefiting farmers and something that hasn’t been part of the conversation yet. It’s shown me that this tension is not really about renewable energy, it’s more about land use, land impacts, livelihoods and ways of life.

Jessica: What do you hope will be the ultimate outcome of this project?

Ashish: I think it can help reframe the conversation around the energy transition. And I think that conversation is in need of a reset. The transition has oftentimes been very prescriptive, and I hope this project will change people’s perceptions of what renewable energy can do for them.

Teddy: I hope that people make more of these agrivoltaics projects. I hope they learn from us and do it cheaper, and I hope it can make them money and keep their land in farming.

As part of our strategic plan, PEC is committed to using our own properties as a showcase for sustainable land management practices, facilitating public access, inspiring conservation solutions and demonstrating our vision, values and practices. Like many of these efforts, the agrivoltaics project at our Community Farm is made possible only through grants and generous private contributions.

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 73 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 easily be 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. See pecva.org for stock gift instructions.



Photo by Hugh Kenny

2025 Photo Contest Winners

“Here at PEC, we strive to connect people to the landscapes and communities of Virginia’s Piedmont. The stunning images that photographers submit to this contest each year help us illustrate the need for and value of conserving the land and waters of this special region” said Hugh Kenny, PEC multimedia communications specialist and contest coordinator.

Thanks to the 115 professional and amateur photographers who submitted more than 650 images of the beautiful Virginia Piedmont, from within Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock counties and the City of Charlottesville.

By public vote, the winners of PEC’s 2025 Annual Photo contest are:



▲ BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES

“Morning Fog and Aurora” • Dawn over rural Greene County with the northern lights showing over the Blue Ridge. By **Peter Forister**, of Earlysville in Albemarle County



▲ WONDERFUL WILDLIFE

“Surprise Visitors” • A pair of sandhill cranes passing in front of a full moon in Loudoun County. By **Shawn Thomas**, of Ashburn in Loudoun County



▲ NATIVE PLANTS AND FUNGI

“Native Garden through a Raindrop” • A native garden seen through the lens of a rain drop in Ashburn, Loudoun County. By **Jim Emery**, of Ashburn in Loudoun County



▲ YOUTH CATEGORY

“Virginia Native” • A pipevine swallowtail butterfly stretches its wings near the Golden Horseshoe Inn in Greene County. By **Corrine Ice**, of Ruckersville in Greene County

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

Can you identify this native plant by its leaves?

ANSWER

b) Poison Ivy

Arguably one of the most important plants to be able to identify, poison ivy changes its appearance seasonally, and can be easy to mistake for other more innocuous foliage if you’re not careful. Look out for red leaves in the spring; shiny green leaves in the summer; orange, yellow and red leaves in the fall; and leafless, hairy vines in the winter. In any season, contact with the plant can expose you to urushiol, the oily sap that causes allergic reactions and rashes for many people. When in doubt, remember the old adage: “Leaves of three, let it be!”

A “hairy” poison ivy vine on a tree; often the best way to identify the plant in the winter. Photo by Tom Potterfield, Flickr



On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

- After working on an update for four years, the Board of Supervisors adopted the new **Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan (AC44)** in October. *Read more about PEC's extensive involvement in AC44 in our story on Page 2 of this issue.*
- Albemarle County paused its **Data Center Ordinance update**, saying that “staff has researched potential regulations to address the environmental impacts of the data centers, but could not create one standard set of requirements that would address every by-right application.” PEC continues to track this ordinance and advocate that all proposed data centers larger than 40,000 square feet go through a Special Use Permit process, which allows for public input on possible adverse impacts from energy-, water- and land-intensive infrastructure development.
- A long-awaited **pedestrian bridge** has been completed over U.S. Route 29 near Hydraulic Road. This bridge links major commercial and residential areas on both sides of the arterial route that has been the site of numerous collisions and a recent pedestrian fatality.
- Planning continues for the **Three Notched Trail**, a future walk/bike connection between Charlottesville, the Afton Tunnel and beyond. A Dec. 4 public meeting unveiled various potential trail routes, and maps will be available online (engage.albemarle.org) for review and feedback until Jan. 31.
- For the past three years, PEC monitored three potential **major transmission line proposals** running through Albemarle, including a wreck-and-rebuild of the existing 230-kilovolt lines running from Gordonsville just northeast of Albemarle through the county and Charlottesville and across the Blue Ridge Mountains to Doods in Augusta County. Our focus is on identifying the impacts these lines will have to communities and natural resources, and advocating to avoid, minimize and mitigate adverse impacts.

Clarke

- In October, PEC partnered with Clarke County Public Schools and the Powhatan School to host the **17th Annual Conservation Day**. This event invites all fourth graders in Clarke County to a day of outdoor learning focused on conservation, wildlife habitat, ecosystems and the natural world. This year, PEC presented a station on local food production.
- County staff have presented the newly drafted **Rural Lands Plan** to the planning commission's comprehensive plan subcommittee and it is expected to come to the Planning Commission in the next few months. PEC will be offering input on the draft.
- PEC has held one virtual meeting so far for concerned stakeholders and residents about a forthcoming proposal for a **resort on Blue Ridge Mountain Road** near the intersection with U.S. Route 50. While the property touches Loudoun, Clarke and Fauquier counties, the application will be filed in Loudoun. PEC will continue to work with community partners to support the residents of all three counties through the public input process for this highly impactful development.

Culpeper

- In September, the Culpeper County Board of Supervisors adopted a **zoning amendment requiring a conditional use permit for all data centers** outside its Technology Zone incentive area. While this move will not impact any of the previously approved facilities, it will prevent any new facilities from developing without public input and board approval. PEC strongly supported this decision and has encouraged the board to consider creating a full data center ordinance.
- In October, the Town of Culpeper passed the **Unified Draft Ordinance**, effectively overhauling its code of ordinances. This document included language restricting data center development to the areas where data centers have already been approved.
- Culpeper's exploding electrical demand, driven by data center development here, has necessitated **the expansion of existing transmission line right of ways and the construction of four new substations** on the east side of town. The State Corporation Commission held a hearing in October for this project, which Dominion calls the “Culpeper Tech Zone” after the data center tax incentive area it will serve. Members of the community have raised concerns about the project's impact on the Town of Culpeper and the allocation of the cost of the upgrades that will primarily only serve new data centers.
- The Town of Culpeper is beginning to work on a **Comprehensive Plan Update**. Virginia law requires that local governments review their comprehensive plan every five years and update if needed to reflect changes in the community. PEC will work to keep the public informed about ways they can contribute to this important guiding document in the coming year!

Fauquier

- For the first time in Fauquier County history, the Planning Commission recommended **denial of a Dominion Energy substation expansion**, which is a required component of the Morrisville to Wishing Star transmission line project. Dominion has now withdrawn its application, and PEC staff continue to track for updates.
- In another first for the county, the **Remington Tech Park data center** developer has applied for an onsite power production permit. Construction is about to begin on Remington Tech Park's first building, and the second is being planned. The developer has filed a rezoning application for a gas turbine power production plant while it awaits power provision by Dominion Energy. PEC is very concerned about this new application, given the air quality impacts of burning fossil fuels and the potential for this project to set a bad precedent.
- The Planning Commission recommended denial of **Eastpoint Energy's Summersweet Battery Energy Storage System** in September. The applicant appealed the decision in November and, in agreement with the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors determined the project failed to comply with the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Gigaland data center** developers withdrew their application in August, prior to a public hearing by the Board of Supervisors. They plan to begin the application process anew in January 2026. PEC awaits details of the scaled-down project design.

- The Town of Remington has begun an extensive project to re-write its 1996 **Comprehensive Plan**. After review and data collection into early 2026, the updated plan will be open for public input, with an intended release in early 2027. PEC is attending meetings of the Comprehensive Plan Committee and contributing to the process.
- Though PEC and many others opposed the Virginia Department of Transportation's plan to replace the **Interstate 66 bridge over Broad Run** with a significantly widened structure that could impact the adjacent Chapman-Beverly Mill, VDOT decided in October to proceed with its original plan over proposed alternatives. PEC and our partners are considering our options for further action.

Greene

- The Board of Supervisors passed a resolution approving a reduced size for both the **White Run Reservoir and the proposed water treatment plant**. The county is securing financing through bonds and is in the process of implementing construction. PEC has followed the county's water supply planning and engaged community members through multiple stages.
- The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors have undertaken many work sessions to review and revise the county's **agritourism ordinance** that regulates farm wineries, farm breweries, farm distilleries and agricultural event venues. PEC has advocated for an ordinance that avoids or minimizes impacts to rural communities by focusing on the appropriate scale of these facilities as well as associated traffic and noise.

Loudoun

- PEC is monitoring over a dozen data center applications and addressing related energy impacts in Loudoun. We helped organize a strong response at the two September public hearings for the **Golden to Mars transmission line proposal**, which drew over 1,600 attendees. Our partners unveiled a feasible underground option in October, and PEC will support that option in public testimony at the Dec. 15 Evidentiary Hearing.
- PEC has also provided comments for a county-wide **Electrical Infrastructure Plan** to proactively manage transmission siting. This new county plan is at the Planning Commission stage and will go to the Board of Supervisors Jan. 14.
- This fall, PEC tracked and provided input for the **Western Loudoun Rural Standards and Uses** stakeholder sessions, including the **Mountainside Overlay District** session in September. PEC continues to advocate for stronger protections in the Mountainside Overlay District while also advocating for strong policies to support Loudoun's agricultural businesses and farms.
- PEC is still supporting partners and community organizers in opposition to a proposed **U.S. Route 15 bypass around Lucketts**, which the county has narrowed to two possible routes. Instead, we advocate for traffic calming solutions that preserve rural character as Loudoun has done on Virginia State Route 9 and U.S. Route 50 in the past.
- We are also calling attention to **Loudoun's groundwater** after a September Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition report documented falling levels and overuse, which emphasizes the need for public education, better monitoring and protective practices.

On the Ground

Madison

➤ After a local resident alerted Madison County staff of apparent recent aerial mapping of the existing **North Anna-to-Pratts transmission line corridor**, Madison County Supervisors sent a letter to Dominion Energy inquiring about any current or future plans to enlarge the existing 115-kilovolt transmission line. Dominion responded that it did not order the mapping flight, but had no other information. PEC is continually monitoring the expansion of energy infrastructure, driven by data center development across the state, and we will watch for and report on any proposals that might impact Madison County.

Orange

➤ Thanks to dozens of residents who voiced their concerns, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality held a public hearing in October on a **pending permit to spread PFAS-contaminated biosolids as fertilizer** on county farmland. PEC was there, along with over 80 residents, to urge DEQ to test for and address the presence of PFAS in biosolids and give farmers complete information

about what’s being spread on their land and the unacceptable level of risk to human health. DEQ will prepare a summary of comments with its response and then hold a second public hearing. A final decision on the permit will follow.

➤ After the county and **Wilderness Crossing** developers tried to throw out a lawsuit about the manner in which the massive rezoning was approved, the Orange County Circuit Court ruled that the legal challenge by the American Battlefield Trust, Central Virginia Battlefields Trust and Friends of Wilderness Battlefield can proceed. We expect the lawsuit to move to trial in the coming months. While not a party to the lawsuit, PEC supported the plaintiffs by filing an amicus brief in the case. The proposed 2,600-acre Wilderness Crossing development is massive: 5,000 car-dependent, single-family homes, 800 acres of commercial use and 732 acres of data centers.

Rappahannock

➤ PEC’s Sarah Parmelee presented to the Rappahannock County Planning Commission PEC’s recommendation that the county require a **conditional use permit for new or expanded**

electrical substations. While local governments cannot control new transmission lines, they can require permits for substations, which are often needed as a component of transmission.

➤ The **Washington Post Office Trail** opened in October, providing safe, convenient pedestrian access from the center of town to the new post office on Leggett Lane. Funded with grants from both PEC’s Krebsner Fund and the PATH Foundation, the trail includes gravel and boardwalk surfaces across multiple private and public properties.

Working on behalf of the communities of our nine-county region, in 2025 PEC staff members have attended many dozen board of supervisors meetings, planning commission meetings, and public hearings, and hosted or presented at numerous community meetings and town halls. We’ve shared almost 150 email updates that inform and empower people to engage in local land use decisions. We are able to be your eyes and ears on the ground through the generous financial support we receive from those who care about the Virginia Piedmont. Thank you!

Wild & Connected: Shenandoah Borderlands property conserved

Continued from cover

A conservation powerhouse

In addition to its indelible impact on the Soloe family, this special parcel of land holds immense conservation value. Kim Biasioli, a conservation program manager for PEC, calls this property “off the charts” when it comes to the metrics PEC uses to identify the most significant lands to conserve.

“It’s in the highest category of forest conservation value,” Kim says about the 100% forested property. “And from a watershed protection standpoint, it’s important to conserving the headwaters of the streams that flow into the South River and ultimately into the Rappahannock.”

She adds that the property is part of a vital wildlife corridor that runs north to south through Shenandoah National Park within the broader Appalachian landscape. Contiguous habitat is essential for interior forest species like migratory birds, but the more that land is fragmented by development, the less habitat there is, Kim says. “Even more common species like black bears need larger areas of habitat to survive and thrive. So, little pockets here and there are not enough, especially if they’re not connected.”

The Soloe property is part of this essential contiguous habitat. Sitting beside the national park, the entire property is part of an “outstanding ecological core,” a Virginia state designation that identifies intact areas of undeveloped land that are a top priority for land conservation.

Conservation of even this privately-owned land also has important public benefits. In addition to wildlife habitat and clean water, conserved forestland reduces flooding impacts from severe

storms, pulls air pollutants and carbon out of the atmosphere, and contributes to the scenic viewsheds that both locals and visitors enjoy.

A National Park Service report showed that in 2024, Shenandoah National Park visitors spent \$175 million in nearby communities. National Park tourism is a major economic force in Greene County, and conserving the lands around the park adds to the awe-inspiring vistas that keep visitors returning. “When you’re driving west from Ruckersville toward the park, this property really is visible,” says Kim. “You see the park, you see the mountainsides, and it’s part of the visual experience that visitors have coming into the park.”

A puzzle piece

When it comes to conserving land, the impact is amplified when parcels are connected: each one is more valuable as part of the collective than separately. Shenandoah National Park and the bordering privately-held lands are part of the larger Appalachian landscape, a global conservation priority for flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, drinking water protection and biodiversity.

PEC staff have been working for the past six years on a larger effort to strategically identify and protect top conservation priorities adjacent to the national park, including the Soloe property. To date, staff have secured grant funding for over 5,000 acres in the pipeline to be placed under conservation easement.

PEC’s efforts to conserve the Shenandoah borderlands connect us with partner organizations working toward the same goal, including the Shenandoah National

Park Trust, which provided funding for continued stewardship of the Soloe property.

“Over the past few years, PEC has been partnering with the Shenandoah National Park Trust and other people, organizations and entities working in and around the park to develop a cohesive and collaborative land conservation strategy,” Kim says. Much like conserved land, each partner has more impact working together than separately.

Conserving land can be a race against time — or, more specifically, against parcelization, when larger parcels are broken up into smaller and smaller chunks, typically for financial benefit. In many parts of Greene County, long narrow parcels resembling a barcode along the mountainside irrevocably divide the land and invite future development. Kim calls this the “Humpty Dumpty effect,” because “once it’s broken apart, it’s impossible to put back together again.” The threat of parcelization makes conserving the larger parcels like the Soloe property all the more urgent.

The Soloe sisters were all too familiar with this pressure, and acted to save their property from future divisions.

“Overdevelopment is a continuing problem everywhere,” Gayle says. “While growth and development is inevitable,



Sisters Cathy and Gayle Soloe in PEC’s Charlottesville office.
Photo by Faith Schweikert

future generations will appreciate the stewardship of those who were able to make the decision to conserve.”

Cathy adds that they want the property “to continue to stay a wild and protected place for plants and animals to thrive and future generations of visitors to find the solace here that we have.”

“Neither the property nor the house on it are grand,” Gayle says, “but nature itself has all the grandeur anyone would need.”

This easement will forever protect the many ecological and community benefits of land in a global conservation priority area in the Virginia Piedmont. It’s the outcome of years of perseverance by PEC conservation staff who work hand-in-hand with community members in our nine-county region. Our unique model is only possible because of the generous and continuing financial contributions of our members and supporters. Thank you!

Out&About

Planting Trees for Cleaner Water



On a beautiful day in October, over 30 volunteers joined PEC staff to plant approximately 270 native trees and shrubs at Chancellors Rock Farm in Flint Hill. The trees will act as a riparian buffer that slows and filters water moving through the farm on its way to the nearby Rappahannock River. *Photo by Hugh Kenny*

Volunteers Support Hunger Relief



Beautiful beets and happy volunteers from Cisco provided a cheerful ending to volunteer season on the Community Farm in mid-October. Thank you to the 800 volunteers who helped make 2025 our most abundant season yet, with over 55,000 pounds of produce grown and donated to area food banks. *Photo by Lea Justice*

Raising Awareness in Albemarle



PEC’s Rob McGinnis and Julie Bolthouse spoke to an overflow crowd in Albemarle County about the risks posed by data center development and the need for strong regulation and transparency for any facilities that are proposed in Albemarle. *Photo by Hugh Kenny*

Highlighting Sustainable Transportation



PEC’s Peter Krebs (hot dog) and Faith Schweikert (pumpkin) partnered with Charlottesville Community Bikes to lead a costumed Halloween bike ride around Charlottesville, promoting connected community, sustainable transportation and spooky fun. *Photo by Hugh Kenny*

Learning from the “Radical Middle” at TEDxWarrenton



This year’s TEDxWarrenton event selected PEC’s Ashish Kapoor to give a brief and inspiring presentation in the model of “TED Talks.” Kapoor’s presentation, titled “Real Change Begins in the Radical Middle,” explored his experience finding common ground between solar energy and agriculture. (See story on page 4.) *Photo by Sonali Kapoor*

Celebrating Salubria Oktoberfest and History Faire



PEC’s Don McCown speaks about PEC’s work to attendees of Historic Germanna’s inaugural Salubria Oktoberfest and History Faire. PEC sponsored this event that featured historical demonstrations and reenactors, as well as local food and music. *Photo by Cindy Sabato*

The PEC Leadership Felt ‘Round the World

Continued from cover

while Dominion makes a 10% return on that investment and wealthy tech companies get massive tax breaks and profits.

Meanwhile, more data center development is sprawling far beyond designated industrial zones into wetlands, pristine parks, national parkland and historical cemeteries. These are areas that once protected drinking water, aided climate resiliency, provided wildlife habitat, and attracted visitors and tourists from around the world. “We’ve seen a tectonic shift in local government priorities away from conservation, water protection, rural resources...

“The money has trumped everything,” Miller said.

Some county supervisors who once opposed this or that proposal are now selling their land to data center developers. The town manager in Warrenton, after facilitating a local approval, took a high-paying job with Amazon. In county after county in Virginia — a state where campaign donations can benefit candidates personally — elected local decision-makers repeatedly turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to hundreds of comments, letters and calls from constituents. And, for the past three legislative sessions, the General Assembly has blocked or deferred any meaningful legislation that could help protect people, communities and their resources.

The shroud of secrecy around data center projects makes it challenging to understand the problem. Proposals are often devoid of details communities and local governments need to make smart decisions — details such as the number and location of buildings; lighting; noise pollution; how much energy and water they need; and where it will come from. Details they do contain can be misleading. Probing questions and Freedom of Information Act requests from PEC, partner organizations, and even the media have been met with heavily redacted documents, claims about proprietary secrets, and non-disclosure agreements signed by local elected officials.

PEC, the people of Virginia, our families, small businesses — we are the proverbial David fighting a Goliath of epic proportions. “There is much more work to be done. We are facing an existential crisis,” Miller said.

PEC’s Relentless Persistence Moves the Needle

With the support of our board of directors and the generosity of donors, PEC has been perfectly positioned to shape the local, state and national conversations.

Our expert staff and volunteers have been the driving force behind the effort to dig up and fill in the missing details. “More than any other organization, we are manually researching every building permit and proposal out there and using that information to build detailed maps of existing, approved, and proposed data centers, transmission lines, substations, and air permits for diesel and gas generators. And then we’re estimating and projecting the aggregate impacts on air quality, water supply, electrical demand and the related need for additional energy infrastructure,” Miller said.

In 2023, PEC co-founded the state-wide **Data Center Reform Coalition** of 50+ organizations and communities urging state lawmakers to institute commonsense reforms for the data center industry around four key pillars: 1) transparency; 2) state oversight and regulation, including requirements for mitigation; 3) financial protection for families and businesses; and 4) tying data center tax exemptions to standards that reduce pollution.

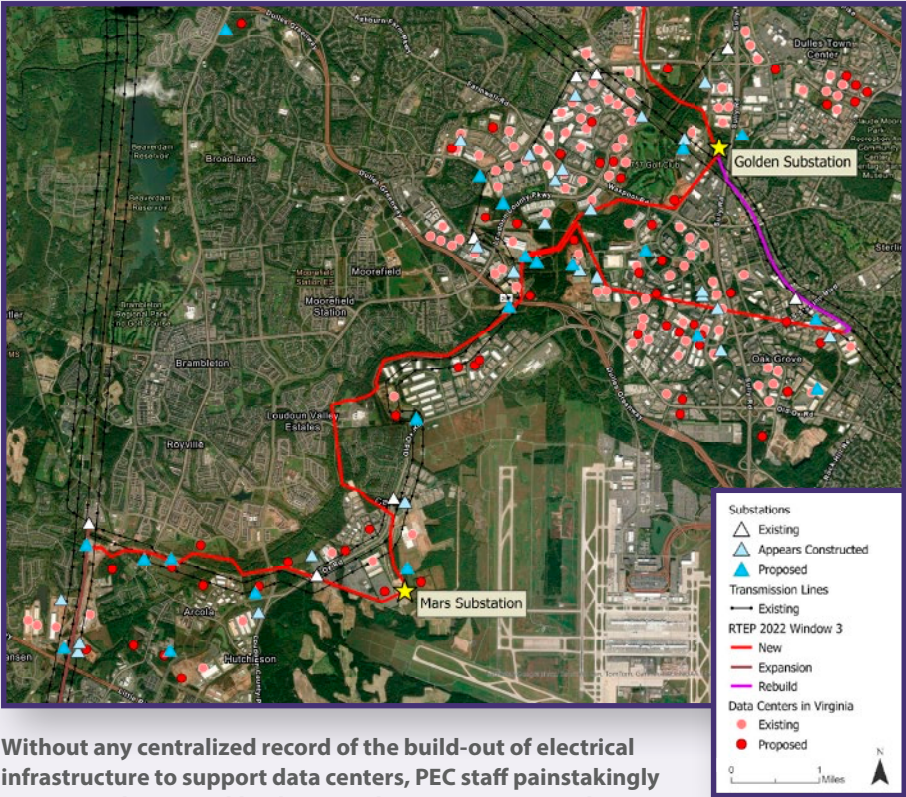
These pillars have formed the basis of dozens of legislative proposals over the past three years, and though the General Assembly has yet to muster the fortitude to take on the complexities or realities of the situation, we see the needle moving with each year. The coalition’s influence has steadily grown, with citizen lobbyists and professional representatives showing up at local, state and federal levels, and hosting press conferences, community meetings and protests.

In fall 2024, PEC also launched **Virginians for a Smarter Digital Future** — an aggressive, statewide public awareness campaign to spotlight the impacts of data centers on all Virginia residents and provide the tools people need to advocate for themselves and their families, businesses and communities. Most recently, this campaign was focused on getting community members to understand and weigh in on the most important decision the State Corporation

Commission has ever faced: Will Virginians continue to be forced to subsidize the hundreds of billions of dollars needed to triple Virginia’s energy system for the additional 47 GW of data center energy demand?

Our efforts are paying off.

We’ve held many dozen community meetings and sent



Without any centralized record of the build-out of electrical infrastructure to support data centers, PEC staff painstakingly piece together maps like this one, showing existing and proposed substations and transmission lines in eastern Loudoun County to support growing data center development there.

more than 100 email alerts. Our digital and video ads reached more than 1.4 million Virginians, and our data center videos have been viewed and shared by more than 300,000 people. County governments in Loudoun, Culpeper, Fauquier and elsewhere are at last starting to reject poorly conceived projects and improve zoning ordinances to protect their communities.

Our outreach and ad campaign inspired nearly 2,500 letters from across Virginia asking the SCC to hold data centers more accountable and to protect Virginians. In turn, the SCC has just created a new energy rate class for data centers and directed Dominion to recommend better cost allocation to reduce their burden on residential ratepayers.

Every day, we’re sending press releases, serving on panels, giving interviews and sharing information about how data centers are impacting all of us. PEC staff and consultants have been cemented as leading experts on data center impacts. Our maps, images, reports, and videos are repeatedly reused and republished by others, including the BBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg News, Richmond Times Dispatch, Virginia Mercury, Now This Impact, More Perfect Union, Bay Journal, and a Swiss TV station. We field a continuous stream of interview and tour requests from national and international news media. And the information and conversations we share with them are forming the framework of headlines, broadcasts, podcasts and substacks around the world.

The Challenge Ahead

Still, money is power, and millions in political contributions and lobbying efforts are formidable foes. With every inch of headway we make, the data center

industry doubles down with multi-million dollar ad campaigns, donations to local causes (that pale in comparison to their profits), and slick marketing efforts. Local businesses are selling out to data center developers. And the hope of future tax revenue is a compelling wolf in sheep’s clothing.

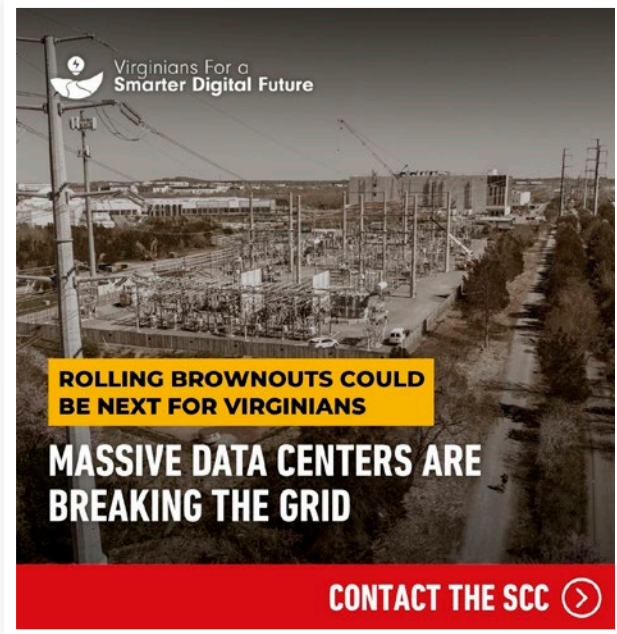
Currently, Virginia faces a dramatically increasing number of energy projects and an unimaginable onslaught of transmission lines proposals through conserved lands, suburban neighborhoods, historic sites and pristine rural corridors. Virginia is considering relaxing air pollution standards so that data centers can run polluting back-up diesel generators more often. And the federal government is pushing to accelerate the build-out of new power plants and transmission lines.

“And Virginia still does not have a data center plan... no established state regulations, no agencies to track how many or map their locations, no aggregate data to assess land or air quality impacts or water consumption, no centralized process where citizens can learn what’s planned for the communities they live in or where they might plan to move,” Miller said.

Instead, the entire situation is being driven by for-profit utility companies, their trade association — PJM — which manages the regional electric grid, and the wealthiest tech companies in the world.

“PEC is on mission, working to convey the most transformational financial and environmental impact our state has ever faced. In the end, we’d love good policy, but right now we’re trying to inform and empower people about how they can make a difference,” Miller said. The fact is, PEC has become known for our relentless determination and growing momentum in the face of powerful obstacles.

Goliath, meet David.



Our digital and video ads reached more than 1.4 million Virginians and helped inspire nearly 2,500 people to ask the SCC to hold data centers more accountable.

Since our beginning, one of PEC’s value propositions is that we are an on-the-ground organization with people working directly in our communities, attending county meetings, reviewing development proposals, learning the details and taking time and energy to mobilize people. We couldn’t work at that level, with that diligence, if not for the generous and sustained financial support — large and small — of our members. We need your continued support to keep the momentum going.

General Assembly Snapshot

By Jessica Edington, Publications Assistant

The Virginia General Assembly will convene for a 60-day session beginning Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2026. PEC staff have co-authored several briefing papers that form the framework of the Virginia Conservation Network’s legislative priorities. Below, we break down some of the key issues we are tracking in the upcoming session.

Conservation

Various conservation programs allow Virginia to realize the many public benefits of protected lands — including clean water and air, wildlife habitat protection, carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, robust rural economies, and reduced costs from sprawl. These state programs are the tools through which PEC accomplishes much of our conservation work, making land conservation an accessible and viable option for landowners and communities. In the upcoming legislative session, PEC is supporting sustained and increased state funding for the following conservation programs:

- **Land Preservation Tax Credit** • Among the most successful land conservation programs in the U.S., this program provides tax credits equal to 40% of the value of donated land or conservation easements and is responsible for protecting over 1 million acres in Virginia.
- **Virginia Land Conservation Foundation** • Run by the Department of Conservation and Recreation to purchase conservation easements, this grant program protects farms, forests, parks and historic landscapes for the benefit of the public. These grants are a major source of funding that PEC uses to help landowners conserve their farms and forestland.
- **Virginia Working Lands Fund** • This state-funded grant program run by the Office of Working Lands Preservation within the Department of Forestry provides funding to help landowners place working farms and forestlands under conservation easements. PEC uses these grants as one tool to support the success of our Agricultural Land Easement work, which is among the most successful in the country.
- **Our Virginia Outdoors** • A comprehensive dedicated funding program for a variety of conservation priorities including many already field tested in Virginia, Our Virginia Outdoors has been through three years of coalition-building, and hopefully will get over the finish line this coming year to dedicate \$300 million annually to conservation programs, including all of the above initiatives and more.

In addition to conservation funding, other issues we will be watching this session include:

- **Oak Hill** • PEC has been an advocate for the expansion of public access through land acquisition and for investment in outdoor recreation in state parks and other opportunities. Establishment of Oak Hill in Loudoun County as Virginia’s newest state park remains a priority.
- **Wildlife corridors** • Within PEC’s nine-county service area, major wildlife corridors along Shenandoah National Park and the Potomac, Rappahannock and James rivers are essential for migratory species like black bears, bobcats, wood turtles and brook trout. In addition to our work to conserve land along these corridors, PEC supports building wildlife crossings to allow wildlife to more safely traverse landscapes split by highways. The General Assembly has an opportunity to establish a Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund that would support wildlife crossings and data collection about wildlife-vehicle collisions to inform better road planning.
- **Invasive species** • Invasive plants harm our ecosystems by choking out native species and reducing the food and habitat available for species that have evolved to rely on native varieties. Removing invasive plants and replacing them with native species is an important part of good land stewardship, and PEC will be tracking any potential legislation this session that aims to address invasive plants.

Housing and Land Use

- **Local authority** • PEC continues to monitor efforts to reduce local land use authority. We feel that local comprehensive plans, developed in consultation with local elected and appointed officials, are best placed to determine the mix, location and compatibility of land uses. When bills arise that seem to circumscribe that authority, PEC works to minimize the impacts and to retain maximum local flexibility.
- **Housing for the Climate** • Safe, secure and affordable housing makes our communities stronger and more sustainable, especially when it’s built to promote dense, walkable cities. PEC and the Coalition for Smarter Growth, a project of PEC, hope to see legislation that supports smart growth and transit-oriented development that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from long commutes and mitigate the ecological impacts of sprawl.

Energy & Climate

To mitigate the worst effects of climate change and ensure a stable, healthy environment for future generations, Virginia must transition from greenhouse gas-emitting fossil fuels to clean energy. This transition must be done thoughtfully, with care to protect the state’s natural resources. Committed to shaping and advancing Virginia’s clean energy future, PEC will be watching the following issues this session:

- **Rooftop solar & distributed generation** • Distributed generation is one of the quickest and simplest ways to add renewable energy to the grid. A range of bills this session will aim to expand the potential of rooftop solar, solar on the built environment and small-scale agrivoltaics, while lessening burdens on localities for rooftop solar permitting.
- **Large-scale solar** • While utility-scale solar is an important part of the energy mix, it is critical that it is well-sited and thoughtfully developed. Improving technologies and practices, such as all-terrain trackers and agrivoltaics, can be part of the solution but must be deployed within the contexts of the region.
- **Battery storage** • Storage is critical in Virginia to increase the efficiency of the existing renewables on the grid and, as a result, protect natural resources and mitigate new generation and transmission impacts. Further direction that ensures local stakeholder engagement in crafting a model ordinance will help ensure that existing and newer long duration energy technology is developed responsibly.

Data Center Reform

The outsized impacts of data centers in our communities will again make data center reform a priority for PEC and our partners in the Virginia Data Center Reform Coalition this year. Our efforts will be focused on our four pillars of data center reform — state oversight, ratepayer protection, enhanced transparency, and mitigating impacts — but we will also be closely monitoring other trends we expect to see this year, including legislation intending to address demand response.

- **State oversight** • PEC supports establishing a state-level regulatory review process by the State Corporation Commission, in addition to the existing local review, to help Virginia plan for and mitigate land use, water, air quality, and energy impacts from this expanding industry and evaluate the regional impacts of data center development affecting neighboring jurisdictions.
- **Ratepayer protection** • We expect ratepayer protection to be a major topic during this legislative session as electric bills continue to rise for Virginians. PEC believes the data center industry should pay its fair share, which is why we intervened in the State Corporation Commission’s ratemaking case with Dominion Energy earlier this year. We hope to see bills that will prevent residents and businesses from shouldering industry risks and subsidizing the billions of dollars in costs associated with the data center industry’s energy infrastructure needs.
- **Enhanced transparency** • To make good decisions, Virginia and its localities need good information. PEC supports legislation that would require local disclosure and statewide reporting on data center energy use, water consumption and emissions to ensure informed review of new applications and monitoring of existing data centers to enhance statewide planning.
- **Mitigation of impacts** • We hope to see bills that will mitigate the impact of data centers on Virginia communities and resources, such as requiring higher clean energy and efficiency standards for data centers, or requiring offsets for impacts to water and land resources. Mitigation could also include either reducing or eliminating the state tax exemption for data centers, or instituting a tax on data centers — and using the tax revenue from either to help balance the state’s budget and fund conservation and clean energy programs.
- **Demand response** • PEC expects to see discussion and legislation around demand response strategies that would pay large energy customers like data centers to disconnect from the grid during times of peak energy demand in an effort to increase grid reliability. We are watching this topic cautiously, as we are concerned it may encourage more data centers to use on-site gas turbines to meet their energy needs during peak times, enable the data center industry to build far beyond the grid’s capacity, and cost Virginians money.

Dear Friends,

One of the most difficult roles that PEC plays is as an organization that anticipates and plans for the future. Imaging scenarios — both positive and negative — is inherently subject to doubt and critique. PEC is unique in our nonpartisan, thoughtful and holistic approach to complex issues facing our communities. Bound only by our mission to protect and restore the lands and waters of the Virginia Piedmont while building stronger, more sustainable communities, we are simultaneously idealistic and pragmatic. That means that more than any other organization, we look for unintended consequences, consider the fullness of data and research, strive to understand on-the-ground policy impacts, and provide alternatives when needed.

Unfortunately, we see all that makes the Virginia Piedmont, and much of Virginia, special under tremendous threat from the rapid and unconstrained data center build-out and the energy infrastructure that build-out demands. For the past five years, PEC has been sounding the alarm about why and how the commonwealth's lack of planning and failure to regulate the global concentration of this information technology-driven economy in Virginia are in sharp conflict with our long-term mission.

Over the past year, PEC's perspective has become a kitchen table issue and a focus of 2025 elections in Virginia and beyond. Virginia will experience up to a trillion dollars in private and public investment through 2045 for data centers and the energy and water supply infrastructure they require. Now is the time for our state leaders to determine how we can leverage that investment to *also* invest in the lands, waters and communities of the Piedmont region and Virginia as a whole.

PEC's founders believed that our engagement in planning for growth and for the conservation of land and water resources was essential. Since our origins, we have argued that Virginia can and should develop 10% of the land area and permanently conserve 50% or more, still leaving plenty of space for continuing debates about the needs of the future. Over my 30

years leading PEC, our staff have worked hard to bring our experience and knowledge into local, regional, state, and multistate planning about issues as diverse and complex as housing, food systems, transportation, water supply, water quality, air quality and historic and cultural resources.

Our consistent vision is that Virginia can accommodate population growth, new economic development, and the infrastructure needed to support both, while also conserving and restoring the natural environment and sustaining the network of communities in the nine counties PEC serves.

The questions of today are: How will Virginia manage the development of data centers to fit into this vision of the future? How can the state use the \$200 billion to \$300 billion investment being made to triple our energy infrastructure for data centers to also protect the climate and community benefits of conserved lands and clean waters? And how do we measure data center impacts on water resources and steer some of that investment toward enhancing water supplies?

Transparency is key. We need to be sharing as much information as possible about what we know and do not know, as well as the models we use to build out that future.

Virginia has to adopt and improve policies that anticipate and assess potential impacts and develop alternatives that avoid and even help mitigate impacts that can't be avoided. Such mitigation could include better zoning and site planning to protect communities; putting transmission lines underground; and implementing energy strategies based on distributed generation, dual land use like agrivoltaics, and battery storage. Virginia also needs to set aside some of the revenue it's getting from the data center industry to invest in strategies that balance conserved lands and water resources with the economic benefits for renewed and vital communities.

Knowing that Virginia is building out a global concentration of data centers and energy infrastructure, the people of Virginia must demand that the data



Star trails over Woolen Mills in Charlottesville. Finalist in the Beautiful Landscapes category of PEC's 2022 Photo Contest. Photo by Charles Fang

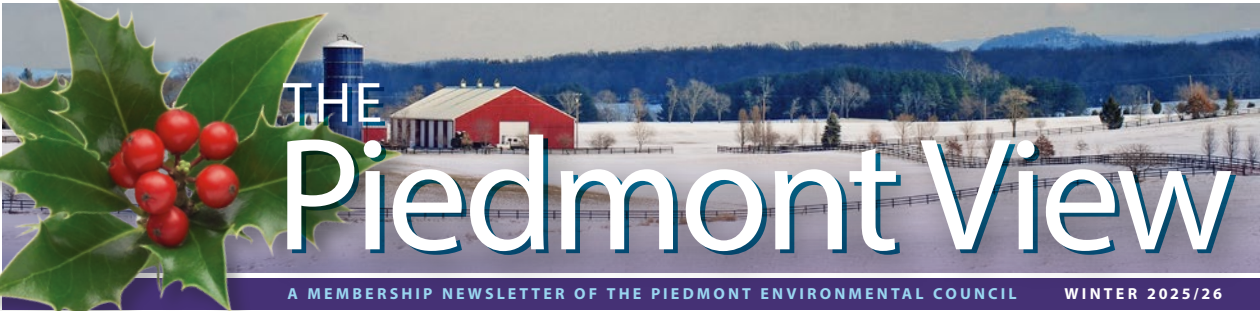
center industry bear the costs that match the scale of its impacts, enough to ensure that Virginians and our natural resources are protected for years to come. PEC has argued to the State Corporation Commission that because data centers are creating no less than 90% of future energy demand, they should likewise bear no less than 90% of the costs to provide it and to mitigate its impacts on our lands, waters and communities. That will be the focus of the coming General Assembly session and policy debate at the local, state and regional levels in the coming years.

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President



Photo by Hugh Kenny



INSIDE

A history of PEC's data center campaign; a special property conserved in Greene; AC44 adopted in Albemarle after four years; a Q&A about PEC's new agrivoltaics project at Roundabout Meadows; a 2026 General Assembly snapshot; PEC Out & About; and more!

A cow braves a snow storm in The Plains in Fauquier County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

Can you identify this native plant by its leaves?

- a) Fragrant Sumac
- b) Poison Ivy
- c) Flowering Dogwood
- d) Black Gum
- e) White Ash

Photo by Nat White, finalist in the Native Plants and Fungi category in PEC's 2025 Photo Contest.

ANSWER ON PAGE 6



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