



# Piedmont Environmental Council 2010 Strategic Plan

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## Executive Summary

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**I**n December of 2010, the Board of The Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) adopted a revised strategic plan. This followed a 15 month review during which the board and staff of The Piedmont Environmental Council undertook a reassessment of our region and our organization to determine what, if any, changes were needed to our goals, programs and structure as we looked ahead to the next twenty years. This report briefly summarizes the strategic plan and the actions it recommends.

The Piedmont Environmental Council was founded in 1972 with the purpose of preserving important attributes of the Northern Piedmont region of Virginia. Those key attributes are the open spaces, natural viewsheds, historic features, agricultural activity and the clean air and water that make living, working and visiting the region so special. Protecting these attributes, while recognizing the importance of economic vitality, has always been, and remains our core organizational goal.

As an organization we have had incredible success over the last 38 years. This success is most readily described by the 336,000 acres of land placed into conservation easements, the 71 Historic Districts that have been created, the one million acres of land still in agricultural use, the growing number of farmers markets, wineries and historic destinations, the creation of service districts in each county and the dark night skies we still enjoy. Throughout this same time the region also saw higher population and economic growth than that of the Commonwealth overall.



Photo by Tom Lussier

While much of the natural and historic resources of the region have been preserved; over the years significant changes to the social, political and demographic landscape have occurred. In a nutshell, the residents of the Piedmont are today younger, newer to the region, more often commuting to work out of the region, and mostly living in urban or suburban communities. The more hectic lifestyles of today's residents mean they are harder to reach through traditional communications channels and less inclined to get involved in the community. At the same time, building strong community support for our goals and programs is more important than ever.

The 2010 strategic planning process also identified a number of risks and challenges that relate to our organization. These include our financial position, our staff and board organization, and our prioritization of programs. Each pose different challenges and require tailored responses. A stronger financial base is needed to assure the sustainability of our programs; our organizational structure can be improved to increase our effectiveness; and our communications and development efforts need greater investments to raise our standing in the region and build greater support for our programs. We have already begun implementing changes to address these challenges.

As we evolve to meet new challenges, we need to sustain the things about PEC that have been crucial to our success—our close connection to issues and policy makers, our nimbleness in responding to new challenges, and the quality of our staff and board. We also recognize the value of our regional and county based organizational structure and our need to continue to engage on policy issues wherever necessary when the policy directly impacts our regional goals.

The plan identified several program changes we have agreed to make to address the shifting social and political realities, as well as better align our programs with our goals. These changes include:

1. Growing our land conservation program to become a more active conservation easement holder
2. Significantly expanding our programs to support the rural and agricultural economy
3. Rebuilding our communications and outreach staffing and program, and revising our messaging to more effectively reach our constituents

Each of the changes noted above are discussed in greater detail in our full strategic plan.

The Piedmont Environmental Council is today the best organized, best funded and best positioned organization to protect the most important attributes of the region. It remains the strongest voice for the Piedmont, and the success of its goals are truly in the best interest of all residents, workers and visitors in the region. With the actions planned to address the challenges identified in this report, PEC's long-term ability to achieve our regional goals will be even greater.



Photo by Rose Jenkins