

The Piedmont View

Special Edition · Fauquier County

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What's unique about Fauquier?

THERE ARE MANY REASONS why people love living in Fauquier. From the beautiful rural landscape to good schools to a friendly community—the list goes on. **Much of what's unique about this special county is not coincidental—it's due to a legacy of good planning and land conservation.** But that legacy isn't guaranteed going forward without continued community support.

Here's what residents are saying...



Marie Washington with her Great Pyrenees.
Photo courtesy of Marie Washington

“ Living in Fauquier allows you to be a part of a friendly rural community, with easy access to urban amenities in nearby cities. ”

Marie Washington
local attorney and *Fauquier Times* Citizen of the Year

“ It's what we call home: the rolling fields, grazing horses, small towns, friendly people, a dog in every car...that's my idea of heaven! ”

Cara Elgin
Fauquier resident, author and disability rights activist



The Elgins, a tenth generation farm family.
Photo by Ken Garrett

“ I love that it's a healthy place for my family to live, play and work. The wide-open spaces, respect for history, generous citizens, unique small businesses and our access to activities all make this a special place. ”

Tony Tedeschi
Fauquier resident and owner of Piedmont Press & Graphics

“ My wife and I could live anywhere in the world, but we've chosen to live in Fauquier. We love it here. ”

Robert Duvall
Fauquier resident and academy-award winning actor



Robert and Luciana Duvall.
Photo courtesy of Daisy Saulls



Tony Tedeschi of Piedmont Press & Graphics.
Photo by Paula Combs



Piedmont Environmental Council

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SEE WHAT'S INSIDE

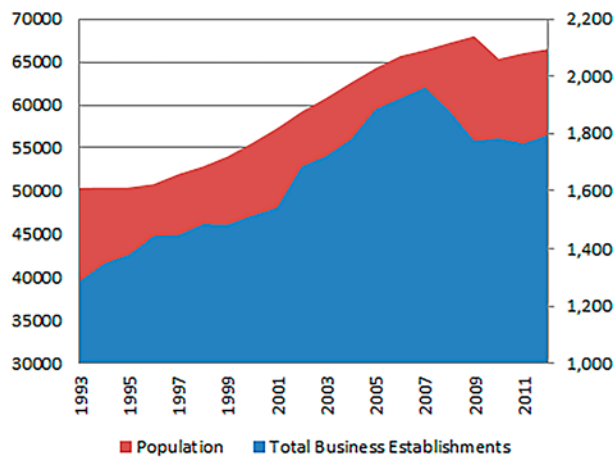
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FAUQUIER COUNTY MythBusters!

Myth: Fauquier is “no growth.”

Fact: Fauquier County has grown steadily over time and often at a faster rate than other places in the Commonwealth. Since 2010, estimates have Fauquier County growing at 3.5%, only slightly slower than the Virginia average of 4.1%. In fact, Fauquier County’s growth rate was 40% higher than Virginia’s growth rate between 2000 and 2010. Residential development and the number of business establishments in the County have also steadily increased over time (see graph).

Growth in Fauquier County



SOURCES:
U.S. Census Bureau
Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service Demographics Research Group

Myth: Fauquier has a higher than average tax rate.

Fact: Fauquier’s 2015 real estate tax rate (\$0.992*) is significantly lower than nearby Loudoun (\$1.155) and Prince William (\$1.2212**). In Fauquier, the median real estate taxes paid as a percentage of median home value is 0.75%, which is less than the U.S. average of 1.08%. The taxes paid as a percentage of median income is 2.85%, which is also less than the U.S. average of 3.13%.

SOURCES:
Fauquier County FY 2015 Adopted Budget (*rate includes Fire and Rescue Levy of \$0.045 and PDR Conservation Easement Program of \$0.006)
Loudoun County FY 2015 Adopted Budget
Prince William County FY 2015 Adopted Budget (**rate includes Fire and Rescue Levy of \$0.0707 and Mosquito and Forest Pest Management of \$0.0025)
Tax Foundation: <http://interactive.taxfoundation.org/propertytax/> Used 2008-2010 three year average.

Myth: My taxes would be lower if we had more growth.

Fact: It’s the type of growth and where it occurs that matters. Counties to our east like Prince William and Fairfax have experienced more growth and pay higher taxes. If a locality grows quickly over a large geographic area, the cost of providing basic services such as schools, public safety, trash collection and landfills, etc., can quickly exceed the resources of the locality, often requiring increases in taxes and government debt. Localities need to carefully plan for growth to ensure that public infrastructure and services can be provided in a cost effective manner.

Myth: There’s no place for new development in Fauquier County.

Fact: All of the Service Districts still have significant room to grow. For example, there are over 400 acres of commercial and industrial land planned for in Opal. In Bealeton, there are over 100 acres of undeveloped commercial and industrial land and plenty of room for higher density development throughout. There is also an abundant amount of residential zoning available in the County. Investments need to be made in these areas to improve transportation, reliability of water infrastructure, pedestrian level landscaping and architecture, park and recreational opportunities, and retail options. Continuously expanding our service districts makes it increasingly difficult to afford these needed improvements.

SOURCES:
Fauquier County 2014 GIS Data, Fauquier County GIS Department.
Fauquier County Real Estate Online: <http://reo.fauquiercounty.gov/>. Date accessed January 2015.

Myth: Our local economy is in bad shape.

Fact: The numbers show a different story. Fauquier has a low unemployment rate of 3.6%* as of December 2014, which is significantly lower than Virginia’s rate of 4.8% and the nationwide rate of 5.6%. Fauquier also has one of the highest median household incomes in the country at \$88,409, while the U.S. median household income is \$53,046 and Virginia is \$63,907. Additionally:

- Sales tax revenues have been on the rise since 2010.
- Residential foreclosures and short sales continue to decline.
- The median home values are returning to the rates of the early 2000s.
- The average number of days that homes are on the market is continuing to decline.
- The number of houses sold has stabilized to pre-recession levels.

SOURCES:
Local Area Unemployment Statistics: Bureau of Labor and Statistics. Date accessed February 2015. *County data is not seasonally adjusted.
Fauquier County of Office of Management and Budget: Fauquier County Economic Indicators.
U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts.

Myth: Fauquier isn’t friendly toward agritourism.

Fact: Agritourism is alive and well in Fauquier County. With 25 wineries, Fauquier ranks second in the state. The equine industry remains extremely important, providing 883 jobs in Fauquier and \$2,113,116 in tax revenue in 2010, with Fauquier being home to several fox hunts and horse shows and two of the largest steeplechase races in the Country—the Virginia Gold Cup and International Gold Cup. There are also ten bed & breakfasts, five farmers’ markets, and a number of pick-your-own orchards, corn mazes, and on-site farm tours in the county.

SOURCES:
Fauquier County Department of Economic Development: www.visitfauquier.com/wineries.html. Date accessed February 2015.
The economic impact of the horse industry in Virginia 2011 study.

Myth: Land with a conservation easement limits farming.

Fact: A significant amount of land under easement is actively farmed while other land is managed for different purposes. Easements help support clean air and water, offer natural habitats for wildlife, and scenic open space for residents and tourists. In 2014, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation conducted a survey of 631 landowners with land under easement, and they determined that 90% of those landowners are “managing their protected lands for agricultural production or forestry.” And 70% said they “used the tax credits to implement land management practices that benefit water, soil, wildlife, or forest quality or that provide other conservation benefits.”

SOURCE:
Survey, “Opinions on and Use of Land Preservation Tax Credits Among Landowners Who Have Donated Easements to the Virginia Outdoor Foundation”—available at www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org.

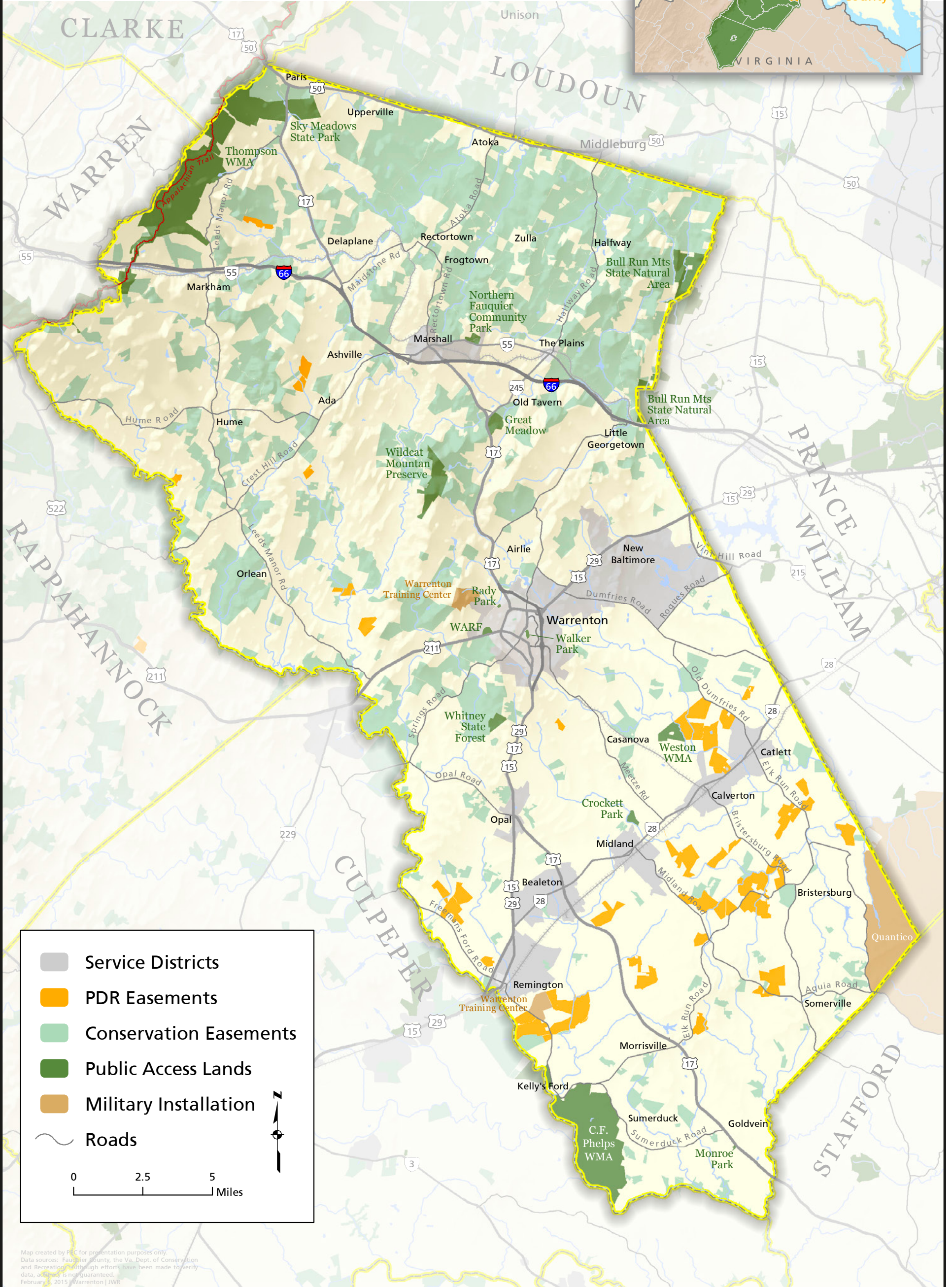
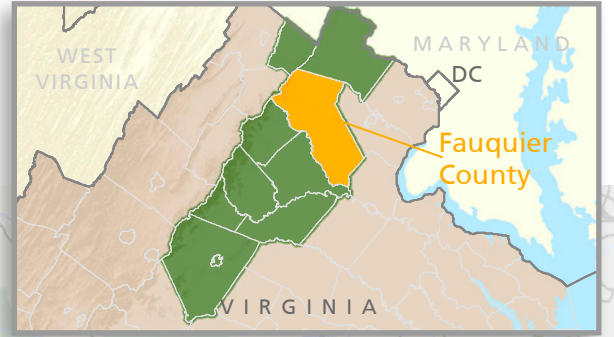
Myth: Conservation easements are just for wealthy landowners.

Fact: Landowners from all walks of life place conservation easements on their property. Easements can either be donated or purchased. The existence of the transferable tax credit and options like Fauquier’s Purchase of Development Rights program help make placing a conservation easement an accessible option for people from every income level.

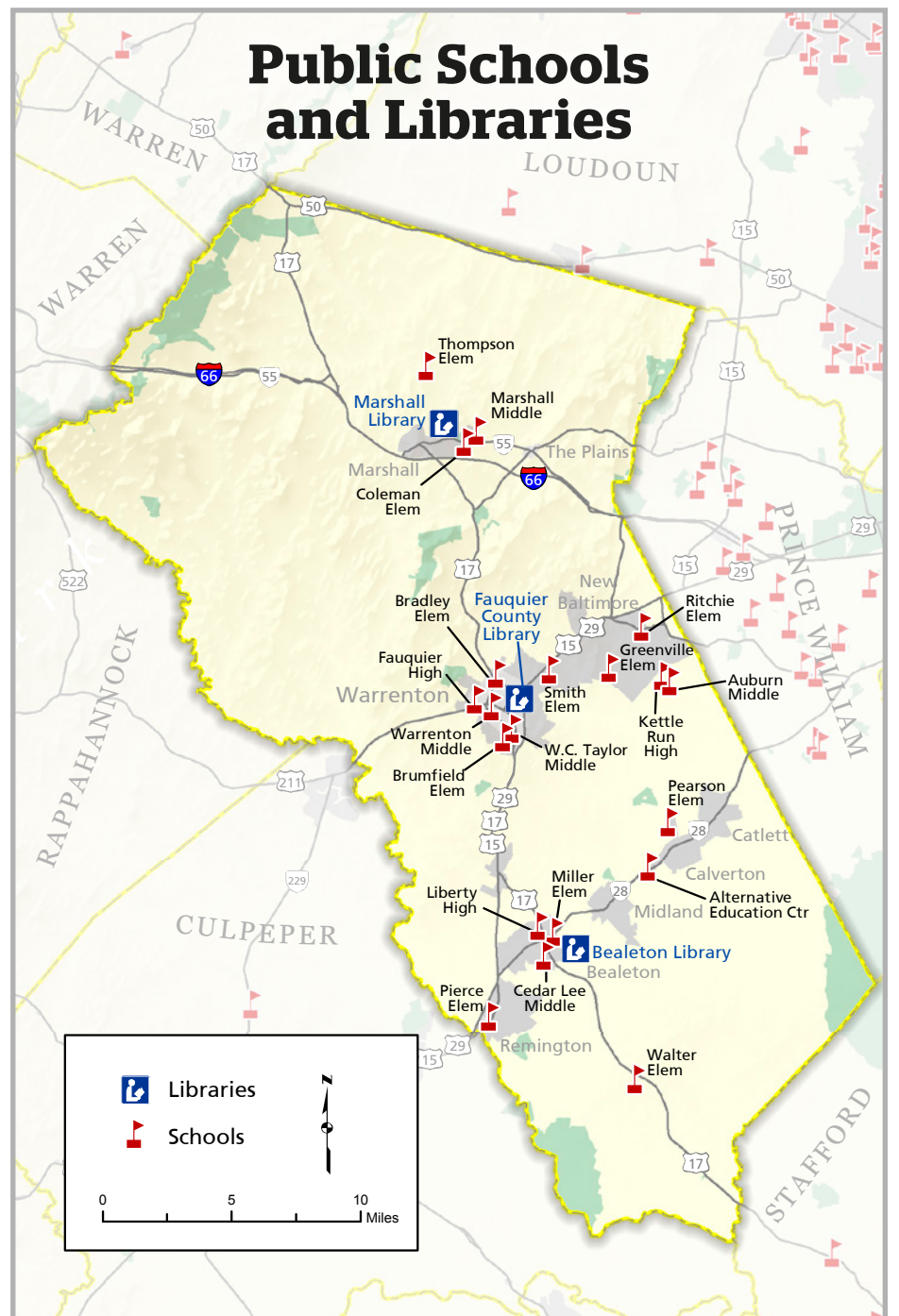
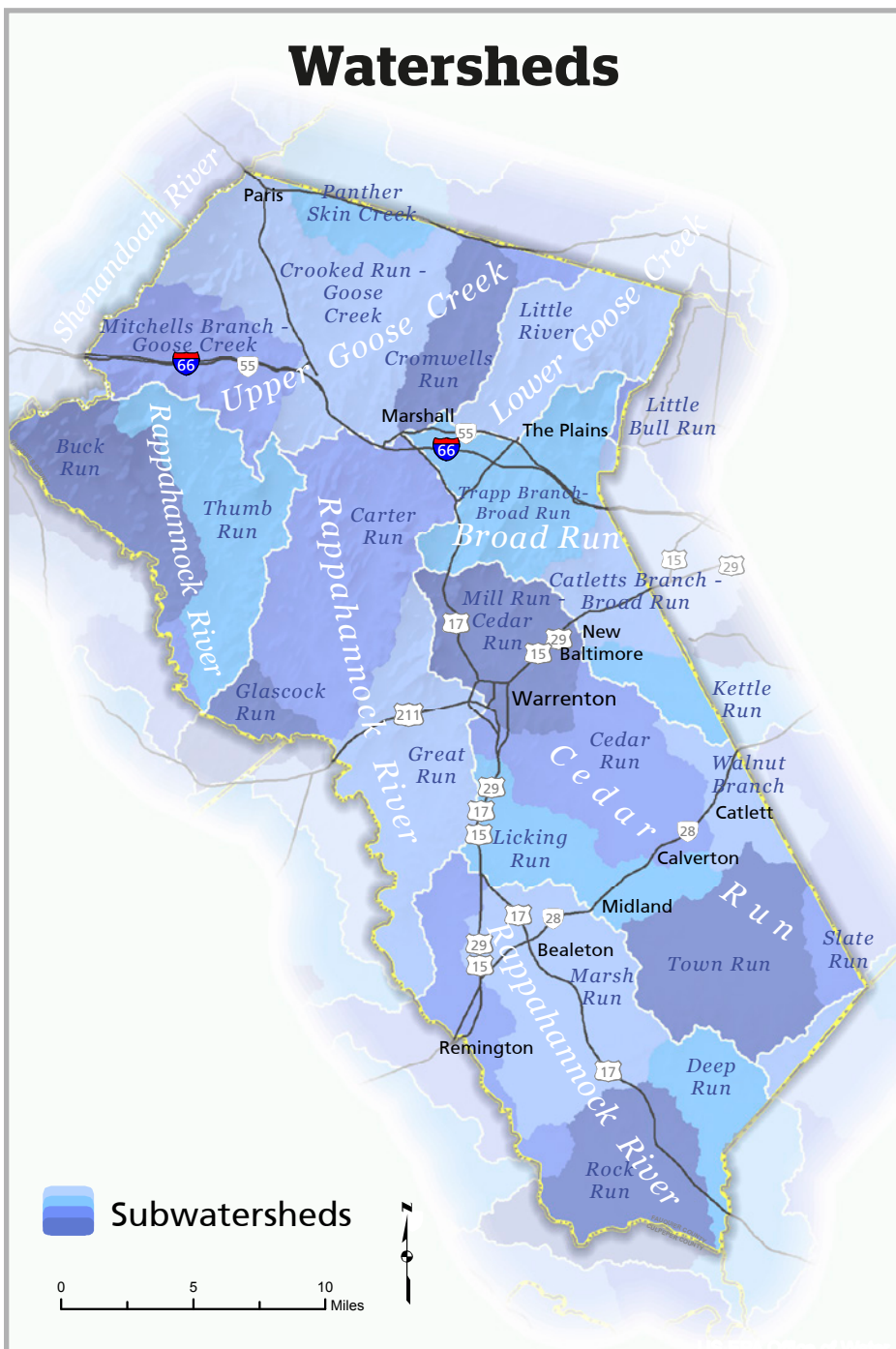
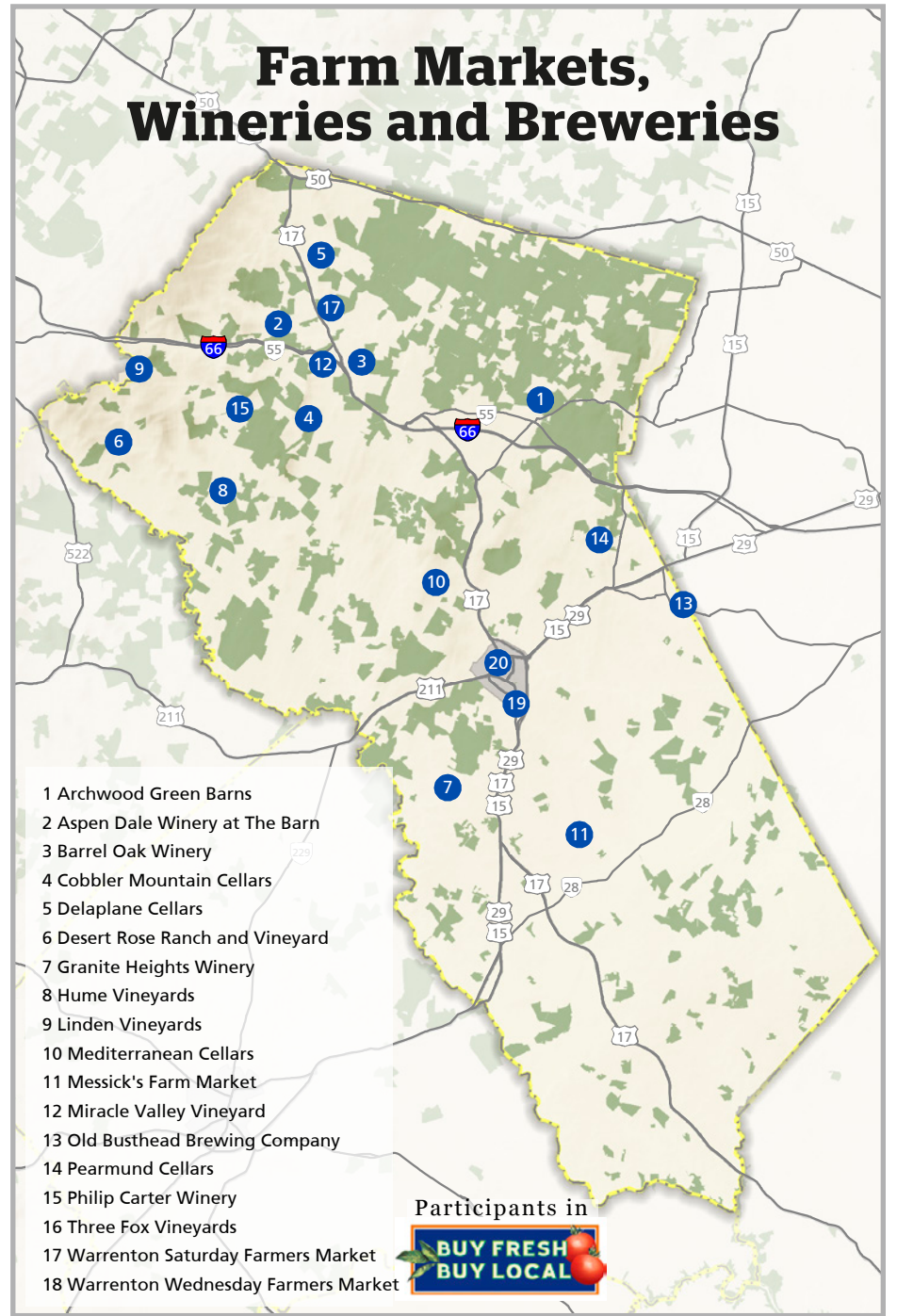
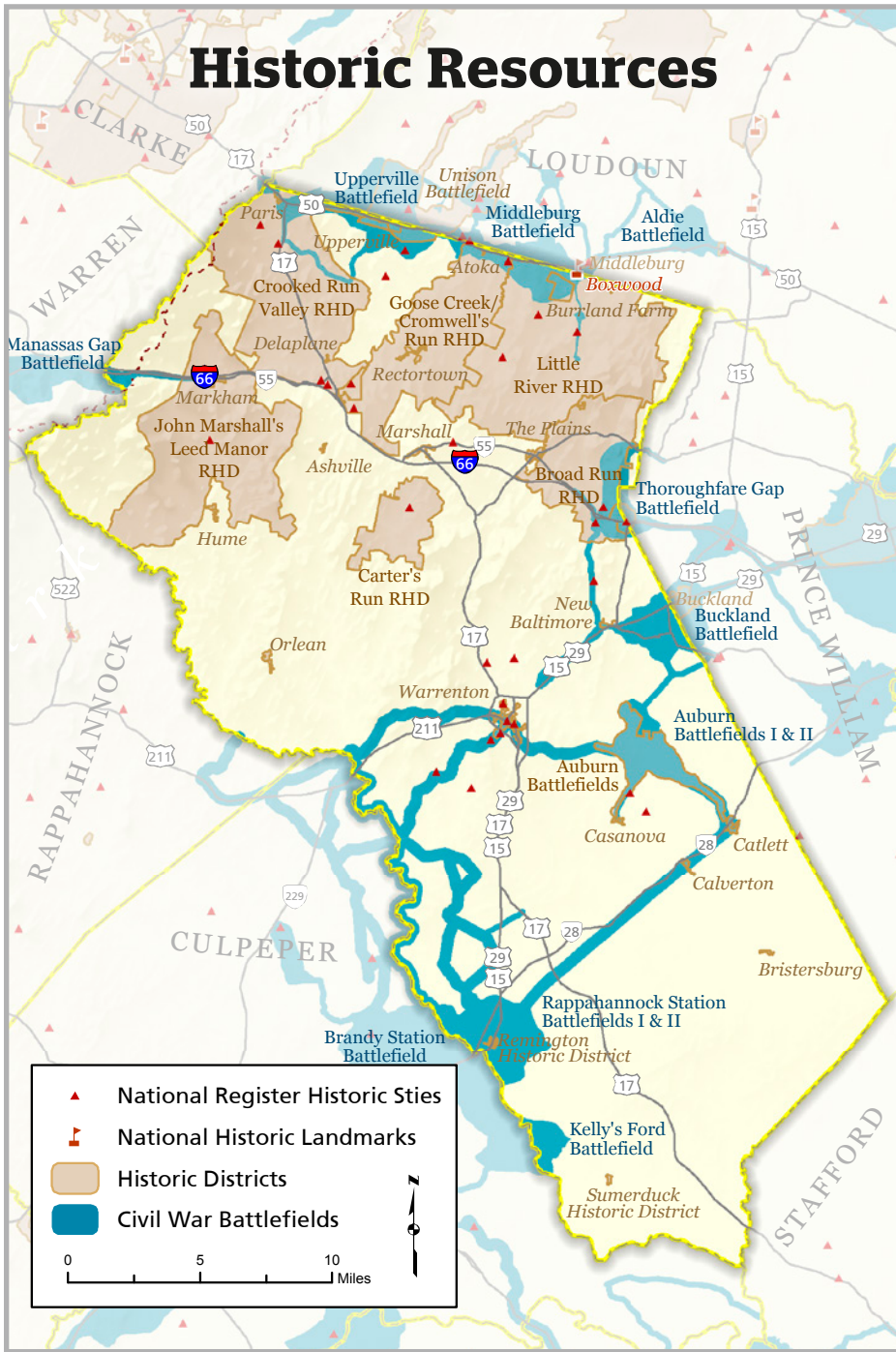
Myth: I don’t benefit from land conservation.

Fact: Conservation easements come in all different shapes and sizes and provide different public benefits—such as reducing development pressure in the rural area, providing cleaner air and water, keeping prime land available for agriculture and forestry, providing wildlife habitat, offering recreational opportunities, and preserving the scenic landscape that residents and tourists alike can enjoy. To see stories of conservation at work, see page 5.

Fauquier County



Map created by PEC for presentation purposes only. Data sources: Fauquier County, the Va. Dept. of Conservation and Recreation. Although efforts have been made to verify data, accuracy is not guaranteed. February 1, 2015 | Warrenton | JWR



Conservation at Work

5 STORIES FROM AROUND FAUQUIER COUNTY



Ken Smith and his son Ben at Cool Lawn Farm.
Photo by Rose Jenkins

“Land conservation is so important. It’s about leaving a legacy for the next generation.”

—Ken Smith, owner of Cool Lawn Farm and Moo Thru

Cool Lawn Farm

Ken decided to protect Cool Lawn Farm through the Fauquier County Purchase of Development Rights program, which aims to protect working farms. He wanted to preserve both the beauty of the open land as well as its agricultural potential. Protecting the land will also help to ease the transition to the next generation, he says, when his son plans to take over. Ken used some of the money from selling his development rights to start a new farm-related business—an ice cream shop called

Moo Thru, located on Rt. 29 in Remington. Moo Thru uses milk from grass-fed cows that graze in fields just a mile away—and the creamy, fresh flavor has been a huge hit!

PUBLIC BENEFITS: Productive Farmland, Scenic View, Water Quality

“When you put kids in the right environment, it enhances their sense of curiosity and discovery. In a sense, that’s the beauty of this place—the opportunity to be outside and learn respect for the natural world. It’s when the learning starts.”

—Dr. Thomas C. Wood, director of Environmental Studies on the Piedmont

Environmental Studies on the Piedmont

Environmental Studies on the Piedmont is the research education and conservation division of the Clifton Institute located on a 900-acre property just outside of Warrenton. The property is under conservation easement with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. *Environmental Studies* works to integrate nature with human activity and development, so that natural resources are sustainably renewed and available to be enjoyed by future generations. They bring scientists and the public together in partnership to accomplish this goal—right on the property.

PUBLIC BENEFITS: Scientific Research, Public Access, Biodiversity



Students discover spring amphibians in a wetland at the *Environmental Studies on the Piedmont’s* land.
Photo courtesy of *Environmental Studies on the Piedmont*

“We must remember that Warrenton has a limited supply of water, and it’s so important to protect its small watershed. When there’s a drought, I see the reservoir go way down. Hopefield protects the town’s drinking water supply and helps to provide a green ring around Warrenton.”

—Hope Porter, owner of Hopefield

Hopefield

In 1922, Hope Porter’s father purchased Hopefield for their family farm. During the 1960’s, to accommodate increased growth, the Town of Warrenton condemned half of the farm to create the Warrenton Reservoir, the town’s primary drinking water supply. The division of the property and the depletion of water resources made it impossible for Hope’s father to continue growing crops. The family placed an easement on the remaining 185 acres with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, ensuring the protection of clean water, scenic open space and their family farm for generations to come.

PUBLIC BENEFITS: Drinking Water Protection, Scenic Views, Productive Farmland



“Fauquier County’s largest Civil War battle—the Battle of Rappahannock Station—occurred here in November 1863. Now that the land has been protected, Fauquier County has an opportunity to realize the creation of a battlefield park to honor the thousands of soldiers who fought and died on the Rappahannock Front.”

—Clark ‘Bud’ Hall, local historian

Rappahannock Station

Last decade, the most significant portion of Rappahannock Station was under threat of development. The Piedmont Environmental Council worked with Fauquier County to raise funds for acquiring the property for the most significant acreage of the battlefield. In 2009, an easement was placed on the property, and the County intends for it to become a public park.

If completed, the site will provide opportunities for education and appreciation of our local history, passive outdoor recreation, and non-motorized canoe and kayak launch into the Rappahannock River.

PUBLIC BENEFITS: Historic Preservation, Tourism and Recreation, Public Water Access



Michael Block (right) and Bud Hall (left) give a tour on the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Rappahannock Station.



Mr. Weidlein at Hunger Run Farm.
Photo by Maggi MacQuilliam

“I saw the easement on the land as a plus. Easements preserve the beauty of the countryside and gives you a sense of comfort that what you see is what you get.”

—John Weidlein, owner of Hunger Run Farm

Hunger Run Farm

Hunger Run Farm was once owned by the Elgin family, dating their roots on the land back to 1757. The 58-acre property was one of the last remaining dairy operations in northern Fauquier County. In 2001, in order to save the family farm, the Elgins worked with the VOF and PEC to place an easement on the property.

Mr. and Mrs. Weidlein purchased the land, subject to an easement, from the Elgins for their home and got to work renovating the old dairy barns. In 2014, Mr. Weidlein invited the Arcadia Foundation to use his land and equipment to grow healthy produce for underserved Washington, D.C. neighborhoods.

PUBLIC BENEFITS: Productive Farmland, Scenic Views, Water Quality

Talking Taxes & Growth

Over the past year, there has been a heated discussion of issues tied to growth and taxes in Fauquier County, both in the local papers and in casual conversation. In these discussions a host of terms are often used without definition. So here's a short list of some taxes and concepts that every resident of Fauquier County should know when talking growth and taxes:

'Service Districts' or 'Growth Areas'

For planning purposes the County is divided into three categories: service districts, villages, and rural areas. Service districts, also known as "growth areas", are where the majority of the residential, commercial, and industrial growth is supposed to go.

In Fauquier, the Service Districts include **Bealeton, Marshall, New Baltimore, Opal, Remington, Warrenton**, and the three smaller Village Service Districts of **Catlett, Calverton, and Midland**.

By maintaining its rural areas and focusing most development in our service districts, Fauquier has managed to keep infrastructure and public service costs relatively low.

Comprehensive Plan

Every locality in Virginia must express its goals in a Comprehensive Plan, a twenty-year vision which must be reviewed and/or revised every five years. The Comprehensive Plan is the community's most important document regarding land use, growth, development, transportation, and resource utilization. It projects needs and trends over the next twenty years and lays out the community's road map for the future. Although the plans are not legally binding, they are intended to guide all local policy and they serve as legal justification for the City or County's decisions on proposed developments.

Fauquier's Comprehensive Plan has eleven chapters, which focus on natural and historic resources, population and demographics, the local economy, transportation, public utilities, and community design. It also has specific chapters on the service districts, villages, and the rural areas of the County.

Land Use Taxation

Land Use Taxation allows eligible land to be taxed upon the land's value *in use* (use value) as opposed to the *market* value, which assumes the highest value use of the land. For example, the County may value land in agriculture use at \$500 per acre, while the fair market value of subdividing the land for residential may be \$10,000 per acre.

In Fauquier, there are four classifications of use value: agricultural, horticultural, forest use, and open space. Each qualifying use has its own criteria, and landowners wishing to receive land use taxation must submit an application to the County with proof of qualifications. Whenever land in land use converts to non-qualifying use or is rezoned to a more intensive use, the land is subject to roll-back taxes.

Land use taxation makes sense for farmers and other rural landowners, since they make few demands for tax-funded services. It's important to note, land use taxation does not apply to the residence and surrounding one acre or to other structures on site.

The Composite Index

The Commonwealth of Virginia uses a formula known as the 'composite index' to determine the percentage that a county is expected to contribute to funding the cost of public education. The composite index is calculated using three indicators of a locality's ability to pay: true value of real property (*not use value*) (50%), adjusted gross income (40%) and the taxable retail sales (10%) for the county. The result is computed per pupil and per capita for each school. Essentially, the lower the composite index the more State aid for education the county will receive.

For this formula, properties that locally benefit from land use taxation are reported to the State Department of Education at their true fair market value—not the reduced land use value. Since conservation easements permanently encumber property, they are reported at their decreased fair market value. Permanently conserved land contributes to a lower composite index, providing more money for education.



Photo by Paula Combs

Over a hundred COCS studies have been conducted in the last 20 years. The studies consistently show that working lands generate more public revenues than they receive back in public services. The median cost per dollar of revenue raised from working and open land is \$0.35 while it is \$1.16 for residential.

Conservation Easements

A landowner can protect specific conservation values on his or her land forever by donating a conservation easement. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency, and it is legally recorded and bound to the property in perpetuity. The landowner retains ownership and use of the land and may convey it like any other real property, subject to the terms of the easement. Conservation easements may be purchased, such as through Fauquier's PDR Program, or donated.

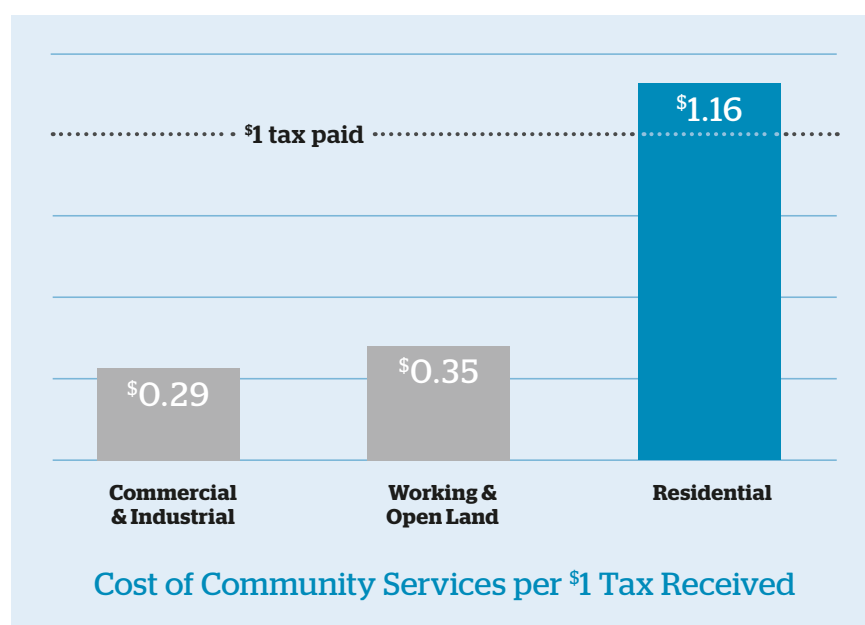
Landowners have traditionally used conservation easements as a tool to voluntarily and permanently limit development and uses on the land while ensuring continued protection of the property's conservation values. Conservation values can include rivers and streams, historic and cultural resources such as battlefields, significant agricultural soils, wildlife habitat or natural and scenic features.

A conservation easement may qualify as a tax deductible non-cash charitable gift if it permanently protects important conservation resources and meets other federal tax code requirements. Associated tax benefits could include a Federal income tax deduction, Virginia state tax credit, and a reduction in local property taxes. For more information about conservation easements, visit pecva.org/conservation.

Cost of Community Services

Cost of Community Services (COCS) is a fiscal analysis that determines the average cost versus revenue of different land uses—such as residential, agricultural, commercial, industrial or forestland. The analysis looks at each of these land use types, and then evaluates demands on public services (such as schools, fire protection, and road maintenance) and shows how much it costs to provide public services to each land use type.

According to the American Farmland Trust, over a hundred COCS studies have been conducted in the last 20 years. The studies consistently show that working lands generate more public revenues than they receive back in public services. The median cost per dollar of revenue raised from working and open land is \$0.35 while it is \$1.16 for residential. Fauquier County is currently conducting its own cost of community services study.



American Farmland Trust. Cost of Community Services Studies, August 2010.

In Fauquier:

As of December 31, 2014, conservation easements in Fauquier County have protected 395 miles of streams, 3,544 acres of scenic rivers, 9,932 acres of historic battlefields, 50,369 acres of farmland, and 39,256 acres of forest.

Fauquier's **PDR** program helps working farms

Fauquier's Purchase of Development Rights program pays landowners of agricultural operations to limit the development potential of their land through a conservation easement.

Unlike a donated conservation easement, the PDR program pays farmers a flat rate of \$25,000 per development right they wish to extinguish.

PDR Program Qualifications

- ▶ Land must be used for a bona fide agricultural operation
- ▶ Land must be in excess of 50 acres
- ▶ Land must currently be zoned Rural Agricultural (RA) or Rural Conservation (RC)
- ▶ Land must not currently be under conservation easement or pending consideration for conservation easement or otherwise restricted from development

Fauquier County formally established the program in 2002 in order to protect the County's farmland and retain the agricultural industry's critical mass. The program is encouraged by the Commonwealth of Virginia, which has policies to support the permanent conservation of farmland, including providing matching funds. While funding for the PDR Program is largely tax based, these funds have been used to leverage non-County sources. About a third (\$4.7 million) has been raised in the form of grants and other contributions.

Benefits of the PDR Program

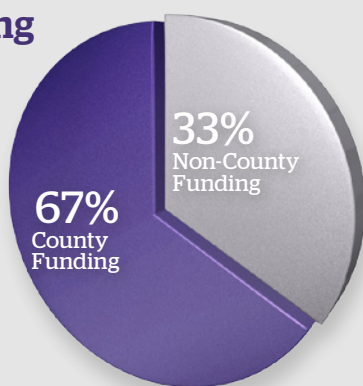
- ▶ Land stays in agricultural use, which ensures that future generations can continue to farm it. Productive agricultural land is finite and an irreplaceable natural resource.
- ▶ PDR easements follow the land into perpetuity and will transfer to a new owner if the property is sold.
- ▶ Long-range environmental benefits, which include the preservation of wildlife habitats, clean air and water, flood control, groundwater recharge, and carbon sequestration.
- ▶ Agricultural goods and services will continue to benefit citizens of Fauquier County and beyond. Agriculture contributes to the local economy directly through sales, job creation, and support to local businesses.
- ▶ Pastoral landscapes and agritourism activities support the tourism economy, which attracts visitors who patronize the many other businesses of Fauquier County.
- ▶ Discourages scattered residential development throughout the countryside where the cost of providing the most basic services, such as schools, student transportation, public safety, public water and sewer, etc., can quickly exceed the resources of the locality often requiring increases in taxes and government debt. (Read more about the Cost of Community Services on page 6.)

The PDR Program is funded through a special real estate tax levy currently set at \$0.006 per \$100 of assessed valuation, which is anticipated to generate \$627,483 in 2015. Fauquier County has also received \$286,983 from the 2015 Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services farmland preservation matching grants and \$90,000 from Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.

In Fauquier, the program has supported ongoing agricultural operations on 45 family farms, mostly in the southern part of the County. To date, the program has permanently protected 10,125 acres and extinguished 537 development rights.

The PDR program is an investment in the future of Fauquier. It supports agritourism and the agricultural economy and promotes economical, efficient, and thought-out development of the County.

Overall Funding for the PDR Program



Sources of Non-County Funding

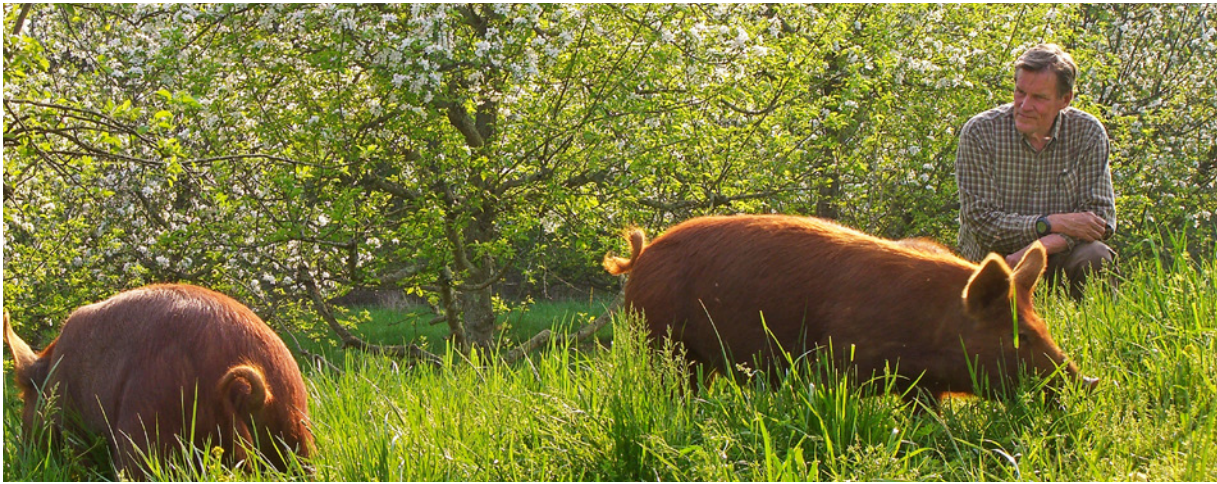
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)—PDR Matching Funds
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)—Virginia Land Conservation Fund
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA)—Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)
- U.S. Navy—Marine Corps Base Quantico REPI Program
- Piedmont Environmental Council
- Dominion Resources
- Old Dominion Electric Cooperative

“The PDR program is excellent, and it's wonderful that our county is using it to preserve open space and farm land. It is costing the taxpayers some money, but we will be repaid by not having the land developed with homes and subdivisions that are cash negative alternatives.”

—Matthew Smith,

Fauquier resident and VP of Sales and Marketing at Smith-Midland





The Piedmont Environmental Council

PEC works with citizens to keep Virginia's Piedmont a wonderful place by protecting beautiful and historic landscapes, building great communities, promoting local farms and food, restoring natural resources, and connecting people with nature.

Visit our website at www.pecva.org to learn more about:

- ▶ Protecting land
- ▶ Getting involved in the issues shaping our community
- ▶ Building wildlife habitat where you live—from butterfly gardens to vast preserves
- ▶ Learning about local and sustainable farming
- ▶ Making your home more energy efficient
- ▶ Community events

PEC is a non-profit grassroots organization supported by people who care about the Piedmont.

Care about how Fauquier grows and develops?
Stay informed by visiting www.pecva.org/signup

Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pecva

Our partners

FAUQUIER PRESERVATION SOCIETY

GOOSE CREEK



ASSOCIATION



Clean air and clean water need open space.

Photo by Ken Garrett

Does it seem like it is easier to breathe in Fauquier? Well it very well may be. According to the American Lung Association's 2014 *State of the Air Report*, Fauquier got an "A" regarding ozone pollution, while nearby urban jurisdictions did not fare as well such as Loudoun ("F") and Prince William ("C").