

CONSERVATION EDITION

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So Many Bills, So Little Time

By Dan Holmes

It is March, a time when most people eagerly await the end of winter and embrace the first signs of spring. For me, the spring also marks the end of long days and nights spent walking the halls and occupying committee rooms in Richmond. The 2020 Virginia General Assembly session concluded on March 7, and by the time you read this, we will all be awaiting Governor Northam’s response to the legislation and budget passed by both houses.

This year’s session, being an even calendar year, was what we refer to as a “long session” (60 days vs 45) as it includes the discussion of a biennial budget. So, besides chasing down legislators on a slew of bills, we were also discussing the funding levels for some of the most important conservation programs and tools we rely on to protect the Piedmont. And this year we had an added twist as both the House and the Senate changed to Democratic majorities. Besides seeing many new faces in the legislature, this meant that the committees that consider the bills and the budget had a very different composition than in years past. This change created opportunities and challenges alike.

The Budget

Our first look at the introduced budget from the governor showed improvements in some areas, including substantial funding increases for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation and the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund. But it also showed weakness in its failure to provide full funding for Agricultural Best Management Practices or other critical tools like the Farmland Preservation Fund (for

A Few Key Budget Numbers

- Agricultural Best Management Practices**
- FUNDING NEEDS: Roughly \$100 million/year
 - BUDGETED: \$66.6 million and \$10 million for technical assistance over a two-year period*
- Virginia Land Conservation Foundation**
- FUNDING SPECIFIED IN CODE: \$16 million/year
 - BUDGETED: \$10 million/year*

- Farmland Preservation Fund**
- FUNDING SPECIFIED IN CODE: \$2 million/year
 - BUDGETED: \$250,000/year*

* Budgeted numbers reflect conference committee agreements. Final vote occurred after this newsletter went to press.

local PDR programs). But the introduced budget is only the framework and does not reflect the different priorities of the House and the Senate. Those priorities were hammered out in House Appropriations and Senate Finance over the last 60 days, including the reconciliation of the two budget bills by a conference committee— comprised of a select group of members from the two committees.

The Bills

- **Stream Exclusion** • We, along with our partners, participated in the discussion around the cattle stream exclusion and nutrient management plan bill. The restructured legislation continues Virginia’s voluntary



More than 3,600 pieces of legislation were introduced this General Assembly Session. Photo by Marco Sanchez

approach to cattle-exclusion, and becomes a mandate in 2026 only if the commonwealth fails to meet water quality targets outlined in the bill. We believe the biggest limiting factor to achieving the watershed restoration goals for the Chesapeake Bay is the lack of funding for agricultural best management practices. It has never been more critical to increase the funding for our cost-share programs, which help farmers install practices, like fencing cattle out of streams, to improve water quality on the farm and downstream. Current budget numbers do not adequately address the need.

- **Conservation** • Besides grant program funding, we were focused on preserving the integrity of the Land Preservation Tax Credit, preventing the breaking up of family lands, and strengthening conservation easement law. We are pleased to report that the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act, which would

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Osage Oranges, Hydrological Cycles, and Ruminations on Conservation Easements

By George Ohrstrom II

My wife and I, and our animal family, have lived on the same farm in Clarke County for over 35 years. We donated an easement on our land 20 years ago for the usual reasons—we loved the farm and wanted to make sure it wouldn’t become a future subdivision. We feel that we are all

part of human settlement on the landscape and everything we do should be compatible with nature’s processes.

I have walked every inch of this farm and am beginning to understand the ecology of it. I know the open fields, where wildlife like to live and the corridors they travel through. The western woods harbor fox families every spring, and the eastern woods is home to barred owls that sound off constantly. I know the big trees in the creek drainage, the giant walnut that quietly gets bigger every year, the huge busted-up hackberry just down the hill, and, of course, Sampson, the white oak that fell over a few years ago whose growth rings counted 325.

Most of Clarke County west of the Shenandoah River sits on a limestone ridge

that runs through Virginia, western Maryland and into Pennsylvania. Osage orange trees love limestone, and over the years I’ve come to understand the cycle of osage fruit as wildlife food. In late November, hard green balls resembling the human brain cover the ground. I wonder every year about the attraction of the one eaten fruit surrounded by hundreds of untouched others. Once winter is well established and the fruit has frozen and thawed numerous times, the wildlife all eat it, and often, squirrels will carry them over to a fence post or tree limb to eat. After the fruit is torn apart and eaten, bits of it are often scattered around, and one can easily see that they are called oranges because they are segmented like the citrus fruit we eat. We have two large matching osages in front of our house 30 feet apart. Oddly, one tree’s fruit is the size of large grapefruits while the other’s

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Post Office Box 460
Warrenton, VA 20188
540.347.2334
pec@pecva.org

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Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!



PEC Board Co-Chair, George Ohrstrom II. Photo by Ken Garrett

2019 Land Conservation Totals

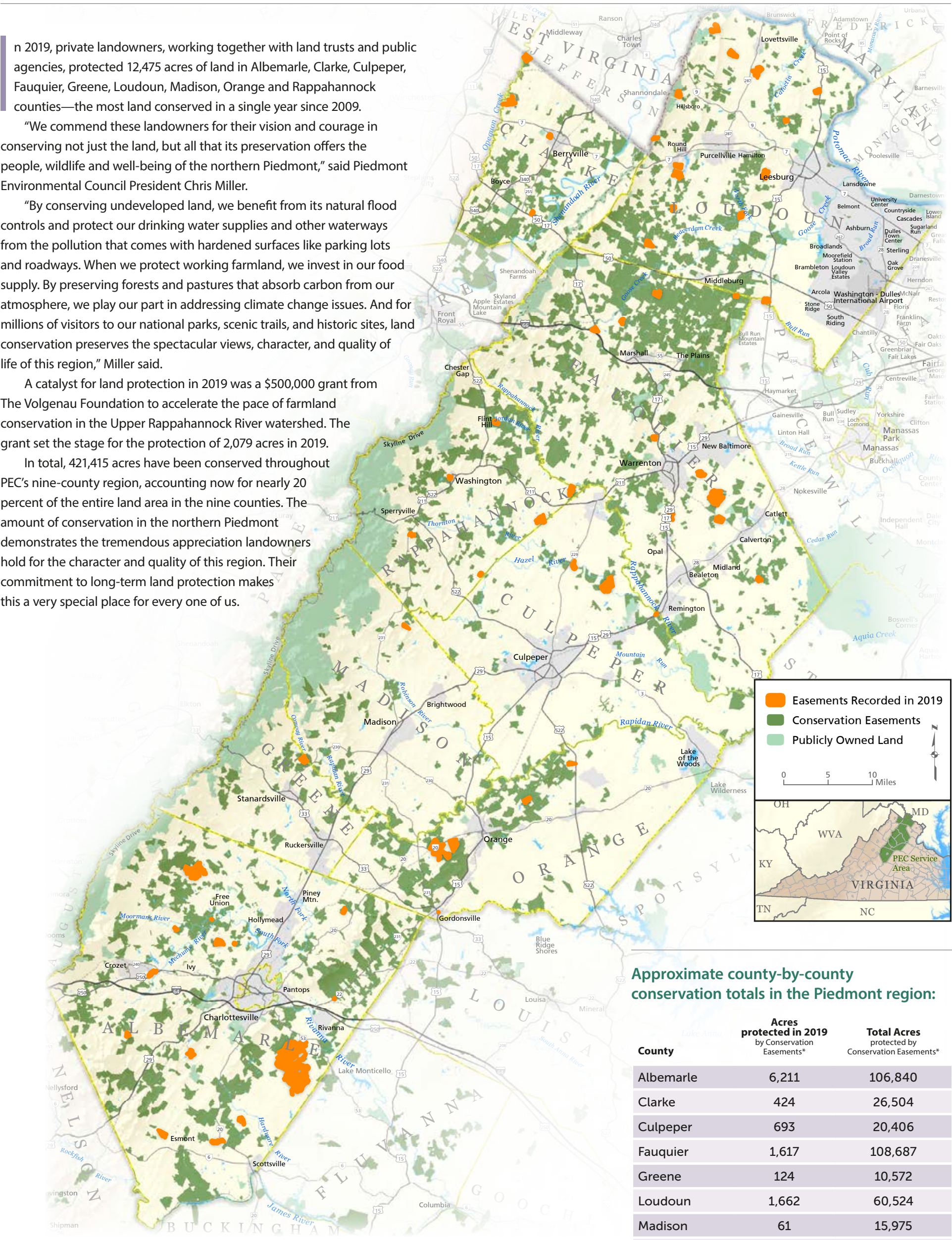
In 2019, private landowners, working together with land trusts and public agencies, protected 12,475 acres of land in Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties—the most land conserved in a single year since 2009.

“We commend these landowners for their vision and courage in conserving not just the land, but all that its preservation offers the people, wildlife and well-being of the northern Piedmont,” said Piedmont Environmental Council President Chris Miller.

“By conserving undeveloped land, we benefit from its natural flood controls and protect our drinking water supplies and other waterways from the pollution that comes with hardened surfaces like parking lots and roadways. When we protect working farmland, we invest in our food supply. By preserving forests and pastures that absorb carbon from our atmosphere, we play our part in addressing climate change issues. And for millions of visitors to our national parks, scenic trails, and historic sites, land conservation preserves the spectacular views, character, and quality of life of this region,” Miller said.

A catalyst for land protection in 2019 was a \$500,000 grant from The Volgenau Foundation to accelerate the pace of farmland conservation in the Upper Rappahannock River watershed. The grant set the stage for the protection of 2,079 acres in 2019.

In total, 421,415 acres have been conserved throughout PEC’s nine-county region, accounting now for nearly 20 percent of the entire land area in the nine counties. The amount of conservation in the northern Piedmont demonstrates the tremendous appreciation landowners hold for the character and quality of this region. Their commitment to long-term land protection makes this a very special place for every one of us.



Approximate county-by-county conservation totals in the Piedmont region:

County	Acres protected in 2019 by Conservation Easements*	Total Acres protected by Conservation Easements*
Albemarle	6,211	106,840
Clarke	424	26,504
Culpeper	693	20,406
Fauquier	1,617	108,687
Greene	124	10,572
Loudoun	1,662	60,524
Madison	61	15,975
Orange	1,173	38,554
Rappahannock	508	33,352
PEC Region	12,475	421,415

* Totals do not sum due to rounding

Map created by PEC for presentation purposes only. Data source: American Battlefield Protection Program, County Governments, USGS, VA Department of Historic Resources, VA Department of Conservation and Recreation. Although efforts have been made to verify data, accuracy is not guaranteed. For more information, please visit www.pecva.org. Warrenton | JWR

The Relentless Pursuit

By Rex Linville

In the 16 years I've been working for The Piedmont Environmental Council, I have had the privilege and opportunity to help many landowners protect the wonderful natural, cultural, and scenic resources of our Piedmont region. During that time, I've never been accused of finding a property unworthy of protection.

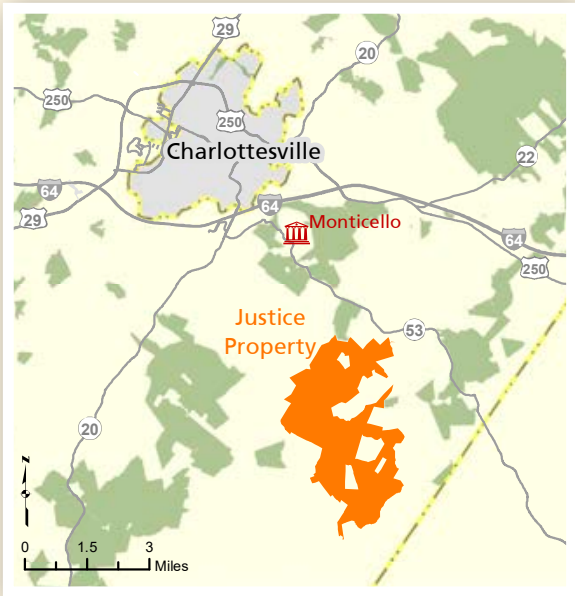
As a conservation organization, we identify land ripe for conservation due to attributes such as important agricultural soils, forested area, wildlife habitat, river frontage, or scenic views, and our staff build long-term relationships with landowners. My primary job with PEC is to help landowners understand the conservation options that are available and then work with them to protect their property with a conservation easement, that is, *if they decide* conservation is right for them. Landowners often say "no" to conservation, or "not now," at least initially, and in this line of work, we develop a thick skin, grow accustomed to rejection, and learn the value of persistence.

From the beginning, I've had on my radar a

large 4,500-acre piece of land within the eastern viewshed of Monticello. It is one of the largest contiguous blocks of land in Albemarle County, and its location just 15 minutes from downtown Charlottesville puts it at great risk for development. When I started with PEC, the land was owned by the timber company, MeadWestvaco. For a few years, I brainstormed with colleagues at The Nature Conservancy on strategies to protect the property, but nothing panned out. Eventually, MeadWestvaco put it on the market and sold it to the James C. Justice Companies in 2010.



PEC Conservation Field Representative Rex Linville. Photo by Marco Sanchez



Map created by Watsun Randolph, PEC

Shortly after the property changed hands, I reached out to a local representative for the Justice family and began exploring conservation options for the property. Over the years, I felt like I tried everything. Maybe the Commonwealth would purchase it as a state forest? Perhaps the owner could establish a carbon mitigation bank and sell carbon credits? How about a limited development scenario that preserved the most important parts of the property? For a host of reasons, nothing worked. But I stayed after it and touched base every six months or so.

Persistence eventually paid off, and in early 2019, the landowner expressed a desire to conserve the property with a donated conservation easement. We connected the owner with the Albemarle Conservation Easement Authority, which actually holds the easement, and by July 2019, this important property was permanently protected. It is now one of the largest conserved properties in the region.

Ultimately, every landowner who donates a

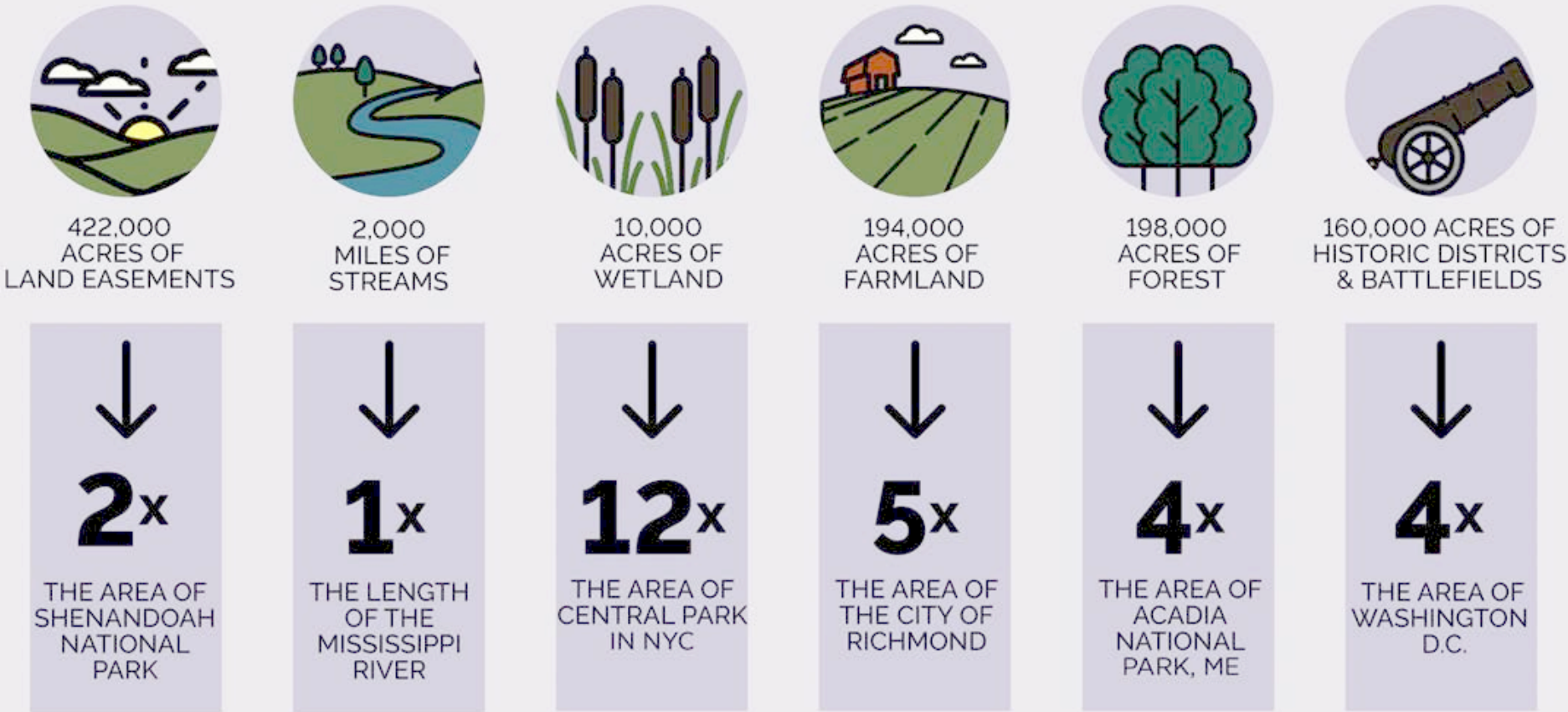
conservation easement deserves 100 percent of the credit for their decision. That said, I truly believe that if The Piedmont Environmental Council had not allowed me to invest years of effort into patiently cultivating a relationship and staying at the table to find a conservation solution, the landowners of this remarkable property would not have been in the position to make the decision they did.

This same type of scenario has played itself out time and time again over the past 50 years in the nine counties served by PEC. Having local staff on the ground who build relationships with individual landowners is one of the key reasons that the northern Virginia Piedmont is one of the most highly protected regions in America.

If you know of a conservation opportunity in your neck of the woods, please reach out to us! You can call our main line at 540-347-2334 or shoot us an email at conservation@pecva.org.

THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF LAND CONSERVATION

THESE COMPARISONS HELP SHOW HOW MUCH HAS BEEN PROTECTED BY CONSERVATION EASEMENTS IN PEC'S NINE-COUNTY AREA.



Fronting the Costs: Fencing at Mountain Hollow Farm

By Tracy Lind

Eight generations of cattle farming had taken its toll on the streams at Dean and Carina Elgin’s Mountain Hollow Farm in northern Fauquier County. Historically, “all the cattle had access to the creek. That was our watering system. And that was the norm in that day,” Dean Elgin said. But by 2015, the Elgins wanted to repair the streambank erosion and reduce the water pollution caused by the foot traffic and waste generated by 200 cattle moving in and out of the water repeatedly. But there was a problem.

Although the Elgins qualified for state and federal cost-share funding for fencing, gates, hardened stream crossings, water pumps and water troughs for livestock, those cost-share programs only reimburse landowners after a project is completed. Like many landowners, the Elgins couldn’t afford the more than \$120,000 upfront cost, and the projects were put on hold.

But last year, The Piedmont Environmental Council was able to offer the Elgin’s a short-term loan through our James M. Rowley Goose Creek Conservation Fund. This fund is one of 11 similar conservation funds that PEC manages and that support on-the-ground conservation and habitat restoration projects in specific geographic areas within PEC’s nine-county region. The mission of the James M. Rowley Goose Creek Conservation Fund is to preserve the water quality, scenic beauty, and rural landscape of the—you guessed it—Goose Creek watershed.

With PEC’s loan, the Elgins fenced out over 4,100 feet of streams in the Hungry Run watershed and installed a new well and livestock watering system at Mountain Hollow Farm. They’ll repay the loan when the cost-share reimbursement comes through.

“A grant from the Chesapeake Bay Land and



Carina and Dean Elgin at Mountain Hollow Farm. Photo by Hugh Kenny

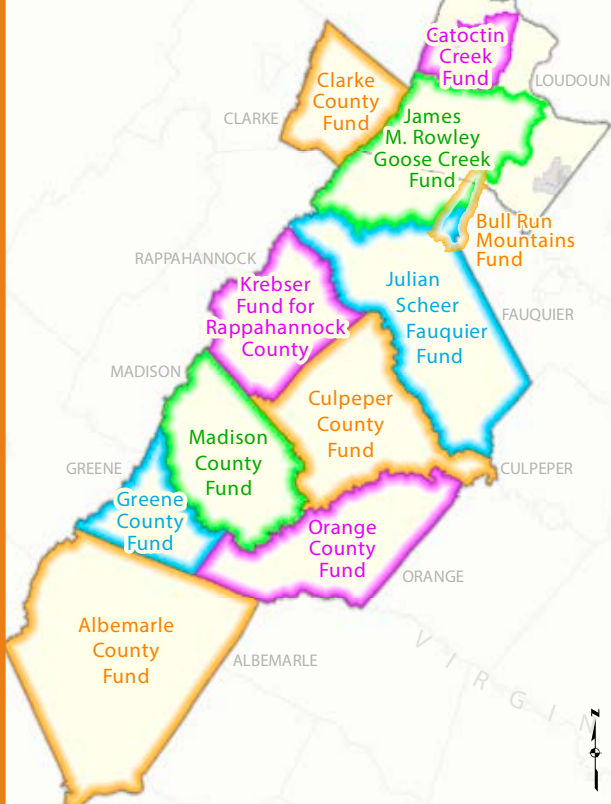
Water Initiative, a project of the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network and Land Trust Alliance, helped us create this short-term loan program as a means of helping farmers like the Elgins,” said PEC Director of Conservation Mike Kane. “We think the loan program is a cost-effective way to accelerate the pace of needed water quality improvements in our region, and we hope it will become a model for our other funds that support other parts of the region.”

As Dean, Carina, and their sheepdog Jenny walk along a Hungry Run tributary on the farm, Dean says he looks forward to seeing what will happen now that the cattle are fenced out. “There’s something to clean water. All of a sudden the cattle are drinking well water instead of stream water.”

The Elgins believe they’re lucky to live here. If it weren’t for PEC’s short-term loan program, Carina said, “everything would have deteriorated. We couldn’t have afforded it, otherwise, when all the fences eventually fell down. Dean would’ve had to give up the cows and farming. This lets us start anew.”

Most of PEC’s 11 conservation funds operate

PEC Conservation Funds



This map shows donor-designated funds created for on-the-ground conservation and restoration projects in specific geographic areas within The Piedmont Environmental Council service territory. The majority of the funds are held by the Piedmont Foundation, a separate 509(a)(3) charitable organization, established to hold and manage special funds in support of PEC’s mission. Learn more at piedmontfoundation.org

with an advisory committee that helps identify projects and provide information to landowners. These funds all provide cost assistance for protecting land with a conservation easement or through a fee simple purchase. They also offer short-term loans for landowners interested in working with their local soil and water conservation district on land management cost-share programs.

For more information on the James M. Rowley Goose Creek Fund or other PEC conservation funds, give us a call or email conservation@pecva.org.

So Many Bills, So Little Time

Continued from cover

help protect heirs of family land from having their properties split up, passed with unanimous support. As well, we were able to defeat legislation that would have inserted another layer of bureaucracy into the easement process, creating delays and the potential to lose out on important conservation opportunities. Sadly, the Senate did not pass SB621, which would have ensured that disputes involving ambiguities in easement terms are resolved in favor of conservation.

➤ **Energy** • This session, we supported the environmental community on larger initiatives, like the Virginia Clean Economy Act, while focusing our attention on improving the underlying utility regulatory structure through legislation like the Virginia Energy Reform Act, which would de-monopolize Virginia’s electricity system. That legislation was carried over until 2021 and remains a PEC priority. We are pleased, however, to report the passage of several bills. These include the Solar Freedom bill, removing barriers to small-scale solar; HB167, a bill on pipeline cost recovery; and HB528, a bill to restore authority to the SCC related to the payback period of retiring power plants.

Lastly, we supported the Fair Energy Billing Act allowing the SCC to finally hold Virginia Electric Power Company accountable for over-earnings through a rate case for both generation and distribution. Unfortunately, that legislation failed to pass the Senate Committee on Commerce and Labor.

➤ **Land Use and Transportation** • This year marks one of the first in which I failed to see the dreaded words “Route 29 Bypass.” And while no bad idea ever truly dies, it was nice not to see an associated bill. Speaking of bad ideas, attacks on Smart Scale scoring were still the focus of some legislators as multiple bills were filed to weaken the scoring system. I am pleased to report that they all failed. Bills impacting localities’ ability to regulate or appropriately evaluate utility scale solar were also defeated, or amended in such a way as to remove major concerns. We also worked with Delegates Guzman and Webert on two bills related to the dumping of construction fill dirt on agricultural lands, one providing notice to localities and the other forming a working group to recommend changes to regulations and guidance. Both measures



PEC’s Dan Holmes and Rex Linville talk to Senator Bill Stanley. Photo by Marco Sanchez

passed. Lastly, the transportation omnibus bill passed. As with any omnibus bill, we didn’t like everything. But the bill did include a lot of positives, including a record amount of new money for transit and rail.

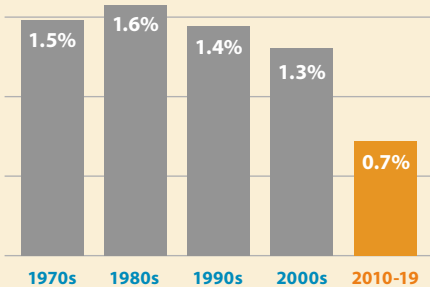
As always, thank you for any action you took this session to improve the Commonwealth. Please feel free to follow up with me directly at dholmes@pecva.org or 540-347-2334 ext. 7040, if you have questions on any of the bills or the final budget numbers.

Please visit pecva.org/richmond2020 for a more complete rundown of the legislation and budget items we were tracking this year.

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

What was the annual population growth in Virginia from 2010 through 2019?



ANSWER

According to the Weldon Cooper Center at the University of Virginia, “though Virginia has added over half a million new residents since the last census in 2010, population growth has slowed significantly across Virginia in recent years, falling below U.S. growth levels to reach the lowest population growth rate since the 1920s.”

Spring at Roundabout Meadows

By Cindy Sabato

A lot is going on, at and around our 141-acre Roundabout Meadows property at Gilberts Corner in Loudoun County. We've got a new trail opening, the second season for the Community Farm and news to share about the market property at the northeast corner!

New Trail Opening

We are excited to formally open the Old Carolina Road Trail this spring, with plans for a new information kiosk, interpretive signs, and freshly planted native trees and shrubs that will form a beautiful walking corridor. Once a Native American trail used by early colonists as a north-south route through Loudoun County and beyond, the Old Carolina roadbed serves as the backbone for the 1/2-mile trail, which creates public access to the scenic, historic, agricultural and natural resources of Gilberts Corner.

Convenient parking is at NOVA Park's Mt. Zion Historic Park, where visitors can see Mt. Zion Old School Baptist Church, built in 1851 and used as a Union field hospital during the Battle of Aldie in 1863. The trailhead and kiosk will be located in front of the cemetery wall directing hikers to the top of the historic roadbed. The trail takes visitors first past a portion of the 1852 cemetery, where 14 Civil War soldiers are buried, and past the 60 largely unmarked graves of the African-American congregation's cemetery. It then leads visitors into the seven-acre Roundabout Meadows Wildlife Management Area, a sensitive wetland site with a fantastic array of flora and fauna. And finally, the trail goes down to the edge of Howsers Branch, where PEC has been working to restore water quality for the past five years.

A partnership of PEC, NOVA Parks, Fauquier and Loudoun Garden Club and the Mount Zion Cemetery of

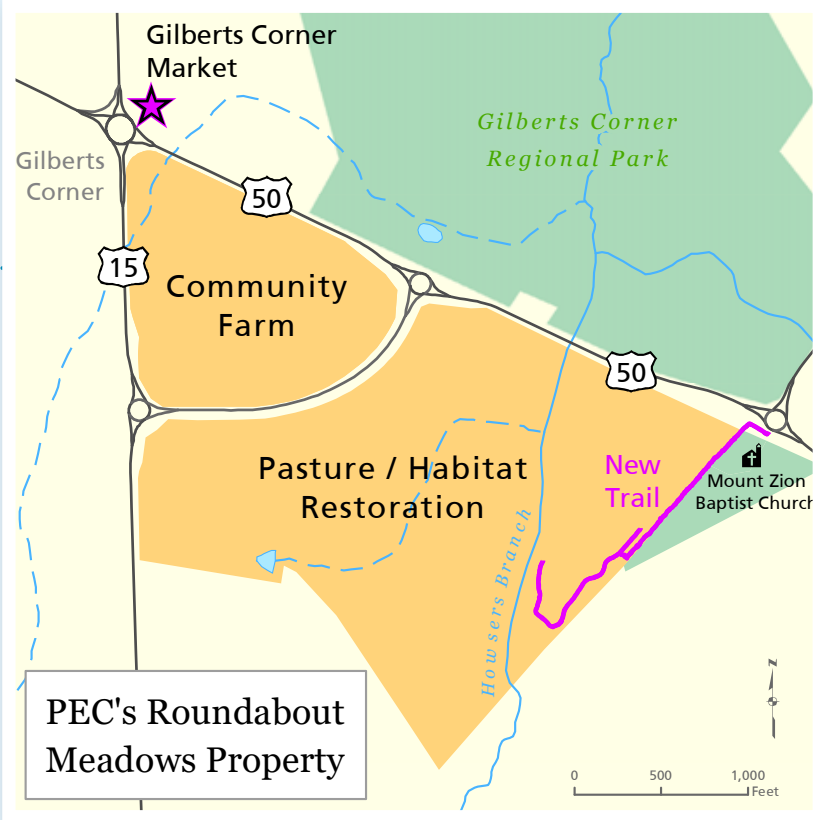
Aldie, the Old Carolina Road Trail is part of PEC's ongoing effort to make Roundabout Meadows a hub for community engagement, with interpretive history tours, pasture field walks, environmental education, native habitat restoration and volunteer service at the Community Farm.

Call for Volunteers at the Farm

Spring planting season is upon us at the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows. With our new greenhouse and a goal of 10,000 pounds of produce for Loudoun Hunger Relief, we need more volunteers than ever before.

The season began on Saturday, Feb. 8 when more than 30 volunteers planted 5,000 seeds that will sprout into our first planting of broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and kale. Volunteers will transplant these seedlings from the greenhouse to the fields as spring emerges. In March, volunteers can help us begin seeding our warm season crops, such as tomatoes, peppers and squash. In April, we'll need help putting potatoes in the ground and planting our flower and herb gardens, which will support pollinators and other beneficial insects for the farm.

We can accommodate up to 25 volunteers at a time, and minors under age 14 must be accompanied by an adult. Volunteers can be school groups, scouts and clubs, businesses or individuals. "The only requirement is a great attitude and a desire to help us provide fresh, healthy food for the food-insecure people in Loudoun



County," said Community Farm Manager Dana Melby.

Find out more about the farm and sign up to volunteer at pecva.org/farm.

Gilberts Corner Market

PEC is proud to announce that we have taken ownership of the Gilberts Corner Market and look forward to enhancing its history as a place to find local food and fiber. As a first step in ensuring local production at the corner, we have happily entered into a long-term agreement with farmer Tyler Wegmeyer, who has been part of the market since 2012. He will continue his popular pick-your-own service, enabling visitors to roam his strawberry patch for the freshest, ripest berries, beginning in May. Gilberts Corner Market is open, and we look forward to sharing more details in a future issue of *The Piedmont View*.

Osage Oranges, Hydrological Cycles, and Ruminations on Conservation Easements

Continued from cover

is noticeably smaller, more like baseballs.

Our farm is lucky enough to have a stream bordering one whole side, and over the years, I've come to understand it has cycles too—drying out in parts and slowly backfilling successive pools as groundwater rises, until the whole flow starts over again.

So what does the observation of all this ecological activity have to do with a conservation easement? One of the major benefits of an easement is the ability to plan for and "codify" the future development of one's land. Knowing the ecology allows for planning a property's future in a way that is compatible with nature's processes. Our easement minimizes impervious surfaces and thoughtfully places buildings to respect these essential cycles, protecting the natural features that contribute to providing clean air and water to us, our neighbors, and the larger community. Now, with the conservation easement in place, I know that future generations will hopefully observe and benefit from these cycles and, in turn, have the chance to share the same sense of wonder I have so enjoyed over the years.

Imagine the possibilities if one had a really large parcel that might be close to a town that might need some room to grow 50 years on. One could plan an easement on the parcel to allow that growth to happen in the places that make sense, and ensure that inappropriate development doesn't destroy the historical ecology of the rest of the land. What could be better than that?



Osage orange remnant left in honey locust tree. Photo by George Ohrstrom II

MEET PEC

Maggi Blomstrom

Rappahannock-Rapidan Conservation Initiative Coordinator

We welcomed Maggi back to PEC in November 2019 as our Rappahannock-Rapidan Conservation Initiative Coordinator. In this role, she will work with partners to accelerate conservation easements, water quality improvement projects, wildlife connectivity, and public access throughout the upper Rappahannock watershed—which is comprised of land in Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties.

This initiative, forged through a collective vision and outcome-oriented projects, aims to establish a continuous conservation reserve connecting the Blue Ridge to the Chesapeake Bay. The initiative is funded by generous grants from The Volgenau Foundation and Virginia Environmental Endowment.

Maggi previously served as PEC's field representative for southern Fauquier and Culpeper counties. She brings years of experience and enthusiasm engaging with landowners, volunteers, communities, and partners to advance environmental stewardship and land management. She holds a B.A. in geography and urban and regional studies from Virginia Commonwealth University and a M.A. in community development and planning from Clark University in Massachusetts.



Photo by Hugh Kenny

On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

> Morven East

Good news! In January, the UVA Foundation protected almost 1,200 acres of forest land, known as Morven East, located in the viewshed of Monticello. This important project was part of a significant gift of land from John W. Kluge in 2001. The new easement was donated to the Albemarle Conservation Easement Authority and is adjacent to the 4,500 acres recently protected by the James C. Justice Companies (more on page 3).

> City Comprehensive Plan

As Charlottesville continues to work on its comprehensive plan, PEC is at the table to ensure the city is planning appropriately for future growth. A thoughtful plan, reliant on citizen input, results in reduced infrastructure costs, better public health outcomes and a thriving community where people want to live, work and play. In addition, a well-designed, functional urban place is a key way to help protect the rural area.

Clarke

> Planning and Water Quality

The Planning Commission continues to review and update the Zoning Ordinance and will likely hold a public hearing after it is complete.

PEC is partnering with Clarke County and the Friends of the Shenandoah River to monitor local streams. You can help by becoming a Certified Water Quality Monitor—visit streams, count bugs, and record data to help the community and organizations better understand our waterways. Join us for a hands-on demo on April 18, and follow it up with training on macroinvertebrate monitoring on April 23 and April 25. Contact Tracy Lind at tlind@pecva.org to learn more.

Culpeper

> Clevenger's Corner

PEC, in collaboration with Rappahannock League for Environmental Protection, has vocalized concerns about the impacts of the Clevenger's Village Planned Unit Development. Our organizations, along with citizens from both counties, are concerned that associated light pollution will be detrimental to both counties' night sky visibility. Culpeper County has recently discussed updating its lighting ordinance to address lighting conditions and requirements; we are pushing for an updated ordinance to include dark sky friendly language.

> Historic Resources

The Draft 2020 Comprehensive Plan severely lacks the appropriate amount of detail related to the county's historic resources. PEC has submitted written comments to government and elected officials, asking that the draft plan include all important, documented historic resources, and strengthen historic resources preservation language. PEC is compiling a list of these resources to communicate to the county.

> The Hazel River

The end of 2019 brought in several new easements

that protect water quality and habitat along the Hazel River. The Hazel is home to the green floater mussel, a federal species of concern, and is one of 30 rivers in Virginia with "Exceptional State Waters." PEC now holds an easement conserving 100 acres on the Parrish Property, which has 5,964 linear feet on the Hazel River and its major tributary, Waterford Run, as well as 51 acres of floodplain.

Fauquier

> Sanctuary at Barrel Oak

The Sanctuary at Barrel Oak Winery request for a hotel, restaurant, and event center on the 50-acre parcel next to the existing Barrel Oak Winery has been postponed at the request of the applicant. The proposed resort, located two miles west of Marshall on Grove Lane, would require approval of four special exceptions.

> Community Planning Initiatives

In January, the Town of Warrenton held an open house to get final public input before drafting its new Comprehensive Plan. Focus is being placed on economic development, creating diverse housing options, mixed-use development, enhancing public services and amenities, and fiscal health. A draft is expected to be released for public review in early Spring. Fauquier County is following the town's planning process carefully and intends to update its Warrenton Service District Plan soon after adoption.

Greene

> Streetscaping and Community Mobility

PEC continues to monitor the future of U.S. 29 in Greene County to ensure it is consistent with the Ruckersville Area Plan, which calls for "appropriate development." Officials will soon conduct an audit of the zoning code and are working on a streetscape plan to limit signage. A major goal is to build a parallel road network to serve local traffic and make it easier for residents to bike and walk, as well as preserve the integrity of the 29 corridor. Later this year, JAUNT will begin operating the Greene County Transit service. As Greene grows, PEC's ongoing work on community mobility issues will help increase ridership.

Loudoun

> Land Use Planning

PEC Field Representative Evan McCarthy was recently confirmed by the Board of Supervisors to serve on Loudoun's Facilities Standards Manual (FSM) Public Review Committee. The FSM contains information related to design and construction standards for subdivisions and site plans. When a change is proposed, the county's director of building and development requests advice from the committee, prior to discussions with the Planning Commission and Board.

PEC staff is helping local residents stay informed and provide input on rural subdivision applications. We are also partnering with other organizations to ensure a reduction of development impacts in the Rural Policy Area to better align with the preservation goals outlined in the newly adopted Comprehensive Plan.

Madison

> Criglersville School

PEC weighed in against the county's decision to demolish Criglersville School. We believe selling the property for adaptive reuse is a better option, especially considering the \$250,000 price tag for demolition. The county tentatively expects a rezoning application and purchase contract to be submitted by an applicant this spring. The applicant's vision includes building updates to allow for retail, event/venue, short-term or long-term lodging, and restaurants/food service, in addition to rezoning the property to light industrial.

> Zoning Ordinance Changes

The Board of Supervisors made changes to its rural resort ordinance, lowering the minimum parcel size to 10-acres in the A-1 and C-1 zoning districts. PEC weighed in against this action, which is a 90% reduction from the original 100-acre minimum. Although we support revenue generated by rural tourism, we believe rural resorts should require more land to mitigate impacts on neighbors and the environment.

Orange

> New County Administrator

The Board of Supervisors has hired an interim county administrator, Brenda Garton, as they search for a new hire. PEC is following the hiring process and looks forward to meeting with and working alongside the new county administrator.

> Gordonsville Park

In January, Gordonsville purchased a parcel from CSX Transportation, which owns and operates one of the rail lines passing through town, to formally incorporate into Verling Park. This latest addition to the park follows two previous ones, including the adjacent parcel on Linney Street, purchased and cleared in 2018, and a vacant lot in the block between Verling Park and the Firemen's Fairgrounds, purchased by PEC last year to better link these two in-town open spaces through our Town to Trail initiative.

Rappahannock

> Beaver Believers & Rush River Volunteers

PEC partnered with Virginia Working Landscapes and Clifton Institute to bring attention to restoration ecology's newest (and oldest) friend: the beaver. Skip Lisle, a renowned wildlife conservationist, joined us at the Little Washington Theater to teach us about his non-lethal beaver management tools, the "Beaver Deceiver," "Castor Master," and other beaver-proofing tools for landowners. A new film, *Beaver Believers*, was shown, followed by an expert panel.

Clean water has been the catalyst for a new citizen science group of volunteers who will monitor water quality on the Rush River. Since 2007, the river has been impaired by elevated counts of *E. coli* bacteria. PEC is supporting the volunteers by leading bi-weekly monitoring at two sites. The data will be provided to DEQ and help make the case for a cleaner Rush River that we can swim in, fish from and enjoy as a community.



UPCOMING Events

Event details subject to change. Please check pecva.org/events for the latest information.

Rappahannock Earth Day Clean-up

When > **Saturday, April 4**
9 AM – 2 PM

Where > **Rappahannock County**
Park, 7 Park Lane,
Washington, VA

Get a head start on celebrating the start of spring and an early Earth Day at Rappahannock County Park for a volunteer clean-up of the Rush River. Event partners include Rappahannock Co. Recreational Facilities Authority, PEC, Friends of the Rappahannock, RappFLOW, RLEP, and Old Rag Master Naturalists. Wear waterproof boots or waders and gloves. Children are welcome with an adult!

Free and open to the public. Visit Rappahannock County Park’s Facebook event page for more info!

Annual Bluebell Walk at Cedar Run

When > **Saturday, April 4 • 2 – 4 PM**
(Rain or shine)

Where > **Bonny Brook Farm,**
8446 Old Dumfries Road,
Catlett, VA

Celebrate spring and walk through a conserved farm to see native bluebells along Cedar Run. Outdoor clothing with waterproof boots is recommended. No dogs allowed. There is no charge but donations are gratefully accepted toward PEC’s Julian W. Scheer Fauquier Land Conservation Fund.

Registration requested. Visit pecva.org/events or contact Kendra Corbin at kcorbin@pecva.org or 540.347.2334 ext. 7005.

From the Rappahannock, For the Rappahannock

When > **Sunday, April 5 • 12 – 3 PM**
(Rain or shine)

Where > **Marriott Ranch, Hume**

Join Friends of the Rappahannock, PEC and the John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District for a day at the iconic Marriott Ranch to celebrate the Rappahannock River watershed. There will be Rappahannock River oysters, catered barbeque lunch from Marriott Ranch, local wine and beer, live music, hayride tours, fish shocking demonstrations and more!

Tickets are \$25 general admission and \$20 for members of PEC/FOR or participants in Soil and Water conservation programs. Admission includes Rappahannock oysters, BBQ and two drink tickets.

To register, visit www.riverfriends.org/events. Contact mblomstrom@pecva.org with questions.

Solarize Piedmont

When > **Monday, April 6 – Friday, June 5**

Where > **Albemarle, Charlottesville, Clarke, Culpeper,**
Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange
and Rappahannock

If you missed PEC’s Solarize campaign last year, you have another chance to sign up this spring! PEC supporters and area businesses within our service territory can take advantage of competitive rates and financing mechanisms designed specifically for solar energy systems. If you’ve been thinking about installing solar panels on your home, farm or business, this is your opportunity to find out if it will work for you.

More information at pecva.org/solarize.

Loudoun Nature Days

When > **Saturday, April 11 • 10 AM – 12 PM**

Where > **The Community Farm at Roundabout**
Meadows, 39990 Howsers Branch Dr.,
Aldie, VA

Join the Community Farm in celebrating Loudoun Nature Days. We will spend Saturday morning improving habitat for beneficial insects and getting our hands dirty on the farm!

Free. Pre-registration is encouraged, visit pecva.org/events for more details or contact Dana Melby at dmelby@pecva.org.

Fauquier Farm and Land Conservation Workshop

When > **Thursday, April 16 • 6 – 8 PM**

Where > **St. Stephens Episcopal Church,**
8695 Old Dumfries Rd., Catlett, VA

There are a variety of land management and land conservation programs available to farm and forest landowners in Fauquier. Join PEC’s Fauquier Fund and our partners at the Fauquier PDR program for a free dinner and learn about federal, state and local programs, as well as hear a review of conservation successes and challenges.

RSVP with Claire Catlett at ccatlett@pecva.org.

Stream Team Workshop

When > **Saturday, April 18 • 10 AM – 1 PM**

Where > **Shenandoah University River Campus at**
Cool Spring Battlefield in Clarke County

Clarke County, Friends of the Shenandoah River and the Piedmont Environmental Council are hosting this fun and informative water quality workshop. Learn what contributes to clean and dirty water in our local streams, how it affects you and simple ways you can help.

Fun for all ages. Lunch will be provided. Learn more and sign up to attend at pecva.org/events.

BikeCville!

Thanks to a grant from the Bama Works Fund of Dave Matthews Band at the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, our BikeCville event series is back for 2020. BikeCville is a series of free monthly all-ability bike rides that emphasize safety, visibility and community. They’re appropriate for anyone who can stay on a bike for half an hour or so and a great way to learn more about Charlottesville, meet new people and become better advocates for walking and biking. Join us on **Sunday, April 19** for a Public Art Bike Ride. Learn more about all upcoming rides at pecva.org/bikecville.

Lucketts Easement and Land Management Panel

When > **Tuesday, April 21 • 6:30 – 9 PM**

Where > **42361 Lucketts Road, Leesburg, VA 20176**

Join us to learn about the variety of land management and land conservation programs and financial incentives available to rural landowners in Loudoun. Join the Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District, PEC and our partners for a presentation and panel discussion and take time to talk one-on-one with organizations.

Free. Registration required. Visit pecva.org/events or contact Tracy Lind at tlind@pecva.org or 540-347-2334 ext. 7066.

Earth Day Ice Cream Social with Moo-Thru

When > **Wednesday, April 22 • 3 – 5 PM**

Where > **PEC Office, 45 Horner St., Warrenton, VA**

Come celebrate Earth Day with free ice cream from a local dairy. Moo-Thru Ice Cream will have their ice cream truck in our Warrenton office parking lot. This year to promote sustainability through local action PEC has partnered with Friends of the Rappahannock to offer residents free trees (limit 2 per person).

Supplies are limited! To reserve your free trees, visit www.riverfriends.org/event/trees-pec

Friends vs. Foes: Insects in the Garden

When > **Saturday, May 30 • 10 AM – 12 PM**

Where > **The Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows,**
39990 Howsers Branch Dr., Aldie, VA

When it comes to insects in the garden it can be difficult to distinguish our friends from our foes. Join us on the Community Farm for an on-farm lecture about which bugs are which and how to best manage them. We will look at which pests are active on the farm at this stage of the season, the basics of integrative pest management, and how you can improve habitat for beneficial insects.

Free. Pre-registration is encouraged. Visit pecva.org/events for more details or contact Dana Melby at dmelby@pecva.org.

Rush River Free Fishing Day

When > **Saturday, June 6 • 8 AM – 2 PM**

Where > **Rappahannock County Park, 7 Park Lane,**
Washington, VA

Bring the whole family for a celebration of Rush River Conservation Day at Rappahannock County Park. Free fishing is being offered state-wide June 5-7 and you’ll find both pole and fly fishing on the Rush River. Native trout will be stocked in the river for the event, fishing gear is free to rent, and no fishing license is required!

Visit Rappahannock County Park’s Facebook event page for more info and to let us know if you are “going”!

Ridges to Rivers

When > **Saturday, June 6 • 6 – 9 PM**

Where > **Oak Hill, Aldie, VA**

Although the annual Summer Safari gala on Racetrack Hill was “sunset” in 2019, the collaboration between PEC, Shenandoah National Park Trust and Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute continues! Enjoy cocktails and dinner at the historic Oak Hill, former home to President James Monroe, to benefit the programs of the three organizations.

Registration: \$300 per person. Contact us for more information on tickets and sponsorship opportunities. Contact Karissa Epley, kepley@pecva.org or 540-347-2334 ext. 7002.



Photo by Peter Krebs

Dear Friends,

Rumor has it, the idea for Earth Day was first announced at the Airlie Conference Center in Fauquier County, spurring a national and international movement to make the environment a major focus. That was 1969, and today, 50 years later, much progress has been made on those initial concerns about air and water pollution, loss of wildlife and endangered species. But, as we are reminded daily, that progress has been offset by population growth and consumption around the world. Arguably, we are overwhelming the earth’s natural systems at a global scale.

Around the same time that Sen. Gaylor Nelson was cooking up the idea for Earth Day over at Airlie, people in Fauquier and eight adjoining counties were cooking up a plan for a new organization that would promote better planning toward a more sustainable future in the region. That organization was founded in 1972 as The Piedmont Environmental Council, and since then, our focus has been consistent and persistent. With an eye keenly focused on land planning, conservation, and restoration, we have pushed for state, regional and federal strategies to improve air and water quality and natural habitats, battled ill-conceived development and infrastructure projects, and worked to preserve historic resources for decades.

What differentiates PEC from other conservation and environmental

organizations is that we strive to empower people to act, either individually or together, toward a more sustainable region. We have a big, bold vision for great communities in a conserved and restored landscape of farms and forests that runs from the Blue Ridge down crystal clear streams and rivers to a thriving Chesapeake Bay. But we know that only happens if each and every one of us participates. PEC’s programs are designed to help each of us do what we can on our own land and in our own communities.

In the northern half of Virginia, 70 percent of the air pollution comes from transportation. To be blunt, too many of us drive, by ourselves, to almost every activity in our lives. PEC has led the effort to plan communities in which people can walk or ride bikes to jobs, restaurants, and services. While carpooling, transit and electric vehicles can all help, reducing the number and duration of car trips is the single best way to improve air quality and reduce contributions to global warming. Other actions PEC has championed that reduce air pollution include home weatherization, distributed solar electric generation that doesn’t risk open space and important habitat, and properly-sited offshore wind energy and industrial-scale solar energy on recovered coal mines and other brownfield sites.

From backyard gardens to large landscape-scale buffers along a river’s edge, PEC programs help citizens restore



PEC’s Marco Sanchez and Friends of the Rappahannock’s JoEllen Santulli at a tree planting in Orange, VA. Photo by Hugh Kenny

native habitats for birds, insects, and other wildlife, plant rain gardens to reduce stormwater runoff, and replace invasive plants with native plants that require less water and work to thrive. We help farmers with the costs of fencing out livestock and planting miles of forest buffers. And we are working to create pedestrian and bike path connections between urban areas and the rural areas in all of our communities, like the Emerald Ribbons plan in Loudoun County.

If you’re looking for something even closer to home, the simple act of planting a tree can make a huge impact. A mature white oak can absorb 11,000 gallons of water per year, provides habitat and food for upwards of 600 species of animals, as well as shade and reduced erosion from storm events.

During their growth period, white oaks store large amounts of carbon. If each of us took the time to plant and care for a few new trees each year on our own properties and volunteered to help plant trees around the region, that alone would improve our part of the world.

In the end, 50 years has taught us that the cumulative actions of 8 billion people makes a difference to environmental quality. What we choose to do every day can make a difference. So on this 50th anniversary year for Earth Day, join me in committing to make every day an Earth Day!

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL SPRING 2020



INSIDE

2019 Land Conservation Totals, An Update from Richmond, Spring at Roundabout Meadows, Upcoming Events and more!

Fox kit in Crozet. Photo by Cass Girvin

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

What was the annual population growth in Virginia from 2010 through 2019?

ANSWER ON PAGE 4



Photo by Evan Raskin



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