



## VCC and Partners Field Different Types of Easements

VCC has always been a primary point of contact for many people who want to find out more about conservation easements. Not only have conservation easements increased in sheer number; they also have matured as a conservation tool. This newsletter showcases some of the ways in which conservation easements have 'grown.'

Conservation easements come in all types and sizes, reflecting the varied wishes of landowners and the unique properties of each site. To help these visions become reality, VCC works with many partners, including state agencies and other land trusts. Staff will talk with landowners, visit their property, and put them in contact with the appropriate agencies and professionals.

In addition to fielding calls from landowners almost daily, VCC is constantly giving educational talks that

include information on conservation easements. One of the best venues is 'easement parties,' gatherings in which easement donors share their experience with neighbors.

As a land trust, VCC also is a co-holder of a number of these conservation easements. VCC currently co-holds 44 conservation easements. Twenty-six of these are in partnership with local soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs). SWCDs complement VCC's land trust role by providing expertise for monitoring riparian easements and helping landowners use available restoration programs.

## As Co-Holder, VCC Assists Niche Easements

### Easement Helps Farmers Stay on the Land

What happens when 'eased' land changes hands? The restrictions ensure that no future landowners can turn the property into residential subdivisions. This guarantees the benefits of open space for the community. It also makes the land more likely to sell at a price a farmer can afford.

A recent example is the 262-acre Canada farm in northeastern Augusta County. The property is part of the Civil War Piedmont Battlefield, has long frontage on the

**See Farmers Buy, p. 2**



*VCC co-holds the conservation easement on the Eavers property in Augusta County. Along the tree line is the historic location of the old roadway, an important corridor for Stonewall Jackson's troops during the Battle of McDowell in 1862.*



*The Canada farm, part of the Piedmont Battlefield, has been put under easement and sold to local farmers.*

VCC shares legal responsibilities for easement stewardship on a number of landholdings along with our partner the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF). We also co-hold specific types of riparian or streamside easements with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts. All told, VCC now has co-holding responsibilities on over 3,300 acres of land. Some types of easements and circumstances require a local organization to co-hold, but more and more we are being requested to co-hold in circumstances where it is

**See Why VCC Co-holds, p. 2**

# Easement Fits Family Plans to Restore, Keep the Farm

For Jim Hepner, placing a conservation easement on his 127 acres in western Shenandoah County ensures the continuation of the farming his family has been doing here since the 1700s. Not just any old farming, though. Hepner, in his 45-year tenure, has put in place farming practices that help keep the land productive and healthy, such as rotational livestock grazing, restoring native warm-season grasses, enlarging a natural wetland, and buffering the stream. He's especially passionate about the native grasses. "People come from all over, many states to see" his native grass system. He converted another 30 acres this year and hopes eventually to have warm-season grasses on most of the farm.

The easement conditions include no divisions, a secondary dwelling (in addition to the existing dwelling), a 35-foot riparian buffer, and reserved rights for a family cemetery and a grass air strip. Says Hepner, "I really believe in this and I hope other people will do it too. It's a way to perpetuate farming, in opposition to the total development of everything. Farmers can't afford to pay development prices for land right next to them."

The next generations of Hepners, fortunately, are already lined up. Of his 5 children, 10 grandchildren, and 2 great grandchildren, Hepner says, "They quite well understand what I'm doing. My grandchildren are especially enthusiastic about it and will probably be the ones to carry on."

## Farmers Buy Land, cont'd

Middle River, and affords tremendous views from four adjacent state roads. It also is a working farm.

When Bob Canada let his tenant farmer, Bud Shaver, know that he wanted to sell the property, but wished it to stay in farming, Bud had what turned out to be a brilliant idea. He suggested a conservation easement. Today, the property has an easement on it and has been sold, 79 acres to Shaver and the remainder to another family of farmers. Shaver credits Canada for his open-mindedness and for sticking with the process. Says Shaver, "The way it played out couldn't have been any better."

Shaver, 34, says the conditions of the easement suit him fine. He is particularly pleased to prevent growth from going into one of the most productive farming areas in the county. "Transition to the next generation of farmers is critical," he says.

## Easement Gathering Held in Alleghany County

VCC's Genevieve Goss and John Eckman recently joined hosts Bill and Lang Wilson and about twenty of their guests to discuss private land conservation options at the Wilson home in Alleghany County. Some areas of the county have a number of large, privately owned tracts as well as large swathes of federal lands. The new development pressure from projects in Bath County has landowners wanting to consider their options.

## State Trust Fund Can Help Cover Easement Costs

The Hepner easement is held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation with VCC serving as co-holder. The cost of the appraisal was covered by the Preservation Trust Fund, a state fund that can assist with the costs of doing an easement.



*Jim Hepner stands next to the pond on his farm flanked by warm season grasses.*

## Why VCC Co-Holds Easements, cont'd

entirely optional for the landowner to have another group involved.

Why do they ask for VCC's participation? Some say they want the added strength of knowing that both a private land trust (VCC) and a public agency (VOF) are involved. Others are interested in having a locally rooted organization named on their easement. Still others just feel that VCC was instrumental in protecting their land and they would like us to continue to be involved.

One of the new easements recorded this summer is on a 30-acre portion of the Eavers farm in Augusta County. This easement allows no new building at all as part of VCC's long-term strategy to protect the scenic and historic Staunton-to-Parkersburg Turnpike route through Augusta and Highland counties.

## Botetourt Workshop Focuses on Minimizing Runoff

VCC and the Botetourt Community Partnership, a local coalition of citizens, sponsored a workshop May 24 on landscaping to lower the impact of storm water at the home and neighborhood level. Specialists described how to design and maintain landscaping to minimize runoff, preserve soil quality, and help recharge groundwater. The Canaan Valley Institute helped fund the program.

## Feds Won't Fully Fund I-81

The Shenandoah Valley Network reports that the July decision by Congress to allocate a modest \$141.5 million for I-81 improvements with \$100 million allocated for "dedicated truck lanes for additional capacity" will slow if not stop this enormous road-widening project. The amount falls far below the federal portion needed to support the \$13 billion project to build such lanes the length of I-81 in Virginia.

For information, see [www.shenandoahvalleynetwork.org](http://www.shenandoahvalleynetwork.org) or the official VDOT website, [www.i-81.org](http://www.i-81.org)

## VCC Arranged Funding Students Take Cavern Trip

Over 200 sixth-grade science students from Stewart Middle School in Augusta County had an educational visit to Grand Caverns Regional Park thanks to a grant from the SAW Community Foundation secured through the Valley Conservation Council. This groundwater education program, taught by North Fork Nature Program's Nancy Carr with the help of Julie Fox and teachers from the school, has been a success in other counties as well.

This field experience mixed study of the natural stream communities outside the Caverns with a fun exploration of the formations underground. VCC thanks the dozens of chaperones, teachers, Grand Caverns staff, and others involved in this project.

## VCC Offers Presentations

VCC welcomes opportunities to discuss land protection and sensible development with any group. VCC has a number of programs on different topics, ranging from development issues to conservation tools. Please let us know if your group is interested in having a speaker.

- **Highland County Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee** - VCC's John Eckman provided a short presentation on rural zoning options and land conservation on August 14. Eckman focused on the principles for better development that most concern a rural area like Highland.
- **Page County Farmers Association** - VCC gave the keynote address at the Page County Farmers Association annual meeting in Luray on August 17. Association members were interested in learning more about agricultural districts and easements.
- **Augusta 'Ag' Task Force** - Eckman joined Virginia Outdoors Foundation's Faye Cooper for a presentation to the Augusta Agricultural Task Force in July. The group is looking at tools to help maintain and improve the vitality of the county's strong farming base. Faye and John discussed the donation of conservation easements and programs to purchase development rights.

Presentations also have been made recently to the **Waynesboro Rotary Club**, the **Staunton Kiwanis Club**, the **Harrisonburg Kiwanis Club**, the **Strasburg Rotary**, and the **Woodstock Rotary**.

## VCC Receives Funding for Land Use Network

VCC was notified this summer that its grant application to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation was approved. VCC will work with localities and other partners throughout the region to form the Shenandoah Land Use Network. The goal is to facilitate sharing of planning resources and help localities move forward on specific growth management techniques.

The project will be guided by Sara Hollberg, a land use planner who has worked on VCC's *Better Models for Development* and *State of the Valley* reports. "This project should be effective," says Hollberg, "because it will be driven by what the localities need right now." She met with planners in a series of informal meetings earlier this summer to hear about growth issues and strategize possible projects.

## Members Rise to Challenge

You, our members and friends, have already helped to raise half of the \$40,000 VCC needs to release matching funds from our Membership Challenge. Thank you, all who have helped with this effort by donating more than you gave last year. Thanks also to our many new members whose donations are fully matched.

Please help us tap all of the matching funds available from the Agua Fund and our other strong supporters.

**What earns the match: new member donations and increases in existing member donations.** Call our office if you have questions about the challenge or how much you gave last year. And please continue to help us bring new members into VCC to support sensible land conservation in the region.

## New Members - August 2005

### Augusta County / Staunton/ Waynesboro

Kim & Luanne Austin  
Nancy Armstrong  
Anthony Baker & Amy Arnold  
Augusta County Service

Authority  
Fitzhugh Elder, Jr.  
Larry & Diane Korte  
Rick & Laurie Landes  
David & Lucy Pederson  
John & Juliette Swenson  
Dan Wachspress

### Rockingham County / Harrisonburg

Ben & Betty Anne Fordney

Rick Showalter & Deborah  
Greene  
Sandy Bahr & Marge Maust  
Raul & Marian Oviedo  
Don & Carol Poulson

Shenandoah County  
Bud Griswold & Mary  
Gessner  
Marian French  
W. Denman Zirkle

From Afar  
Thomas Gilmore  
Bob & Beth Scott

## Best Wishes to Nan

Nan Fiebig, VCC's indomitable and fearless office manager, has moved on to pursue a different career path. We will all miss her friendly, can-do spirit. Best wishes, Nan!



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## Errecart Joins VCC Staff

Jackie Errecart, VCC's new full-time staff member, brings an impressive mix of skills and background to her new post. A Vermont native, she holds a BA in geology from



Yale University and a master's degree in Natural Resources Planning from the University of Vermont. She worked as a staff hydrogeologist before returning to school and has interned with the Lake Champlain Land Trust, the Vermont Forum on Sprawl, and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. She recently relocated to Virginia.

Jackie will be helping to implement VCC's land conservation and public policy programs, as well as being the primary presence in the office. She also will be putting to good use her proficiency with GIS software and database management. "This feels like a really good fit," says VCC Executive Director, John Eckman. "Jackie not only has a great resume, but she is enthusiastic about learning from the ground up and growing with the organization." Welcome, Jackie!

## Better Models, Conservator Nominations Sought

VCC is seeking out the best examples of development the region has to offer. To save land successfully, sensible development approaches must become the norm, not the exception. These awards help inform builders, developers, and local governments about the fine work that is already happening right here in the Valley.

**The deadline is December 15, 2005** for nominating a development project for VCC's Better Models for Development Awards or an individual or organization for the Valley Conservator Award. Call for information (toll free 877.216.1782) or download the form from the VCC website ([valleyconservation.org](http://valleyconservation.org)).

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Executive Director, John Eckman • Conservation Officer,  
Jackie Errecart • Botetourt County Steward, Genevieve  
Goss • *Vision* Editor & Planning Consultant, Sara Hollberg