



VCC's Better Development Symposium and Awards Event Scheduled for May 25



Downtown Harrisonburg will be the site of Valley Conservation Council's 2011 Better Development Symposium and Awards Ceremony on May 25. A walking tour of this energetic downtown will showcase reuse of historic buildings as well as new designs for modern uses, including housing, offices, retail, and entertainment.

On the theme of Building Livable Communities: Plans in Place, sessions will address "Elements of Livability" and "Master Planning for Traditional Neighborhood Developments." Included will be Harrisonburg's biking and pedestrian programs, New Market's annexation area master plan, and an Albemarle developer's perspective on building to the Crozet Master Plan.

The day will culminate with presentation of the Better Models for Development Awards at the Court Square Theater. Check the VCC website (www.valleyconservation.org) for information and to register.

Court Square, Harrisonburg

Smaller Valley Counties Have Biggest Easement Gains in 2010

In 2010, landowners in the Valley region donated conservation easements to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation on 20 properties totaling 4,760 acres.

Bath County was the clear leader in Valley acres conserved in 2010 with five VOF easements totaling 2,395 acres. Albemarle County led the Commonwealth with 13 easements totaling 2,836 acres. Rockbridge County was the runner-up for Valley acres conserved with VOF adding 971 acres in 8 easements. VOF, the largest easement holder in the Commonwealth, now holds over 3,000 easements on over 606,000 acres.

Governor Bob McDonnell announced in 2010 his goal to conserve 400,000 acres of Virginia land following the success of former Governor Tim Kaine in meeting a similar goal. Based on statistics provided by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, 53,629 acres have been conserved in the first year of Governor McDonnell's administration. Valley Conservation Council continues to do its part through outreach, education, and landowner visits.

Virginia Outdoors Foundation Conservation Easements 2010 in Area Served by VCC

County	2010 Easements	2010 Acres	Cumulative Acres
Alleghany	1	144	6,469
Augusta	4	816	16,059
Bath	5	2,395	21,742
Botetourt	1	107	14,853
Frederick			4,565
Highland	1	327	9,718
Page			1,733
Rockbridge	8	971	32,940
Rockingham			2,654
Shenandoah			3,636
Staunton (City)			3
Warren			6,256
Winchester			115
VCC Region	20	4,760	120,743

Source: Virginia Outdoors Foundation

McDonnell Administration Emphasizes Conserving Working Lands

On March 9th VCC's John Eckman participated in a working lands conservation workshop hosted by the Office of Farmland Preservation of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) at the Horse Center in Lexington. Under-

scoring the importance of conserving farm and forest lands, both the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Todd Haymore, and the Commissioner of Agriculture, Matt Lohr, attended, along with Bob Lee, Executive Director of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

Haymore and Lohr emphasized Governor McDonnell's commitment to conserve

another 400,000 acres of land—a mark Governor Kaine had managed to meet during better economic times. The Governor is looking to working farm and forest landowners to help reach this ambitious goal.



Working agricultural lands often include larger buildings, like this historic farm with both cattle and poultry operations in western Rockingham County.

Issues such as large agricultural buildings, however, can be hurdles to traditional scenic easements.

Along with professionals in the field, dozens of landowners from near and far heard an indepth explanation of how conservation easements work and the incentives available. Lisa Hawkins of the Lenhart

Obenshain law firm emphasized the importance of finding the best land trust or agency to suit the conservation needs of your land and building the right team of advisors to help you through the process. VCC board member, Mark Botkin, of the BotkinRose law firm, gave details on how an easement can mesh with a family's overall estate

planning to help save them money while also saving their land. Other speakers included Kevin Schmidt of VDACS, Katie Frazier of the Virginia Agribusiness Council, and Sherry Buttrick with VOF.

Expanded Federal Benefit Makes 2011 Good Year to Conserve Land

When the federal tax deal was struck in December, the expanded federal deduction benefits for donation of a qualified conservation easement were extended through 2011. While there is hope that the benefits will be made permanent, there has been so much change in these laws over the years that it is difficult to make any predictions. If you own land and have been considering doing an easement, 2011 may be one of the best years to take advantage of the financial incentives.

Landowners who want to conserve their land this year will be able to take up to 15 additional years to carry their federal deduction forward. The previous rules only gave five extra years to use up the federal deduction. In addition, the new rules allow you to use the deduction at a value equivalent to up to 50% of your adjusted gross income (AGI) in each year. Full-time farmers who make more than 50% of their income

from ranching or farming may use up to the equivalent of 100% AGI.

Most people do not have enough income to use up the deduction quickly and many of the farmers we work with leave hundreds of thousands of dollars of deduction on the table. Having more years to use the deduction helps the program make sense for more people at all income levels.

In addition to the federal deduction, Virginia easement donors may also be able to use or sell Virginia tax credits. Income from the sale of state credits is considered taxable by the federal government, but the federal deduction can help offset the additional income.

VCC is happy to explain how easements work. Landowners also are encouraged to seek their own legal and financial counsel and to consider all the options carefully.

Principle 3: Build Livable Communities

Meeting the Demand for Walkable Neighborhoods

The important flip side of not developing the countryside is building attractive places to live in the areas planned for growth. Growing better, not just bigger will require transforming our development processes.

Opportunity to Reshape Future Development

When development comes back, what form will it take? About half of the homes, office buildings, stores, and factories needed by 2030 do not exist today, according to a 2004 Brookings Institution report. There are more reasons than ever for communities to get ready to develop in a different and more efficient way. One is change in market demand. Diverting a portion of new development into compact patterns can provide new options for residents and better meet community goals.

A growing number of comprehensive plans call for concepts like “walkable neighborhoods.” The most difficult—but essential—step is putting in place the policies to make it easier to build developments with these desired characteristics.

The Coming Demand for Walkable Neighborhoods

Demographics and consumer preferences are shifting what kinds of housing consumers will want in the future. These trends point to an increased market share for compact, walkable neighborhoods.

- America’s population is expected to grow by 94 million between 2000 and 2030.

- Already more than 75 percent of home buyers do not have school-aged children. The coming need is for housing for retirees, empty nesters, single parents, and unrelated singles.



Livable communities with the right mix of design and density become even more convenient and vital as they gain residents, businesses, and services. In this Williamsburg development, townhouses, apartments, a medical center, and community center (left) are all within walking distance of each other and commercial uses (right).

Six Principles for Better Development

1. Conserve Natural and Scenic Assets
2. Conserve As You Grow
- 3. Build Livable Communities**
4. Preserve Historic Resources
5. Respect Local Character in New Construction
6. Reduce the Impact of the Car

- Both the “age wave” of baby boomers and the younger generations are trending toward smaller households and a preference for smaller attached housing with urban amenities.

- People do not want more auto dependence. Nearly 90% of those polled in a 2007 survey sponsored by the National Association of Realtors® and Smart Growth America said new communities should be designed so we can walk more and drive less, and that public transportation should be improved.

- A survey cited in a 2008 journal article found that 42% to 59% of all households want “new urban” neighborhood characteristics.

- No more “McMansions” needed? A 2007 study predicted that by 2025 the nation will need 35 million more attached and small-lot housing units, but the demand for large-lot houses will be below our current supply.

- Houses with above-average walkability command a premium of \$4,000 to \$34,000 over houses with just average levels of walkability in typical metropolitan areas, according to a 2009 study.

(Adapted from *Better Models for Development in the Shenandoah Valley 2010*, available from VCC)

Up and Down the Valley

“Better Models” Hits the Road

Many localities throughout the Valley have seen Better Models presentations in recent months. VCC planner Sara Hollberg has talked with numerous planning commissions and boards, including Rockbridge, Frederick, Shenandoah, and Augusta counties, the City of Waynesboro, and the towns of Woodstock, New Market, and Strasburg. The updated *Better Models for Development* book provides ample material to show examples and discuss development choices.

She also has spoken to local groups. These have ranged from the Botetourt Community Partnership and the Upper James RC&D to a local realtors group in Harrisonburg. Other local venues have included the Staunton Kiwanis Club and the Staunton City Library. If you know of an organization in your community that would be interested in a program, call the office at 540.886.3541 or email sara@valleyconservation.org.

Shenandoah County’s New Zoning Aims to Maintain Agricultural Base

After years of intensive committee work, public meetings, consultant studies, and discussions across the range of perspectives in the community, the Shenandoah County Board adopted regulations designed to implement the Comprehensive Plan. A strong community consensus on directing growth to the towns and retaining agricultural character kept parties at the table through the challenging steps of determining specific development policies for the rural areas. The new ordinance sets an overall minimum density of one lot per ten acres in the agricultural and one lot per fifteen acres in conservation zoning districts. “Lot size averaging” and conservation subdivision designs are allowed in order to encourage protection of farmland within developed sites. The plan also strongly promotes purchase of development rights and use of conservation easements along with active planning between the towns and the county to define urban development areas and encourage traditional neighborhood designs.

Augusta County Passes Source Water Protection Ordinance

Augusta County, which draws its drinking water from aquifers, has moved to protect those sources by regulating uses around springs, wells, and delineated groundwater recharge areas. Under the Sourcewater Protection Ordinance (SWPO) passed in February 2011, certain uses (such as those that use hazardous materials and petroleum products) are not allowed in a 1,000-foot radius around the more than 20 listed springs and wells. Less restrictive regulations apply in the recharge areas, which are individually mapped. Normal residential and agricultural uses are exempted. The ordinance and maps are on the county website.

New Fishery Opened on South River Near Waynesboro

The hard work of Trout Unlimited and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has resulted in the opening of Upper South River Special Regulations Area, a potentially rich coldwater fishery upstream from Waynesboro. The enormous springs feeding the river in this area help to keep water temperatures cool enough for trout to survive and thrive. Further restoration efforts are needed to bring the river back to its full potential and to minimize the impacts new development in the area will have on this unique ecological resource.

To learn more about the new fishery and trail, and to get a special permit to fish there, visit the Shenandoah Valley Trout Unlimited site at: <http://sites.google.com/site/shenandoahvalleytu/> or pick up a permit at: Stone Soup Books & Cafe, 908 W Main St, Waynesboro, (540) 943-0084.

State Law Change Strengthens Oversight of Tax Credit Deals

Valley Senators Deeds and Hanger championed legislation this year to focus on concerns about potential abuses of the Virginia tax credit program. The resulting revision of the code should have minimal impact on landowners seeking conservation easement tax credits if they follow the sound advice of always seeking experienced legal counsel and working with appraisers who specialize in conservation easements.

The changes allow the Tax Commissioner to undertake further review if he is concerned that a deal may have an inflated appraisal or other issues. The new law allows the Commissioner to have a second appraisal conducted on property for which an application for the credit has been made if he provides written notice to the donor within 30 days of the application being filed. The Tax Commissioner must make a final determination within 180 days of such notice.

Farm to Table Summit a Success

Currently only \$200 million of the \$1.2 billion that Valley residents spend on food is for products produced or processed here. As Eric Bendfeldt of Virginia Cooperative Extension points out, buying more locally produced food products is a simple and direct way to boost the Valley's agricultural economy. This economic optimism and the need to build stronger, value-based relationships between growers, processors, marketers, and consumers formed the core of an innovative Farm-to-Table Summit at Blue Ridge Community College on March 10.

About 120 Valley farmers, restaurant owners, chefs, school food coordinators, community gardening advocates, marketers, students, extension agents, and other concerned professionals and citizens gathered, shared success



Harrisonburg Farmers Market

Catch this online

A wonderful short video showing the link between the inner-city work of DC Central Kitchen and the Valley farmers they work with through the Shenandoah Valley Produce Auction is available at www.valleyconservation.org.

stories, and began serious problem solving at the Summit. Hosted by Virginia Cooperative Extension and Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development Council, the Summit built on the work of the Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign and other efforts of the Shenandoah Local Foods Working Group.

A goal was to begin strategic visioning for developing a local food system for the region. Robert Eggers of DC

Central Kitchen shared the inspiring story of how that nonprofit has grown by connecting the needs of homeless and indigent people with the empowering training they receive to become productive cooks helping feed others less fortunate. Rich Pirog, Associate Director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Iowa provided a detailed look at the economic impact local foods can have.

Meet VCC Director Bill Noack

For Bill Noack, now serving his second stint on the VCC board of directors, it was the history of the Valley that first captured his attention.

"As a college student, I read a marvelous book about the Germans and Scotch-Irish who first settled the Valley," he says. "These were the toughest, most resilient people in the country, and they faced incredible hardships. They fought Indians, cleared the land and established much of the culture we see around us today.

"Then, they moved west and settled most of the rest of the country," Mr. Noack says. "Today, you can jump on Route 11 at Strasburg, drive south to Lexington, and a good deal of the history of this country will unfold before you."

Bill and his wife, Lois, were both born and raised in Michigan. They moved to Virginia in 1978 when Bill was transferred by General Motors to the company's Washington, D.C., office.

As director of GM's public policy communication office, Mr. Noack and his team developed most of the

company's positions on policy issues such as vehicle safety, the environment, and international trade.

"After just one trip to Rockbridge County I was hooked," Mr. Noack says. Over the years, the Noacks have owned two farms in the Valley: one in Page County just south of Luray, and another in Augusta County west of Middlebrook.

Today, the Noacks, with their son Sergei, live on a farm near Annapolis, MD

"When we came down here, we became totally captivated by the scenic beauty of the Valley and the wonderful people here," Mr. Noack says. "To me, the Valley is a special place. That's why VCC, in its role to educate, preserve and protect, is so vitally important."

Following a 37-year career with GM, Mr. Noack retired in 2002 and established Noack & Associates, LLC, a media consulting firm.

"The Valley is like a magnet that keeps pulling me back," Mr. Noack says. "Once you've been here and moved away, you keep looking for reasons to return."

Old & New Conservation Easements Protect Middle River

Easement Helps Furthers Strategic Land Conservation

A generous Augusta County family, who prefers to remain anonymous, has added protection for another 1.6 miles of river frontage on a section of Middle River near several other easements. The donation in December of a 177-acre easement to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation ensures in perpetuity the integrity of this historic working farm. The wide floodplains have highly productive crop fields that include 57 acres of federally recognized prime soils and 12

additional acres of soils considered to be of statewide significance.

The crop fields cannot be cultivated closer than 20 feet to the river. If the owners, or a future owner, should choose to use the fields for livestock pasture, the easement requires a 35-foot livestock exclusion buffer along the river. The farm includes a beautiful home dating to 1830.

Riparian Easements Improve Habitat and Keep Water Cleaner

Several properties upstream from the newest easement have been protected by riparian easements that VCC co-holds with the Headwaters Soil and Water Conservation District. These "riparian," or streamside easements focus on the conservation of land along rivers and streams and help to maintain or restore the riparian habitat zone. Maintaining healthy grasses, shrubs and/or trees in this zone along streams is crucial both for protecting the stream from pollutants that wash down from land above, and for the many species that live in this very active zone. Trees along streams have the added benefits of holding the bank in place which reduces sedimentation and shading the water to keep stream temperatures lower. Trout and many other species need cool clear water to survive and thrive.

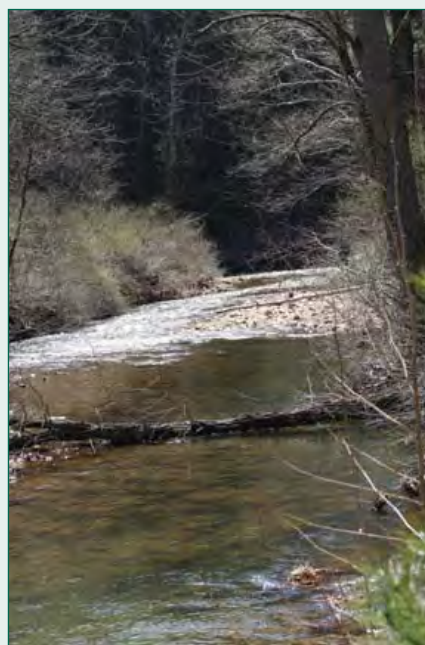
VCC staff took the photos below in early April while monitoring conservation easements in Augusta County. These healthy streams support people, plants and animals.



A kayaker floats the Middle River in Augusta. A new easement protects an additional 1.6 miles of streambank.



Box elder tree blossom



Calypso River in western Augusta (with riparian easement on right and open space easement on left) shows evidence of abundant wildlife.



Trout-lily



Blue Bells about to fully open

Gifts in Memory of Anne Smith

Wick and Betty Vellines

New Members (from 12/2/10 - 4/4/11)

Albemarle County

Jane Kerewich

Augusta County/ Staunton/Waynesboro

David Benner
Nancy Carter Crump &
James Emory
John Rogers
Harold Stepp
Laura Thurman
Robert & Helen Hart Wise

Botetourt County

J.A. Layman

Frederick County

Jill Wintersteen

Highland County

Nelson Hoy and Elizabeth Biggs

Rockbridge County

John and Sallie Sebrell

Rockingham County/ Harrisonburg

Paul and Amy Goodall
Bix Houff
Peace Dogs

Shenandoah County

Beth Cardwell

*Thank you
for your
support!*

Help VCC Match Funds

A very generous VCC member has pledged to match donations to the Valley Conservation Council Endowment Fund up to a total of \$5,000. This is a wonderful opportunity to help secure the future of land conservation in the Valley by doubling the power of your gift to VCC. Please consider making a donation to the Endowment Fund in addition to your regular donation to VCC's operating fund. All donations to VCC are tax-deductible.

Gift Honors Staunton Conservationist

In 2010 the Valley lost a strong conservationist when John Moore of Staunton died in a traffic accident. An architect, farmer, and active citizen, John touched many lives with his quiet, dedicated efforts. To honor John's legacy, an anonymous donor made a significant contribution to VCC's Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation for the Central Blue Ridge.

From the Director

With the warmer weather I'm sure all of you are out in your gardens, plowing your fields, hiking the woods, hunting spring gobblers, or just enjoying the early bounty at your local farmers markets. Each of us interacts with the land differently, but we know it sustains us in so many ways.

We appreciate all the help and support we have received in recent months. This has been a busy time at VCC, with time on the road speaking with local landowners and leaders. Here's some of what we're hearing:

- Now is the prime time for localities to consider policy changes before the next development cycle kicks in.
- Conservation and watershed funding are being cut at the same time that farmers are pushing hard to implement more best management practices to save soil and protect water.
- State agencies are reducing staff positions directly responsible for conservation activities.
- Local governments have also had to let people go, eliminating environmental and planning staff in some counties.

Agencies and localities do a lot to help, but we can not rely on government to be the driving force for conservation in our communities. Private landowners will always lead the way as voluntary stewards of their property. Nonprofit groups like VCC work hard to take up the slack. We need your help to do so.

This year VCC will respond to dozens of inquiries from landowners, host several landowner workshops, and provide education and technical assistance to localities throughout the region.

Please take a moment to support VCC's efforts with your financial contribution today.

Thanks for all your help,

John Eckman
Executive Director





VALLEY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

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VCC and Beverley Street Studio School To Host Events

Valley Conservation Council and the Beverley Street Studio School are co-hosting a "Paint Out" on May 21. What's a "Paint Out"? Open to members of VCC and BSSS, artists will spend the day painting (or drawing or photographing) scenes at Prospect Hill on Bell's Lane in Staunton (lunch provided as part of the registration fee). Later, these art works will be offered for sale (as a benefit for VCC and BSSS). That event is planned for June 18th at Waverley Hill, a beautiful conserved Staunton property.

For more information on reserving your spot at the May Paint Out, please contact Beverley Street Studio School at 540.886.8636. Invitations to the

Friday, September 9 Save the Date for Annual Conservation Celebration

Valley Conservation Council will hold its Annual Conservation Celebration on Friday, September 9, 2011 at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton (with convenient access to I-81). There will be a brief membership meeting.

Mark your calendar now so you won't miss this enjoyable event!

June event at Waverley will be mailed to VCC members in mid-May.

These events should be lots of fun and both focus on the beauty of our conserved lands. Support land conservation and local artists by attending and purchasing a work of art!

VCC is on
Facebook

