



2015 ANNUAL REPORT

Special Thanks to VCC's 2015 Volunteers!

Many thanks to the over 100 people who gave their time and talent to VCC to make Kites and Critters, the Dark Sky Summit, our Silver Anniversary Annual Meeting and other events a huge success.



Volunteer Barbara Brothers

Welcoming VCC's New Director



In February, VCC welcomed **Brenda Mead** as Interim Executive Director. Brenda knows VCC well. Our 2015 Volunteer of the Year, she has been active in VCC for years. Brenda brings the skills and accomplishments of a 40-year career in finance, business, leadership, and fundraising. She and her family moved

to Staunton in 2009 after she retired from her role as Virginia statewide Executive for Bank of America's wealth management group. A lifelong gardener, Brenda became a Master Gardener in 2010 and has spent six years creating a landscape at her

Staunton home based on Virginia native and edible plants. One of 50 grandchildren of a Minnesota farmer, she counts agriculture an important part of her heritage.

Brenda will have experienced staff alongside. Sara Hollberg, as Programs Manager, coordinates all of VCC's programs. Upper James Program Manager Genevieve Goss has long represented VCC in Rockbridge, Botetourt, Alleghany, and Bath counties. Faye Cooper is serving as a consultant for conservation easement outreach. Ben Craig likewise continues as a coordinator with the Upper Middle River project. Come by and see us!

Goodbyes and Best Wishes

Bruce Rinker resigned in January. VCC is grateful to Bruce for his contributions as Executive Director over the past 18 months. His enthusiasm was contagious and without his leadership we would not have recognized the necessity to reinvest in our core mission.

Sheryl Van Gundy, VCC's dedicated Office Manager, retired at the end of February to pursue other adventures. Please join us in wishing her the best.

Thank you to our hard-working VCC staff

As we look back on 2015 and forward to 2016, we want to recognize the contributions by VCC staff. This year end brought comings and goings within the VCC office, but also a continuity with the long tradition of extraordinary commitment to the VCC mission. We take this time at the end of VCC's first quarter century to salute all VCC employees, past and present.

Chairman's Letter

Valley Conservation Council just celebrated its 25th anniversary. **We have you, our partners, members, volunteers, and funders to thank for our successes:** securing protection for thousands of acres of land that provide food, habitat, water quality, history and sense of place for Valley residents and our visitors.

However, the pressures on our beloved rural communities remain. The loss of farm and forest to development is forecast to accelerate over the next 10 years. The economic recession put the brakes on development pressure in our region. That slowdown is ending and it is the next economic cycle that will determine the fate of our Valley region. Will it succumb to urban sprawl or will it stay magnificent rural landscapes dotted with vibrant and historic cities, towns, and villages?

VCC's mission is to promote land use that sustains the farms, forests, open space, and cultural heritage of the Shenandoah Valley Region. From the headwaters of the Shenandoah to the Alleghany Highlands and the Upper James this is one of the most beautiful and economically viable places in the nation. Our region's natural assets – our mountains, our forests, our rivers and streams, our skies (especially at night), our wildlife and our historical landmarks - share a common denominator: open space. When farms are broken up or

subdivided, not only are viewsheds changed forever but opportunity is lost for clean water, clean air, intact ecosystems, food security, and rural livelihood. The long-term costs of ever expanding the footprint of development far exceed short-term profits. VCC measures its success by the amount of land kept open and undeveloped.

We know our focus: protecting the Natural Resources, Cultural Heritage, and Agricultural Vitality of our region.

To step up to the challenges, VCC is reinvesting in its core competencies:

- **being the region's premier land trust**
- **helping landowners, the stewards of private lands, keep their landholdings intact**
- **partnering with community leaders, both county and city, to make the best-informed choices for guiding development**

During the coming year VCC will introduce a new easement template designed for use by working farmers. Our goal is to make easements a more attractive option to the agricultural community and help protect working farm and forest land from development.

Further we will identify focus areas in our region and then design comprehensive strategies that enhance

and protect each of those areas. We will strive to bring existing and new programs together, partner with local organizations and deliver workshops that help landowners in those areas understand and choose conservation options for themselves.

Finally, we will continue to partner with local communities, helping policy makers find ways for our communities to grow without sacrificing their inherent natural and historic assets.

VCC must grow its programs and capacity. Your ongoing support is vital. We welcome hearing your concerns and ideas. If you can recruit friends and colleagues to support VCC, please do. The Board is asking the VCC staff to do a lot this year. They will need all of us to help. Thank you for believing in VCC and joining us in this mission to conserve the natural and cultural assets of our Valley.

Butch Snow
Chairman
Valley Conservation Council
Board of Directors



17 Barristers Row
Staunton, VA 24401-4225
540.886.3541
info@valleyconservation.org
valleyconservation.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- William "Butch" Snow
CHAIRMAN
- Karen Hembree
TREASURER
- Laurie Berman
- Mark Botkin
- Kevin Craun
- Abbie Cutter
- James Flory
- John Gibson
- Ryan Hodges
- Bill Jones
- Anna Lawson
- Beverly S. "Cheri" Moran
- Bill Noack

STAFF

- Brenda Mead
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
- Sara Hollberg
PROGRAMS MANAGER
- Genevieve Goss
UPPER JAMES PROGRAM MANAGER

Action Highlights 2015

In VCC's 25th year, we engaged more than 1,600 people in nearly 40 events to enhance appreciation for the irreplaceable natural and cultural resources of the greater Shenandoah Valley region.

Improving Land Conservation Tools for Productive Farm Areas

Current land conservation tools do not always match well with the needs of the full-time farmers that are the backbone of the region's agricultural heartland. VCC's Agricultural Tools Summit in December brought expertise and energy toward finding solutions.

As part of our initiative to partner with the agricultural community on the shared goals of land conservation and agricultural vitality, it capped a busy season of farmer meetings and programs. VCC also reached out to Century Farms, young farmers, "ag district" participants, and families wanting to transition the farm to the next generation.

"Having diverse, interested stakeholders at the table enabled us to brainstorm the importance of protecting working farms."

— Buff Showalter, Farmer and Conservation Easement Donor

Below. Intensive farms like these near Dayton make the Shenandoah Valley one of the nation's most important agricultural regions.



Making Water Protection Permanent

Ken and Diane Brasfield's conservation easement commits to permanent forest buffers around six springs and three spring creeks at the headwaters of the Middle River in Augusta County. VCC's "Land and Water Connections" project seeks conservation easements that also protect water quality.



Bringing Families to Nature

Kites and Critters, April 26, in Staunton: a rainy day, 150 attendees, 10 partner organizations, countless close encounters with little critters, and three conservation tours, all at one amazing farm in an agricultural and forestal district in the city.

Financial Overview 2015

In 2015 VCC raised over \$300,000 to support our operations. While individual philanthropy remained flat compared to 2014, we continued to receive the strong support of private foundations, and saw growth in corporate support. Our General and Administrative expenses trended up in 2015 due to the one-time expenses associated with rebranding and web site enhancements. The financial results depicted are based on VCC's unaudited internal statements as of 12/31/2015.

