



VALLEY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

VISION

VOL. 24, NO 1
MARCH 2014

PROMOTING LAND USE THAT SUSTAINS THE FARMS, FORESTS, OPEN SPACES, AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY REGION



Peaks of Otter viewed from Natural Bridge property

Natural Bridge: Saving a National Treasure

The wonderful news has spread quickly about the permanent conservation of one of the Valley's and the nation's most treasured landmarks. The mammoth effort it took by many partners has been touted as one of the most complicated landsaving transactions ever.

Many individuals and entities played key roles and deserve commendation but three people rise to the top. First, we extend our gratitude to Jim Woltz, the listing agent, for reaching out to Valley Conservation Council and other conservation groups seeking assistance and advice. Secondly, a huge shout-out goes to Tom Clarke, CEO of the buyer, Virginia Conservation Legacy Fund (VCLF), for stepping up to the plate and tenaciously focusing on a conservation solution.

At the pinnacle of the gratitude list is Angelo Puglisi, former owner of the 1,600-acre Natural Bridge property. His dream for the Bridge to be forever enjoyed by the public through state or federal park ownership is coming to fruition. Mr. Puglisi and a handful of minority investors purchased the property in 1988. Although his vocation is real estate development, his goal in purchasing this property was not for profit. He felt a deep sense of stewardship for a place that, to him, represented what our founding fathers envisioned for a "new world where millions of people who didn't have anything could come and be anybody...." Mr. Puglisi's family, who immigrated from Italy in 1901 seeking opportunities that only America could offer, is the example he uses to make his point.

Mr. Puglisi exhibited remarkable patience throughout the tedious negotiations and also extraordinary generosity. He donated the Bridge and 188 acres to VCLF, a gift worth many millions. He says that this is the only real estate deal he ever made "from the heart" and "not from the numbers." Mr. Puglisi, you are a shining star. We thank you!

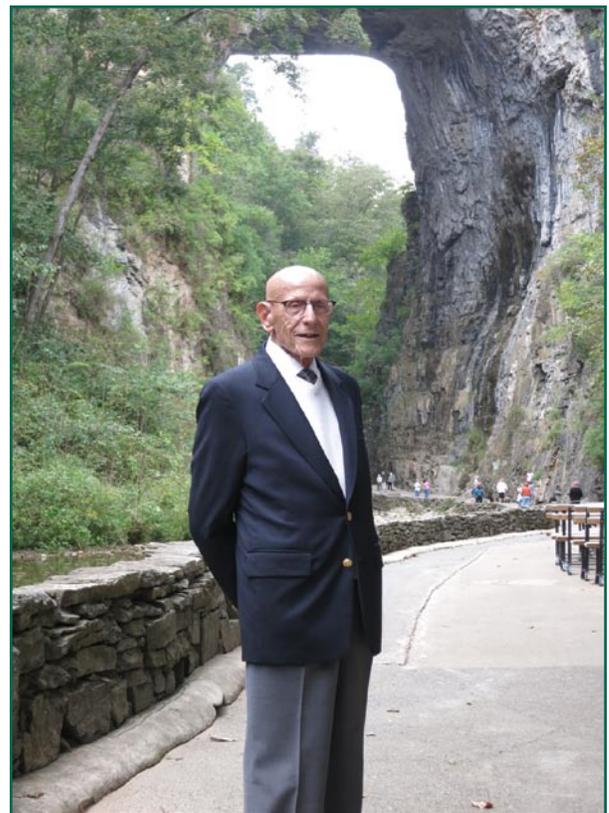


Photo courtesy Jim Woltz, Woltz & Associates

Angelo Puglisi donated the bridge portion.

**Save the Date - September 7th
VCC Annual Conservation Celebration at
Natural Bridge**

What's Next for Jefferson's Bridge?

When Thomas Jefferson first laid eyes on the magnificent 215-foot high limestone arch he declared it "the most sublime of nature's works." His purchase of the Bridge and the land around it, and keeping it available for the public's enjoyment, represents the first instance of a private land conservation action in America. Now, 240 years later, the goal of preservation and public access remains intact thanks to the generosity of Mr. Puglisi and the creativity of the new owner.

On February 7th, Virginia Conservation Legacy Trust (VCLT), a non-profit conservation-minded subsidiary of Kissito Healthcare International, completed the complex transaction with Jefferson's legacy in mind. VCLT received a gift of the Bridge and the surrounding 188 acres from owner Angelo Puglisi and purchased the remaining 1,400 acres with a loan provided by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. VCLT immediately donated a permanent conservation easement on the Bridge and 188 acres to the Virginia Department of Parks and Recreation. Once the \$9.1 million loan is paid down, VCLT will donate additional acreage bringing the total gift to 1,530 acres to the Commonwealth's park system.

Tom Clarke, Kissito's CEO, plans to make this transfer as quickly as possible using proceeds from

visitor fees and private donations. In the meantime, the new owner will manage the property to enhance a "park-like" experience and will work closely with the Virginia Division of State Parks to develop and implement a plan prior to the transfer to the state. Clarke stated, "Our vision for Natural Bridge is to be the centerpiece of the state park system. We want Natural Bridge to become a family destination resort that represents the essence of outdoor recreation, historic preservation, and environmental conservation in Virginia."

The hotel, cottages, and caverns and approximately 100 acres will be held and managed by Kissito in a way that complements a state park and brings economic development benefits to Rockbridge County and the state.

The Friends of the Natural Bridge, which VCC and its partner, Rockbridge Area Conservation Council, formed to advocate for the park outcome, will continue to support the planning for a stellar addition to Virginia's award-winning state park system.

Natural Bridge will be reopening under the new VCLT management on March 14. For more information about upcoming events and their plans for recreational activities visit the Natural Bridge website: www.naturalbridgeva.com.

Cooper Stepping Down: VCC Seeks Next Executive Director

Faye Cooper, VCC's executive director, has announced her plans to step down. Serving admirably as "interim" for more than a year, Cooper was in the right place at the right time to play a key role with the protection of Natural Bridge and guide VCC through the absorption of the former Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development programs. No words can express the appreciation owed for her service. Fortunately, Faye will continue to support VCC as a volunteer or consultant.

This position is an excellent opportunity to make a difference in the Valley at a high level and apply a wide range of professional skills. VCC's Board is seeking a capable leader, fundraiser, and program manager who can build on the strong conservation foundation established over more than twenty years of working with Valley landowners and communities. If you are interested or can suggest a qualified candidate, call VCC at 540.886.3541 or email info@valleyconservation.org.



Faye Cooper, VCC Executive Director, is stepping down.

Valley Easements Top 150,000-Acre Mark

In 2013 conservation easement activity in the Valley more than doubled from the previous year thanks to 37 families who took this voluntary step to protect lands that host a diversity of natural and historic resources. The adjoining table provides an overview of the properties and acreages by county.

Rockbridge County continues to be a leader, however all Valley counties now have exceptional examples of conserved lands. VCC continues to work in partnership with other easement holders in promoting this flexible, voluntary, and increasingly popular tool for conserving our rural landscapes.

If you or someone you know is interested in tools for conserving your land, please contact the VCC office at 540-886-3541 or info@valleyconservation.org.

2013 Conservation Easements in VCC Region

County	2013 Easements	2013 Acres	Cumulative Acres
Alleghany	3	1,759	8,495
Augusta	7	1,255	20,001
Bath	5	1,191	27,653
Botetourt	1	31	15,698
Covington (City)	0	0	424
Frederick	1	8	5,626
Highland	1	105	13,985
Page	4	596	2,602
Rockbridge	8	1,477	38,663
Rockingham	2	213	5,733
Shenandoah	2	470	5,648
Warren	3	885	7,835
VCC Region	37	7,990	152,363

Source: Virginia Division of Natural Heritage (acres rounded)

Upcoming Events

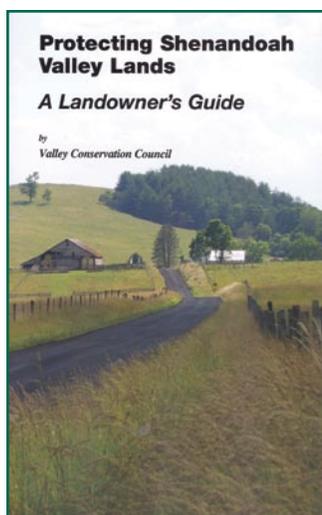
March 27-30 - Virginia Cattle Industry Convention at the Rockingham Fairgrounds in Harrisonburg. Visit VCC's booth. www.vacattlemen.org for more info.

April 12 - Blacks Run Clean-up Day & Arbor Day at Ralph Sampson Park in Harrisonburg from 9:00-noon. Visit with VCC staff and learn more about the easement held by VCC along part of Blacks Run. www.harrisonburgva.gov/cleanstream-clean-up-day.

April 13 - Kites and Critters: Day at the Farm on Poague Run (Staunton) - Kids (young and old) can release a trout, plant a tree, go on a habitat walk, pet a lamb, and see land uses that protect a local watershed. For information contact sara@valleyconservation.org.

May 6 - Buffalo Creek Special Project Area (Rockingham County) landowner "meet and greet" at the Palmer Center from 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. to learn about land conservation tools.

May 16 - Century Farm Celebration at the Cutter Farm in Augusta County beginning at 11:00 a.m. If you or someone you know owns a farm that's been in the same family for 100 years or more, come celebrate with us. Call VCC for more information (540.886.3541).



Love Your Land? This Guide's for You

Protecting Shenandoah Valley Lands: A Landowner's Guide gives practical tips on how to protect and enhance the natural resources on your land. Valley Conservation Council's newest release is full of photos and examples and covers both how the tools work and the benefits to landowners. The resources section provides contacts specifically for the Valley.

The guide was funded in part by the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, U.S.D.A Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry program, and The Keith Campbell Foundation. For copies contact VCC at 540.886.3541 or go to www.valleyconservation.org for an on-line version.

VCC Launches New Conservation and Ag Vitality Programs

VCC will use three recent grants in innovative ways to help Valley farmers improve water quality and stay on the land.



The **Land and Water Connections: Perpetuating Healthy Streams** program, made possible with funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, will provide incentive payments for the placement of whole-farm conservation easements on farms where the owners have applied, or are willing to apply, agricultural Best Management Practices, such as fencing livestock out of streams and establishing forested riparian buffers. The program serves three goals: conserving working lands, improving water quality for Eastern brook trout habitat, and enhancing the farmer's bottom line. Efforts will focus on Shenandoah River headwaters streams in Augusta County and the Smith Creek watershed of Rockingham and Shenandoah counties. Incentive payments can be up to \$10,000.

The **Upper Middle River Initiative** will provide flexibility in funding and technical support to address the barriers that make it difficult to invest in long-term conservation measures on farmland that is rented through short-term lease agreements. The program, funded by the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network and undertaken in partnership with the Headwaters Soil and Water Conservation District, will concentrate on livestock exclusion from streams and pasture management in the Bell, Eidson, and Moffett creek subwatersheds of the Middle River in Augusta County.



The **Agriculture Cultivates Resilient Economies Grant Program (ACRES)** is designed to boost family businesses that are part of our regional foods economy and that have taken steps to improve water quality. With funding provided by the Agua Fund, VCC is offering small grants between \$1,000 - \$3,000 to support small farm producers and local foods-based businesses in the Shenandoah River watershed. Funds can be provided for marketing, infrastructure development, and other identified needs. Participants can also receive business training and support through our partnership with the Staunton Creative Community Fund. To apply, contact Kate Hopkins at 540-886-3541, kate@valleyconservation.org.

Farm to Table Survey – We Need Your Input!

As part of our Farm to Table initiative, VCC is partnering with Virginia Cooperative Extension and Virginia Tech to better understand institutional procurement and regional infrastructure availability and needs as they relate to building a stronger local foods economy in the Valley.

Three surveys will be distributed beginning March 17th to local producers, institutional buyers, and organizations with food infrastructure capacity. The surveys will gather data from all three stakeholder groups regarding local food cleaning, processing, and packaging infrastructure availability and needs.

We would greatly appreciate your participation by completing the survey as we strive to develop a viable local foods economy. If you would like to be added to the survey distribution list or to participate, contact Ben Craig at 540.886.3541 or ben@valleyconservation.org.

Winning Photos Show Off the Valley

Jim Brown's spectacular landscape shot taken at dawn on his Rockbridge County farm earned him the Grand Prize in VCC's first annual photo contest. Honorable mentions in the "For the Love of the Valley" photo contest went to Chuck Almarez, G. Richard Anderson, Ken Hawkins, Nancy Sorrells, and Ligon Webb. Check out their beautiful photos on our website: www.valleyconservation.org/2013-vcc-photo-contest. Many thanks to all who shared their photo talent and to our judges, Pat and Chuck Blackley, Peter Aaslestad, and Sara Hollberg.

Stay tuned for information about our 2014 contest.



Dawn in Rockbridge County, winning photo by Jim Brown

Meet New AMS Fellow, Kate Hopkins

Kate Hopkins joins VCC staff for 2014 as a fellow with the Allegheny Mountain School, a fellowship program for young adults that teaches holistic agriculture through study, living, and working. Fellows spend six months on a farm growing food and then a year serving a non-profit and working with food issues. Growing up in a military family, Kate spent her childhood living throughout the southeast before studying international studies, philosophy, and anthropology at the University of South

Carolina. It's there that she fell in love with the local foods movement as a way to address modern problems: economic, human alienation from nature, and health and nutrition concerns. Her interests include permaculture design and nature connection for young people-enabling a land ethic in the next generation. With VCC she supports staff in work across all program areas with a special focus on ag vitality projects, including the new ACRES grant program (described on page 4). Welcome to VCC, Kate!



New AMS Fellow, Kate Hopkins

You Can Help Keep the Valley Exceptional



Photo contest Honorable Mention photo by Ligon Webb from our "Kids at Play" category.

When we speak with long-time Valley residents, more recent transplants and visitors, we hear a common theme: the Valley, with its vibrant communities, rolling farmland, and mountain forests and streams, offers a superior quality of life. Here at VCC, our mission is to promote land use that sustains the farms, forests, open spaces and cultural heritage of the Shenandoah Valley region.

You can help:

- Continue to give generously to VCC.
- Share with others about VCC's important work.
- Remember VCC in your estate planning.
- Enroll in your employer's matching gifts program.
- Host small gatherings for prospective VCC members or easement donors.
- Pass along this newsletter (we can send you extras).
- Forward VCC eblasts or web links to those interested in a topic.
- Give a gift membership (only \$20 for one year).

Thank you for acting on your love of the Valley.



VALLEY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

17 Barristers Row
Staunton, VA 24401

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
HARRISONBURG, VA
PERMIT NO. 75

INSIDE:

- Natural Bridge: Saving a National Treasure
- VCC Launches New Conservation and Ag Vitality Programs
- Winning Photos Show Off the Valley



VALLEY
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL

17 Barristers Row
Staunton, Virginia 24401
540.886.3541; fax 540.886.1380
toll free 877.216.1782
email: info@valleyconservation.org
www.valleyconservation.org

Executive Director:

Faye Crawford Cooper

Program Manager: Ben Craig

Office Manager: Sheryl Van Gundy

Land Use Planner: Sara Hollberg

Upper James Steward:

Genevieve Goss

2014 Fellow: Kate Hopkins

Excellence Enhancement Program Advisor:

Jill Templeton

Visit

valleyconservation.org

to sign up for
e-news



View in Alleghany County from photo contest entrant Ken Hawkins.

New Members (as of 3-7-14)

Augusta County/ Staunton/ Waynesboro

Ted Brown

Ann Cline

Diane Fosnacht

Brenda Mead

Steve and Julie Plumbley

Rockbridge County

Donald Hasfurther

Rockingham County

Ben Craig

From Afar

Peter Dalke

Rod and Karen Lorence

Merck Partnership for Giving