



VALLEY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

VISION

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



Photo courtesy Virginia Outdoors Foundation

Bath County Easement

VCC Lends Hand to Enable Bath County Easement

When Ed Cook returned from the Korean War and a long recovery from serious war injuries, he had one thing in mind — to return to the peace and tranquility of his homeland in the Allegheny Mountains. He found that special place on a 315-acre Bath County farm nestled in a stream valley. In 1957 he purchased the farm and has lived and farmed there contently for 55 years.

In making his estate plans, including consideration for the future of this land he so loves, he realized that the beauty and natural resources of this farm could easily be degraded by future development. With the help of his attorney, he sought options for making sure that this land remained a farm forever. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF), one of VCC's key partners in conservation, stepped in to help and learned that the cost associated with completing a conservation easement would be a challenge for Mr. Cook.

VCC was asked to help and was able to arrange assistance from an anonymous donor. The VOF-held easement permanently protects not only productive farm and forest land, but also robust wildlife habitat and extensive frontage on Back Creek, a popular native trout stream.

Asked why he wished to conserve his land, Mr. Cook stated firmly and clearly, "If you love the land, you have to protect it and make sure it's never destroyed."



Ed Cook, second from right, is presented with an easement boundary sign from Faye Cooper, VCC Director, and Ann Morse, VCC Board member. At left is friend and neighbor, Artie Barnes.

You can help save more acres with a generous year-end gift.

From the Director

Season's greetings from VCC. Thank you for helping to make 2012 another banner year for VCC.

I'd like to share with you a bit of interesting Valley history. On a summer morning in 1767, a young Thomas Jefferson set off on horseback from Charlottesville, riding west over the Blue Ridge Mountains to what is now Rockbridge County. Here he saw a massive geological arch rising 200 feet above the ground. He was awestruck by this "most sublime of nature's works." Seven years later, in 1774, he purchased what is now known as Natural Bridge from King George III for 20 shillings. In 1815, he wrote to a friend, "*I view my ownership as a kind of public trust and in no way want to see the bridge injured.*"

As far as we know, Mr. Jefferson's purchase of Natural Bridge was the first time in American history that a private citizen conserved land for the public good. Amazing! The first private land conservation action right here in our valley. Nor was it the last. Thanks to VCC and our members and partners, many more special, irreplaceable places have been conserved through private action.

The Valley's natural and cultural assets are all linked to the land but unfortunately are not guaranteed. VCC's State of the Valley research found that one-third of the land area covered by development in the Valley region had been developed in the previous 20 years. Even in these sluggish economic times, more acres are lost each day.

Fortunately, citizen efforts to preserve working farm and forest lands, open spaces, and cultural resources have gained momentum. VCC remains ever dedicated to its work with landowners, local governments, partner agencies, and others interested in voluntary conservation.

Our approach is succeeding. Through the efforts of VCC and our partners over 130,000 Valley acres are now protected permanently by conservation easements and likewise over 130,000 acres are protected in agricultural and forestal districts. Comprehensive plans in many counties are improved and "better models for development" are visible throughout the region. Our expanded approach through the new Resource and Conservation Development Program is helping to sustain the economic vitality of agriculture and forestry, mainstays of our rural economy.

These successes are made possible by you – our members – now numbering over 1,000 people who are deeply rooted in the Valley and committed to maintaining healthy, prosperous communities.

As the year draws to a close, we extend our heartfelt thanks to our members and friends for believing in VCC's conservation mission. Together, we are creating a land legacy for future generations.

Happy holidays from all of us at VCC,
Faye Crawford Cooper

VCC Selected for Land Trust Alliance Excellence Program

The Land Trust Alliance (LTA), a national organization that supports private land trusts, has selected VCC to participate in its new Excellence Enhancement Program, an invitation extended to only fifteen land trusts in the southeastern U.S. and two in Virginia. "We are greatly honored to be among the few land trusts chosen for this new and innovative program," said Interim Director Faye Cooper. "We appreciate their confidence in us and this boost to help launch our work to a whole new level of effectiveness."

LTA, as part of its national and regional strategies, is making intensive, multi-year investments in land trusts that have been identified as having high potential to significantly increase their conservation impact and program excellence. LTA based its selection of VCC on its "high potential for growth," stating that "Valley Conservation Council has demonstrated that it is prepared to become a stronger and more accomplished land conservation program."

The three-year program establishes a formal partnership between LTA and VCC, which includes commitment of LTA grants and technical guidance from their regional program personnel.

Specifically the Program will help VCC: 1) strengthen its performance in program operations and leadership; 2) achieve and maintain conformance with LTA's national code of land trust operational standards and practices; 3) increase the pace and success of efforts to protect, restore and defend important land, ecological and water resources; and 4) gain greater community support and respect sufficient to maintain and sustain conservation programs.



VCC Awards Sustainable Agriculture Mini Grants

Through its Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program, VCC has selected five mini grant recipients of “Agriculture Sustainability and Vitality in the Shenandoah River Watershed” funding. This VCC RC&D Program sponsors and promotes projects that support the sustainable use of natural resources. Funding for the mini grants was made possible by the Agua Fund, Inc., a family foundation based in Washington, D.C., that works to protect the natural environment.

The selected projects will help support the rural economic base, enhance natural resources, and support sustainable agriculture in the Shenandoah River watershed. Approximately \$20,000 will be dispersed among the following projects:

- Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission. *Accessing Healthy Local Foods in the Northern Shenandoah Valley*: Establish community gardens at the new affordable housing complex at the former Toms Brook School site.

- Shenandoah County and Shenandoah County Cooperative Extension Service. *Shenandoah County Sustainable Farm Demonstration*: Demonstrate farming practices at the Shenandoah County Farm that are sustainable for the environment and for the financial well-being of the landowner.

- Virginia Cooperative Extension, Northern District Office. *Shenandoah Valley Buy Fresh Buy Local Mobile App and Database Development*: Helping producers add value to their farm products and make consumers aware of the steps producers have taken to protect water quality on their farms via a web-based database and a mobile application.

- Friends of the Shenandoah River. *Spout Run TMDL Benthic Impairment Study*: Establish the basis for installation of stream bank restoration practices to reduce sediment loads in Spout Run sufficient to meet water quality standards.

- White House Farm Foundation. *White House Organics Garden*: Demonstrate that small gardens if managed sustainably and organically can produce sufficient produce to feed an average family, as well as allow families to preserve a percentage of their crop for winter consumption and sell a portion for profit.



Garden at White House Farm



Page County Neighbors Discuss Conservation

VCC and the White House Foundation recently hosted a Page County landowner gathering, just one example of VCC’s outreach and educational efforts to inform property owners of their conservation options. Faye Cooper explains how conservation easements can help landowners reach their future conservation goals for their land while protecting valuable natural resources.

Annual VCC Celebration Biggest Ever

More than 140 members and guests gathered at the beautiful and conserved Parsons Farm in Augusta County to celebrate another successful year for VCC. Tom and Sally Parsons graciously welcomed the crowd and provided a history of the farm which was once the home of Grandma Moses, the renowned folk artist who made Shenandoah Valley landscapes the subject of many of her famous paintings. Fittingly, the date was the 152nd anniversary of her birth.

VCC Chairman Thomas Lockhart commended the Parsons for permanently protecting their farm with a conservation easement. In addition to the historic Victorian farm house and numerous farm buildings, the farm boasts prime soils for crops and 1.6 miles of frontage on Middle River, now protected with a forested buffer and livestock exclusion.

Matt Lohr, Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services and Rockingham county farmer, was VCC's special guest and recipient of the 2012 "Conservator of the Year" award. He spoke about the newly adopted "agricultural easement template." VCC was a lead partner in this effort to create an easement template that would be more flexible for agricultural uses and more attractive for working farms.

Faye Cooper, Interim Director, welcomed and thanked attendees for their commitment to VCC's work, which continues to help save more acres and raise the awareness among Valley citizens and decision-makers about the need for careful and sensible



Tom and Sally Parsons welcome the crowd

land use planning policies. The farm was the perfect place to showcase VCC's successful land conservation efforts. A large map of the local segment of Middle River showed the cluster of easements that protect 842 conserved acres and provide forested buffers along six miles of river frontage.

Attendees enjoyed an almost magical evening in a place that epitomizes the very qualities that VCC was formed to save and that bind members from across a wide region.

New VCC Board Members Elected



New VCC Board Members Butch Snow, Joan Comanor, and Bobby Whitescarver

At the annual celebration, members elected three new Board members:

Joan Comanor (Shenandoah County) is retired from federal service in natural resources management. Her positions included Director of Resource Conservation and Community Development with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry with USDA Forest Service. Joan received a bachelor's degree in natural resources management from the University of Nevada-Reno. As an active board member of the Shenandoah Resource and Conservation Development Council she has worked for years alongside VCC.

William "Butch" Snow (Rockbridge County) was born and raised on the west coast

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before moving to Augusta County in 1988 to start a cow/calf operation. In 2005, he moved to Rockbridge County and in 2008 he placed his two properties in conservation easement with VCC. He has been a VCC member since the early 1990s.

Robert “Bobby” Whitescarver (Augusta County) retired from federal service as a field conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service and now has his own consulting business, Whitescarver Natural Resources Management LLC. Bobby is a founding board member of the VCC and was chosen the Conservationist of the Year by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in 2002. He enjoys farming with his wife, Jeanne, in Swoope.

Three retiring board members, Keith Holland (Rockbridge), Ray “Buff” Showalter (Rockingham), and Jim Lawrence (Frederick) were thanked for their time and skills during their tenure.



From left to right, former Board member Joe Davis, former VCC steward Kathryn Pfeifer, her husband Robert, and easement donor Susan Bowen were among the members and guests who gathered for the recent “meet and greet” at Belle Grove Plantation near Middletown in Frederick County. Many thanks to Elizabeth McClung, Belle Grove Executive Director, for sharing a stunning and historic location for this fun event.

Link to Lewis & Clark Celebrated

Botetourt County’s cultural heritage was well celebrated at the November dedication of a marker commemorating the Lewis and Clark expedition’s ties to Fincastle. Master of Ceremonies the Honorable Malfourd “Bo” Trumbo noted that “the beauty of Botetourt, the crossroads trail of southwestern Virginia” motivated William Clark’s travels. Clark met his future wife, Julia Hancock, when the expedition traveled to Fincastle to see Col. William Preston.

The National Park Service is trying to establish verified sites along a Lewis and Clark “Eastern Legacy Trail” that would eventually connect to the already established trail that begins in Illinois and ends at the Oregon Coast. The marker is a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration geodetic disc.



Period re-enactors, shown here with VCC’s Genevieve Goss and her husband John, traveled from St. Louis to attend the Botetourt dedication.

New Members (as of 11-21-12)

Augusta County/ Staunton/ Waynesboro

Bob Barron
Hugh and Rebecca Lamb
Dorothy Duval Nelson
Dennis and Bonnie Nielson
Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport
StellarOne Bank
Whitescarver Natural Resources Management LLC

Frederick County

Museum Of The Shenandoah Valley

From Afar

Gregory and Jacquelyn Bednarz
Robin Cage Pottery
Lynn Zoll

Rockbridge County

Jo Ann Abell
Dick and Mary Halseth
Michael and Kathryn Sherwood

Rockingham County

Nicholas Swartz

Shenandoah County

Joe and Kaye Lehnen



VALLEY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

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Upper James Steward:
Genevieve Goss

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Many Thanks for Your Sustained Support

VCC anticipates that demands on our programs and services will continue to grow in the coming years. Please help VCC remain strong and successful in conserving the Valley.

- * Consider a generous year-end contribution.
- * Host a small “meet and greet” gathering for prospective members or easement donors.
- * Remember VCC in your estate plans.
- * Enroll in your employer’s matching gifts program.
- * Tell others about VCC’s work – share this newsletter, give a friend a gift membership or provide us with new member suggestions.

SPECIAL GIFT OFFER. Gift memberships to VCC are only \$20 a year. It’s a great way to share your interest in land conservation and love of the Valley with friends and colleagues.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!