



2019 FALL NEWSLETTER

Upcoming Events

September 23, 7pm Backyard Botetourt

Join VCC at the Fincastle Library for this free event highlighting backyard conservation and funding programs.

October 13, 4-7pm Annual Meeting

Join VCC's staff and board as we celebrate 2019 and share our goals for 2020! Call us or visit valleyconservation.org/rsvp to register. \$35/person

Silent Auction

Can't make it to our Annual Meeting? Get in on some of the fun with our Silent Auction, which is already open online and will close at the Annual Meeting. Participate at www.auctria.com/auction/valleyconservation

October 27, 12-5pm Farming in the Valley Festival

This family-friendly festival is geared towards children's education in agriculture. Visit VCC's table to meet our staff and make your own pollinators!

October 28, 7pm Backyard Botetourt

Join VCC at the Fincastle Library for this free event on a topic TBA!

November 25, 7pm Backyard Botetourt

Join VCC at the Fincastle Library for this free event on a topic TBA!

Change is in the Air

As the first leaves begin to turn along the ridge lines that surround us, we are reminded that time brings change to VCC as well. Throughout our history, we have facilitated land protection, promoted smart growth, advocated for appropriate transportation solutions, and most recently, served as the "boots on the ground" to put more land into permanent protection. Throughout all of these changes, our mission has remained the same: to promote land use that sustains the farms, forests, open spaces, and cultural heritage of the greater Shenandoah Valley region.

In the coming months, two very visible changes will take place in our organization. First, we will be hiring a new Executive Director to build upon the momentum we've established these past few years. Second, we are moving out of our long-time home at 17 Barristers Row. The building has treated us well, but moving to a new home will provide us additional flexibility and ensure that the historic building is given the love and care that it deserves. On September 16, we opened our new office at the Harrisonburg Hub, a coworking space in which we will continue to have a private office, but will also have the flexibility to expand and contract as our projects and priorities change. Once our new Executive Director comes on board, we will be assessing whether to remain in our new home or return to a coworking space in Staunton, but for the time being, we look forward to taking advantage of all that Harrisonburg has to offer!

VCC Receives Accreditation!

If you've been following our newsletters for the past few years, you've probably learned more than you ever wanted to about the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and the work that VCC's volunteers, staff, and board have invested in our inaugural bid for accreditation.



In August, we received a phone call from the Commission. The news they shared? We did it! Accreditation by the Commission affirms that VCC engages in responsible governance, exemplifies ethical conduct, is on sound financial footing, and that our lands will be protected forever.

As all of our supporters can attest, our region is an amazing place to live, to work, and to play. With this new recognition and nearly three decades of conservation experience under our belt, we're better positioned than ever to protect the lands and waters that make it so special. Touting other recent accomplishments such as doubling the acreage we steward in 2018 and receiving a \$200,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to help protect the valley's waterways, VCC remains a driving force for conservation in both the Shenandoah Valley and in the highlands to its west. We're excited to have received this national recognition, and invigorated by the many opportunities that lie ahead.



JMU Student Develops Herpetological Inventory of Sweet Family Farm

When John Sweet made the decision to donate his 400-acre Highland County farm to VCC, his hope was that the farm might be used to help educate future conservationists for generations to come. Less than a year after making the gift, Sweet's vision had already become a reality when David Weisenbeck, a student at James Madison University, approached Sweet about the possibility of conducting a survey of reptiles and amphibians on the farm.

What began as a component of VCC board member Eric Fitzgerald's "Valley to the Bay" class at JMU soon evolved into a nearly six month project during which Weisenbeck spent many late nights out in the woods and wetlands on Sweet's farm. Over the course of the project, Weisenbeck gained an appreciation for the diversity of wildlife on the preserve. "It quickly became my herping spot," he noted. "Each time I go out, I find something new."



The project has focused on identifying and documenting as many species as possible, mapping their presence so that future researchers can identify trends in diversity and distribution. The preserve is located at the intersection of several different habitats where multiple species overlap, so it can be a challenge to identify the species by sight alone. To aid in identification, Weisenbeck collects a specimen for preservation at JMU's collections facility and takes tissue samples in order to analyze their genetics. Working with a labmate at JMU, he is then able to pinpoint the exact species found on the property.

Both Sweet and VCC are delighted with Weisenbeck's work on the preserve. "Not only is this a great example of the educational opportunities generated by Mr. Sweet's gift, but the project also provides VCC with baseline data that we can use to monitor change well into the future," said VCC's Scott Kelly of the project. "We're grateful for David's efforts and look forward to working with more rising conservationists to learn more about the Sweet Family Farm's outstanding resources."