



## Regional Workshop Shows Counties How To Fund PDRs

“Virginia is the next big place where land preservation will take place. Everywhere north is going great guns purchasing farmland,” opened Pat O’Connell, a financing expert for localities setting up easement purchase programs. Judging by turnout for a ‘workshop held April 19, that place ought to be the Shenandoah Valley.

‘Options for Funding Local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Programs’ played to a nearly full meeting room at the Augusta County Government Center. Sponsored by the Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council and Valley Conservation Council, the workshop drew about 75 officials and staff from nine localities.



*“Richmond has not heard from you guys that this is important.”*

*Mary Heinrich*

Mary Heinrich of Ag Prospects explained why investing in easement purchase programs makes fiscal sense. Pat O’Connell of Evergreen Capital Advisors, Inc., described how installment purchase agreements have worked for PDR programs in Virginia Beach and elsewhere, by structuring the capital costs to the advantage of both the locality and the farmers. Howard Estes of the Virginia Resources Authority described how his state agency can help localities stretch their dollars to finance PDR programs.

John Hutchinson of the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation described existing PDR programs in Virginia.

### Augusta Sets Up PDR Funds

In May, just weeks after the workshop, the Augusta County Board of Supervisors budgeted over \$491,000 toward the purchase of development rights on agricultural land. Most of the supervisors had attended the session.

Augusta, a top farm county, is experiencing rapid growth and accelerating land prices. The board felt it was important to have the tool of easement purchase available, especially as it anticipates recommendations next year from its Agricultural Task Force. The funds also could serve as match for federal PDR programs.

*“Installment Purchase Agreements give farmers a reason to say yes.”*

*Pat O’Connell*



Patrick Barker and Rob Kinsley spoke on new fiscal impact models in Frederick and Shenandoah counties.

Speakers stressed that the longer a locality waits to establish a program, the more money it will need to spend to have an impact. Debt to finance PDRs is less expensive than debt to finance infrastructure. Nationwide, approximately 60% of PDR funding comes from states, yet Virginia does not have a state program. Heinrich urged citizens and localities to make it clear to their state legislators that they are interested in PDRs and want to use this tool.

Proceedings of the session are available from VCC. For more information on PDRs, call VCC or Kathy Holm at the Shenandoah RC&D Council, 540.248-3321.

### Newest Easements Are From Repeat Donors



*Eggleston farm, on Smith Creek in Rockingham County*

**See article on page 2.**

## Challenge Doubles Donations

Dear Friends,

The Agua Fund has offered a challenge to the members of the Valley Conservation Council this year, giving you an opportunity to expand our work of promoting land use that sustains the farms, forests, open spaces, and cultural heritage of our region. Please tell your friends and acquaintances about VCC and ask them to become members. Each new donation will be doubled: a \$50 membership will become a \$100 gift.

And please consider increasing your gift for this important year. Any increase over your 2004 donation will be doubled.

This exciting challenge will make us stronger. With your help we will be able to expand the services we offer to our unique and wonderful region.

Gratefully,

Lucile Miller, Board Development Committee

## Second Easements Further Protect Pristine Areas

The two latest conservation easements help protect superlative natural features – and both are the donors' second easements. Philip Clayton's easement on 214 acres of forest land in Rockbridge County joins a previous 100-acre tract and provides additional protection for local landmark House Mountain. Says Clayton, "It has been over 41 years since I first slept in the saddle between the two House Mountains by myself at age 11.... I feel immensely fortunate and thrilled to be able to have a positive effect on the future of the land here so that it can be enjoyed as I have enjoyed it for generations to come."

In northern Rockingham County, Dr. Robert B. and Elisabeth T. Eggleston placed an easement on 189 acres near Lacey Springs. The property consists of pastures, fields, and approximately ¾-mile frontage on Smith Creek, affording scenic views from two rural roads. This is the Egglestons' second farm easement, bringing the total they have protected to 309 acres.



Clayton tract near House Mountain in Rockbridge County

### Here's How You Can Help

- **Give the attached insert sheet to a friend, colleague, or acquaintance.** Speak to them about VCC. Chances are they care about the region, its open spaces, its rural heritage, its special character. Explain that VCC is a member organization. If you and every current member take the opportunity to tell at least one other person about VCC, we could substantially expand our membership, and our capacity to make a difference.
- **Work with the VCC office** (toll free 877.215.1782) to get information to people and organizations. We are glad to tailor and send out information packets.
- **Increase your donation over last year.** VCC will receive DOUBLE the amount of any increase. Please give generously.

## Comp Plans: Get Involved

Many area counties are in various stages of updating their comprehensive plans. These documents are critical in determining how a county will develop, but their function is largely under-recognized by general citizens. If you ever see in the paper that your county is in the process of updating its comprehensive plan, TUNE IN. There should be public meetings to gather input from citizens on what they value and what they want their locality to be like in the future. For example, the Land Use Map in the comprehensive plan is tremendously important in determining how resources are allocated and what projects are approved where. Even better, consider volunteering to serve on citizen advisory committees or the planning commission.

### County Comp Plans Under Review

Augusta County	Highland County
Bath County	Page County
Frederick County	Shenandoah County

## Memorial Gifts Honor Morgan, McNamara

VCC gratefully acknowledges the gifts received in memory of two friends of conservation who passed away recently, John Morgan of Rockbridge County and Judge Thomas McNamara of Highland County. Both were VCC members and conservation easement donors.

## New Members - May 2005

Augusta Area  
Steven Cox  
Larry and Diane Korte

Shenandoah County  
W. Denman Zirkle

Rockbridge Area  
Saundra Martis

From Afar  
Dorian Gregory and Janice Wood

## Message from the Executive Director

# Federal and State Scrutiny of Easement Donations

VCC is closely watching activity at the state and federal levels that may significantly impact the future of conservation easements in this country. The federal action hinges on recommendations handed down by the Joint Committee on Taxation, partially in response to isolated abuses of the tax benefits available through easement donations. We hope that the added scrutiny and professionalism proposed reforms may demand can improve the long-term protection of private lands.

VCC has been participating in forums to ensure that conservation easements remain available as a valuable voluntary tool with significant conservation benefits. VCC has adopted the national Land Trust Alliance (LTA)'s "standards and practices" as guidelines for ethical and responsible land trust management and governance.

On the state level, there have been concerns over alleged abuses based on inflated easement appraisals. VCC is participating in Virginia's United Land Trust's tax credit working group and in a Historic and Conservation Easement Roundtable convened by the Secretary of Natural Resources. Our hope is that changes to the tax credit program can help it better target the working farmers and individual landowners it was intended for.

## I-81 Forums Give the Facts and Chance for Input

The proposal to expand Interstate 81 has people throughout western Virginia concerned. Two recent seminars gave citizens the chance to hear various perspectives.

In January the Shenandoah Forum hosted a forum in Shenandoah County that drew more than 320 people. Speakers were Fred Althizer, I-81 project manager for the Virginia Department of Transportation; Trip Pollard of the Southern Environmental Law Center; Michael Testerman of RailSolution, and Tiffany Hamby of Shenandoah Valley Network, a group raising issues about the proposed I-81 expansion.

Rosemary Wallinger, a founder of the Shenandoah Forum and organizer of the event, says there was such extensive public participation that they compiled the comments and sent them to state officials. Shenandoah Forum created a "How to Plan a Forum on I-81" packet. For information contact Wallinger at 540.477-2661.

The Augusta Community Partnership (ACP) took this

## Board Nominations Sought

Nominations to the VCC Board of Directors may come from the general membership. If you know of someone who could potentially make a fine board member, please contact VCC, [vcc@valleyconservation.org](mailto:vcc@valleyconservation.org) or 540.886.3541.

**Corrections** - On the annual giving list for 2004, Al and Phyllis Saufley should have been listed at the Sponsor Level and Olivia Reed should have been listed at the Sustainer Level.

## Landowner Workshops Draw Crowds

The McGaheysville Ruritan Hall in Rockingham County, the Highland Center in Monterey, and the Shenandoah County Government Center were all sites for VCC workshops on land conservation options for private landowners this spring. VCC combined with various partners to help explain conservation easements and other tools to about 100 participants, discussing both the public and private benefits of placing an easement on their land.

- March 29: Highland and Bath counties - VCC's John Eckman joined Faye Cooper of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and easement donor Wesley Woods for a workshop for landowners.
- March 31: Rockingham County - Eckman gave a workshop on easements and agricultural forestal districts to landowners in McGaheysville, a fast-growing area east of Harrisonburg.
- April 14: The Shenandoah County Farm Bureau and the Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development Council sponsored a workshop featuring Eckman, Cooper, and Howard Kittell of the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation.

If you would be interested in having a landowner workshop in your community or neighborhood, please give VCC a call.

packet and ran with it. On May 16, the ACP hosted a similar seminar which attracted about 125 people. VCC Executive Director John Eckman served as emcee for the event, which was spearheaded by ACP member Nick MacNeil. In addition to Altizer and Pollard, David Foster of Rail Solution was a featured speaker.

Mr. Althizer explained the complex processes that will control the decision making on the project. Mr. Pollard gave background on transportation trends and potential negatives of the proposed STAR proposal to build truck-only toll lanes the length of Virginia. Mr. Foster described a possible alternative: a rail line that could ferry long-distance trucks, potentially keeping many of them off I-81 and reducing the need for wholesale improvements.

### I -81 How to Stay Informed

Stay informed. The process is complex. While the decision is far from over, citizens need to recognize the points at which they can make their viewpoints heard. One such time may come this fall, in hearings for the environmental impact statement.

Give your input. Look for public input sessions and for times when legislators need to hear from their constituents. State, federal, and local officials may have a role.

### Useful Websites:

[www.I-81.org](http://www.I-81.org) (VDOT's official website)  
[www.railsolution.org](http://www.railsolution.org)  
[www.shenandoahvalleynetwork.org](http://www.shenandoahvalleynetwork.org)



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## VCC Brushes Up on GIS

In the ever-changing world of technology, it's hard for the little guys to keep up. Enter the Canaan Valley Institute. A technical assistance grant from CVI enabled VCC staff to receive specialized training in April.



*Janette Bennett, of Canaan Valley Institute (center) shows VCC Office Manager Nan Fiebig (left) and intern Cathy Wright (right) some GIS tips.*

**Save the Date**  
**VCC Annual Meeting**  
**September 10 in Rockingham County**

## Alleghany Workshops Look at Land-Water Relationships

VCC held two "water workshops" in Alleghany County in May to discuss how best to protect water sources and handle stormwater runoff. Sponsored by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (VDCR) and organized by VCC County Steward Genevieve Goss, they drew a cross-section of community leaders, resource professionals, and interested citizens from Alleghany, Botetourt and Bath counties.

Panel participants emphasized the need to fully research groundwater flows in our cave-riddled limestone valleys. They also suggested that when financing allows, counties should run sewer lines wherever they run water supply lines, thus minimizing the potential for groundwater contamination from septic systems.

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