



## A Tale of Two Easements: Same County, Different Goals

One family farms full time in Rockingham County's agricultural core. The other visits their mountain retreat on weekends. Both love their land and both hit on the same tool to suit their vision of the future: a conservation easement. The Showalter family found that an easement donation would enable them to expand and protect their farming operation. With land their main asset, this was a serious and complicated decision. The state's Preservation Trust Fund helped defray the legal and appraisal costs while the tax benefits helped them buy an adjoining parcel and keep it in farming. Across the county, the Naylor family chose to protect a wild and forested property and to use it lightly now and forever.

These two easements, donated in 2006 and held jointly by VCC and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, illustrate

conservation easements at their best. They protect water quality through riparian buffers and protect the property against any future subdivision. They also show the range of properties and landowner situations that can benefit

**See Tale of Easements on p. 4**



*The Showalters farm in the heart of Rockingham County.*

## First Statewide Land Trust Conference Held in Valley

VCC helped host a well-attended gathering of Virginia's United Land Trusts in Staunton, in early June. Over 100 representatives from Virginia's private land trusts, state agencies, consulting firms, and others attended workshops and shared their best practices. Plans are in the works for the group to return again next year.

Staunton will play host this month for the Restore Virginia! Workshop & Preservation Conference, September 21-27. Visiting [www.apva.org](http://www.apva.org) or call 540-886-6100.



*The Naylor land adjoins Shenandoah National Park.*

## Two Local Counties Go for Easement Purchase Match

Two Valley counties are applying for matching state funds to support local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs. Clarke County has had a program for years, already protecting some significant properties. Frederick County has set up a "Conservation Easement Authority" and earmarked \$265,000 to match the state's Farmland Preservation office funds. They and other localities from across the state who qualify by having both an ordinance and funding, will split a very limited \$4.25 million pot of funds, the first Virginia has ever offered.

Two other counties came close. At the last hour, the Augusta County Board balked at passing its proposed PDR ordinance, despite having set aside funds for several years, that now total over \$1 million. Rockbridge County, which has had a PDR program in place for years but has yet to complete an easement, declined to put up matching funds. VCC hopes that the successful leveraging of state funds will encourage more counties to move ahead with developing their programs.

# Mapping Highlights Conservation Priorities

Whatever the conservation goal – maintaining the agricultural land base, protecting water quality and other environmental benefits, or providing habitat — a strategic approach helps. Every location varies in its physical features and also in its importance to people. Some parcels have more conservation value than others, be it prime soils, unique habitat, a historic site, or streamside areas.

Strategic conservation sets priorities, on both a parcel and a landscape level. Each conserved parcel has value on its own. Taken together these parcels also form a mosaic. Often these conservation decisions are made randomly as individual families learn about easement options. But it can also be useful to try to fill in connections and make a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. For example, a combination of strategically placed parcels can protect a water source or a larger block can assure an agricultural reserve free of residential conflicts.

**Encouraging voluntary conservation.** To raise landowner and citizen awareness of particular conservation opportunities, the first step is to identify important resources. VCC regularly uses Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping software to support land conservation. GIS enables VCC to create maps for every corner of our 11-county region. These can show information such as existing conservation easements, rivers and water ways, mountains and topographic features, public lands (such as national park and national forest), battlefields, agricultural and forestal districts, land parcels, and much more.

GIS is a wonderful technical tool for identifying geographic areas where conservation values are high. It can take various data and make the location of important conservation features easily accessible through maps. These maps can be made at all geographic scales: parcel, area (such as watershed), community, or region.

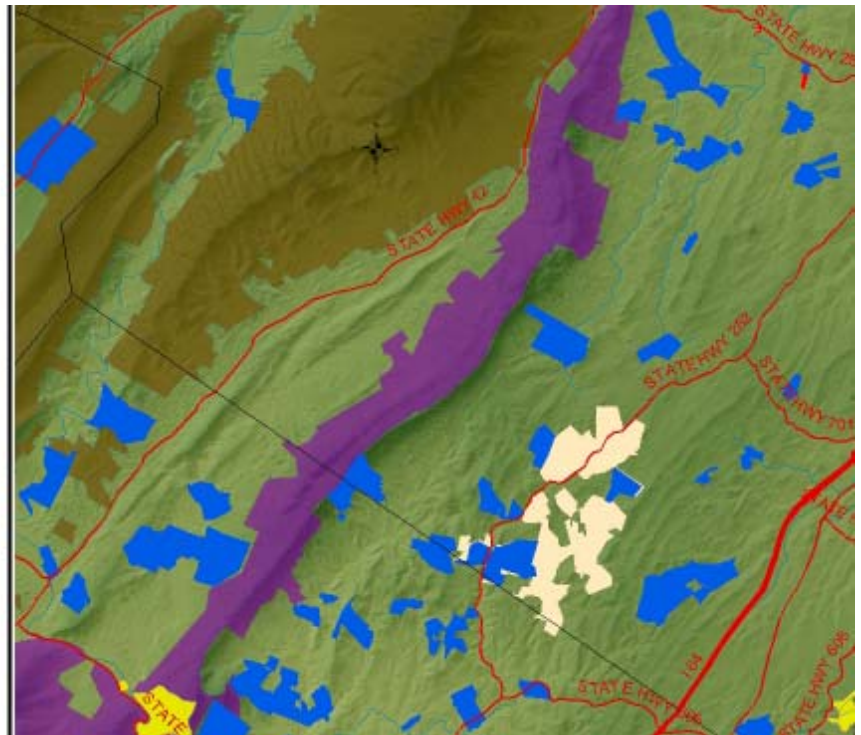
**At the parcel level.** VCC can help identify conservation features on the properties of landowners who approach us about an easement. It also helps us focus our outreach in priority areas. Not every parcel is created equal in terms of its value for conservation. For example, land that is adjacent to already conserved land can contribute to building a larger block of protected land with fuller environmental benefits. Land with water features that can be protected through an easement is very important for water quality, fish health, and drinking water.

**At the landscape level.** The Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor in Augusta and Rockbridge counties offers a good example of strategic conservation.

VCC identified the tremendous historic, natural, and scenic assets of this geographic area in a 1997 report. Landowners responded to knowing how unique and important their area is. Today this area has the largest concentration of easements in VCC's service area. These conserved sites protect not only the features on the individual parcels, but increasingly form a mosaic that hints at protection of features across the landscape. Continuing outreach emphasizes how additional easements can contribute to this greater goal. Today, ten years after the release of the study, it is landowners in the Corridor spreading the word to their neighbors about conservation easements that regularly results in several more properties protected each year.

**Connecting the Dots.** Joining these mapping capabilities with ongoing coordination and education is one more way VCC tries to meet its mission of conserving the farms, forests, cultural heritage, and open space of the Valley region. Through this combination of solid, easy to understand mapping and public education, we hope to encourage the connections that conserve features not just on an individual parcel level, but at a landscape level as well.

## Conservation Lands in the Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor



*This GIS graphic illustrates the mosaic of public and private protection of the headwaters of the James and Shenandoah rivers in southern Augusta and northern Rockbridge counties. Shaded parcels show National Forest, state Wildlife Management Areas, county agricultural and forestal districts, and private conservation easements.*

## Meet VCC's Office Manager

VCC welcomes Kim Tinkham, our new office manager and program assistant. Kim takes over many of the day-to-day operations of the VCC office and program support. A Valley native, she graduated from Broadway High School and James Madison University.

She has worked as a research assistant in the JMU archaeology department, including field work at many battlefields in the Valley and at the Montpelier historic site. She has already proven her organizational skills. Kim lives in Staunton with her husband Cory and son Wyatt.



### Jackie Jamison Shifts to New Roles

Jackie Jamison's expected start date for her new role as mother is September 10. After maternity leave, she will focus her VCC time on land conservation support, particularly the important tasks of land trust accreditation, easement monitoring, and GIS mapping.

## VCC Plans to Seek Land Trust Accreditation

VCC is greatly increasing its commitment to serving as a regional land trust by embarking on national accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). The process will take years, but a big step comes this fall, as VCC undergoes a major organizational assessment with help from conservation consulting group Mayes, Wilson and Associates.

LTA, a national organization serving 1,200 land trusts, is initiating this accreditation process in order to give Congress and the public confidence in the quality of the nation's land trusts. A small pilot program for a handful of land trusts has been implemented for 2007. The process is so intensive that it will take several more years to bring all the land trusts through the accreditation program. VCC expects to join by 2010.

Accreditation aims to ensure that the nation's land trusts are upholding the best standards in their conservation transactions and organizational practices. Almost every aspect of land trust operations will be scrutinized, from record-keeping procedures, to the documenting and monitoring of conserved properties, to financial and strategic planning.

The upcoming organizational assessment will help VCC prepare for undertaking national accreditation. This process will be a time to examine our strengths and weaknesses as an organization, update our strategic plan, and ensure that VCC's conservation files and policies meet the highest standards in our field. Thanks to LTA for a grant to make this assessment possible.

## New Stewards Bring Grassroots Outreach

VCC's Working Landscapes Initiative brings part-time staff members on board to assist in conservation outreach and grassroots conservation. This structure increases VCC's local presence throughout its service area. We are grateful for support from Oak Hill Fund, Virginia Environmental Endowment, and the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund.

Kathryn Pfeiffer and Jeff Green join current steward Deb Truban to form VCC's Northern Valley team. Cliff Gilchrest and senior steward Genevieve Goss will coordinate VCC's work in the Upper James watershed.

**Kathryn Pfeiffer** (Northern Valley) got involved in conservation through working with neighbors to ensure protection of Ogden Cave, a unique site adjacent to her home. Their 12 years of effort paid off when the 100-acre property was protected recently by The Nature Conservancy and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Kathryn is an author of two books for young adults. She lives with her husband and three sons near Middletown where they have horses and chickens.



**Jeff Green** (Northern Valley) raises chickens, geese, sheep, cattle, and bobwhite quail on 186 acres near Mountain Falls in Frederick County that have been in the family since 1800. In fact, few people have local roots as deep as Jeff's. His family has lived in Frederick County since the French-Indian War. He grew up in the 1822 brick house where he now lives and recently donated a conservation easement that is held by VCC and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.



**Cliff Gilchrest** (Upper James) taught social studies for 38 years, has served on the Bath County Planning Commission and currently is chairman of the Bath County Board of Supervisors. He will retire from that post soon and looks forward to employing the skills and insights gained from these 42 years of public service as he works with local landowners to promote land conservation.



## Our Newest Members

### Augusta County/Staunton/ Waynesboro

Claudia & Don Hall  
Wharton, Aldhizer & Weaver  
Kathy Belcher  
Barbara Phillips  
Mary Rogers  
Chris Harman & Joi Brown

### Bath County

Cliff & Betty Gilchrest

### Clarke County

Virginia B. Lloyd

### Frederick County/Winchester

Bud & Patricia Good

### Highland County

Jeffrey & Kathryn Ward

### Rockbridge County/Buena

#### Vista/Lexington

Blue Ridge Garden Club, Inc.  
Sandy McLaughlin  
Greg Raetz  
Joseph & Joann Wilson

### Rockingham County / Harrisonburg

Martha B. Caldwell  
Robert & Dorothy Connelly  
David Daeuper  
Gary Race & Marti Lay  
Dr. Joseph L. Glick, Sr.  
Cassandra Naylor

### Shenandoah County

Robert Boisture  
Abbe S. Kennedy

### Warren County

Town of Front Royal

### From Afar

William J. Modica  
Leah Zimmerman  
Harry & Laura Hogan  
HSP Direct, LLC  
Elizabeth Rooks  
Carl A. Dehne  
Edge Research  
Angela Showalter

## A Tale of Easements cont'd

from this voluntary and increasingly popular conservation method.

Buff and Debbie Showalter's farm easement covers 118 acres that includes forest, cropland, a poultry house, and a historic home built in 1841. The easement protects the farm from future subdivision and also includes a riparian buffer strip to improve water quality on Muddy Creek, which has been identified as a polluted stream.

In Virginia, when you donate a qualified conservation easement, the donation generates state tax credits worth up to 40 % of the value of the easement, which can be sold. These transferable tax credits have made easements possible for many Valley farmers who have used the sale of these land preservation tax credits to many worthy ends such as paying off debt. In the Showalters' case, the sale of the land preservation tax credits enabled him to buy an adjoining 70 acres that was threatened with development.

Cassandra Naylor, on the other hand, placed a conservation easement on 346 acres of forested mountain property bordering the Shenandoah National Park near Elkton. The tract contains a large waterfall called Cedar Run, the headwaters of the Shenandoah River. The Naylor family lives in Maryland and bought the property in the 1970s as a summer camp. The third generation of Naylor's now enjoy the property on weekends. They live completely off the electrical grid on their mountain property.



**Clean Streams.** This mountain stream on the Naylor property will benefit from the conservation easement. Both the Showalter and Naylor easements specify buffers along stream courses to reduce erosion and pollution.

## Page Residents Turn Out for Rural Protection Tools Talk

In June, VCC and the Virginia Tech Extension Service hosted an evening workshop in Stanley with Sara Hollberg, consulting planner, the resource speaker on Rural Protection Tools. The crowd of citizens, farmers, and elected officials had a lively discussion of various tools available to communities to guide growth.

## Upcoming Workshop to Educate on Local Stormwater Options

Development can have a negative effect on water quality. How should Valley localities structure their ordinances and review processes to minimize erosion and pollution from runoff? As part of its work to encourage better development practices, VCC is working with a committee of local and state staff to plan a workshop and educational materials to help localities develop effective programs.

## Issues VCC Is Tracking

VCC is very concerned with a number of issues in the area. Please give us a call or visit our website to learn more and find links concerning these and more:

- **Huge powerlines** across the northern Valley and Piedmont would significantly impact important historic and natural resources
- **Industrial wind energy** generation facilities proposed in Highland County could be just the beginning of ridge top development.
- **Efforts to widen I-81** are still very much alive.
- **Resort Development** proposals are afoot using loopholes in outdated county ordinances to create new resort developments with the equivalent impact of hundreds of home sites in agricultural areas without county review or citizen input.

If these or other issues concern you, be in touch with VCC or visit our website at [www.valleyconservation.org](http://www.valleyconservation.org) for more information and links.

## Meet the VCC Board

# Showalter Links Farming and Environmental Interests

Ray (Buff) Showalter joined the VCC board in 2006, but his interest in conservation has deep roots. Born and raised in the Mennonite community in western Rockingham County, Buff produces beef and poultry on a farm that has been in his family since 1831. He also is Vice President of Poultry Specialties, a business that supplies poultry equipment to farmers in the region.

His goals show how his professional calling is intertwined with his love of the land. He wants to improve the water quality of the creeks that run through his property, to see the return of bobwhite quail, and to conserve these farms for future generations. That's just what he's doing. A conservation reserve (CREP) riparian buffer of trees protects the creeks on his farm from runoff.

When neighboring property went up for sale, Buff and his wife Debbie decided it was so important to keep it farmland that they placed a conservation easement on their home tract and used the tax credits to help purchase the adjoining parcel. It's a sacrifice they talked over with their young son. Says Buff, "Josh loves that land too and doesn't want to see it developed." Buff clearly thinks a lot about the future of this farming region. We asked him to share his thoughts:

**On keeping farming viable:** If family farms and production agriculture ever vanish from the Valley as a viable economic enterprise, the air, water, natural beauty, and quality of life that have made the Shenandoah Valley a special place for hundreds of years will be gone forever.

***The need for education is huge. It will take years and I'm not sure we have years.***

**What he would say to non-farmers:** Don't lump all farmers and all farming practices into one. Call us. Visit our farms. Most farmers are proud of their farms and the quality of what they produce. Many of us are more concerned about the environment than the average suburbanite. Why? Because every day we see the effects of runoff, unplanned development, and outdated farming practices on the land and water we depend on for our living.

**On water quality and farming:** Agriculture has been the scapegoat on the Chesapeake Bay issue. There is plenty of blame to go around. I've seen a real positive

change in attitudes in the ag community on water quality. It's education, education, education. When you can show people the cold, hard facts that apply to their local stream, it starts to get their attention.

**On moving forward on environmental and farming issues:** There is plenty of common ground between farmers and governments and environmentalists. We should all sit down and work on common-sense solutions rather than point fingers at one another.

**On conservation easements for farmers:** I would like more people to know how much help there is to get through the process. Many people are interested but are scared of the process. And I'd guess more than half of the farmers in this county do not understand the state tax



*The Showalters share a love of the land, fishing, hunting, birdwatching, and bluegrass.*



***If family farms and production agriculture ever vanish from the Valley ... the air, water, natural beauty, and quality of life that have made this a special place will be gone forever.***

credits and federal deductions [that can make easements a good financial option for farmers].  
**On protecting farmland:** Localities are not sure what to do. They are uncertain what farmers want. Farmers themselves don't know what they want. Many are scared of permanent easements. There is a HUGE education need. You have to take it one individual at a time.

**On VCC:** It's been a lot more farmer friendly than I anticipated. I've been pleasantly surprised by the openness to farmers' problems. I've thoroughly enjoyed the people I've worked with.

**Goals as a VCC Board member:** I'd like to see VCC seek accreditation as a land trust. I'd also like us to work more closely with local governments to protect land.

Buff acknowledges these are complex issues. Whether it's farmland preservation or pollution prevention, education is called for. "The need for education is huge," he says, "It will take years and I'm not sure we have years."



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## VCC Annual Meeting, September 14

# Join Us on the Frontiers of Land Conservation

Come one, come all to VCC's Annual Meeting and Dinner on Friday evening, September 14th at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton. Events will be held at the Cochran Pavilion.

Nikki Rovner, Virginia's Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources, will speak. VCC also will name this year's conservation awards winners. Chef Eric Stamer will provide dinner, while musical entertainment will be "Progressive Medicine Show" by Driver, Parks & Knicely.

### **VCC Annual Meeting & Dinner**

**Friday, Sept. 14**

**Social Hour — 5 p.m.**

**Annual Meeting — 6 p.m.**

**Dinner and Music — 7 p.m.**

**\$20 per person**

***Respond by September 10***

**[kim@valleyconservation.org](mailto:kim@valleyconservation.org) / 877.216.1782**

**Newcomers and guests welcome!**

*Come early to tour the museum:*

*A living landscape of traditional working homesteads. Historic German, Scotch-Irish, and English farms from the 17th and 18th centuries are rebuilt on the site to illustrate the cultures that converged at the Virginia frontier to bring forth a uniquely American form.*

### **Valley Conservation Council**

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