



VALLEY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

# VISION

SUMMER/FALL 2009

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

## District Renewals Show Landowners' Commitment

Ten years ago landowners in western Rockingham County came together to form three agricultural/forestry districts covering over 11,000 acres of land in the Valley's agricultural heartland around the Town of Dayton. Those three districts, Spring Creek, Dry River, and Oak Grove, are all up for renewal in January of 2010. Working with local citizen leaders and the County, VCC organized two evening workshops to discuss the renewals and to assist new landowners who might be interested in joining and expanding the districts.

At the meetings held at a church school and a public middle school, landowners reaffirmed their strong commitment to the stewardship of their land, seeking to renew two of the districts for the full ten years and the third for seven more years. Agricultural and forestry districts give groups of landowners

Photo © Pat and Chuck Blackley



*A farmer works in the Dry River area of Rockingham County near Mole Hill.*

the opportunity to band together and send localities a strong message that they want to remain a productive agricultural community.

## Join Us to Celebrate as VCC Turns 20 in 2010



*VCC Steering Committee pictured at first annual meeting in 1991. Left to right: Mark Hollberg, Sara Hollberg, Rick Chittum, Bobby Whitescarver, Steve Talley, Faye Cooper, Robbie Brown, Jim Brown.*

Valley Conservation Council will celebrate 20 years of service to the Shenandoah Valley region in 2010. To coincide with VCC's official incorporation in February 1990, a kick-off celebration will be held at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in Staunton on Saturday, February 20, 2010. Enjoy a seated dinner, dancing to a live band, a silent auction, and a look at both our past successes and our future hopes.

Please join us for this special evening. We will be posting further information on the event on our website where we also will have previews of the silent auction items. Watch your mailbox for a formal invitation after the first of the year.

We are using this milestone as a conservation springboard to make even more progress in the next 20 years. You can help:

- host a local event
- donate an item for the auction
- sponsor an event

Please call for details.

Other events are being planned throughout VCC's service area during the upcoming year.

# Lancaster Panel Shares Message of Successful Farmland Purchase Programs

In October, Jeff Swinehart, the Deputy Director for the Lancaster Farmland Trust, and Matt Knepper, the Director of the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, came to the Shenandoah Valley for a series of technical workshops on farmland conservation. Lancaster County is nationally known for programs that purchase the development rights (PDR) from landowners of working farms. Farmers enter into agricultural easements that allow them to maintain production but limit subdivision of the property. This helps maintain a network of farmland that supports an important part of the local economy with more than \$1 billion generated in agricultural sales. Through the efforts of both the County and the private land trust, there are more than 1,000 conserved farms protecting just under 85,000 acres.

Jeff and Matt shared their expertise in a discussion comparing

conservation easements available to farmers in Virginia with the agricultural easements offered in Lancaster County. The Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council funded the Lancaster visitors, while VCC took the lead on organizing along with other partners. An evening event in Stanley was sponsored by the Page County Farmers Association. The Potomac Conservancy co-hosted a session in Woodstock exploring how to build a successful PDR program for counties in the Shenandoah Valley that are interested in or have recently adopted PDR ordinances.

These events are a follow up to a visit from Gene Garber and Luke Brubaker, two farmers from Lancaster County who shared their experiences with farmland conservation. With nearly 6,000 farms, Lancaster County ranks fourth in the country in number of farms. Dairy is the leading agricul-

tural sector, but farming is diverse with poultry, swine, beef, crop, and vegetable production also contributing to the local economy. The farming families recognize the importance of maintaining lands for agriculture. For every one acre lost to development, two acres were preserved from 1994 to 2001.

## *Acre Conserved in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*

To date, 20% of Lancaster County's farms and farmland have been conserved.

	<u>Acre</u>
County Agricultural Preserve Board	64,093
Lancaster Farmland Trust	<u>20,784</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>84,877</b>

# Workshop Goes Back to the Basics: Land Use Taxation and Agricultural Districts

“Making the Most of Agricultural and Forestal Districts, Land Use Taxation, and Related Options” brought together representatives from localities throughout the Valley and beyond on October 7th. Held at the Rockingham County office building, this VCC workshop featured speakers from the Virginia Office of Farmland Preservation, the Virginia Farm Bureau, and Virginia Association of Counties. VCC presented research from its statewide survey of Agricultural and Forestal District programs.

Presentations relayed the status and trends of the tools Land Use Taxation, Agricultural and Forestal Districts (AFDs), as well as the emerging tools of Lease of Development Rights, Transfer of Development Rights, and Urban Development Areas. Most valuable was the open discussion on obstacles to the

effectiveness of these tools and possible improvements.

Emphasis was given to land use taxation and AFDs. These basic short-term tools are widely applied and often are the only strategy beyond zoning that localities use to encourage land conservation. In the Valley, all but the most rural counties use land use taxation and eight have agricultural and forestal district programs.

Participants came from Valley counties as well as from Albemarle, Montgomery, and Loudoun and had positions ranging from planners and planning commissioner to Commissioner of Revenue staff. This range of perspectives and experiences brought out good insights. VCC plans to follow up on some of these ideas. For more information, including speaker presentations, go to VCC's website.

# VCC Releases Report on Agricultural Districts

VCC just released a new report, *Agricultural and Forestal Districts: Their Use and Applicability Across the Commonwealth*, based on a statewide survey and related research. VCC surveyed all the programs this summer to determine the extent of districts statewide, how they are administered, and the details of districts in the Valley region. The report includes discussion of issues and recommendations, based on our research and October 7th tools workshop.

An agricultural and forestal district (AFD) is a voluntary agreement between landowners and the local

## Status of Agricultural and Forestal Districts in the Shenandoah Valley Region

Locality	2009 Districts	2009 Acreage	Change from 2002
Augusta	4	15,385	-189
Clarke	1	28,000	-261
Frederick	3	7,817	-5,768
Page	1	1,243	-669
Rockbridge	7	6,097	+861
Rockingham	9	22,395	-3,823
Shenandoah	21	41,392	-1,746
City of Staunton	4	2,532	+211
Warren	3	11,112	+1,688
<b>Valley Totals</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>135,973</b>	<b>-9,696</b>

government designating a district within which no non-agricultural changes will occur for a term of between four

and ten years. The property owners commit to not rezoning or subdividing or developing their land and the locality commits to considering the district in its planning and infrastructure decisions.

Survey respondents named “conservation value” the greatest benefit from AFDs, noting they protect productive farmland, rural character, and environmental resources. More acres are conserved through AFDs than any other method. The greatest challenge, however, is the lack of incentives for landowners to take this step.

Statewide, 30 localities have AFD programs covering a total of 684,236 acres. Nine of the programs are in the Valley region. Between 2002 and 2009, the region saw an increase in the number of districts but a loss in acreage.

For more information or to see the report, call 540.886.3541 or visit [www.valleyconservation.org](http://www.valleyconservation.org).

### Ag Districts Statewide Highlights:

Localities with districts: 30  
 Acres conserved in AFDs: 684,236  
 Districts per program: 1 to 24  
 Acres per program: 668 to 80,215

# Warren County Passes Easement Ordinance

In August, the Warren County Board adopted a Conservation Easement Program to enable the county to acquire voluntary conservation easements either through donation or purchase as one means of assuring that valuable County resources are protected. One of the primary objectives is to help maintain the county’s rural character. There is not currently any funding for the program, but this will enable the county to work with property owners

who might come forward and to seek grants and other financing. The county has been working on the concept for years. Scenic 340 helped get the ball rolling several years ago and spoke in favor of the ordinance.

This puts Warren in good company with neighbors Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah, and Fauquier. All these counties will be able to consider applying for a new round of state matching funds for farmland protection when those become available.

## Special Thanks

### Annual Meeting Sponsors:

Botkin Rose PLC  
 Conservation Services, Inc.  
 Myers and Woods Appraisal Group  
 Shamrock & Stephenson Realty

### Annual Meeting In-kind Donors:

Cally’s Restaurant & Brewery,  
 Harrisonburg  
 James London Photography  
 Mountain View Farm Products, LLC,  
 Fairfield  
 Rockbridge Vineyards, Raphine  
 Staunton Steam Laundry

# Morse and Lawrence Join VCC Board

During the VCC annual meeting, Ann Kelly Morse of Staunton and Jim Lawrence of Winchester were elected to the VCC Board for three-year terms. No strangers to VCC, both bring a breadth of experience and a long track record of local service. Outgoing board members Rick Shiflet, Mike Pelton, Diane Kearns, and Matt Morgan were thanked for their outstanding service.

Ann Kelly Morse recently returned to Staunton, her hometown, and also has lived in Botetourt and Shenandoah counties. She served previously on the boards of VCC, the Virginia Conservation Network, and Historic Fincastle, Inc. In Fincastle, she and her husband restored a 200-year-old log home. Before that, Ann lived in Massachusetts where she served on a Conservation Commission which administered the state's Wetlands Protection Act and worked as a regional planner in floodplain management for the State Department of Environmental Management. She has worked most of her career as a ranger for the National Park Service, in Yellowstone and Shenandoah National Parks. Ann has a degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in Outdoor Recreation/Natural Resource Management.



*Jim Lawrence and Ann Kelly Morse—new VCC Directors*

Jim Lawrence serves on and is immediate past chair of the Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development Council where he represents the board of the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District. He currently serves on the Frederick County Easement Authority. Jim works as project coordinator for the Winchester Green Circle, a biking/walking

trail along Town Run and Abrams Creek. The Green Circle will promote stream stewardship while providing a safe alternate means of transportation throughout the City. He also coordinates tree planting and other projects for Opequon Watershed, Inc. and has done significant restoration work in support of trout habitat on Red Bud Run on the north end of Winchester. He graduated in 2001 from the Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute and has participated in workshops on topics including GIS training, stream bank restoration, watershed management, green infrastruc-

ture, and grant management. He has worked in restoration contracting, farming, and woodlot management and has taken courses in economics, real estate, and environmental science, and graduate courses in architecture at the University of Virginia. In his free time, Jim enjoys all outdoor activities, especially fishing and hiking.

## Combined Annual Meeting a Success

VCC joined with the Virginia Conservation Network to host a "Conservation Weekend" at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton, September 11 and 12. VCC is one of over 100 member organizations that together make VCN the state's most broadly represented environmental organization focused on policies coming out of Richmond. VCN's annual Virginia Environmental Assembly on Saturday brought people

from across the Commonwealth to Staunton to enjoy the weekend's festivities.

The weekend kicked off on Friday afternoon with a Green Tour of Staunton which featured protected properties and stream restoration efforts. The first stop was a well established restored forest area in the midst of Staunton's Bell's Lane Agricultural/Forestral District where Bobby Whitescarver, District Conservationist for the

Natural Resources Conservation Service, explained how forests grow and change over time and the water quality benefits they provide.

From there the trolley wove its way up to Cobble Hill Farm, a 196-acre farm that is permanently conserved with a conservation easement held by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Owner Harriet Hanger discussed the easement and how it protects

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## Combined VCC Meeting *(continued)*

not only the land but also the architectural resources of the property. Farm Manager Jim Pyle shared some of their innovative practices.

The Tour proceeded to downtown Staunton where Frank Strassler of Historic Staunton Foundation shared information on the environmental benefits that restored structures may offer over building new ones. The tour ended with a stop at Bessie Weller Elementary School where a “rain garden” has been built to filter runoff from the school parking lot before it enters into Asylum Creek.



*Frank Strassler of Historic Staunton Foundation leads the Green Tour in downtown Staunton*

## VCC's Annual Meeting

Friday evening a mix of VCC members and out-of-town guests joined to celebrate land conservation at the Cochran Pavilion. A delicious local foods dinner followed the evening's brief business.

Joe Davis of Luray was recognized as Conservationist of the Year for his long service with the Conservation Fund and assistance to VCC. Joe was instrumental in protecting privately held parcels bordering Shenandoah National Park and has since assisted with



*Jerry and Priscilla Rainey enjoy the local foods supper at VCC's Annual Meeting*

Luray's downtown redevelopment.

Easement donor Butch Snow from near the Augusta/Rockbridge line reminded the crowd that “Conservation is the responsibility of individuals.”

Harrisonburg Mayor Kai Degner spoke briefly mentioning the partnership of the City, VCC, and many other organizations that has restored Blacks Run in Purcell Park. Degner challenged all attending to convey the importance of saving land to “the three most important people you know who are not here tonight.”

## VCN's Virginia Environmental Assembly

On Saturday conservationists from across the Commonwealth filled the Octagonal Barn at the Frontier Culture Museum to connect and share information. Workshops on alternatives to widening I-81 and on recent changes in stormwater regulation were followed by a keynote address from Tim LaSalle, CEO of the Rodale Institute. LaSalle shared the results of 28 years of research at Rodale's Pennsylvania farms which point to the capacity of organic soils to help sequester

## New Members

### Augusta County/ Staunton/Waynesboro

Bruce Bowman, DVM  
Cooper Conservation Advisors, LLC  
David and Lucinda Fuller  
Peggy McFarland  
Quality Inspection Service  
Jeff Shingleton & Christina Lego

### Botetourt County

Barry Kinzie

### Frederick County/Winchester

Lisa LaCivita  
Tim Youmans

### Highland County

Shamrock & Stephenson Realty, Inc.

### Page County

Barton Pakull

### Rockingham County/

### Harrisonburg

Bonnie L. Paul, P.C.  
Kai Degner  
H. Rees James  
James Lofton  
Barbara McKee  
Sally Newkirk  
Dick Neese

a large quantity of carbon. Video clips and presentations from the Assembly and tour are available at [www.vcnva.org](http://www.vcnva.org).



*Joe Davis of Luray—VCC Conservationist of the Year*

# From the Director: Looking Toward 2020

Winter is the best time for our staff to meet with farmers and other busy landowners. This year we are also working hard on updates to two of our publications, reviewing and improving our easement procedures, and working quickly to respond to a flurry of activity on new ordinances in several counties. There's never a down time at the VCC office.

VCC's strategic planning retreat this fall helped us set the stage to think about where we want to be in the next 5, 10, and even 20 years. When you deal with issues of conserving land in perpetuity every day, it's not a huge leap to consider the future decades away.

Where we see the organization heading is a reflection of our hopes for the Valley region. These are your hopes as well—your special places, your ideas about quality of life, your vision of vibrant commu-

nities and conserved countryside. We need to defend what we hold dear and create what we envision.

We know there will be continued growth, that the wave of building and development we have experienced in the past will return. We know that the challenges agriculture faces may change, but that development pressure will continue to play a major role. We know that new regulations to protect the Chesapeake Bay are going to foster changes in how stormwater is managed in new development and how nutrients and livestock are managed on farms. We know that large-scale developments will continue to come to the Valley and that scattered rural development will slowly erode the landscape if we are not successful in our efforts.

All of this means that the demand for VCC's services will remain high. If we want to protect

the next 100,000 acres, to make sure good planning is the norm, and to take care of our rivers, streams, and heritage, we need to grow the organization over time.

Our long-range vision includes building the VCC staff with new positions. That takes money. We plan to add over 200 new members each year for the next 5 years.

***To do this, we need your help.***

If you are enthusiastic about our mission, please tell others. If you know people who would be interested in learning more about land conservation and our work, we can send them information. If you would like to help host a small gathering or otherwise introduce VCC's staff to people you know, please give us a call. We can help you host an event.

Thank you to all who already support VCC's work and to all those who will in the coming years.

--John Eckman, Executive Director

## Horse Show in the Heart of Conserved Landscape



*A class participant*

The Middlebrook area is one of the most conserved landscapes west of the Blue Ridge. Celebrating this, VCC helped sponsor the Tot Lead Line class at the 52nd Annual Middlebrook Ruritan Club Horse Show held on August 1, 2009 at the Ruritan Club grounds. The class was open to young equestrians aged six and under.

### ***Did you know?***

- The value of Virginia equines is \$1.65 billion
- Horse owners in VA spent \$783 million caring for their animals in 2006
- Augusta County ties for fifth among the top equine counties
- Equines ranked 9th among Virginia's Top 20 Farm Commodities

***per a 2006 survey (source: VDACs)***

*Please  
Support  
Conservation  
with a  
Year-End  
Donation*

# Interns Take on Big Projects

VCC's two recent interns have done excellent work, keeping us moving on important projects. Both came out of the University of Virginia planning program.

Sandy Bottoms is in her second year of UVa's Master of Urban and Environmental Planning program, concentrating in Environmental Management and Conservation. Sandy grew up near Louisville, KY, and has been interested in land conservation and urban growth issues for years. She spent the summer working on several projects with VCC, such as preparing for the assignment of several co-held easements to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, developing an electronic conservation easement database, and restructuring VCC's easement files. As the result of a federal work study agreement with UVa, Sandy has continued to work at VCC on a part-time basis during the fall semester. She is continuing her work on the easement files and database, as well as assisting with easement monitoring duties.



*VCC Intern Sandy Bottoms*

Jared Knicley, an Augusta County native, received his undergraduate planning degree from UVa in May and joined VCC for a summer internship before heading to Harvard Law School in the fall. He spearheaded VCC's Agricultural and Forestal District survey and research. Jared's energy and technical ability helped make this a comprehensive state-wide survey. He researched the regulatory backing for these tools and pulled together the first draft of the report summarizing survey findings. He also helped update references and resources for the upcoming revision of VCC's Better Models for Development book. We appreciate Jared's efforts for his home region and wish him the best.



*Jared Knicley works with Sara Hollberg on the ag district survey*

## Update on Local Issues

### Goshen Pass Dropped as Site

The proposal by the Boy Scouts of America to host their national Jamboree with upwards of 200,000 participants at the scout camp near Goshen Pass was withdrawn. The remote location had many technical hurdles and raised local concerns about water quality, traffic, and impact on the rural and scenic values of the area. Others in the community saw this as a favorable development opportunity. The Scouts have moved their focus to the New River Gorge area of West Virginia.

### Power Lines Power On

In November, the Virginia Supreme Court upheld the approval of the large-scale electric transmission corridor line across the northern Valley and Piedmont

area. Piedmont Environmental Council has led a coalition opposed to the lines and advocated for alternative approaches to meeting energy needs.

### Augusta Approves Nearly 1 Million Sq Ft of Retail

In May, the Augusta Board of Supervisors unanimously approved rezoning for a development project billed as the "largest commercial center" in Augusta County. Augusta Marketplace would add more than 900,000 square feet of retail at the northeast corner of Exit 225 on I-81 on the northern outskirts of Staunton. Citizens from both localities raised concerns over historic, scenic, and environmental values that would be impacted. The site contains a house eligible for the National

### Stormwater Regs Passed

In October, the Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board adopted enhanced stormwater regulations after four years of extensive research and input. A key change requires incorporating better stormwater management into development design. The regulations await implementation and a battle looms in the General Assembly if development interests continue to fight the new standards.

Register and straddles Lewis Creek, a major tributary that has been the focus of restoration efforts in the city. However, the location is designated for growth in the County's comprehensive plan.



# VALLEY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

17 Barristers Row  
Staunton, VA 24401

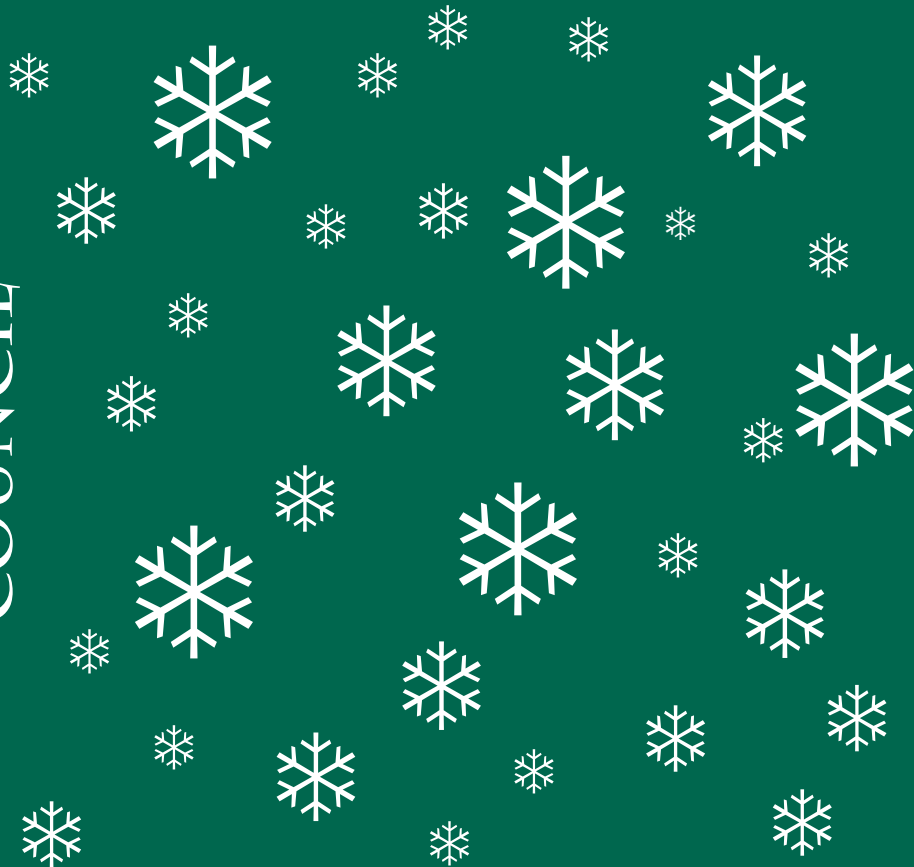
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## INSIDE:

- VCC Annual Meeting
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HAPPY HOLIDAYS  
FROM  
VALLEY CONSERVATION  
COUNCIL



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF  
CONSERVATION