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## New Special Project Area

*Buffalo Creek-Purgatory Mountain SPA straddles Rockbridge, Botetourt counties.*



At its June 26 Board of Trustees meeting, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation approved the designation of a new Special Project Area in Rockbridge and Botetourt counties.

The Buffalo Creek-Purgatory Mountain Special Project Area encompasses 178,800 acres bordered on the west by the George Washington National Forest and on the east by the Blue Ridge Parkway. Providing headwaters of the James River, this relatively pristine agrarian and forested area has seen extensive easement activity in recent years. It includes one of the few remaining intact rural east-west connections between the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains. This undeveloped corridor provides critical habitat connectivity and safe passage under Interstate 81 for wildlife between the ridge systems.

The area was nominated for Special Project Area designation by the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC) and Valley Conservation Council (VCC) —two groups that have been key partners of VOF in protecting open space in the region. Of the 51,000 acres that VOF protects in Rockbridge and Botetourt, about 19,000 acres lie within the new Special Project Area.

**SPECIAL PROJECT AREA** *continued on page 3*



Open space along Buffalo Creek provides one of the few intact wildlife corridors connecting the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains to the east and west of I-81. VOF has already protected about 19,000 acres in this area, and local landowners and land trusts hope the new designation will build upon that success.

## VOF Announces New Executive Director

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation has selected Brett C. Glymph, of Springfield, Va., to be the organization's new Executive Director effective September 1, 2013.

Since 2006, Brett has worked as an assistant attorney general in the Real Estate and Land Use Section of the Virginia Attorney General's office. Her duties have included serving as agency counsel for VOF, drafting and defending many of the policies and legal decisions related to VOF's portfolio of more than

3,500 open-space easements. She earned her Juris Doctorate from the William and Mary Marshall-Wythe School of Law in Williamsburg, and she also holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia.

"VOF has more than doubled its portfolio of protected land in the last seven years, and Brett has been there every step of the way," says VOF Board of Trustees Chairman Charles H. Seilheimer, Jr. "Under her leadership, we are confident that

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# Assuming the Mantle

## *Letter from the Executive Director*

It is with great excitement that I write my first Executive Director's column for the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. On June 27, I was selected as Executive Director by the VOF Board of Trustees to replace the inimitable Bob Lee, who will continue to serve VOF as Executive Director Emeritus in his retirement. I thank the search committee and the Board of Trustees for selecting me. I am honored to join VOF and follow in the steps of a leader whose commitment to land conservation and VOF's integrity is inspiring.

During Bob's tenure VOF recorded more than 2,000 easements to protect 418,224 acres—a rate of five acres every hour. Our portfolio of easements is now one of the largest in the nation. Bob strengthened VOF with stabilized funding, steady growth, and responsible stewardship. I find myself in good stead with a talented, veteran staff and dedicated Board of Trustees to make this transition and build upon Bob's good work. For his lifetime's work in public service, we owe him so much; and for my part, I thank him personally for placing his trust in me.

I come to VOF from the Virginia Attorney General's office, where I served as an assistant attorney general in the real estate and land use section, representing VOF in all aspects of agency operations. During that time, I had the good fortune to work with a remarkable group of dedicated attorneys and, most importantly, to study under my mentor and friend, Frederick Fisher, a paragon and first among many in Virginia's land conservation movement. In 2006, Fred was passing the baton to me as VOF's legal representative at the Attorney General's office as he began his retirement from a decades-long career in conservation. I learned from the best, and I intend to carry forward the lessons of my colleagues and mentors in furtherance of protecting and promoting Virginia's natural heritage and deep conservation ethic.

My job will be to continue VOF's success in the face of increasing stewardship demands and challenges to public investment in voluntary land conservation. I am confident that we can overcome these challenges with the commitment of VOF's esteemed Trustees and staff, and with the continued support of dedicated Virginia landowners and our partners in land conservation.

Although we all will miss Bob Lee, he has promised to visit often and not allow his traveling and hiking to take him too far away from VOF. I will do my best to lead this great organization and persevere in our joint endeavor to preserve Virginia's natural and cultural resources for future generations.



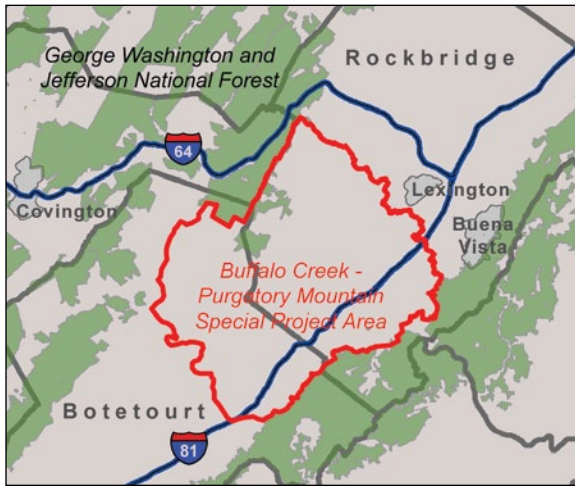
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**SPECIAL PROJECT AREA** *continued from page 1*

"The Special Project Area designation is a tremendous benefit to local residents who are interested in establishing conservation easements or accessing other resources to manage their land in ways that maintain healthy wildlife populations," says RACC Executive Director Barbara Walsh. "The area is now recognized as having characteristics like forested and rural landscapes, food, water, and cover that are providing an important connection between populations and habitat areas, as well as a way to cross Interstate 81 that protects both the public and wildlife."



VCC Executive Director Faye Cooper agrees. "This special designation supports a focused conservation effort in an area of great ecological value and complements the land-saving accomplishments of private landowners in the area who already have taken steps to conserve their lands," she says.

The Special Project Area has been identified in a recent study by The Nature

Conservancy and the Open Space Institute as one of the more intact and resilient forested landscapes within the Appalachian Mountain region. The Buffalo Creek watershed supports extensive recreational opportunities and hosts an impressive diversity of flora and fauna. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation has rated several plant and animal species in this area as "extremely rare and critically imperiled" or "very rare and imperiled within Virginia."

The area also contains many cultural resources, such as Native American historical sites; the Aubrey Paul fort, active during the French and Indian War; remnants of the Natural Bridge-Dagger Springs Turnpike constructed in the 1830s; and the historic Greyledge Plantation, which played a role in Virginia's early iron mining industry.

Efforts to designate the Buffalo Creek Rural Historic District are currently underway. The Special Project Area nomination was supported by officials from Botetourt and Rockbridge counties, the Historic Lexington Foundation, the Rockbridge Historical Society, the Upper James River Resource Conservation and Development Council, and several local landowners.

With the Special Project Area designation now in place, RACC plans to finish the ongoing wildlife survey led by RACC board member and bear specialist Mike Pelton, which documents wildlife movement under I-81. Following that, events are planned for landowners in the area who want to learn more about the opportunities for conservation easements and meet with neighbors who have already established easements on their property.

For more information or to get involved in any of these activities, in Rockbridge County contact Barbara Walsh at (540) 463-2330 or [racc@rockbridge.net](mailto:racc@rockbridge.net), and in Botetourt County contact Genevieve Goss at (540) 966-4606 or [genevieve@valleyconservation.org](mailto:genevieve@valleyconservation.org).



## BY THE NUMBERS

**VOF currently owns 3,323 acres of public land, most of which is managed for wildlife, recreation, and education. Our largest holding is 2,343 acres in the Bull Run Mountains in Fauquier and Prince William counties.**





## Preserving the Jordan

*A conservation ethic runs deep among landowners in this small watershed in northeastern Rappahannock.*

Story and photos by Pam Owen

Rappahannock is a small county with a big penchant for preservation. Of its 170,825 acres, roughly 35 percent, or 60,000 acres, are protected—half in Shenandoah National Park and half in conservation easements on private land, mostly held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

About 6,700 of VOF's easement acres lie within the Jordan River watershed. From its headwaters in the park, the Jordan winds east through beautiful rolling hills for 12 miles through northern Rappahannock. Shortly after it flows under Route 522, it parallels a twisting country road, North Poes, for 6.5 miles before joining the Rappahannock River. Anyone traveling on North Poes will drive past a VOF easement on one or both sides of the road the entire way. The easements form an almost continuous corridor of protected forestland and open space along the river, helping ensure its status as a state-designated Scenic River.

Easement donors along the Jordan represent a mix of incomes, livelihoods, and history with their land, but there's one thing they have in common, says Kristin Ford, VOF's assistant director of easements: "They realize how special the area is. The whole conservation community works together to let people know about easements—to help protect their land and keep it in the family."

Land parcels throughout the county have been put together, split apart, and rejoined at various times—a pattern that fits the 2012 easement donations along the Jordan. Two are from siblings in the Vierling family. Larry, Karen, and Bruce Vierling, all now past 60, inherited three parcels that their father had purchased from local farming families in 1958 and combined into a single farm. He needed to have a place to store the airplane parts he sold, Karen says, and also enjoyed being a "gentleman farmer" when he had the time, raising a line of prize Hereford cattle. The three kids grew up spending their summers and weekends there in an old brick farmhouse.

"It was my dad's church," Karen says. "He loved to walk the land, and I'd walk with him. This is what feels like home to me."

Now married to Jay Allen, Karen says she and her brothers divided the farm among themselves when they inherited it and sold 25 acres with the old farm house on it to Laura Morris, Larry's daughter. Laura was the first in the Vierling family to donate an easement to VOF, in 2008, and encouraged her parents and aunt to do the same. Laura's efforts, Karen says, along with those of the Piedmont Environmental Council's conservation land officer for Rappahannock, Don Looock, led her and her brother Larry to jointly donate easements on their properties last year.



**Left:** Karen and Jay Allen along the Jordan River on their 100-acre easement, which was recorded in 2012 on land that she inherited from her father. The tax credits they received from the easement donation enabled them to build a house on the property. Karen's brother Larry also donated an easement on family land along the Jordan in 2012. Larry's daughter, Laura, was the first in the family to donate a VOF easement, in 2008.

**Opposite page:** Helen DuBois recorded her 93-acre easement in 2012. The property has more than half a mile of frontage along the Jordan and is enrolled in the Virginia Working Landscapes program, a joint effort of the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, Piedmont Environmental Council, VOF, and others. She plans to plant more wildflowers and native grasses on the property to make it more wildlife friendly.



“We’ve been really lucky that my father had the foresight to buy the property back when it was affordable,” Karen says. She notes that she and Jay would likely have donated an easement without the associated tax incentives, but the ability to sell the tax credits that came with the easement enabled them to build a house on the property, where they plan to live out their lives.



The concentration of easements along North Poes Road all began with a single easement donated by Bob and Barbara Dennis in 1977. At the time, Bob was the executive director of the Piedmont Environmental Council, and he promoted easements among his neighbors and other Rappahannock landowners, often through neighborhood brunches.

One of the things that makes Rappahannock special, says VOF’s Kristin Ford, is that landowners “have such a deep love for the county” and “have been instrumental in getting the word out to other landowners.” Neighborhood gatherings, such as the brunches, are a great way to get landowners interested, she says. “When their own neighbors are at a neighborhood gathering, they feel they’re in a comfortable spot to just begin the discussion.”


Easements are the first line of defense against rampant development and in protecting family farms, but conservation organizations are increasingly looking to the bigger picture—how to protect entire ecosystems. Given Rappahannock’s proximity to the national park, it has important waterways and wildlife corridors, says Ford. “Everything is connected. The bigger the block of protected acreage, the better it is for wildlife, but also for keeping farming and forestry viable.” That in turn drives other aspects of the local economy, she adds.

More and more, easement donors are expressing interest in going beyond that first step toward protecting wildlife. As a result, conservation organizations that were focused on easements are now also providing more programs on wildlife habitat for landowners. In one of these programs, the Virginia Working Landscapes—coordinated by the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and supported by VOF, PEC, and others—a group of landowners engage in various habitat-restoration projects on their land.

The Allens are looking into joining the program and recently attended two of its workshops—on managing riparian areas and on pollinators. Another 2012 easement donor along the Jordan River, Helen DuBois, is already a member of the group. She feels strongly about conservation, saying that, while the opportunity to lower her taxes “was a nice benefit,” she was really driven by the desire to reassemble a larger parcel of land that then could not be further developed.

“Our easement collapses three parcels that might otherwise contribute to increased forest fragmentation and greater invasives along the woods’ edge,” she explains. “In that sense, the granting of the easement helps ensure that the Jordan River frontage will remain largely wild and intact.”

With her kids now graduating from college, Helen says she is taking more time for volunteer conservation work. She’d like to make her property, which is classified as a “high priority conservation area” by the Virginia Department of Forestry, more wildlife friendly by planting select areas in wildflowers and native grasses.

Both Helen and the Allens continue looking for ways to be good stewards of their land. In this small corner of Virginia, determination like theirs is achieving big results. 



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR *continued from page 1*

VOF will maintain the high level of credibility and integrity it is known for both regionally and nationally.”

Brett takes the helm from Bob Lee, who became VOF’s Executive Director in 2004 following a 30-year career as a county administrator for Fauquier and Clarke counties. Under his leadership, VOF protected more than 400,000 acres of open space across 98 localities, thereby strengthening Virginia’s position as a national leader in voluntary land conservation. Lee modernized and expanded VOF’s stewardship division, secured new funding sources for the organization, and strengthened

VOF’s relationship with state agencies, private land trusts, and other key partners. The Board of Trustees has granted him the title of Honorary Executive Director Emeritus.

VOF was created by the Virginia General Assembly in 1966 as an independent agency whose mission is “to promote the preservation of open-space lands and to encourage private gifts of money, securities, land or other property to preserve the natural, scenic, historic, scientific, open-space and recreational areas of the Commonwealth.” VOF is governed by a Board of Trustees composed of seven trustees appointed by the Governor for four-year terms.

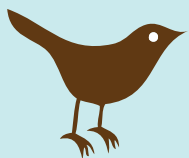
## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Jay and Karen Young may be retired, but that’s doesn’t mean they are not busy. In their first year of volunteering at VOF’s Staunton office, they have already logged more than 70 hours organizing easement property files and updating digital records.

And that’s just one of their pastimes.

Jay, a U.S. Air Force veteran and medical laboratory technician who retired from the American Red Cross in Norfolk, has spent much of his spare time backpacking in Shenandoah National Park, on treks that sometimes last four or five days. His next planned hike will combine his love for hiking with his passion for the Civil War—hiking to McDowell Battlefield in Highland County. Jay has also volunteered at the Marine Museum in Virginia Beach, as well as for special projects with the Virginia Department of Health and the Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation.

Karen began her career as a clerk for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but later transferred to the Library of Congress. For 23 years while she lived in Canada, she focused on raising her three children but also assisted in running the family business where she did accounting, filed business taxes, maintained office supplies, and acted as a receptionist when needed. When she returned to the U.S., she relocated to Virginia Beach, where she worked as a furniture salesperson and an apartment leasing agent until landing an accounting position at a large business, from which she retired. Karen also has participated on a special project with the Virginia Department of Health in Staunton.



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# EASEMENT SPOTLIGHT

## *Craun Farm, Augusta County*

Jim Craun celebrated a 100th birthday in June.

Not his—his barn's.

The barn is one of several buildings that Mr. Craun has restored on his family's 165-acre farm in Augusta County. The cavernous interior is barely enough to contain his memories of summers spent working there as a boy, when his grandparents owned the place. From unloading the hay wagon to milking and feeding cows in the weathered troughs downstairs, his memories are as vivid as the fresh red stain covering the exterior.

The farm has been in Craun's family since the 1800s. Although he has spent most of his life as a dairyman in Fauquier County, his love for the Augusta farm is evident in his attention to detail in restoring its buildings. All but one piece of the farmhouse's siding is original. The interior is meticulously cared for, and the original wood—from the floors to the paneling to the solid cherry staircase and front door—has been refinished to perfection.

One of the more remarkable restorations is a small corn crib next to the barn. Not long ago, the structure was in shambles. "Everyone said, 'Let it fall,'" Craun says. "But I said no." He salvaged and restored nearly all of the original wood, including the slotted siding that allows air to come in while keeping the rain out. The building exudes the kind of simple elegance that defines

Shenandoah Valley farming. "It's my pride and joy," Craun adds.

Craun has restored more than buildings. Between the house and pastures stands a dense patch of vegetation. Hidden there is a spring that was once the source of water for the farm but was stomped shut by cattle over the years. Working with Bobby Whitescarver and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Craun enrolled in conservation programs that enabled him to dig out the spring, revive its flow, and protect the area with a fence. The spring drains into Naked Creek, a state-listed impaired stream that passes through the farm and has also been fenced off and protected with vegetative buffers.

Craun points out that it was the careful stewardship of his ancestors that enabled the farm to be here today. "My grandparents deserve all the credit because of the way they took care of the place. That was a characteristic of the Crauns. If the Crauns had anything, it was for life."

It's that same sense of stewardship that spurred him to place a Virginia Outdoors Foundation easement on the property in 2011. He hopes that future generations will care for the property just as he has.

Admiring the massive oak timbers in the barn, Craun says with a smile, "It'll outlive me."

Nothing could please him more.



Pictures of the barn and corn crib before and after restoration. Jim Craun was able to salvage most of the original wood. He is proudest of the corn crib restoration, which many thought couldn't be done. "I looked at the ridgeline on the roof, saw it was straight, and thought we might be able to save it," he says.



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**VOF easements protect more than 62,000 acres  
next to National Parks and National Forests in Virginia.**

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