



virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org

The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation

From agriculture to tourism to local planning, open-space preservation is paying off in many ways.



Since Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit program was rolled out in 2000, more than \$1 billion in credits have been issued to easement donors, resulting in the protection of more than 600,000 acres. The natural and cultural resources protected by these easements are vast: thousands of miles of streams, thousands of historic landmarks, hundreds of thousands of acres of prime soils and forests, and more than half a million acres of undeveloped open space in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Water quality, wildlife habitat, scenic landscapes, rich soils, areas for recreation—all have benefited from what many consider to be the best voluntary land conservation incentive program in the nation.

The environmental benefits, however, are only part of the story.

Recently, the Department of Conservation and Recreation wrote a paper summarizing the benefits of land conservation in Virginia. It turns out that some of the most tangible benefits are to Virginia's economy.

PROTECTING VIRGINIA'S WORKING LANDS

Today, the majority of land conserved within Virginia contains



Working with the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Agribusiness Council, and others, VOF has developed easements that better protect working farms from development.

BENEFITS *continued on page 4*



Call for Calendar Photos

Do you have a photo of your VOF-protected property that would be perfect for our 2014 calendar? If so, send a high-resolution copy (300 dpi or greater) by email to jmcgarvey@vofonline.org or mail a print to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, Attn: Jason McGarvey, 1108 East Main St., Suite 700, Richmond VA 23219. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you would like the print to be returned.

Landscapes are preferred, but images of wildlife, livestock, flora, farm buildings and equipment, historic structures, and other subjects depicting the character of your property will also be considered.

Preserving Virginia's scenic, natural, historic, recreational, and open-space lands for future generations.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Charles H. Seilheimer, Jr. (Chair)
Mark S. Allen
Peter C. Bance
Childs F. Burden
A. Benton Chafin, Jr.
Suzanne M. Lacy
Jeffrey K. Walker

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Executive Office / Northern Region

39 Garrett St., Suite 200
Warrenton, VA 20186
(540) 347-7727

Appalachian Highlands Region

468 Main St., Suite 400-B
Abingdon, VA 24210
(276) 623-8256

Central Region

1010 Harris St., Suite 4
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(434) 293-3423

Shenandoah Valley Region

103 East Beverley St., Suite B
Staunton, VA 24401
(540) 886-2460

Southeast Region

1108 East Main St., Suite 700
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 786-9603

Southwest Region

900 South Main St.
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 951-2822

Tidewater Region

P.O. Box 909
Tappahannock, VA 22560
(804) 443-3029

Passing the Baton

Letter from the Executive Director

I anticipate this may be my last Executive Director's newsletter column for the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. I was selected as the VOF Executive Director in 2004. In 2012, I informed the VOF Board of Trustees that I felt it was time to think about new executive leadership for VOF. It has been an honor and a privilege to work constructively with so many outstanding public servants. During my tenure, VOF has benefited greatly from three Governors who have been great champions of the voluntary land conservation programs that make Virginia the national leader for natural and cultural heritage preservation. Like the Governors, the three Secretaries of Natural Resources and the many state agency colleagues with whom I have collaborated evinced profound positive synergy to protect the estimable land resources for which our Commonwealth is revered.

VOF was created by Act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1966, and when I came to VOF, almost 40 years later, substantial land conservation achievements were already in place – approximately 1,500 VOF recorded open-space easements on almost 250,000 acres. Now, less than a decade later, VOF is fast approaching a total of 4,000 recorded easements on almost 700,000 acres. I sincerely salute the incredibly competent and completely dedicated VOF staff and gubernatorial appointed Trustees who have achieved this best in nation status. The men and women appointed as VOF Trustees during my years of service have been absolutely inspirational. Serving without monetary consideration and at considerable personal sacrifice, every VOF Trustee I have known has exemplified Thomas Jefferson's reflection on the personal consequence of ethical public service: "Public employment contributes neither to advantage nor happiness. It is but honorable exile from one's family and affairs."

The Trustees provided the inspiration for conservation excellence, but it was the incomparable VOF staff that provided the extraordinary efforts to achieve the ambitious goals and exemplary standards that were established for us by the Trustees. The esprit de corps I observed in both the VOF staff and Trustees has been exhilarating and infectious.

Now, however, the time has come for me to let a new person benefit from the fabulous personal and professional relationships that I have been blessed with in recent years. When I leave VOF later this year, hoping to make a positive difference in other realms of human endeavor, I am gratified that VOF's esteemed Trustees and talented and devoted staff are in place for my successor. This is also my opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the many conservation leaders in the state, especially among the private land trusts, who have worked tirelessly to promote easements through landowner education and by support of the Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credit program.

Finally, and most important, the success that VOF has had from the very inception was primarily due to Virginia landowners whose love of the land has been manifested in their open-space easements that will benefit Virginians for generations to come. This love of our heritage land resources represents the essential foundation for a bright and sustainable future for our Commonwealth.



Bob Lee, Executive Director
(540) 347-7727
blee@vofonline.org





Historic B&B uses tax credits to go solar

Oak Grove Plantation, a bed & breakfast just outside South Boston in Halifax County, works hard to minimize its environmental footprint. Some of the steps it has taken include recycling, composting, installing energy-efficient storm windows, offering optional linen service, drying laundry on clotheslines, collecting rainwater with rain barrels, and using compact fluorescent lighting.

The inn even offers motorists who arrive in hybrid vehicles a third night free.

In 2010 the owner, Mary Pickett Craddock, whose family has owned Oak Grove since 1820, decided to permanently protect the 390-acre property by donating a conservation easement to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

Now, using proceeds from the sale of tax credits she received from the donation, she has installed a 3.9-kilowatt solar array that will power the inn with sunlight.

Craddock hopes the decision will not only help to keep Virginia's environment clean by utilizing clean, renewable energy, but also will save her money and attract environmentally conscious guests.

"Our guests will be able to sip lemonade on the front porch as my ancestors once did, then tour the 25 by 10 foot lineup of solar panels in the back field," she says. "I want to encourage guests to install solar power, too."

"Solar is a perfect fit for Oak Grove, and this system will go a long ways towards helping them reach their sustainability goals," adds Evan Bickerstaff of Southern Energy Management, which installed the system. "This is the first time we've had a client finance their system quite like this, but we'd love to see more businesses do something similar. The idea that land preservation can go hand in hand with a solar installation is absolutely in line with our mission, and that made this project even more impressive."

See more about the installation at <http://oakgroveplantation.com/going-solar/>.



BY THE NUMBERS

Since its creation in 1997, VOF's Preservation Trust Fund has spent about \$10 million to help landowners protect nearly 70,000 acres of open space. Most of these acres are on working farms, which contribute to the Commonwealth's \$55 billion agriculture industry.



BENEFITS *continued from page 1*

farmland and forests. Agriculture and forestry are Virginia's largest industries, with an economic impact of \$55 billion from agriculture and \$27 billion from forestry. The industries also provide approximately 500,000 jobs in the Commonwealth. According to the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia, Virginia lost 3.3 million acres, or over 20 percent, of its farmland between 1982 and 1997. The most recent information from the National Resources Inventory indicates that between 2002 and 2007 Virginia lost 60,800 acres of agricultural land directly to developed uses. Real estate cycles affect the rate of farmland loss to development, but the overall trend clearly reflects declining agricultural acres.

With 15.9 million acres of forested land, Virginia is 62 percent forested. According to the Virginia Department of Forestry, urban growth and development resulted in an average net loss of 16,000 forested acres annually over the past 10 years. If current development trends continue, it has been projected that Virginia will lose a million acres of forest in the next 25 years. Protecting the Commonwealth's working lands ensures that the necessary land-base for these important industries will be preserved for future use.

SUPPORTING TOURISM AND RECREATION

Tourism has an annual economic impact of \$19 billion and

creates 205,000 jobs in Virginia. In 2010, tourism provided \$1.2 billion in state and local taxes. Conserving the lands that represent Virginia's character preserves the landmarks, battlefield sites, and public parks and beaches that tourists travel from all over the country to visit.

Outdoor recreationists spend over \$8 billion within the state annually, making recreation a significant factor in attracting travelers to the Commonwealth. Most of the popular forms of outdoor recreation for tourism are either dependent on undeveloped lands and waters or enhanced by their proximity to them. Land protection is essential for ensuring outdoor recreation opportunities for visitors and for Virginia's growing population, and to afford opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and experience Virginia's diverse landscapes and landmarks. Long-term support for land conservation and open space protection are strongly tied to outdoor recreation experiences for all ages.

Both public and private lands are important for meeting the needs of outdoor recreation. Public recreation areas are increasingly in demand as urban and suburban residents seek respite through enjoyment of open spaces. Conserved private land is important, not only in providing much of the hunting opportunities east of the Blue Ridge, but also in maintaining scenic vistas and serving as buffer lands around major parks and recreation areas.

STABILIZING LAND VALUES

Studies demonstrate that open spaces can boost the value of neighboring commercial properties. Businesses seeking an area in which to locate report that quality of life is a major factor in their decision-making, and cultural and recreational open spaces are important components in creating that quality of life.

Protected land generally enhances the value of nearby residential property. In most cases, home buyers prefer a view of a forest or meadow to a similar home with a view of developed property, and they will be more likely to purchase if that view is guaranteed to remain in place. Recognizing this concept, many local governments strongly support land conservation, understanding that protected, undeveloped land generates more direct tax revenue than the services it requires, and that residential development typically brings in less revenue than it costs to provide support services. In addition, the increased value of properties near preserved lands means increased revenue to localities from permanent protection of green space.

A locality's property tax revenues are reduced very little by conservation easements. A report by the Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission indicates tax revenue losses due to conservation easements averaged only 0.26 percent of the annual budget for localities within that region. For localities that have adopted use-value assessment programs where revenues from eligible land are already lower, the effect of easements is no loss in revenue.

BENEFITING LOCAL ECONOMIES

A number of localities have calculated the fiscal impacts associated with different types of land use and found that increased growth brings new area residents who require services such as roads, sewage and water-supply infrastructure, fire and police services, schools, and libraries. Increased population density in a locality eventually requires increasingly complex public services that increase per capita costs. The costs to provide these services may be much greater than the tax and non-tax revenue that residential lands provide.

A 2012 study in Albemarle County found that, for every dollar of local revenue generated, the public costs for residential and institutional (hospitals, libraries, churches) development range from \$1.29 to \$1.59—a negative ratio. Commercial and industrial uses have a positive ratio, around \$0.50 in costs for every dollar of revenue generated, and farmland generates even greater surplus revenue at \$0.20 in costs for every dollar of revenue generated. However, the revenue-cost ratios associated with residential properties create a net deficit for Albemarle County, and for most other localities.

Since the cost to a locality to provide services to undeveloped land is relatively low, a net positive tax cash flow is achieved when localities are able to concentrate growth and leave rural areas intact.

ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS

Developed lands are predominantly impervious surfaces like sidewalks, buildings, and parking that do not allow water to filter directly into the ground. Water flows over these surfaces, picks up pollutants such as oil from roads and fertilizer from lawns, and deposits them in rivers, lakes, and the Chesapeake Bay. The more polluted our waterways become, the more money we must spend on cleanup and restoration to make them fishable, swimmable, and drinkable—the three goals of the federal Clean Water Act.

Undeveloped lands are different. They filter both surface water and groundwater. These ecological functions have an economic value.

The Cost of a Clean Bay: Assessing Funding Needs Throughout the Watershed, a 2003 report from the Chesapeake Bay Commission, noted that the services provided by natural systems in retaining and filtering pollutants cannot be ignored, from either an environmental or economic perspective. A study by American Forests of urban tree loss in the D.C. metropolitan region calculated the pollution control benefits provided by its existing urban forest. The metropolitan D.C. area's trees remove 20 million pounds of pollutants from the air each year, a benefit worth \$50 million annually. The ability of trees to absorb stormwater, lessen erosion, and reduce flooding was also analyzed. Urban trees were estimated to retain 949 million cubic feet of water. If these trees were lost and replaced by impervious surfaces, building equivalent retention facilities would cost the region \$4.7 billion.

Clearly, open-space preservation exemplifies the notion that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

CONCLUSION

At all levels of government, there is a general desire to boost the economy, sustain industries, and create jobs. Land conservation is not often promoted as an economic engine, but Virginia's success over the last decade demonstrates there is a clear correlation between protecting our natural and cultural resources and protecting our economy.

As the steward of most conservation easements in Virginia, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation is committed to protecting this public investment. You, as vested landowners, can help us by sharing your stories with your legislators, local officials, and other leaders in your communities. 

Who Built the Stone House on Bull Run Mountains?

The 2,350-acre Bull Run Mountain Natural Area Preserve in Fauquier and Prince William counties is well known as a treasure trove of recreational and natural resources located just 35 miles west of Washington, D.C. Less known to the public, but just as valuable, are the historic structures on the property. One of these structures is an old stone house of unknown origin. Recently, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation has been working with historians and archeologists to uncover its past. What we are learning is that the house might be older and more significant than anyone thought.

In October 2012, Wendy Wheatcraft, a preservation planner for Fauquier County, visited the house to look for clues to its construction date. People familiar with the structure always assumed it was old, but nobody knew whether it dated back 100 years, 200 years, or more. Unfortunately, a heavy-handed renovation was performed in the 1960s. The structure was so altered that it now lacks interior features that might provide those clues.

Wheatcraft has since conducted extensive deed research and uncovered missing pieces of the property's past.

In the 18th century, the property was part of the 16,000-acre Bull Run and Battle River tract owned by George and James Mercer. Colonel George Mercer was a Virginia aristocrat who fell into severe financial straits primarily due to land speculation losses. In 1773, he mortgaged some 4,000 acres of his Bull Run Mountains land to an Englishwoman named Mary Wroughton. Just a year later, Mercer was unable to meet the terms of the mortgage and he was ordered to sell the 4,000 acres along with additional land in Frederick County.

Because Mercer was living in England at the time, the sale was managed by his lifelong friend, George Washington. Washington arranged to have the properties subdivided and personally

handled the auction on November 21, 1774. Records reveal that the auction was a frustrating experience for Washington, who complained the land had "a good deal of exceeding poor and broken ground on it." Bids were nowhere near the original estate valuation, and Washington stated, "There was no help for it; everything that could be done, was done, to dispose of it to the best advantage; in attempting which, I had three Lots of the Land ... left upon my hands."

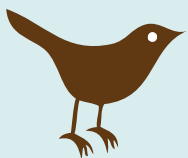
The 470 acres that includes the area of the stone house was purchased by a man named John Monday. Could the house have been built by him and his household? If so, that would date the house to before the Revolutionary War.



Much research still needs to be done. One of the avenues yet to be explored is archaeology. On October 11–12, 2013, Fauquier County and VOF will jointly sponsor public archaeology days on the site. Before the event, professional archaeologists will identify the most promising features on the site for revealing the most information. Then, they will lead teams of volunteers to perform additional archaeological study.

VOF's Bull Run Mountains stewardship committee devoted one of their recent workdays to the stone house. The house narrowly avoided damage last summer when a large portion of a tree blew down close to the structure. Committee members removed the tree and other aged trees that posed a danger to the house.

VOF will continue working to uncover the origin of the stone house. We invite anyone with knowledge of the structure's past to contact us. Citizens who are interested in volunteering at the Bull Run Mountains, either during the upcoming archaeology days in October or for any project (such as maintaining trails, picking up litter, etc.) should contact VOF Owned Lands Manager Amanda Scheps, ascheps@vofonline.org, (540) 347-7727 ext. 227.



FOLLOW US ONLINE

- ▶ facebook.com/virginiaoutdoorsfoundation
- ▶ twitter.com/vofonline

HELP KEEP OUR RECORDS UP TO DATE

Please notify us if you have a new mailing address, email, or phone number. Send your new info to bcabibbo@vofonline.org or call (540) 347-7727.

EASEMENT SPOTLIGHT

White House Farm, Page County

In 1760, about 30 years before construction began on the White House in the District of Columbia, a Mennonite settler named Martin Kauffman II built his own little White House in Page County.

Kauffman constructed the building as a residence and Mennonite meeting house, locating it at the foot of the Massanutten Mountains, along the South Fork of the Shenandoah River, within the original 5,000-acre land grant that became the first European settlement west of the Blue Ridge in Virginia. The settlement was called Massanutten, which locals say is an American Indian word for “Great Mountain Yonder.”

Other buildings were added to the farm over generations, but the little White House—and the now remaining 270 acres of fertile farmland surrounding it—are today intact.

In 2005, Scott Plein and his family purchased the farm. Recognizing the rich natural resources on the farm—karst ponds, limestone outcroppings, USDA-designated Prime Farmland soils, and high bluffs along almost a mile of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River—he donated a permanent conservation easement to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

Plein’s desire was to restore the White House and use it to tell the story of the early history in the Valley. He also wanted to build the farm as a model of sustainable land use. So, he formed an environmental education and research center, named it the White House Farm Foundation (whfarmfoundation.org), and hired Chris Anderson of Luray as its executive director.

Since then, the Foundation has engaged numerous partners on



The historic White House still stands along the Shenandoah River in Page County, surrounded by 270 acres of fertile farmland that is used by the White House Farm Foundation to teach local students and others about sustainable agriculture and biodiversity. Below, students work one of the gardens.

projects that blend sustainable land use with environmental protection. It has enrolled in the Smithsonian’s Working Landscapes project, which helps farmers enhance biodiversity on working lands. It has worked with the Virginia Department of Forestry to conduct controlled burns in riparian areas. It maintains a fruit orchard and garden dedicated to heirloom varieties. It has also allowed local high school students to install wildflower demonstration sites along the river, practice mapping and natural resource inventorying skills, and use one of the farm ponds as a special study area, planting a variety of shrubs to help protect water quality and stabilize the soil.

Most recently, the Foundation has formed a partnership with the Virginia Tech Conservation Management Institute (VTCMI) to study native warm season grasses. The VTCMI will utilize the Foundation’s warm season grass (WSG) habitat restoration site as a comparison to a nearby WSG biofuel planting at the Merck, Sharpe, and Dohme Stonewall Plant in Elkton, VA. Virginia Tech students and VTCMI staff will monitor both sites to compare avian abundance and diversity between the two types of WSG plantings.

According to Anderson, the foundation uses the data it collects from all of these projects to determine whether they are benefiting biodiversity. “We use the farm as an outdoor laboratory,” she says. “Each project builds on the last.”



SPRING  2013

IN THIS ISSUE

- ▶ A farewell letter from Executive Director Bob Lee
- ▶ **The economic benefits of land conservation for Virginia**
- ▶ Halifax County bed & breakfast uses easement credits to go solar
- ▶ Uncovering the mystery of a stone house on the Bull Run Mountains preserve
- ▶ Easement Spotlight: White House Farm in Page County



VOF easements help to protect more than 3,400 miles of streams and rivers in Virginia, including about 100 miles of state-designated Scenic Rivers.