

2022

Celebrating the

Collective Impact



of Virginia Land Trusts



Goodall Family Farm in Madison County, Drone Credit Hugh Kenny



Photo by Emily Bender

Who we are

Virginia's United Land Trusts (VaULT) supports Virginia's diverse conservation community to magnify and amplify land conservation efforts and achieve widespread protection of the Commonwealth's natural, cultural, and scenic resources, ensuring their long term benefits for all Virginians.

VaULT was founded in 2001 to forge partnerships between state agencies and nonprofit land trusts. In the two decades since VaULT's creation, we have brought together 24 land trusts with Virginia's Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Historic Resources, Department of Forestry, Department of Wildlife Resources, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and Virginia Outdoors Foundation as well as the U. S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service.

What is a nonprofit land trust?

A land trust exists to conserve land and water resources. Because over 80% of Virginia's land is privately owned, ecosystem stability and resilience, healthy wildlife habitat, availability of productive farmland, and the survival of cultural landscapes depend on owners having options for protecting their land from development. Virginia's land trusts explore these possibilities with owners who have conservation goals for their land. Land trusts and landowners collaborate on tailored voluntary legal agreements—conservation easements—to leave land largely undeveloped in perpetuity. Land trusts also join partnerships with public agencies and private landowners to acquire parks, trails, and other publicly accessible land.

Land trusts conserve forests, wetlands, farms, and the streams and rivers running through them as a legacy for future generations of Virginians who, like us, will embrace the Commonwealth's uncommon beauty and natural resources and will be enriched by their immeasurable benefits.



Photo courtesy of Trust for Public Land

Celebrating Our Collective Impact

This publication showcases the **Collective Impact** of VaULT's nonprofit member organizations. Their accomplishments are as distinct as the communities and organizations that made them happen.

Virginia's land trusts are fulfilling their missions with commitment and creativity. All of our members' 2022 signature achievements have something in common: They defy easy labeling and involve expansive and often complex partnerships. **Whether their primary focus is Culture & History, Resiliency & Restoration, Family Farms, Connected Communities, or Tools of the Trade, our land trusts are proving every day that conservation matters to the lives of all Virginians.**

Celebrating one million acres:

How big is a million acres? Big enough to encompass—from the Appalachian Mountains to the Eastern Shore—what makes Virginia like no other place. And big enough to span more than two decades of land conservation made possible by a uniquely Virginian approach to conservation—the Land Preservation Tax Credit (LPTC). The LPTC, created with landmark legislation in 1999 and improved in 2002, is a voluntary tool for private land conservation that maximizes Virginia's investment in our most valued and vulnerable landscapes and natural resources. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation, our agency partner and one of the largest easement holders in the country, now protects approximately three-quarters of the one million acres.

Please join us as we celebrate the accomplishments of the Virginia conservation community and to recognize that our work is just beginning!

Sincerely,

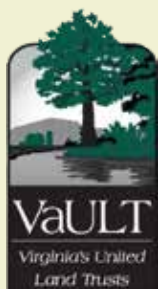
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Cover photo by Emily Bender



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Culture & History:

RETURN TO THE RIVER

CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY

The Rappahannock Tribe's Reacquisition of Pissacoack

WWW.CHESAPEAKECONSERVANCY.ORG

Fones Cliffs, rising dramatically above four miles of the Rappahannock River in Richmond County, is the ancestral home of the Rappahannock Tribe who inhabited at least three villages there until the early 17th century when English explorer John Smith described the tribe's first defense of the cliffs.



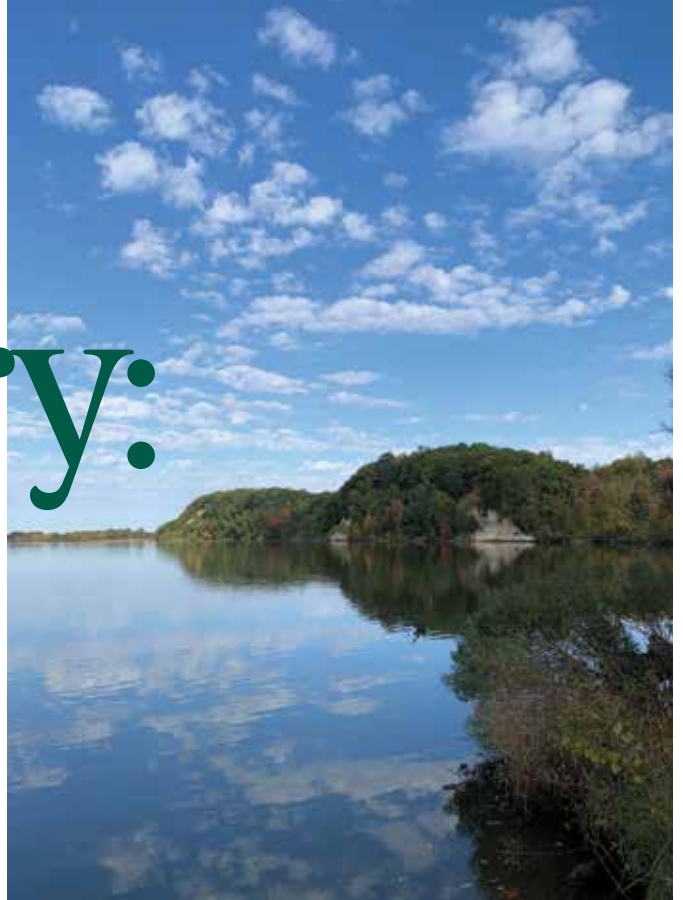
Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, Dr. Carol Angle, Rappahannock Tribe Chief Anne Richardson, Chesapeake Conservancy President & CEO Joel Dunn.

Photo courtesy of Chesapeake Conservancy

grant enabled the conservancy's purchase of the property from Northern Neck Lumber Company.

Pissacoack is part of an expansive campaign to save approximately 2,000 acres at Fones Cliffs from development and to protect its cultural heritage and wildlife habitat. Pissacoack's future includes trails, a replica 16th-century village, and expansion of the Rappahannock Tribe's *Return to the River* program for tribal youth and other communities.

Nearly four hundred years after forcible removal from their homeland, the Rappahannock Tribe and the site of Pissacoack village have been restored to each other. Chesapeake Conservancy donated a conservation easement to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) before transferring the title of the 465 acre parcel to the Rappahannock Tribe, a federally recognized sovereign nation, who will place the land in trust with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The family of William Dodge Angle, MD and a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation



Fones Cliffs upstream from public boat launch. *Photo by Heather Richards*

THE CONSERVATION FUND

Acquisition of nearly 1,000 acres at Fones Cliffs (Wecuppom)

WWW.CONSERVATIONFUND.ORG/WHERE-WE-WORK/VIRGINIA

More than any other conservation achievement, Fones Cliffs tells the story of transient ownership transformed into enduring stewardship. The Conservation Fund's December 2022 purchase of 964 acres at Fones Cliffs on the Rappahannock River is a bridge to both past and future. In 2023 the USFWS will purchase a conservation easement on the land with funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (established in 1964 and permanently financed by the 2020 Great American Outdoors Act). The Conservation Fund then will transfer the ancestral site of the village of Wecuppom to the Rappahannock Tribe.

The outcome ends years of peril for Fones Cliffs, the object of grandiose development plans, unpermitted land clearing, lawsuits, and bankruptcy. The nearly thousand acre parcel was the largest unprotected portion of the collective area known as Fones Cliffs.

The cultural and ecological merge at Fones Cliffs, a globally Important Bird Area for resident and migratory species including the mid-Atlantic's largest population of bald eagles as well as osprey, songbirds, and waterfowl dependent on neighboring wetlands and marshes that also support protected fish species. The purchase further expands the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

AMERICAN BATTLEFIELD TRUST

Culpeper Battlefields State Park

WWW.BATTLEFIELDS.ORG

The American Battlefield Trust fulfilled a seven year coalition-driven, bipartisan initiative to establish a state park between the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers where the pivotal Civil War battles of Brandy Station and Cedar Mountain were fought in the northern Piedmont's Culpeper County. The General Assembly approved a \$3 million budget appropriation to create the park and fund the trust's acquisition of up to 800 acres to add to the 1,700 acres it will donate as the heart of the new state park. The trust immediately initiated master planning to prepare for the park's opening on July 1, 2024.

The historic and agricultural landscape of Culpeper County, long under development pressure, has been a preservation focus for American Battlefield Trust for over 30 years. The future state park is also within the region of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground, and its rivers were key points of northward passage for those escaping enslavement, some of whom later returned as enlisted Union soldiers.



Photo courtesy of American Battlefield Trust



Photos courtesy of The Trust for Public Land

THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

George Washington Birthplace National Monument & Viewshed

WWW.TPL.ORG/STATE/VIRGINIA

Along the Potomac River on the Northern Neck, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) transferred a one-acre critical inholding within the George Washington Birthplace National Monument to the National Park Service (NPS) and permanently protected a 662-acre private property within the historic viewshed of the national monument in Westmoreland County. That easement—on wetlands, forests, and farmland—also buffers Westmoreland State Park. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) and the U.S. Navy, through the Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI), were key partners.

Both the easement and the parcel transfer advance TPL's landscape-scale objective to protect 3,500 acres connecting and buffering 5,000 acres of already secure public and private lands along the Potomac River from the George Washington Birthplace National Monument to Stratford Hall National Historic Landmark. By the close of 2022, TPL's initiative was further bolstered by congressional approval of the five-county Northern Neck National Heritage Area designation, itself the fulfillment of a two decade long initiative to garner recognition and resources for the region's unique cultural, historic, and natural assets.

Heir's Property bill
signing at Ralph
Sampson's farm in
Rockingham County
Photo by Marco Sanchez



Family Farms

BLACK FAMILY LAND TRUST

Heirs' Property

WWW.BFLT.ORG

"Heirs' property" is a legal label applied to land that passes informally to a descendent, often from a previous owner who died without a will or clear title. Over generations, property transfers to an expanding pool of sometimes far-flung heirs, many of whom have never resided on, paid taxes for, or perhaps even visited the land they inherit. The cascading legal and familial complications, sometimes costly and unresolvable, too often have forced property sales particularly in the rural South. Heirs' property was the leading cause of involuntary loss of land—and of wealth-building opportunity—for African Americans in the 20th century.

The Black Family Land Trust (BFLT) has worked for years to advance policies to protect families from the consequences of heirs' property and restore generational land retention. BFLT is one of the nation's only conservation land trusts dedicated to the preservation and protection of African-American and other historically underserved landowners' assets. The BFLT applies core principles of land conservation and land-based community economic development to improve quality of life by providing families with the tools necessary to make informed, proactive decisions regarding their land.

CAPITAL REGION LAND CONSERVANCY

Four Mile Creek Farm

WWW.CAPITALREGIONLAND.ORG

Howard C. Eberly, III is the fourth generation of his family to make Four Mile Creek Farm his home—and the first to give it away. In July 2022, Mr. Eberly honored 133 years of his family's stewardship by donating 28 acres of the eastern Henrico County Virginia Century Farm, including the family farmhouse and a 19th century barn, to the Capital Region Land Conservancy (CRLC) with an agreement to the future transfer of another 45-acre parcel. Four Mile Creek Farm, near historic New Market Road (a Scenic Byway) and the Capital Trail, will eventually be accessible to the public.



Mr. Howard Eberly.
*Photo courtesy of Capital
Region Land Conservancy*

The farm is within the National Park Service's boundary for inclusion in the Richmond National Battlefield Park. It had already been the site of three battles when, on September 29, 1864, U.S. Colored Troops broke through Confederate defenses in the Battle of New Market Heights. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation also prioritizes Four Mile Creek Farm for protection in five categories including water quality and habitat ecosystem diversity.

Eberly, who previously had turned down developers' offers, will continue to live in his home. As he explained to a local news outlet, "I feel very at peace . . . I think my family would believe I'm doing the right thing."

LAND TRUST OF VIRGINIA

Rowe Easement, Caroline County

WWW.LANDTRUSTVA.ORG

Land Trust of Virginia (LTV) continued extending its reach beyond its northern Piedmont roots in 2022 with its first easement in historic Caroline County. Sandwiched between Fredericksburg and the Richmond metro region east of interstate 95, the still rural county faces development pressures from both north and south. Landowner Bernice Rowe and LTV's Malcolm Forbes Baldwin Fund were a perfect match for permanently protecting Rowe's 419-acre Wayland Farm in Milford from future development.

The donor restricted fund memorializing Loudoun County conservationist and LTV board member Malcolm Baldwin specifically assists with easement costs for actively farmed properties. Wayland Farm currently produces corn, soy, wheat, and barley. Though the Rowe easement prioritizes preservation of productive agricultural land, it also protects 18 acres of wetlands, 122 acres of forest, and nearly two miles of scenic road frontage.

Said Bernice Rowe on the occasion of finalizing her easement, "Too much wonderful farmland disappears yearly from development and will never return to agriculture ... growth and development will come at some point, and I wanted Wayland Farm to avoid this fate."

The 419-acre easement in Caroline County.

Photo courtesy of Land Trust of Virginia



Photos courtesy of the Northern Neck Land Conservancy

NORTHERN NECK LAND CONSERVANCY

Mount Zion & Kennersley Easements

WWW.NNCONSERVE.ORG

Three generations of Cowarts have not just lived on the Northern Neck, they have made their livelihoods from its land and water, a give and take relationship running as deep as the Coan River itself. The Coan is a tributary of the Potomac River significant to both colonial era trading and early 20th century steamboat transport to and from Baltimore. In 1899, William Cowart began farming on part of the former 'Kennersley'. Fifty years later his son Lake Cowart, Sr. expanded to oyster harvesting, founding Cowart Seafood, and later, Lake Packing. In 2022 Lake Cowart, Jr., now an owner and operator of an oyster hatchery there, donated to the Northern Neck Land Conservancy an easement on 400 acres of the original tract he and family members have gradually reassembled from multiple parcels.

The inseparable bond of a family and a place through its history and economy is at the root of Cowart, Jr.'s determination to protect the land in perpetuity. Mr. Cowart did not devote decades to the ups and downs of the traditional oyster business—losing oysters and revenue to disease, hurricanes, and ravenous Cownose Rays—only to give in to development pressures or give up a legacy of stewardship. The Kennersley easement follows an earlier Cowart easement on the 311-acre Mount Zion property; both were supported by the U.S. Navy's REPI program.



Connecting Communities

HISTORIC VIRGINIA LAND CONSERVANCY

Conservancy Awareness Family Bike Ride

WWW.HISTORICVIRGINIALANDCONSERVANCY.ORG

In June of 2022 the Historic Virginia Land Conservancy (HVLC) hosted the second annual Conservancy Awareness Family Bike Ride—a ten mile loop beginning and ending at Billsburg Brewery on the James River—pedaled by nearly 70 participants, including many families. The conservancy's history intertwines with the development of Virginia's Capital Trail along Route 5, Virginia's second Scenic Byway; HVLC donated a parcel near mile marker zero to VDOT in 2005, the year of the trail's groundbreaking.

The 2022 bike ride, sponsored by the Williamsburg Community Foundation, featured educational respite along the route. Stops included the 214 acre Mainland Farm—the United States' oldest continuously cultivated farm, home to Native Americans thousands of years ago, and witness to colonial and revolutionary history. Mainland Farm's forests, streams, and wetlands sustain habitat for hundreds

of vertebrate and invertebrate species, surveyed since 1997. The farm is just one of HVLC's easements protecting a total of 14,000 acres in the Peninsula, Middle Peninsula, and South Side regions.

HVLC's annual Conservancy Awareness Family Bike Ride is a recreational celebration of the inseparable scenic, cultural, historical, and ecological benefits of land conservation.

Bill talking at Spoke & Art.
*Photo courtesy of Historic Virginia
Land Conservancy*



In 2022, Gary & daughter and Chris & son not only saw many deer but were presented with harvest opportunities during Youth and Apprentice Deer Hunting Weekend.
Photo courtesy of Ever Green Team

EVER GREEN TEAM

Veterans and Youth Program

WWW.EVERGREENTEAM.ORG

Ever Green Team, based in Blackstone, is a conservation specialist. Though they hold over 100 conservation easements, Ever Green's mission is to merge the goals of environmental protection and military readiness and to serve those who serve through access to undeveloped landscapes. EGT's Veterans and Youth Program inspires a connection with the great outdoors for military veterans and their families, reflecting the historical alliance of the nation's outdoor traditions with conservation. Participants camp, hike, hunt, fish, and shoot on EGT-protected lands in Brunswick, Dinwiddie, and Prince George counties. EGT preserves many properties through their partnership with the Ward Burton Wildlife Foundation and Fort Pickett with support from the Department of Defense Army Compatible Use Buffer Program (ACUB) and Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI).

Fourteen veterans and 18 youth enjoyed outings with EGT in 2022, a record year. Their testimonials prove the program's success: One vet and father spoke of the "awesome comradery" of feeling "at home and welcome" while a 16 year old resident of Virginia Beach and survivor of 13 open heart surgeries described how "Being out on these lands . . . makes me forget the normal day struggles and city life. It brings my appreciation to nature and conserving country".



The shoreline at Newtown Neck Preserve. Photo courtesy of Coastal Virginia Conservancy

NEW RIVER CONSERVANCY

New River Hill Forest

WWW.NEWRIVERCONSERVANCY.ORG

When a 174 acre parcel on the New River in Grayson County went up for sale, the New River Conservancy marshaled philanthropic resources to help protect one of America's few rivers that holds both Wild and Scenic and American Heritage status. Local advocates came through with nearly \$1 million for the conservancy to purchase the New River Hill Forest, which will be open to the public. The property—including 3400 feet of river frontage— adjoins the 140 acre educational New River Hill Farm, owned and operated by the New River Soil and Water Conservation District.

The ecologically rich land shares ancient origins with the northward-flowing "New", North America's oldest river that predates the Appalachian Mountains. Its hardwood forest is home to the rare Blue Ridge bittercress and to endangered Eastern hemlock trees, a keystone species critical to the health and habitat of rivers and streams in the Appalachians.

The conservancy is placing covenant restrictions on the New River Hill Forest before deeding it to the New River Soil and Water Conservation District and continues to fundraise for trail extension and river access, with an existing Department of Wildlife Resources boat launch just across the river.

New River Hill Forest. Photos courtesy of New River Conservancy



COASTAL VIRGINIA CONSERVANCY (formerly Living River Trust)

Newton Neck Preserve

WWW.COVACONSERVE.ORG

A satellite image is worth a thousand words. Seen from above, it is easy to understand why the EPA singled out the Elizabeth River among tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay for its pollution levels thirty years ago: 90 percent of the 11-acre watershed is developed. But zero in on the southern branch of the river and an oasis comes into view—88 acres of green permanently protected by a partnership of the Living River Trust (LRT), the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF), the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the City of Chesapeake, and the property's previous owners.

The Newton Neck Preserve now belongs to the City of Chesapeake as part of its community park system. LRT leveraged a \$100,000 award from VOF's Preservation Trust Fund for fundraising to secure a \$1 million grant from DCR for the purchase of the nearly 90-acre parcel bordered by a marina, industrial complexes, and neighborhoods whose residents embrace the land's future as a passive use park. In June LRT hosted a dedication marking the transfer of the preserve to the city. Said LRT's Liz Friel, "There's really nothing better to protect water quality than land left in its natural state." The park is now open to the public and the City of Chesapeake honored the conservancy with an Outstanding Environmental Partner Award after a nomination from a neighborhood citizen's group.



NEW RIVER LAND TRUST

Brush Mountain Park

WWW.NEWRIVERLANDTRUST.ORG

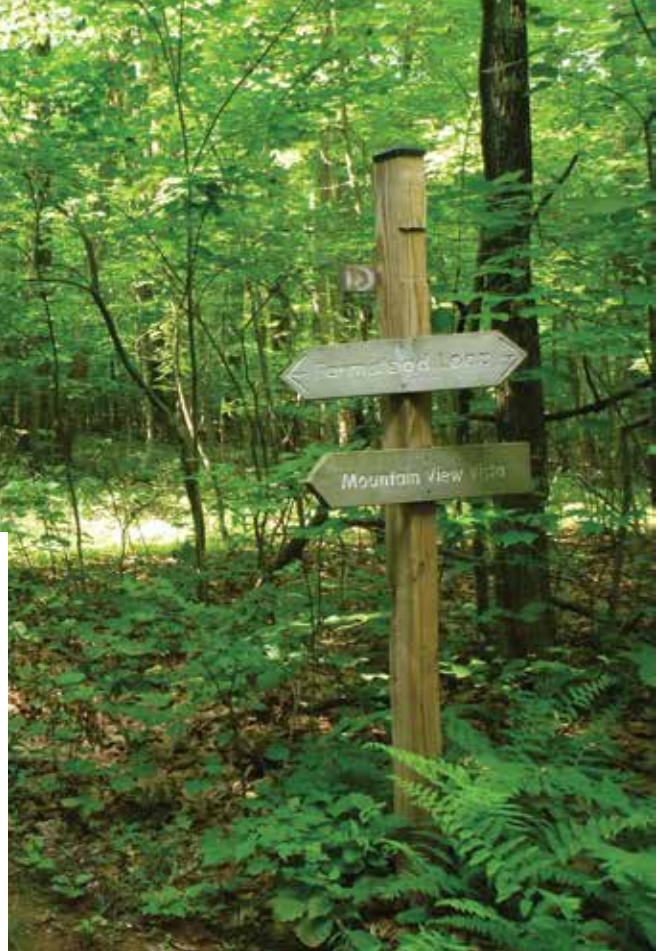
In Blacksburg, Brush Mountain is always with you, a defining view for the town and the Virginia Tech campus. Thanks to a collaboration led by the New River Land Trust (NRLT), that view will endure while residents and visitors alike do not have to keep their distance. Brush Mountain Park will offer 18 miles of multi-use trails on nearly 620 acres. In 2021, trail builders completed six miles of trails on the first of three properties and opened that to the public. Four trails have been completed on the second property (soon to be partially open to the public) and trail building has just started on the third parcel.

Acquisition, stewardship, and trail development brought together NRLT, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the US Forest Service, the Town of Blacksburg, the Poverty Creek Trails Coalition, and Eastern Trail Co., plus individual donors, local businesses, and volunteers who contributed thousands of hours of sweat equity.

The park's trail system connects with Jefferson National Forest, Blacksburg Heritage Park, and Huckleberry Trail Greenway, offering hikers, runners, equestrians, and cyclists experiences at all levels of difficulty. Whatever the pace of trail users, they will immerse themselves in hundreds of acres of forested habitat buffering two miles of streams flowing into the New River.



A view of Brush Mountain from an adjacent Town of Blacksburg Park (Heritage Park). *Photo credit: Michael Carnrike*



Trails at Sweet Run State Park. *Photo courtesy of Old Dominion Land Conservancy*

OLD DOMINION LAND CONSERVANCY

Sweet Run State Park

WWW.ODLC.US

What are the ingredients for a new state park? In western Loudoun County: devoted stewardship, public-private collaboration, time, and—of course—funding. Old Dominion Land Conservancy (ODLC) slipped the last puzzle piece into place for Sweet Run State Park when the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) accepted its gift of the 280-acre parcel. Working together, Loudoun County and the Robert and Dee Leggett Foundation had donated the land to the conservancy, another key advance toward the goal of a state park shared by the Leggetts, ODLC, and DCR since 2013.

For 22 years the nonprofit Blue Ridge Environmental Center for Environmental Stewardship had managed the 884 acres as a preserve, offering recreational and educational programs to the public. Sweet Run encompasses all the cultural and ecological riches where the northern Piedmont meets the Blue Ridge Mountains within the viewshed of the Appalachian Trail. Streams run eastward to the Potomac River, endangered wood turtles find refuge, and 19th century stone and log structures still stand along with a fully restored farmhouse.

Though an opening date is not yet set, staff are in place and DCR's management plan process is underway for Sweet Run State Park.

VIRGINIA EASTERN SHORE LAND TRUST

Picture the Shore

WWW.VESLT.ORG

In the fall of 2022, the Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust (VESLT) launched *Picture the Shore*, a photography contest and art exhibit highlighting the work of student and amateur photographers while connecting the public to the natural beauty and character of the Eastern Shore through the egalitarian lens of a cell phone camera.

Students from Accomack County's Nandua Middle School in Onley and Northampton County's Broadwater Academy in Exmore joined community amateur photographers in capturing the seasons, moods, and inhabitants of the Eastern Shore from sweeping sunsets to intricate tidal pools. During the November 4th exhibit opening and reception, the audience bestowed People's Choice Awards on one student and one amateur contest participant.

The photographers' own words reflect the intention behind their images: Entrants evoked the experience of "bearing witness" to the damage of fragile ecosystems, "abundant gratitude" for the place they call home, and the compelling hope that the beauty they captured exemplifies VESLT's efforts to "preserve Eastern Shore wildlife habitats while living alongside their beauty" and motivates residents to commit to that mission.



Tonsler Trail, Charlottesville. Photo credit: Sophia Chapin

THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

Fifeville Trail

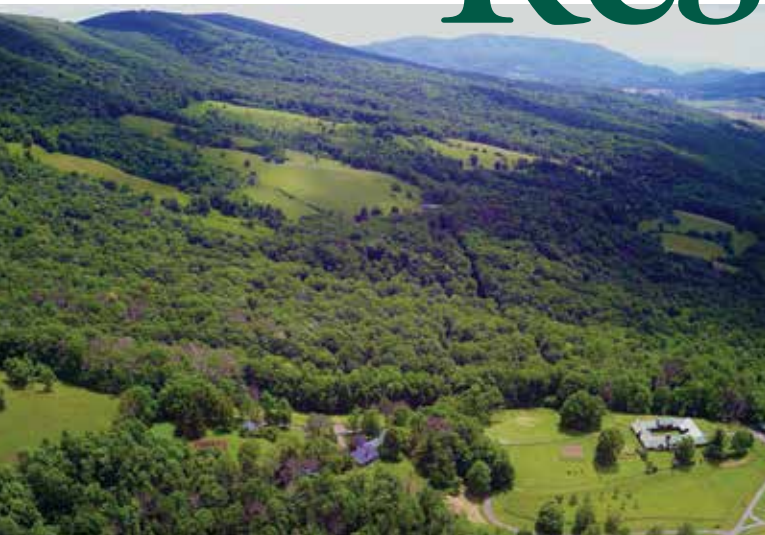
WWW.PECVA.ORG

The Fifeville Community Trail, which officially opened in the Fall of 2022, restores a historic connection that was lost to the cycle of urban renewal followed by urban neglect in the second half of the 20th century. This woodland trail crosses private land along a historic pathway to connect residents to Tonsler Park, and to shopping, jobs and cultural resources along Cherry Avenue and in the heart of Charlottesville

The Fifeville Neighborhood Association was determined to bring back the connectivity and safety older residents remembered and missed. The association truly trail-blazed, acquiring public access from landowner Woodard Properties and leading an expansive public input process. The Piedmont Environmental Council secured a \$25,000 grant from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation *Get Outdoors* program and helped coordinate a coalition that included the Rivanna Trails Foundation, Charlottesville Parks and Recreation, AMPPL Trails, the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, and neighborhood volunteers who helped clean up and clear the new footpaths.

Now, trail posts with distances and estimated walking time direct the way to nearby destinations. Residents quickly adopted the new mode of transportation, heading to and from work and school, carrying grocery bags, or accompanying their dogs to Tonsler Park. Though the sound of traffic never entirely recedes, birdsong, a flowing stream, and breezes through treetops are closer companions.

Resiliency & Restoration



Aerial of Hobby Horse Farm. Photo courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Hobby Horse Farm

WWW.NATURE.ORG/EN-US/ABOUT-US/WHERE-WE-WORK/UNITED-STATES/VIRGINIA

Twenty years after establishing the 9,269 acre Warm Spring Preserve in Bath County, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) received a gift from the heart of Warm Spring Mountain – the 600 acre Hobby Horse Farm. The farm, and the preserve that cradles it, both trace their history to the Ingalls family who developed The Homestead resort in the 1890s. But it is latter day owners Truman and Nellie Semans whose decades of stewardship culminated in their gift to TNC.

Hobby Horse Farm is an integral piece of TNC's immediate climate-resilient conservation goal of protecting 3 million of the 21 million acres in the Appalachian Mountain range critical as a wildlife corridor. The preserve protects rare natural communities including the fire-dependent montane pine barren and core forest essential to interior-dwelling songbirds as well as the headwaters of the Jackson and Cowpasture rivers. The farm's "next act" likely will be as a retreat and research lab for scientists and students and a training center for fire crews.

Said Locke Ogens, TNC's former Virginia director, "This gift will profoundly impact our work across the Appalachians and help us achieve our bold conservation vision in the decades to come."

CENTRAL VIRGINIA LAND CONSERVANCY

Fisher Easement in Nelson County

WWW.CVALC.ORG

Nearly a quarter of the Appalachian Trail (AT) is within Virginia's borders, but the communities along those 542 miles have changed dramatically since the AT's opening in 1937 when the Commonwealth's population was about a fourth of what it is today. Protecting the sights, sounds, and atmosphere of the AT corridor through landscape conservation is a priority for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and its partners like the Central Virginia Land Conservancy (CVaLC), based in Roanoke with the Blue Ridge and Southern Virginia land conservancies.

CVaLC—with a grant from ATC's Wild East Action Fund—completed an easement in 2022 on 53 acres in Nelson County within the trail corridor. The Fisher family easement adjoins National Park Service-owned land along the AT and secures a seamlessly protected landscape visible from both the trail and the Blue Ridge Parkway near Afton. Most of the property is forested, contributing to its high-scoring ecological core habitat, while a portion is managed as native meadow. Its surface water—including a spring-fed pond—flows to the James River. Landscape conservation proves that there are no small easements and that the whole *is* greater than the sum of its parts.



Fisher easement in Nelson County. Photos courtesy of Central Virginia Land Conservancy



Photo courtesy of Northern Virginia Conservation Trust

NORTHERN VIRGINIA CONSERVATION TRUST

Accokeek Bottomlands, Crow's Nest NAP

WWW.NVCT.ORG

The ability to act quickly when a unique conservation opportunity presents itself is a hallmark of land trust work, and the stakes are always high when the land in question is of exceptional ecological significance. The latest expansion of the Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve in Stafford County depended on a long-standing partnership between the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) and the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program (DCR) to honor the Bowling family's wish to permanently protect their unique 59 acre tract in just two months' time. Given DCR's goal to add the Accokeek Bottomlands property to the preserve for its permanent protection, NVCT stepped forward to finance the purchase through The Conservation Fund's Conservation Loans Program and the community's enthusiastic response to a generous donor's matching contribution.

The acquisition enlarged to 3,115 acres the Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve which encompasses two globally rare forest types and biologically rich habitat for 60 species of neotropical songbirds, 49 species of fish, seven species of mussels and shellfish, and 22 plant species unique to the Coastal Plain. Visitors can already explore areas of the preserve along eight miles of walking trails that soon will allow a close-up view of one of its iconic residents on the newly acquired tract: a champion tulip tree with a seven foot circumference that survived the mid-20th century sawmill which once occupied this now protected land.



Photo courtesy of Potomac Conservancy

POTOMAC CONSERVANCY

Tomorrow's Trees

WWW.POTOMAC.ORG

Every year, Virginians collect acorns and other indigenous tree nuts to supply the Virginia Department of Forestry's (VDof) nurseries with seed stock for reforestation, riparian buffers, and watershed planting projects. In 2022, Potomac Conservancy rebooted its previously named *Growing Native* program to meet VDof's demand for seedlings. Relunched as *Tomorrow's Trees*, this people-powered seed collection initiative invites volunteers from all over the Potomac River region to gather desired tree seeds from their communities for VDof to nurture into woodlands that will help restore ecosystem health and Chesapeake Bay-bound streams and rivers.

The Bay watershed is losing an estimated 70 acres of forest to development every day. Virginia's Chesapeake Bay plan includes the goal of planting nine million trees by 2025. Successful germination and survival of that many trees demands tens of millions of acorns and nuts—and many hands to collect them. *Tomorrow's Trees* is a partnership invested in forest ecosystems that flow with clean water, provide healthy habitat, and better prepare communities for climate impacts. The potential within a single acorn multiplied by millions embodies Potomac Conservancy's commitment to "Sustain What Sustains Us".

BEST PRACTICES

Tools of the Trade



Greenwood property in Chesterfield County that was recently acquired by CRLC in partnership with FOLAR and Chesterfield County. Once protected by easements (with VOF and DHR) it will be donated to Chesterfield County for a park. It was one of the highest scoring parcels in our Land Conservation Tool along the Appomattox River.

Photo courtesy of Friends of the Lower Appomattox River

FRIENDS OF THE LOWER APPOMATTOX RIVER

Appomattox River Land Conservation GIS Tool

WWW.FOLAR-VA.ORG

Accurate, relevant information and resources inform a land trust's goals and their implementation. Efficiently and effectively identifying, planning, and funding projects depends on something most conservationists love less than land and water: data. Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR), with funding

from the Virginia Environmental Endowment, has launched the region's first Lower Appomattox River Land Conservation GIS Tool to focus their multi-jurisdictional region's conservation efforts on the river corridor.

The user-friendly Appomattox River conservation tool inventories land within a 500 foot corridor along the river for each locality, cataloging ownership, protection status, adjacency to protected or publicly accessible land, and other characteristics. It analyzes and weights ten fields to produce a priority ranking for each jurisdiction. The tool revealed that just 21 percent of land in the designated corridor is permanently protected—underscoring both opportunity and urgency. FOLAR is just getting started with this essential tool, which will incorporate continual updates and additional data layers including historic and scenic resources and a survey of invasive plant species cover.

VALLEY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

Remote Monitoring of Easements

WWW.VALLEYCONSERVATION.ORG

'Perpetuity' is not a word to take lightly; Easement donors literally *entrust* their land and legacy to the land trust they select. The responsibility of stewardship grows with every easement and with it, the demands of monitoring. This past year, the Valley Conservation Council (VCC) implemented remote monitoring to help meet the challenge of overseeing 8,500 acres of farmland and forests in more than 70 easements throughout its 11-county service area in the Shenandoah Valley.

High resolution satellite imagery drives the program that is ideal for expansive and remote properties and is capable of sending alerts if it detects red-flag changes to a property's vegetative cover. Remote monitoring reduces staff travel time—and associated fuel usage and emissions—while allowing VCC to monitor multiple easements in a single day. VCC continues to rely on the human element at the heart of conservation: The remote monitoring system is a supplemental complement to irreplaceable in-person staff stewardship visits.



View from Tanner's Ridge, the Land Transfer to Shenandoah National Park. *Photo courtesy of Valley Conservation Council*

Accreditation and Best Practices

The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission (an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance) awards accreditation to land trusts that are dedicated primarily to conservation easements and that meet the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. Each accredited land trust completes a rigorous review process and joins a network of organizations united by strong ethical practices. This trusted network of land trusts has demonstrated fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions, and lasting stewardship of the lands they conserve.

Accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission is just one way that Virginia land trusts hold themselves to high standards. Accredited land trusts are also always improving and putting into practice tools to fulfill the trust placed in them by landowners and the people of Virginia.

Photo by Emily Bender

Welcome to New Members

500-YEAR FOREST FOUNDATION
& AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST
joined VaULT in the fall of 2022.

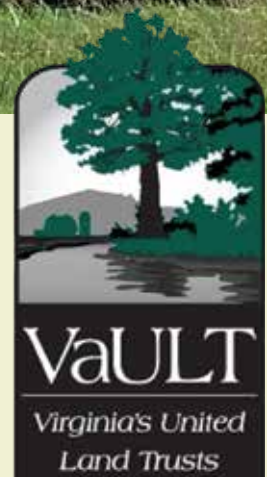
THE 500-YEAR FOREST FOUNDATION

conserves mature forests and the biologically diverse species they nurture.

www.500yearforest.org

AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

works to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. www.farmland.org



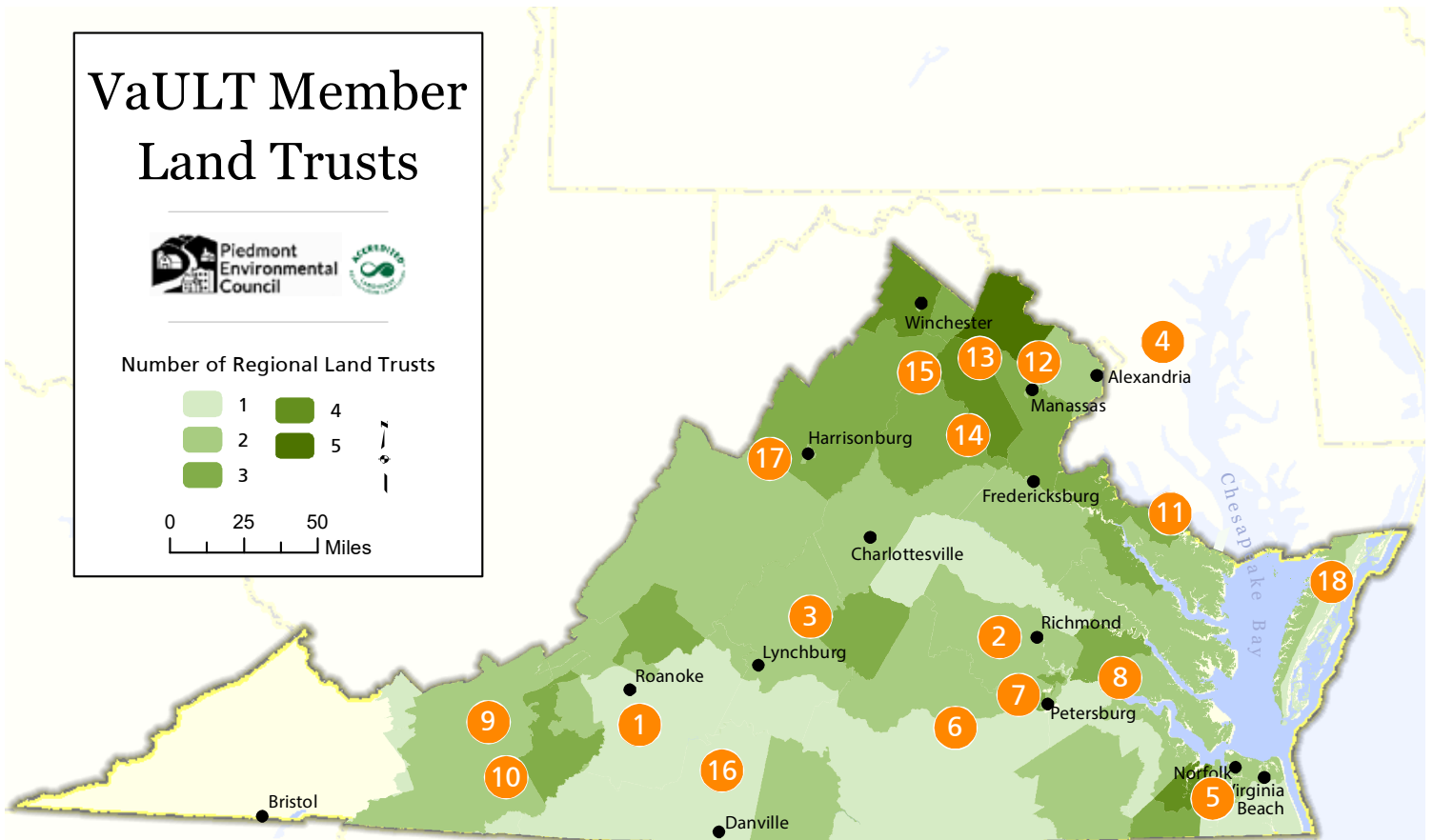
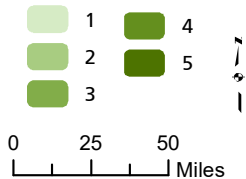
Virginia's United Land Trusts
4308 Newport Drive
Richmond, VA 23227

vaunitedlandtrusts.org
eshepard@vaunitedlandtrusts.org
540-529-1595

VaULT Member Land Trusts



Number of Regional Land Trusts



Regional Land Trusts (See Map):

- 1 Blue Ridge Land Conservancy
- 2 Capital Region Land Conservancy
- 3 Central Virginia Land Conservancy
- 4 Chesapeake Conservancy
- 5 Coastal Virginia Conservancy
- 6 Ever Green Team
- 7 Friends of the Lower Appomatox River
- 8 Historic Virginia Land Conservancy
- 9 New River Conservancy
- 10 New River Land Trust
- 11 Northern Neck Land Conservancy
- 12 Northern Virginia Conservation Trust
- 13 Old Dominion Land Conservancy
- 14 Piedmont Environmental Council
- 15 Potomac Conservancy
- 16 Southern Virginia Land Conservancy
- 17 Valley Conservation Council
- 18 Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust

Land Trusts that Work Statewide:

- 500-Year Forest Foundation
- American Battlefield Trust
- American Farmland Trust
- Black Family Land Trust
- The Conservation Fund
- Land Trust of Virginia
- The Nature Conservancy
- Trust for Public Land

Agency Partners:

- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Virginia Department of Forestry
- Virginia Department of Historic Resources
- Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
- Virginia Outdoors Foundation
- USDA-NRCS

*A number of Virginia localities have easement authorities and some Soil and Water Conservation Districts also hold easements.