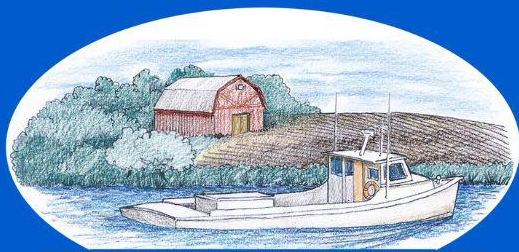


Building Advocacy Influence to
Achieve Big Conservation Wins

Agenda

- Who we are and how we approach this work
- Common barriers to doing advocacy
- Practical, low maintenance ways to build your advocacy influence
- Tools you can use
- What's working or isn't working for you?
- Call us! We're here to help



NORTHERN NECK LAND CONSERVANCY

Incorporated in 2004.
501 c 3 Nonprofit Land Trust.

Mission

To preserve the rural heritage
of the region by conserving its
lands, water, economies and
culture for future generations.



58 Easements
8,583 Acres



Essex
2,312



King George
494



Lancaster
512



Northumberland
3,248



Richmond
512



Westmoreland
1,769

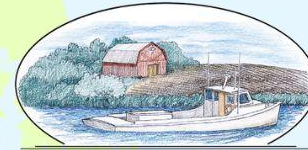


- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship

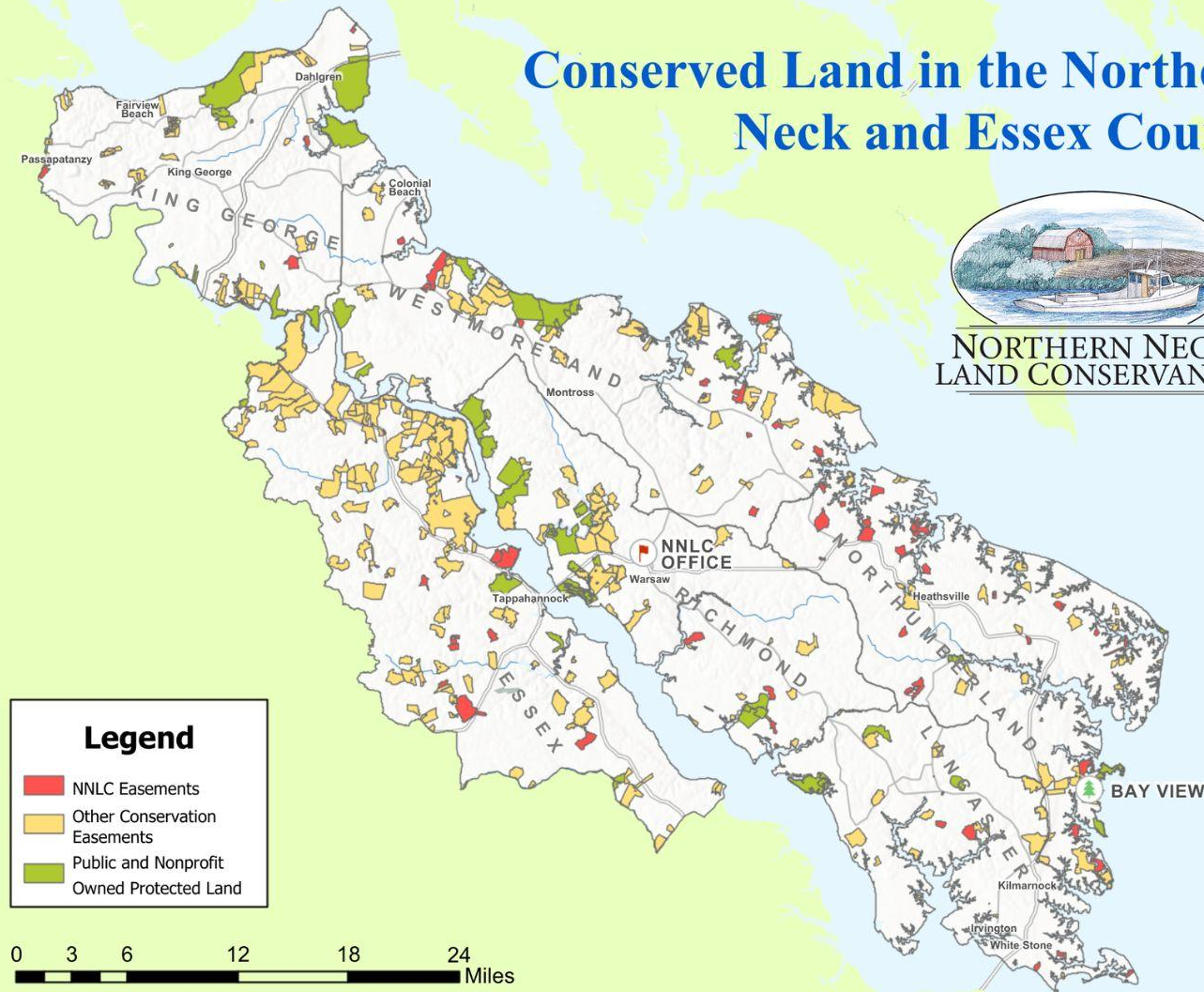
Northern Neck Land Conservancy



Conserved Land in the Northern Neck and Essex County



**NORTHERN NECK
LAND CONSERVANCY**



Evolution of Conservation Advocacy in King George

Rapport with supervisor -->

Opportunity to serve on
ZOTAC sub-committee -->

Opportunity to address
Planning Commission -->

Opportunity to contribute
to Comprehensive Plan -->



Evolution of General Assembly advocacy

Explained our challenges, kept communications open, sent comments on various bills -->

Del. Kent submitted bills to change VLCF criteria, refined them over time -->

Passed the Baton to the Conservation Fund and other advisors -->

Popular bill that passed!



LTA Advocacy Days

Easy to participate – LTA and VaULT organize everything.

Orientation to the issues and specific talking points + LTA staffer.

Cool photo ops for the supporters back home.



Challenge - Getting “Pulled In” to Issues

Paraphrased from some recent board talking points:

How should board members respond if asked about this by landowners or donors?

Note that Northern Neck Land Conservancy takes no position on this (or any) individual property/conservation easement.

Acknowledge the case and the concerns it raises. Emphasize ways the issue is dissimilar to the work our organization does.

Reaffirm Northern Neck Land Conservancy’s commitment to:

- Permanence.
- Commitment to the original conservation intent of the easement donor.
- Independent decision-making.
- National best practices (Land Trust Accreditation Board accreditation)

You can also note that Northern Neck Land Conservancy’s organization and easements are structured to avoid political influence.

GIVE US A CALL



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Stewardship Director

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Duncan Griffiths

Conservation Easement
Manager

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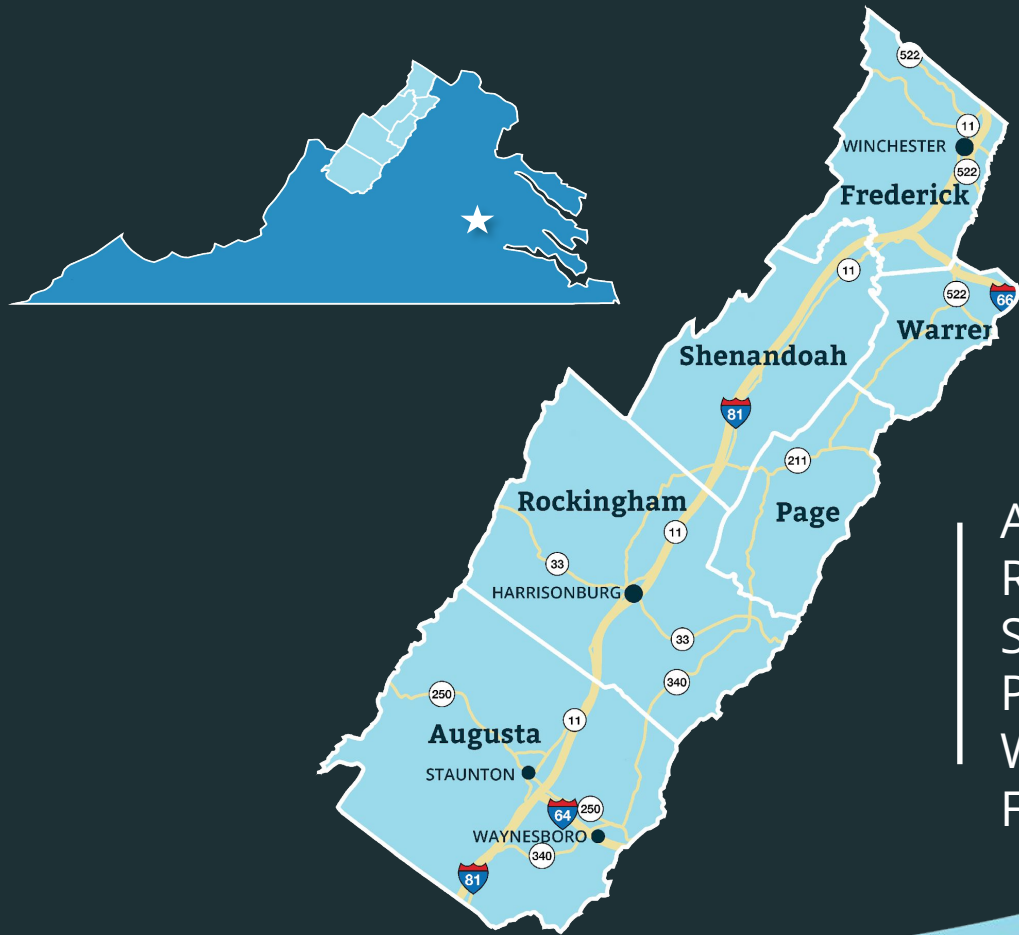
duncan@nnconserve.org



ALLIANCE

FOR THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY





Service Area

Augusta
Rockingham
Shenandoah
Page
Warren
Frederick



Our Vision:

A Shenandoah Valley sustained by farms and forests, clean streams and rivers, and thriving communities.

Our Mission:

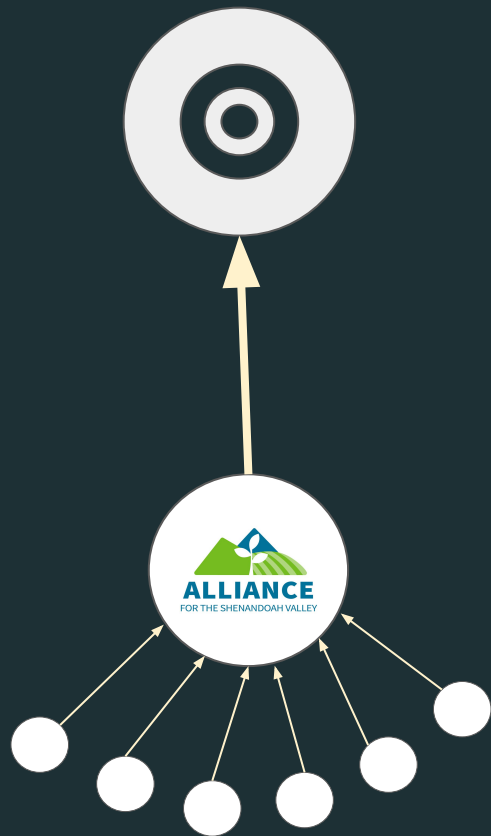
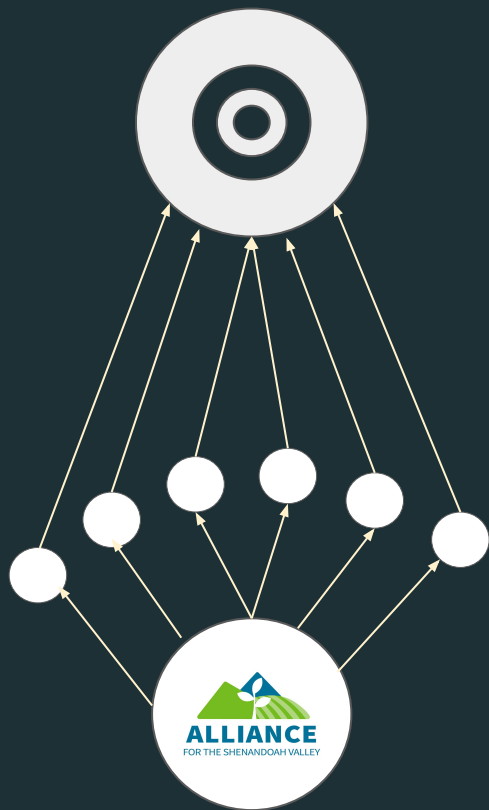
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley informs and engages people to protect the natural resources, cultural heritages, and rural character of our region.



Our Work:

Land Use & Transportation Planning
Conservation and Agriculture
Clean Water
Strong Communities
Regional Issues/Opportunities





Community planning
Public input sessions
Citizen advisory committees
Planning commission meetings
Boards of supervisors meetings
Work with county electeds/staff
Sign on letters
Policy papers/briefing book
Lobby days
Direct advocacy to legislators



Example: Gas City llc

>Neighbors reached out to Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley with concerns about an SUP

> Staff educated ourselves on the issue to understand if there was a role for advocacy, lean on networks to become experts (stormwater, traffic, etc.)

>Staff applied knowledge of people, county process and community to come up with a plan of action - focused on what the county could do.

>Met with key community members and electeds

- > Emails/posts to community members about public meetings, who to contact, what to say, when to say it, focused on key community interests
- > Connected with friendly local reporter(s) and found allies (*maybe uncommon!*) to build supporters.
- > Empowered key community members with data, info, messaging for inside the community.
- > Sent meeting reminders and showed up at county meeting!
- > Thank everyone involved and had ice cream party to celebrate
- > **FOLLOW UP** - Changed zoning at interchange, AG/Forestal district established, easements in process, grew our network.

Challenges

- Local vs. Regional dynamics
- Time vs. Impact
- Partnerships - complexity vs. influence
- Focus on **interests** not **positions** (why?)
- **Expertise** and **honesty**
- Organization vs. Individuals (board and staff)

THERE'S (free) HELP!!





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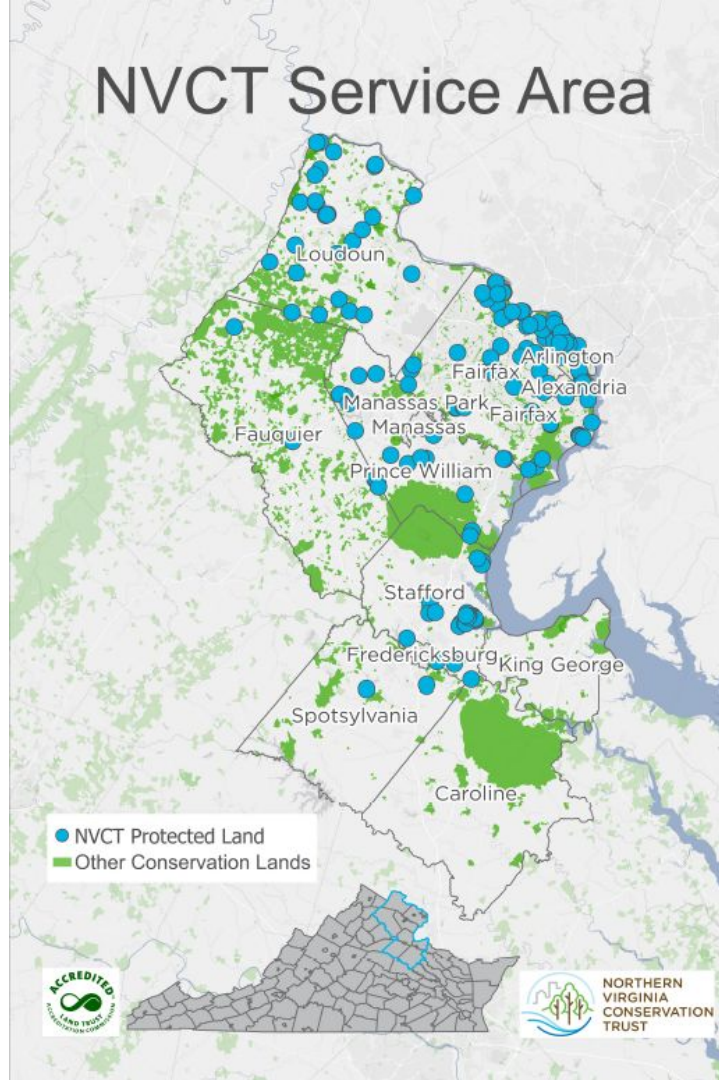


Northern Virginia Conservation Trust

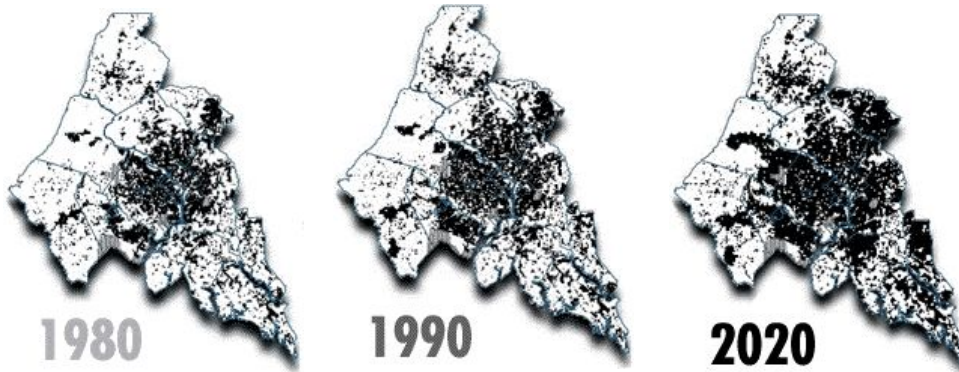


Our Service Area

- Nearly 200 projects completed
- 9,200 acres conserved
- Work with nearly 300 landowners annually on existing and new projects



Northern Virginia At A Glance

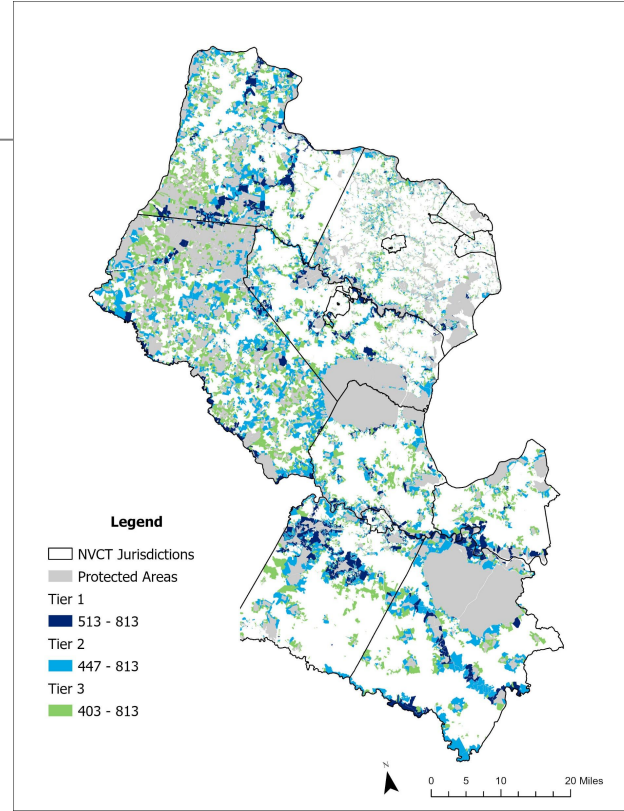


- 27 state delegates and 12 state senators = 28% of the entire general assembly
- Very blue leaning but without statewide support
- Highly urban/suburban landscape with huge property values and development pressures
- Major data center impacts
- Local elected officials support conservation but are more concerned about housing and workforce development



Strategic Conservation

- 2-year process focused on regional opportunities
- GIS analysis used 24 datasets in 10 themes
- Integrates urban factors:
 - Urban,
 - Social Vulnerability,
 - Heat Island,
 - Park Access



Formal County Partnerships



- Official land trust of Arlington, Fairfax and Stafford Counties and the City of Alexandria
- Comes with funding and access to county staff, programs and planning
- Necessitates significant rapport with county board members and supervisors
- Subject to the whims of annual budget cycles
- Financial support allows for discounted stewardship gifts



Annual Gala

- Bring worlds together
- Celebrate successes
- Raise money
- Build awareness for future work
- Huge time commitment but everyone loves a party



River Farm

Fairfax County

- Asked by elected officials to help save site in 2021
- Personal stories made it special
- Run by another non-profit that was selling the property
- Couldn't afford to buy it had we gotten the opportunity
- Had to stop the sale before permanent protection
- State assembly members and county board leaders demanded conservation easement



Terborgh Terrace Garden

Arlington County

- Land donation from long time resident and supporter
- Fully expected to sell for \$
- County partners demanded protection
- Made lemonade out of lemons
- Creativity led to new partnership
- Saved floundering county partnership



Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve

Stafford County

- Inholding acquisition in partnership with DCR
- Private fundraising campaign to raise funds
- Included local elected officials who had nothing to do with the project
- Enhanced relationships that could then build to bigger goals



Challenges born from advocacy commitment



- ED as political lead – opportunity cost
- Large service area with huge number of elected officials
- Numerous statewide coalitions, causes and work groups
- Build a reputation and then have to live up to it
- Maintaining apolitical positioning as a 501(c)3



Opportunities born from advocacy



- Elected officials as a great source of projects
- Ribbon cuttings and conservation announcements are currency
- Unlocking funding
- Brand and name recognition - media
- Reputation built for other causes
- Inoculation against attacks



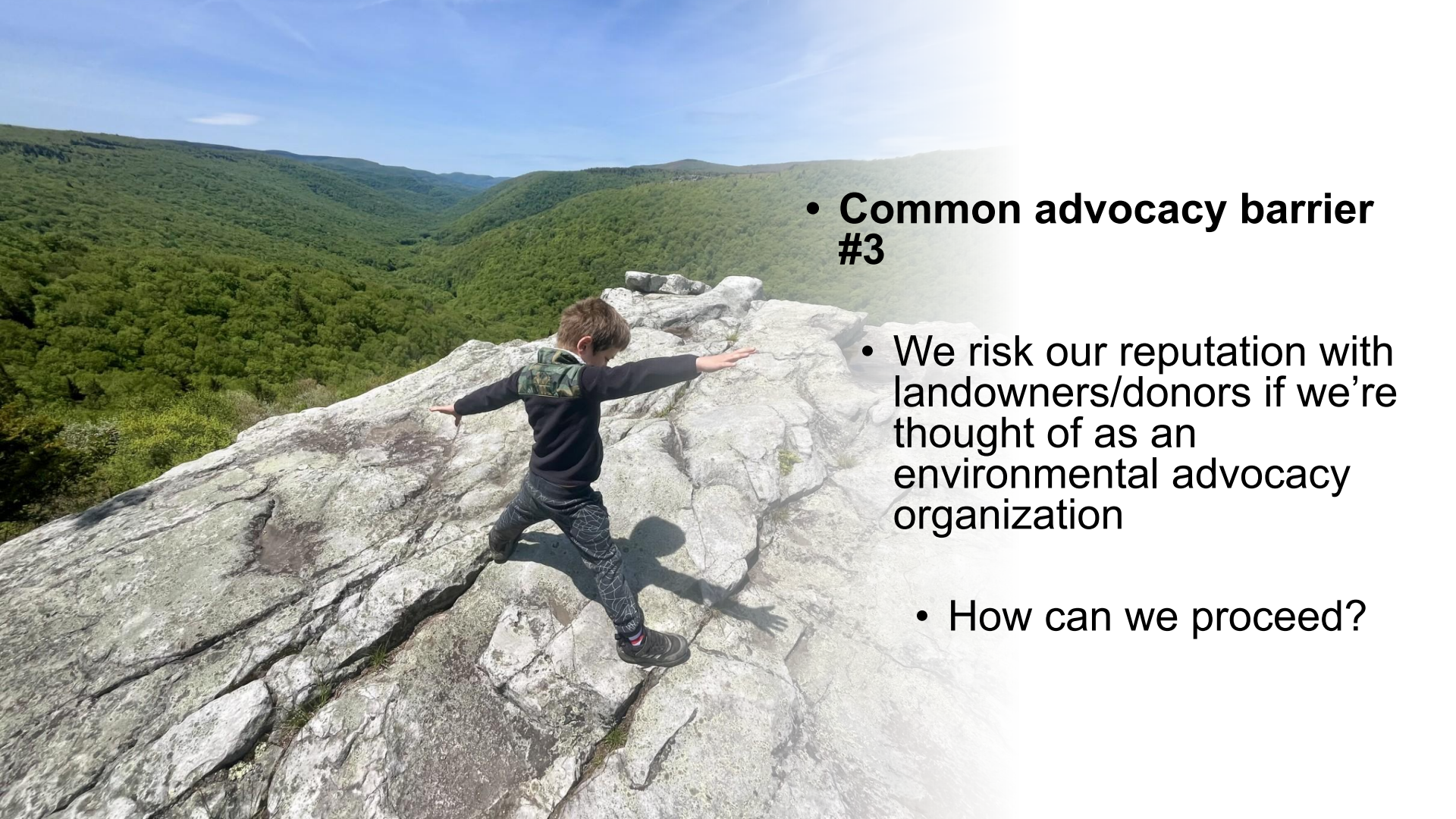


- **Common advocacy barrier #1**
 - Our board, donors, or stakeholders think we should stay in our lane and stick to doing conservation projects
 - How can we proceed?



- **Common advocacy barrier #2**

- We don't have the staff capacity to do more advocacy
- How can we proceed?



- **Common advocacy barrier #3**

- We risk our reputation with landowners/donors if we're thought of as an environmental advocacy organization
- How can we proceed?



What are some practical ways to build your organization's advocacy influence?



- Attend a VaULT conference session on advocacy
- Pick off small tasks
 - What takes one email?
- Utilize volunteers or board members
- Have a board or ad hoc policy committee
- Look at your event invite list
- Set a local meeting
- LTA education center
- Call a partner of similar size and dynamics
- Choose one coalition or listserv to follow

Resources

1. Local

- a. Article: How Nonprofits can Partner with Local Government
<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/looking-downtown-how-nonprofits-can-partner-with-local-governments/>

2. State

- a. VaULT Annual Meeting and Hill Day: TBD early 2027
- b. Virginia Conservation Network (VCN) <https://vcnva.org/>
- c. VCN's Advocacy Guide
<https://vcnva.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-VCN-General-Assembly-Advocacy-Guide.pdf>
- d. Other VCN resources: <https://vcnva.org/general-assembly-advocacy/#videos-and-guides>

3. Federal

- a. Land Trust Alliance (LTA) <https://landtrustalliance.org/resources/advocate>
- b. LTA Advocacy Days
<https://landtrustalliance.org/resources/learn/explore/2026-land-trust-alliance-advocacy-days>

4. General

- a. IRS on Lobbying <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying>

Questions?

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