

VIRGINIA

Land Legacies

BLUE RIDGE FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY

A Local Resource for Madison and Greene

Volume 17

Spring 2016



Cloud Shadow by Larry Behunek

President's Message

Off to a good start in 2016. At the end of 2015, the Congress expanded federal tax benefits for those who placed a qualified easement on their property. For particulars, see the article in this newsletter. Add in the Virginia easement tax credit, and landowners in our State have among the most generous tax benefits for protecting their land of anywhere in the country.

Equally good news is that 2015 brought 600 additional acres under permanent protection in Madison and Greene Counties. Altogether 26,063 acres are now protected, representing a nearly 16 fold increase since

2000. See the Conservation Scorecard.

While promoting conservation easements is a core objective of the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy, we are also promoting good conservation practices on the land. After all, a conservation easement is a legal instrument that may not impact what may be happening on your land, such as sediment runoff during storms, out of control growth of invasive species or loss of wildlife. We are working with our conservation partners to promote the many programs available to help you adopt good land conservation practices. Please consider coming to the April 26 dinner seminar

exploring those programs that is announced later in the newsletter.

I wish to each of you the blessings of springtime. Carl Schmitt

Great News on Federal Tax Incentives for Conservation Easements

For many years, voluntary Conservation Easements have been a major means by which Virginia landowners can protect their farms, forests and historical properties in perpetuity. Those Virginia landowners who donate a qualified Easement are eligible for both Federal and Virginia Tax benefits. The state benefits are among the most generous in the nation.

Nationally and regionally, this form of land protection has enjoyed continuing bipartisan support. The most recent example is the enactment of a 2015 federal funding bill making permanent an enhanced federal tax incentive for those who donate a qualified Conservation Easement. The new legislation expands the ability for landowners to use the charitable gift deduction value of their Conservation Easement to deduct up to 50 percent of their adjusted gross income with a 15-year carry-forward. Further, a farmer who will receive more than 50% of adjusted gross income from the trade or business of farming is eligible for a tax deduction of 100% of adjusted gross income which could mean no federal income tax for years after donating a qualified Easement.

What could this save a landowner? If we assume a landowner has a taxable income of \$75,000 each year, and has a property with a qualified Easement worth \$500,000, the expanded provisions would save them about \$130,000 in Federal tax, and use up their Easement value in 14 years. Under the old provisions (30% of adjusted gross income with a 5 year carryover plus the initial year),

they would save about \$35,000 and not be able to use up the full Easement value when the allowed deductions expire at the end of 6 years.

In addition to Federal tax benefits, Virginia has established a State tax credit for qualified Conservation Easements by Virginia landowners at 40% of the value of the Easement. The amount of the credit that may be used by a taxpayer may not exceed \$20,000 for taxable year 2016 and \$50,000 for every taxable year thereafter, with any unexpended portion carried forward for the next 13 taxable years. Of particular importance, any portion of the tax credit not used to pay State taxes may be sold to another Virginia taxpayer. The added amount and time of the expanded Federal deductions would also pass through to savings on Virginia taxes and leave more of the State tax credit to sell.

Conservation Score Card as of January 2016

At the beginning of 2016, the total acreage under conservation easement stands at 15,570 acres in Madison, and 10,543 acres in Greene. In 2015 Madison gained 532 acres under easement and Greene gained 67.7 acres. Holding the easements are the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Piedmont Environmental Council, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Land Trust of Virginia, who co-holds easements with the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy. This affords considerable diversity to landowners as to who may hold their easements.

Also noteworthy is that 13 Conservation Areas have been established, areas where neighbors have joined together to put their land under easement. By preserving areas much larger than a single property, they protect larger view sheds, contiguous

Conservation Easements between January 2000 and January 2016

	Land Under Easement	Number of Landowners	Percent of Private Land
Madison – January 2000	1,181 acres	5	0.7%
Madison – January 2016	15,520 acres	71	8.5%
Greene – January 2000	374 acres	3	0.5%
Greene – January 2016	10,543 acres	61	12.7%

farmland and forests, lands critical to wildlife habitat and watersheds essential to our drinking water. Being in a Conservation Area also can serve to enhance the property values of the Area's landowners because of the local protection collectively afforded against future development. From 2000 to the start of 2016, the number of Conservation Areas in both counties has gone from 0 to 13.

Septic System Help in Madison

Residents in several areas of Madison County continue to be eligible for reimbursement of fifty percent of the expense of maintaining, repairing or replacing on-lot septic systems. Two target areas are involved which include about 65 percent of the county. Part of the Robinson River as it flows downstream from the new bridge at Mulatto Run on Route 231, including all of White Oak Lake and White Oak Run areas and south to Route 230, and then all of the Robinson River areas east of U.S. Route 29. In addition, all of the northwest section of the county that drains to the Hughes River is eligible. This is all of the Etlan and Nethers areas. Although the two areas are funded by different grants, the financial opportunity for landowners is identical. The goal of the two programs is also the same; to lessen the real or potential pollutant loads from ailing, failing or non-existent septic systems, that enter ground water or surface water in these areas. One particular pollutant, E. Coli bacteria in these local streams has been identified as being

higher than expected by state water quality standards, although other pollutants can also be involved. An additional benefit to the property owner is the assurance that their system is up to standards and functioning properly. It is a win-win for water quality and property value.

Program participants are eligible for several different payments depending on the actual needs of their system. Reimbursement payments are typically fifty percent although can go as high as seventy-five percent for individuals that qualify for low income status. Maximum payments to property owners under average income levels are \$150 maximum towards a pump out and inspection; \$3,500 maximum towards a repair; \$4,000 maximum towards a conventional system or \$4,500 if a pump is required to move the liquids to the drain field; and \$10,000 maximum towards an alternative engineered system. Pump outs and inspections are encouraged by everyone; such preventative maintenance extends the life of a system and prevents higher costs later on if the systems fail. If further repairs are indicated by the inspection, the owner is still eligible for the additional repair payments. Reimbursement payments are made promptly once the work has been completed. Applications are required and need to be approved prior to the work being done or funding can be declined. Free assistance with initial assessments and application submittal is available from the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District at (540)948-7531 or (540)825-8591.

2016 Welcomes New BRFC Officers

Carl Schmitt, President
 Trish Crowe, Vice President
 Bill Scholten, Treasurer
 Russell James, Secretary
 John Moore, Legislative Chair



Red Roof by Larry Behunek



Walter Nicklin
Keynote Speaker
2015 Annual Meeting

“How can critically acclaimed volumes be devoted to other, historically less interesting, even aesthetically bleak, parts of America, with so little put to paper specifically evoking the beautiful Piedmont, in many ways the nation’s historic heart? I suspect I know the answer: Although fixed geographically, the Piedmont is in many ways a shifting, fluid place, not lending itself to rigid categorization or genre. The rolling hills themselves seem wave-like and elusive; the history of these hills is also marked by movement and transition, of passing through, of the transmuting of the first European settlements and Old World attitudes into the American destiny and dream - the promise that lay just beyond the next hill..., the Piedmont defies reductionism and definition.”

*-Walter Nicklin, Pieces of the Piedmont,
 The Puzzle of One Life*



Sources of Funding for Land Management & Land Conservation

Tuesday, April 26, 2016 6:00 pm — 8:00 pm

Free Buffet Dinner & Informational Workshop

Blue Ridge Cafe, 8315 Seminole Trail, Ruckersville, Virginia 22968

There are a wide variety of land management and land conservation programs available to farm and forest landowners in Virginia. It can often be overwhelming trying to learn which programs and funding sources might work best for you and your particular property.

Join us for an overview of federal, state, and local programs offered by the following organizations:

Virginia Outdoors Foundation
 Virginia Department of Forestry
 Soil and Water Conservation District
 Natural Resource Conservation Service

Registration Required: For questions and to register by Friday, April 22nd contact PEC at (434) 977-2033, rlinville@pecva.org or register online at: www.pecva.org/landworkshop

WORKSHOP AGENDA

- 6:00 pm Doors open, registration, and free buffet dinner begins.
- 6:30 pm Welcome and overview of the presentations
- 6:40 pm **Farmland Conservation & Landowner Cost Assistance:** *Virginia Outdoors Foundation* will provide an overview of conservation easements, including conservation easements designed specifically for working farms.
- 7:00 pm **Forest Management & Conservation:** *Virginia Department of Forestry* will discuss a variety of programs including Forest Legacy, Forest Stewardship, Reforestation of Timber lands Cost Share Program, and general landowner assistance.
- 7:20 pm **Water Quality Protection & Stream Buffers:** *Soil & Water Conservation District* will describe options and cost-share incentives for landowners, including 100% cost-share for buffer fencing.
- 7:40 pm **Wildlife Habitat & Related Sources of Funding:** *USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service* will provide an overview of local habitat restoration efforts and present options for making them affordable on your property.
- 8:00 pm Attendee Questions & Closing Remarks

Workshop Presenters & Sponsors:





Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy, Inc.
PO Box 116
Hood, VA 22723

It is the mission of the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy to help facilitate an effective partnership between all of the various conservation groups and willing landowners who desire to make a commitment today for the benefit of future generations.

www.BlueRidgeFoothillsConservancy.org Email: TheLegacyoftheLand@gmail.com
Telephone: (540)948-5444

**Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy
Board of Directors**

Carl Schmitt - President
Trish Crowe - Vice President
Bill Scholten- Treasurer
Russell James - Secretary
Gail Trimmer-Unterman - Special Events
Chip Morris - Land Protection
Frank Wilczek - Land Protection
Alton Keel
James Maloney
John Moore

**If you wish to receive your newsletter
by email, please let us know at
TheLegacyoftheLand@gmail.com.**

***Please help support the hard work
of the
Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy***

Member	\$35
Family	\$50
Friend	\$500
Guardian	\$1,000+

**I would like more information on
land conservation.**

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

**Please mail donations to the following:
PO Box 116
Hood, VA 22723**

