



Land Conservation Wrap Up for 2013

The year 2013 saw a steady rate of seven landowners putting acreage under voluntary easement. Two landowners in Greene added 214 acres while in Madison five landowners added 1,169 acres. With the addition of those acres, the total acreage under easement stands at 14,987 acres in Madison, and 10,466 acres in Greene. The groups holding easements were the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, 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 diversity shows the options landowners have in terms of who may hold their easements.

Also noteworthy is that 6 of the 7 new landowner properties under easement contributed to one of 14 Conservation Areas, 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 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.

Both Madison and Greene Counties now have Conservation Funds. These funds are managed by the PEC with BRFC participation and offer a qualified landowner a no interest loan to pay the costs in obtaining an easement. The loan is then paid back out of the State tax credit earned by the landowner.

Conservation Scorecard from End of 1999 to End of 2013

	Land Under Easement	Number of Landowners	Percent of Private Land
Madison End of 1999	1,181 acres	5	0.7%
Madison End of 2013	14,987 acres	67	8.5%
Greene End of 1999	374 acres	3	0.5%
Greene End of 2013	10,466 acres	61	12.6%

Land placed under easement today, is land preserved for all!

4th Annual Conservation Barn Dinner

The Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy hosted its 4th Annual Conservation Barn Dinner on March 28, 2014. We bring together not only the leading conservation partners, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, The Department of Forestry and The Piedmont Environmental Council; but landowners who have put their land under easement, as well as people who might be considering the process. Jeraldine Tata was our keynote speaker this year, and she gave a touching testimonial of her personal wish to see her family farm preserved. In her own words:

“...Although I have not lived in Greene all of my life, I was born and raised in Greene, and have always known that some day I would come back to stay. My parents, grandparents, and great grandparents all lived their lives in Greene. The beauty of the county, my family memories, and my love of my uncle’s farm would draw me back...I am sure that had my uncle known a way to make certain that his farm remained a farm forever he would have rushed to do so.

I am grateful to my 92-year-old uncle who seemed ‘ahead of his time’ in his thinking. Had he not ‘tied up’ the farm so his heirs could not sell it, I can promise you it would have been sold as my sister and I were the only heirs who wanted to keep the farm...Finally I was in a position to honor my uncle’s wishes as well as my own by seeking to place my farm in conservation easement. I wanted to preserve my agricultural heritage and our family farm’s contribution to the beauty of the scenery in my home county, Greene. Along the way, I talked with my husband, Bob, and my children, Robert, Tony, and Kendall about the easement plan.

It is very distressing to see our farms becoming housing developments, factories and business centers. Here at our farm I love having our ‘one of the best views in Greene County,’ seeing the farm animals, our gardens, the barn, the birds, our forest, being on South River, seeing our wildlife in our 24 acres of crep fields. We have deer there and hope to have quail soon.

I am thrilled to have had this opportunity to preserve our land in perpetuity. I believe that my heirs will be pleased just as I am pleased that Uncle Jean had so much forethought. I think he was very wise. I believe that here in Virginia and in all of America we must do what we can to stem the siege on the life of our farmland. I also believe that conservation easement way well be an act of wisdom...

In conclusion, please protect and save your farmland.”



Jeraldine Tata assisted by her daughter, Kendall, as she gives her speech

One Person's Journey to Wildflowers with a Variety of Birds and other Wildlife

by Dana Squire

Question: What does one do with a field of fescue and cows?

- a. Let a local farmer put his cows in the field.
- b. Let a local farmer hay the field.
- c. Pay someone to bush hog the field once or twice a year.
- d. Nothing.
- e. All of the above.

In my case, the answer is 'e', I've tried them all. And I haven't found any of these options particularly satisfying, so I'm adding another:

- f. Convert the field to native grasses and wildflowers, creating aesthetic interest and a wildlife habitat.

I have a small property by local standards - 17 acres - with only 4 of those acres in fescue. But no area is really too small to benefit wildlife, even if it's only a few pollinators. Four acres would make a nice wildflower meadow and host a variety of birds and other wildlife. But several issues had to be addressed first.

The first was: How will I get rid of the fescue? Most fescue in our area is tall fescue, which becomes very dense near the ground and creates a lot of thatch. These attributes make it impossible for ground nesting and ground-feeding birds to use the field. They need bare soil around the bases of plants to move, build and feed. In fact, in our area, the widespread planting of fescue for livestock has greatly contributed to the decline of the once

abundant Northern bob-white quail, not to mention quite a few other bird species. Unfortunately, cows are about

the only creatures who benefit from fescue. Fescue is not easy to get rid of. The most effective way to destroy it is with an herbicide such as Glyphosate. I am not a fan of herbicides, and this was a really difficult hurdle for me to get over. I had to do a lot of research to convince myself that I would not be causing more harm than good. Two applications would be



Article Photos by Dana Squire

needed: one in the fall and one in the spring.

The next issue was cost. I would not be able to do this work myself. I had to pay for all the seed, as well as someone to do the two sprayings, and someone to plant the seed, which would require a seed drill. I looked into hiring different people to do the different steps, renting equipment if necessary, and I started looking into bulk wildflower seed prices.

During the process, I made two fortuitous discoveries. The first was that the Natural Resource Conservation Service was offering grants to landowners agreeing to convert their fescue fields to warm season grasses and wildflowers. The program was aimed at restoring habitat for the aforementioned quail. Acceptance of the grant required that recipients plant at least two native warm season grasses and five native wildflower species, and establish and maintain the habitat for a period of five years. The going rate was \$350 for each acre converted.

The second discovery was Chesapeake Wildlife

Heritage, an organization that would do all the work, from the two herbicide sprayings to drilling the seed into the ground - and including the seed -for, you guessed it - \$350 an acre.

The meadow was planted in May of 2013. I chose to add more wildflowers to the mix for a total of twelve native species, as well as the two native grasses: Little Bluestem and Side Oaks Gramma.

I was surprised to find that many plants bloomed their first summer: partridge pea, coreopsis, gaillardia, echinacea, black-eyed Susan, New England as-

ter and Maximilian sunflower all had a showing in their first year. To be sure, there were many annual weeds and grasses, which theoretically will decline as the native plants grow and thrive. But the variety of structures and shapes was an interesting contrast to the fescue monoculture I was accustomed to. My perception of the field changed with the field itself - what I once would have called scruffy or messy now look interesting and rich.

As the winter moves on (and on!), I found the appearance of the field more and more fascinating. Walking after abundant snows, my dog and I flushed dozens and dozens of juncos and sparrows - common species, to be sure - but never so numerous in the past. And it was easy to see why; many pockets of relatively dry ground under the grasses bending with snow afforded a welcome refuge not available in the past.



The spring of 2014 marks the end of the first complete annual post-conversion cycle. A year ago, I thought I would have to grin and bear the appearance of a messy meadow for an entire year; annual weeds and bare ground, followed by scruffy standing dead weeds and grasses. Instead, I've thoroughly enjoyed watching

the ever-changing shapes, colors, and movements of the meadow. At this writing, I can see small coreopsis and echinacea plants peeping through the yellowed winter scrub. I am filled with anticipation of what is to come - will all the

species we planted survive? Will I notice more and different birds and animals? (I've already had wood-



cocks this spring, a new and thrilling experience for me.) After a year which I expected to showcase a rather unsightly mess and instead found beauty and interest, I am certain that whatever shapes, colors,

and creatures appear, this was a good decision.

VOICES of the LAND



Photographer Patricia Temples documented Fairview Farm, the Lamb dairy farm in Greene County. 10 photographs and a DVD are available. For a \$200.00 donation, you will receive a free membership to BRFC and a print of your choice. To order go to: blueridgefoothill-conservancy.org

The program can be viewed at: DuCard Vineyards June 8, 2014, and Kilaurwen Winery June 13, 2014. Also at U S Farm Report/AG Web: http://www.agweb.com/article/tour_lamb_family_dairy_farm_in_virginias_greene_county_NAA_Nate_Birt

Virginia Bluebirds



Photo by Patricia Temples

Roger Temples provides this full installation with pole, baffle around it, and western red cedar box with a Noel guard over the opening which prevents critters from getting on top of the box and reaching in the hole, all for \$68.50.

Contact him at: Virginia Bluebird Society's website: www.virginiabluebirds.org
Or, email him at rogertemples@gmail.com.

Tucker Hill Scholarship Recipients for 2014 Announced

For our 5th year presenting scholarships for graduating seniors to further their education, Lauren Housel and Devan Myers from William Monroe High School were selected to receive scholarships. We wish to congratulate both these ladies as they begin the next step in their academic careers.



(l-r) Lauren Housel, Devan Myers, Beth Laine, William Monroe art teacher who has just been named Educator of the Year in Greene County, and Trish Crowe, BRFC-President.

Land Legacies

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



Photograph by Patricia Temples

“Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.” by Vince Lombardi

Donate to Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy (BRFC)

Chartered in 1998, BRFC is a private, non-profit land trust. Our mission is to conserve, through voluntary land protection, the agricultural, scenic, natural, historic and recreational resources of Greene and Madison counties.

Help us to continue our mission by becoming a partner within our organization by submitting your tax deductible donation.

We need *your* support!

BY MAIL: BRFC-PO Box 116-Hood, VA 22723
ONLINE: www.blueridgefoothillsconservancy.org

**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