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Shenandoah Valley Conservancy Celebrates Award-Winning Achievements and Significant Land Conservation

Land Trust Looks Forward to Another Banner Year during its 35th Anniversary

HARRISONBURG, VA (January 27, 2025) – Shenandoah Valley Conservancy, formerly Valley Conservation Council, today reports significant achievements in its land protection efforts as well as national land trust re-accreditation. The non-profit organization, which advances conservation priorities in the Shenandoah Valley region, worked to permanently protect 1,700 acres of land in 2024 with 40 new conservation projects already in progress as it enters its 35th year of operation.

Late in 2024, the Conservancy was re-accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. The Commission makes the award to land trusts meeting 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, including demonstrated fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions and lasting stewardship of the lands they conserve.

“We are proud to be recognized once again for the high standards we maintain for conservation as we celebrate 35 years of land protection,” says the Conservancy’s Board Chairman Steuart Thomas. “On the heels of a very successful year of land protection, we are confident in our ability to rise to the challenge of continuing to protect the Valley as it rises in global conservation significance. We are grateful for our many supporters who trust us as stewards of the Valley.”

The Conservancy not only meets high standards for conservation practices, but ranks among the most fruitful land trusts of its size in Virginia. According to state conservation easement data, the Conservancy ranked as the fifth most productive land trust in Virginia of the 40 operating within the Commonwealth.

Local Impact on Land Conservation

In partnership with local landowners, the Conservancy permanently protected 1,700 acres in 2024, securing 11 conservation easements in seven counties in the Shenandoah Valley and adjacent Alleghany Highlands across Allegheny, Highland, Rockbridge, Augusta, Rockingham, Page and Shenandoah Counties.

These properties encompass significant wildlife habitat, productive farms and working forests, including:

- 159 acres on the top of Poorhouse Mountain visible from Lexington,
- Devil’s Backbone, the iconic ridge in the Blue Grass Valley near Monterey, and
- Almost one mile along the Jackson River and its namesake public trail.

The Conservancy also collaborated with the Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley and the City of Harrisonburg to develop a public trail around Silver Lake, a 10-acre spring-fed lake near Dayton.

It protected an additional 880 acres in the Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor between Staunton and Lexington, where residents have conserved more than 30,000 acres of working farms, forests and historic sites. Three additional properties were conserved in the Page Valley that bolster a 1,700-acre wildlife corridor of privately conserved lands connecting Shenandoah National Park with George Washington and Jefferson National Forests.

The Conservancy has 40 additional easements already in progress for 2025 and anticipates protecting hundreds more acres. In fact, the organization received a major contribution to create an additional land protection staff position in 2025 to keep up with the growing demand for conservation.

Conservation of Local and Global Significance

“By teaming up with landowners, we’re having a significant impact on landscapes all over the Shenandoah Valley. People throughout the region have now privately conserved more than 220,000 acres – an area larger than Shenandoah National Park – with more than 845 miles of rivers and streams,” says Peter Hujik, Executive Director. “While local land protection efforts have a significant impact on our viewsheds, biodiversity, agriculture and way of life here locally, their conservation significance on a broader, national scale should not be overlooked.”

Located at the intersection of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and the Appalachian Mountains, the Shenandoah Valley is ranked as one of the most important regions to protect worldwide – for both people and wildlife – because of the resilient nature of the landscape. With shifting patterns in weather and precipitation, the Shenandoah Valley remains a viable agricultural landscape, unlike many areas in the West and around the world. Plants and animals, many considered rare and only found in this region, are already responding to the changing conditions by moving 11 miles north along the Appalachians and 36 feet in elevation every decade.

“We have important work ahead of us,” adds Hujik. “We are excited to see our momentum continue to grow and take solace in the fact it will enable us to conserve the Shenandoah Valley at a truly meaningful scale.”

To learn more, visit shenandoah.org. To see the Conservancy’s conservation efforts in action, regularly visit shenandoah.org/events for upcoming spring outings at places it has conserved and in landscapes where it is working, including many places not regularly open to the public.

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About Shenandoah Valley Conservancy

Shenandoah Valley Conservancy, formerly Valley Conservation Council, is a non-profit, nationally accredited land trust dedicated to advancing conservation priorities in the Shenandoah Valley and adjacent Alleghany Highlands by strategically protecting farms, forests, and waterways. The Conservancy is focused on protecting the natural landscapes of its service area with strategic and innovative approaches that consider the intrinsic connection between our land and water, along with the plants, animals and people they sustain.

The Conservancy’s service region includes 11 counties: Frederick, Warren, Shenandoah, Page, Rockingham, Augusta, Highland, Bath, Rockbridge, Alleghany, and Botetourt. Since our founding in 1990, our mission to protect the natural landscapes and agricultural legacy of our region has never wavered. The Conservancy has secured nearly 89 easements and protected over 10,850 acres throughout the Valley. Landowners who are interested in learning more about protecting their land with conservation easements may contact Conservancy staff at info@shenandoah.org.

The Conservancy is a community-based organization that relies on the generosity of its members to support its Valley-wide land protection and outreach efforts. For more information or to donate, visit shenandoah.org.