

# Field Notes

## Conservation Spotlight

### A River Runs Through It

Our land and water are inextricably linked – our fisheries in the Chesapeake Bay are impacted by the upstream management of our farmers and landowners here at home. Flowing through the scenic and ecologically significant Page Valley, the South Fork of the Shenandoah River eventually runs into the Potomac River and ultimately to the Bay. Last year, we received a landmark gift – the Valley Green Fund – to assist landowners in this area of the upper Shenandoah Valley who wish to conserve their land.

Thanks to the Fund and the donors who established it, a growing number of landowners are engaged in our conservation efforts, including Derek Goebel who completed a conservation easement along the South Fork of the Shenandoah in June. Perched upon a biologically significant cave system, Derek's property northeast of Luray:

- conserves almost 1,000 feet of the South Fork with a 100-foot wide buffer;
- maintains forest cover, 25% of which are considered high to outstanding value, from conversion to other land uses; and
- protects prime and statewide important soils that cover over 85% of the property.



After completing his easement, Derek expressed gratitude to Taylor Evans, Director of Conservation, for helping protect the property. "I believe that we never really own a piece of land, but rather are only the temporary guardians of it while it is in our possession," he said. "It is our responsibility to preserve it, to the best of our abilities, for future generations."

One of the many other success stories throughout the Shenandoah Valley centers around Page Valley, where a group of neighbors protected their private properties, one-by-one, thereby establishing a secure 1,700-acre wildlife corridor between Shenandoah National Park and the George Washington National Forest across the South Fork. Thanks to Derek and landowners following in his footsteps, more of this wonderful landscape is secured.

We expect to more than double the number of properties protected in the Page Valley in 2024 compared to 2023.



SHENANDOAH VALLEY  
CONSERVANCY

## Nature in Design

We have received abundant support for our name change and reimagined brand. The new logo artfully reflects the sense of place evoked by the Shenandoah Valley – delineated by the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains, free flowing rivers and streams, and working farms and forests. The design and its bold and distinctive colors intuitively identify our conservation priorities with verve.



**Our mountains** are home to much of the biological diversity in the region, including many endemic species – plants and animals only found here.



**Our rivers + streams** provide drinking water to communities and aquatic habitat for Brook trout, American eel, and freshwater mussels, connecting us to the Chesapeake Bay.



**Our working farms** and agricultural legacy are gold, literally and figuratively. The Valley is the agricultural heart of Virginia, and with our work will remain as such for generations to come.



**Our forests** and verdant green open spaces support outdoor recreation, hunting, and habitat – all important for the economic vigor and resilience of our small towns and rural communities.

*The team at Wallace360 has gone the extra mile to support this branding effort with generous pro bono contributions. They are emblematic of the openhanded people, businesses, and organizations – like you – we have the honor to work with in advancing our ambitious landscape-scale conservation mission.*

## The Nature of Conservation



### Alder Flycatcher

The Alder flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*) is a small migratory bird found from the Appalachian Mountains to Alaska in summer. They migrate south in the fall to South America, specifically Colombia, Brazil, and even parts of Bolivia. In spring and summer, these birds can be found in the Alleghany Highlands of Virginia. The Alder flycatcher eats insects in bogs and beaver ponds. It looks like the Willow flycatcher, so much so that they were not considered two distinct species until 1973. Key identifying features: Alder flycatcher has a slightly rounder head and a different song than the Willow flycatcher.

# What's at Stake?

## Local Farming and Our Food Supply

Every five years the United States Census of Agriculture compiles data about the state of agriculture in Virginia and around the country, including the most recent version for 2022 released February 13, 2024.

According to this report, Virginia lost more farmland in the most recent five-year reporting period than it did in the previous 15 years – a startling loss. In other words, more than 488,000 acres of productive farmland in Virginia were converted to another land use.

Unfortunately, the loss of farmland was significant in the Shenandoah Valley, home of four of the top-five agricultural producing counties in the Commonwealth. According to Census reports, Rockingham and Augusta Counties, the top-two agricultural producing counties in Virginia, have collectively lost almost 85,000 acres of farmland since 1978. Nearly 30% of farmland loss in Virginia occurred in the Shenandoah Valley.

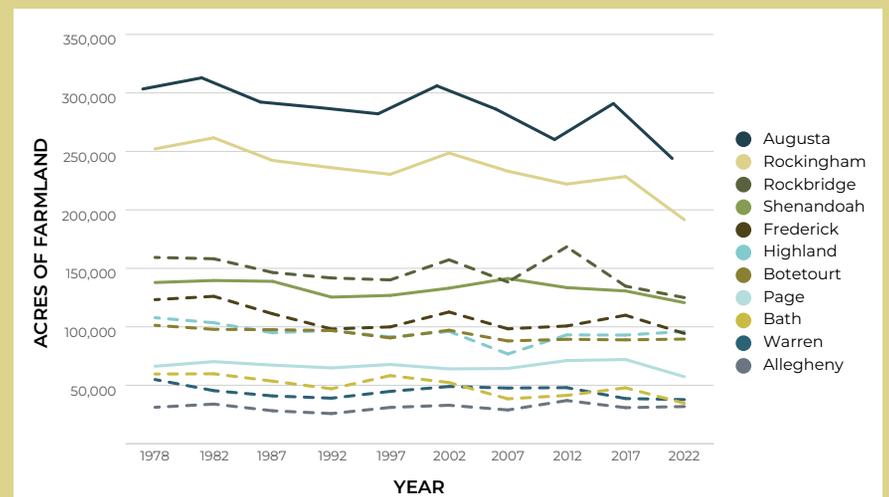
Agriculture provides more than 381,800 jobs in the Commonwealth and contributes \$82.3 billion in annual economic impact. According to a 2021 report from the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, agriculture and forestry contribute 9.3% of the state gross domestic product and represent 9.4% of the total state employment. "Approximately one of every 11 jobs in Virginia can be tied to its agriculture and forest industries," it states. The mounting loss of working lands is hurting rural communities, families, and jobs.

A 2021 report from The Nature Conservancy identifies the importance of conserving agricultural lands in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in particular because of the resilient nature of the region, especially in the face of changing weather patterns. They highlight the unique character of the Chesapeake Bay foodscape in that it encompasses a terrestrial component, including working farms throughout the Shenandoah Valley, as well as a

marine component, where seafood is harvested.

With threats intensifying and the importance of protecting farmland growing, we need your help more than ever. Fortunately, we are well positioned to address this threat with your support. Shenandoah Valley Conservancy and Virginia Outdoors Foundation have long been collaborating with farmers in the Middlebrook – Brownsburg Corridor between Staunton and Lexington to conserve this iconic and productive agricultural landscape in Augusta County. Here more than 31,000 acres of land is conserved, the largest area of privately protected land in the Shenandoah Valley. With your generous support, we can stem the loss by accelerating local farmland protection efforts.

### Loss of Farmland



# The Evolution of Conservation in the Shenandoah Valley

To more strongly align our identity with our important work, we made the strategic decision to change our organization's name to Shenandoah Valley Conservancy. The organization has evolved significantly since its founding in 1990, as have local conservation efforts throughout the Shenandoah Valley, and we see this change as a positive step to increase conservation throughout the region.

Thanks to the consistent support of the community, we have an almost 35-year legacy of conservation. When we were founded in 1990, we advanced conservation in a variety of ways. We addressed land use planning issues, promoted smart growth, and conserved land with conservation easements. Early on, we facilitated land protection among landowners and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and, over time, we began holding conservation easements ourselves.

Between 2017 and 2019, several county-based conservation organizations focusing on land use planning and smart growth merged to form the Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley. During this time as conservation efforts evolved, we too evolved and redefined our role in the conservation landscape by shifting our focus to directly protecting land. We have since partnered with landowners to protect the Valley's lands and waters with conservation easements. In 2019, we became a nationally accredited land trust.

This growth enabled us to add another stewardship specialist to our team and form productive relationships with conservation groups like Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, and the many organizations involved in the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative.

After careful consideration and heartfelt conversations over the past year, we have started doing business as Shenandoah Valley Conservancy. The new name:

- **Clarifies our geographic identity** and provides solid footing for additional support from all who recognize the Valley's critical importance;
- **Engages a new dialogue** around our increasingly innovative landscape conservation efforts and legacy of conservation; and
- **Connects us with our roots** by anchoring us in place and better reflecting our identity as a nationally accredited land trust.

Thanks to dedicated sources of funding, including special grant funding from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and Virginia United Land Trusts, and a very generous pro-bono contribution from marketing agency Wallace360, we developed fresh branding and enhanced communications, including a new website: [Shenandoah.org](https://www.shenandoah.org).

We are thrilled with the momentum conservation work has gained across the region, thanks in no small part to the exceptional, nationally recognized conservation organizations and partnerships throughout the Shenandoah Valley. We share our heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved, especially to you, and the role you play.





SHENANDOAH VALLEY  
CONSERVANCY

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