



SHENANDOAH VALLEY
CONSERVANCY

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CONTACT:

Kathryn Piasta
276-732-5844

kathryn@wallace360.com

Valley Conservation Council Changes Name to Shenandoah Valley Conservancy

*Organization Advances Landscape Conservation Efforts across a
Region of Growing Conservation Significance*

STAUNTON, VA (September 5, 2024) – Valley Conservation Council today announced that it has changed its name to Shenandoah Valley Conservancy. The change better reflects the organization’s evolving identity as the only nationally accredited land trust exclusively working to protect the lands and waters of the Shenandoah Valley region – an area growing in conservation significance regionally, nationally and even globally.

Bolstered by recent unprecedented funding and grants, the Conservancy is making significant strides at carrying out its mission of land protection on a meaningful scale across the Valley. The name change reflects a deeper strategic realignment within the organization anchoring it in place and providing solid footing for additional support from all who recognize the Valley’s critical importance.

The organization is beginning to operate as Shenandoah Valley Conservancy effective immediately.

“The Valley’s conservation landscape has evolved significantly since our founding nearly 35 years ago. The Conservancy is also evolving and sharpening our focus on the most vulnerable lands and waters in the region,” says Executive Director Peter Hujik. “The threats are real and the stakes are high, but we are thrilled with the strong momentum conservation work has gained across the region as more begin to recognize the significance of this place we all cherish. We are passionate about our work and grateful to our donors and partners who make it possible for us to advance our ambitious and critical landscape conservation mission. We see that momentum only continuing to increase.”

Growing Significance of the Region

The Valley’s conservation value is growing in regional, national and even global significance. Located at the intersection of the Appalachian Mountains and Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Valley falls within an area of world-wide significance, encompassing:

- A rich matrix of working farms and forests, including several of the top producing agricultural areas in Virginia, and
- A globally significant biodiversity hotspot.

With changing weather patterns, preserving prime soils and clean water in resilient landscapes like the Shenandoah Valley is now more important than ever.

In fact, national conservation organization The Nature Conservancy was recently awarded \$47.2 million for Virginia alone as part of a historic multi-state coalition grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The funds will be used to conserve forests and improve forest management across the Central Appalachians and Southeastern Virginia via partnership with organizations operating in the region, further underscoring the critical role the area plays in mitigating climate change.

Recent Strides in Land Protection

Shenandoah Valley Conservancy has already secured five easements and permanently protected almost 1,000 acres of additional land and more than two miles of waterways since the start of the year. This brings the total acreage of privately protected lands in the Valley to over 220,000 acres with over 40 additional easements in progress, seven of which the organization hopes to close by the end of the year. Recent easement highlights include:

- Last month, landowners partnered with Shenandoah Valley Conservancy to protect an extensive section of Devil's Backbone, the iconic ridge in the Allegheny Highlands in Highland County, with a conservation easement. The area includes several rare habitats that support unique plants and animals, such as Timber Rattlesnakes and Rusty Patched Bumble Bees.
- In June, the Conservancy secured an easement on another property along the South Fork of the Shenandoah River in the Page Valley northeast of Luray in Page County. The easement protects almost 1,000 feet of the river in a landscape where landowners have already protected over 1,700 acres of private land that serves as a wildlife corridor connecting Shenandoah National Park with Washington National Forest.
- Finally, the Conservancy also secured an easement that permanently protects Poorhouse Mountain in Rockbridge County from development. The mountain rises 1,600 feet above the Valley floor and Maury River below and is clearly visible from the City of Lexington, House Mountain, and Hogback Mountain – contributing to the iconic scenery of Rockbridge County. This is the third easement completed this year in the rich agricultural landscape running through Staunton and Lexington where landowners banded together to conserve more than 30,000 acres over several decades.

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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 eleven 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. Landowners have permanently conserved over 220,000 acres of private land and over 800 miles of rivers and streams throughout the Shenandoah Valley and Allegheny Highlands in collaboration with land trusts. Landowners who are interested in learning more about protecting their land with conservation easements may contact staff at easements@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.