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Valley Conservation Council Announces Peter Hujik as New Executive Director
*Organization Anticipates a Strong Year Ahead for Conservation Bolstered by
Record-Breaking Funding and Extensive Land Protection in 2023*

STAUNTON, VA (January 23, 2024) – Valley Conservation Council (VCC) today announced Peter Hujik as its new Executive Director. In the role, he will lead the organization’s efforts to protect the significant natural and cultural landscapes of the greater Shenandoah Valley region and to preserve the life-enriching benefits its lands and waters provide. The organization looks forward to Hujik’s leadership in what it anticipates being one of its strongest years on record.

Hujik brings with him the regional conservation leadership experience and vision needed to expand the cutting-edge conservation efforts VCC has facilitated throughout the Shenandoah Valley in recent years. He will put his passion for landscape-scale conservation, ecological restoration, and community development to work for the 11 counties VCC serves.

“We couldn’t be more thrilled to have Peter at the helm. He brings considerable experience and a wealth of knowledge to the role that will be critical in helping further our mission,” says VCC Board Chairman Steuart Thomas. “I believe our recent successes allowed us to attract someone as experienced as Peter to our team to continue to build upon the momentum we have established with our land protection work. We’re eager to see where he will take it.”

Building on a Banner Year

In partnership with local landowners, VCC secured nine conservation easements last year, permanently protecting 614 acres of productive working farmland and forests – including the headwater areas of Tinker Creek, Big Run, and Manassas Run, as well as two rare cave systems – across Botetourt, Augusta, Rockingham, Page, Rockingham, Warren, Shenandoah, and Frederick counties. Building on the success of 2023, the organization has 20 additional easements already in progress for 2024.

VCC was also awarded several first-time and very significant gifts and grant awards in 2023. The funding will allow it to carry out its mission at a meaningful scale throughout the Valley this year and in the years to come. Highlights include:

- A landmark gift of \$1 million from a visionary donor to protect highly threatened land in the northern part of the Valley. As a result of the donation, VCC launched the “Valley Green Fund,” a new program to support protection of large parcels of land with high agricultural and ecological conservation value across targeted areas in the northern Shenandoah Valley.
- VCC also received a nearly \$750,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation that will fund its “Permanently Protecting Wildlife Corridors in the Shenandoah Valley” grant program.

The program will establish permanent land protection for wildlife movement between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains. This funding also enabled VCC to increase its land protection capacity with another staff position to implement this unprecedented award.

- Finally, VCC also received its first farmland protection grant for over \$215,000 from the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service to purchase a conservation easement on a working farm in Rockingham County.

“VCC has made tremendous strides in protecting and conserving land and waterways in the Shenandoah Valley, and it is poised to make even greater ones in the coming years,” says VCC Executive Director Peter Hujik. “I am honored to have the privilege of helping the organization fulfill its mission of protecting this exceptional landscape. You can feel the momentum around conservation in the Valley, and I know it will only continue to grow.”

Prior to joining VCC, Hujik led farmland protection efforts on the other side of the Blue Ridge as Senior Field Representative for the Piedmont Environmental Council. He has also led land protection efforts in the Susquehanna Basin with Otsego Land Trust in Upstate New York. Hujik began his conservation career with The Nature Conservancy in the Lassen Foothills of northern California, where he restored streamside forests and managed native grasslands with prescribed fire.

Hujik developed his love for the land in the Northwoods of Wisconsin, where he spent his summers as a child. Today he enjoys exploring the Valley with his wife and kids, restoring old houses, and getting outdoors.

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About Valley Conservation Council

Valley Conservation Council is a non-profit, nationally accredited land trust that protects the lands and waters of the greater Shenandoah Valley region so they can continue to enrich the lives of its residents and visitors for generations – whether it be for exploring its expansive forests, fishing its picturesque waterways, farming its productive soils, or simply basking in the majesty of its spectacular open spaces.

An accredited land trust since 2019, VCC has secured nearly 80 easements and protected over 9,100 acres throughout the Valley. Landowners who are interested in learning more about protecting their land with conservation easements may contact VCC staff at easements@valleyconservation.org.

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