



Protecting America's Legendary Shenandoah Valley

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Valley Conservation Council Celebrates Land Protection Successes and Looks Forward to Record-Breaking New Year

Unprecedented Resources and Funding Sets Stage for More Land Conservation in 2023

STAUNTON, VA (January 11, 2023) – Valley Conservation Council (VCC) today announced the results of its land protection efforts in 2022. In partnership with local landowners, VCC secured 16 conservation easements, thus permanently protecting 1,909 acres of farm and forestland and nearly 10 miles of waterways across seven counties.

Land now protected includes large tracts of agricultural farmland in the upper Valley and vibrant forestland scattered throughout much of the region. Easements on these properties help VCC achieve its overall mission to protect the natural and cultural resources of the greater Shenandoah Valley region.

As a non-profit accredited land trust, VCC holds easements donated by local landowners, ensuring that the land is maintained and protected in perpetuity according to the terms of the easement. Terms typically guard against future subdivision and development while the landowner retains full ownership, management, use, and enjoyment of their property with the comfort of knowing his or her land will remain protected for generations to come.

"I am thrilled by what we were able to accomplish for land protection in the Shenandoah Valley last year," says Adam Schellhammer, executive director. "Each acre put under easement is an acre where we can now protect critical habitat, invaluable agricultural lands, and unparalleled scenic beauty. And in protecting the land, we're able to help ensure responsible land management and promote best practices, which in turn preserves and supports the Valley's vibrant agricultural communities and contributes to regionally significant resiliency efforts."

Schellhammer, who joined VCC at the start of 2022, predicts a banner year for land conservation in the Valley in 2023. Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and other organizations will have unprecedented grant funding and other resources available for landowners to lessen the financial burden of protecting land through easements and to support on-farm landscape restoration and implementation of best practices. VCC can help landowners navigate these available resources in addition to continuing its efforts to advocate for and facilitate conservation easements.

"While benefits to donating an easement are enormous, the legal and financial process to protect land with an easement can be costly and is a barrier to many who might otherwise wish to embark on the process," says Schellhammer. "Thanks to the influx of grant funding, 2023 will hopefully be a year where some of that financial burden is lessened and more landowners – whether they own a small homestead or operate a 500-acre farm – can protect their land in perpetuity."

VCC publishes a Landowners' Guide to help explain the process of donating a conservation easement. Reach out to info@valleyconservation.org to request a copy.

About Valley Conservation Council

Valley Conservation Council is a non-profit accredited land trust that preserves and 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 hiking in its abundant forests, fishing in its picturesque rivers, farming in its productive soils or simply basking in the majesty of its spectacular open spaces. Since becoming an accredited land trust, VCC has secured 69 easements and protected over 8,500 acres throughout the Valley.

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