



VALLEY
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL

Above: Tanner's Ridge in Page County.

Protecting Land and Expanding the Shenandoah National Park in Page Valley

WHAT IS THE SHINIEST JEWEL in the crown of conserved land that rings the Shenandoah Valley? Shenandoah National Park. That's where VCC recently aimed its conservation expertise to help bring protection to almost 1,000 acres of mountain land adjacent to the Park that will eventually become part of its borders.

Throughout late 2020, Valley Conservation Council (VCC) assisted the Shenandoah National Park Trust (SNPT) in the acquisition of land on Tanner's Ridge in Page County in a rare project that will expand the Park into mountain land it currently borders.

"We need a land trust," SNPT said on a call last summer. "Can you help us?" So that is exactly what we did. VCC assisted SNPT through the process of acquiring three properties totaling 967 acres.

The land acquired will eventually be conveyed to the Shenandoah National Park to provide public access for all to enjoy breathtaking views, strenuous hikes, and pure clean water. In the meantime, VCC has also accepted a conservation easement on the property and with it has

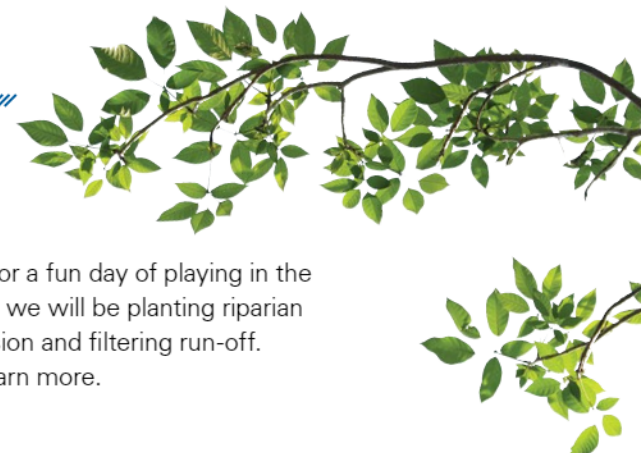
taken on the responsibility for ensuring the land remains intact and unchanged until it is transferred to the care of the National Park Service.

By protecting this land, we are protecting the headwaters of Naked Creek, ensuring pristine water quality in the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. The waters of Naked Creek flow from this newly protected mountain land into Hawksbill Creek, then to the South Fork of the Shenandoah River, running through Page and Warren counties to join the main stem of the Shenandoah at Front Royal and on to the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. Along the way, these streams and the groundwater that connects them provide drinking water to millions of people, from the Town of Luray all the way to the DC metro area.

We are so fortunate to have played a part in protecting such a beautiful and important property, expanding our beloved Shenandoah National Park for the wider public to enjoy. This is the work, the dedication, and support our members make possible. We are overjoyed to share this win with you.

April Tree Planting

JOIN US AT JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY ON APRIL 7 AT 5:30 pm for a fun day of playing in the dirt and making a difference. In partnership with Friends of the Middle River we will be planting riparian buffer trees, which will directly protect clean, clear water by preventing erosion and filtering run-off. Call us at 540-886-3541 or email us at info@valleyconservation.org to learn more.



One Acre at a Time: 2021 Land Preservation Strategic Priorities

2020 WAS A BIT OF A CHALLENGE, but it was also a year of substantial growth for Valley Conservation Council (VCC) fueling our ability to preserve and protect the land and water of the greater Shenandoah Valley region.

In 2020, we:

- protected 3,418 acres of land under conservation easement,
- protected 13.5 miles of waterways,
- supported landowners in the ongoing stewardship of their property, and
- significantly increased our organizational capacity, especially with the addition of full-time Operations Director Maya Hawthorn Gunderson.

We are off to a good start in 2021 too. With support from our members, as well as the Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley and Appalachian Trail Conference, we brought on a second Land Protection Specialist, Taylor Evans, who is finishing a master's degree in conservation biology at JMU this spring. This brings our staff to 4.5 fulltime equivalents, about double VCC's historic staff levels.

In the Shenandoah River watershed Evans will work with our partners in the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative to protect land and water. We have high hopes for his ability to help us expand our easement work across the Valley but especially in three "Priority Places."

These initial Priority Places are areas where VCC has focused in the past. They all correspond to some extent with Virginia Outdoors Foundation Special Project Areas (SPAs).

We are also exploring other areas ripe for new and renewed protection efforts. Focusing on these existing areas while developing new partnerships will make our efforts to conserve land and water in the Valley most effective.

This year we intend to begin to tackle three of these geographies with coordinated landowner outreach and education, and by supporting the good work of our partner organizations.

While our focus is on these three areas, we are always open to working with landowners throughout our whole service region interested in pursuing an easement. This year we will also be creating educational opportunities at Sweet Farm in Highland County and engaging the community in 11 hikes over 11 months in the 11 counties we service. Find out more about these efforts in this newsletter and future updates.

Our goals for 2021 are ambitious, but with the help of our engaged membership and our growing staff, we know we can make meaningful progress this year in our mission to protect the lands and waters of the greater Shenandoah Valley region. Thank you to all our members and supporters for your help over VCC's 30-year history. Stay tuned for a truly great 2021.

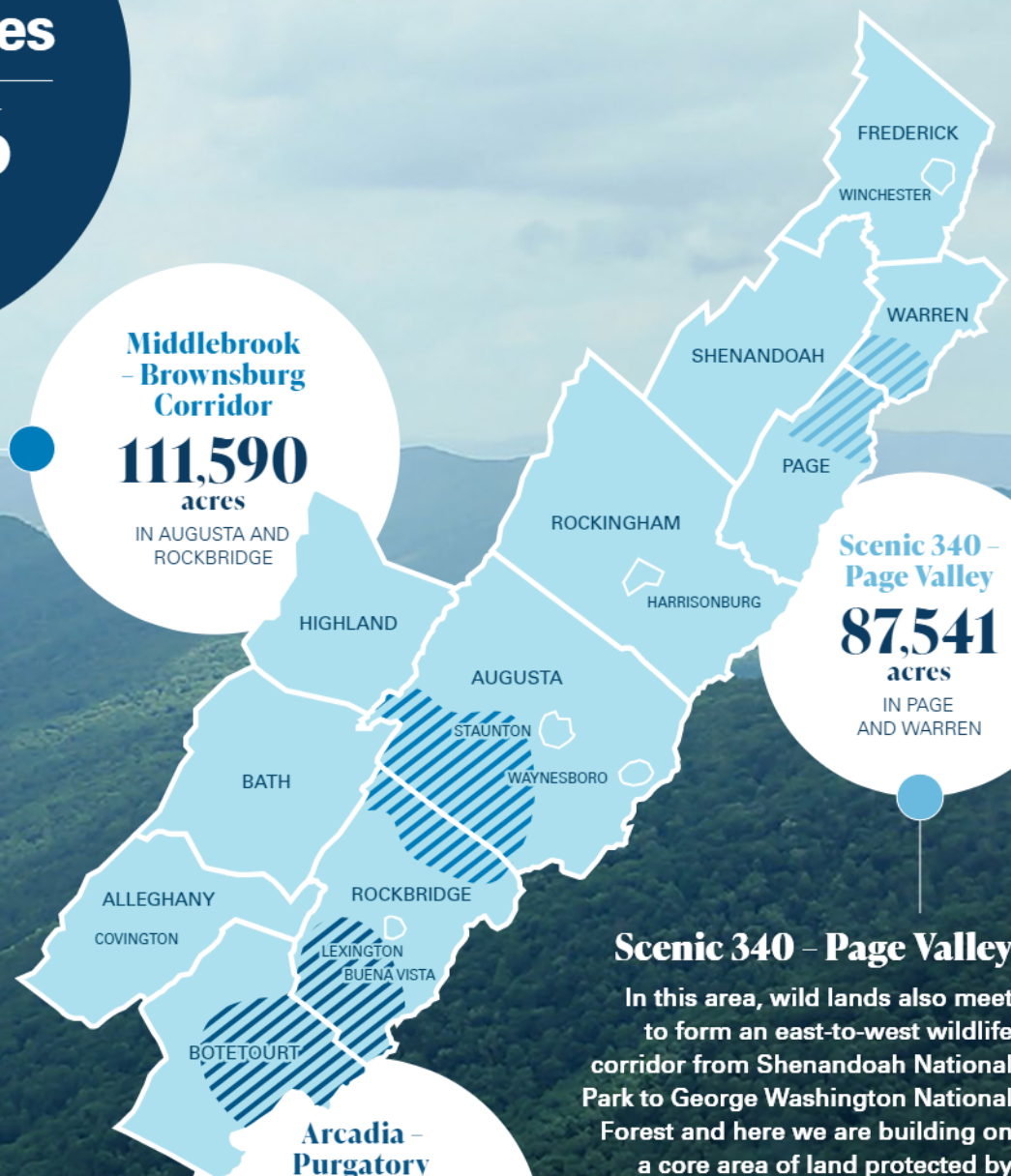
In Conservation,



John D. Hutchinson V

Priority Places

467,956 total acres



Middlebrook – Brownsburg Corridor

111,590 acres

IN AUGUSTA AND ROCKBRIDGE

Middlebrook – Brownsburg Corridor

VCC has arguably had its greatest success in this region and we have already begun project planning for more. In 1997, VCC released a study of the corridor featuring its natural and cultural resources and conservation options available to landowners – *The Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor: A Survey of Cultural and Natural Resources* – and helped assemble the largest concentration of protected private land in the Commonwealth west of the Blue Ridge. Later this year, we will re-release the report with updates regarding all the land and resources protected in the corridor and will hold events to bring additional landowners into the fold this spring.

Scenic 340 – Page Valley

87,541 acres

IN PAGE AND WARREN

Scenic 340 – Page Valley

In this area, wild lands also meet to form an east-to-west wildlife corridor from Shenandoah National Park to George Washington National Forest and here we are building on a core area of land protected by the Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley. Neighbors there have joined together with VCC, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and other partners to protect about 3,500 acres of land along the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. This work is of particular importance because the northern part of our service region is experiencing increased pressure from the urban sprawl that expands out of the DC metro area. By increasing the amount of conserved lands, we aim to ensure that the future identity of this place is shaped with care and intention.

Arcadia – Purgatory Mountain

178,825 acres

IN BOTETOURT AND ROCKBRIDGE

Arcadia – Purgatory Mountain

This is another area on which VCC has focused in the past with our partners at the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC). It is one of the few places where large concentrations of public wild lands meet to form an east-to-west wildlife corridor, so essential in these times of climate change. We have already begun collaborating with RACC on plans for targeted outreach to landowners in this unique and beautiful region to expand the wildlife corridor and protect the identity of Arcadia as a truly special place.

Partnering to Protect the Upper James River Watershed:

Common Goals for Common Good

When you think of VCC, you probably think of land conservation. You may not realize how closely land conservation is linked to the water network that is a source of drinking water, fisheries, wildlife health, and outdoor recreation. A big part of conserving land is protecting the water that flows through it. A task this tall requires the collective effort of various groups working together.

In 2010, the EPA established the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), which mandates limits on common pollutants that enter the bay and requires Virginia to deliver about 70,000 acres of riparian buffers by 2025. Riparian buffers are vegetated areas adjacent to streams and waterways that help stabilize stream and riverbanks, reduce the impacts of flooding, filter pollutants from runoff and provide wildlife habitat. Riparian buffers in the Shenandoah Valley have an important positive impact on the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

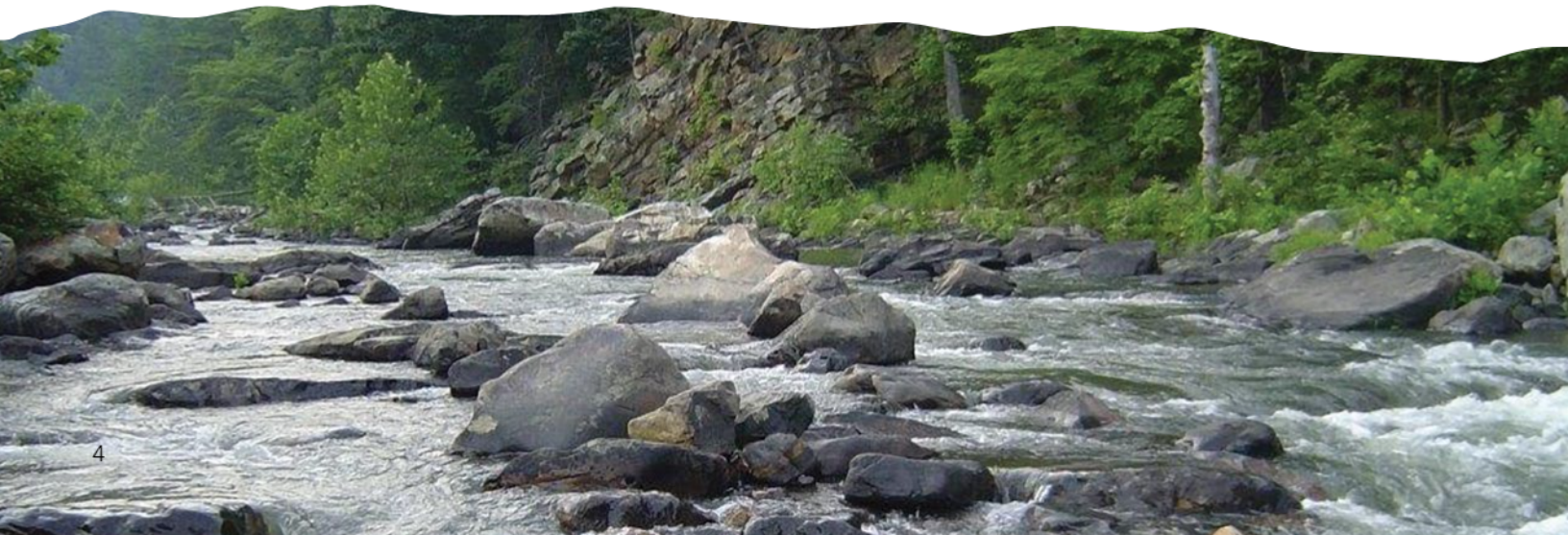
Where does VCC come in?

VCC helps educate landowners and the public about these critical buffers and helps landowners put riparian easements in place that protect streams, rivers, and their

floodplains. But this is just one piece of the puzzle in maintaining the health of our waterways.

We also partner with a large number of organizations, each with their own unique roles (and acronyms). We work with the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) river roundtables, the Upper & Middle James Riparian Consortium, and the Chesapeake Conservancy to educate landowners about protecting the land that borders water. We also work with the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOP) and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) who are focusing on land protection and those with a focus on water, like Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), James River Association (JRA), Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), Friends of the Rivers of Virginia (FORVA), Friends of the Middle River (FOMR) and other river-focused "friends" groups.

If you wish to be part of these efforts, contact Genevieve Goss, VCC's Upper James Program Director, at genevieve@valleyconservation.org. If you are a landowner with streams and rivers on your land and want to learn more about easements, contact us at info@valleyconservation.org or 540-886-3541.



A Treasured Gift for Education & Outreach

VCC's mission is to protect the natural and cultural resources of the greater Shenandoah Valley region through land conservation, education and experiences. A beautiful 400-acre farm set in the forested hills of Highland County was generously donated by John Sweet to VCC in 2018. Our goal is to establish the farm as a VCC center for education, research and outreach. The VCC board recently committed to form an Education Committee which will examine opportunities that the Sweet Farm provides for future educational collaborations, both in higher education science and environmental outreach to elementary and middle school students. In an ongoing effort, VCC recently partnered with JMU student David Weisenbeck to catalog amphibians and other wildlife there.

John recently tied the knot with Martha Teeter in an outdoor ceremony at the farm in the fall. Join us in sending our gratitude along with warm wishes and congratulations to our friends John and Martha.

Stay tuned for more exciting developments from this amazing farm!



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MEET OUR SPONSOR:

SKTWorks

“Our goal is to make the work of individuals and organizations seeking to protect and preserve Virginia’s open land as efficient and effective as possible.”



Ways to Get Involved

Become a member!

Donating at the \$50 level or above gets you access to our newsletter, annual meeting, and first knowledge about our events. Find out more at valleyconservation.org/become-a-member.

Commit to a monthly donation!

This is an easy way to support VCC. When you visit valleyconservation.org/donate-online, you'll see an option to make your payment recurring on a monthly basis. Set it up, and never think about it again. Meanwhile, your support becomes something that we can count on, letting us do our conservation work with confidence. Cancel anytime with no fuss by emailing info@valleyconservation.org.

Donate an easement!

Own property? Email us at info@valleyconservation.org to start a conversation that will place lasting protections on the land and water under your care.



Mark Your Calendars and Get Ready to Give!

VCC is excited to be participating in The Community Foundation of Harrisonburg-Rockingham County's Great Community Give, a day of community giving on April 21 starting at 6:30 am. Visit greatcommunitygive.org and make a donation to us and/or to any of the great participating nonprofit organizations. All giving will end at 8:00pm on April 21.

11 Counties

11 Hikes

11 Months

Come hike with us!

This year, on the 4th Saturday of every month, we'll be enjoying the land we protect with 11 hikes over 11 months in each of the 11 counties we serve: Botetourt, Rockbridge, Allegheny, Bath, Highland, Augusta, Rockingham, Page, Shenandoah, Warren, and Frederick. We hiked in Botetourt in February and will be hiking in Rockbridge at Natural Bridge State Park on March 27 at 10am. Email info@valleyconservation.org or watch your inbox for more information.

Have a favorite hike
or want to let us hike
on your land?
Let us know!



Do We Have Your Email? We have lots of communication planned this year – an annual report this spring and additional newsletters later this year. But we will also be sharing the latest news and events once a month and an annual member survey over email and WE NEED YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS! Call us at 540-886-3541 or email us at info@valleyconservation.org to share your email.