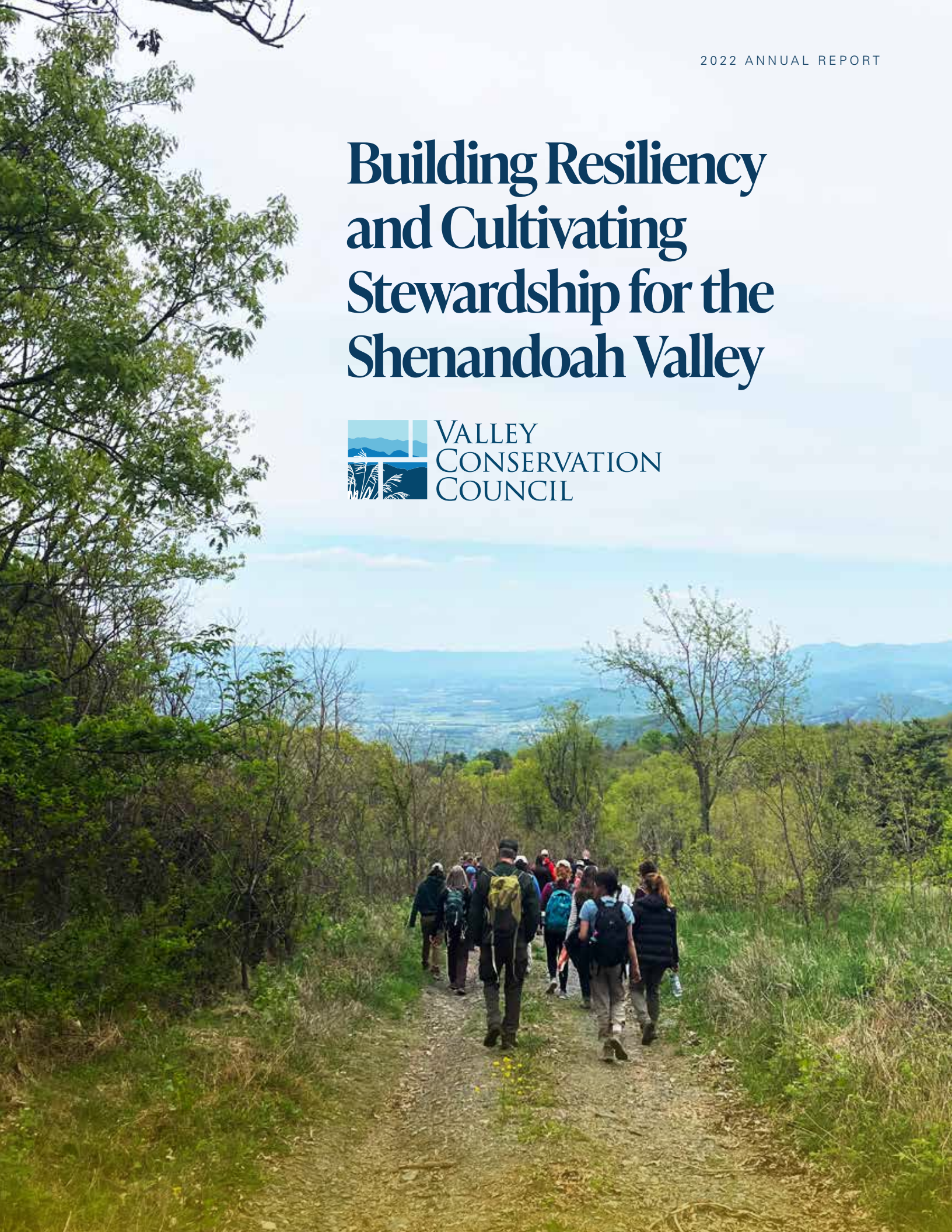


Building Resiliency and Cultivating Stewardship for the Shenandoah Valley



The Resilience of Stewardship in a Time of Change

Land is everything. It forms the foundation of our lives – it gives us soil to grow our food, bedrock on which to build our homes and communities, and stores and cycles our water. It forms the backdrop of our histories and remains the stage for the future. As a “Land Trust” we place our faith in the land as the basis for the sources of life and, in return, we promise to protect it, as best we can, forever.

We live in a rapidly changing world, perhaps no more evident than in the face of the greatest challenge of our time- climate change. Even in the Shenandoah Valley, generally understood by numerous models to be a safe harbor from the worst effects of climate change, we can see less predictable rainfall and temperature patterns, and more severe weather. Land, if cared for, is resilient and is fundamental to the mitigation of and adaptation to a changing climate.

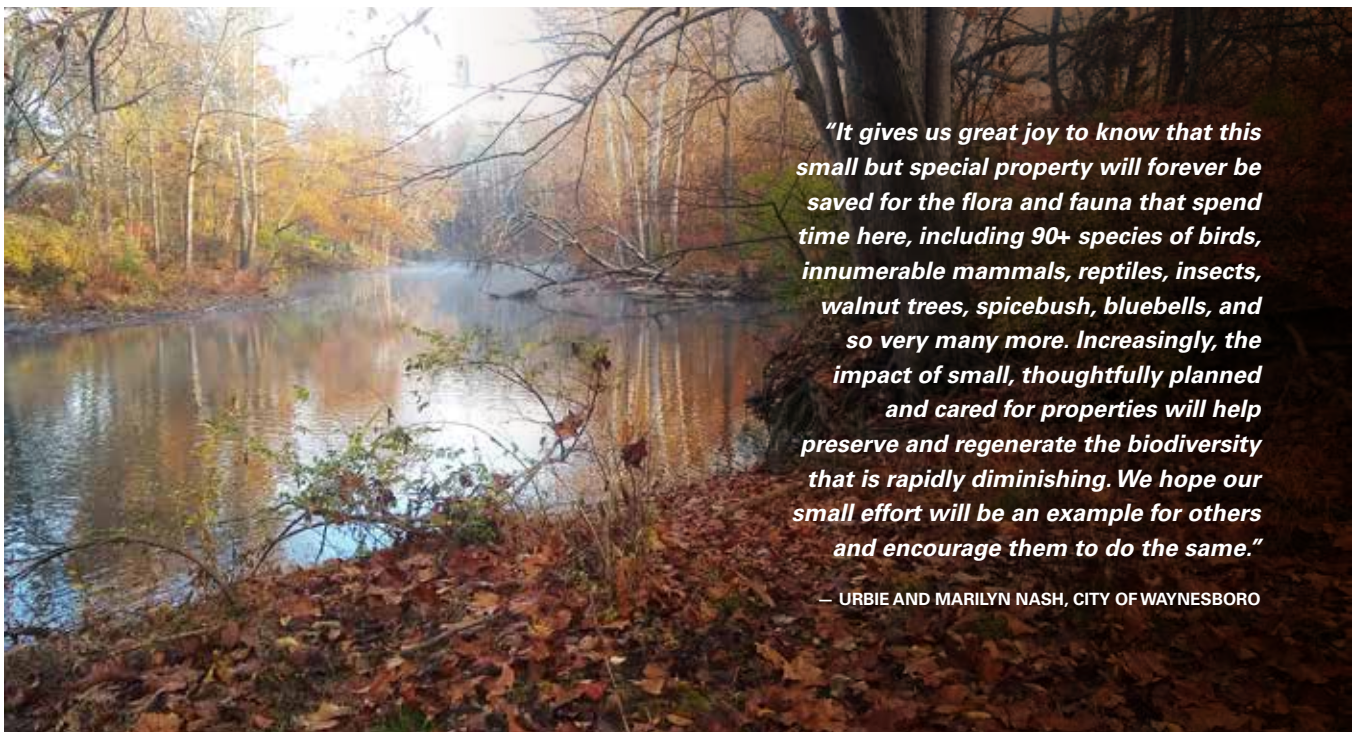
The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report released in 2023 on the current assessment of climate change and its impacts details dozens of land-based methods for effectively adapting to and mitigating climate risks, including wetland restoration, agroforestry implementation, soil

conservation, and improved crop and forest management. Land lost to development is not just an aesthetic concern any longer – it is a lost opportunity for a more resilient future.

VCC is dedicated to the preservation of agricultural lands, ecosystem protection, and the preservation of open space – but what does that mean for a more resilient future in the Valley and beyond?

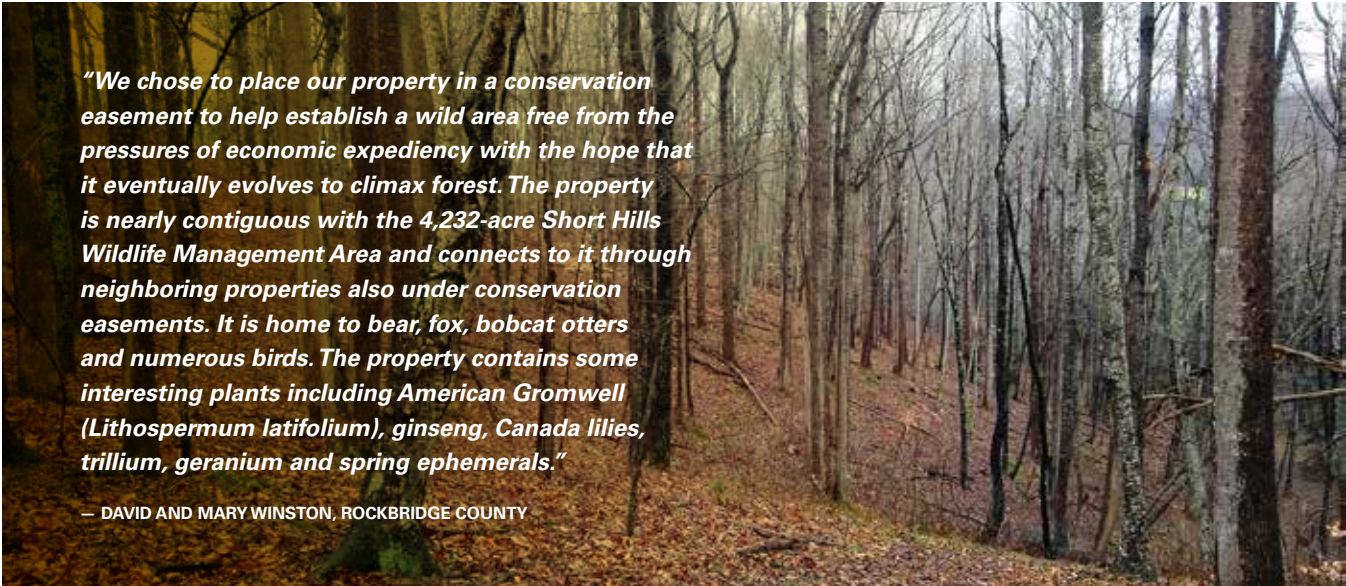
The Valley contains several of the top agricultural counties in the Commonwealth – farming is the driving force behind the economy and the culture of the Valley. Farmland is also key to many of the challenges in a rapidly changing climate by sequestering carbon in the soil and re-regionalizing global food systems that are increasingly subject to disruption due to severe weather and unpredictable changes in prices. VCC has built a reputation for working farmers and public partners to support production agriculture in the Valley for the long term – keeping the land open and available for responsive and resilient farming practices in the face of climate change.

As for protecting ecosystems, we are fortunate to be surrounded by large swaths of public lands from Shenandoah



“It gives us great joy to know that this small but special property will forever be saved for the flora and fauna that spend time here, including 90+ species of birds, innumerable mammals, reptiles, insects, walnut trees, spicebush, bluebells, and so very many more. Increasingly, the impact of small, thoughtfully planned and cared for properties will help preserve and regenerate the biodiversity that is rapidly diminishing. We hope our small effort will be an example for others and encourage them to do the same.”

— URBIE AND MARILYN NASH, CITY OF WAYNESBORO




*“We chose to place our property in a conservation easement to help establish a wild area free from the pressures of economic expediency with the hope that it eventually evolves to climax forest. The property is nearly contiguous with the 4,232-acre Short Hills Wildlife Management Area and connects to it through neighboring properties also under conservation easements. It is home to bear, fox, bobcat otters and numerous birds. The property contains some interesting plants including American Gromwell (*Lithospermum latifolium*), ginseng, Canada lilies, trillium, geranium and spring ephemerals.”*

— DAVID AND MARY WINSTON, ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY

National Park to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest. Wildlife must cross the Valley while dodging cars, navigating culverts, and avoiding the other markers of our modern life. Development and infrastructure are two main barriers to wildlife passage, their continued advance without consideration to our non-human neighbors risks cutting off wildlife from pathways to find new habitat in the face of climatic uncertainty. VCC has identified several primary areas to focus its efforts in connecting public lands with corridors of protected private lands to maintain the viability of these cross-valley connections for the long term. We are actively engaging landowners and our partners in conservation to ensure the long-term preservation of these key passage ways.

And as for open space, we don't want to say that only the largest farms and forests are part of the solution – unique properties in unexpected locations are also part of a more resilient future. VCC helped protect 11 acres within the City of Waynesboro with frontage on the South River to provide a refuge for wildlife, protect a rare piece of open space within the City Limits, and to maintain forested buffers along the South River for aquatic wildlife and recreation.

Land conservation in itself will not solve climate change – but it is foundational to nearly all the changes humanity will have to make in order to blunt the effects of a warming world in the future. Land, its soils, mountains, valleys, caves, rivers, streams, forests, and fields, is everything.



“When we see our son and daughter, their spouses and children hard at work and at play on our joint farms, we know why we want to preserve this land for them and for future generations. We are outdoors most of every day, and each day brings a new adventure. We have visitors year-round who come to enjoy the farm, the animals and the land. And when they invite us to visit them, we invariably decline, because we can't think of a better place we'd rather be than here!”

— DON AND JUDI RACE, BOTETOURT COUNTY

16 EASEMENTS DONATED

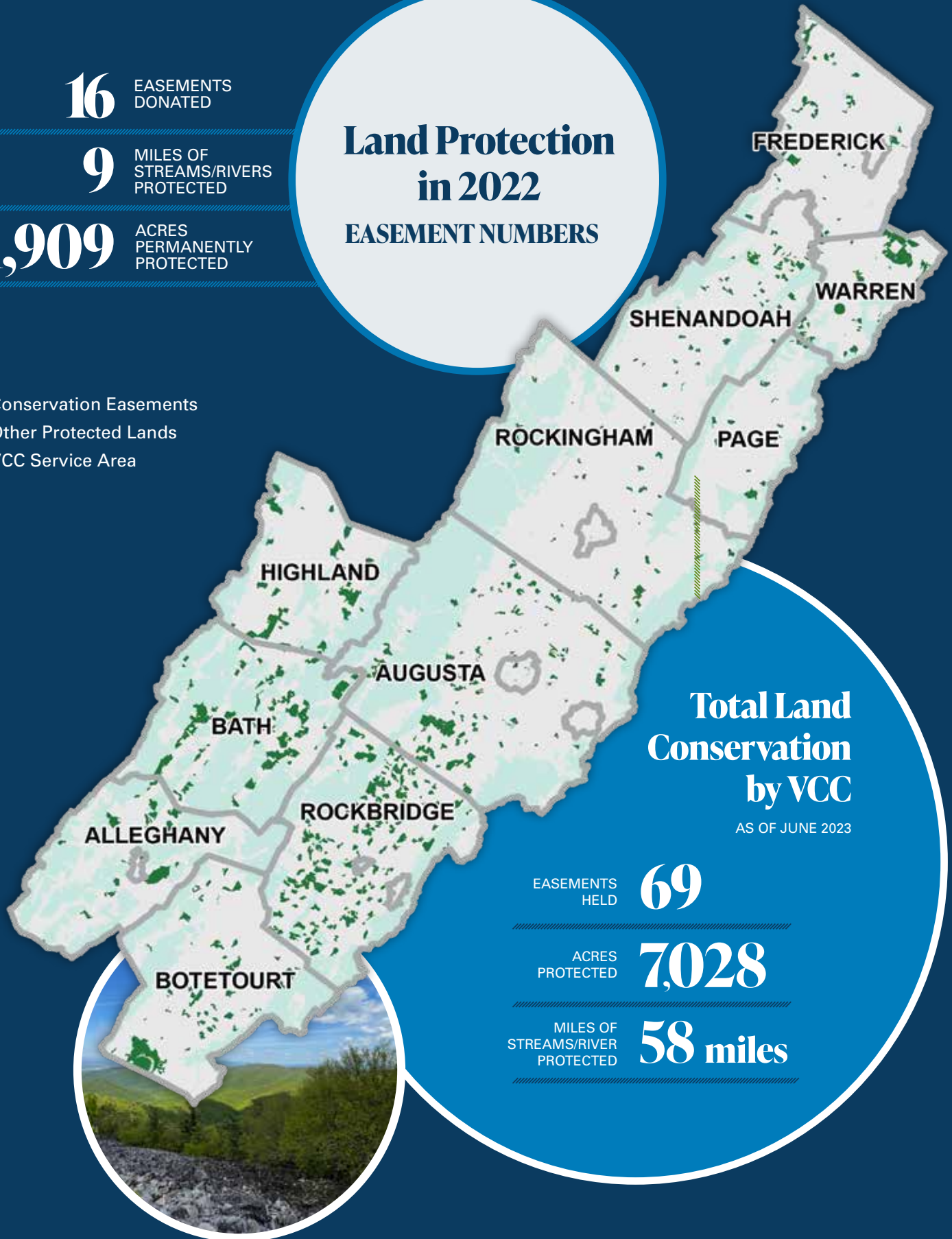
9 MILES OF STREAMS/RIVERS PROTECTED

1,909 ACRES PERMANENTLY PROTECTED

Land Protection in 2022

EASEMENT NUMBERS

- Conservation Easements
- Other Protected Lands
- VCC Service Area



Total Land Conservation by VCC

AS OF JUNE 2023

EASEMENTS HELD **69**

ACRES PROTECTED **7,028**

MILES OF STREAMS/RIVER PROTECTED **58 miles**



Cultivate Stewardship as a Volunteer

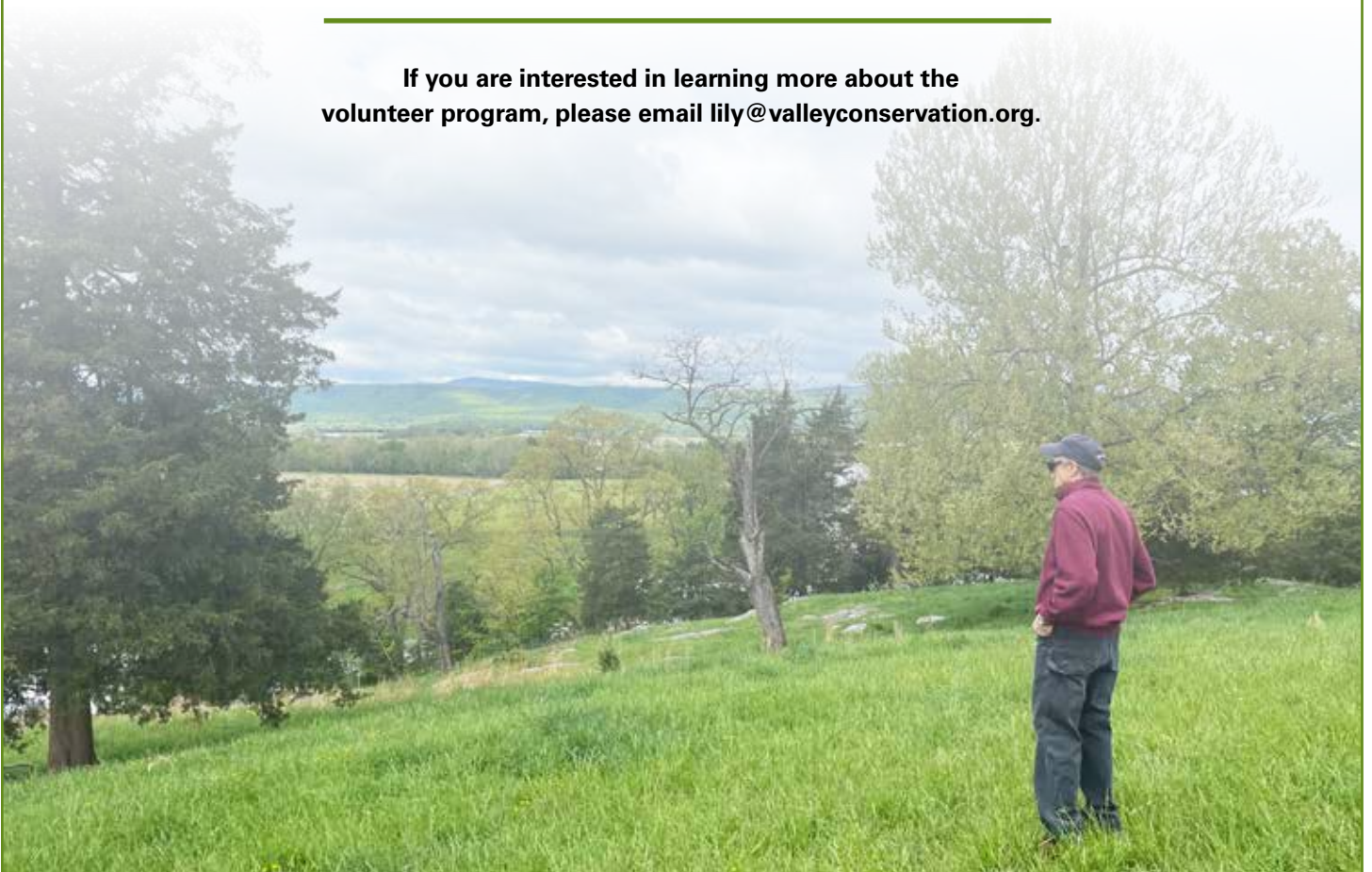
Since VCC's founding over 30 years ago, the success of the organization has been built upon a foundation of talented and dedicated volunteers. As we help more and more landowners to conserve their land, this also results in a growing obligation to steward and monitor these properties. To maintain our accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance, we must make these visits all within the calendar year, every year, in perpetuity. As our Director of Land Protection, Taylor, always says, "Forever is a long time!"

This January, the Shenandoah Valley Stewards volunteer program was created to support VCC's current and future stewardship capacity. The program allows interested volunteers to join on stewardship visits around the valley, assisting with the annual monitoring of the easements we hold. Volunteers are helping to extend staff capacity as well, as our policies encourage all visits to have two people for safety and efficiency.

So far, interested volunteers have included folks from around the valley, including retired conservation professionals, past and present board members, and young professionals interested in gaining experience in the conservation field. Our hope as we grow this program is to provide volunteers with a unique experience that allows volunteers a chance to explore hidden gems of the valley. In addition, volunteers will get a look into how stewardship is being conducted in the digital age with the use of our various online tools.

We are very grateful for the hours our passionate volunteers have donated to VCC. Though the program is in its early stages, we hope to keep improving and formalizing the format as time goes on, so as to provide all volunteers with a great experience. Overall, it has been great to connect with those in our community who are passionate about helping the environment. The work of these volunteers is a great reminder that only through collaboration can we conserve the natural resources and the beauty of the great Shenandoah Valley we all call home.


**If you are interested in learning more about the
volunteer program, please email lily@valleyconservation.org.**





The Contribution of Conservation Easements to Climate Resiliency

Perpetuity is a serious deal – but it’s also a gift – because it forces people to take a long-term look at land. It opens the door for meaningful conversation with family and neighbors by asking the question: ‘What does this look like after I’m gone and no longer caring for this place?’



Climate Resiliency, the ability to withstand and mitigate the effects of climate change, is key for building sustainable communities. While there is no one solution to create the most climate-resilient spaces, conserving land is one of the most effective tools we have in combating and managing the effects of climate change. One of the things that makes conserving entire ecosystems so effective is the fact that ecosystems are multifaceted. For example, a mature oak tree will simultaneously sequester carbon, provide habitat, prevent erosion, recycle nutrients into the soil, clean air, and fight against the ‘heat bubble’ effect we see in densely paved areas. Few, if any, man-made climate resiliency solutions can accomplish this feat.

If those are the benefits of one tree, it is easy to imagine the exponential benefit 200 acres of protected forest can have. We hope that the acres of farms and forest around us will stay that way forever, but already we are seeing development pressure contradict our wishes. Conservation easements give all of us the peace of mind that the valley will be resilient and green forever.

Helping Family Farms Stay Family Farms Forever

The Shenandoah Valley’s agricultural legacy is one of its most defining characteristics. Trying to picture a future for the Shenandoah Valley without the patchwork of fields and pastures stitched between the mountains is bleak. VCC is proud to work with farmers to preserve and honor agriculture of all forms.

Agriculture is a natural tool for ecological restoration and climate resiliency. Farmers know the land better than anyone, and their experience and expertise are invaluable when conserving the various types of land they tend. Furthermore, their work can directly

benefit the ecosystems we work to restore; farming and conservation are often one and the same.

Local farmer, and VCC Board Member, Alex Moore exemplifies this approach. Moore’s ethos is centered around care for family, community, and the land. The practices he uses to raise livestock on his 200-acre farm, Anthallo Acres, outside of Staunton, incorporate conservation into everyday practice through livestock exclusion fencing, rotational grazing, and building up the soil. Every animal on Anthallo Acres fills a role within the ecosystem on the farm, mimicking the functions of wild animals. This practice, commonly called ‘regenerative farming,’ works to rejuvenate the land in ways that have been proven to increase biodiversity and sequester carbon.

When we asked Moore about why land conservation matters he had this to say: *“Perpetuity is a serious deal – but it’s also a gift – because it forces people to take a long-term look at land. It opens the door for meaningful conversation with family and neighbors by asking the question: ‘What does this look like after I’m gone and no longer caring for this place?’ If people are land holders and have a heart for the long-term care of their souls and want to grant durability to the good work that you’re doing today to care for a piece of land, easements provide an extra layer of fortification beyond your own lifetime”*

VCC is honored to work with farmers of all shapes and sizes – from cattle to corn and everything in between. Farmers are some of our greatest allies for conservation, and their knowledge about their land and the local history of the region is our greatest resource when protecting a property. Knowing that family farms will stay family farms forever and that the tradition of farming will remain in the Valley is one of the most rewarding aspects of the work we do.

Our Donors

VCC's work would not be possible without the generous support of our members. We are immeasurably grateful for their dedication to conservation in the Shenandoah Valley and their support of VCC in 2022.

VCC MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| VALLEY GUARDIAN | \$5,000 and above |
| VALLEY STEWARD | \$1,000 to \$4,999 |
| VALLEY SETTLER | \$500 to \$999 |
| VALLEY PIONEER | \$100 to \$499 |
| VALLEY EXPLORER | from \$30 per individual/ \$50 per family to \$99 |

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Leaving a Legacy of Conservation

Conservation is, by its nature, a long-term investment. When we talk about protecting land forever that does not stop at the legal protections. Conservation easements held by VCC are stewarded and monitored annually, and VCC staff are always available to assist landowners in promoting conservation-minded projects on their land. It is our mission, and our honor, to protect the unique ecological, agricultural, and cultural value of each acre under easement.

VCC raises money each year to secure easements on some of the most beautiful properties in the Shenandoah Valley and Allegheny Highlands. Each easement we hold represents not only the protection of the unique natural beauty of the land but the stories of all the families who have lived there. Attending to

the needs of each property requires resources, time, and dedicated staff. VCC staff have adopted new technologies to assist in annual monitoring and stewardship work but we pride ourselves on our direct, face-to-face approach with our stewardship partners.

The Shenandoah Valley is a special place, and the community of people who work to protect what makes it so unique are even more so. The love for this place runs deep through many of us, as these mountains and rivers have embedded themselves into our hearts forever. A planned gift from your estate, or your assets, provides VCC with impactful support and provides you with the knowledge and certainty that the land and water we love so much will receive enduring stewardship and care.

Please consider making a legacy gift to VCC. For more information about planned giving options, please contact us at 540.886.3541 or email Adam Schellhammer at info@valleyconservation.org

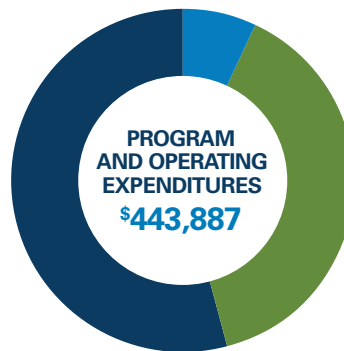


Furthering Conservation Efforts with Strong Funding

2022 was a year of growth in many ways. Our team continued to grow and with that came an ever-expanding portfolio of conservation properties and the responsibilities that this entails. Throughout our operational and programmatic growth, VCC's financial portfolio has stayed strong. Supporting an expanding organization is no easy task, but our commitment to sustainability extends into our finances as well. Support from dedicated conservationists like you, along with hundreds of other individuals, foundations, businesses, and grantors enabled VCC to fund our growth and lead us into another successful year.

One particularly exciting development was the creation of the Valley Green Fund. This \$1 million conservation impact fund was generously established by a private foundation for the sole purpose of furthering conservation efforts and protecting land in Page, Warren, and Shenandoah counties, as well as the Cedar Creek Wildlife Corridor in Frederick County. The investment in VCC's work within these communities will drive conservation success for years to come.

What does this mean for VCC moving forward? We see VCC's future as one of continued growth that is both ecologically and fiscally sustainable. We know how important our work is to protecting natural spaces across the Valley, and we must ensure that VCC continues to prosper in order to meet the vital commitments we make to our communities. We would not be able to do this without your continued and growing support, and for that we thank you.



Program and Operating Expenditures

- Fundraising 7%
- Management and General 39%
- Program 54%



Sources of Organizational Support

- Individual Contributions 53%
- Grants 27%
- Events <1%
- Stewardship Funds 19%
- Investment <1%



Financial Holdings Dec. 2022

- Stewardship Money Market 24%
- Stewardship Investment Fund* 16%
- Sweet Family Farm Endowment* 59%

* Our Forever Funds are restricted for the sole purpose of monitoring and stewardship of our easements, and to ensure that VCC has the necessary legal defense fund to enforce and protect the easements in perpetuity. These funds cannot be used for general operating expenses.

These figures are based on the end of year financial report from our contracted bookkeepers and are pending review by our tax accountants. Numbers are rounded and percentages may not perfectly equal 100%. Copies of VCC's official 2022 financial statements and IRS Form 990 will be available upon request once filed. For more information, please contact our office at 540.886.3541 or email admin@valleyconservation.org.

The Vital Role of Relationships in Conservation



Protecting the Shenandoah Valley is a critical task, and one that Valley Conservation Council is happy to champion. As an organization dedicated to conserving natural resources and open spaces, we understand that the preservation of the Valley's diverse landscape is essential to maintaining the region's character and heritage. And doing that starts with people.

One of the challenges is that in a rapidly growing region, there is pressure on landowners to sell their land for development. Fortunately, conservation easements offer a way for some landowners to receive compensation for the development rights they give up, while still retaining ownership and use of the land. This helps ensure that the land remains in production, preserved for habitat and ecological integrity, and available for future generations.

But there is work involved. There are costs incurred when it comes to conserving land and it's a complex and often long process. So there needs to be support and trust. And that's where people come into play. Relationships help make this work happen and help landowners see the mutual benefit in conservation easements. Conservation easements are often only achieved through the personal relationships and one-on-one engagement fostered by land trusts like ours.

The work of a land trust is community and relationship driven. It relies on our staff building trust and rapport with landowners who are willing to conserve their properties. A personalized approach allows land trusts

to collaboratively craft conservation easements tailored to individual landowners' needs while still meeting the broader conservation objectives. By cultivating strong relationships and working closely with landowners, land trusts foster a sense of shared stewardship and ensure that conservation efforts are aligned with the community's vision. This community-driven approach not only strengthens the effectiveness and longevity of conservation efforts but also creates a sense of pride, ownership, and enduring commitment among landowners and the broader community.

People are also critical to supporting our wider mission. To accomplish our desired outcomes we need to continue to engage with wider audiences to safeguard against pressures facing the Valley. Engaging with local communities and stakeholders ensures that our conservation efforts are responsive to the unique needs and concerns of the surrounding communities and helps build public support for conservation initiatives. Our partnerships allow for a more holistic approach to conservation, enabling multiple perspectives and ideas to be brought to the table. Our relationships also help us identify and prioritize critical lands and natural resources, develop and implement effective management plans, and ensure long-term stewardship of the protected lands.

Lastly, beyond preserving the natural beauty and history of the Shenandoah Valley, protecting land also supports the local economy. And if we help people understand this, we rally more support and bolster our ability to do

“Protecting our incredible landscape takes an entire community, and that is why we need you. Thank you for your past and future support, and please remember to spread the word about what VCC is doing so we can broaden our reach and support.”



the preservation work we set out to do. The region's agriculture and tourism industries are significant drivers of economic activity, and both rely on the natural resources and open spaces of the Valley. By protecting these resources, we are supporting the long-term viability of these industries and ensuring that the region remains a desirable place to live, work, and visit.

Protecting land in the Shenandoah Valley is essential for preserving the region's natural beauty, history, and economic vitality. By working together as a community, we can ensure that the land remains intact and available for the benefit of future residents, visitors, and industries of the Valley. Conservation easements are a vital tool in this effort, but it's our collective partnership that leads to results and we will continue to work with landowners, partners, and communities to protect this national treasure for generations to come.

Protecting our incredible landscape takes an entire community, and that is why we need you. Thank you for your past and future support, and please remember to spread the word about what VCC is doing so we can broaden our reach and support.

Very truly yours,

C. J. Steuart Thomas III
Board of Directors Chair

Our Diverse Community Brings Us Strength

We take great pride in highlighting the numerous benefits that the diverse communities of the Shenandoah Valley bring to our organization. The wide array of ethnicities and cultures present in the region enriches our conservation efforts, fostering a deep sense of engagement and shared stewardship. By embracing the diversity of our population, we gain access to a broad spectrum of knowledge, traditions, and perspectives that greatly enhance our ability to protect and preserve the land. From the collective wisdom of agricultural communities to the innovative ideas of young environmentalists, our work is strengthened by the wealth of expertise and experiences that our diverse residents contribute. Furthermore, the demographic diversity of the Shenandoah Valley ensures that our conservation efforts are inclusive and reflect the needs and aspirations of all residents, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. By recognizing and celebrating the unique demographics of our region, we can create a sustainable future that honors the rich tapestry of life in the Shenandoah Valley.



Programming Progress

VCC's programming is growing! Our summer monthly hike series – **The Outdoors for All** – highlights the importance of getting outside for everyone by partnering with organizations across the Valley! Staff are also out around the Valley leading free educational workshops about conservation easements, native plant landscaping, and other conservation topics. These workshops are designed for landowners of all sizes, or anyone with an interest in conservation in Virginia. We plan to announce more specific workshops in the Fall of 2023, so keep an eye out for new opportunities! All programming information can be found on our website, social media, and in our monthly e-newsletters (which you can sign up for on our website)



Save the Date!

Our annual **VCC Celebration**, will be held the evening of Friday, September 15, at Bluestone Vineyard in Bridgewater! Come down to celebrate our collective achievements in saving land.

Learn more: www.valleyconservation.org/annual-celebration

Our Valley Needs Your Support



Valley Conservation Council needs your support to continue its work. Since its inception, VCC has facilitated protection of more than 40,000 acres of land in the Shenandoah Valley and currently holds 69 conservation easements protecting more than 8,500 acres of productive farm and forest lands as well as 60 miles of streams and rivers. The need to protect our shared natural resources and way of life has never been more urgent as the Shenandoah Valley continues to experience growing pains and development pressures. Your gift to VCC will help further vital work to preserve our region's natural resources and agricultural heritage for future generations.



<< **SCAN TO
DONATE
ONLINE**



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| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Adam Schellhammer | Executive Director |
| Taylor Evans | Director of Land Protection |
| Lily Bose | Land Protection Specialist |
| Genevieve Goss | Upper James Program Director |
| Babette Thorpe | Northern Valley Representative |
| Wren Frueh | Office Manager and Programming Coordinator |

2021-2022 Board of Directors

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Scott Kelly, Secretary/Treasurer
Eric Fitzgerald, Immediate Past Chair
Lisa Ann Hawkins
John Rice
Kirk Billingsley
Alex Moore
Sally Newkirk
Sally Parsons
Beth Leffel
Tom Lockhart
Abbie Cutter

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Steuart Thomas, Katie Wallace, John Rice, Scott Kelly

Finance Committee:

Scott Kelly, Steuart Thomas, Kirk Billingsley

Fundraising Committee:

Sally Newkirk, Faye Cooper, Katie Wallace, Steuart Thomas, Lisa Ann Hawkins

Outreach Committee:

Katie Wallace, Abbie Cutter, Alex Moore, Eric Fitzgerald, Beth Leffel, Sally Newkirk

Governance Committee:

John Rice, Lisa Ann Hawkins, Scott Kelly, Tom Lockhart

Land Protection Committee:

Sally Parsons, John Rice, Mark Botkin, Kirk Billingsley, Faye Cooper, Tom Lockhart, Lisa Ann Hawkins

Education Committee:

Beth Leffel, Sally Parsons, Eric Fitzgerald, Abbie Cutter

Valley Conservation Council is a nonprofit organization that preserves and protects the beloved natural resources of the greater Shenandoah Valley region so the land 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 soil or simply basking in the majesty of its spectacular open spaces.



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Valley Conservation Council



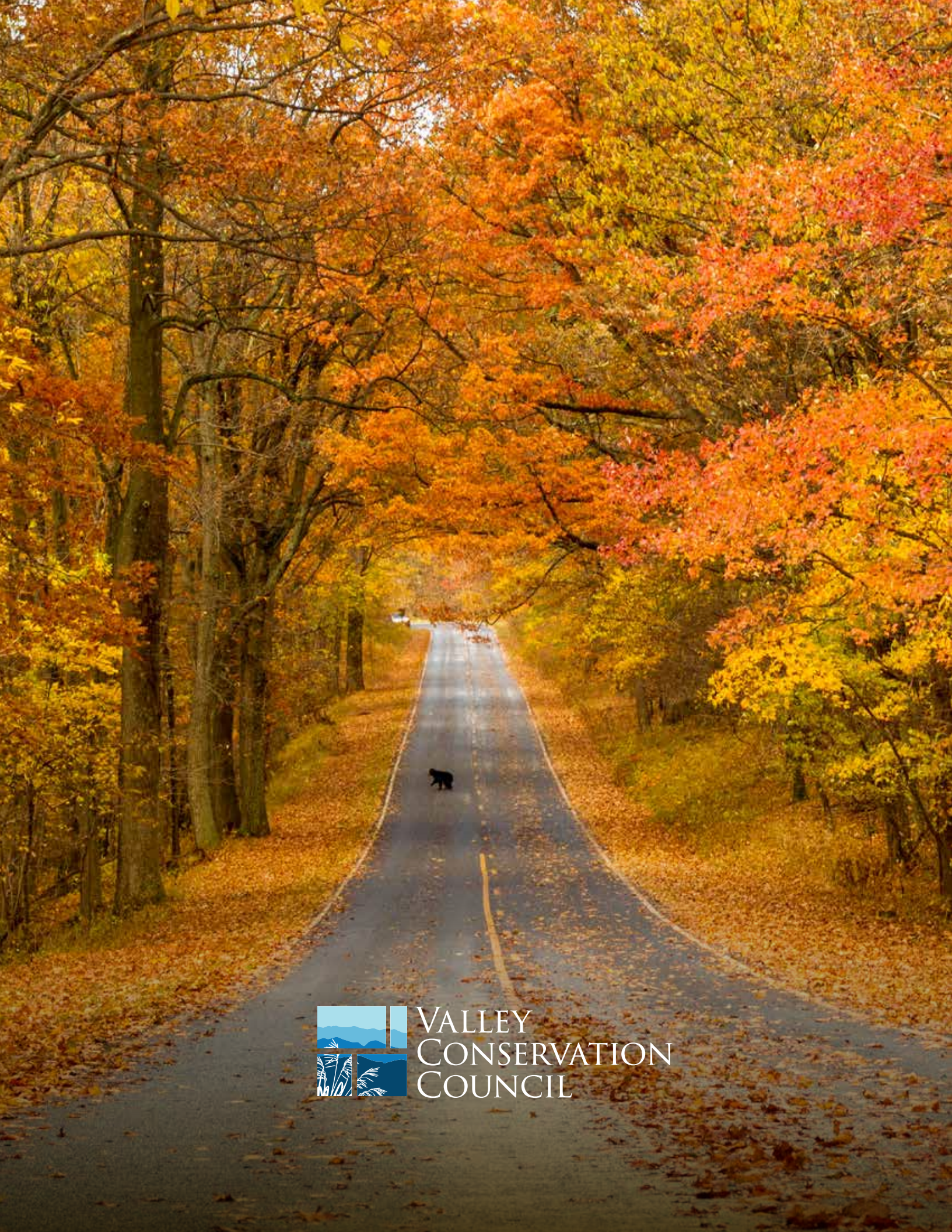
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*Our office is located within the Staunton Innovation Hub.

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VALLEY
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