



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Mill Mountain and Carvins Cove Conservation Easements

Q: What is the Western Virginia Land Trust proposing?

A: To preserve two of Roanoke's most outstanding natural features, the Western Virginia Land Trust is proposing that the Roanoke City Council place conservation easements on portions of Mill Mountain and Carvins Cove.

Q: Why would this be good for Roanoke?

A: In addition to its wonderful people, the key to the Roanoke Valley's outstanding quality of life is the beautiful natural assets with which we're blessed—the Appalachian Trail, the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Roanoke River, Mill Mountain, and Carvins Cove, to name just a few. Roanoke's strongest asset is its natural beauty and the recreational opportunities its beautiful environment offers.

By preserving and showcasing its best natural features, Roanoke could declare itself a top-flight green city on the level of Asheville, NC, Burlington, VT or Chattanooga, TN. Roanoke could help increase its "attraction factor" to area residents, tourists, young professionals, new businesses and retirees. Additionally, as expressed in Vision 2001, the conservation of Carvins Cove and Mill Mountain will ensure that Roanoke residents, and those who follow us through the ages, will have the same beautiful mountains to enjoy as we do.

Q: Does this conflict with new development on top of Mill Mountain?

A: While our conservation easement proposal applies only to the slopes and sides of Mill Mountain the Land Trust recommends that the City follow the recommendation in its Mill Mountain Park Management Plan that states in part that "any development at the summit should remain below the treeline to preserve the forested ridgeline."

What's a "conservation easement?"

A *conservation easement* is a permanent legal agreement that protects land from certain kinds of development. Conservation easements are entered into by a landowner and a conservation group called a *land trust* that enforces the easement.

Conservation easements typically limit the number and kinds of buildings that can be placed on a property, and the number of times the property can be subdivided. They also prohibit environmentally poor practices like clear-cutting, and may include special provisions to protect streams, wildlife habitat, or scenic views.

Conservation easements are very common in and around Roanoke. Much of Read Mountain and Tinker Mountain are already protected with conservation easements. These areas will *never* be developed—our children and our children's children will enjoy the same vibrant green views that we do today.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, more than 400,000 acres of land are protected by conservation easements held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the state land trust.

Q: Aren't Mill Mountain and Carvins Cove owned by the City and already protected?

A: While Mill Mountain Park and Carvins Cove Natural Reserve are owned by the City of Roanoke, placing a conservation easement on them would be a powerful statement of the City's commitment to preserving its best assets and attracting young people who enjoy an active, outdoor lifestyle. Also, municipal ownership does not guarantee its preservation in the future.

Q: Isn't Mill Mountain too steep to build on anyway?

A: While the slopes of Mill Mountain are steep, there are many examples of building taking place where no one ever thought possible or realistic. Mill Mountain is too important to the Valley's future to leave its preservation up to chance.

Q: What other local governments have done this?

A: In 1996, Asheville, NC, placed a conservation easement on a 17,000-acre, city-owned property that is the source of the city's drinking water, much like Carvins Cove is for the Roanoke Valley. In 2007, Fredericksburg, VA, placed conservation easements on 4,200 acres of city property along the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers. In Roanoke County, the Land Trust has partnered with the County, Hollins University, the Western Virginia Water Authority, grassroots groups, and private landowners to protect significant portions of two other local icons, Tinker Mountain and Read Mountain. There are numerous other examples as well.

Q: Who would hold and monitor the easements?

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation, which is the Commonwealth of Virginia's land trust, would be asked to hold and monitor the easements. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation holds conservation easements on over 400,000 acres of land in Virginia.

Q. Why isn't the Western Virginia Land Trust proposing to include the top of Mill Mountain in an easement?

After discussions with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, it became clear that they have serious concerns about the complexity, expense and time involved with monitoring and enforcing an easement on the top of the mountain where intensive land uses exist. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation does not rule out the possibility of placing an easement on the land at the top of the mountain but suggests that such an easement should be held, monitored and enforced by a qualified organization other than themselves, with the resources necessary to do the job right. An alternative to this approach would be for the City to adopt an ordinance making the protection of the treeline and view of Mill Mountain from the City a matter of City policy.

Q: How do the Fishburn heirs feel about the Land Trust's proposed easement on Mill Mountain?

A: The Fishburn heirs desire that a conservation easement be placed on Mill Mountain that includes not only the slopes and sides but the top of the mountain also.

Q: What will this cost the City?

A: The cost to place a conservation easement on these properties is very small and is limited to expenses such as surveying. We estimate the total expense to be less than \$10,000. This money could be raised by private citizens who wish to see Mill Mountain and Carvins Cove preserved. There is no charge to the City of Roanoke by the Western Virginia Land Trust for its services in facilitating these proposed easements.

Q: How would a conservation easement affect the City's current management plans for both Mill Mountain and Carvins Cove?

A: In 2006, the City adopted the Mill Mountain Park Management Plan which identified long-term protection of the mountain as a critical issue and recommended a conservation easement "be explored." We believe that the time to do this is now, given the current public discourse about the future of Mill Mountain. The policies and practices described in the existing Mill Mountain Park Management Plan are nearly all compatible with a conservation easement. The Carvins Cove Natural Reserve management plan is still in the development process, but the core elements are preservation of the Reserve.

Q: How would a conservation easement affect the public's use of Mill Mountain and Carvins Cove for recreation?

A: It would improve it. Conservation easements on public property are designed to protect and enhance public access for recreational activities such as hiking, biking, bird watching, family picnics, and other activities. Easements are compatible with things like trails, picnic tables, benches, interpretive kiosks, and other park accommodations. What a conservation easement would restrict is where building and development can take place and how many buildings can be built, along with common-sense restrictions on things like clear cutting, dumping trash, billboards, and so on.

Q: What is the danger of not acting?

A: An example of not acting in a timely manner to save valuable views can be found on the nearby Blue Ridge Parkway. For years, the Parkway meandered through peaceful and undeveloped countryside. But population growth, new suburban developments and commercial growth have negatively impacted views along the Roanoke section of the Parkway. Through the efforts of the Land Trust, neighboring communities and partner organizations, progress is being made to reverse this trend. If we don't have the vision and foresight to protect Mill Mountain and Carvins Cove now, we may regret it down the road.

Q: How would these conservation easements impact other parts of the Roanoke Valley?

A: It is the hope of the Land Trust that these easements will serve as conservation models and serve to encourage other mountainside land owners to protect their properties and preserve the beautiful views of the mountains from the Roanoke Valley. The Land Trust hopes to encourage other public entities to follow the lead of Roanoke City by placing conservation easements on their public properties.

Q: What is the Western Virginia Land Trust?

A: The Western Virginia Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Roanoke whose mission is to “promote the conservation of Western Virginia’s natural resources—farms, forests, waterways, and rural landscapes.” Since 1996, we have helped preserve more than 21,000 acres of land in Western Virginia. The Land Trust is governed by a Board of Trustees that includes members from business, development, conservation, education, local government, and individuals who volunteer their energies to preserving the natural resources of Western Virginia. We are funded by 700 dues-paying members, grants, and private foundations.

Q: How can I get more information or lend my support?

A: Contact the Western Virginia Land Trust at (540) 985-0000 or e-mail rhoInback@westernvirginialandtrust.org or dperry@westernvirginialandtrust.org. You can also visit our website at www.westernvirginialandtrust.org.