

# Land Protection *news*

WESTERN VIRGINIA LAND TRUST

SPRING 2003

## Five Miles of River

*Grant Funds Water Quality Easements*

WVLT's Water Quality Improvement Act (WQIA) grant has funded the purchase of conservation easements that protect over 5 miles of rivers and streams in the upper James, New and Roanoke River watersheds. And funding remains for more.

Starting in 2000, the Land Trust was awarded a series of WQIA grants from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. The grants fund the purchase of riparian easements to protect water quality. Landowners can receive up to \$950 per acre to retain tree cover (or allow it to grow back) to filter and slow runoff before it enters the water. Stream corridors in permanent plant cover also help prevent erosion and provide shade to enhance fish habitat.



*This section of Franklin County's Roaring Run – a native trout stream – will be preserved through a WVLT riparian easement. The surrounding property of 125 acres is also being placed in a conservation easement to protect views from the nearby Smart View Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway.*

*(continued on page 5)*

## Family Farms Forever

*Newest Bedford County Easement Preserves 256 Acres*



*The Fellers homeplace with Peaks of Otter in the distance.*

WVLT's partnership with Bedford Citizens for Land Preservation (BCLP) provided just the right combination to help preserve another family farm.

Pete Fellers and his family are placing a conservation easement on their 256-acre homeplace in the Cifax area of Bedford County. The easement permits two more family homes, encourages continued agricultural use and forever preserves the land from commercial, industrial or residential development. The easement was accepted by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and will be officially recorded in the near future.

*(continued on page 5)*

# Director's Report:

## The Importance of Membership

I was not always the "membership" type myself. That \$50 or \$100 was money better spend on a special dinner, or family movie outing, or saved for a rainy day and what the heck, all those charitable organizations existed without me and they didn't solve all the world's problems or do "my" bidding. I was not alone, as most people only give to their church, school, or civic clubs if at all.

Is the Western Virginia Land Trust going to save the world or find the cure for cancer in your lifetime? No, we won't. But if we are given the financial support of those of you who understand the work we do, our dedication to voluntary conservation, good community planning and open space preservation, your children and grandchildren will live in a better world and have a better quality of life right here in SW Virginia.

Can we exist without your support? Probably, even though we are struggling to offset the huge reduction in State and

foundation grant opportunities the present fiscal mess in Washington and Richmond has

caused. Can we do as much conservation work without your support? **No we can't.** Every time we send out a newsletter, or special landowner mailing, host a community meeting or use staff time to apply for a grant, we spend money and it doesn't grow on trees. It comes from our members, private foundations and our remaining state grants.

Members not only give us much needed money to cover the day to day expenses of our office and staff, but from among our members come the talented volunteers and board members that help sustain us with their efforts. Our members talk up conservation and conservation easements to their friends and family. A large membership gives us credibility with foundations and state agencies when we make grant applications, where we leverage your gift of hundreds into thousands for specific projects like our Riparian Easement Acquisition program featured in this issue.



A number of years ago, I got married, gave up my career as a yacht captain, and started living on the land in a house like most everybody else. I even started to drive with safety in mind as many do when they realize they are responsible for others. And I found myself giving to charities that had taken on the challenge and hard work

of doing the things I cared about. Now I do conservation work every day, am on a number of boards and am taking an active part in shaping the future of SW Virginia.

Quite a change and one I am proud of. So I send my small checks, and each time think of all the nice folks who send their checks to us and call themselves members of WVLT.

Thank you,  
Roger B. Holnback

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...from among our members come the talented volunteers and board members that help sustain us with their efforts...

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## Spring Membership Drive

Thank you for reading *Land Protection News* and caring about the natural, scenic and historic resources of Southwest Virginia! WVLT is working hard to preserve more of the special places that define this beautiful and unique part of the world. But we don't work alone – your membership to WVLT is vital.

If you haven't yet joined the land trust, please take the time to send your check today and help us set a membership record before spring is out. More member support lets staff spend even more time conserving land and less with fundraising duties.

If already a member, consider a special gift to honor or remember someone with a deep love for the resources we protect – the hills and mountains, the rich farm valleys and the rivers and streams of Southwest Virginia.

And help us get out the word – WVLT needs more of the active, passionate and generous members who support voluntary land conservation. Ask friends and neighbors to join you in helping to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of Western Virginia, a place we all hold dear.

All gifts for this fiscal year will be gratefully acknowledged in our summer edition of *Land Protection News*.



## Stewardship

*David A. Hurt, Project Manager*

### *Family Land & Long-term Plans*

Much of the private property that holds Southwest Virginia's historic, scenic and natural treasures is "family land" – land that, even if legally owned by a single individual, is really owned, controlled and loved by a family.

A landowner recently told me that "Selling your family farm is like selling your momma," and that feeling runs deep through the mountains and valleys across WVLT's service area. Those who have such a multi-generational connection to their land are facing new issues that make it harder than ever for a new generation to keep the land, or to even keep the land intact. Conservation easements can help.

We need to keep in mind that the remaining rural landscapes across Virginia are there for the most part due to good stewardship of private property owners. Donating a conservation easement is not a requirement for being a good steward of the land. But it is a good stewardship tool worth exploring.

Some families have passed on land from parent to child as matter of course, even a birthright. But the decline of the family farm as an economically viable business, a more mobile society, estate taxes and rising land values are factors that sometimes force families to sell property that they'd really like to keep or preserve. Land trusts like WVLT work hard to make sure that all landowners understand their options and consider conservation easements when planning wills and the transfer of farms and land to their heirs. And failing to plan at all can have some unpleasant and unexpected consequences for the next generation ... and for the land.

Most prospective easement donors consider income tax deductions, sellable tax credits, reduced estate taxes, some protection from eminent domain, and, above all, assurance of the land's preservation as powerful motivations.

But "family land" creates special concerns that might make a conservation easement an even more powerful planning tool.

How does a couple divide their estate when one child wants to stay on the farm and the others want the land's value? How can Grandma fix things so that her heirs won't squabble over what to do with the old mountain place? Can conservation easement incentives improve farm profitability? And how can those who really wants to preserve their land give away development rights when that value is their only retirement asset?

A land trust can't offer financial planning advice, but we welcome the opportunity to meet with families to explain the honest pros and cons of conservation easements. And every

family with land should consult an estate planner who has experience with real estate and conservation easements. Most families have a vision of what they'd like to see

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*One landowner told me that  
"Selling your family farm is like  
selling your momma."*

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happen to their land. But visions are only realized through planning.



## Join the Western Virginia Land Trust Today!

WVLT's activities are supported in large part by membership dues and contributions. If you are not a member, please consider adding your support to ongoing efforts to preserve western Virginia's natural and cultural heritage.

If already a member, your assistance in recruiting new members would be greatly appreciated. Why not offer memberships as gifts for special occasions? There's no better gift for someone who has everything than to include them in a legacy of conservation. Future generations will thank them – and you!

*A postpaid, pre-addressed donor envelope is enclosed for your convenience.*

# Carvins Cove Watershed Initiative

WVLT has organized a task force to help preserve the 36,000-acre watershed that feeds the City of Roanoke's principal water reservoir. Though fed by Carvins Creek and surrounded by 11,000 acres of city-owned land, Carvins Cove is also fed by recharge tunnels that flow under mountains to bring additional water from Catawba Creek and Tinker Creek.

WVLT's efforts to preserve the Carvins Cove watershed will focus upon the use of donated conservation easements, riparian easements purchased with a WQIA grant (see "Five Miles of River" on page 1) and agricultural best management practices implemented by Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Roanoke City has expressed interest in providing technical and financial support as well.

At the task force's first meeting, attendees agreed that the group's sole focus would be upon voluntary conservation. The main goal is to pull together every voluntary option, many of which provide some combination of payments, cost share, and tax breaks, to present to landowners.

Though focused on water quality, the land trust and its partners also strive to preserve and enhance the following resources within the project area:

- Carvins Creek and portions of Catawba and Tinker Creeks
- Brushy Mountain, Catawba Mountain and portions of North Mountain
- Twenty-two miles of the Appalachian Trail
- McAfees Knob, the most photographed feature along the Appalachian Trail
- Communities for three rare and endangered plants
- Habitat for the endangered Roanoke River Log Perch
- Portions of Interstate Bike Route 76
- State Scenic Byways Routes 785 and 311
- Carvins Cove Reservoir, drinking water supply for over 100,000 people

WVLT is forming a working partnership with local governments, state and federal agencies, non-profits and landowners that seems primed to accomplish its ambitious conservation goal. Membership of the task force is still being expanded. Look for a full list of participants and an update on this exciting initiative in the next issue of *Land Protection News*.



*Brainstorming session at the first meeting of the Carvins Cove Task Force.*



*Map courtesy of Roanoke Valley-Allegheny Regional Commission.*

## Family Farms Forever *(continued from page 1)*

Fellers decided to pursue a conservation easement because he feels that, "This growth can't go on forever" and wants to do his part to preserve a rural landscape for future generations. He grew up on the land "in the house his grandfather built" before moving away and finding himself working in an office for the Virginia Lottery. But Fellers always felt more at home in the country and made a mid-life decision to return to the family farm and set up a beef cattle operation.

"I did the rat race, lived in a subdivision, fought traffic every day and made a lot more money than I do now with these cows. But I gave it up to come home because I like the rural way of living. It's just a rewarding way of life."

The Fellers homeplace is also where Captain Taylor Fellers, leader of Bedford's famed Company A of the D-Day invasion, was raised. This was an additional factor in the decision to preserve the farm. "Now that Bedford is home to the D-Day Memorial, I feel I'm saving an essential piece of history," Fellers states.

Although the Fellers family was motivated by the desire to preserve their land, they also see conservation easements as a

way to keep land in the family while cashing in some of its value. The tax benefits of donating an easement, especially the state tax credit that can be sold, promise to improve the bottom line of their farming business.

Last year, Fellers attended a community meeting of Bedford Citizens for Land Preservation where he became re-acquainted with his childhood family doctor, Bill McCabe. McCabe and his wife, Annis, are active members of BCLP and encouraged Fellers to visit one of the resource carts they had set up in Bedford libraries. WVLT worked with BCLP to include land trust literature in the carts and this led Fellers to further examine conservation easements.

After numerous conversations and two site visits with WVLT staff, Fellers made the commitment to donate his development rights to the Commonwealth of Virginia through a conservation easement with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, WVLT's primary conservation partner.

BCLP and WVLT are planning a series of meetings this coming fall to reach more landowners like the Fellers – people who love the land and are committed to preserving a landscape and a way of life.



## Five Miles of River

*(continued from page 1)*

In some cases, permanent grass cover such as hayfields can serve as the buffer, but no grazing or plowing is permitted. The buffers must be at least 35-foot wide, but most landowners have opted to protect buffers of 50 to 100 feet or more.

In addition to purchasing easements, WVLT has used the grant to fund water quality workshops and stream-side tree plantings with elementary and middle school students. Outreach efforts from this grant have also led to donated conservation easements on two farms.

WVLT is seeking more applicants interested in selling riparian easements. Please call 540 985-0000 for details.

**The following WOIA easements have been recorded or are pending**

James River	Botetourt County	.37 miles
Little River (New River Watershed)	Floyd County	1.50 miles
Little River (New River Watershed)	Floyd County	1.34 miles
Blackwater River (Roanoke River Watershed)	Franklin County	.32 miles
Blackwater River (Roanoke River Watershed)	Franklin County	.50 miles
Roaring Run (Roanoke River Watershed)	Franklin County	<u>1.03 miles</u>
	Total:	5.06 miles

## Landsaver: *Vic Thomas – Saving Land for the People*

Retiring Delegate A. Victor Thomas, one of the best-known conservationists in this part of the country, probably is the only living person in Virginia who has three buildings named for him—and no one doubts that he deserves the recognition. The Thomas name is placed on buildings at Catawba Hospital, Virginia Western Community College and a Striped Bass Fish Hatchery at Brookneal.

Friends and admirers of Thomas and his plain-spoken, common sense approach to politics and business have difficulty believing that he really is hanging it up after 30 years as a Democratic legislator and more than a half-century of running his family store beside Tinker Creek on Orange Avenue in Northeast Roanoke. He's a natural choice as a Landsaver for Western Virginia Land Trust.

A key Thomas accomplishment was his important role in gaining General Assembly approval of a \$3 million loan from the state general fund to enable the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to acquire the huge 9,000-acre Big Survey in Wythe County. "Everybody wanted to sign on that bill... We had a lot of help." The Big Survey legislation passed the House by a vote of 100 to 0 and the Senate by 40 to 0, Thomas recalls proudly. "We had a lot of help from hunters, fishermen and birdwatchers," he added.

"It's good when you have people working together to preserve land for future generations... I hope they realize how critically



*Vic Thomas bags a wild turkey in the forests of Botetourt County.*

important that is. One hundred years from now and it (Big Survey land) will be there."

In his 21 years as chair of the House Conservation and Natural Resources Committee, Thomas won a reputation for getting things done. His philosophy—"you work with people and try to get them to help you" – made him a popular figure in Richmond. But "if you don't have the votes, sometimes you have to compromise, as long as you don't compromise your principles."

Thomas was a leader in the successful 2000 campaign adding a hunting and fishing rights amendment to the state constitution. He won quality facilities in the swimming area at Smith Mountain Lake State Park and he worked to stock trout in Tinker Creek, running beside his Orange Avenue market. "I was sweating blood to get permission from landowners" for stocking the creek. When he asked the Game Department for trout, "they thought it was hilarious putting trout in the middle of a city." But they did it and fishermen continue to line the creek banks in search of the fish.

In his 15 terms in the House of Delegates, Thomas said people have become "much more aware" of the environment. "I'd like to think we're on track to protect the environment...we know what to do."

Recognized as a moderate legislator, he also was chair of the State Coal and Energy Commission and a strong advocate for mental health and for the poor and disabled.

His office walls are covered with plaques, honorary titles and hunting and fishing photos, as well as recognition from a variety of organizations.

Now 73, Thomas can trace his love for the outdoors to his boyhood days of possum hunting and rabbit trapping along Tinker Creek, not far from his home in East Gate and the family grocery on Orange Avenue. Sometimes he loaded 15 boys in a pickup truck and headed for camping and fishing along North Creek in the national forest in Botetourt County.

He and his wife, Dot, were married as teenagers 57 years ago. After high school at William Byrd in Vinton and Jefferson in Roanoke, he served in the Army and agreed in 1950 to run E. J. Thomas Market, the family business, after his father died. The Thomases have three sons in the Roanoke Valley: Vic Jr. and Tom, who work in construction and Eric, who is active in real estate sales.

Many people in the Roanoke Valley recall Thomas's narrow escape in the big flood of 1985. Tinker Creek was far out of its banks and cars were washed against the side of his store building. He and several other employ-

ees climbed to the roof and a helicopter bearing a WDBJ-TV reporter picked them up, about 10 seconds before the creek swept the market building away.

When Thomas said he wouldn't be around next year to host his famous game dinner for legislators, Gov. Mark Warner and many other Democrats in Richmond tried to get him to continue serving in the House but he said, "It's time."

A Roanoke Times editorial said Thomas's retirement "will be a blow felt far beyond the Roanoke Valley, which he has served so well.

"Across the state, Virginians who are elderly, mentally ill or homeless, or who struggle to help those who are, will miss his big heart and untiring work on their behalf. Virginia's sportsmen and environmentalists will miss his unswerving dedication to their causes. Virginians grown cynical about political flim-flamery will miss his compassion and plain-spoken honesty."

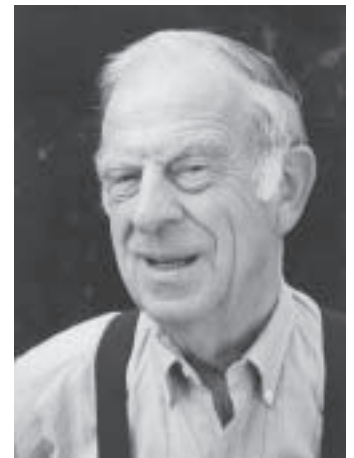
## A Land Trust Reliable Turns 75

*Happy Birthday, George!*

To honor long-time WVLT trustee George Kegley on his 75th birthday on May 15, his family and friends have made a series of gifts to the land trust. As a testament to the deep love and respect that George has earned through a lifetime of hard work for the people and land of Southwest Virginia, gifts in his honor were still arriving at press time. Final acknowledgements will be printed in the summer edition of *Land Protection News*.

A retired newspaperman, George works tirelessly on every issue of *Land Protection News* and eagerly volunteers for many tasks. Having written a long series of "Landsaver" profiles, George is worthy of the title himself.

A highly regarded local historian, Kegley also lends his talents to numerous charitable causes throughout the Roanoke Valley. Robert Kegley, George's son, spearheaded the challenge to honor his father for his dedication to these many causes and to the land trust mission of preserving western Virginia's natural and cultural heritage.



## Gifts of Land

It's not every day that a landowner wants to give away property. Our "bread and butter" work involves helping people who love their land to keep it and preserve it – often for the enjoyment and security of their children and grandchildren. We celebrate such committed stewardship and certainly don't expect the average contact to result in a land donation.

But for some, giving land to WVLT may be a sound option. People looking to maximize tax deductions and credits, who have no heirs, or who simply want to preserve their property and further conservation may want to consider a real estate gift, life estate or bequest.

In addition to preserving open space, gifts of land can provide WVLT with much needed capital to sustain and expand conservation efforts across Southwest Virginia. Our goal is not to hold and manage property, but to

preserve it through a conservation easement before finding a suitable buyer. The donor is assured that the land will be preserved, receives maximum tax deductions and sellable state tax credits, and the land trust can leverage the donation into much more land conservation. And considering capital gains tax, a gift of appreciated property may actually be more advantageous to the donor than a sale.

Every offer of land may not be accepted, and donations must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. But gifts of land do provide a unique opportunity to further our mission of preserving western Virginia's natural and cultural heritage.

For more information, please contact WVLT at 540 985-0000.



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**WESTERN VIRGINIA LAND TRUST MISSION STATEMENT**

*A publicly-supported charitable organization providing voluntary means to promote the preservation of western Virginia's natural & cultural heritage*

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722 First Street, SW, Suite L  
Roanoke, Virginia 24016-4120

Phone/Fax 540/985-0000  
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Celebration June 1!**  
(See enclosed invitation.)

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