

Land Protection

news

WESTERN VIRGINIA LAND TRUST

SPRING 2002

More Bedford County Countryside Protected

As one of the fastest growing localities west of Richmond, Bedford County faces growing pains. Proximity to Roanoke, Lynchburg and Smith Mountain Lake has brought Bedford County new opportunities and new challenges. One negative result of its growth is the rapid conversion of forests and farmland to sprawling residential development. Working with landowners and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, WVLT continues to buck the urban sprawl trend and build upon previous success by preserving more privately owned open space in Bedford County.

In 2000, Ms. Barbara Hatcher donated a conservation easement to 158 acres she owns at the base of the Peaks of Otter to WVLT and the Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District. This year, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation gave preliminary approval to conservation easements on two Bedford County properties.

A 77-acre farmstead with mixed forest and pastureland will forever remain part of western Bedford County's landscape. Within the Blue Ridge Parkway viewshed, the land has been home to the same family for generations. By donating a conservation easement to the VOF, the family will secure its desire to keep the farm intact for future generations.

Forty-seven acres of open space amidst a highly developed area of Bedford County will also be protected by a conservation easement. In addition to preserving rural landscapes, WVLT strives to make urban and quickly urbanizing areas of western Virginia more livable by preserving buffers between our man made and natural worlds.

Yet another Bedford County conservation easement is in the works. The owners of an over 100-acre tract within close view of Peaks of Otter wish to preserve the special characteristics of their land. Final details of the easement may be worked out as early as this summer.

Conservation easements are taking off in Bedford County, helping to save more of the Blue Ridge region.

Bedford County has a rich historical, natural resource and agricultural heritage.

These resources must be preserved in Bedford County – and across western Virginia— in order to maintain a sustainable economy and a high quality of life. WVLT continues work to preserve special places as modern change continues.

State Funds WVLT Streamside Easement Purchases

Several agreements in the works

Western Virginia Land Trust has secured funding through Virginia's Water Quality Improvement Act (WQIA) to purchase conservation easements along rivers and streams in portions of the James, New and Roanoke River watersheds.

A series of WQIA grants enables WVLT to pay landowners up to \$950.00 per acre to permanently protect riparian zones by excluding livestock, prohibiting development, and maintaining forest or perennial grass cover. Typically covering 35 to 100



(Please see Streamside Easements, continued on page 3)

Director's Report:

By Roger Holnback

Has it really been six months since I became executive director in October? In the flurry of moving offices, reorganizing and getting up to speed, we have – with help from my worker bees on the Board of Trustees – managed to get a lot done. Now, with the welcome assistance from our new project manager, David Hurt (page 3), we are positioned to continue making great strides in saving western Virginia's special lands.

As highlighted in this issue of *Land Protection News*, WVLT continues to work with the Read Mountain Alliance in efforts to preserve this prominent part of our skyline. We also continue educational and community outreach efforts by working with Roanoke City youth to reforest a future greenway corridor along Lick Run. As part of an Earth Day exhibit in Highland Park, we unveiled a newly created display highlighting WVLT projects. (Special thanks to treasurer Gary Duerk and to new WVLT volunteer Debbie Lawson-Gaines for helping man our booth.) Ann Rogers, another new volunteer, is spearheading an effort to secure riparian easements along Franklin County's Blackwater River. Perhaps most exciting are the many gains we are making in permanently preserving our landscape through conservation easements.

Throughout my travels and conversations across western Virginia, I am continually impressed by how many private landowners practice good stewardship and express deep love for

their land. It has been this love of land by individual families that has preserved so much of our landscape for generations. But in quickly changing times, this is often no longer enough. With an estimated



70% of Virginia's rural land changing hands to a new generation in the next fifteen years, educating landowners about conservation options is a vital task.

Additional staff, dedicated board members, and energetic volunteers

have reinforced WVLT's conservation efforts, but we are racing against the clock. It seems that we lose another farm or forested ridgeline every day. With each of these changes, we lose a piece of the unique quality of life that defines our part of Virginia. A fellow conservationist reminded me the other day that a subdivision is the last crop a farm will ever grow. Even unsightly clearcuts along scenic ridges will eventually grow back, but, once land is lost to sprawl, it's gone for good. With a mission to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of western Virginia across a service area of over 10,000 square miles, we have our work cut out for us.

With the welcome addition of the New River Land Alliance working in the New River Valley, the western fourth of Virginia is now served by two land trusts. But, the rest of Virginia is served by 21 land trusts. In order to better serve our conservation mission, we will continue to support the creation of new land trusts in far southwest Virginia. WVLT will continue educating landowners about conservation options, will keep partnering with governmental agencies and other conservation groups, and will keep assisting and working with other local grassroots groups such as the Read Mountain Alliance. To do all this – to keep making a difference in our surrounding landscape – WVLT must have your support.

This past year has been a time of national crisis and state fiscal uncertainty. Economic hard times hit non-profits especially hard as well. Knowing that our needs may have seemed of secondary importance following September 11, we have not made any strong appeals for your financial support. But the time has come for us to seek your help. **Your financial support is essential** in order for WVLT to expand conservation programs that will save parts of our landscape otherwise destined for destruction.

“A subdivision is the last crop a farm will ever grow.”

Virginia's remaining forests, fields, and rivers will remain unspoiled only through the sustained financial support and stewardship of people like you. Your tax-deductible contribution will help cover WVLT's operational expenses and help provide matching funds to the many grants to which we apply. Please consider becoming a stakeholder in the preservation of western Virginia's natural resources.

Roger Holnback,
executive director

Meet David Hurt, WVLT Project Manager

David Hurt comes to the post of project manager for the Western Virginia Land Trust from a varied background, much of it related to land stewardship.



In his new job as project manager, Hurt will write grant proposals and reports and manage fund-raising activities and conservation projects, working with Roger Holnback, executive director. He is currently administering a Roanoke City Cultural Services grant to help school children restore and reforest stream banks along Lick Run as it flows through Roanoke City parks. He also will provide a landowner's perspective during easement contacts with other property owners.

For the past three years, he's taught seventh-grade English in Roanoke City schools while also working as a Land Trust volunteer and summer employee. He came to WVLT in the process of persuading his family to donate a 169-acre conservation easement, the first co-held by the Land Trust with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

Hurt now owns part of that easement property in Red Valley, a quickly changing rural community just south of Windy Gap in Franklin County. He and his wife, Katrina, are raising two children, Henry and Phoebe, in a 19th century farmhouse where his grandfather was born. He calls the renovation "a slow, ongoing process." Katrina Hurt is a daughter of Land Trust treasurer Gary Duerk and Barbara Duerk.

As a seventh-generation Franklin County native, Hurt says he developed a sense of land stewardship from his father while growing up on the family homeplace along the Roanoke River. His father has a part-time beef operation on River Place Farm, a Virginia Century Farm.

After graduating as an English major from Roanoke College in 1991, Hurt sold Bluegrass instruments at Fret Mill Music on the Roanoke City Market. Last fall, he was elected to the Franklin County Board of Supervisors, with smart growth and preservation of farmland and open space as "a big plank" in his platform.

During his volunteer and summer work with the Land Trust, Hurt did research, mapping and clerical work and organized a Franklin County landowner workshop, which led to continuing negotiations over a 250-acre conservation easement. He also wrote an application to Scenic America, nominating the Lynville Mountain Landscape as a 2001 Last Chance Landscape. This was selected by Scenic America as one of the nation's 10 most scenic and threatened landscapes.

Streamside Easement *(continued from page one)*

foot wide strips on either side of a river or stream, riparian easements protect water quality by slowing storm runoff, filtering pollution and reducing erosion. Healthy riparian zones also provide wildlife habitat and travel corridors and protect fish habitat by shading water surfaces. Public benefits also include maintaining the scenic value of rivers and streams.

WVLT already has an agreement to purchase a riparian easement on 11 acres of bottomland along the upper James River. This property, between Arcadia and Buchanan in Botetourt County, will forever be managed to protect water quality in the James River, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay. This small part of a larger scenic resource will be

(Please see Streamside Easements, continued on page 5)



We Invite You to Become Part of the Western Virginia Land Trust

Please feel free to contact us at any time for more information on the Western Virginia Land Trust.

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

Phone/Fax 540/985-0000
E-mail wvlt@msn.com

LANDSAVERS:

Jim & Jill Woltz Love and Save the Land

Jim and Jill Woltz, landsavers extraordinaire, have a busy summer ahead—their auction company will sell 20,000 acres of land in West Virginia and Tennessee in the next four months and Jill is scheduled to give birth to twin boys in August.

Along with their successful auction operation, both Woltzes are passionate about land, about preserving it for the use and enjoyment of future generations. They have placed 1,500 acres of their own property under easement—1,000 acres on Bent Mountain and 500 in North Carolina. And they recently gave the state a 13-acre tract containing Chestnut Falls for parkland along the New River Trail in Carroll County.

How can land sellers be landsavers? Why do they do it? Jim Woltz puts it this way: “I have to wear two hats. I have to make a living. Our job is to get the seller the most dollars out of the land. In order to do that, we must divide the land into portions or parcels that people can afford. At the same time, we point out to the seller the benefits of conservation easements. As long as there are monetary benefits, it’s a fair, a great way, to preserve property and open land.”

Woltz, a North Carolina native who tried the apparel industry and left it quickly, says, “I like land. It’s in my blood and has been a big part of my family for generations and although I make my living selling it, I try to do it with care and concern.” He grew up on a farm near Mt. Airy and graduated from North Carolina State University. After a brief try at quality control in his father’s apparel plant, he came to Roanoke for a real estate job in 1973. He started selling farms and large land boundaries with his own company in 1978.

“I spend hours laboring over maps to decide how best to lay out divisions, when they have to be made, so as to let the boundaries make sense. Conservation is a good thing and very needed,” he said.

But Woltz draws a line in the sand. Easements must be voluntary, self-driven. Easements “help when they come from the heart.” He believes in property rights and he opposes “forced conservation.” A landowner “should have rights...He’s invested in the land and to have those rights taken away by ordinance or regulation is unfair...Down the road, that’s going to hurt land conservation. County administrations and federal regulations need to be careful about enforcing restrictions.”

For example, Woltz points to a Wythe County ordinance that restricts landowners from subdividing any property not on a state road. He said a man wanted to divide a 2,000-acre farm into smaller 100-acre tracts but the ordinance tied his hands. The county did this “without compensation,” Jill Woltz added.

While assisting in administration and coordination of auction sales, Jill has her own deep-seated convictions about land conservation. The seller looks at the monetary benefits as well as preservation of land for future generations to enjoy, she said.

A native of Franklin, Pa., Jill came to Roanoke for a medical job 12 years ago and then headed to Ferrum College for an environmental science degree. She took this background to a job overseeing state Soil and Water Districts in Southwest Virginia for three years. “You won’t find better people” than the soil and water volunteers, she said. The districts are eligible to hold easements. After joining the auction team, Jill played a key role, along with Roanoke County Planner Janet Scheid, in helping the John Bernard family write an easement on Cahas Mountain property they were selling near Boones Mill.



Jill and Jim Woltz ride in front of Chestnut Falls on Carroll County land they gave the state.

Husband Jim says Jill “shares my views and ideas about the love of the land, mountains and conservation. Her wonderful nature and personality have made it easy for her to explain the benefits of and how good a conservation

easement can be. She has helped tremendously with showing people what they can do to help to preserve land.”

The Woltzes are landlords and good friends of the Western Virginia Land Trust. They own the 1 Elm Place building housing the spacious ground-floor offices of the Land Trust.

In spreading word about conservation options, Jim Woltz operates almost as an educational arm of the Land Trust. Partly through his influence, about 3,000 acres of land was placed under easement in what his company called “the sale of the century” in September 1999. At a Hillsville auction, Woltz sold a total of 13,000 acres of riverfront property for \$17.4 million.

A recent auction of High Mountain Farm in Floyd County “gave us the opportunity to talk about conservation,” said Roger Holnback, executive director of WVLT. Probably 250 of the farm’s 400 acres will come under easement. Jim Woltz “gives conservation a chance,” Holnback said.

The Woltzes often tell their clients about conservation. His company’s information network is far-flung. In one 90-day period, the Woltz website drew 750,000 hits.

More education is sorely needed, Woltz says. Landowners should be made aware of the need for conservation. Even more importantly, he believes local governments should set money aside for the purchase of easements to protect viewsheds and create greenways or create more conservation incentives for landowners.

What legacy would Jim Woltz like to leave on this earth? “As someone who made a living selling land but did it with a concern for how it was left after the sale. As someone who was conscientious about open space easements yet understood the value of the people’s right to their own land. The beauty of my own farm, after I am dead and gone, will be preserved for the most part by easements and greenways.”

Are the Woltzes really environmentalists? “I like to hug a tree every day,” said Jill, with a playful nudge at her husband. Jim Woltz just grinned.



Streamside Easement *(continued from page 3)*

preserved for the enjoyment of future generations of boaters and anglers as they travel this historic waterway.

Two landowners along Franklin County’s Blackwater River have also applied to WVLT’s riparian easement purchase program. When these easements are finalized, the landowners, with over 1/2 mile of river frontage, hope to demonstrate the value of riparian easements to their neighbors. The Blackwater is a major tributary to Smith Mountain Lake and its corridor is a highly productive agricultural area. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation has declared a lengthy segment of the Blackwater eligible as a State Scenic River. With help from conservation-minded landowners and WQIA funds, WVLT hopes to protect water quality in the Blackwater River while preserving the area’s agricultural and scenic resources.

The owner of a 130-acre Floyd County property is exploring placing a riparian easement along 2.5 miles of the Little River, which flows into the New River. The landowner has also expressed interest in placing a conservation easement on the entire farm in partnership with the New River Land Alliance and Virginia Outdoors Foundation, further protecting the land’s natural resources.

Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are also working hard to protect our region’s water quality. Since WVLT’s riparian easement program can complement so many other conservation programs, we have been working with local districts to offer landowners a complete conservation package.

River roundtables – grassroots organizations formed to address water quality and water use issues within specific watersheds – have formed throughout WVLT’s service area within the last two years. Roundtables now exist for the New, upper James, and upper Roanoke Rivers. Comprised of representatives from state and federal agencies, local government officials, landowners, commercial interests and conservationists, river roundtables identify methods to assure responsible use, orderly economic development and conservation of resources within watersheds. Roger Holnback, WVLT executive director, was recently selected to serve on the Upper Roanoke River Roundtable Board of Directors. WVLT continues to work closely with each local river roundtable to make contacts with riparian landowners who may be interested in our easement program.

In addition to securing riparian easements, WQIA funds also allow Western Virginia Land Trust to continue water quality education with Roanoke City youth.

Assistance from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and generous funding through WQIA grants have made these activities possible. As part of WVLT’s mission to preserve western Virginia’s natural and cultural resources, we are making great strides in protecting our region’s water quality and riparian habitat.



Read Mountain Alliance

607 Ray Street • Roanoke, VA 24019
540-977-4540

Read Mountain Update

The Read Mountain Alliance is gearing up for a fund-raising program to support its long-range goal of saving the top of this Roanoke Valley landmark through purchase of conservation easements and property from private landowners.

Individuals, foundations and companies throughout the Roanoke Valley will be contacted for support. About \$10,000 has already been contributed, along with more than \$30,000 worth of in-kind contributions.

The Alliance is working in partnership with the Western Virginia Land Trust. Contributions may be made to WVLT for the Alliance. Thus far, more than 650 supporters have joined the Alliance and volunteered to help the effort.

Western Virginia Land Trust recently authored a grant application on behalf of Read Mountain Alliance in hopes of securing funds for an upcoming brochure.

Following a meeting of about 75 supporters of the grassroots organization in February, activities, technical, communications and funding committees are beginning to organize and tackle their specific tasks. Ken Lane and Mike Lafoon are leading the Activities Committee, assisted by advisors Liz Belcher and Bill Gorge. Tom Skelly and Mike Robertson lead the Technical Committee with help from Janet Scheid and Bill Hickman. The

Communications Committee is headed by Carol Orr and Allyson Lee, advised by George Kegley. David and Mary Cook-Moore and Mike Vaughn lead the Funding Committee, with Ron Crawford, Roger Holnback, and Waller Caldwell serving as advisors.

In other developments, eight hikers climbed the mountain following a recent meeting of the Activities Committee. The Technical Committee has started to organize volunteers into "telephone trees" to spread information about the Alliance's progress, activities and plans. They have also developed an attractive and informative website at <www.readmountain.org>.

Cutler Named to State Board and Elected to Roanoke City Council

Governor Mark Warner has appointed Dr. M. Rupert Cutler, WVLT trustee and founding executive director, to the board of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation is a state agency that promotes and holds conservation easements. Cutler is a retired executive of the National Audubon Society, the Environmental Fund and Defenders of Wildlife. Former Assistant Secretary of Agriculture under President Carter, Cutler was also elected to Roanoke City Council in the May elections.



In a VOF-approved boundary line adjustment, approximately 10 acres have been added to an existing Franklin County easement. This streamside field will be protected in perpetuity.

WVLT Member Gifts

WVLT is sustained in large part by member contributions.
The following people have generously contributed to WVLT during the current fiscal year.

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Project Manager David Hurt and volunteer Debbie Lawson Goines man WVLT's display at Earth Day festivities in Roanoke's Highland Park.

Thanks to Grant Providers

The following partners have awarded grants to WVLT that fund current projects and expenses.

An anonymous, yet generous, foundation

Foundation for the Roanoke Valley

Horace G. Fralin Charitable Trust

Roanoke City Cultural Services Committee

Virginia Dept. of Conservation & Recreation

Virginia Department of Forestry's Division of Urban and Community Forestry

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

W. Alton Jones Foundation

"The land belongs to the future... We come and go but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it – for a little while."

- Willa Cather, O Pioneers!

IT'S MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME!



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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



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

Phone/Fax 540/985-0000
E-mail wvlt@msn.com

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