

Land Protection *news*

WESTERN VIRGINIA LAND TRUST

WINTER 2003

Last Chance for Parkway

Roanoke Leg of Blue Ridge Parkway Declared Last Chance Landscape



Scenic America, a national non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the scenic character of America's communities and countryside, designated the 28 miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Roanoke County as a 2003 "Last Chance Landscape" in February.

Scenic America selects 10 landscapes across the nation for the annual award. The Lynville Mountain landscape in Franklin and Roanoke Counties was chosen for that recognition in 2001.

WVLT is working with Roanoke County planners to develop preservation strategies for the threatened Parkway viewsheds.

Roger Holnback, WVLT executive director, told a news conference that the Land Trust "will spearhead an outreach effort to talk with landowners about protection through easements. The Parkway's viewsheds are rapidly degrading."

The imperiled landscapes chosen by Scenic America face imminent threats that still have potential

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solutions. Ongoing demands for housing and commercial development are placing tremendous pressure on the remaining undeveloped land throughout the Roanoke Valley Parkway corridor. Several overlooks have already lost most

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Parkway Views Preserved

WVLT is already working with landowners on several conservation easements that will protect Parkway views in Roanoke County and surrounding areas. In fact, WVLT has already helped secure a number of conservation easements that protect Blue Ridge Parkway views.

- 317 acres adjacent to Smart View Recreation Area in Franklin County
- 158 acres near Bedford County's Peaks of Otter
- 76 acres of Bedford County farmland
- 28 wooded acres on Franklin County's Cahas Mountain
- 89 acres atop Read Mountain in Roanoke County

Director's Report:

At least for the moment, the drought seems to be behind us as the regular snowfalls and recent rains have filled our rivers and reservoirs. I don't know about you, but I thought the pattern of snow every week was getting a little old, so spring is welcome indeed. This issue's photo of me was taken by Liz Belcher (WVLT Trustee and Roanoke Valley Greenways Coordinator) who talked me into a Super Bowl Sunday afternoon hike to the Cascades in Giles County.

Seeing the frozen falls (in the photo's background) was much better than the media-made contrivance of the Super Bowl by any measure. In our modern world of newer, bigger, faster and more we should each remember to stop speeding by nature's beauty, and remember to occasionally reconnect with the magic and natural wonders to be found in our part of Virginia.

This newsletter has as its core a special edition we sent in February to almost 2000 landowners who own properties of over 100 acres in Bedford, Floyd, Franklin, Montgomery, Patrick and Roanoke Counties. These were surrounding counties with tax information in computer form that was easy for us to convert to a mailing database. In the process of sending this and an earlier mailing last fall, we realized the sobering fact that all the larger tracts of private lands in a 6 county area are in the hands of only 3,000 individuals. As Margaret Mead put it in one of my favorite quotes "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever does." I suggest that the decisions made by these few landowners will play a large part in determining the character of our region forever.

A large part of our effort as a land trust is to present these important folks with all the alternatives so that the decisions they make that will affect the whole community are made with full knowledge. We are not about

saying no to all development or the landowners' right to do what they want with their property. We fully promote both capitalism and freedom of choice.



While we don't say no to development, we do want the placement, style and effect on the greater community to be considered by those who build new residential housing. We hope that when development will have an impact on an important natural, scenic or historic resource, developers will look elsewhere or take great care to mitigate the impact of their projects. Specific features like the Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian Trail, our National and State Parks, recreation areas, and environmentally sensitive areas along our waterways, wetlands and natural heritage sites define our region and must be preserved before they are lost for good.

We promote the creation of quality people-friendly communities but hope that more developers will also consider infill and the redevelopment of our blighted inner city neighborhoods and struggling small rural communities. Let's not just take the easy way out and only do "greenfield" industrial and residential development in our all too rapidly disappearing beautiful rural valleys.

We support greenways, connectivity and walking and biking trails for our citizens. We support making city neighborhoods and small rural towns safe and friendly places to live and we support the local businesses that provide jobs and important services to our communities.

So, let's get out of our cars and walk more often. If there are no sidewalks or greenways, work to get them built. And while it may seem to be un-American, skip the super center and mall more often and frequent small locally owned and operated businesses when you can, and above all, **don't forget to enjoy the incredible beauty of our region while you can.**

Roger B. Holnback
WVLT Executive Director



Stewardship

David A. Hurt, Project Manager

What's not to like about conservation easements?

Conservation easements enjoy widespread support for providing a voluntary, free-market land conservation tool. Few criticize this

low-cost, non-regulatory approach to preserving woodlands, historic landscapes, scenic views and family farms.

To be sure, conservation easements aren't for everyone. Landowners can make up their own minds and many, even some passionate stewards of their land, aren't interested or just can't justify the choice. That's a fact that land trusts accept.

But from a public policy perspective, it's important to have and promote the option. Unfortunately, there is a tiny but increasingly vocal fringe that opposes outright the concept of permanent land protection.

Over the past year, I've seen anti-easement views expressed in the Wall Street Journal, from a thankfully small minority of the Virginia General Assembly and among some skeptical folks in our local community. Following is my take on their questions and misconceptions.

What about property rights?

Critics claim that conservation easements violate private property rights. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Land ownership brings with it a bundle of rights. Landowners are free to sell, lease, or donate any combination of these rights, including those to timber, minerals, rights of way... and development. Conservation easements are private land transactions that no more violate property rights than do timber sales, subdivisions or hunting leases.

As a staunch land-rights attorney recently told me, "A conservation easement is the ultimate expression of private property rights." A-men.

"We need everybody on board to help provide voluntary means to preserve western Virginia's natural and cultural heritage ... a mission that's hard not to like."

Is forever too long?

Some say that we shouldn't make land use decisions for future generations, but nearly every choice regarding land does just that. Selling land out of a family, fragmenting a forest with homes or paving prime farmland are all permanent choices that affect future generations.

Conservation easements are also permanent, but preserve landscapes that will be in short supply for our descendants. Clean water and clean air come from undeveloped land and that's not a bad legacy to leave the grandkids.

Don't people have to live somewhere?

We absolutely need room for housing. We also need room to grow food and timber, recharge aquifers, provide wildlife habitat and serve innumerable other needs. The trick is finding a balance.

America's land consumption is out of balance and far outpacing population growth. It's not so much more people gobbling up land, but their desire to live on bigger and bigger lots, with the ironic result of those seeking the countryside causing it to vanish at an ever-faster clip.

In contrast, recent gains by land trusts such as WVLT still leave less than 1% of Virginia's privately owned lands under conservation easement. The question should not be "Where will people live?" but "How will they live without open space?"

Don't easements just obstruct public projects and community planning?

While it's true that lands under conservation easement may have some protection from eminent domain, easements are not stopping public projects. Easements held by state agencies such as the Virginia Outdoors Foundation must be considered when planning roads, utility lines and other projects, but so must many other resources such as schools, wetlands and historic sites. There's nearly always a way to protect easements and accommodate public works.

Just as easements must be considered when planning projects, projects must be considered when planning an easement. In fact, a WVLT or VOF conservation easement must be compatible with the local comprehensive plan.

Don't we already have enough public land?

Maybe yes and maybe no, but conservation easements are not public lands. Just as we need cities and wilderness, we also need the conserved private lands that conservation easements protect. America's "working landscape" – the land that produces our food and fiber – needs to stay in private hands to remain productive. Most of the scenic views that drive tourism in Southwest Virginia are not public lands. And every community deserves protected open space.

Don't easements hurt the local tax base?

Some myths die hard, but word is finally getting out that preservation pays. A recent American Farmland Trust report shows that 83 studies in 19 states concluded the same thing – farms and forests provide a net gain for taxpayers.

On average, farms and forests consume only 36 cents in public services for every tax dollar they generate. In contrast, residential development

consumes \$1.15 for every \$1.00 generated. Preserving land preserves strong local tax bases, along with the invaluable "sense of place" critical to tourism and economic development efforts.

Can't conservation easements "trick old people out of their land"?

Conservation easements are a tool, not a trick. Any real estate deal can involve deception and our mountains are rife with stories of unsuspecting people cheated of land, coal or timber. But I've yet to hear of a single land trust using questionable tactics to conserve land.

In fact, the Western Virginia Land Trust and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation strongly urge prospective easement donors to seek their own independent counsel. Those who choose not to are required to sign a waiver and no easement is considered without the owner's intent clearly expressed in writing. The process usually takes several months and the donor may back out at any time before signing and recording the deed at the courthouse.

Conservation easements are still a new idea in Southwest Virginia and deserve careful scrutiny. We encourage a close look and are happy to see that as knowledge of easements grows, so does acceptance. We need everybody on board to help provide voluntary means of preserving western Virginia's natural and cultural heritage – a mission that's hard not to like.

Floyd County Native Preserves Family Land

Margaret Smith, a retired Martinsville school teacher, preserved her 85 acres of Floyd County land just outside of the county seat by donating a conservation easement to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) late last year.

“I just wanted to keep it as it is,” says Smith, who preserved land that was originally purchased by her great-great grandfather.

Known as Howard’s Hill, the site once contained Williams Carding Mill on Dodd Creek. With the mill long gone, Smith uses her property primarily as private hunting land.

Smith learned about conservation easements from Jim Wilson, a Martinsville realtor and WVLT trustee.

Wilson has donated conservation easements to 317 acres of his land on the Floyd County/ Franklin County border off of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Smith talked to Wilson about preserving her property after hearing him discuss conservation easements at a meeting of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Through a WVLT contact and VOF easement, Margaret Smith’s desire to keep her little corner of Floyd County as-is will be perpetually enforced by the Commonwealth of Virginia.



Trustee Saves Poor Mountain Treasures

Jim Woltz, a Roanoke real estate broker and auctioneer and WVLT trustee, preserved another 67 acres of Roanoke County’s Poor Mountain by donating the property’s development rights to the Nature Conservancy. This makes a total of 910 acres that Woltz has placed under conservation easement on Poor Mountain.

The agreement, recorded in December 2002, allows for one single family home on the wooded tract, but Woltz has no plans for even that level of development. Cell towers are prohibited to protect scenic views and only highly selective, sustainable timber harvests (no clear cuts) are permitted in order to preserve a natural forest and protect the nearby headwaters of the Roanoke River.

More Peaks of Otter View Preserved

Joining a growing trend in quickly growing Bedford County, T.E. “Mike” Reynolds has conserved 48 acres of lush, rolling pastureland just north of Bedford City.

After exploring conservation options with WVLT, Reynolds decided to make sure that his land will always be available for agriculture and open space use. He finalized a conservation easement in December 2002 with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

Reynolds stipulated in his easement that the property will never be subdivided and that development will be restricted to one single family home.



WVLT outreach and personal contacts from previous easement donors resulted in three new Bedford County conservation easements for 2002. WVLT anticipates the completion of a 250+ acre easement on a Bedford County cattle farm within the next few weeks and is working with three other Bedford landowners hoping to finalize easements this summer.

The following three pages are from WVLT's special landowner mailing.

SPECIAL LANDOWNER'S ISSUE

YOUR LAND, YOUR LEGACY... YOUR CHOICES

WESTERN VIRGINIA LAND TRUST 2003



Historic mill on 289-acre farm preserved through a WVLT conservation easement.

Choices for Preservation & Profit

Decisions you make about your land will shape our landscape for generations to come. The Western Virginia Land Trust respects your property rights, yet hopes that you will be interested in options to conserve land while meeting your personal goals and potentially enhancing your financial situation.

Keep reading this special newsletter if you need to:

- **Protect your land from future development**
- **Keep land in the family**
- **Reduce or eliminate estate taxes**
- **Earn substantial income tax deductions**
- **Gain additional income without selling your land**

The Western Virginia Land Trust (WVLT) is a private non-profit organization formed to preserve our natural and cultural landscape. We work with property owners to help them find voluntary ways of preserving their land so that all of our descendants will have places available to farm, cut timber, hunt, fish, hike and enjoy the beauty of our special part of Virginia.

Conservation easements can be used to accomplish this goal by limiting intensive development while keeping land in private hands and providing landowners with substantial tax benefits and cash compensation.

A conservation easement is a flexible and voluntary tool that lets you determine the legacy of your land. Please review the information in this special edition of *Land Protection News* and return the enclosed form or call us at (540) 985-0000 if you'd like to discuss how conservation options might fit into your plans.

Conservation Easements

Have Your Cake and Eat It, Too!

A conservation easement is a voluntary deeded agreement that permanently protects land from subdivision and development. An easement protects your piece of mind by preserving the scenic, agricultural, forestal or historic qualities of your land while improving your financial security through tax benefits and tax credit sales.

Voluntary: Conservation easements are completely voluntary and initiated by landowners who wish to protect and preserve the land they love forever.

Private: Conservation easements do not require public access, as landowners retain total control of who visits their land. If the landowner wishes, conservation easements can even remain confidential to avoid publicity.

Permanent: Conservation easements permanently protect land. To qualify for tax benefits, an easement must be made in perpetuity binding current and future owners to the easement terms.

Flexible: Conservation easements are as individual as the lands they protect. Landowners and their easement holder negotiate specific terms to meet their mutual goals. Traditional uses such as hunting, fishing, farming and forestry are encouraged.

Financially Beneficial: Donating a conservation easement provides significant financial benefits to landowners and their heirs. Please see details inside that explain the following tax advantages:

- **Federal Income Tax Deductions**
- **State Income Tax Credits**
- **Estate Tax Reductions and Exclusions**
- **Reduced Real Estate Taxes**

Donating an easement creates a permanent legacy; such a decision should not be made in haste. WVLT's experienced staff will be happy to meet with landowners and their families to discuss all aspects of conservation easements.

Cash for Conservation

Virginia Tax Credit Sales Offer Landowners New Options

The primary reason landowners donate conservation easements is to preserve some natural, scenic, agricultural or historic resource of their land forever. Many want to establish a legacy for their children and grandchildren. Most value the peace of mind from knowing that their land will always be protected from development.

However, landowners can't ignore the value of their property. For many rural landowners, real estate is their primary asset and permanent reduction in its value can't be taken lightly.

Fortunately, there are many financial benefits to donating conservation easements.

A certified appraiser must determine an easement's value (the basis of all tax advantages) by showing the difference between what land is worth before being conserved and what it's worth after being placed under easement. For example, if the appraisal shows a \$500,000 "highest and best use" valuation and then a \$300,000 valuation after the owner gives up development rights, the easement is valued at \$200,000.

1. Federal Income Tax Deduction The donation of an easement is treated as a charitable gift and the value of the easement may be deducted from the donor's income for purposes of calculating income taxes.

- Deduction is limited to 30% of the landowner's adjusted gross income in the year the donation is given (the unused portion of the gift may be carried forward to be used as a deduction for an additional five years, subject to the 30% limit each year).
- Alternatively, the landowner may elect to reduce the amount of the deduction to the basis of the property. Then the value of the gift (as reduced to basis) will be deductible up to 50% of the landowner's adjusted gross income (for one plus five years). *This election may be advantageous to the landowner if the donation of an easement is made shortly after acquiring the property.*

2. Estate Tax Reduction Estate taxes often surprise heirs as land values increase. *In some cases, a landowner's heirs must sell the property just to pay estate taxes.* By donating an easement, landowners can reduce these taxes in two ways:

- The estate will have been reduced by the value of the easement (smaller estate value means less—or perhaps no—estate tax due).



- The American Farm and Ranch Protection Act of 1997 allows heirs to exclude up to an additional 40% of the remaining value of their land from estate taxes.

3. Reduced Real Estate Taxes In counties with use value taxation, land under easement is automatically entitled to use value tax rates. Even in places without use value taxation, land under easement should get a lower assessment since the full development potential no longer exists.

4. State Tax Credit Since 1999, Virginia has offered easement donors a tax credit for 50% of their easement value. Carried forward for five years, many easement donors eliminated state income tax for six years but left significant tax credit value unused. **Starting this year, the unused tax credit can be sold.**

Any owner of Virginia land who donates land or an easement for conservation purposes is entitled to a tax credit worth 50% of their gift. Any portion of the tax credit may be sold or given to other Virginia taxpayers.

This credit may also be sold by out of state residents who donate conservation easements to Virginia property. WVLT is not directly involved in the sale of conservation tax credits, but can provide a list of brokers upon request.

WVLT strongly urges prospective easement donors to seek their own professional counsel in matters related to tax, estate, and financial planning.

"I was born on this land and I've lived here all my life, off and on. I didn't want it cut up into subdivisions. I'd like all of my neighbors to donate conservation easements because it's the only way to preserve this part of the country."

Barbara Hatcher of Bedford County preserved her 158 acres near the Peaks of Otter by donating a conservation easement to WVLT and the Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District.

"My land is special to me—I hunt on it, watch wildlife, and manage timber. I enjoy its beauty and wanted to make sure that it'll be here for future generations. Since it borders the Blue Ridge Parkway and Smartview Recreation area, I was also aware of how my decision could affect a valuable public resource."

Jim Wilson, a WVLT trustee, and his wife Esta used conservation easements to preserve 317 acres of Franklin County forest.

"Conservation easements are valuable tools for balancing private property rights with land conservation. I sell land for a living, and I advocate conservation easements as a way to preserve land and to help landowners with tax deductions and credits."

Jim Woltz, WVLT trustee, realtor and auctioneer and donor of over 1,700 acres in conservation easements.

"A conservation easement allowed us to preserve our land for future generations and to honor our forefathers who labored so hard to preserve it for us... With the tax advantages from our easement donation, I feel like we sold part of our land and got to keep it all. The easement doesn't restrict any of the plans we had for the land and it protects it from the things that we'd hate to see happen."

Arnold Hurt donated a 169-acre easement in Franklin County to WVLT and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

What's The Fine Print In A Conservation Easement?

Since a conservation easement is forever, families should try to think of every "what-if" when considering specific easement terms.

Each easement is unique, but there are some general starting points. Following are terms of a "typical" easement. Remember, some of these points are negotiable as long as they serve a worthwhile conservation goal. Conservation easements only restrict the specific activities that they mention.

1. Division or subdivision of your land will either be totally prohibited or divisions will be limited to a certain number or acreage.

This is the most critical part of a conservation easement. Some landowners specify that their land can't be subdivided at all. Some reserve the right to split it into 50 to 100 acre tracts or to keep a couple of building lots for future family use or "insurance" to fund unforeseen emergencies.

There is some flexibility with this point, but it's hard to justify a conservation easement that allows more than one subdivision right per 100 acres.

2. No structures can be built except for one single-family home per parcel and associated outbuildings such as garage, guest cottage, sheds, barns and other farm buildings. If your easement allows you to divide your land, each parcel can contain a home and associated structures.
3. Industrial or commercial activities are prohibited except for agricultural, forestry and equine activities, temporary outdoor activities that do not permanently change the appearance of your land, or activities within a permitted building (i.e., house, barn, etc.) without changing its appearance. For example, you could host a temporary music festival, but you couldn't build permanent fairgrounds. A bed and breakfast might be fine but not a new motel.
4. Timber harvests must include Best Management Practices to control erosion and protect water quality. If you wish, logging provisions can protect scenic forests, rare habitat, or other specific resources.

5. Trash, refuse or junk will not be permitted on your land. This restriction does not apply to brush piles, composting, farm machinery storage or other agriculture or wildlife management practices. You will not be responsible for cleaning trash brought in by floodwaters or other situations beyond your control.
6. Billboards are not permitted. You can still post your land and have signs to show your address, advertise the sale or lease of your land or goods or services produced there or to direct visitors. No sign can be larger than nine square feet.
7. Grading, blasting, mining, or earth removal is prohibited, except what is required for utilities, private roads, pond construction, or permitted buildings. This does not in any way restrict cultivation.
8. The easement holder may visit your property annually after getting permission from you and giving reasonable notice.
9. You or your estate will need to notify the easement holder within 60 days of any transfer or sale.



Essentially, easement terms assure that your land will always stay pretty much the way it is now. The only rights you give up are those specifically listed in your easement. If your general goal is to preserve your land but you don't like a specific provision listed above, don't assume that an easement can't work. When a landowner and a land trust have mutual conservation goals, easement details can often be arranged to preserve land and please all parties.

"This is the only open land left in town. I could not see having it developed, for sentimental reasons. I read somewhere that 10 percent of the land in the nation is in asphalt... I just could not see that here."

Eliza Thomas preserved 45 acres – the largest remaining tract of open space in Bedford City – through a conservation easement.

LANDSAVER: *Tamara Vance, Virginia's Leading Landsaver*

Tamara Vance, a working environmentalist for 21 years and a unique Landsaver, drives all over the state and carefully approves thousands of pages of conservation easements in her job as executive director of Virginia Outdoors Foundation. Leading a staff of 11 at five offices, she administers a rapidly growing land-saving program from her Blacksburg headquarters.

Her state agency placed easements on a record 205 projects covering 36,975 acres of land last year – a steep 68 per cent increase from 22,000 acres in the preceding year. The previous record was 28,000 acres when state conservation tax credits began in 2000.

Vance “works tirelessly and travels tens of thousands of miles in a dilapidated state jeep to look in every nook and corner for land to be protected,” said Frank Kilgore, a Wise County lawyer and chairman of the VOF board. The director has “absolute integrity and support” for the easement program. He also complimented her staff: “I’ve never seen a government agency that, across the board, has such dedicated employees. Everyone works hard. There is not a weak link.”

A lady with a mission, Vance gets satisfaction from preserving open space and saving family farms. She tells a story of a woman in Catawba Valley whose husband died after years of running a dairy farm. The widow leased the land to Virginia Tech for research but she wanted to keep the farm ownership in the family. After a permanent easement was prepared, the woman said, “When I’m up in heaven, I’ll look down and it’s still a farm.”

“That made me feel good,” Vance said. “I feel like it’s a real public service to help people preserve family land.”

After the easements are recorded in court, VOF is charged with monitoring and, when need be, enforcing the agreements. Though checking up on conservation easements is a perpetual responsibility, the frequency of monitoring declined last year due to deep cuts in state funding.

Vance’s attraction to the environment probably began with her association with a family friend, a naturalist-photographer who took pictures of birds in North Carolina. Vance, born in Raleigh, grew up in McLean in Northern Virginia. Her interest in conservation began in college. She earned a degree in economics and biology at the College of William and Mary and a graduate degree in resource economics at Virginia Tech.

After college, she joined the Piedmont Environmental Council for seven years, directing the Charlottesville office. She worked another seven years as Virginia director for the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, providing staff for the Citizens Advisory Committee, appointed by the governor. From that post, Vance moved to VOF seven years ago.

During General Assembly sessions, she’s off to Richmond to monitor relevant legislation. “I’m pretty busy, going back and forth.” She’s responsible for offices in Richmond, Charlottesville, Staunton, Aldie (near Middleburg) and at Blacksburg, her home base. From Blacksburg, Vance handles all conservation easements in Southwest Virginia, working with the Western Virginia Land Trust and other organizations.

She signed the first easements in Radford, Bedford City, four in Pulaski County and the first in Patrick, Wythe and Scott counties. A Virginia Tech graduate student helps with the increasing load – over 3,000 acres under easement in Southwest Virginia last year. “But we definitely need more staff.”

Vance takes the paperwork and field visits in stride but she does have a family. Her husband, Andrew Kassoﬀ, works in environmental management, handling cleanups for industries and counties. They have two teenage sons, Luke and Cy, and they like to hike when they can find time. The boys enjoy the outdoors. Time with the rest of her family—her mother, two sisters and a brother —also is important.



Tamara Vance and friend enjoying the view from Roanoke County's McAfee's Knob.

Several family experiences remind her of the need to save land. Her father's family sold a farm near Grandfather Mountain; her mother regrets the sale of a family dairy farm in North Carolina and her husband was disappointed when his family sold land on the Eastern Shore.

One of her major boosters is Rupert Cutler, long-time environmentalist in national, state and local work, current trustee and former director of WVLT and a new member of the VOF board. "I cannot imagine the Virginia Outdoors Foundation having a better qualified, more conscientious, or harder-working chief executive officer than Tamara Vance. She has dedicated her professional life to open-space land conservation," he said.

At the beginning of WVLT six years ago, Cutler teamed with Vance to win conservation easement protection of lands in Western Virginia. "Her support of WVLT in its infancy helped it survive into its current robust adolescence." Cutler said she is "a believer in the importance of the role of local land trusts as the eyes and ears of the Richmond-based VOF to monitor lands under easement, whenever there is an opportunity to provide for jointly or co-held easements."

Roger Holnback, WVLT executive director, said the partnership between WVLT and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation in helping landowners donate conservation easements is "a study in the best kind of cooperation based on the friendship and trust of the individuals involved." He continues, "When we meet with landowners, I know Tamara's empathy for them will allow her to take the time and effort to fully understand the unique situation they face and make sure they fully understand the process and issues involved in placing a conservation easement on their land."

Winter Intern

Eliza Temeles, a freshman at Amherst College, completed a winter internship at WVLT.

With roots in Botetourt and Bedford Counties, Eliza is a horse enthusiast with a passion for land conservation. Troubled by seeing places that were special to her transformed by urban sprawl within the past few years, Eliza sought to help a local land trust when returning home for winter break.

She says, "I believe through personal small commitments the momentum behind the land trust can build and substantial amounts of land can be protected."

Roger Holnback, WVLT executive director, was impressed by Eliza's initiative. "Eliza showed up just in time to help with a special landowner mailing. She jumped right in and did the hours of research and data-entry that was required in order to reach hundreds of property owners about conservation easements. Considering our small staff, volunteers like Eliza are invaluable to WVLT."

For information about internship opportunities, please call 540 985-0000.

VOF Easements in Western Virginia

Following are the total acres of land under VOF conservation easement within the 23-county WVLT service area. Many of these easements were recorded in cooperation with WVLT.

In addition, WVLT directly holds conservation easements on 768 acres. Other organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy, also hold conservation easements in Southwest Virginia.

Though lagging behind other parts of the state in total easement acreage, over 30% of VOF's Southwest Virginia easements have been recorded in just the last two years. And the upswing continues.

With increased WVLT outreach efforts, more equitable tax benefits for conservation, and cooperation with other groups such as the New River Land Trust, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation is almost certain to have another record year of land conservation in Southwest Virginia.

Bedford	1,277	Grayson	59	Radford City	149
Carroll	291	Henry	76	Russell	830
Craig	1,994	Montgomery	1,974	Scott	205
Floyd	565	Patrick	53	Washington	272
Franklin	492	Pulaski	293	Wise	27
				Wythe	210

Total VOF Easement Acreage in Southwest Virginia: 8,767

Cooperative Conservation

Land Trusts Work Together

The Western Virginia Land Trust (WVLT), based in Roanoke, and the New River Land Trust (NRLT), located in Blacksburg, have signed a memorandum of understanding which spells out an agreement to work “cooperatively to promote conservation... assisting landowners with the donation of conservation easements and promoting best management practices to maintain farm, forest and open-space lands.”

Roger Holnback, WVLT executive director, and Elizabeth Obenshain, NRLT executive director, said the agreement is intended to create a close cooperative effort between their two organizations.

The Western Virginia Land Trust has a 23-county service area extending westward from Lynchburg to Lee County while the New River organization’s service area is the eight Virginia counties in the New River watershed: Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, Pulaski and Wythe and the cities of Radford and Galax. These eight counties also are in the WVLT area.

The two groups agreed that each will be responsible for record-keeping on projects for which they are the primary contact and to make relevant information available to each other, as appropriate, in their overlapping region. They may co-hold conservation easements and they may co-sponsor or assist each other with landowner education events or other outreach efforts to promote conservation in Southwest Virginia. Both agreed to keep each other informed of major fund-raising efforts within the overlapping territory.

In Blacksburg, Obenshain said Holnback and David Hurt, WVLT program manager, have been “very helpful” on several projects of the new organization. “There’s more than enough work” for both, she added. Obenshain is working fulltime and the New River Land Trust has hired its first office assistant. The New River Trust placed almost 1,000 acres under easement in its first year.

New Partnership with Blue Ridge District

WVLT and the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District (BRSWCD) have entered into a cooperative agreement that paves the way for the two groups to co-hold conservation easements in their mutual territory of Franklin, Henry and Roanoke Counties.

John Freeborn, conservation specialist, expresses his board’s view by saying, “We at the District look forward to the cooperation between our organizations. As many of our conservation goals parallel, we believe our future teamwork will prove to be effective and long-standing.”

Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) were established in the 1930’s to conserve soil resources, control and prevent soil erosion, prevent floods and conserve water. SWCDs also have the legal authority to hold conservation easements. Today, 47 districts serve nearly all Virginia localities and oversee many government conservation programs. Voters elect directors from each locality served by a SWCD.

Soil and Water Districts are especially valuable partners for riparian easements that protect water quality. WVLT has cooperative agreements with three other districts and co-holds conservation easements with them.

Read Mountain Efforts Continue

Talks are continuing with landowners and developers on possible acquisition of property or conservation easements to protect the top of Read Mountain, according to Ron Crawford, founder of the Read Mountain Alliance.

Several activities are under way by the grassroots organization formed to save from development the top of the mountain in northern Roanoke County and southern Botetourt County. WVLT staff has worked with Crawford on land protection proposals and has met with him and representatives from a national land conservation group.

A meeting was held in early March to make plans for corporate participation in a second annual fall hike-at-thon on the mountain. Crawford spoke to the Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs and he has talked to two Virginia Tech geology classes on the Read Mountain project.

Two school groups planned workdays on the mountain. The Builders Club at Read Mountain Middle School was to groom trails for a second year. The Lord Botetourt Key Club planned to clear boulders to create a small park on the Durham property, now under easement.

WVLT Needs You!

*Membership dues and contributions provide essential support for our conservation activities. If you received this newsletter, but haven't made a contribution to WVLT, please join today, or renew your membership and help preserve Western Virginia's natural and cultural heritage. We need your support **today** to save land for **tomorrow**.*

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendar for the following dates:

- **Sunday afternoon, June 8 – A WVLT conservation celebration** will honor easement donors, conservationists and WVLT members in a festive outdoor environment. Wait for the spring edition of the Land Protection News or call 540-985-0000 for details.
- The James River Association will present **Conservation Easements and Tax Benefits** in Lynchburg on April 8 at 7:00 p.m. The speaker, Tim Lindstrom, is an attorney for the Jackson Hole Land Trust in Jackson, Wyoming. He helped draft federal legislation expanding the estate tax benefits of conservation easements and has donated easements on family land in Michigan and Virginia. For more information call 804 730-2898 or e-mail chagin@jamesriverassociation.org.
- Look for WVLT at **Earth Day** festivities in downtown Roanoke from 9:00 to 4:00 on Saturday, April 19. Hikes on the new Mill Mountain Trail will depart from downtown throughout the day. For more information, call Bill Modica at (540) 387-2782.
- Environment Virginia is conducting a **Conference on Virginia Water Supply** April 29 to May 1 at Virginia Military Institute. Call 540 464-7740 for details.
- The Franklin County Citizens Task Force for Trails and Greenways will host a community meeting at 7:00 p.m. on May 8 at the Len Gereau Center for Applied Technology and Career Exploration in Rocky Mount. Join in an engaging discussion about the benefits, challenges and opportunities related to greenways. **Chuck Flink of Greenways Incorporated** will be the keynote speaker. Mr. Flink has been involved in the development of over 1,000 miles of public trails throughout the U.S., authored the Roanoke Valley Greenway Plan, and is presently completing work on a Central Virginia greenway plan. Contact Franklin County Parks at (540) 483-9293 for details.
- The New River Land Trust is sponsoring a seminar entitled **Saving Land: A Road Map to Conservation Easements for Professionals and Landowners** on May 21. The event is for lawyers, accountants, appraisers, financial planners, landowners and estate planners. Continuing education credits are available. For more information contact Beth Obenshain or Holly Taylor at (540) 951-1704 or at betho@l-plus.net. This event is made possible with financial support from the Virginia Environmental Endowment.



Last Chance for Parkway *(continued from page 1)*

of their integrity, but others can still be saved.

The Blue Ridge Parkway, working with the Roanoke County planning staff headed by WVLT trustee Janet Scheid, has identified 42 scenic view areas along the 28-mile section extending from Botetourt County to the Franklin County line on Bent Mountain. Thirteen of the areas are rated as having little remaining scenic quality, 20 as having moderate quality and 9 exhibit high scenic quality.

The planners and the Parkway say their strategies may include a viewshed overlay district, conservation easements, fee simple purchase and/or design guidelines.

Parkway Superintendent Dan Brown said the Last Chance selection is "a dubious distinction" that focuses attention on the problem of development.

Brown said his recent return to the area after a 25-year absence was bittersweet because so many views have been compromised.

Sixth District Rep. Bob Goodlatte, boasting that 138 miles of the Parkway are in his district, said the Last Chance recognition "will be the catalyst for things that need to be done." He hopes the designation will lead to more "zoning and planning efforts... conservation easements and perhaps land acquisition so it (the Parkway) doesn't simply become a corridor of trees."

Goodlatte also asked that bike paths be included in Parkway plans.

Elmer Hodge, Roanoke County administrator, said the task ahead is "to blend development and preservation. This is something we can do. It's very worthwhile. Development is going to take place."

One of WVLT's top priorities for 2003 is to help steer Roanoke County's growth in a direction that preserves this valuable community asset and national treasure.



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