

# Land Protection *news*

WESTERN VIRGINIA LAND TRUST

FALL 2001

## WVLT Has New Director, New Office, New Challenge

The Western Virginia Land Trust ends 2001 with a new director, a new office and a challenge to enter its sixth year with a mandate to protect more land.

Roger Holnback, our new director, comes from the post of southern regional administrator and formerly regional trust coordinator for the Appalachian Trail Conference Land Trust for three years. He succeeds Michael Van Ness, who resigned as director on Sept. 1.

Holnback attended Mercersburg Academy and graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in economics and political science in 1976. For almost 20 years, he was a sailing and motor yacht captain, traveling in the Caribbean and Mediterranean, including a stint operating a yacht for the Aga Kahn. For the past four years, he has lived in the Roanoke area, and he and his wife, Lauren, have been co-owners of a Roanoke manufacturing firm.

In October, the Land Trust moved its offices from cramped quarters on Crystal Spring Avenue in South Roanoke to a spacious area donated by Jim Woltz, a WVLT trustee, in the ground floor of his One Elm Place building at 722 First St., SW, Suite L. The new office contains more than 1,200 square feet, more than six times the size of the former space.

With the formation of the New River Land Trust, based at Blacksburg, the Western Virginia Land Trust will be able to concentrate on the Roanoke-Franklin-Bedford-Craig-Botetourt area and the Blacksburg



*Holnback rests atop Dragon's Tooth in Roanoke County.* group hopes to work in the New River corridor from Giles, Montgomery, Floyd, Pulaski, Wythe, Bland, Carroll and Grayson counties. That trust was in formation in late November.

Among the leaders of the new trust are Randi Lemon and Tom Green, who have been WVLT trustees. Dr. Joyce Graham, an environmental developer and a former Radford University faculty member, is the acting president. Others are Beth Obenshain, Dylan Jenkins, Britt Boucher and Diane Green.

## Calling All...

Hikers, Paddlers, Anglers, Hunters, Farmers, Bird Watchers, and all Lovers-of-Virginia!

### ***Protect a Mountain Acre this Christmas!***

This Christmas, we can spend money on any number of gifts—software, appliances, boots, vacations, wine, a cruise, whatever. But very few purchases we make will last the year—much less a lifetime—and almost never, centuries to come. Would you make a small investment to save an acre of land as a Christmas present?

We have, today, an amazing and brief opportunity to secure some of the precious, historic, scenic land of Southwest Virginia—before it is developed, divided and forever altered. We MUST save these acres within the decade, if our descendants are to know the majesty, health and beauty of our mountains and valleys and rivers.

*(Please see form on page 11)*

# Director's Report:

By Roger Holnback

It has been a very busy month since I became director of the WVLT. It has been at the same time, a challenge for me personally and a wonderful opportunity to play a significant role in conserving the beauty of Western Virginia. Those of you who have heard me speak may have guessed I am not a native of Virginia, or of the Blue Ridge Mountains, or of any forested area full of game, wild rivers and creeks; I am from New Jersey. Not only that, but after getting out of college, my first career was on the ocean as a yacht captain, where land was for the most part the flat lowland along the shore.

Then a few years ago fate, and my wife's career choice, brought me to Virginia and I immediately fell in love with the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Appalachian Trail. In the past 20 years, I have been fortunate to travel the world and have seen or lived in many of the beautiful places you might have seen, read about or even dreamt about. What I can tell you from experience is this: the western part of Virginia is, without a doubt, *one of the most beautiful places in the whole world to live*, and keeping it that way is the mission of the Western Virginia Land Trust.

The Trust's mission is to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the western-most 23 counties of Virginia. That is just over 10,000 square miles, almost one-third of Virginia. Just over five years ago, the WVLT was formed because the trustees saw the need for land conservation work in the Roanoke area, where most of them

lived. To their credit, they also saw that there were no land trusts working to conserve the beautiful open spaces in any of the western-most counties of Virginia. So they took on the huge responsibility to be "the" land trust for Western Virginia. Now that I have visited most of the 23 counties south and west of Roanoke, I understand they were bold indeed to take on the challenge. And I am pleased to report that the WVLT has done and continues to do significant conservation work for which we may all be proud.

One of the secondary missions of the Trust from the outset has been to encourage the formation of new conservation groups in the region. We are very pleased that an outstanding group of committed conservationists have gotten together in the New River Valley and will shortly officially form the New River Land Trust. They are at present going through the legal processes and the fund-raising necessary to get things going and we are confident that because of the strong board they have assembled, they will be successful. In the end, the NRTL will provide even more land-owners along the New River with the opportunity to learn about conservation easements and forestry management techniques that will help them be good stewards of the river and the surrounding farming and forested lands. We look forward to working with them to conserve the New River watershed.

Another partnership we are proud of is with the Read Mountain Alliance. This local, grass-roots effort to preserve the upper slopes of Read Mountain is a great example of committed citizens doing the hard work of conservation for which all of the citizens of the Roanoke Valley will benefit. It's easy to see the need to preserve the wooded slopes and forested ridges of the beautiful Roanoke Valley, but I can tell you that getting it done is no small feat. The land on the top of Read Mountain is privately owned, and as such, it is up to those land-owners to voluntarily place conservation easements on their lands, or donate or sell their land for the good of future generations. A great goal, achievable only through the hard work of a few committed citizens.

In ending my first Director's letter, I want to thank my Board of Trustees for their unfailing support and give a special thanks to the members and supporters of the Western Virginia Land Trust, whose generous financial contributions make our work possible. The people of Western Virginia I have met remind me that not only is this a beautiful place, but so are the people. Thank you all for making me welcome and for your continuing support of the Western Virginia Land Trust.



# Land Trust Works To Save Read Mountain

Backed by the Western Virginia Land Trust, the new Read Mountain Alliance is working to preserve Read Mountain, a "woodland island" surrounded by homes, highways and businesses at the northern rim of the Roanoke Valley.

Ron Crawford, a passionate, retired architect who leads the grassroots movement, calls Read Mountain "one of the few remaining pristine undeveloped mountains" in the valley. In only a few months, he has enlisted the support of Roanoke and Botetourt supervisors, the Land Trust board and many volunteers. Crawford has recruited men and women who have distributed more than 5,000 petitions seeking support from people who live in the shadow of the mountain. He has described the project at civic group meetings and the Alliance plans to contact prospective donors who may give money to protect the mountaintop from development.

The Land Trust has offered to provide technical and administrative support for the project, working in concert with property owners, citizens and the Alliance. Roger Holnback, new director of the Trust, is working with the Alliance to submit grant applications and to educate landowners on easements.

In October, the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors agreed to pay \$100 for a six-month option on 89 acres of the top slopes of Read Mountain. The Alliance plans to use that time to begin raising the \$200,000 purchase price of the land. A down payment of approximately \$50,000 is expected to be required. While the Alliance seeks grants and donations from corporations and individuals to the purchase fund, Roanoke County has not ruled out further contribution.

On a colorful fall day, Saturday, Oct. 20, 6<sup>th</sup> District Rep. Bob Goodlatte, State Sen John Edwards and about 50 other civic and environmental leaders hiked up the eastern side of the mountain for a picnic, enjoyment of the view and celebration of the Land Trust's 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Before the walk, Roanoke County Supervisors Fuzzy Minnix, chairman, and Bob Johnson announced the county's planned option at a news conference at Crawford's home at the base of the mountain.

The Alliance is seeking purchase or easements for 560 acres of the mountain land, owned by three families, with help from the Land Trust, Roanoke Valley Greenway Commission and the Appalachian Trail Club.

Much of the mountain, 2,350 feet high at the summit, would remain undeveloped under the Alliance plan. Trails for hiking, bicycle and horseback riding would be the chief use, while picnic areas and handicapped-accessible trails could be placed at lower levels. Read Mountain stretches 2.8 miles from Alternate Rt. 220 in Botetourt County south to Monterey and Blue Hills golf courses.

Crawford said the lower slopes of the mountain and the nearby valley floor are becoming rapidly urbanized while the difficult higher elevations of the mountain have proven resistant to commercial encroachment. He wants to save the upper

section, above the 1,800-foot contour line, where the woodland remains in a relatively pristine state, untouched by development.

Of 22 mountain-tops or ridges featuring prominently in the Roanoke Valley viewshed, only Mill Mountain and Tinker Ridge are in the public domain, according to the Roanoke Valley-Allegheny Regional Commission. Read and the 19 other mountains and ridges are partially or totally in private ownership and subject to development.

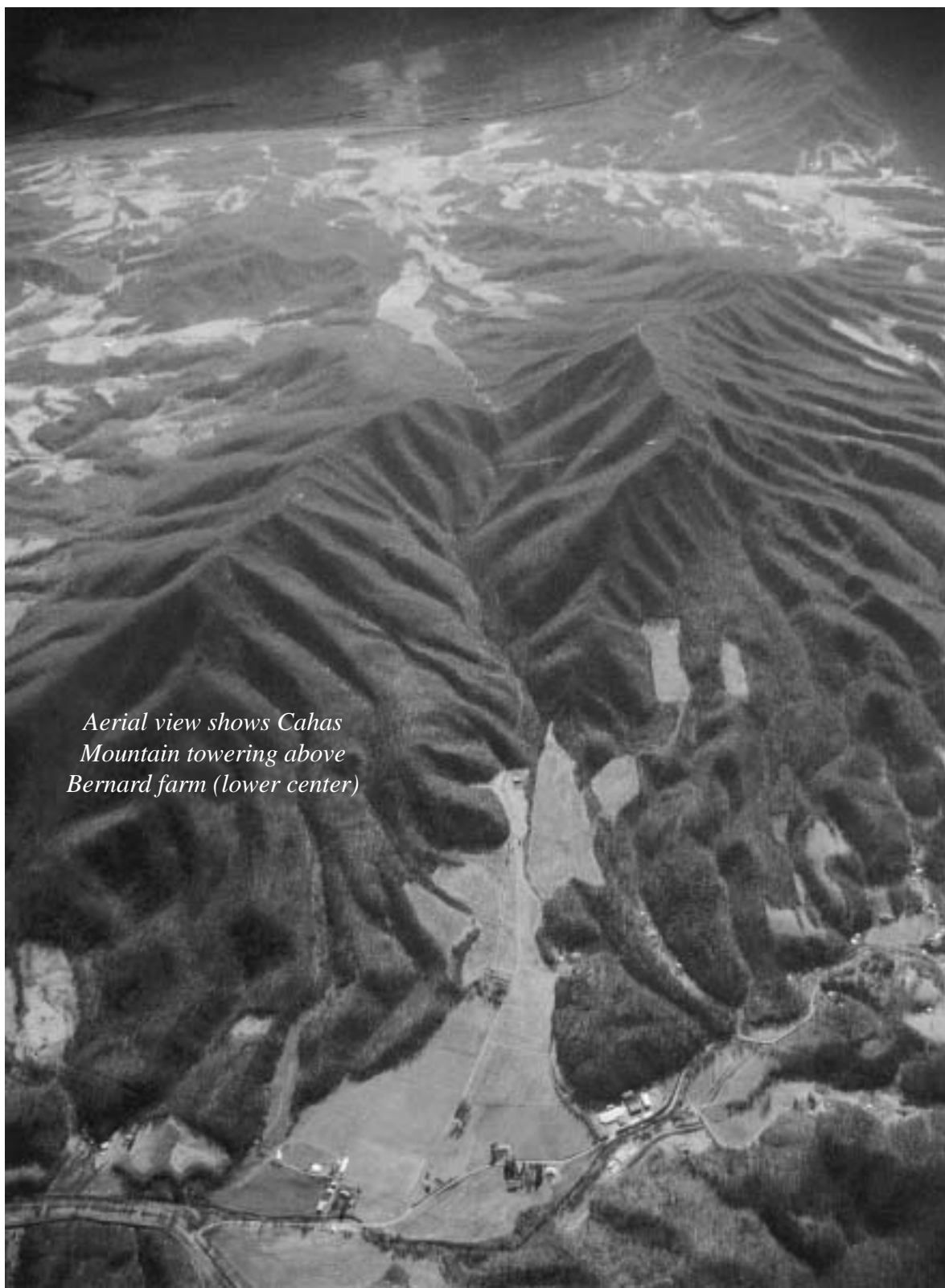
Because of the difficult terrain, Crawford suggests that roads be limited to access points for parking and possibly a neighborhood park. Trails would be provided for hiking, bicycle and horseback riding, including a link to the proposed Tinker Creek greenway. A trailhead could be located near the Roanoke Centre for Industry and Technology. Broad views of the northern Roanoke Valley may be seen from sandstone ledges near the peak of the mountain.

Early 19<sup>th</sup> century maps designate Read Mountain as Mills Mountain, named for William Mills, a settler who lived on the western side between Glade Creek and Buffalo (an early name for Tinker) Creek. Two centuries ago, Col. William Fleming, a prominent pioneer, soldier and legislator who lived on present Monterey Golf Course, owned more than 2,000 acres of land, extending to the top of Mills Mountain. The Read name came from the Read family who lived for more than a century in an old home near Monterey Golf Course and the southern end of the mountain.

Read and neighboring mountains figured in news stories in November. The Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation placed Read and other mountains in the Roanoke Valley viewshed on its annual Endangered Sites list. And Scenic America, a national organization, named Lynville Mountain, five miles east of Roanoke at the edge of Franklin County to its 10 "Last Chance Landscapes." This was the only selection in Virginia.



*Read Mountain is surrounded by development.*



*Aerial view shows Cahas Mountain towering above Bernard farm (lower center)*

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*“We are going to write some history. Think of the honor! We have been chosen to put some of Nature’s grandest scenes on the page of human record and on the map. Hurry! We are daily losing the most important news of all the world.”*

*– John Muir, Alaska Days*

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## Easement Saves Cahas Mountain Tract

A 25.5-acre tract of land atop Cahas Mountain, near Boones Mill in Franklin County, was protected under a conservation easement hours before an August auction, thanks to last-minute work by Janet Scheid, Stephen Lemon and Jim and Jill Woltz, working as a Western Virginia Land Trust team.

John and Jeanne Bernard wanted an easement for the mountain when they sold their 1820 Federal, two-story brick home and their 470-acre farm. Their property extended to the ridgeline of Cahas at Table Rock, near the top of Franklin County's highest mountain at 3,571 feet.

The easement, jointly held by the Land Trust and the Friends of the Rivers of Virginia, preserves the ridgeline of Cahas Mountain and provides viewshed protection forever and ever. The mountain and the Bernard farm are in an historic district.

The historic home was built by John Boone, son of Jacob Boone, the pioneer at Boones Mill in the late 1700s. His son, another John Boone, raised his 15 children there. Penn Boone, one of the 15, sold the house and farm to John Bernard's father, Silas W. Bernard, and his brother-in-law, C. J. Kinsey, in 1905. John and Jeanne Bernard

had lived there since their wedding 50 years ago. They have moved to Roanoke.

The architectural wealth and historic associations of this farm contributed to a determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. The farm lies within the shadows of Cahas Mountain.

Jim Woltz, a WVLT trustee and owner of Woltz & Associates, an auction firm, and his wife, Jill Woltz, assisted and supported the easement. Lemon did the legal work and Scheid coordinated and pulled the work together.



*Bernard farm buildings (right) are in the shadow of Cahas Mountain.*

## Lynville Mountain Is A National Endangered Scenic Place

Lynville Mountain landscape in Franklin County, in the pathway of the favored Int. 73 route east of Roanoke, has been named one of the most endangered scenic places in America in a nationwide competition.

Scenic America, a Washington-based conservation organization, selected the mountain as one of 10 "Last Chance Landscapes" in the nation. The mountain, also known as Windy Gap and crossed by Rt. 116, has been chosen as an endangered place of beauty or distinctive community character with both a pending threat and a potential solution.

This landscape, nominated by Land Trust volunteer David Hurt, is only a few miles from the Green Richardson house, an 1830s brick home selected as an endangered site by the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation. Both the house and the landscape are in the path of Int. 73 and they are near

the Blue Ridge Parkway. (Hurt, a high school teacher, was elected to the Franklin County Board of Supervisors on Nov. 6.)

Lynville Mountain lies directly in the path of rapid suburban growth in Roanoke and Franklin counties. Several ridges near the mountain have been cleared for residential development and land in the nearby Roanoke River Gorge is being actively developed.

The proposed interstate highway and haphazard sprawl development from Roanoke, just 5 miles away, threaten the outstanding scenic beauty of this peak and its unspoiled views of the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains, according to Hurt's nomination.

The mountain's landscape covers 50 square miles within the viewshed of the Parkway, the most frequently visited unit of the National Park Service, as well as nearby Smith Mountain Lake. The area, typifying the beauty and

## Lynville Mountain *continued*

history of Southwest Virginia, is dotted with small farms, heavily timbered hillsides and historic sites, including original land-grant holdings. Its unblemished quality is an important buffer between Roanoke and the growing communities of Smith Mountain Lake.

Cell towers, billboards, large homes and strip malls are rapidly encroaching on the mountain. Plans for the Int. 73 corridor would send the highway through the heart of the Lynville Mountain landscape, ignoring several existing alternative corridors.

Meg Maguire, Scenic America president, said Lynville Mountain "is among the most beautiful places in America. It would be a tragedy to destroy it now."

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency strongly objects to the Int. 73 location because its environmental impact statement revealed a failure to fully study alternatives, demonstrate the road's need or purpose or describe its irreparable damage to the environment. Despite strong citizen and government agency objections, the Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board approved construction of the new interstate highway last June and it is in the process of completing a final environmental impact study.

The potential solution: The Transportation Board has authority to alter the proposed course of Int. 73. The use of existing corridors such as U. S. 220, would spare the Lynville Mountain landscape and take advantage of existing infrastructure and concentrate growth along established corridors.

There is also an opportunity to apply more stringent development standards to the area. Overlay zoning districts, wireless telecommunications tower ordinances and ridgeline protection ordinances would preserve the beauty of the Lynville Mountain landscape while allowing for appropriate development.

The other nine Last Chance Landscapes selected by Scenic America:

The State of Oregon, Washington, D.C., Marsh Islands of Coastal Georgia, Red Rocks Scenic Road in Arizona, Coyote Valley near

San Jose, Cal., Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island, St. Croix Valley Scenic Corridor in Minnesota and Wisconsin, Harpeth River Valley in Tennessee and Woodberry Watershed Forest near Baltimore.

The 1999 Last Chance Landscape list included the region along historic Rt. 15, extending from Charlottesville through Maryland to Gettysburg, Pa. The Virginia Department of Transportation was persuaded to abandon its original highway design plans and hire consultants to explore traffic calming strategies for the road that would preserve its unique character. Among the landscapes on the 2000 listing was Poplar Point, a waterfront open space in metropolitan Washington threatened by development.

The Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation also selected Read Mountain and other scenic mountains, including Windy Gap, on its Endangered Site list.



*Lynville Mountain rises above rolling countryside in Franklin County.*



*Rachel Brown's farm lies near the foot of Lynville Mountain (rear)*

## Mountaintop Protection Ordinance Planned

Roanoke County planners are working on a proposed Mountainside and Ridgetop Protection Ordinance designed “to encourage the sensible development of the high elevations and steep slopes that surround our valley and provide the backdrop we all cherish so much,” according to Janet Scheid, chief planner. She hopes to have a final ordinance adopted early next year.

This project is “probably the most challenging ordinance I’ve ever worked on,” she said. Mapping is a critical element in the planners’ multi-faceted approach, Scheid said. Identifying mountains and ridges to be protected is not just a simple process of calculating elevations.

For example, Bent Mountain’s elevation exceeds 2,000 feet but large portions are flat as a pancake and are not visible from the valley floor. The ordinance should consider not only elevation but also the degree of slope so such areas will not be unfairly regulated.



Too, she said, the ordinance needs to provide financial incentives for property owners, such as density bonuses, tax abatements and conservation easements. Also, the regulation should encourage sensible development without penalizing property owners who have invested life savings in mountain lands and it should be equitable. A land owner told Scheid, “For 35 years, I have bought beautiful mountain property in Roanoke County rather than invest in 401(k) plans.”

She also raised the issue of regional equity. If part of the county’s ordinance is a program which has financial and tax implications for county residents, is it fair that the program should be borne solely by those who live in the county or should it be shared by all Roanoke Valley residents who benefit from the county’s protection of these scenic resources? Should all who benefit share in the cost?

While specific details have not been resolved, Scheid said the concept has strong support from elected officials and top management. A high level of community input will be required, she said, and the process will give planners an opportunity to educate the community about the benefits and threats to natural resources. “If they don’t

value it, they won’t protect it and if they don’t protect it, they will lose it.”

In Roanoke County, scenic beauty and visual resources are an integral part of the economic well-being, she said. “Scenic landscapes are an asset, not just because you or I think they are nice but also because other people are willing to pay to see the view and to experience the unique character of a place.”

A Viewshed Ordinance, in the works for a couple of years, would protect the scenic beauty of the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail in the county. Planners have mapped viewsheds, those areas that are seen and are critical to user experience on the 29 miles of the Parkway running through the county. Some of the most spectacular sections of the Appalachian Trail and two of its most used destination points are along the 18 miles of trail in the county. McAfee’s Knob in the county is one of the most photographed places on the trail.

Critical viewsheds from the trail have been mapped, Scheid reported, and the information will be used to develop an Appalachian Trail Overlay District to provide design guidelines and development flexibility to protect the viewsheds. Such a district could include density

bonuses to encourage cluster development outside the viewshed areas, as well as more stringent limitations on height of structures and more flexibility in landscaping requirements.




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*“The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely, or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature, and God. Only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simply beauty of Nature. And I firmly believe that Nature brings solace in all troubles.”*

– Anne Frank, *Diary of a Young Girl*

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## Who Are The Landsavers?

By Liza Field

Sir Edmund Hillary, the famed Mt. Everest climber, told the National Press Club back in 1992, “We cannot wait for government to save the environment. The earth cannot wait for someone to be paid to save it. Each of us must rise to the occasion of this momentous time in history, to save life and life systems on this marvelous planet.”

The Western Virginia Land Trust, in its few short years, has been a conduit of such work. By their nature, land trusts collect a group of private individuals who want to protect riverbanks, farms, mountains, or scenic beauty, even though (or because) it is no one’s “job” to save these places. Even government agencies have limited scope and staff—and piles of paperwork—that hobble their capacity to protect water, air, forest, wildlife, and soil.

Saving the earth is up to us, then. Never has the ordinary hiker, fisherman, or landowner had such means and such a clear calling to help the planet. Saving even one spare lot of scrub trees requires a whole collection of such individuals working together, for no personal gain but the sheer love of a place.

The Big Survey project was a good example of such a group of rescuers, all stepping far outside their job descriptions or pastimes—to rescue a piece of wild land many had never seen and none would ever own. A partial list of these landsavers follows:

**Archie Campbell:** had the vision to protect Big Survey 30 years ago. Three decades later, the vision became a reality. Archie convinced Wytheville’s Town Council to protect its 1850-acre watershed within the Big Survey. Without this action, the state Department of Game and Inland Fisheries would have been reluctant to pursue the acquisition.

**Mary Lou Campbell:** Archie’s spunky bride, connected us to her river-saving daughter, Hollis Wilde of North Carolina. Hollis connected us to a colleague, Mikki Sager of the Conservation Fund. Although her district lay within North Carolina, Mikki heard our appeal, saw some slides, and went quietly on to convince her national organization to help fund the Big Survey project and take on the option contract.

Another North Carolina organization went far outside its region to help the cause. **Chuck Roe** of the Conservation Trust for North Carolina answered 100 questions about the conservation easement for Asheville’s 17,000-acre watershed, and sent us vital information, documents, and letters of support.

**Charles and Betty Crockett** of Wytheville and brother **Alex Crockett** of Durham, N.C., were among the first to donate money to the critical Natural Heritage study which made Big Survey a “legitimate” potential for acquisition. Charles was one of few town citizens who’d ever hiked up Sand Mountain or knew where the watershed was. He spent numerous hours studying conservation easements and lobbying the other council members for protection of its land.

**Rupert Cutler** founded WVLT and decided to help Big Survey in late 1996 despite its location far south of the Roanoke-based, fledgling group. He connected us to the following three:

**Tamara Vance** of Virginia Outdoors Foundation, loves land and has proliferated conservation easements all across Southwest Virginia. Struck by the immensity of Big Survey, she called her former colleague, **Tyson Van Auken** at the State Parks in Richmond and urged his help. Tyson, who also loves wild land and would like to save 1000’s of acres, went to the Division of Natural Heritage to discover that no study had taken place on the land and helped us organize such a study.

**Carl Silverstein** of Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition in Asheville, just before going to press with a wish-list book of imperiled lands in the Southeastern U.S., asked for our maps and a photo, at Rupert’s encouragement. They included Big Survey in the book, which was sent to many agencies and legislators, helped garner Big Survey support through the next three years.

**Michael Van Ness**, the next WVLT director, took on Big Survey as a main goal, and spent countless 70-hour weeks lobbying, researching, and networking for the land, connecting all of the dozens of circuits that needed closing for the land deal to happen.

**Becky Charles, Bill Huddle and Edwin Shaffer:** three landowners rallied support from the other ten, for the conservation sale. Becky, a young attorney in



*Young hikers and a hound dog enjoy the Big Survey.*

West Virginia, and the guiding visionary among the landowners, spent thousands of her own hours and dollars researching tax law and the land's history, playing counselor and negotiator and spokesman for all involved. With so many scattered landowners, each with various agendas, Becky truly accomplished a miracle—and made history in these mountains.

**Sen. Bo Trumbo** and **Delegates Chip Woodrum** and **Vic Thomas**: true examples of bipartisan work and trudging many extra miles to find emergency funding for the Big Survey purchase. They promoted "Big Survey!" to the entire Virginia General Assembly, until every delegate and senator knew the obscure name as familiarly as the words "Richmond" or "Norfolk." Well, sort of.

WVLT's **Cabell Brand** (who loves Virginia land) and **George Kegley**, a Wythe County native, lobbied legislators and made trips to Richmond to pursue state funding. **Bob Field** provided transportation and **Tom Field** gave a car!

**Stephanie Porter Nichols** of Family Community Newspapers, and **Betty Strother**, **Beth Obenshain**, and **Mary Bishop** of The Roanoke Times wrote articles and editorials promoting Big Survey and land conservation, which were copied and sent to legislators and agencies around the state. **Greg Rooker**, former Wytheville newspaper publisher, helped fund the Big Survey grant application, from sheer love of the land.

**Phil Lounds**, of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, was the first state official to see the true potential of the Big Survey tract. After the state denied grant money to the project in December, 1999, Phil went to work behind the scenes and within a year rallied the entire department to accomplish this land rescue.

This very partial list of individuals who looked beyond the borders of their jobs, their districts, and their personal interests, helps convey the greatest miracle of the Big Survey rescue. Saving such a huge wilderness tract at this late time in our continent's history, is miraculous enough. But the amazing story of so many strangers coming together to work selflessly, each offering his own know-how or her own influence to make the thing fly, has left us a story of communion that can inspire us to meet—together—the difficulties yet to come.

WVLT and its handful of members—that's YOU—make this possible.

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*"People protect what they love."*

— Jacques Cousteau

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*Liza Field strummed a guitar at the Big Survey dedication.*

## Liza Field Wins State Conservation Award

Leading the preservation of the 8,300-acre Big Survey in Wythe County won a 2001 Virginia Watershed Award from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation for Liza Field of Wytheville, a Western Virginia Land Trust trustee and life-long environmentalist.

Field, a Roanoke native, writer and teacher, rode her bicycle on a door-to-door campaign to raise \$2,000 for an endangered species study which eventually led members of the Shaffer, Huddle and Wohlford families to sell their interests to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. She began working to save the Big Survey soon after she moved to Wytheville in 1992.

In 1997, Michael Van Ness, then the Land Trust executive director, working with the landowners, legislators and state officials to put the transaction together. An application for a state grant failed but the General Assembly passed emergency funding legislation loaning the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries \$3.5 million to buy the Big Survey.

In addition to Field's state award, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation gave an award to Beth Obenshain for editorials she has written for *The Roanoke Times*, raising awareness of New River issues. Her editorials also brought the Big Survey statewide notice. She is one of the organizers of the New River Land Trust.

## Big Survey Dedicated For Future Generations

State and Wythe County officials and an appreciative crowd of environmentalists celebrated the dedication of the Big Survey Wildlife Management Area, an 8,300-acre tract of mountain land south of Wytheville, on Oct. 18.

The State Department of Game and Inland Fisheries purchased the property for \$3 million from the Shaffer and Huddle families in a transaction coordinated by the Western Virginia Land Trust.

Ronald Hamm, acting secretary of Natural Resources, said this is “one of the biggest pieces of family-held, pristine property left in the state... We’ll enjoy it, as well as hundreds of generations to come.”

Del. A. Victor Thomas of Roanoke, a champion of the state’s hunters and fishermen, recalled the efforts to find state funding for the project and said, “If sportsmen and wildlife watchers stick together, we can whip anything that comes along.”

Carson Quarles of Roanoke, board chairman of Game and Inland Fisheries, praised “the great partnership between the Western Virginia Land Trust and the Conservation Fund” which made the purchase possible. The property will be “truly a legacy for future generations,” he added.

Rebecca Charles Suthers, a Charleston, W. Va. lawyer and representative of the selling families, said they experienced a great sense of loss “but the time has come to place this wonderful land in the care of those who will be able to protect and conserve the resources here in ways that our families could not do forever... much of our rural land in the South has become timbered, mined and otherwise developed. By luck or design, the Big Survey never fit into one of these plans and so it came to be one of the largest undeveloped, privately owned tracts of land in the Southeast.”

Suthers said her grandfather, the late Joseph C. Shaffer, 9<sup>th</sup> District congressman in 1928, “took enormous pleasure in sitting on his front porch in a rocking chair and looking at the mountain... he always believed that the Big Survey would one day serve a useful purpose.”

Shaffer passed his legacy to his five children who learned to cherish the mountains too, she said. The Shaffer family and many others in Wytheville hiked up to Chimney Rocks where they would roast marshmallows and hunt for chinquapins in the mountains.

Telling of Shaffer’s love for Wytheville and the surrounding area, Suthers said he told a fellow congressman that Southwest Virginia is “the greatest country in the world with the greatest people and ought to be a separate state—from the top of the Alleghenies to Cumberland Gap, with Wytheville as its capitol.”



*Big Survey and Wytheville town watershed, looking toward Mt. Rogers in Grayson County.*



*Dr. Scott Shaffer and his niece, Becky Charles Suthers, helped Natural Heritage botanists explore the Big Survey in 1997.*



*Rupert Cutler and George Kegley made the drive to Wytheville in 1997, to explore the Big Survey and speculate upon what measure might work to protect the 10,000 acres.*

## Protect A Mountain Acre This Christmas!

The Western Virginia Land Trust has been able to protect over an acre of rural Virginia for every \$300 donated, via the use of grants, land contributions, land owner workshops, lobbying and conservation easements.

You can expand this work by protecting a portion of scenic land, as a gift, a donation or memorial. Little time remains for protecting our rural landscape. If you “invest” now, you can save a noteworthy, visible chunk of forest, farmland, mountain, riverbank or creek gorge—for the price of a few dinners out or a new printer. (Believe us, the land will last a lot longer!)

- |                          |       |          |
|--------------------------|-------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | \$300 | 1 acre   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | \$150 | 1/2 acre |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | \$75  | 1/4 acre |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

For each portion of land you protect, WVLT will send you or the recipient a “deed,” in Christmas green, suitable for framing, inscribed with the recipient’s name, your name and/or the name of the individual or group being recognized by your protection of the Virginia landscape.

Please respond by Dec. 20 to ensure timely delivery of your good Deed, this Christmas. Land may, however, be protected throughout the year. The WVLT mailing address is: 722 First Street, SW, Suite L, Roanoke, VA 24016-4120.

## A Letter From The WVLT President

The Western Virginia Land Trust has often stated that the abundant beauty, richness and diversity of Southwest Virginia’s natural and cultural heritage will be taken for granted at their peril.

The Trust has preserved several important pieces of land through easements in the last few months. More and more farm and mountain land comes on the auction block every month. The Trust has been effective in helping to preserve land, and its mission is to continue to do so in the future. Your support is absolutely essential to our success.

Our greatest need as a viable, ongoing organization is unrestricted funds for general administrative costs, always the hardest funds to raise in my long experiences with non-profits, but always the most vital base for good program and services development. We hope that you can and will respond with support to the Trust’s work.

We have been fortunate in obtaining state grants and in partnering with large conservation organizations plus individual conservation buyers, successfully completing the protection of particular tracts of land. However, only a small percentage of those funds can be allocated to administrative costs (time-related salaries to the project, minimal office expenditures as documented).

As we move forward into a challenging and potentially very important successful work-year ahead relating to land, water quality and establishment of other local groups throughout

Southwest Virginia which can help to identify primary areas for preservation, to contact landowners and to raise funds, we are grateful for the support we have received in the past. Gratitude is a word that has deepened in its meaning for all of us, and so we use it carefully and knowingly. Thank you very much for what you have done and will do.

We are also most grateful for the talent, dedication and experienced abilities of our new Director, Roger Holnback. He was providentially available immediately upon Michael Van Ness’ leaving to concentrate his work in the New River Valley. Roger Holnback’s past education and work experience, including the last three years with the Appalachian Trail Conference as regional director, has already proved invaluable. He knows well many of the state agency and other land trust administrators with whom we work. His experience with land acquisition and riparian issues is real. His work with us has already borne fruit, another cause for our true gratitude.

In this holiday season, we give our thanks to each of you for your intellectual, moral and financial support.

Barbara B. Lemon  
President,  
Western Virginia Land Trust

P.S. Please see the call to “Protect A Mountain Acre This Christmas” above.



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**WESTERN VIRGINIA LAND TRUST MISSION STATEMENT**

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