

“Increasingly, I hear from landowners who are intent on keeping their land whole and healthy to honor their parents’ legacy and because they seek to pass these values on to their own children.”

Piedmont Environmental Council Land Conservation Officer Beth Burnam

## Six percent of Madison now easement protected

The numbers are in. New conservation totals show that in 2010, landowners in Madison County permanently protected 803 acres of land, bringing the total amount of land protected by conservation easements to more than 12,500 acres, or six percent of the total land in Madison County.

Voluntary conservation easements are an important tool for protecting rural landscapes, including working farms and forests. Landowners who protect their land with a conservation easement give up some of their rights to develop the property, in order to preserve resources that include productive farmland and forests, wildlife habitat, streams and rivers, historic sites and scenic views.

Madison is one of nine counties served by the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC). In this nine county region, landowners protected more than 10,500 acres in 2010, adding to a total of more than 336,000 acres, or 15 percent of the total land in the region. Public lands in Shenandoah National Park and Wildlife Management Areas add another 186,000 acres — or eight percent — to the region’s tally of conservation lands.

The land protected in Madison County in 2010 included three sizeable farms on the Rapidan River. One of these was James Aylor’s 272-acre farm in Rochelle. Aylor farmed the land with his father for many years before his father’s death in 1984. As Aylor contemplated his own lack of heirs and the number of houses springing up on

neighboring farmland, he decided to protect his family’s land. As he told PEC’s land conservation officer, Wolfstown resident Beth Burnam, he didn’t want “houses built all over it after I’m gone.”

Now, Aylor Farm will continue to be open land, undivided forever and available for agriculture. Aylor’s example motivated his next-door neighbor, Julia Connelly, to donate a conservation easement on her 188-farm, which also borders the Rapidan River, last year. Aylor Farm also adjoins Seven Springs Cattle Farm, which was protected in 2002.

Most landowners who protected their land in 2010 did so in spite of financial uncertainty. State and federal tax incentives partially offset the financial sacrifices that landowners make when they give up part of the development potential of their land, but in 2010, Congress did not vote until December to maintain the expanded federal tax incentive. With this expanded incentive in place through 2011, this is a particularly good year for landowners who want to donate a conservation easement.

“Increasingly, I hear from landowners who are intent on keeping their land whole and healthy to honor their parents’ legacy and because they seek to pass these values on to their own children,” said Burnam. “The existence of the Madison Conservation Fund loans for conservation easement transactional costs has made that kind of land protection a financial possibility for any Madison landowner.”