

SUPPORT NEEDED TO CONTINUE BRFC'S LAND CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

In this, our 10th Anniversary year, the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy is among many charitable organizations faced with the challenges of a difficult national economic situation — yet our work must go on! Not only do we need to keep helping landowners who wish to place their properties under conservation easements, but we also have to monitor the lands under existing easements.

Please consider supporting BRFC this year. To reduce expenses, we're not sending out a membership renewal letter this year. Instead, we're providing a return envelope for our existing members to renew — one we hope will also be used by other readers who wish to join. **Contributions to BRFC are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.**

Stewardship—or monitoring—entails going out to each property under easement on an annual basis. The purpose is to insure that the stipulations in each individual easement are being met. The property must be walked; photographs taken, and the resulting observations and physical records entered into a report, the template of which is provided by the Land Trust Alliance.

We are also still hard at work with the Hughes River project — educating interested homeowners about the various programs that can benefit open space efforts and environmental well-being. Other partnerships are on-going.

BRFC has also joined forces with Cooperative Extension to support the conservation of agricultural open spaces by supporting local food providers. In addition to working with the Farmers' Markets, we are establishing local consumer—producer linkages, developing power points to explain the relationships and economic benefits, and featuring our efforts at Expos and local fairs and other events. Your support will insure this can all happen!

BRFC ENTERS NEW PARTNERSHIP “The Land That Feeds Us”

Conservation has many faces. While BRFC will always focus its efforts on conservation easements, we frequently participate in other initiatives, such as the Hughes River Partnership, that encourages conservation of specific resources.

This year's focus, supported by years of our “Home Grown Blue Ridge” programs, will be to work with other groups whose principle effort is to **enhance the economic viability of farmlands** to encourage keeping the land in open space.

Partnering with the Madison County Farmers' Market Association, the Greene County Farmers' Market, and the Cooperative Extension, BRFC will be lending its support to the cultivation and purchase of locally-grown foods (in step with PEC's “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” campaign.)

Profiling our farms and farmers through the Farmers' Markets (and soon-to-be developed recipe cards), supporting them through fairs and other venues, and **“The Land That Feeds Us” dinner on August 12 at The Madison Inn** are just a few of the efforts underway.

By supporting our local producers, we can help keep Virginia farming and preserve open space!

Mark Your Calendars ! !

The culmination of the BRFC's year of work is our annual meeting — and you are cordially invited to join us on Saturday, September 26th from 4 to 7 p.m.

This year's meeting will be held in Greene County on one of the properties under easement — and will again feature Home Grown Blue Ridge.

Look for your invitations in August!

Greetings from the President

Dear Friends,

The Board of Directors of The Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy is proud to announce completion of its first audit. We took advantage of today's economic climate to get our house in order.

As we look forward to the work ahead, our next project is to secure our membership base, continue to reach out to our local partners and continue our efforts to protect open space conserving the farms, forests, and scenic beauty, natural and historical resources in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. We want to be as green as possible; to offer a newsletter online and an e-mail link to coming events and opportunities. We are enclosing a reply envelope for your membership.

We welcome Rob Gardner, Greene County resident to our Board; we thank both Phil Paschall and Su Webb for their years of service to the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy. Carol Merrill has become Chair of our Legislative Committee and is doing an outstanding job helping us sift through the issues important to Madison and Greene County. Jill and Mark Meyer will be hosting our first annual Advisory Board get-together.

You can have a preview of our Annual Meeting's exciting and informative display: *Urban Places, Rural Spaces* at the Charlottesville Community Design Center from May 1 to June 6. More information: www.cville.design.org

In our efforts to support our local farmers and growers, we, Cooperative Extension and the newly-formed Madison County Farmers' Market Association are co-sponsoring an event at the Madison Inn on August 12 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. The dinner, featuring locally-grown foods — ***The Land that Feeds Us: Celebrating Farms and Farmers*** — is open to the public but limited to 60 people. If interested, please e-mail us. We encourage you to get your reservations in early as space is limited.

If you would like to nominate someone for the VaULT conservation award in the categories of: 1. 2. 3. 4, (see article elsewhere) please e-mail me at: TheLegacyoftheLand@gmail.com or call our office: 540 948 5444 by deadline.

Please don't hesitate to call us with any questions or concerns. If you would like to be more involved, I am happy to talk to you about opportunities with The Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy.

Trish Crowe
President



Welcoming Rob Gardner to the BRFC Board

Rob's strong love of plants and the environment prompted a successful bid to be a Smithsonian Horticulture Intern upon high school graduation in 1982. Invited back to the Smithsonian's Office of Horticulture the following summer, he decided to major in Plant and Soil Science at The University Of Vermont. After receiving a B.S. in Plant and Soil Science, Rob worked for several years in the D.C. area in landscape contracting. Not wanting to die at a young age on the Capitol Beltway, a move was made to Charlottesville.

The wine bug bit after a stint at the C & O restaurant, and Rob moved to Santa Barbara to work in the wine industry. Work in all aspects of the wine business was found at two vineyards in the Santa Ynez Valley. After a few years in Santa Barbara, a family decision was made to plant a small vineyard in Greene County. While in Santa Barbara, Rob earned a teaching credential from U.C. Santa Barbara with the idea of teaching most of the year and tending to the vineyard all the rest.

With no openings in teaching in the early 1990's, retail wine work and the vineyard consumed most of Rob's time. After several years, a move to wholesale wine consulting was made to The Country Vintner. Nearly ten years with Country Vintner, Rob has built a career in wine. Guest lecturing at JMU, staff trainings at area restaurants, and hosting hundreds of wine dinners all around Virginia couple with daily wine sales. He's also been involved with several environmentally minded organizations, including two years as the Vice President of The Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy during its formative years.

LANDS UNDER EASEMENT

LAND CONSERVATION UPDATE

In the eight plus years that BRFC has been promoting land conservation in Madison and Greene counties, the number of acres placed under voluntary conservation easement in cooperation with our conservation partners has increased 965%, for a total of 17,759 acres. There are 7,512 acres or 9% of the private land protected in Greene and 17,759 acres or 4.9% of the private land protected in Madison. Not surprising because of uncertain economic times, 2008 saw a modest increase of 193 acres in Greene County and 548 acres in Madison County. While tax benefits for easements in Virginia are as good as any in the nation, unease and uncertainty in recessionary times makes many hesitant to change their economic standing.

What remains thrilling to those working to save our rural landscape for the future is the steady expansion of Conservation Areas in each County. (See map, p 3). These are areas where multiple landowners join together to place their lands under easement, thereby ensuring much larger landscapes and ecosystems are protected rather than just individual properties. Each landowner in a Conservation Area is protecting the values of the others and as a result, all Area landowners benefit collectively – and so do the Counties. Here is the Conservation Area breakdown:

Greene County Conservation Areas

<u>Name</u>	<u># Landowners</u>	<u>Acres</u>
South River	11	1,809
Snow Mountain	7	1,966
Parker Mountain	4	200
Amicus	3	891
Pocosan Mountain	3	404
Flattop Mountain	2	520

Madison County Conservation Areas

<u>Name</u>	<u># Landowners</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Hidden Valley	3	407
Garr Mountain-Ruth Rd	5	529
Old Rag Mountain	5	540
Robinson River	5	690
Graves Mill	2	1,568

Greene and Madison Cross County Conservation Areas

<u>Name</u>	<u># Landowners</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Conway River	7	1,889
Rapidan River	13	4,240

ON THE LEGISLATIVE FRONT

Legislative Committee Formed

To further the Conservancy's overall agenda of protecting open rural space for both the people who live on it and the people who come to enjoy it, a Legislative Committee has been formed to monitor and support relevant government activities at both the state and Federal levels. The committee consists of BRFC President Trish Crowe, Carl Schmitt, Susan Cable, and Kim Johnson-Smith with Carol Merrill as Chairman.

Since we are very small and government activity is very great, we are tapping into the resources of other organizations who share our goals. We're fortunate that as part of the land trust movement, we have access to the Land Trust Alliance at the Federal level, and to the VaULT (Virginia United Land Trusts), at the state level. Also, we also hope to share information and ideas with groups like the Piedmont Environmental Council, The Nature Conservancy, and others.

We have already sent letters to our State Senators and Delegates urging them to help Governor Kaine hold the line on changes to Land Preservation Tax Credits, supplying funds for Purchases of Development Rights, and the continuing budget of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. And we are working with the Land Trust Alliance at the Federal level to encourage Senators Warner and Webb and Congressmen Cantor and Perriello on the passage of the Conservation Easement Incentive Act as part of the upcoming Farm Bill.

Help is most welcome! If you hear of government activity we should be aware of, or have an idea for outreach, whether Federal, state, or local, let us know via e-mail.

Become an Advocate!

Join members of the Legislative Committee and your fellow Board members by becoming a Land Advocate! The BRFC is a member of the Land Trust Alliance, a national organization of land trusts that for the last 25 years has shared information, raised money and awareness, and helped focus the national conversation about land conservation.

It's easy. Just go to LTA's web site and follow along:

Go to www.landtrustalliance.org

Then click on Policy Action.

Then click on "Become an Advocate" on the bar across the top.

Click again on "Become an Advocate" on the menu on the left-hand side.

Regular e-mail alerts are sent to anyone who registers as a Land Advocate updating them on government activities at the Federal level.

Land Advocates are occasionally asked to make their individual voices heard by contacting their own Senators and Congressmen on issues like the Conservation Easement Incentive Act, part of the Farm Bill being re-introduced this year to make easement tax credits permanent.

We are fortunate here at the Conservancy because our Congressmen – Eric Cantor (R – 7th district/Madison) and Tom Perriello (D- 5th district/Greene) are lead sponsor and co-sponsor respectively. Representative Cantor was encouraged to take the key role on this critical legislation in part by BRFC President Trish Crowe who attended the Piedmont Environmental Council's award presentation to him earlier this year.

On The Tax Front

Conservation easement donors in the Commonwealth are eligible for a transferable income tax credit that is equal to 40% of the value of their donation. The value of these tax credits has increased over the years and donors can now get up to 80 cents on the dollar when they sell their Land Preservation Tax Credits. The overall fiscal impact of the program is capped such that no more than \$100 million (indexed to inflation) in tax credits can be issued in any one year. This is the greatest state level incentive for private voluntary land conservation in the nation and it has resulted in tremendous growth in the rate of land conservation across the Commonwealth.

Due to the budget shortfall in the Commonwealth's budget the General Assembly and the Governor temporarily reduced the credits an individual can use in 2009 and 2010 from \$100,000 to \$50,000. Fortunately, this proposal does not impact the dollar value of credits that conservation easement donors will be eligible for, nor does it reduce the total number of credits that are allocated on an annual basis. As such, there should be little if any impact on the rate of land conservation across the region.

As part of the Farm Bill that passed in 2008, an expanded federal income tax deduction for conservation easement donations was extended for another two years. Now conservation easement donors can use their charitable deduction from a conservation easement at the rate of 50% of their Adjusted Gross Income per year and they can carry forward any surplus deduction for 15 years. Farmers who received at least half of their income from agriculture can offset 100% of their income annually. Unless a bill that has been introduced by Congressman Eric Cantor passes, this expanded federal income tax deduction will expire at the end of 2009 so landowners who want to take advantage of this incentive should act now.

COMING EVENTS

TBA

Neighborhood Meeting—Advisory Board

Hosted by Jill and Mark Meyer

May 1—June 6

Urban Spaces, Rural Places100 5th Street, NE, Downtown Mall,
Charlottesville, VA www.cvilledesign.org

May 2

Madison Farmers' Market opens

(8-12 p.m. Saturdays; special events 1st Saturday of each month:

<http://www.madisonfarmersmarket.pbwiki.com/FrontPage>

May 17th

BRFC Board Meeting

June 10-12

VAULT 3rd Annual Meeting, Staunton, VA

August 12th

The Land That Feeds Us Dinner, Madison Inn**5—8 p.m.** By invitation (call if interested: 540-948-5444)

September 26th

BRFC Annual Meeting, 4—7 p.m.

Home of Victor and Janice Rosenberg, Greene County

Land Legacieswww.blueridgefoothillsconservancy.org

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