



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL SUMMER 2024

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Partnership for the Ages

Conserved lands and cleaner waters go hand in hand in Albemarle County

By Faith Schweikert, Communications Specialist

At first glance, it may appear that Albemarle County's southern edge doesn't face much development pressure — at least compared to the north. But driving out to Schuyler to visit Pattie and Pete Hellmann's farm, recently protected with a conservation easement, I passed several now-familiar "Land for Sale" signs along the way. One advertised 180 acres for sale, to be divided into 21-acre parcels.

Witnessing the end result of signs like these — an increase in rural area subdivisions

particularly around Schuyler — is what led the Hellmanns to finally place their own 184 acres into conservation easement, and further, to enlist the help of the James River Buffer Program to plant two acres of streamside trees to help improve Green Creek, which runs through their land.

"It's exciting that the Hellmanns [have put] their land under a conservation easement," said Anne Marie Roberts, senior restoration field manager for the James River Association. A partnership of the James River Association and

the Virginia Department of Forestry, the James River Buffer Program "requires that landowners keep the land we plant in established forest for 15 years, but this [easement] is an added reassurance that this riparian buffer will stay in trees for perpetuity."

The Hellmanns' land is a mix of working forest and farmland, and under



The Hellmanns' newly-conserved Keep Moving Farm in Albemarle County. Photo by Hugh Kenny



Pete and Pattie Hellmann celebrate the conservation of their Albemarle County property. Photo by Hugh Kenny

the County's zoning ordinance, they could have divided and sold it into 22 parcels. But Pattie's historic family homestead, Rabbit Run (ca. 1790), has been in the family for over 200 years, and when retirement opened a window of opportunity, they leaned into the legal protections of a conservation easement. They saw it as a chance to prevent land loss and the negative effects of development that doesn't align with smart growth principles, which respect natural resources in the rural areas and create better-connected communities in the development areas.

In addition to Rabbit Run, their properties include the forested recreational tract, known as Bear Trail, and the larger Keep Moving Farm. Both Rabbit Run and Bear Trail lie within the 83,000-acre Southern Albemarle Rural Historic

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Wilderness Lost?

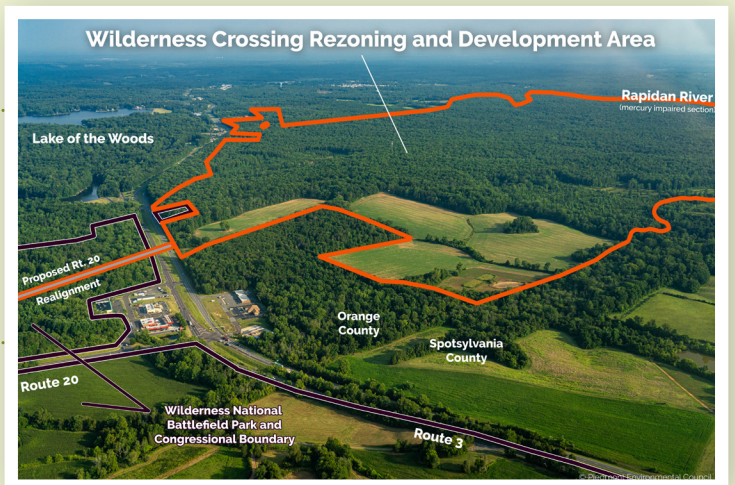
Industrialization marches into Orange County, threatening historic battlefield and landscapes along Route 3.

By Don McCown, Orange County Field Representative

Pausing just before the path turns wooded and winds its way into to her Lake of the Woods neighborhood, Teri Vickery gazes back over her shoulder across the 40-acre clearing at Wilderness Battlefield known as Saunders Field, near where Company K of the most famous Native American unit in the Union Army engaged in its first combat.

She and her husband Doug have just finished their weekly Sunday walk, and on this warm spring day with the grass already knee-high, they chuckle remembering a very different Sunday when many of their Lake of the Woods neighbors arrived on scene to remove tree limbs dropped across the trail by Winter Storm Frida. After all, Teri said, their community feels it has a strong responsibility to steward the beloved woods and open spaces of the Wilderness Battlefield area in eastern Orange County.

"The Wilderness" is a favorite destination not only for locals, but also for nearly 500,000 history buffs, wildlife enthusiasts, hikers, wine lovers and others who visit here every year. Historic Germanna Plank Road (today's Virginia Route 3) — stretching from Historic Germanna's Siegen Forest and its new public boat ramp, down the Rapidan River to the vineyards just across Wilderness Run in Spotsylvania County — has long been at the crossroads of history and commerce, and more recently, preservation and conservation.



Aerial view of the proposed Wilderness Crossing development area and possible Route 20 realignment. Photo by Hugh Kenny/Southwings

Unfortunately, the data center industry is steadily spilling outward from its hub in Northern Virginia and posing a dire threat to this storied, mostly intact, rural landscape of fields, forest, river and history. A massive 2,600-acre mixed-use development that could include over five million square feet of energy- and water-hungry data centers is proposed within the historic boundaries of the Wilderness Battlefield. That is why, on May 1, Wilderness Battlefield Area was named one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Places. Teri, Doug, and many of their neighbors were present for the announcement.

The 1864 Battle of the Wilderness resulted in high casualties on both sides, marked a pivotal turning point in the Civil War and is

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Thank you for helping to protect the Piedmont!



In the Driver's Seat on Parking Lot Solar

By Ashish Kapoor, Senior Energy & Climate Advisor

Calling on the state's utilities to provide 100% renewable energy by 2050, Virginia's Clean Economy Act presents an exciting framework for a mix of renewable energy solutions for the Commonwealth. Rapidly decreasing solar and battery storage costs make the goal viable.

But exploding electric demand, almost entirely from data centers, is doubling the amount of electricity we need. That's complicating and compromising our 2050 goals, because powering all that new demand is leading to big impacts on natural resources and a continued reliance on fossil fuels.

Large-scale solar, typically over five megawatts and starting at around 35-50 acres, will be a critical part of the transition to clean energy, but it has some downsides. For instance, the escalating energy demands of the data center industry in Virginia would require hundreds of thousands of acres of land for solar — at the expense of prime agricultural land and forests. Large-scale solar facilities in rural areas also require extensive transmission lines to connect to the regional power grid, with years-long wait times. In the meantime, gas and coal, with their deleterious health and climate impacts, are being tapped to fill the demand gap.

The urgency of these issues has created increased pressure points at the state and local levels, and even within the environmental community itself.

But another path to a renewable energy system exists — one that is smarter and more efficient. "Distributed solar" refers to smaller solar installations such as rooftop, brownfield and parking lot solar. Because it is placed in already-built environments, distributed solar is close to where energy is needed and has fewer negative impacts on the environment while saving households and communities money. And it employs around 10 times more people than large-scale solar.

Since Virginia is still at the beginning of its energy transition, now is the perfect time to rebuild our energy system in a way that is just and fair to all Virginia residents and ratepayers. Toward that end, PEC has taken the lead in aggressively exploring the viability of parking lot solar in Virginia.

The action-oriented leg of the journey began last summer, when Dr. Samantha Ahdoot, director of Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action, called us to discuss existing research on high mortality rates and economic losses caused by poor air quality and the ways clean energy can help. That call led to a partnership between our two organizations and connections with Virginia research institutions that could provide complex, robust mapping research on the actual production capacity of parking lot solar in Virginia.

What we found is that the Commonwealth is awash in parking lots full of potential generating capacity. In fact, according to preliminary studies by one of our partners, parking lot solar facilities could generate around half of Virginia's energy usage! And parking lot solar enjoys the benefits of distributed solar that large-scale solar lacks.

Because it's installed in the built environment, parking lot solar preserves prime agricultural soils and forests, which have their own environmental benefits. Forests sequester carbon from the atmosphere, filter pollutants from groundwater and contribute to healthy ecosystems. Prime agricultural soils contribute to local rural economies and aid in regional food security, an important benefit that rose in the public awareness during the supply chain breakdowns of the recent global pandemic.

Parking lot solar is also a more efficient use of land, since it generates one megawatt of energy for every two acres, as compared to large-scale solar's one megawatt of energy per seven-to-10-acre average. And by keeping cars cooler on warm days, the



A prime parking lot on ASU campus, next to the sports stadiums, and now providing shade for tailgate parties. ASU meets about 35% of its electricity needs with solar panels on campus. Photo by Kevin Dooley

shade provided by these solar canopies reduces the energy and emissions needed for air conditioning.

When adopted broadly, parking lot solar would feed excess energy directly into the distribution grid, getting clean energy on the grid more quickly, and collectively reducing the need for more hulking steel-girded towers that occupy 500-foot rights of way beneath them. That means getting cleaner energy — and cleaner air — to replace carbon-emitting sources faster.

This investment in places where people already work and live is not only good energy policy, it is good economics and smart growth that respects our natural and cultural resources.

Some places near and far have already taken initial steps in implementing parking lot solar. France has mandated that 50% of large parking lots be covered with parking lot solar. Closer to home, large canopies are showing up in places like New Jersey, New York and even Washington D.C. In fact, D.C. Metro is currently implementing four large-scale parking lot solar projects on their station site parking decks.

Why aren't we seeing parking lot solar here in the Commonwealth then? The answer is simple: it's just not as profitable for solar developers and investors. Based on the current incentive structure, or lack thereof, removing forest and farmland for solar is cheaper for solar developers than placing it on a parking lot. But if we financially accounted for the negative externalities of large-scale solar, such as stormwater runoff and loss of farmland and forest lands, that cost differential would look quite different.

After extensive research and conversations with large developers and clean energy financiers, it became clear to us that an incentive based on Solar Renewable Energy Certificates (SRECs) would be effective in closing the cost difference for parking-lot solar. SRECs are solar incentives that allow developers to earn additional income for each megawatt-hour of energy produced, and buying SRECs are one mechanism through which Virginia utilities fulfill their annual clean energy obligations. An incentive linked to SRECs has proven efficacy elsewhere and would reflect and magnify Virginia's renewable energy priorities.

Led by our research, during the 2024 legislative session PEC authored a legislative proposal for a parking lot

solar pilot program in the Commonwealth. Our proposal included a SREC incentive, a stakeholder process to determine the optimal incentive level and a mapping process to determine ideal sites. The resulting bills, SB234 and HB367, were sponsored by Senator Ghazala Hashmi and Delegate David Reid.

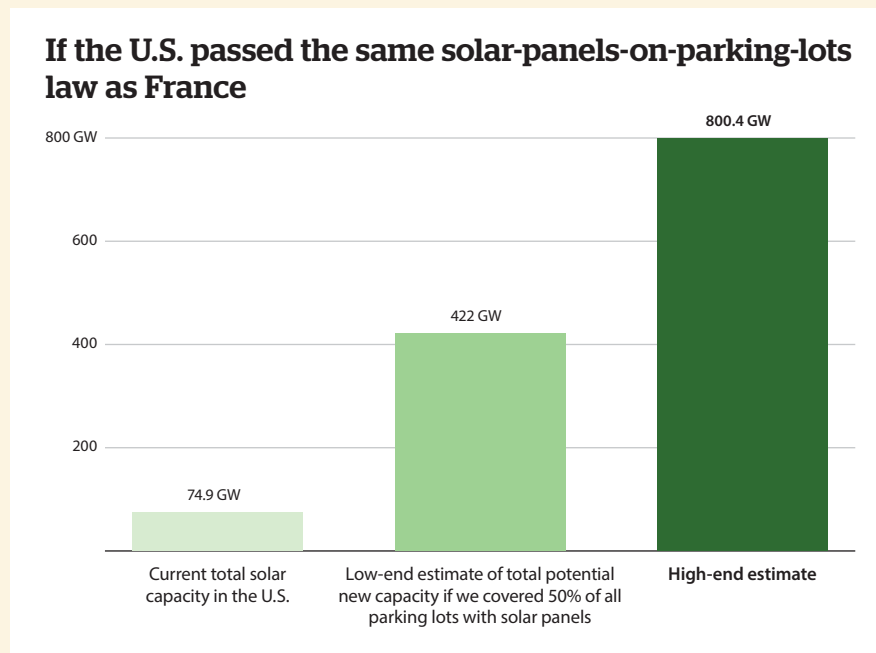
During the first major Senate committee hearing on the Parking Lot Solar Development Pilot Grant Program, PEC's expert technical testimony was followed by supporting testimony from an inspiring set of partners, including Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia Agribusiness, Southern Environmental Law Center, Virginia League of Conservation Voters, Climate Cabinet, Virginia Conservation Network, Natural Resources Defense Council and Virginia Cattlemen's Association.

The bill moved on to the Finance Committee and eventually passed the Senate with a strong 30-10 bipartisan floor vote. While a House appropriations subcommittee eventually carried the bill over to 2025, we were able to secure robust funding through the recently approved state budget. Just as importantly, at a time of great division across both the state and the nation, we were deeply encouraged by the support from a wide range of stakeholders who saw their own values reflected in the prospect of strong parking lot solar implementation throughout Virginia.

Part of PEC's vision for the Virginia Piedmont, and even beyond, is that residents and leaders of all walks of life and world views act on a belief that conserved lands are essential to vibrant, healthy communities. That means taking a thoughtful and holistic approach to tough issues, like the clean energy transition, and looking out for unintended consequences and on-the-ground impacts.

Our hope for a strong parking lot solar initiative in Virginia keeps an eye on preserving the environmental benefits of undeveloped lands and food security in our region, while also connecting clean energy quickly to the grid for its public health and global climate benefits. Creating parking lot solar research, support, legislation and funding is just the first step in expanding support for distributed generation and tapping into the motivations of diverse communities to deliver practical solutions for Virginia's clean energy future.

Preliminary studies suggest that parking lot solar facilities could generate around half of Virginia's energy usage, more if we were to adopt France's requirement that 50% of all parking lots be covered with solar panels. Chart by Elijah Wolson for TIME



Source: U.S. EIA; U.S. Geological Survey; Mikhail Chester, et al. 2010 Environ. Res. Lett. 5 034001

Inspiring Conservation

PEC's annual meeting inspires many in Charlottesville

June 1 was a beautiful day to welcome some 120 new and familiar faces to our 2024 Annual Meeting: Inspiring Conservation. Charlottesville's LEED Platinum Certified CODE Building, with design features emphasizing principles of wellness, sustainability, and connections between nature and town, served as a perfect backdrop for a day of camaraderie and conversation among friends who share our conservation goals and commitment to strong and sustainable communities. **We thank Brown Advisory for its generous sponsorship and support of this event.**



PEC President Chris Miller and Board Chair David Aldrich welcomed guests at the Irving Theatre to kick off a great day of information and inspiration. Photo by Hugh Kenny

All photos by Hugh Kenny



Conservation Leadership

President Chris Miller presented PEC's Conservation Leadership Award to Andrew Bowman for his work at the helm of the Land Trust Alliance for eight years. Bowman said that land trusts across the United States have conserved more 61 million acres of private land, more than America's 63 national parks combined. Commending PEC for our model leadership in community-based land conservation, he emphasized the importance of this work in climate change mitigation. Bowman also said that PEC "was first in educating the rest of us" about the very real and very grave impacts of data centers on our renewable energy goals and water security. "At least we can take comfort that we have a group like PEC, with tremendous expertise and tremendous staff and a multi-faceted approach to dealing with all of this. What you're doing here will be a model for the rest of the country," he said.

Keynote Speaker Travis Belote

The keynote address by Dr. Travis Belote, Senior Science Director at The Wilderness Society, was amazing in its breadth, depth of analysis and conclusion that our work in the Piedmont is nationally and globally significant. With fascinating mapping research, Belote illustrated the critical importance of large landscape conservation for biodiversity and wildlife survival. He explained that the greater Shenandoah ecosystem, a corridor that continues from one protected area to another, is part of the world's top 20% of global priorities for retaining biodiversity, carbon and drinking water. "Nature does not adhere to boundaries," he said. We were energized by Belote's confirmation that PEC's work is important to our world here in the Piedmont and to the world.



Inspiring Workshops

We received overwhelmingly warm and positive feedback about the concurrent workshops presented by PEC staff members. Kim Biasioli (left) shared PEC's new strategic approaches to building and improving landscape connectivity, with terrestrial and riparian corridors, through our conservation work. During a walk along the Fifeville Community Trail, Peter Krebs (right) told the inspiring story of community collaboration that built a publicly accessible pathway through private land, linking city neighborhoods and Tonsler Park. Julie Bolthouse told how PEC's work is encouraging policies, zoning and individual actions to help meet the goals of Virginia's Clean Economy Act, while the proliferation of energy-hungry data centers is shifting the goalpost.



UPCOMING Events

Event details subject to change. Please check pecva.org/events for the latest information.

Annual Purple Martin Field Day

When > June 22 @ 11 A.M. - 3 P.M.

Where > Louisa, VA (for directions, visit purplemartinfieldday.org/directions.html)

Join the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative, a PEC partner initiative, at a bird-focused field day at the farm of Mrs. Merle Wood and her son, Mr. Lance Wood in Louisa County. Come learn about purple martins, a native songbird that relies almost exclusively on human-supplied housing, and how to attract and manage a colony of your own. The Wood farm hosts a large colony of more than 70 pairs of martins! This event is free and no registration is required.

PEC Member Mixer

When > July 11 @ 3 - 6 P.M.

Where > PEC's Warrenton Office, 45 Horner Street, Warrenton

Join fellow PEC members and staff for our inaugural Membership Mixer. Enjoy refreshments in the native garden & event room at the Warrenton office, all while connecting with fellow members and the resources of PEC staff! This is a free event for members, but we do ask that you register at pecva.org/membershipmixer.

Culpeper Conservation Lecture Series

When > July 11, Aug. 8, Sept. 12 @ 7 P.M.

Where > Culpeper County Library, Meeting Room 271

Join local environmental nonprofits PEC and Friends of the Rappahannock for this new monthly summer lecture series. Upcoming lectures are: *Solar on Your Home*, July 11; *Bringing Back Virginia's Grassland Birds*, Aug. 8; and *Conserving Forests for the Climate*, Sept. 12.

Volunteer at our Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows

When > Now through October

Where > 39990 Howser's Branch Drive, Aldie

Discover the joys of farming and the value of conserved land while helping us grow and harvest more than 35,000 pounds of fresh vegetables and fruits for donation to food banks in Loudoun and Clarke counties. We're welcoming volunteers of all ages as well as groups and troops. For more information, visit pecva.org/farm. Sign up to volunteer at pecva.org/farmvolunteer.

Loop de Ville Rivanna Trail Fest

When > Saturday, Sept. 28

Where > Starts/Finishes at Rivanna River Company, 1520 E. High St, Charlottesville

Walk, bike, run, or volunteer around Charlottesville's beloved 20-mile loop trail. This community celebration includes music, aid stations and more! Loop de Ville is the go-to event for newcomers and experienced trail users alike to celebrate the connectedness of our community through the trails and the natural landscape that surround Charlottesville. Learn more at loopdeville.org.

Partnership for the Ages

Continued from cover

District. Collectively, the three properties hold 144 acres of natural hardwoods and pine stands, 31 acres of active agricultural production, 120 acres of prime farmland and over a mile of frontage on Green Creek.

Green Creek is a perennial stream that flows into the Rockfish River, which ultimately empties into the James River and the Chesapeake Bay. That makes protecting waters upstream critical. As part of PEC's conservation easement

agreement, PEC Senior Land Conservation Field Representative Kim Biasioli referred the Hellmanns to the James River Buffer Program for help restoring natural vegetation along their sections of Green Creek.

As a result, more than 600 native hardwood trees were planted along the creek in spring 2024, widening and enhancing the natural condition of these riparian buffers. "Riparian buffers provide many benefits to both water quality and wildlife habitat," Roberts said. "Native hardwoods hold eroding stream banks with their roots, filter other land runoff and pollutants such as fertilizers and manure, shade and feed the stream's aquatic life, plus increase forest corridors that provide food and shelter for wildlife."

Because the buffers at Keep Moving Farm are

part of a field that the Hellmanns hay for income, PEC and the James River Association worked with them to ensure that this income stream wasn't sacrificed in the process. "Pete wanted to protect Green Creek and increase wildlife habitat, but also not shade out his hayfields," Roberts said. "During the planning process, we can choose species that are smaller and plant those on the outer edge."

Over on the Bear Trail and Rabbit Run parcels, the waterways were already buffered, but the conservation easement ensures that even when the pines are timbered, a 50-foot buffer of trees, along with the soils underneath, will remain undisturbed. "Wider buffers are better from an ecological perspective, as they can allow for other co-benefits like flood resiliency and wildlife habitat," said Biasioli.

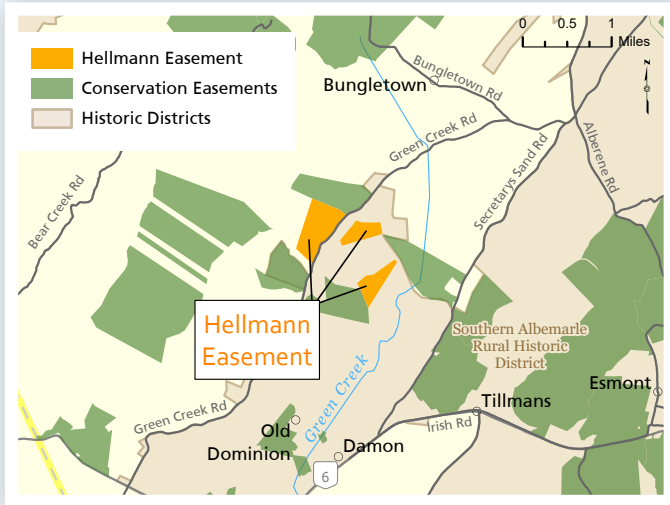
The fact that the three parcels are adjacent to other lands protected with conservation easements makes conserving the Hellmanns' land and stream corridor even more significant. "The more we can connect conserved lands, the more we're protecting the ecological value of these forest blocks and the continuity of the natural landscape," Biasioli said.

"Even in the most rural parts of the county, we have development pressure,

and every time property changes hands or is passed on to the next generation, it's at risk of being divided and developed, regardless of whether it's right outside of Charlottesville or 30 minutes away," Biasioli said. "Maintaining forested riparian buffers will have a significant impact on protecting water quality in Green Creek, so we're very pleased that the Hellmanns have chosen to improve the management practices on their newly conserved land."

In the end, in addition to the riparian buffer plantings, Pete said he and Pattie gave up 19 of the 22 development rights on their land in order to "keep it as natural as possible." Down the road, neighbors and developers may build more houses, but the Hellmanns are glad to know that their corner of the world will remain intact — a place where generations to come can enjoy the native wildflowers alongside Bear Trail, the hardwoods they plan to plant after the next pine harvest, and the great place to live that they have always loved by the creek.

The James River Buffer Program is now accepting applications for the Fall '24 and Spring '25 planting seasons! Learn more at jamesriverbuffers.org



The Hellmanns' three parcels help build a connected landscape of open space, which enhances the ecological benefits of each individually. Map by Watson Randolph

Wilderness Lost?

Continued from cover

essential to our understanding of that conflict. Today, Wilderness Battlefield anchors a fragile patchwork of protected and unprotected open space, as well as the mostly-unprotected scenic landscape at the gateway to the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park (FSNMP).

Once built, the "Wilderness Crossing" development would sit at the entrance to the Wilderness Battlefield unit of the national park, a portion of it directly abutting National Park Service land. The development is also expected to reignite interest in a Virginia Department of Transportation plan to realign Route 20 through a swath of unprotected battlefield land, owned by the Wilderness Crossing developer, within the Congressionally authorized park boundary.

Data centers are huge — each one about the size of two-to-four football fields and often as tall as a six-story apartment building. They make noise — an incessant hum that has driven some Northern Virginia homeowners to move bedrooms into basements. And they use enormous amounts of water — water that, in the Wilderness Battlefield area, is already in short supply for existing homes and businesses.

And, as has been well-documented, data centers have an insatiable energy appetite and rely on miles and miles of associated transmission infrastructure crisscrossing the landscape. These high-voltage transmission lines are strung along steel-girded, latticed towers as tall as eight two-story homes, in cleared rights of way as wide as 500 feet. To power Wilderness

Crossing, at least one mile of new transmission would need to be built from the substation near Lake of the Woods across Route 3 and right over the historic Pilgrim Baptist Church, ca. 1877.

But the threats posed by the mammoth, car-dependent development ripple region-wide. Its proposed footprint and features will exacerbate development pressures along all of Route 3, mirroring past encroachments on Salem Church Battlefield and Chancellorsville Battlefield. Other sites at risk along this historic route through the Rappahannock basin include Historic Germanna, Spotswood Palace, Salubria, Brandy Station Battlefield, Madden's Tavern, the U.S. Colored Troops Memorial at Ebenezer Baptist Church, and the proposed 40,000-acre Rapidan River-Clark Mountain Rural Historic District. Together, these weave an intricate tapestry of the region's history.

Teri and Doug know they are lucky to live so near publicly accessible historic and natural resources. "We love walking these trails in all seasons. The battlefield trenches are easiest to see during the winter. The rest of the year, one can understand where the term 'wilderness' comes from, since there is so much scrub and undergrowth all around. It's easy to reflect on the Civil War and how terrible the fighting in this area must have been." Along with the historical contours of the site, the National Park Service manages battlefield lands to provide habitat for myriad wildlife, including two species of bats which fall under the Endangered Species Act.

Ideally, County leaders would follow that example by promoting biodiversity,



At a press conference announcing Wilderness Battlefield's designation as one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, PEC President Chris Miller addresses threats along historic Route 3 posed by the Wilderness Crossing development. Photo by Hugh Kenny

ecological resilience and cultural landscape integrity in its land use decisions. Instead, PEC had to file a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit to uncover even basic details about how the forests and fields on the Wilderness Crossing site would be developed and by whom. The American Battlefield Trust and two other nonprofits are engaged in litigation over whether the County followed the proper process in approving the site's rezoning.

Meanwhile, PEC is co-leading the Virginia Data Center Reform Coalition, comprising more than 30 organizations, homeowners' groups and residents. This coalition is calling on Virginia's leaders to implement common sense regulation over an industry that's creating an energy crisis in Virginia and derailing our climate and clean energy goals while effectively being subsidized by everyone who pays

a utility bill.

Wilderness Crossing is a stark example of the threat posed by the unchecked proliferation of data centers across Virginia on our natural, historic and cultural treasures. The 11 Most Endangered Historic Places listing underscores the inextricable link between natural and cultural resources and amplifies the critical importance of state and local policies requiring full transparency and thorough assessment of sensitive resources when considering data centers and other impactful development proposals.

From the edge of Saunders Field, Teri imagines the worst and hopes for the best: "The Wilderness Battlefield area is a serene and special place filled with history. It would be heartbreaking to see it negatively impacted by industrial development like data centers."

On the Ground

Albemarle & Charlottesville

Now in the third of four phases, the County's **AC44 comprehensive plan update** is focused on developing action items for the goals and objectives in its eight chapters. Building on conservation wins in earlier phases, PEC continues to advance our recommendations for conservation programs, liveable communities, reductions in energy demand and adoption of renewable energy sources that are sensitive to the climate and water resources.

In response to **data center development**, Dominion Energy is proposing to wreck and rebuild a larger Gordonsville-Dooms transmission line across Albemarle County. PEC is working at the national and state levels to raise awareness of the negative impacts of this industry on our communities and to advance state and federal policy changes we believe are necessary for the industry to continue to operate sustainably in Virginia.

Clarke

In March, the Board of Supervisors approved the **Horus Virginia LLC 5-megawatt utility-scale solar facility**, after the applicant agreed to address several concerns raised by PEC and others about stormwater runoff and topsoil depletion, including phased installation. Located between Triple J and Westwood Rd. near Berryville, the 400-acre facility would be sited atop prime agricultural soils. Under the county's updated zoning ordinance for solar facilities, this will be the final utility-scale solar facility built in Clarke County.

Culpeper

The **future State Park at Culpeper Battlefields**, comprising more than 1,000 acres at the Brandy Station and Cedar Mountain Civil War battlefields and three other sites, is set to open on July 1. The opening marks the culmination of many years of preservation efforts by the American Battlefield Trust, Friends of Cedar Mountain Battlefield, Brandy Station Foundation and others. Much of the land is already open to the public and includes trails and interpretive signs.

PEC is paying close attention to the **XX Tech Park data center campus proposal** in historic Brandy Station. This proposal could allow for over 4.6 million square feet of data center building space in an area that lacks both power and water infrastructure to support such a facility. The Culpeper Board of Supervisors has moved to delay its vote on the Keyser Farm data center campus by Red Ace until its July meeting, citing concerns about water and power usage. Though this site is near other approved data centers, the cumulative impacts of unchecked data center growth is a growing concern.

The State Corporation Commission's public comment period for **Dominion Energy's Germanna Line and Substation** closed on May 21. Our understanding is that this \$54.3-million project, for just 1.8 miles of new transmission

line and a six-acre substation, which will be paid for by Virginia ratepayers, is being built solely to support the Amazon-owned Marvell data center in Stevensburg. It is also likely to encourage additional industrial development in this otherwise rural area.

After many residents and farmers expressed their desire to keep Culpeper a rural, agricultural community during the Comprehensive Plan update in 2022-23, the County is examining its **Rural Area and Agricultural subdivisions ordinance**. We expect to hear more about the potential change later this summer.

Fauquier

The Town of Warrenton planning staff has approved **Amazon's fourth Site Development Plan for its data center on Blackwell Road**. Like previous submissions, much of it was redacted, and details about power and noise emitting equipment had yet to be determined. Dominion Energy has said the data center will be served by an underground distribution line within the Route 29 right of way to an off-site substation in the county, though the specifics of this proposal have yet to be shared.

In April, PEC **held a community meeting at Liberty High School in Bealeton** to inform residents of local data center proposals and a proposed upgrade of an existing transmission line from Morrisville to Loudoun. Dominion Energy has since delayed its submission to the State Corporation Commission, citing the need for additional evaluation of electrical and construction alternatives.

PEC is tracking **multiple rezoning proposals for data center campuses** in Remington and Catlett. While the timelines for each vary, some will likely have public hearings this summer or fall. PEC will be participating in and informing residents about that public process and raising important questions about power availability and community impacts.

Greene

Assisted by PEC, two landowners **permanently conserved 142 acres of forested land** on the east side of Powell Mountain, about a mile east of Shenandoah National Park. These easements, held by the Virginia Department of Forestry, will help maintain important natural habitat, watershed protection and the scenic beauty of the Virginia Route 33 corridor.

Greene County included a new land use in its recently adopted comprehensive plan. This **Technology/Flex/Research and Development District** is intended to support the County's economic development initiative, including data centers and defense industry companies associated with Rivanna Station in Albemarle County.

Loudoun

The **Zoning Ordinance Amendment** to address rural economy and zoning issues has begun. PEC will be working with multiple partners to ensure that community stakeholders are fully engaged.

The County started its first **five-year review of the 2019 Comprehensive Plan**, which is expected

to take 11 months. PEC will be engaged as county staff address various residential and commercial development issues primarily related to the Suburban Policy Area.

In April, PEC spoke at the Board of Supervisors Public Hearing in **support of the Prime Soils and Cluster Subdivision ordinance**, due for a final decision on June 12, with edits to improve the ordinance.

PEC **held a rally in March to demonstrate public opposition to data center rezonings** and special exceptions. We opposed the Belmont Center Innovation Data Center application, which ultimately was approved after conforming more closely to the zoning requirements for the site.

Three new data center rezonings will be considered by the Board of Supervisors over the next few months: Greenlin Park, Hiddenwood Assemblage and Orme Farm. PEC opposes all of them and will notify the public when the public hearings are scheduled.

Madison

As part of our Upper Rappahannock-Rapidan Watershed initiative, PEC secured funding from the USDA's Agricultural Land Easement program, The Volgenau Foundation, and Virginia Land Conservation Foundation to **permanently conserve two working farms**, both containing prime agricultural soils, totaling 972 acres.

Orange

The proposed 932-acre, 80-megawatt **Sunfish utility-scale solar facility** continues to make its way through the Planning Commission review process. We remain concerned about this project's impact on over 650 acres of productive farmland.

Two **community solar proposals failed** to move forward in March. Citing that viewshed and decommissioning concerns were not adequately addressed by the applicant, the Board of Supervisors denied the Cunningham Springs Solar project, despite the Planning Commission's recommendation. The ESA Solar proposal, similar in size, withdrew its special use permit application only days later.

The Board of Supervisors tabled the Planning Commission's proposed common sense **guidelines for siting and decommissioning solar facilities**, in favor of a zoning amendment that would prohibit community solar and utility-scale solar countywide. PEC is opposed to such a sweeping amendment as it would preclude even well-sited and appropriate projects. A public hearing on the amendment has not yet been scheduled.

Rappahannock

The County continues its **review and revision of zoning rules** under the guidance of both county staff and consultants with the Berkeley Group. Hearings are being held this spring, most recently with proposed changes to signage provisions. The process is ongoing and will continue through the coming months.

Out & About

21st Annual Bluebell Walk



▲ On April 7, an intergenerational group of people aged 5 to 90 joined our gracious hosts Margrete and Mike Stevens on a short hike to splash in Cedar Run, learn about native species and habitat restoration and enjoy the stunning Virginia bluebells along the streambanks.

Active Mobility Summit



▲ About 80 community members, advocates, and planners came together to brainstorm, collaborate, and share ways to improve walking, biking and access to the outdoors in Charlottesville and Albemarle County. The fourth annual Piedmont Mobility Summit, organized by PEC with support from a broad coalition of partners, included a full day of presentations, discussions, hikes, facilitated planning sessions – and lots of information and inspiration.

“Roots so Deep” Film Screening

▶ PEC partnered with Virginia Working Landscapes, Kinloch Farm and American Farmland Trust to host a screening and Q&A with the director of the new documentary series “Roots so Deep” at Germanna Community College in Culpeper County. The series focuses on farmers around the country who are using regenerative practices to boost soil fertility, cut their operating costs and help fight climate change.



Greene County “Water is Life” Earth Day Celebration



◀ PEC staff members Kim Biasioli (left) and Rob McGinnis (not shown) and board member Carol Carter (right) attended Greene County’s “Water is Life” Earth Day celebration in Ruckersville. The event was an opportunity to engage with community members and share information about PEC’s local efforts around land conservation, habitat restoration and land use planning in Greene.

Siegen Forest Celebration



▲ Historic Germanna hosted a ribbon cutting to celebrate the new Germanna Ford boat launch and the completion of a conservation easement on the 172-acre Siegen Forest, both of which PEC was heavily involved with. Now when visitors use the new boat launch to start their journey on the Rapidan, they’ll know that the flora and fauna, riverbank and historic resources of Siegen Forest are permanently protected from development thanks to the hard work of many partners over the course of nearly a decade!

Goose Creek Association Golden Egg Award



▲ The Goose Creek Association awarded PEC Director of Land Use Julie Bolthouse with its Golden Egg Award for her extraordinary service to the Loudoun and Fauquier communities, especially her leadership on data centers and the Virginia Data Center Reform Coalition.

GMU Visit to the Community Farm at Roundabout Meadows



Photo by Hugh Kenny

▲ Dr. Andrea Weeks' Introductory Botany class at George Mason University visits the Community Farm to gain hands-on experience interpreting soil tests and making nutrient management decisions.

Solar for Rural Businesses Workshop



Photo by James Bussells

▲ PEC co-hosted a workshop on how rural businesses and agriculture operations can access small-scale solar and improve energy efficiency through the USDA's Rural Energy for America Program, Solar Renewable Energy Certificates and Investment Tax Credits. Speakers included PEC, the Climate Protection Program of Albemarle County, Powers Farm & Brewery and Solar United Neighbors.

Out & About

It's a great time to GO SOLAR!

Through June...

Our annual Solarize Piedmont campaign is well underway and you still have time to get the process started. So if you've been curious about getting a solar system for your home, farm or business, now is the time to learn more, get a free assessment, and pursue installation with pre-vetted installers offering reduced pricing that's negotiated in advance.



Solarize Piedmont, offered in partnership with the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP), is available to anyone who lives or has property in Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange or Rappahannock counties, or the City of Charlottesville.

Save money on electric bills, reduce air pollution, combat climate change, become more energy independent... these are great reasons to go solar!

Learn more and sign up now through June 30 at pecva.org/solarize.

Farm-to-Table Dinner and Virtual Auction

When > September 21 @ 5:30 - 11 P.M.

Where > Historic Spring Hill, Rectortown

PEC's annual Farm-to-Table Dinner will take place at historic Spring Hill, where Michela Gorham & family will host us for cocktails, a farm-to-table dinner, and dancing to Gordon Sterling & The People – all with sweeping views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and PEC's Piedmont Memorial Overlook. Formerly part of the Bunny Mellon Estate, Spring Hill has classic gardens designed by Perry Wheeler, who, along with Mrs. Mellon, also contributed to the White House Rose Garden. As always, this event will feature a live paddle raise and a virtual auction, which is open for bidding from Sept. 13-23. You can shop the auction for the best in luxurious travel, local adventures and world-class cultural events from any device.

Want a sneak peek? Visit pecva.org/auction now!



Pop Quiz

QUESTION

When is the best time of year to clean up your perennial garden for the next season?

ANSWER

e) Very late spring, or not at all

According to Plant Virginia Natives, the ideal garden cleanup routine is to leave everything alone over winter and well into spring, and if possible, leave last year's perennials in place entirely, as new growth will just poke its way right up through them. If you must cut back perennial stalks and dead seedheads, do it as late as possible and leave at least 12-18" of dried plant stalks.

Why? Because pollinators and other

wildlife are counting on last year's garden dregs for food and shelter deep into spring. Chrysalides cling to last season's dried-up plant material. Seed heads feed birds. Bees nest in old plant stalks over winter and rely on them for shelter in heavy spring rains. Last year's leaf litter shelters turtles, caterpillars and other creatures.

In fact, the Xerces Society says before cutting back last year's perennial garden,

ask yourself: Have you put away *all* your winter clothing? Would you plant tomatoes yet? Does the lawn need *regular* mowing yet? Has tax-day arrived? Have apples and pears finished blooming?

If your answer to any of these questions is "no," leave your garden be!

RIGHT: *Callosamia promethea*, commonly known as the spicebush silkworm for one of its common host plants, spicebush.



Dear Friends,

The focus of PEC's Annual Meeting was the connection between community-based conservation and broader land conservation goals, especially the need for connected landscapes to support biodiversity and the migration of wildlife.

With the PEC Conservation Award, we recognized Land Trust Alliance President Andrew Bowman for his leadership of the land trust community over the past eight years. In his remarks, Andrew recognized the role of PEC as a model for the land trust and conservation movement, engaging communities in conservation and restoration while embracing the complexity of the world and addressing climate change, equitable access to nature, and the need to protect biodiversity.

The keynote address by Dr. Travis Belote was amazing in its breadth to the continental scale and depth of analysis. Highlighting the Blue Ridge and Appalachian corridor as one of the most important ecosystems in the United States, he recognized our work in the Piedmont as nationally and globally significant in terms of conserving and restoring the most important lands for biodiversity. We are proud to be part of an effort to conserve and connect more than 5,000 acres of working forestland near the Shenandoah National Park.

But that narrative of success is threatened.

The challenge presented by the explosive growth of artificial intelligence, data centers and the energy infrastructure they require continues to grow. PEC and our partners at the Virginia Data Center Reform Coalition are also responding to the accelerated push for new transmission lines across the Piedmont and the Mid-Atlantic region. We are preparing to challenge proposals locally in Albemarle, Culpeper, Orange, Fauquier, and Loudoun counties,

and we are gearing up to raise concerns with the State Corporation Commission, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and Department of Energy, and ultimately, with the General Assembly and Congress. As the enormous amount of additional energy required by data centers dominates headlines, the potential impacts of the new and expanded energy infrastructure on our landscapes are becoming more apparent.

Why does this matter to PEC?

...Because the 200 million square feet of data center construction and the energy infrastructure to support the insatiable demand for electrical power is increasingly being proposed for critical conservation lands, adjacent to national parks, state parks, and community trails, and on fertile farmland and intact forests.

...Because the demand for water to cool the massive computing centers will exceed the carrying capacity of our rivers and aquifers. Although we have been blessed with sustaining rains in the past month, all of us know that the water levels in our wells and in our nearby streams remain at historically low levels.

...Because the demand for electricity now is setting back our collective efforts to develop a clean energy future, encouraging expanded transmission to bring in energy from fossil fuel electrical generation plants in neighboring states.

Just this past weekend, many of us enjoyed the incredible views at the epicenter of the new Culpeper Battlefields State Park on Fleetwood Hill, with a 360-degree panorama of open space. Speaker after speaker, from the Culpeper tourism and economic development director to Gov. Glenn Youngkin, celebrated the importance of the open spaces and

views for solace and remembrance and as an anchor to the economy. If not for the courageous and sustained efforts of conservation-minded citizens, landowners, and partners like the American Battlefield Trust, Brandy Station Foundation, and many others, these places would have been lost decades ago to new and expanded highways, sprawling residential developments and a proposed Formula 1 race track.

At the Upperville Colt and Horse Show, thousands enjoyed a week under the shade of majestic oaks with sweeping views of the Loudoun Valley. That view represents generations of effort by PEC, the Land Trust of Virginia, Goose Creek Association, the Route 50 Coalition and thousands of individual families.

The remarkable qualities celebrated at both of these events are directly threatened by the next generation of high voltage transmission lines to support the expanded data center industry in Virginia.

Thanks to all for their work, day and night, to engage and mobilize our communities to fight for something better. It's worth it. By being present and taking action ourselves and by reaching out to others — from friends and family to business leaders and members of local boards to governors, the General Assembly and Congress — we can continue to advocate for reasonable regulation of impacts and for the mitigation of the impacts we cannot avoid. Now is the time to make the case.

Sincerely,

Chris Miller, President

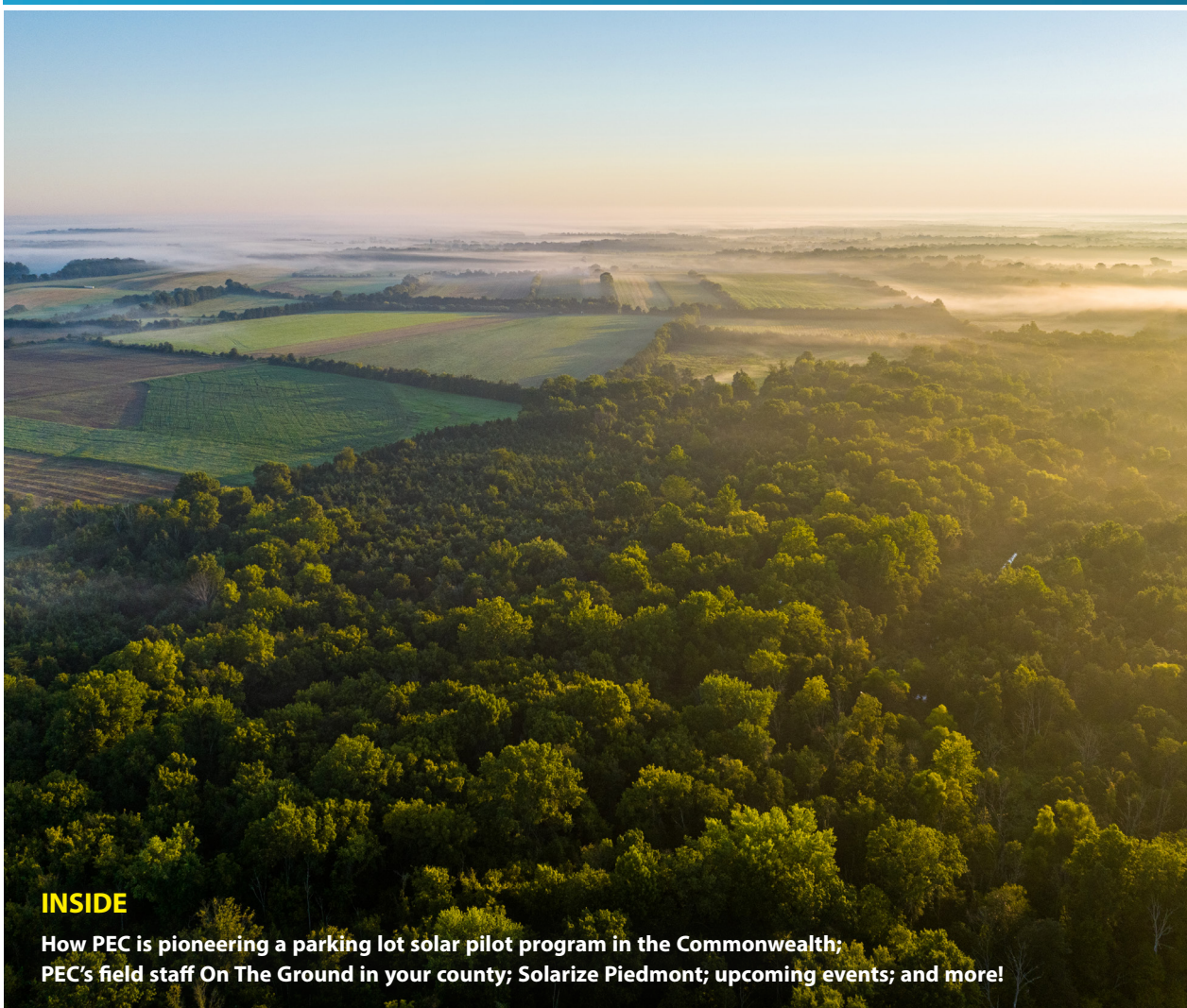


Photo by Hugh Kenny



The Piedmont View

A MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL SUMMER 2024



INSIDE

How PEC is pioneering a parking lot solar pilot program in the Commonwealth; PEC's field staff On The Ground in your county; Solarize Piedmont; upcoming events; and more!

Summer sunrise over southern Fauquier County. Photo by Hugh Kenny

Pop Quiz

QUESTION

When is the best time of year to clean up your perennial garden for the next season?

- a) In late fall, just before the first freeze
- b) In late winter, when things look drab
- c) In spring, just after the first warm night of the season
- d) In spring, after temperatures have been the 50s for consecutive days
- e) Very late spring, or not at all

ANSWER ON PAGE 7



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