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**First National Census of Land Trusts in Five Years:
Big Gains in Voluntary Land Conservation**

Belle Haven, VA – A national census of land protection indicates that about 10 million acres of land was conserved nationwide in the past five years, including 8,148 acres on Virginia’s Eastern Shore.

The National Land Trust Census, released November 16 by the Land Trust Alliance, found that protected land increased 27 percent nationally between 2005 and 2010. Locally, Virginia Eastern Shore (VES) Land Trust reports it preserved 8,148 acres since 2005, a 90 percent increase.

Nationally, 47 million acres – an area more than twice the size of all the national parks in the contiguous United States – are protected by land trusts. In total, VES Land Trust has assisted landowners in protecting 13,138 acres, including 4,101 acres of prime farmland and 73 miles of waterfront and shoreline, since it was founded in 2003.

The Land Trust Alliance reports that the major increase in land protection over the past five years reflects the increasing role of local land trusts in protecting private land. VES Land Trust is one of just five land trusts in the state to earn national accreditation for its work and now co-holds with its partners (Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District and The Nature Conservancy) more acres of voluntarily protected land than any other conservation organization on the Shore.

“We believe the big gains in protected land offer big benefits for the entire Shore community,” said VES Land Trust Executive Director Peter N. Henderson of Bridgetown. “Our work preserves the working farm land and natural resources, like clean water and wildlife habitat, which contribute so much to the quality of life on the Shore.”

Henderson also noted that growth in VES Land Trust’s operation from 2005 to 2010 also matched national trends, despite tough economic times over the same period. Nationally, land trust employment rose 19 percent, volunteers grew by 70 percent and stewardship endowments rose 300 percent. VES Land Trust now maintains two staff positions, more than a dozen committed volunteers and has increased its endowment funds by 500 percent since 2005.

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