



*Tidal gut on Sunset Farm Heron Rookery*

## **Land Trust Stewards Craddock Creek Heron Rookery**

VES Land Trust was entrusted with the long-term stewardship of a 13-acre heron rookery on Craddock Creek by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF). The property contains mature cedars, pines, salt bush and tidal marsh, as well as an active Great Blue Heron rookery which provides nesting for two to fifty herons every summer.

Philip and Majorie McCaleb protected the land with a conservation easement donated to CBF in 1988. The McCaleb family and CBF asked the land trust to become a partner in easement stewardship last year. The Land Trust agreed to provide annual monitoring of the rookery and surrounding lands, which lie within the viewshed of Corratock, 1,200 acres protected by a VES Land Trust easement.

## **Northampton County To Protect Second Farm**

By February, Northampton County expects to protect a second working farm through the local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program. The 172-acre farm near Nassawadox is close to two other farms protected by easements held by VES Land Trust or the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF).

The Northampton County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to fund a portion of the easement purchase at a work session in September 2010. Additional funding was secured from state and federal sources by the PDR Program Committee.

Northampton County created the PDR program to help residents protect productive farm and forest land and valued open space. The PDR Program Committee accepts applications from landowners who might not be able to afford to donate the conservation easement value outright. The Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District and the VOF serve as the conservation easement co-holders.

The Northampton program is managed by Peter Stith in the County's Department of Planning and Zoning. Supervisors appoint the PDR Program Committee, currently composed of farmers, conservationists and public servants. VES Land Trust Executive Director Peter Henderson serves as the committee chairman.

For more information about the Northampton County PDR program or to obtain a PDR application package, contact Peter Stith, 757-678-0443 Ext. 27. or

[pstith@co.northampton.va.us](mailto:pstith@co.northampton.va.us)

## **Congress Approves Easement Incentives for 2011**

Conservation easement donors on the Eastern Shore got a fine gift from Congress over the holidays. In the big tax bill, "enhanced" tax incentives available since 2006 were approved for easement donations this year.

The tax incentive applies to a landowner's federal income tax. It:

- Permits a conservation easement donor to take a deduction on up to 50 percent of adjusted gross income in 2011.
- Allows farmers and ranchers to take a deduction on up to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income in 2011.
- Allows easement donors to apply the deduction on tax returns for up to 16 years.

Contact your accountant, financial advisor or Land Trust Executive Director Peter Henderson for details, (757)442-5885.

## Land Trust Wins State Scenic Rivers Award

VES Land Trust was awarded the 2010 Scenic Water Corridor Preservation Award by the statewide Scenic Virginia conservation group in October at a reception in the state Capitol. The award recognizes the land trust's seven years of outreach to landowners on five Eastern Shore river corridors, resulting in the permanent protection of 53 miles of scenic rural shoreline and nearly 8,800 acres.

VES Land Trust river corridor campaign resulted in conservation easements on two complete river systems, Finney Creek & Nickawampus Creek in Accomack County. Significant gains in land protection also took place on Church Neck in Northampton County and on Nandua Creek, Folly Creek, Swans Creek and Coldkall Creek in Accomack County.

In total, the Land Trust secured 26 of the 30 conservation easements on the scenic river corridors. Numerous historic houses and the traditional farm, forest and marsh landscapes viewed from the water on the five river corridors have been preserved.

The Scenic Virginia award recognized the board and staff of VES Land Trust, our conservation partners and the Eastern Shore landowners whose extraordinary stewardship made the protection of the scenic water corridors possible.



*Clockwise from bottom: Tata Kellam, Lynn Allison, Harry Holcomb, Lucius Kellam, Potter Henderson, Susan Henderson and Nancy Holcomb at the Scenic Virginia Awards Reception.*

## Land Trust Completes Process for National Accreditation

VES Land Trust has completed its application and final review for national accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. "National accreditation will recognize the quality of our conservation program and give our easement donors, contributors and partners greater confidence in our ability to preserve and protect resources on the Eastern Shore forever," said Executive Director Peter N. Henderson. Application results will be announced in February.



## Land Trust Adopts Long Range Plan

The VES Land Trust Board of Directors recently completed a three-year strategic plan to build on the success gained in our first seven years and on the lessons learned from the year-long national accreditation process.

Nine board members past and present and Executive Director Peter Henderson held a retreat in November facilitated by founding executive director Megan Gallagher, now an

advisor to the Land Trust. The board retreat followed a work session Peter and Megan held a day earlier with colleagues from nine Eastern Shore conservation groups and agencies.

To date, the Land Trust has concentrated on voluntary land protection through donated conservation easements in Accomac and Northampton counties. The retreat and strategic plan added an important new focus to the Land Trust's work: educating the Eastern Shore community about the valuable public benefits of land protection. The article that follows is the first small step in this challenging task. Look for new outreach programs in the future.

## **The Public Benefits of Land Protection**

Many people think land protection only benefits prosperous landowners. A conservation easement may give the donor some significant short-term tax advantages. But the public shares in the lasting rewards realized by protecting our farm and forest land, valued open spaces and critical natural resources, like water quality.

### Social Benefits

Much of the Eastern Shore's historic culture is based upon natural resources. Fishing, farming, forestry, hunting and simply exploring our creeks, rivers and bays have captivated Shore residents for many generations. Our historic buildings, settlements and landscape reflect the importance of these activities. You can still see that history today in harbor and railroad towns like Onancock and Eastville.

Too much development of farm lands, forests and waterfront threaten these natural resources and the traditional Shore activities they support. Permanently protecting productive lands through voluntary conservation easements also preserves the traditional land uses that Eastern Shore residents find vital to their quality of life.

### Environmental Benefits

By preserving open space and conserving farm and forest land, ecological integrity is maintained and often enhanced. Many conservation easement donors continue to improve the natural quality of their land. Stewardship includes rehabilitating wetlands from poorly drained agricultural lands, planting native plant species for wildlife habitat or expanding and improving waterfront buffers. The positive environmental impacts do not end on the land that is improved; surface waters are made cleaner and groundwater recharge is increased. These environmental benefits have direct positive results on our local drinking water supply, as well as fishing, aquaculture and agriculture.



*Hardwood trees planted to protect water quality*

### Economic Benefits

Local taxpayers and schools are the winners when productive rural land is permanently protected. Farm land demands little in public services (schools, roads, emergency services) and can generate surplus property tax revenue, while new houses require far more services, at more cost than the tax revenue generated. Basically, local taxpayers save money on farms and must pay a tax subsidy for new homes.

Formulas for state aid to counties for education also reward places with significant protected lands. School aid is based upon the total fair market value of a county's real estate. Protected lands reduce the total value of land in the county and thereby increase the amount of state aid received. In turn, new residential

development raises the total value, which lowers the amount of state aid to local schools.

Protected lands also help preserve core industries based on natural resources. The Shore's clam aquaculture industry generates millions in local revenue and recent development of oyster aquaculture is very promising. Both are entirely dependent on high water quality, which is best preserved through good stewardship practices in traditional land uses like farming and forestry. All of these major economic sectors rely on healthy soils, open land and clean water.



*Hungars Glebe, home of Jack & Suzanne Wescoat*

## **VES Land Trust Oyster Roast April 2 on Church Neck**

VES Land Trust will host its fourth annual fundraiser on Saturday, April 2, 2011, at Hungars Glebe near Machipongo, home of board member Suzanne Wescoat. This year's menu will include beef tenderloin and, as always, roasted oysters and clams and clam chowder. A silent auction will showcase local artwork and promise great trips and excursions. Tickets are \$75 per person, with several sponsorship opportunities available. Invitations will be mailed in mid-February. Please call the Land Trust office, (757) 442-5885, for more information. Tickets will be limited so get yours early!

## **Growing Specialty Crops & Linking Landowners with Growers**

VES Land Trust – in cooperation with its conservation partners and several Eastern Shore growers – will sponsor a half-day seminar on growing specialty and/or organic crops including berries, sweet potatoes, greens, herbs and flowers. The Land Trust will provide information to help link emerging farm entrepreneurs to landowners interested in providing farm land. The seminar is planned for mid-2011. If you are interested in attending and/or would like to lease or loan a few acres to specialty growers, please call Peter Henderson, (757) 442-5885.

## **A Message from the Executive Director**



*Peter, Conner and Charlotte Henderson*

Hello Friends and Colleagues:

I recently watched a thought provoking documentary, *Dirt!*, which explored the wonders of soil, "a living skin on the earth's surface derived from the same materials that make up all the stars, plants and animals in the universe." The film described the connections that everyone and everything has to dirt. "When humans arrived 2 million years ago, everything changed for dirt. And from that moment on, the fate of dirt and humans has been intimately linked..... Though, in modern industrial pursuits and clamor for both profit and natural resources, our human connection to and respect for soil has been disrupted. Drought, climate change, even war are all directly related to the way we are treating dirt."

I had never really thought about soil in such great detail, but I remember my mother quoting Scarlett's father in *Gone With the Wind*. "Land is the only thing in the world worth working for, worth fighting for, worth dying for, because it's the only thing that lasts." Like many things moms say, the idea really stuck with me. Land is the only thing that lasts forever. In addition, everything we do to the land lasts forever. There is a reaction to every action, good or bad.

*Dirt!* is a call to action to do our best to protect this most valuable of all resources. Everything comes from the dirt and everything will return to it. Check out [www.dirtthemovie.org](http://www.dirtthemovie.org).

*If you would like to donate to VES Land Trust please make check payable to:*

**VES Land Trust**

**P.O. Box 1114**

**Exmore, VA 23350**

*Or call (757) 442-5885 for stock gifting instructions.*

**VES Land Trust Directors and Staff**



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*VES Land Trust seeks to conserve rural lands which will best preserve the farms, forests, fisheries and heritage of Virginia's Eastern Shore for the benefit of future generations.*