

THE RESOURCE



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE EQUINE LAND CONSERVATION RESOURCE

Protecting Virginia's Horse Country: Conservation Strategies That Pay Off

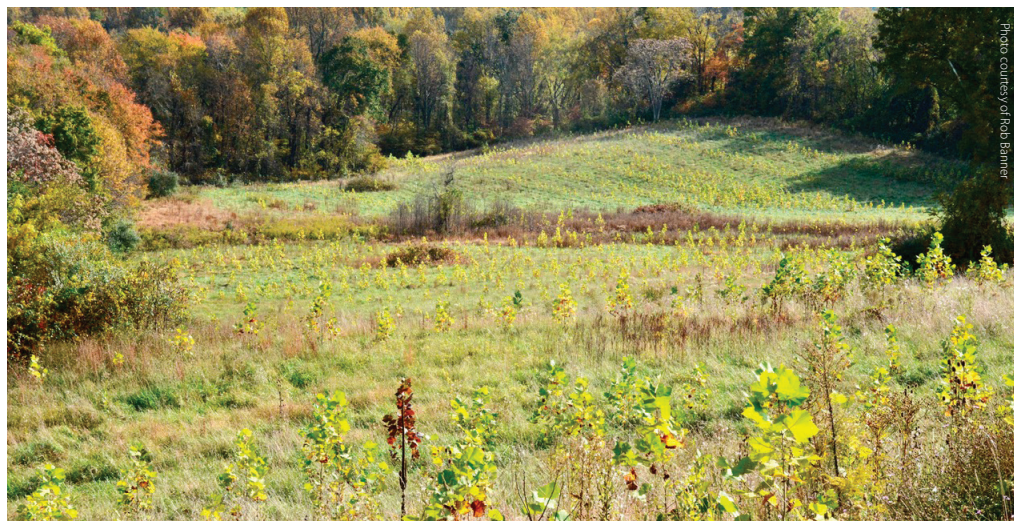
by Robert Banner

Virginia has always been a progressive state when it comes to conservation. When you consider the many heart-stopping views, valleys, and vistas framing up centuries of history, this comes as no surprise. The Route 15 corridor from Leesburg to Charlottesville hosts the homes of several of our first presidents and countless Revolutionary and Civil War battlefields. Virginia also hosts more than 15 recognized foxhunts and the nation's oldest horse show in Upperville. But Virginia is more than just horse land; it is the heartland of our nation.

Consequently, Virginians are committed to protecting their land. Devising programs that will truly take hold requires a system of rewards with real value. As the saying goes, "If it pays, it stays." Here are two Virginia programs that actually pay big dividends and offer maximum protection. Perhaps your state would benefit from adopting similar programs.

Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a conservation organization or government agency that restricts the development or alteration of the land to protect its natural, historical, or ecological values. It allows landowners to retain ownership while ensuring long-term preservation of the land. Depending on the terms



Newly planted trees at Great Meadows in The Plains are part of Virginia's nutrient trading program, designed to filter groundwater and improve water quality.

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NO
LAND
NO
HORSE



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of the easement, landowners can continue using the land for its designated purpose, such as operating a horse farm, as long as the use aligns with the easement's conservation goals.

Of course, you can receive substantial federal tax deductions for protecting your property anywhere in the nation, and while many states offer tax credits for conservation easements, Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credits (LPTC) provide additional tax benefits. The LPTC are worth 40% of the easement value, making them the most generous in the country. This is one reason why Virginia has one of the nation's highest concentrations of conservation easements.



Great Meadows staff at the same location after several years, showing the growth of trees planted for nutrient credits.

Unlike federal tax deductions, Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credits are transferable and can be sold to anyone with a Virginia state tax liability at a slight discount. This allows sellers who have already satisfied their own tax obligations to sell the credits. The seller receives payment directly for protecting their land, while the buyer can use the credits to offset their state tax at a 10% to 12% discount. Many taxpayers in Virginia incorporate this into their annual tax strategy.

Nutrient Trading

In 2005, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) launched its nutrient trading program to address nutrient pollution—mainly from fertilizer, manure, wastewater, and stormwater runoff—entering the Chesapeake Bay from cropland in the headwaters. This pollution fueled harmful algae blooms and the creation of the Bay's loathsome dead zone.

Virginia's nutrient trading program is a market-based approach that allows developers downstream to offset their stormwater management by purchasing credits from landowners or organizations that have implemented practices to reduce pollution runoff. These credits are earned through activities like installing best management practices or restoring wetlands, helping to meet the state's water quality goals, especially in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The DEQ's plan rewards landowners for planting trees in strategic areas where their root systems filter groundwater runoff, keeping excess nutrients in check. The more sensitive the area, the greater the reward in the form of tradable credits, which can be sold to real estate developers downstream. A key element of the program is that the state legislature requires developers downstream to buy these credits to permit their projects, ensuring that private industry, not taxpayers, funds the restoration efforts.

One example of a horse property that has taken advantage of Virginia's Nutrient Trading program is the Great Meadow Foundation in The Plains, an elite equestrian facility that features polo, steeplechase, jumpers, dressage, and outdoor events for the local community.

Here's the icing on the legislative cake: Virginia law grants public bodies that hold easements (such as the DEQ or a local government) the authority to negotiate or even block the eminent domain actions of public utilities. This means that transmission lines, which threaten to disrupt scenic views for the sake of powering data centers, can be delayed or blocked by existing conservation efforts, like trees protected under the DEQ program or conservation easements held by local counties.

In Virginia, savvy conservationists often utilize both conservation easements and nutrient banks as a dual strategy. They ensure that both types of easements are held by public bodies. Depending on where you are located, this not only can help protect the land from development, but also can provide financial incentives for doing the right thing—offering an extra layer of protection and potentially earning substantial compensation.

About the Author: A lifelong horseman, Rob Banner has 28 years of experience with national horse publications, including serving as the former publisher of *The Chronicle of the Horse*. Today, he works at ACRE Investment Management, focusing on growing trees for ecological credits.

Questions?

Feel free to contact Robert Banner at robertbanner2@gmail.com.

The Giangiulio's and Geraghty's Honored with 2024 Robert N. Clay Award

The Equine Land Conservation Resource (ELCR) honored Peter Giangiulio and Barbara Geraghty with the prestigious 2024 Robert N. Clay Conservation Award at the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association (TOBA) National Awards Dinner on September 7, 2024, in Lexington, Kentucky.

Established in 2014, the Robert N. Clay Conservation Award highlights the significance of land conservation within the Thoroughbred industry. A collaborative effort between TOBA and ELCR, the award serves as an inspiration to others in the industry to recognize the importance of protecting open spaces. It is presented annually at the TOBA National Awards Dinner.

Peter and his sister Barbara shared this honor with their spouses, Stephanie Giangiulio and Bill Geraghty, for their remarkable conservation efforts at Castle Rock Farm in Unionville, Pennsylvania. This 113-acre farm, located in scenic Chester County, is home to the beautiful Brandywine Creek and has long been a treasured spot for local outdoor enthusiasts.

Both Peter and Barbara are lifelong supporters of Thoroughbreds, following in their father's footsteps with a deep passion for ownership and breeding. Peter's connection to horses began at the age of eight, and he is now celebrating his 54th foaling season. His farm also serves as a sanctuary for aging equines, reinforcing his longstanding bond with these animals. In addition to his conservation work, Peter has served in several community leadership roles, including past president of the Pennsylvania Horse Breeders Association and current Vice President of Ryerss Farm for Aged Equines in Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

In 2022, after thoughtful deliberation, Peter and Barbara made the crucial decision to protect the future of Castle Rock Farm by placing it under a conservation easement with Natural Lands, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving open spaces in eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. This ensures that the stunning views of the Brandywine Creek Valley will remain unchanged, and the land will be shielded from development. Natural Lands notes that Castle Rock Farm is now part of an expanding greenway along West Branch Brandywine Creek, linking it to other protected properties in the area.

Through their conservation efforts, Peter hopes to inspire others in the Thoroughbred industry to make similar commitments to land stewardship. His dedication to both the welfare of horses and the protection of their habitats reflects a holistic approach to responsible ownership and sustainable land management, benefiting both the equine community and future generations.



Peter Giangiulio of Castle Rock Farm accepting the 2024 Robert N. Clay Award from ELCR Executive Director Holley Groshek. Photo courtesy of Mahan Multimedia.

EQUINE PLACES AND SPACES

THREATENED: Freehold Raceway, Monmouth County, New Jersey

The closure of Freehold Raceway, the oldest harness racetrack in the United States, marks the end of an era in American horse racing. Located in Freehold, New Jersey, the half-mile track began hosting unofficial races in the 1830s. Despite its rich legacy, the track's physical condition had deteriorated beyond repair, with multiple efforts to restore it proving unsuccessful. Jointly owned by Penn National Gaming and Greenwood Racing, Freehold Raceway held its final races on December 28, 2024. As news of its closure spread, many expressed hopes that the property would be bought and revitalized, but as of now, there has been no official word on its future. Speculation surrounds its potential redevelopment, though the fate of the historic site remains uncertain.

SAVED: Foxfield Racing, Charlottesville, Virginia

Foxfield Racing in Albemarle County, Virginia, has a history that stretches back long before the establishment of the iconic steeplechase races there in 1978. The property was originally a private horse farm and a renowned riding school under the guidance of Grover Vandevender, the first professional huntsman of the Farmington Hunt Club. Vandevender's influence made the property a significant center for equestrian activity throughout the 20th century and his legacy is deeply woven into the land. After Vandevender's death in 1973, the property was sold, and a steeplechase course was constructed in his memory.

The property was recently sold to the Cassiopeia Foundation to ensure that this historic site will be preserved for future generations. The Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization focused on environmental conservation and land preservation, helps solidify the continued operation of steeplechase racing at Foxfield.

REBORN: Detroit Horse Power, Detroit, Michigan

As urban sprawl continues, horses are becoming increasingly distant from cities, making them less accessible to many. One group is working to change that. Created in 2015, the non-profit Detroit Horse Power has operated using bor-

rowed horses, equipment, and facilities. Often, riders never get to sit on the same horse twice. Now, Detroit Horse Power will have a place to call home.

The new equestrian center will sit on a 14-acre property that has been vacant for more than a decade, the former site of the Paul Robeson School. Plans for the stables include stalls for 17 horses, an indoor and outdoor arena, bridle trails, and numerous community learning spaces.

It seems only fitting that the property will continue to provide educational and recreational opportunities for Detroit's youth. The groundbreaking ceremony took place in October of 2024, and once completed in 2026, the facility will be the largest urban equestrian center in the country.

GAINING GROUND: Laurens County, South Carolina

Laurens County recently purchased 335 acres of land with the intention of establishing a new equestrian park and trails for horseback riding. With the development of Greenville sprawling outwards, the county is focused on conserving land and natural resources.

In 2023, the Nature Conservancy of South Carolina purchased more than 2000 acres, of which 335 acres for the equestrian park were subsequently purchased by Laurens County in late 2024. Additionally, the US Forest Service has identified almost 2000 additional acres surrounding the park as a high-priority acquisition with intentions to restore the land. Laurens County hopes the equestrian park's trails will eventually connect to the existing Palmetto Trail through joint conservation efforts on these adjacent properties.

If you are aware of an equine-related place that has been lost, saved, or is in danger, please let us know about it. You can contact us at 859-455-8383 or info@elcr.org, or visit the Report an Issue page on our website.

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ELCR Welcomes New Board Members

ELCR is pleased to welcome two new members to its Board of Directors. Ashleigh Dane, a professional developer from Charleston, South Carolina, and Bill Ward, a 30-year veteran in the marketing and advertising industry from Baltimore, Maryland.

Ashleigh Dane

Ashleigh is a partner in EDP Holdings, which develops boutique residential and multifamily communities in South Carolina and Georgia. EDP's focus is on opportunities in sought-after secondary markets where they can design communities thoughtfully curated with the end user in mind. Ashleigh is active in site selection, underwriting, and raising debt and equity. She also oversees development and lease-up. EDP has developed over 400 units since forming in 2016 and currently has 172 units under construction in Charleston and Savannah.



In building the development business, Ashleigh's love for the land drew her to the perceived conflict between development and conservation, ultimately leading her to question the process by which communities grow. She has spent the last several years considering how communities can grow while honoring the land and sense of place that catalyzed the growth.

Ashleigh received her undergraduate degree and her MBA in Finance from Vanderbilt. She is the former president of the Charleston Alumni Association for Vanderbilt. She is lifelong horsewoman with a passion for horses and the equestrian lifestyle. She lives on her farm in Charleston and competes in the jumpers while occasionally dabbling in the eventing discipline. She is forever indebted to horses for the smiles and joyful memories they have brought to her life and finds so much pleasure sharing her passion. She recognizes that the farms, trails, and fields that accompany the sport are what breathe life into us equestrians. Ashleigh is committed to working to protect the land needed to sustain our equestrian lifestyle, sport, and industry.

Bill Ward

Bill Ward is Executive Vice President and Managing Director of TBC, a leading ad agency in Baltimore, Maryland. Equally important to Bill is his passion for the equestrian world of sport, thanks to his 14-year-old daughter Taylor, who took to the sport seven years ago and has not looked back—competitively riding in hunter and equitation divisions. While all-things-horse may not have been a part of Bill's life until recently, the past seven years have been nothing less than an all-encompassing, rocket-fueled experience in the sport, magic, and community of everything that goes into successful partnerships of horse and rider. And despite some general allergic reactions around horses, his heart and head are all-in to do what he can in the best interest of these amazing animals who deliver so much to their human partners and deserve much more from us. Along with his dedication to the ELCR, Bill sits on the Board of Directors with the Washington International Horse Show and the Sport & Entertainment Corp of Maryland. The latter also operates the Maryland 5-Star, where Bill also is a member of the 5-Star event committee.



Bill is thoughtful and intentional about what he commits himself to, so that everything can get the level of attention it needs and deserves. He prioritizes being a supportive husband and business partner to his wife of 18 years, Nichole; an always-improving father of their child Taylor; a driver of opportunity and growth for their ad agency TBC; and a partner-owner of an independent wine and spirit retail store. He pursues opportunities that feed into these areas of interest and offer challenges he believes he can help solve.



ELCR Education Corner

Recent additions and updates to the ELCR Online Resource Library

The ELCR Online Resource Library represents the largest available collection of resources, including articles, guides, tools and templates, and recorded webinars related to conserving horse lands. These online resources are available to the public free of charge. The online library can be accessed at www.elcr.org.

New Article: “Protecting Virginia’s Horse Country: Conservation Strategies That Pay Off”

Virginia, renowned for its historic horse country and thriving equestrian culture, offers horse property owners two innovative conservation programs that provide both environmental and financial benefits. In this article, Robert Banner dives into how Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credits for conservation easements allow equine landowners to conserve their property while receiving significant tax incentives. He also explores the Nutrient Trading program, which rewards landowners for implementing practices that reduce runoff and improve water quality, benefiting both the Chesapeake Bay and the surrounding landscapes. These programs not only help protect Virginia's iconic horse country, but also offer horse owners valuable financial rewards for their conservation efforts. The full article can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/4jFelyK>

New Article: “Helping the Birds and the Bees: Tips to Boost Pollinators on Your Equestrian Property”

In this article focused on best management practices, author Christina Keim emphasizes the importance of enhancing pollinator habitats on equestrian properties, noting that small adjustments in maintenance routines can significantly benefit both pollinators and the farm's ecosystem. By incorporating native plants that provide forage and shelter, allowing less maintained “transition zones” to flourish, and adopting mindful mowing practices, equestrians can support diverse plant life essential for pollinator survival. These efforts not only foster a balanced ecosystem that reduces reliance on pesticides, but also improve overall land health. Keim encourages farm owners to start small and gradually expand their initiatives while educating visitors about the ecological benefits, ultimately creating a more vibrant and sustainable environment for both horses and wildlife. Read the full article here: <https://bit.ly/4aIFHQO>

Recorded Webinar: “Barn to Trail - Managing Sustainability on Equine Properties”

This webinar is part one of a two-part series related to sustainability. As a distinctive community of trail users, equestrians depend not just on access to trails, but also on the farms that serve as homes for their equine partners. Sustainability on the trails begins on your equine property. This webinar aims to introduce you to the fundamentals of managing a sustainable horse farm. Our speakers, including John Blackburn and Jane Thery, discuss how sustainable management practices on farms may impact private and local trail systems adjacent to these properties. The recorded webinar can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/4e1PHV5>

Recorded Webinar: “Sustainable Equestrian Trails: From Grant Funding to Project Execution”

This webinar is part two of a two-part series related to sustainability, delving deeper into environmentally sustainable trail building and maintenance for equestrian use. This webinar begins with an introduction to the American Trails Legacy Trails Grant Program and further explores how two different chapters of Back Country Horsemen of America—Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands and Back Country Horsemen of Washington—utilized this funding to support projects that sustain and improve equestrian trails in their regions. This presentation focuses on the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail Project and the Pasayten Wilderness Project in Washington, using these examples to highlight key issues in trail maintenance and sustainability while offering common solutions to challenges that may arise on equestrian trails. Check out the webinar here: <https://bit.ly/4gqt1Av>

Introducing the Rural Landowner Manual for the Northern Piedmont

Landowners in Virginia's Northern Piedmont now have access to a comprehensive new resource: The Rural Landowner Manual: A Resource Guide for the Northern Piedmont. Developed through a collaboration of eight local conservation organizations in Fauquier and Loudoun counties, this guide offers valuable support for managing rural properties.

Whether you're new to land stewardship or looking to deepen your knowledge, the guide provides expert advice, key resources, and details on local programs designed to help landowners navigate the complexities of rural property management.

Contributors to the manual include

- The Piedmont Environmental Council
- Citizens for Fauquier County
- Goose Creek Association
- OCH Conservation Foundation
- Land Trust of Virginia
- Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition
- PFH Conservation Fund
- Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area Association

Access guide here: <https://www.piedmontheritage.org/manual>

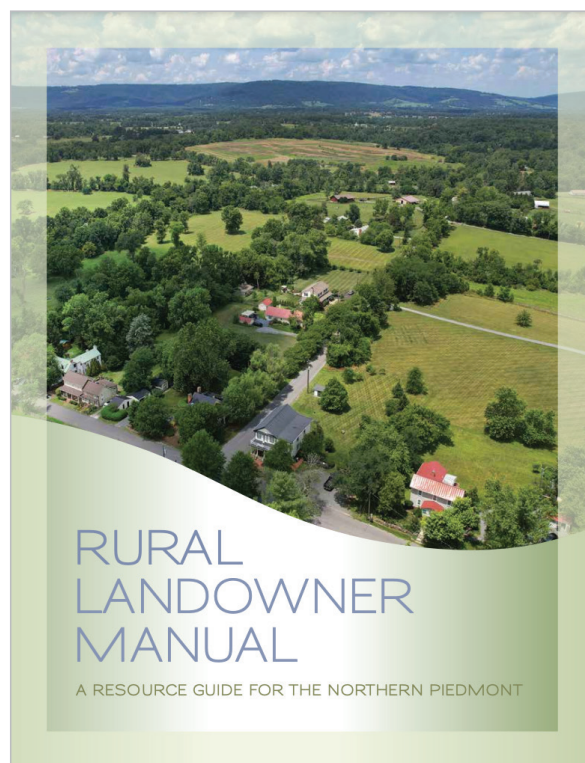


Photo courtesy of the Virginia Piedmont Heritage Area.

Ways to Support ELCR

ELCR could not continue the good work it does without your support. Below are some of the many ways you can help support ELCR's vital mission of saving horse lands!

1. Join ELCR as a Conservation Partner.
2. Make a gift in honor of friends and family who also love our equine friends and way of life.
3. Donate stock to ELCR.
4. Become a monthly donor and leverage a smaller monthly gift into a larger annual impact.
5. Remember a cherished loved one or equine companion with a Memorial Tribute Gift.
6. Like and share ELCR on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram—the more people we reach, the more cherished lands and equine heritage we can save!



Visit ELCR.org for more information or contact us at elcradmin@elcr.org.

Spotlight on Monthly Donors

A great way to support our mission is by becoming a monthly donor. Instead of giving a single "lump sum," you can divide out your donation over an entire year. Many donors find this is a great way to give and end up having a larger annual impact than if they gave only once. Arrangements can be made for a monthly charge to a major credit card. Please contact us at elcradmin@elcr.org for more information on setting up a monthly donation.



4037 Iron Works Parkway
Suite 120
Lexington, KY 40511

Support ELCR

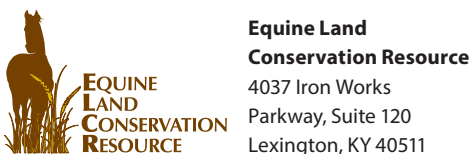
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