



The Case for Land Conservation in Virginia

Presented by the Piedmont Environmental Council to
the Senate Finance Subcommittee
on Economic Development and Natural Resources
May 19, 2008

A Look at Land Conservation in Virginia



- Why conserve Virginia's land and resources?
 - What are we doing to conserve our land?
 - Measuring our accomplishments
 - ✓ Are we conserving the right land?
 - ✓ Are we effectively leveraging state conservation funding?
 - What can we accomplish in the future?
-

Why Conserve Virginia's Land and Resources?

Because Virginia is our home.

Our land provides us with....

- A renewable source of nourishment
- A sustainable natural environment
- Jobs and a vibrant economy
- Areas to recreate
- Historic and scenic places to experience.

In short, our land connects us to our past and sets the course for a prosperous future.

What are we doing to conserve our land?

Landowners, private land trusts, and government are working together to conserve land important to Virginians.

Three funding strategies exemplify the Commonwealth's role:

- Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF)
 - Partnership with localities on Purchase of Development Rights programs
 - Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credit (LPTC)
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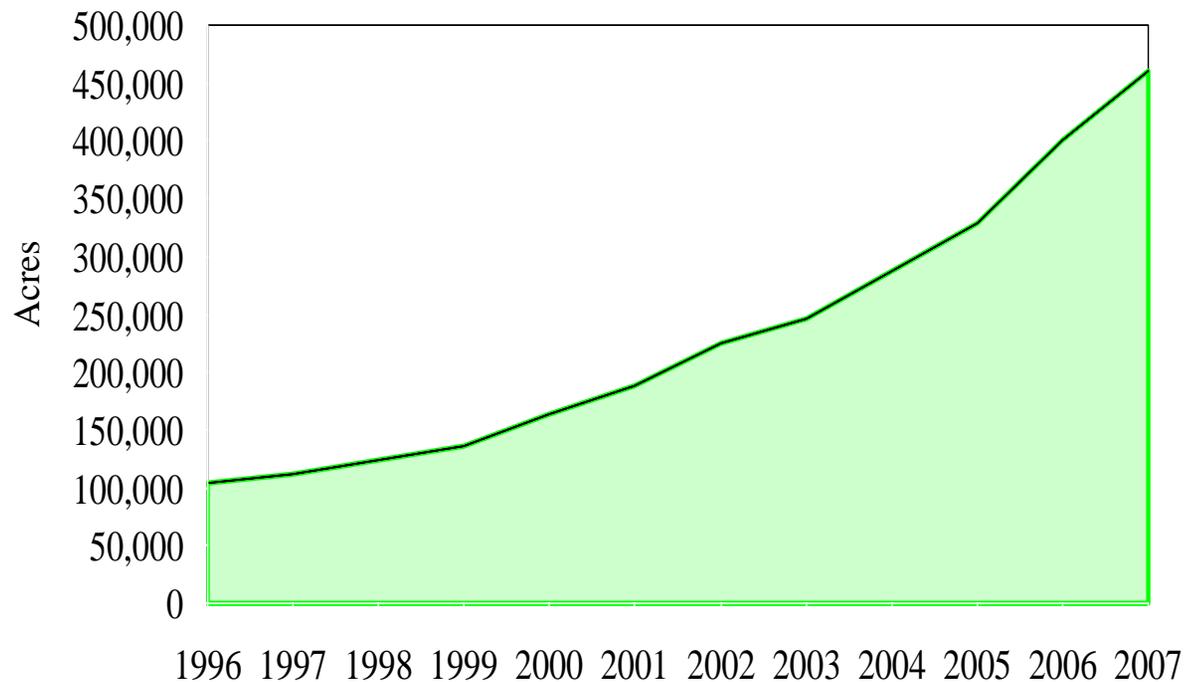
Three-Legged Conservation Strategy

Over the past seven years, the LPTC, VLCHF, and local adoption of PDR programs have resulted in the conservation of nearly 400,000 acres in Virginia.

Conservation Strategy	Acres
Land Preservation Tax Credit	326,000
Virginia Land Conservation Foundation	31,000
Local PDR Programs	20,800
Total	377,800

Land Preservation Tax Credit

The LPTC's success is highlighted by the dramatic increase in the amount of land conserved by VOF since 2000.



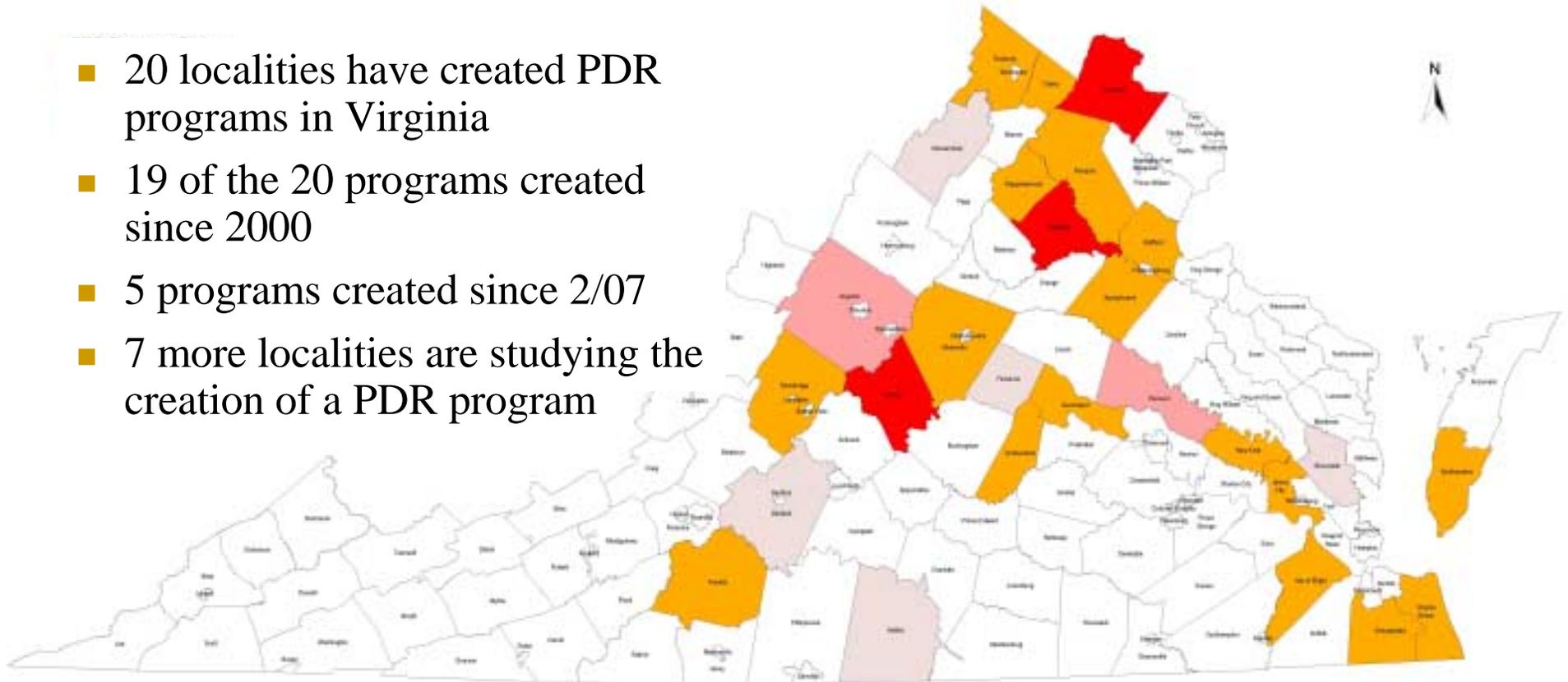
Increase in Total Acres Conserved by VOF (1996-2007)

Since enactment of the LPTC in 2000, VOF has conserved over 324,000 acres, tripling its portfolio of conserved land from about 135,000 acres to over 461,000.

Local PDR Programs

STATUS OF LOCAL PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (PDR) PROGRAMS

- 20 localities have created PDR programs in Virginia
- 19 of the 20 programs created since 2000
- 5 programs created since 2/07
- 7 more localities are studying the creation of a PDR program



Map Prepared on 10/4/07 by



VA Land Conservation Foundation

VLCF provides competitive matching grants to support a wide range of statewide conservation priorities.



Despite inconsistent funding, the 84 grants awarded by VLCF since 2000 will conserve more than 31,000 acres in VA

VLCF funding supported the conservation of Meadow Grove Farm, a sixth generation working farm

Are we conserving the right land?

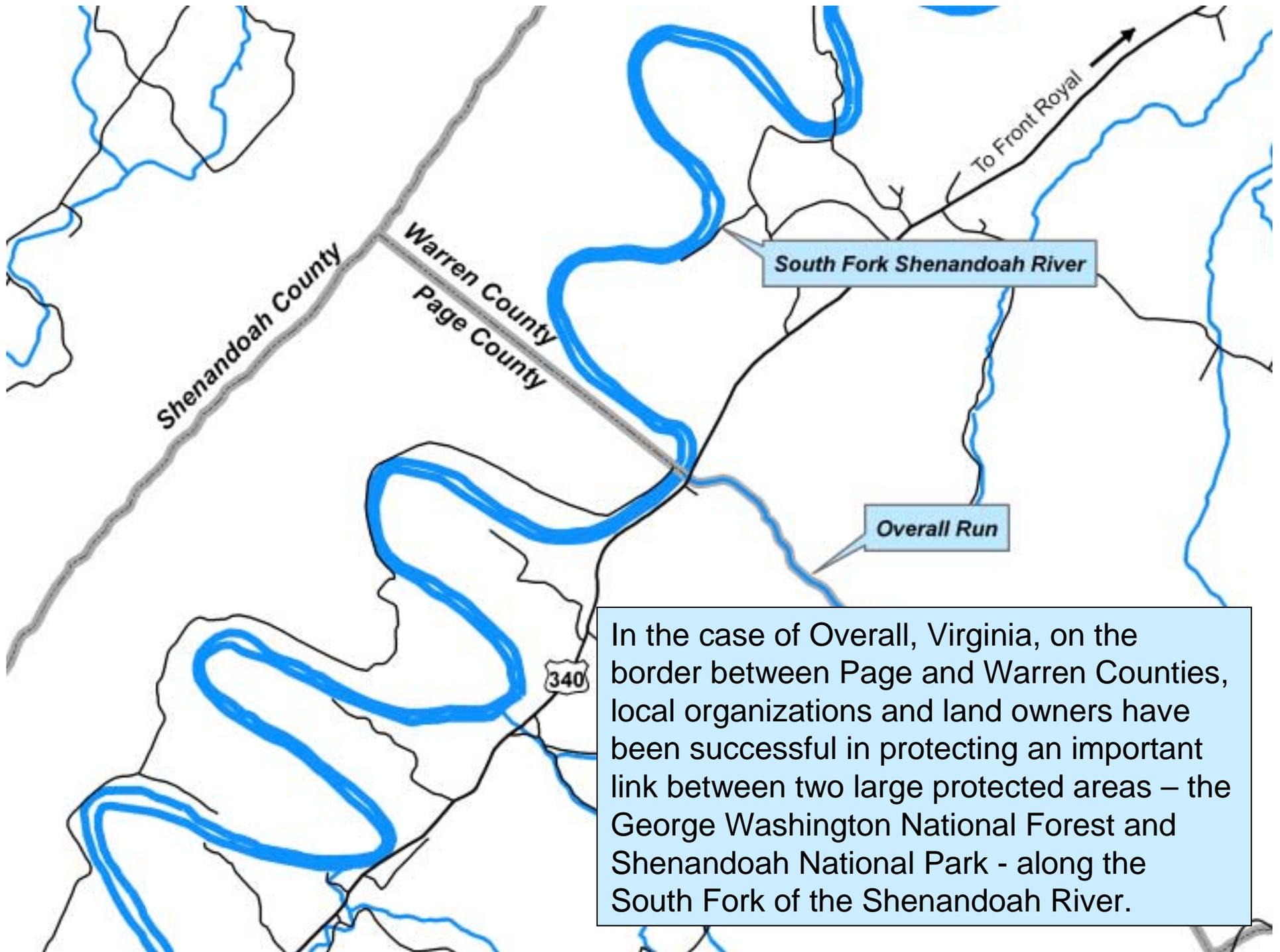
YES! Land protected through donated easements, PDR Programs, and VLCF are strategically achieving important local and statewide conservation goals such as....

Protecting Wildlife Habitat

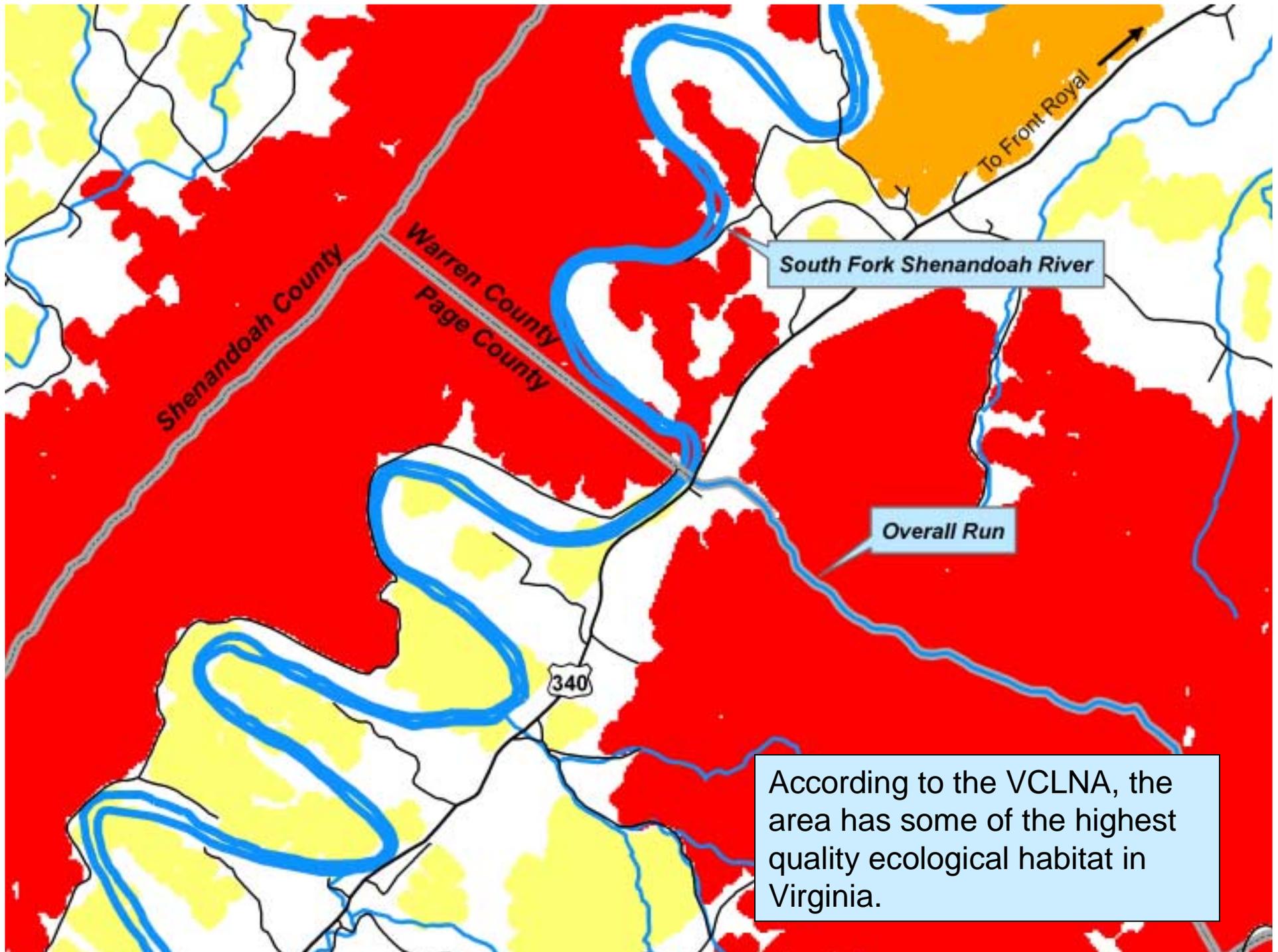
Conservation easements are being used strategically to maintain biological diversity, protect rare ecological communities, and retain blocks of habitat for hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing.



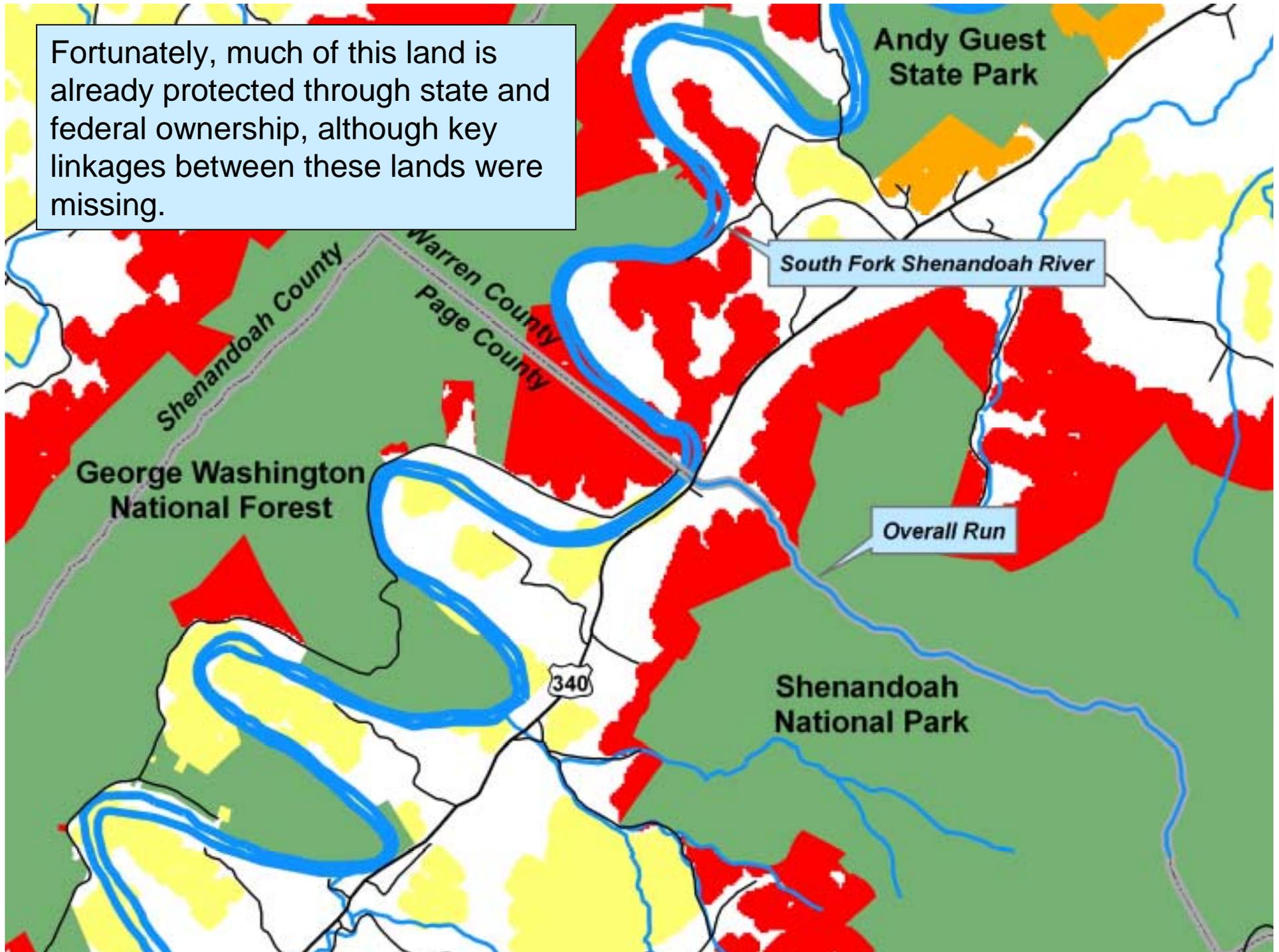
90% of all VOF easements—
totaling 320,000 acres in
Virginia—contain land
designated as an ecological
“core” by the Virginia Land
Conservation Needs Assessment
(VCLNA)

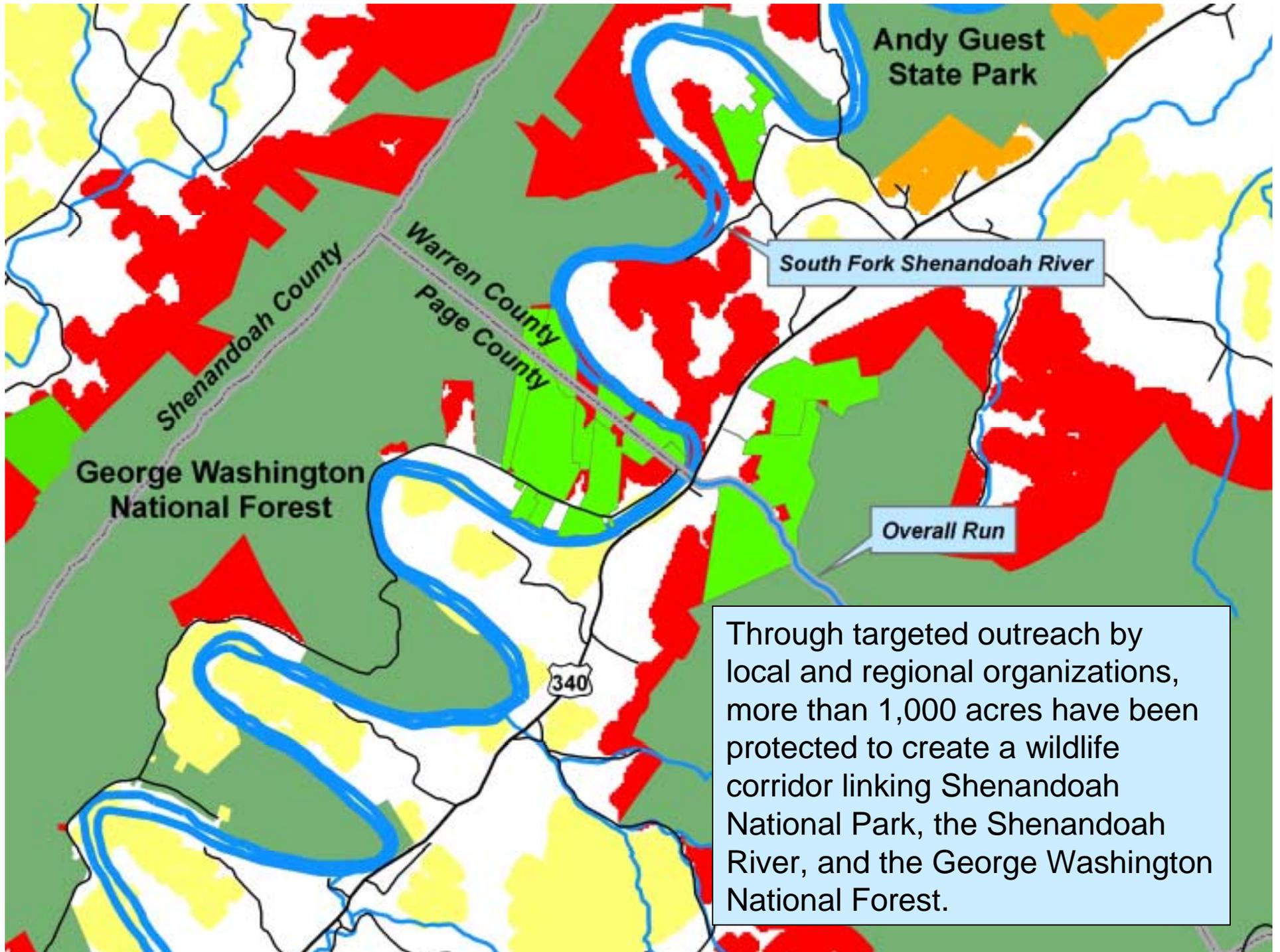


In the case of Overall, Virginia, on the border between Page and Warren Counties, local organizations and land owners have been successful in protecting an important link between two large protected areas – the George Washington National Forest and Shenandoah National Park - along the South Fork of the Shenandoah River.



Fortunately, much of this land is already protected through state and federal ownership, although key linkages between these lands were missing.





Protecting Water Quality and Supply



Thousands of residents and businesses in eastern Loudoun County and the City of Fairfax rely on the Goose Creek watershed to provide a safe and adequate supply of public drinking water

Goose Creek Watershed

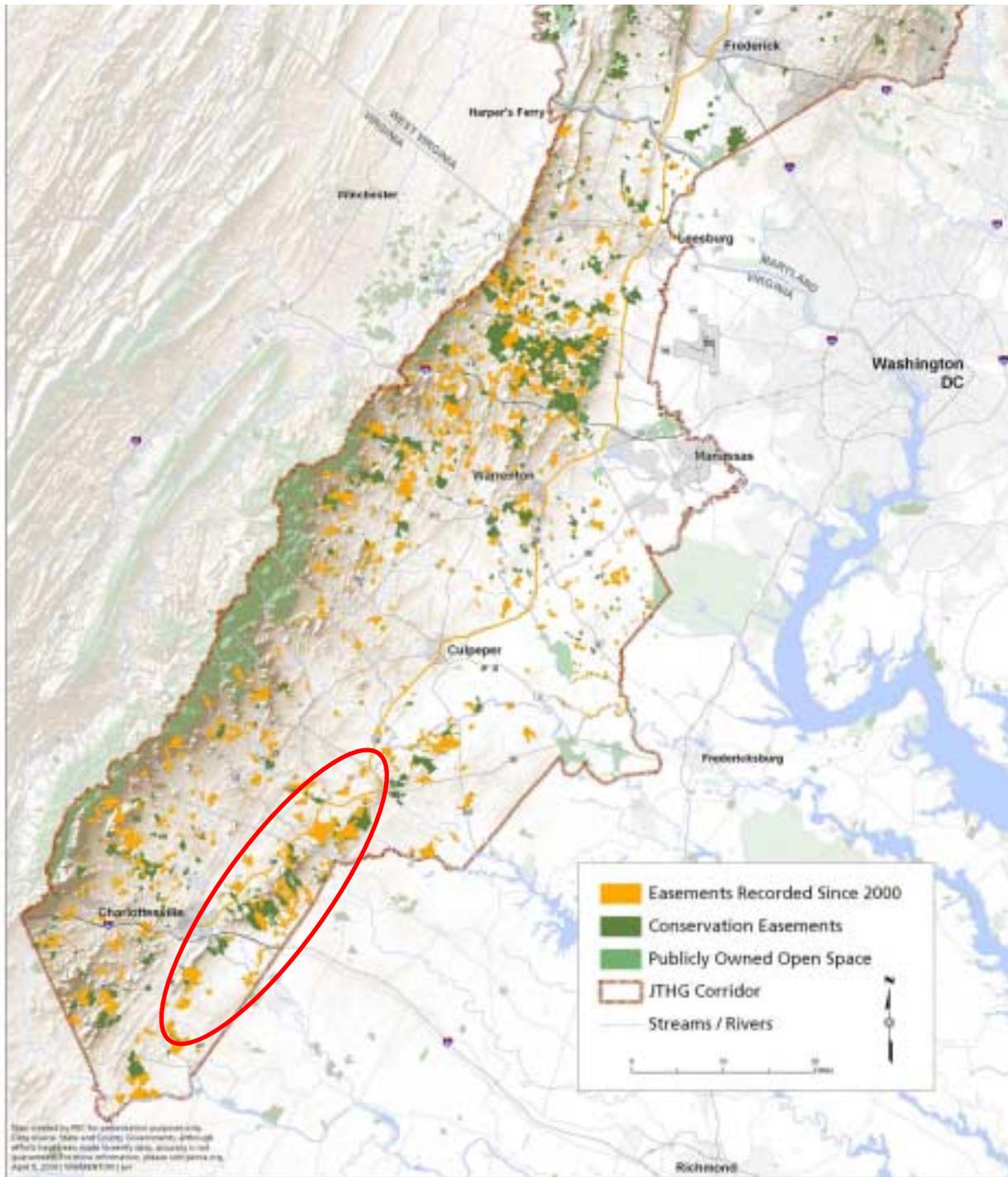
See and Experience Our History

Tourism is one of VA's most important industries, with domestic tourists spending over \$16 BILLION annually.



In Virginia, tourism annually accounts for nearly \$700 MILLION in state tax receipts and provides \$435 MILLION in revenue to localities

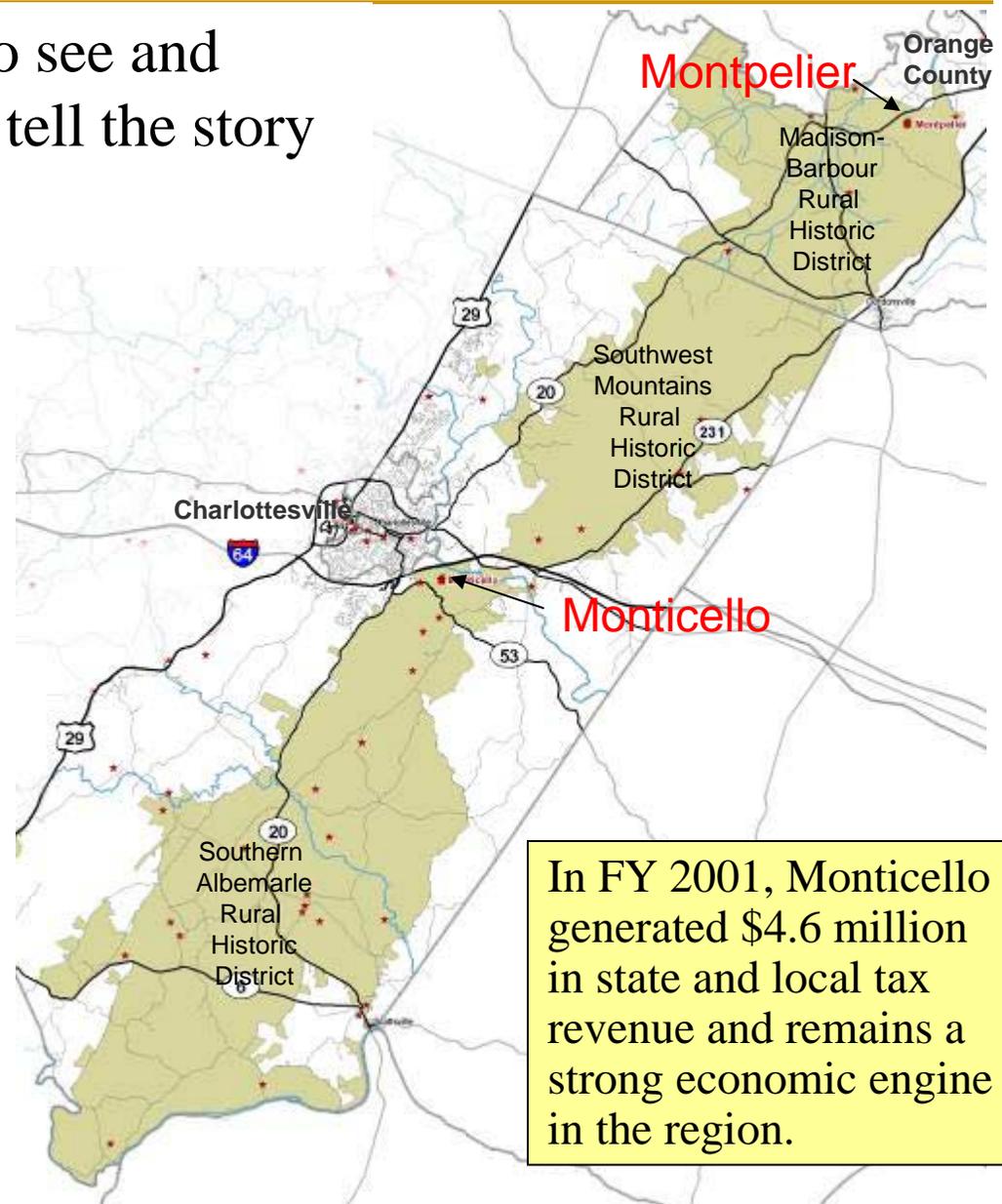
The connection to land conservation is.....



The Journey Through Hallowed Ground is the newest National Heritage Area in Virginia, and one of only a handful of recognized heritage areas nationwide.

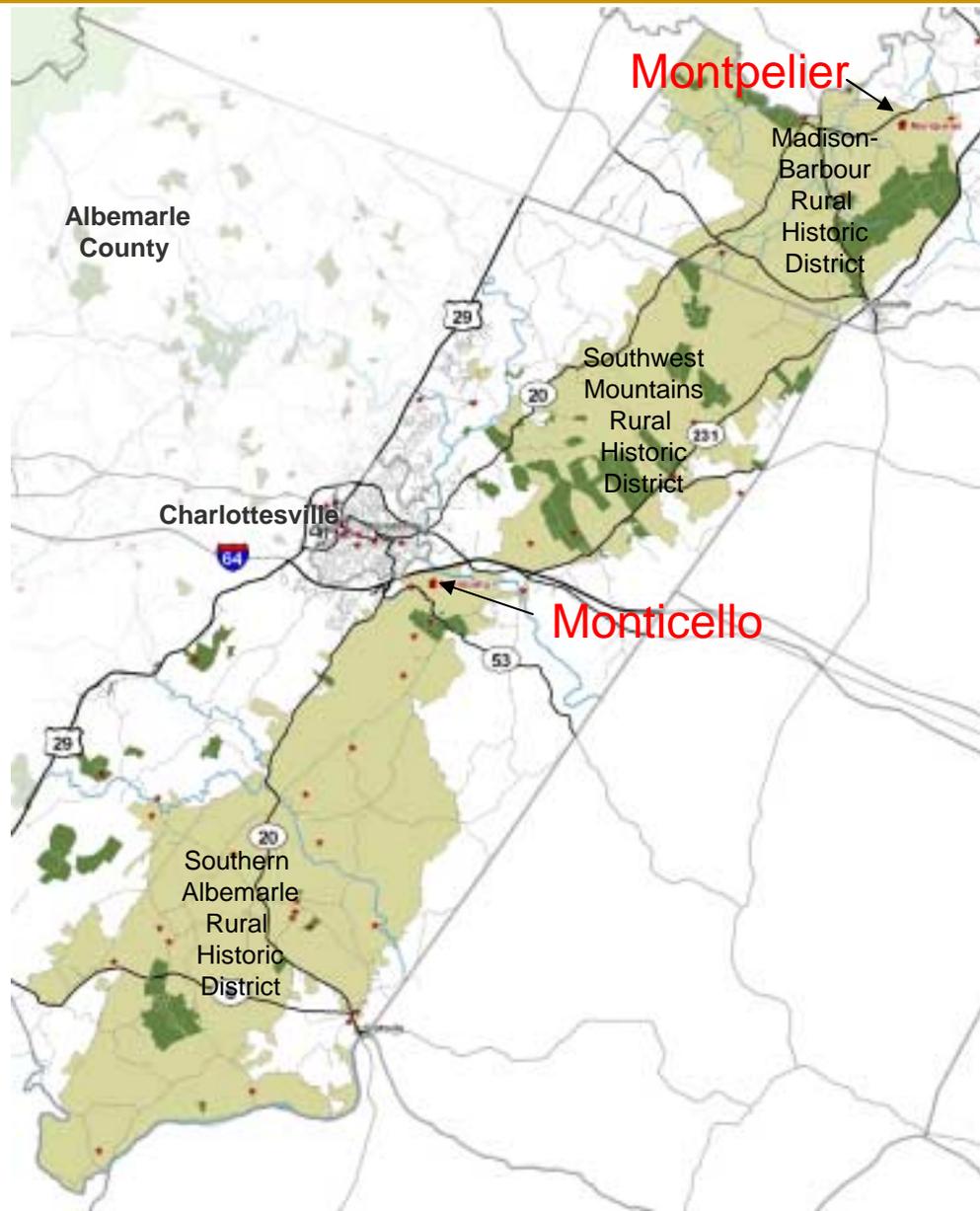
People come to Virginia to see and experience the places that tell the story of our nation's history.

- **84%** of people who plan to visit the eastern US want to visit our **quaint towns, historic villages, and scenic byways***
- **More than 500,000 people annually visit Monticello, Montpelier and the surrounding area.**

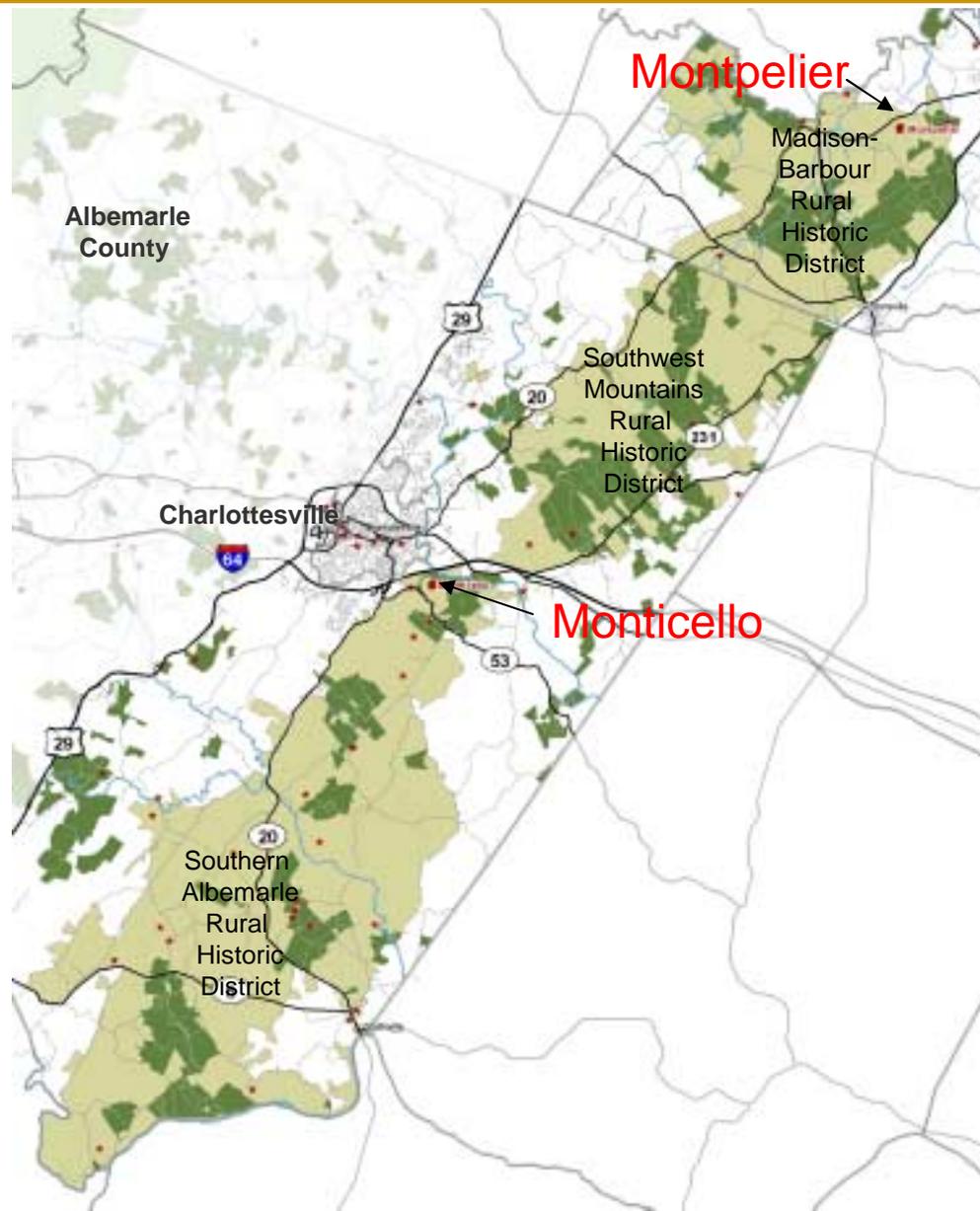


*Journey Through Hallowed Ground, Visitor Market Research, 2008

Prior to the LPTC Program in 2000, there were 16,000 acres of land protected within these three rural historic districts.



Since implementation of the LPTC, an additional 25,600 acres have been conserved and now a total of 41,600 acres (26% of total acreage) within one of the nation's most historic landscapes are preserved forever.



Enhancing Recreational Opportunities

Support for land conservation ensures that Virginia's residents and visitors—now and in the future—are able to experience the Commonwealth's uncommon natural beauty.



48% of visitors to Virginia came to enjoy nature and the outdoors*

*Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation Tourism Research, 2006

Enhancing Recreational Opportunities

- Devil's Backbone State Forest
 - Shenandoah County
 - Donation completed in 2006
 - When opened to the public, the property will provide passive recreational opportunities for hiking and wildlife watching



John Hoffman, landowner and donor of Devil's Backbone State Forest

Enhancing Recreational Opportunities

VLCF is bringing state, Federal, and non-profit partners together...



Merrimac Farm protects 300 acres along Cedar Run in Prince William. Conservation supports water quality protection, habitat conservation, and will provide for public access

Merrimac Farm

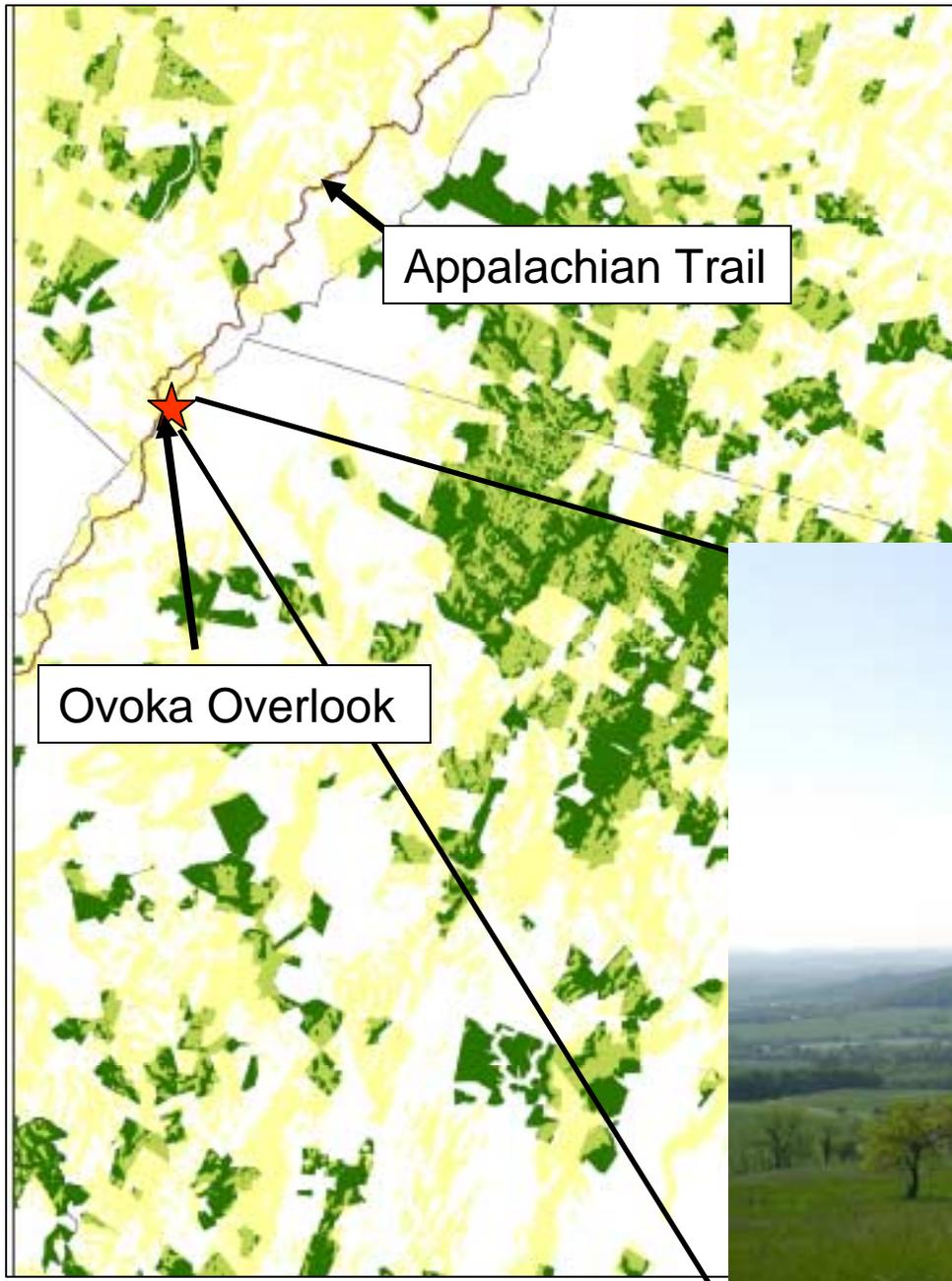
- ❑ Conservation effort led by the PW Conservation Alliance
- ❑ VLCF grant awarded funding in 2007
- ❑ Matching funds provided by U.S. Marine Corps under the Defense Encroachment Partnering program
- ❑ Project selected as a regional conservation priority by the Washington Smart Growth Alliance

Enhancing Recreational Opportunities

- Appalachian Trail Viewshed
 - Thousands of people hike the Appalachian Trail each year to enjoy the views
 - Donated scenic easements are protecting thousands of acres statewide



Photo courtesy of Benjamin Swain



Appalachian Trail

Ovoka Overlook

In the northern Virginia Piedmont, more than 130,000 acres of easements protect land visible from the Appalachian Trail, enhancing the natural experience for hikers.



Appalachian Trail's Ovoka Overlook

Conserving Working Farms and Forests

Agriculture and forestry are Virginia's number one industry, annually contributing more than \$47 billion to the state and comprising more than 15% of total employment¹.....



..Yet...Virginia is losing the land that supports this industry. Nearly 68,000 acres of working farm and forest land was converted per year to developed uses between 1992 and 1997².

¹ <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/agfacts/index.shtml>; ² National Resources Inventory, USDA/NRCS;

Conserving Working Farms and Forests

Support for land conservation ensures that the basic inputs for farming and forestry—an adequate supply of land and water—will be available in the future.

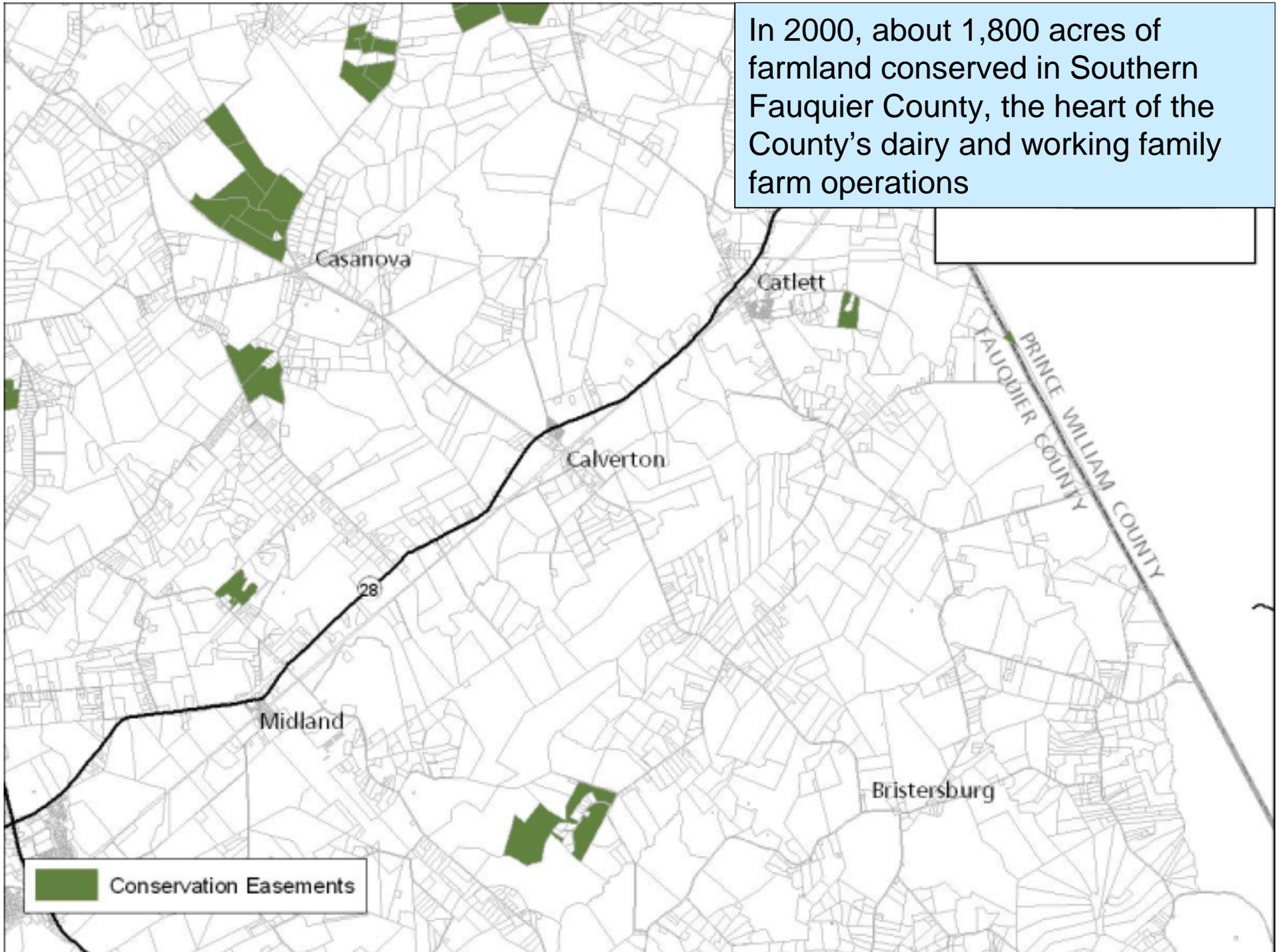


Statewide, VOF easements have conserved 160,432 acres of land containing prime agricultural soils*....

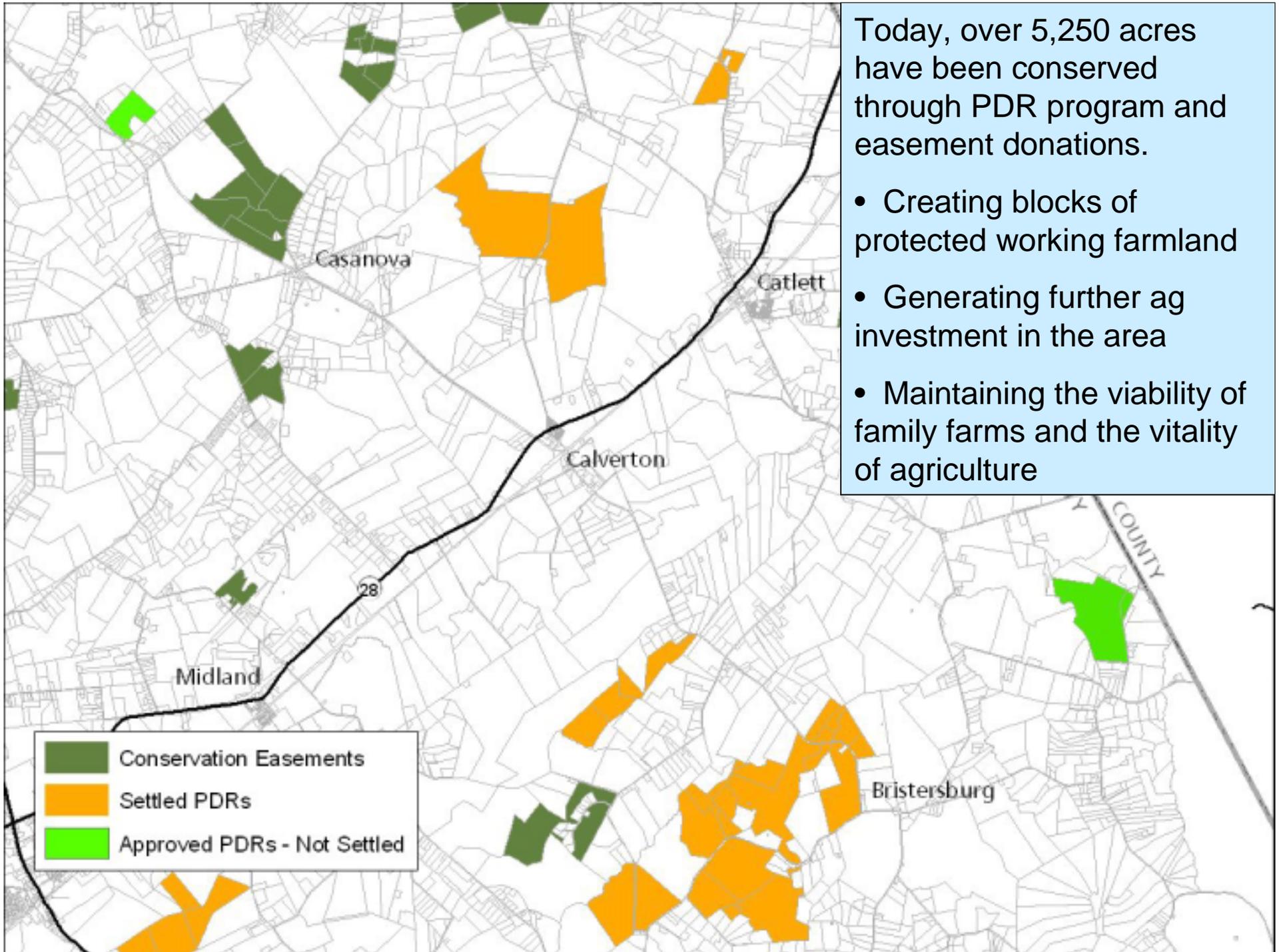
..and support for PDR programs give localities the ability to target working farms and—in conjunction with donated easements—conserve large blocks of productive farm and forest land.

1 <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/agfacts/index.shtml>; 2 National Resources Inventory, USDA/NRCS; 3 American Farmland Trust

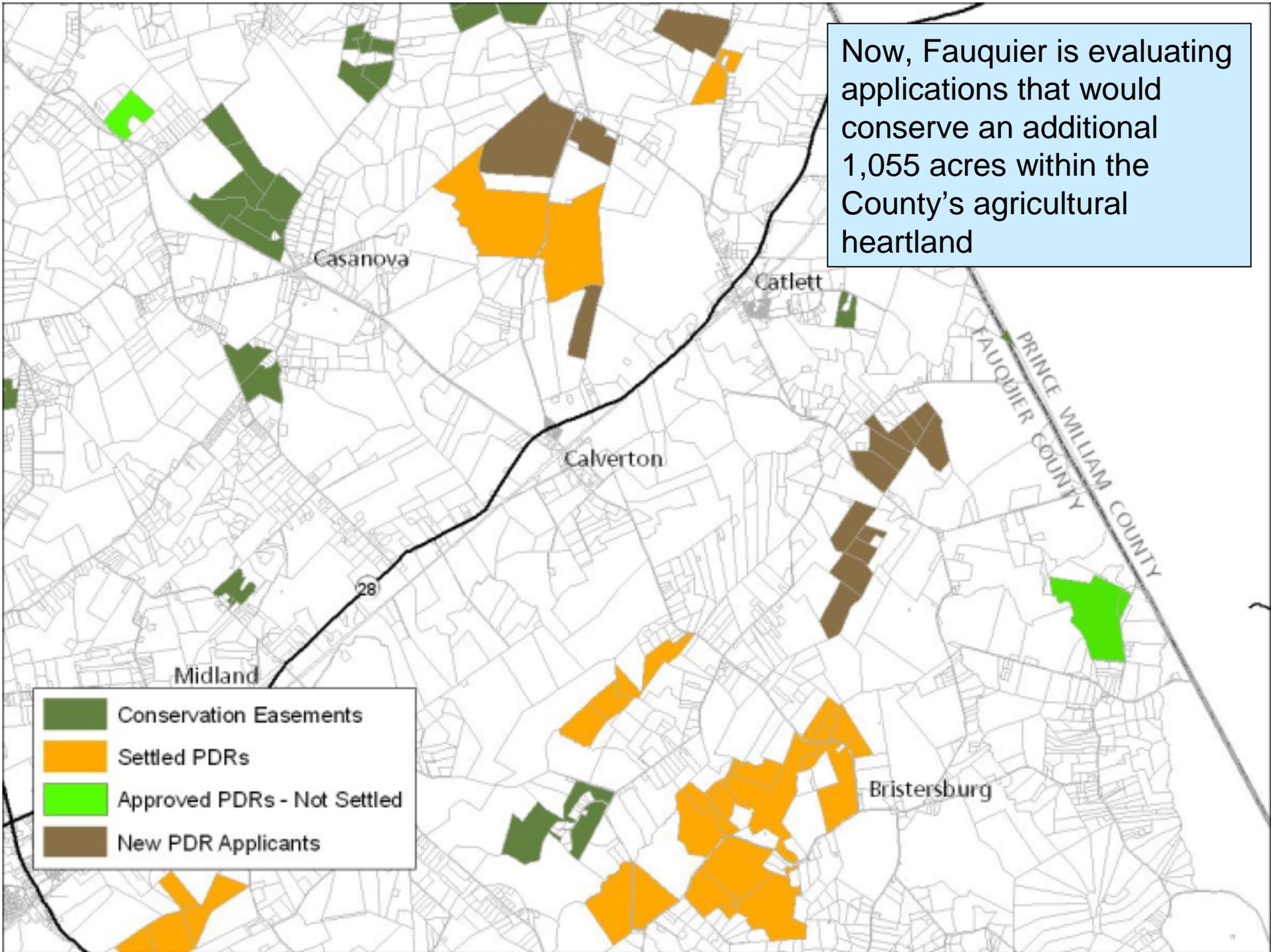
In 2000, about 1,800 acres of farmland conserved in Southern Fauquier County, the heart of the County's dairy and working family farm operations



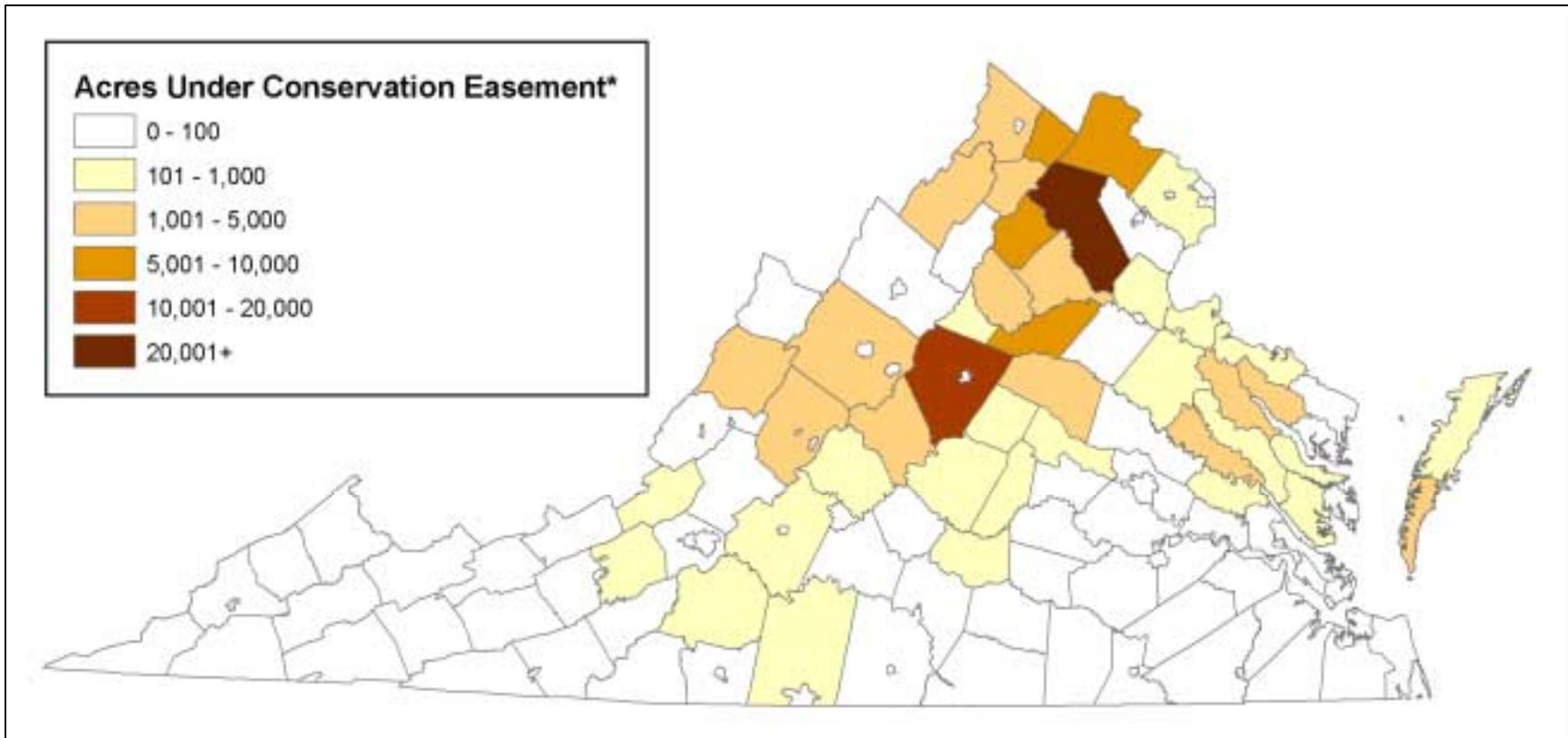
Conservation Easements



Now, Fauquier is evaluating applications that would conserve an additional 1,055 acres within the County's agricultural heartland

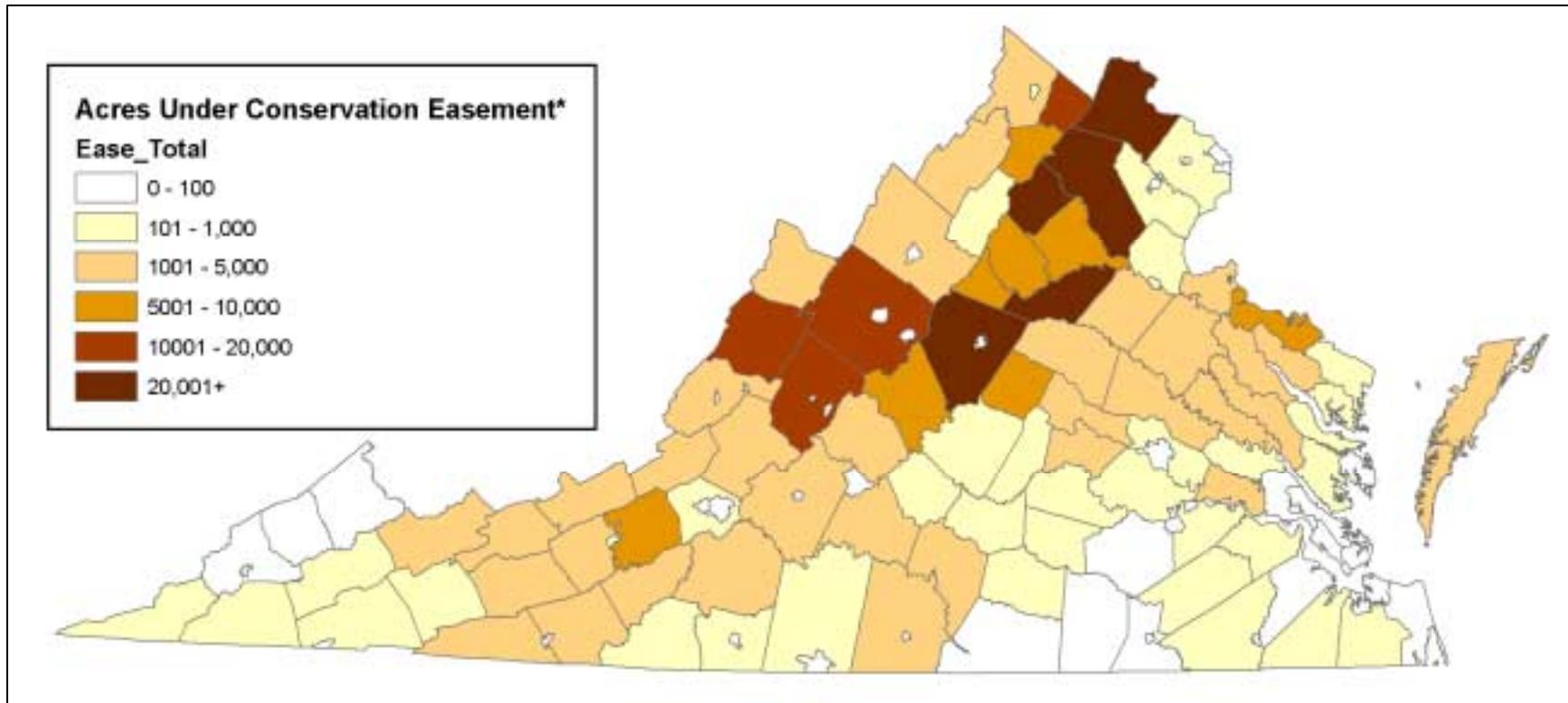


a *truly* statewide land conservation initiative



Prior to the LPTC, conservation easements protected more than 1,000 acres in just 19 localities across Virginia...

a *truly* statewide land conservation initiative



Over the past six years, the number of localities where conservation easements protect at least 1,000 acres has increased to 52 localities, more than 2.5 times the total number of such localities produced in the previous 30 years.

Signs of Success....



- Land conservation is providing a broad range of public benefits to the Commonwealth and its residents
- Strategically conserving land & resources (it's more than just acres)
- LPTC, PDR programs, and VLCF has created a statewide conservation initiative

Moving to Maturity...

Maximize the power of Virginia's existing "three-legged" land conservation strategy.....

- **LPTC**—Retain the LPTC as currently enacted and review the reported barriers to entry in the tax credit criteria.
 - **Local PDR Programs**—Strengthen the partnership with local governments on PDR programs by providing \$30 million per year for the next ten years.
 - **VLCF**—Match the commitment to local PDR programs with similar funding, providing \$30 million per year for the next ten years.
-

Land Preservation Tax Credit

Why retain the LPTC?

- LPTC is the most dynamic, cost-effective, and efficient conservation program in Virginia.
 - *Over 260,000 conserved since 2000*
 - *Conservation costs only a fraction of the true cost of land*
 - *Analysis shows achieving strategic conservation objectives*
- 2006 LPTC reforms improve accountability and budget stability.
 - *Annual Cap on LPTC creates stability and increased scrutiny of appraisals creates accountability, but...*
 - *Increased review of easement terms by DCR may be hampering efforts to reach the land conservation goals set by Gov. Kaine and the Ches Bay 2000 Agreement*

Office of Farmland Preservation

Why strengthen the partnership with localities on PDR programs?

- Opportunity to double (or more) Virginia's conservation funding.
 - *Localities ready to commit \$45 M based on \$4.25 VA commitment in 2007*
 - *Secure greater Fed Farm and Ranch Protection Program funds*
 - Localities provide “boots on the ground” for conservation.
 - Fosters coordination of complementary tools that support working farms and forest.
 - *Local agricultural development offices*
 - *Local land use policies and practices*
 - Provide critical alternative to conservation easement donation
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Virginia Land Conservation Foundation

Why bolster funding for VLCHF?

VLCHF has successfully leveraged other funding sources.....

VLCHF has awarded \$18 million in grants since 2005, spurring \$44 million in non-state funding to complete 29 projects valued at over \$63 million

Virginia Land Conservation Foundation

...but VLCHF has not been consistently or adequately funded.

Year	Grant Requests*	Grants Awarded*
1999	\$5.8	\$1.7
2000**	\$3.4	\$3.4
2001	\$11.2	\$3.9
2002	\$0.0	\$0.0
2003	\$0.0	\$0.0
2004	\$0.0	\$0.0
2005	\$37.1	\$12.7
2006	\$0.0	\$0.0
2007	\$24.5	\$6.2
Total	\$82.0	\$27.9

No competitive VLCHF grants were awarded in 5 of VLCHF's 9 years of existence

Since 2000, VLCHF grant requests have exceeded awards by \$54 million

* Millions of dollars

** The Appropriations Act specified funding for 4 projects totaling \$3.4 million

There are Costs of Inaction!

A commitment to conserving important land and resources is not free. But the cost pales in comparison to...

- The cost of complying with possible EPA regulatory mandates related to the Chesapeake Bay Agreement
 - The cost of losing the basic inputs for Virginia's largest industries—agriculture and forestry
 - The cost of losing the scenic and historic landscapes that bring tourists (and their dollars) to Virginia
 - The cost of mitigating degraded watersheds, especially those that are critical to a safe and adequate supply of public drinking water
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Questions?

