



RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY
CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

12018 Lee Highway
P.O. Box 116
Sperryville, VA 22740
(540) 987-9118
rcca1@earthlink.net

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DESIGN & EDITING
Nighthawk Communications

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Rappahannock Views

The Story of Belle Ridge Farm

BY LARRY AND KATHY GROVE

When Larry Grove decided to retire from the Arlington Public Schools, he told his wife, Kathy, "I'd like to be a farmer. I'd like to raise cattle." Kathy said, "Great! Let's not move too quickly, though. Why don't you work with your uncle as an apprentice to be sure it's as much fun to ride a tractor when you're fifty-five as it was when you were ten!"

So, after receiving a cow from the students of Thomas Jefferson Middle School as a retirement gift, former principal Larry began commuting to the Grove family farm in Fauquier County. While Kathy served as Assistant Superintendent in the Arlington Public Schools, Larry worked at White Ridge Farm, learning from his uncle and cousins. On weekends, Larry and Kathy began looking for ten to twenty acres in the country.

Kathy knew the county she wanted to live in. Her mother's family had lived on Red Oak

Mountain for more than two hundred years. Kathy had visited her great-grandmother, uncle, and aunt regularly for Sunday dinners and two-week summer vacations. After years of family indoctrination, she knew there was no prettier place than Rappahannock County. They knew what they wanted: some open land for pastures, some forested land for hiking, a view of the mountains, some moving water. They met with real-estate

agents, watched the paper, and enjoyed their trips to Rappahannock County and their visits with Kathy's Uncle Raymond in Woodville.

In the fall of 2000, Larry and Kathy's eldest son completed his doctorate in cognitive science. To celebrate, the Groves took him to the Inn at Little Washington for dinner. The next morning they stopped in the town of Washington at Sunnyside Market. There a customer told them about a property that had just gone on the market, "on Route 522 this side of Scrabble."

After driving by the overgrown property, Larry insisted on doubling back to look, and then pulled up to a rusting gate. They walked up the barely discernible driveway to a dilapidated farmhouse at the top of the hill, surrounded by small trees and weeds. After they wandered around they said, "It's too much land; we could never afford it!" Nevertheless, Larry jotted down the real-estate agent's phone number, mumbling, "That name sounds familiar."

Back in Falls Church, Larry made the call. The property was more 160 acres, with a farmhouse that hadn't been occupied for fifty years. And, yes, the name was familiar: the real-estate agent knew Larry when the latter coached football "Okay if I call you 'coach'?" the real-estate agent asked.

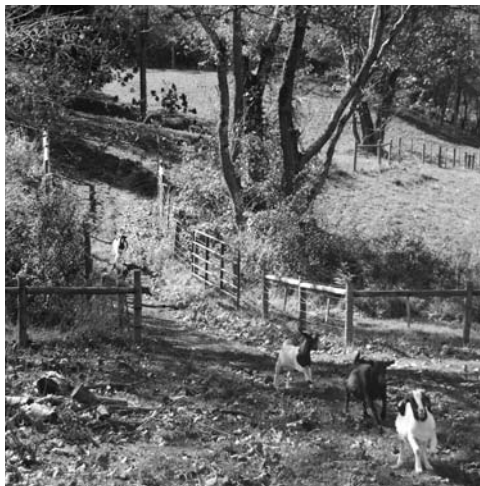
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Kathy and Larry Grove at Belle Ridge Farm, their property on Bessie Belle Mountain

PHOTOS BY LARRY GROVE

➤➤➤ *Belle Ridge Farm*, from previous page



The Groves' goats make their way down a path at Belle Ridge Farm.

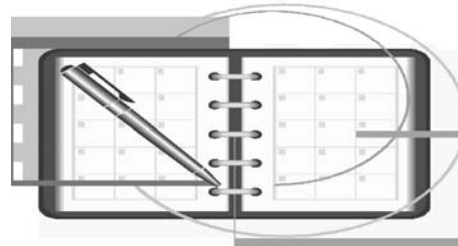
Within a month, the Groves owned the property, and Larry began clearing pastures, putting up fencing, and building a barn. They debated what to do with the old house—no running water and a rotten floor in one room. Then they discovered the

original log cabin under the plaster of that front room, and they knew they would have to bring it back to life.

They named the property Belle Ridge Farm, after Bessie Bell Mountain, on which it sits. Four years later, Larry had a goat farm and Kathy was headmistress at Wakefield Country Day School. The Groves had learned about conservation easements after participating in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and decided to protect the property from development. They thought about their five children and how to ensure that those who wanted to live in Rappahannock County could have that opportunity. So they separated the four acres for which they had a separate deed and stipulated that the remaining 160 acres could be divided only once. This way, one or two children could buy out the others and hold onto a piece of the property.

Their eldest son summed up the attitude of the rest: "You should

absolutely do this. I'd happily promise to give my inheritance to my brothers if that would help." So, supported by their family, the Groves put Belle Ridge Farm in conservation easement, so that its beauty and untouched woodlands will offer pleasure to others in perpetuity.



CALENDAR

July 15	Board Meeting
Aug 19	Board Meeting
Sept 16	Board Meeting
Sept 28	Considering an Easement? An Informational Gathering for Prospective Easement Donors
Oct 21	Board Meeting
Oct 26	State Tax Credit Seminar
Nov 9	Annual Meeting
Nov 18	Board Meeting
Dec 16	Board Meeting

The public is welcome at all RCCA board meetings.

*For more information on any of these events,
call the RCCA office at (540) 987-9118.*

From the President...

I am constantly amazed at the generosity and perseverance of those who call Rappahannock County home.

Last month, well over 200 people were not deterred by a cold, damp evening nor gale force winds from supporting land preservation in our county. Those folks braved the elements, came to the RCCA-sponsored Rappahannock Evening View at Phil Irwin's Caledonia Farm—1812, and celebrated the 2007 Rappahannock easement donors.

RCCA also raised significant funds for the county's Farmland Preservation Program—which, unlike neighboring counties, does not rely on annual tax revenue for funding. Rather, the program is funded by "roll-back" taxes (the penalty for opting out of land-use taxation) and private donations.

But more importantly, we demonstrated a commitment to preserving the rural way of life that we enjoy in Rappahannock County—to ensuring that the Rappahannock of tomorrow will still be recognizable as the county we cherish today.

Our stunning vistas, picturesque hollows, and rural character are worth protecting. And scenic easements, the purchasing of development rights, and other conservation programs are the best available tools to protect our gem of a county.

Susan Strittmatter

Susan Strittmatter
RCCA President

DOF Programs Offer Other Conservation Options

BY MIKE SANTUCCI

DOF FOREST CONSERVATION SPECIALIST

Forests are woven into the very identity of Rappahannock County. More than 136,000 acres of forestland cover approximately 70 percent of the county. This figure has remained relatively stable, even increased slightly, over the past two decades. Despite the increase in forested area in the county, however, Rappahannock's working farms and forests are threatened by fragmentation and conversion. The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) supports land conservation with three tools: State Forests, the Forest Legacy Program, and Conservation Easements. Of these, the option to donate a conservation easement to DOF may be the most accessible to Rappahannock landowners.

STATE FORESTS

The DOF can acquire forestlands for scientific, recreational, and educational purposes through purchase, gift, or lease. To qualify for acquisition, continuous active forestry must be allowed on the land, without restrictions. The property should also be accessible and preferably free of rights of ways. While there are no acreage limitations, the property should be of sufficient size, location, and species composition to allow for sustainable and economically viable forest management.

The DOF manages 19 state forests and other state lands totaling more than 55,000 acres, none in Rappahannock County. State forests are self-supporting from the sale of forest products, with 25 percent of the revenue returned to the counties in which the forest is located.

FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is a U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service program administered by the State Forester. FLP identifies and protects economically and environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by conversion to nonforest uses. Protection is achieved through purchasing the land or purchasing development rights. The program is guided by an "Assessment of Need" that describes the state's forest conservation areas in which FLP funding will be applied. Most of Rappahannock County falls within Virginia's Assessment of Need.

Competition for legacy funds is intense at both the state and national level, and the complicated application process can take up to two years.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

DOF can accept donated conservation easements under the 1966 Open Space Conservation Act. The DOF program focuses on preserving working forestland.

All properties are evaluated on individual merits and circumstances. While there are no strict guidelines for a conservation easement, DOF prefers that the property be at least 50 contiguous acres and at least 75 percent forested. All properties should be under a forest-management stewardship plan or equivalent, and managed for multiple uses. DOF easements contain restrictions similar to other easements, such as limits on subdivision, signage, number and size of structures, and land-disturbing activities. Some allowances may be tailored to individual landowner needs, provided the purpose of the conservation easement is not compromised.

DOF easements are perpetual, enforced as other easements are enforced, and are fully protected by Virginia's Attorney General. In addition, landowners are eligible to receive all of the state and federal income-tax and estate-tax benefits afforded easement donations. The conservation-easement process is completely voluntary, and a landowner is under no obligation to grant the easement until the completed agreement is signed. The application process is open year-round and fairly straightforward but does take some time to complete.

For further information about DOF conservation programs, contact Mike Santucci at Mike.Santucci@dof.virginia.gov, or by telephone at (434) 977-5193.



Virginia Department of Forestry Forest Conservation Specialist Mike Santucci (at right) teaches members of the Old Rag Master Naturalist chapter about forests on a training field trip.



Across the Fence: NEWS FROM BEYOND THE RAPPAHANNOCK BORDER

FEDERAL INCENTIVES APPROVED IN THE FARM BILL

The approval of the Farm Bill brought good news for easement incentives by providing a two-year extension of the increased

federal tax incentives. For easements donated in 2008 and 2009, a conservation easement that meets federal tax code requirements qualifies as a charitable deduction of up to 50 percent of the adjusted gross income (AGI). Any remaining deduction can be spread over fifteen more years. Qualified farmers however are able to deduct 100 percent of their AGI.

EASING THE STRESS OF LAND CONSERVATION


Conservation Partners, LLC, a full-service conservation easement consulting firm in Lexington, Virginia, is trying to ease the financial stress during the process of putting land into a conservation easement. They will be accepting applications through September from landowners throughout Virginia to advance all costs associated with putting land into conservation easement. The landowner then pays all the costs later once the landowners sells the tax credits they earned for donating the easement. For more information, contact Conservation Partners at (540) 464-1899 or by e-mail at wfunk@conservationpartnersllc.com. (*The Winchester Star*, May 15, 2008)

FAUQUIER COUNTY

Virginia Beach currently has protected more acres through its purchase of development rights (PDR) program than any other local government in Virginia. But that may change soon. While Virginia Beach has 7,000 acres protected by their PDR program, Fauquier's 6,170 acres is expected to steadily increase over the next year or two. Since the program's inception in 2002, Fauquier has bought 336 development rights at a total cost of \$8.6 million. Each home site generates \$30,000 for the selected landowners who also agree to put easements on their property. (*Fauquier Times-Democrat*, May 28, 2008)

In Memorium

RCCA and Rappahannock County lost a friend and long-standing advocate for land conservation when Bill Dobrovir passed away on May 23, 2008. As a RCCA board member for more than five years, Bill was instrumental in helping and guiding the organization during its formative years. Always quick to help, he was active on many RCCA projects over the years that have helped to keep this county beautiful and scenic. We will miss his witty remarks, critical thinking, legal guidance, and kind spirit.



May 5—The Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors approved the \$200,000 purchase of four development rights from Manfred Call. This purchase, funded by the county's Farmland Preservation Program, will merge three parcels totaling 103 acres on Muskrat Haven farm. The resulting easement prohibits any future property divisions or buildings.



Easement Update



Rappahannock County
Conservation Alliance

P.O. Box 116
Sperryville, VA 22740