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Two Shenandoah Waterways Designated ‘Special Project Areas’

Cedar & Passage Creek Landowners Will Benefit from Additional Land Protection Resources

Winchester (VA) -- Cedar Creek and Passage Creek were recently accepted by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) as a Special Project Area. Nominated by Potomac Conservancy, designation of this area will enhance the Conservancy’s land protection efforts in the Shenandoah Valley region, specifically in the headwaters of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River.

Enhanced and continued protection of Cedar and Passage Creeks ensures the preservation of local drinking water supplies as well as historic and recreational resources. The area contains fragile ecosystems, rare species, and incredible scenic beauty that should be preserved for enjoyment by generations of Virginians.

Special Project Areas are particular geographic regions in Virginia where the VOF board of trustees determines land protection through easements is especially warranted. Nominated areas are judged using an array of criteria including conservation value and public benefit. Community support is integral to the nomination process, which requires letters of support from community members and organizations, expressing their readiness to proceed.

| <i>Highlights of the new Special Project Area</i> | |
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| Private land protected by conservation easements | 2,289 acres |
| Land in designated Agricultural and Forestal Districts | 6,300 acres |
| Land in Virginia State Forests | 558 acres |
| Land in National Forests | 42,000 |

“Over the past year, I reached out to the local communities to both gauge and garner support for this designation,” said Potomac Conservancy Director of Land Protection Kelly Watkinson, who oversaw the nomination process. “I was very encouraged by the enthusiasm and support from local officials, landowners, and community organizations, such as the Fort Valley Ruritans.”

For landowners in Cedar or Passage Creek communities interested in protecting their properties with a conservation easement, Special Project Area designation will improve their ranking with VOF, making it more likely for their easement to be accepted.

Considered among the cleanest and least disturbed streams in the Shenandoah Valley, Cedar and Passage Creeks have long been a priority for Potomac Conservancy. The Conservancy currently co-holds an easement with VOF at historic Mount Pleasant Farm, a 106-acre property along Cedar Creek. Concerned about the rapid development around her farm, owner Mrs. Caroline Stalnaker chose to permanently protect her land in 2006 to ensure it remains available for agriculture for future generations. “It’s rather an Island, in a sense, because the land is the only property south of Route 81 that hasn’t been annexed or developed,” she commented. Mrs. Stalnaker continues to live and raise sheep on her farm. She is hoping to have her bed and breakfast operation, *Mount Pleasant 1812*, up and running by April of this year.

“The designation of this Special Project Area will enable VOF to more effectively build upon the 1,600 acres that we currently protect in these two watersheds,” remarked VOF easement manager Laura Thurman, who works with landowners throughout the Shenandoah Valley to protect their land.

For more information about Special Project Area designation, please contact Emily Warner at 540-667-3606. To learn more about Cedar Creek and Passage Creek, please contact Emily or visit www.potomac.org/site/priorities/#shenandoah.

About Potomac Conservancy

Since 1993, the Potomac Conservancy (a nationally accredited land trust) has protected the health, beauty, and enjoyment of the Potomac River and its tributaries. Its conservation programs address the goals of improving water quality, protecting rivers' scenic integrity, enhancing recreational resources, and building an informed and engaged constituency, using a range of tools, including restoration, permanent land protection, advocacy, and citizen education and engagement. Visit www.potomac.org for more information.

About Virginia Outdoors Foundation

Established in 1966, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation is Virginia's largest land trust, preserving more than 600,000 acres of natural, scenic, historic, recreational, and open-space lands for future generations. Visit www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org to learn more.

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