

The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

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Landowners address VOF about easements

Editor's note: The following letter was sent to Brett Glymph, executive director of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, on June 13, and shared with The Recorder. Dear Ms. Glymph,

When we found our farm in 1971, there were no internal fences, the line fences were “brush and bluff,” most of the outbuildings were collapsing, there wasn't water in the house which hadn't been lived in in five years, and a couple very nice horses sought shade on the front porch.

But it was beautiful, the river was clean and clear, and we were young and had hopes. We thought we could grow our own food, cut our own fuel and for cash, I'd write paperback thrillers. Hadn't I sold an article to The Whole Earth Catalog? We had a Xerox of the \$10 check. Anne and I worked right here. We didn't take vacations and when one was off the farm the other stayed home to look after our milk cow, sheep and sheepdogs. It's been a good ride but we're coming to the end. What to do with this special place that shaped us as we shaped it? What could we do for the farm that'll be here long after we're buried on the hill? Your people were knowledgeable and sympathetic, so we deeded a conservation easement to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. We didn't want to dictate what future owners do, but the farm can't be sold off in pieces and restrictions favor farming it. The considerable drop in market value the easement created wouldn't be all bad: maybe some young people could buy this farm and work it and cherish it as we do. Our intent, like yours, was the preservation of a unique place on earth. Like us, other owners in Bath and Highland have protected their unique places with a conservation easement. Motives differ: perhaps the family had lived and worked the unique place for generations, perhaps it was unique because of a cave or a stretch of river or was the very spot where an ordinary human was one day touched by God. What we property owners had in common was a desire to protect our land. If we'd believed rights the VOF holds are a pool of conservation rights and could be traded up for prettier or pricier properties, we wouldn't have assigned our rights to VOF. Dominion Resources has suggested they buy Hayfields Farm and swap its conservation easement for easements VOF presently holds along Dominion's proposed pipeline route. Then presumably, they'd sell Hayfields or perhaps use it as an executive retreat for their multi-million dollar executives. It's a pretty place and upstream from the destruction their pipeline will wreak.

Donald McCaig,
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