



Protected Landscapes: Art meets conservation

Protected Landscapes is an art exhibit designed to bring conservation to the public through visual art. The exhibit will feature local artists and Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust (VES Land Trust) permanently preserved land. "We are really excited about this exhibit and to share our conservation work in a new way," said Peter Henderson, Executive Director. This event both opens land for artists to work on and presents protected spaces to a larger audience. "We had an overwhelmingly positive response from the landowners, more than a third were interested in inviting artists to work on their land over the next few months," said Hali Plourde-Rogers, Stewardship Manager.

The exhibit will provide viewers with an intimate experience of VES Land Trust protected lands through the eyes of local artists, Carole Boggemann Peirson, Cameron McIntyre, Jack Richardson, Nancy West, Thelma J.

Peterson, Marty Burgess, and Willie Crockett. "We are extraordinarily fortunate to have such a wealth of artistic talent on the Eastern Shore," said Henderson. At the opening night exhibit, viewers will have the chance to mingle with the artists and easement donors, discussing the art and the creative process as well as the land and protecting it.

The exhibit opens to the public **Saturday, October 24, 2015 at 6 p.m.** at the Barrier Islands Center. \$10 at the door covers wine, beer, and light snacks. All artwork will be available for sale. A portion of the proceeds will benefit the VES Land Trust and its mission. The exhibit will remain open October 24-30, 2015.

Conserving place, preserving traditional economic engines

A group of fifteen, including partners and a few new faces, joined VES Land Trust at Chatham Vineyards for a 4-mile hike across Chatham Farm, Edgewood Farm, and Green Valley Farm,



encompassing 488 permanently protected acres that highlight major economic engines for the Eastern Shore: viniculture, agriculture, and aquaculture. Chatham Vineyards, family owned and operated by the Wehners, is located on Church Neck near Machipongo, Virginia and is protected by the Virginia

Outdoors Foundation (VOF). More than 1600 acres on Church Neck are permanently preserved. VES Land Trust holds conservation easements on more than 1300 of those acres, including Green Valley and Edgewood Farms.

The hikers met VES Land Trust staff and Mrs. Wehner at the Chatham Vineyards tasting room. The group traversed farm fields and woods and passed along waterfront buffers, streams, and

Church Creek. Along the way, Mrs. Wehner, a petite woman in a beige wide brimmed hat and denim, provided historic insight. Now farm fields and homes, the surrounding area used to be bustling Bridgetown. The tour also wound past historic Hungars Church (1851) and Chatham's Federal-period brick house built in 1818.

All three farms demonstrate how permanent conservation and economic development can support one another. On these three easements, hikers saw working farms, a successful winery, oyster and clam beds, and a bed and breakfast. Each of these farms leases land to farmers for crops such as potatoes, wheat, corn, and soybeans. In addition, easements encourage implementation of farming best management practices, which promote water quality by reducing runoff. VES Land Trust easements require a 100-foot vegetated buffer along perennial streams and creeks. In this way, easements foster clean water for aquaculture.

The hike concluded back at Chatham Farm where the group met Jon Wehner. Jon is easy-going, friendly, and passionate about his work. He owns and operates the vineyard and winery with his



wife, Mills. As he led the hikers past the vineyard to the tasting room, he showed them the pruned vines, which had just begun to bud.

Jon's conservation easement with VOF allows him to operate his successful vineyard, winery, tasting room, and small retail shop. In addition, during the summer they host a summer concert series. As he

wrapped up the hike with a complimentary wine tasting Jon said, "My favorite wines are those that taste like place." Conservation preserves that sense of place at Chatham and Jon's wines allow guests to taste it.

Small farm tour: Shine and Rise

Normally dressed in more farm and dirt friendly attire, Jay Ford greeted the 40 tour participants in shorts and a light blue button up at the forest edge near the front of the farm. It was a warm, mid-May afternoon and the shade provided welcome relief. Shine and Rise Farm, a 40-acre permaculture farm, is located in Painter, Virginia. Jay, his wife, Tatum, own and operate the farm while working full-time jobs and raising their 18-month-old daughter. Their farm hosts Nubian goats, geese, laying hens, a miniature horse, an aboveground and a belowground greenhouse, a vegetable garden, fruit trees, berry bushes, and much more.

Jay began the tour along the forest edge to demonstrate the ecosystem the Fords are mimicking. "The forest edge is an efficient closed-loop ecosystem," said Jay. A closed-loop ecosystem cycles nutrients instead of requiring constant inputs. The forest edge is layered, full of shade tolerant shrubs and small trees, and creates a natural barrier of brambles. Each layer (canopy, understory, vines, brambles, animals, and fungal) plays a crucial role in cycling nutrients and providing habitat and food. Jay helped the tour group identify edible plants that could be used to represent these layers, such as pecans or walnuts (canopy); wild apricot or mulberry trees (understory); grapes, kiwi, and passion fruit (vines); and native blackberries or *Rosa rugosa* (brambles).

From the forest edge, participants began the cross-farm trek to see how Jay has implemented these forest lessons in his cultivation techniques. He pointed out a bramble hedge of *Rosa rugosa*, which produces edible flowers and rose hips and acts as a barrier. Next to the hedge were several trees that provide fodder for the Nubian goats and nitrogen for the surrounding plants.

The tour continued past the fruit tree grove. The trees are interspersed so no variety is adjacent to itself. This spacing and the use of farm animals reduces the spread of disease. When leaves drop in the fall, one of the main ways disease spreads among trees, he sends his goats through the grove to eat the leaf litter. Jay has also noticed certain varieties that fare better on the Shore. "The fruit trees that are doing best are actually Thomas Jefferson's varieties of peaches (August Prince and Monticello) and apples (Albemarle Pippin and Gravenstine). Turns out, he knew what he was doing," joked Jay.



While the Fords plant many natives and choose them when possible, they are introducing some new flavors to the Shore. "A gooseberry is like a grape and a blueberry had a baby," explained Jay as the tour passed a group of bushes bearing light green unripe gooseberries. To market these unfamiliar tastes, they offer free samples at the Onancock Farmers' Market and suggest ways to prepare and eat them.

The tour ended at the underground greenhouse, tires packed with earth create a higher wall on one side and a slanted roof. The greenhouse is heated by solar gain, the stable temperature of the earth, and hot compost piles. Jay reported the average temperatures during the winter were 82 degrees during the day and 55 degrees at night, which allowed the Fords to keep growing in raised beds during the coldest months without using fossil fuels.

Each part of the farm is an example of how to experiment, have less impact on nature, and produce delicious and nutritious food. Participants took away ideas to apply to their own land even if they are hobby gardeners or were just looking for the right hedgerow. The Fords are experimenters looking to feed themselves and their community better. They work in concert with and learn from their surroundings.

13,786 acres protected

VES Land Trust recorded two new easements in June: Richardson Tract (133 acres) and Water View Farm (64 acres)! We now hold 70 conservation easements on 13,786 acres.

Easement donors Tim and Susie Brown said, "Not only is the Richardson Tract a tremendous complementary addition to Hills Farm, it is also an integral part of the 6,800 acre Chesapeake Island corridor of protected lands. The protected property is important for preserving water quality, providing habitat for migrating birds, and keeping the Bay marshes pristine forever."

Water View Farm is located on Holly Grove Cove directly across from a 240-acre conservation easement held by VES Land Trust and part of a 1,430-acre conservation corridor. Mostly mixed-growth forest, the property also has significant waterfront and marsh front buffers.

Upcoming Events

Keep your eyes peeled for events coming this fall:

- **Backyard Habitat Workshop**, mushrooms of the Eastern Shore presentation
- **Stream and Buffer Walk**, the importance of vegetated buffers to water quality
- **Inclusive Conservation**, engaging all demographics in the conservation dialogue

Save the date: 9th annual oyster roast

April 23, 2016, 4 p.m.

VES Land Trust Newsletter: Summer 2015

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To support our work, please send donations to VES Land Trust, P.O. Box 1114, Exmore, VA 23350, or online at www.veslt.org. Call us 757- 442-5885 for instructions on making gifts of stock.



VES Land Trust seeks to conserve rural lands, which will best preserve the farms, forests, wetlands, fisheries and heritage of Virginia's Eastern Shore for the benefit of future generations.

**VES Land Trust
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