

Protecting Property, Honoring Tradition on Rte. 15 Through Conservation Easement

Leesburg, VA – December 9, 2021 – As the debate about the potential expansion of James Monroe Highway (Rte. 15) north of Leesburg continues, New River Farm Trust has quietly conveyed perpetual conservation and open-space easement of more than 748 acres of property on both sides of Rte. 15 to Old Dominion Land Conservancy. The property sits in the Catocin Historic District along the Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Scenic Byway and includes approximately one mile of frontage on the west side and .7 miles of frontage on the east side of Rte. 15. It also is entirely within, and a contributing primary resource to, this National Heritage Area.

New River Trust conveyed the property under the Virginia Conservation Easement Act to prevent the destruction of the property, which includes 200-plus year-old trees, an original home from the late 1700s, a historic family graveyard behind that house and a large historic barn. All of these and more are threatened by the proposed widening of Rte. 15.

For example, the parcel also includes more than 600 acres of prime farmland and soils of statewide importance, both of which make it important land for the future production of food and fiber. It currently includes “Farmer John’s” stand, which has been preserved and expanded to continue to offer local farmers and others the opportunity to sell produce and other items to people traveling on the Scenic Byway. The property also includes more than 51 acres of working forest that provide habitat for a variety of wildlife and plant species, and maintaining this habitat will support the local ecosystem.

“It was very important to us to protect this property for so many reasons, including the fact that it is a part of the Catocin Rural Historic District, which has been a cohesive agricultural community for more than 300 years,” said Karen G. Schaufeld, New River Farm Trustee. “For many of us who live in and around Lucketts, the protection of scenic property here is vital to helping Loudoun County remain close to its agrarian roots and its position as Virginia’s number one agro-tourism destination.”

Old Dominion Land Conservancy, Inc., is based in Purcellville, and is a member of the Land Trust Alliance and VA United Land Trusts. The organization holds more than 100 easements, protecting more than 15,600 acres, in Virginia.

“Old Dominion is excited to continue our work with the Schaufelds and New River Trust to protect Virginia’s natural and historic landscapes,” said Henry Stribling, Executive Director of Old Dominion Land Conservancy. “Conserving lands along the Rte. 15 corridor is important to preserving the history of Virginia and the United States.”

The property that New River Farm Trust has conveyed is largely undeveloped and contains forests, cropland and pastures. It is adjacent to more than 900 acres that are currently in conservation easement, making a contiguous collection of approximately 1,694 acres of land under conservation in this historically significant area.

“Preservation of this area is vital to the quality of life in Loudoun County,” Schaufeld said. “New River Farm Trust and the Old Dominion Land Conservancy are very concerned that the proposed widening of Rte. 15 not only will destroy the historic nature of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground, but also will threaten more than \$710 million in annual tourism income that it brings to our area.

“The proposed widening plans will require the removal of thousands of trees, threaten or destroy several historic buildings and hurt stream quality, because it will cross many streams that feed into the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. The potential harm to water quality and ecosystems is far-reaching but preventable. Respecting this conservation easement will help prevent that damage.”

In addition to its work with New River Trust, Old Dominion is working with the Leggett Foundation, the County of Loudoun, and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to create Loudoun’s first state park. More information on ODLC can be found on their website at www.odlc.us