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Clarke County Easement News

SUMMER

2024

“It’s Like a Wheel ... An Unending Promise to Our Neighbors When We’re Gone” **Duck Pond Owners Expand Easement with Land Purchase**

When Marti Bryant first visited Clarke County with a fellow equestrian in 1982 – the two had seen a mention of the Blue Ridge Hunt in a magazine – little did she know the trip was the beginning of a life-changing adventure.

Today, Marti and her husband, David, own Duck Pond, the sweet homestead off Old Winchester Road in Boyce. The original portion of the house was built in 1870. Additions subsequently were made, including mirroring porches on each side of the house, with identical furnishings – complete with binoculars to birdwatch – and breathtaking views of rolling terrain, magnificent trees, visiting fauna.

After many treks to the area, one day when the time came to pack up and head back to Baton Rouge, where David had spent his entire life and Marti had lived for four decades, David recalls their moment of revelation: “We looked at each other and said, you know, we want to stay here.”



At Duck Pond, Marti and David Bryant enjoy the many trails with their trusty companions Millie and Hilde

easement,” explains Lorien Lemmon, the Easement Authority’s Conservation Planner. “It was a lot of collaboration between two neighbors who ultimately wanted to see their land protected.”

David was pleased with the outcome: “We wanted the same thing the Easement Authority wanted. I don’t think the easement would have happened if we didn’t. We were all very flexible.”

“Clarke County has been so careful about conservation,” David adds.

“Easement is good for the landowner and good for the county. How would you like to wake up and have a development next door? I didn’t do an easement to get a tax break. I did it because it’s good for the community.”

The sprawling landscape offers the Bryants many joys. For Marti, she frequently goes horseback riding through the fields on the carefully carved trails, often traversing from Duck Pond to the homes of friends who live on Pyletown Road. For David, he enjoys trail shaping with his tractor and keeping an eye on the abundant wildlife. During this summer’s drought, he even dug a small pooling area near the house, keeping it filled with water from the hose to make sure critters always found a place to drink.

On a recent weekday in August, David and Marti were planning a large family get-together for the upcoming weekend – with several of the six grandkids, ages 10 to 24, promising to bring motor bikes to ride the miles of trails.

“We’re having so much fun,” Marti smiles. “Every single day, we say we’re so glad we moved here.”

“It’s like a wheel,” David adds philosophically. “You think of all the tears, the joys, the laughter, the fears that happen on a property over the years. Through our easement, we’re making an unending promise to our neighbors that when we’re gone, this property will always remain very similar to the way it is today.”

Drought Emergency Highlights Benefit of Easements

This summer, Clarke County and the surrounding area experienced some of the harshest drought conditions in years. The U.S. Department of Agriculture declared the county in severe drought in July.

Lorien Lemmon, Clarke County’s Conservation Planner and liaison to the Easement Authority, presented information on the drought and how the county is collaborating with nearby counties in the Northern Shenandoah Valley, releasing information to residents to coordinate the response to the drought.

Several of the striking statistics about the drought in Clarke County, found at www.drought.gov in mid-August:

- 18th driest July on record, over the past 130 years.
- 42nd driest year to date over the past 130 years (January-July 2024)

So how do conservation easements play a role in lessening the impact of droughts?

“The majority of Clarke County depends on private well water,” explains Lemmon. “The Easement Authority helps (Over)

Quarterly newsletter published by the Clarke County Conservation Easement Authority dedicated to preserving properties with natural, cultural or scenic resources worthy of protection

extinguish dwelling unit rights, or DURs, and that in turn helps curtail how many new wells need to be drilled and takes the pressure off our groundwater.” Since its inception in 2002, the Clarke County Conservation Easement Authority has extinguished 311 DURs.

“In addition to preserving the quantity of groundwater, the Authority’s work establishing easements helps preserve the quality of the water,” Lemmon points out. “This happens through additional restrictions within the riparian buffer around wetlands, ponds, and streams on easement property.”

The drought-impeding practices supported by conservation easements may include restrictions on developing new buildings and roads, the prevention of tree removal in some cases – except invasives, of course – and the fencing out of livestock from bodies of water.

Fortunately, as of press time, the drought severity in Clarke County had lessened to “moderate,” although Lemmon still advises voluntarily conserving water.

Summer Interns Gain Skills, Learn About the Land *“Letting nature do its thing”*

“What’s so nice about Clarke County is everybody knows everybody,” Easement Authority summer intern Sara Murray says. “And it’s great to see people with large properties placing the land in easement and letting nature do its thing.” Sara and fellow intern Ellen Smith visited more than 120 easement properties and, using state-of-the-art Landscape software, recorded data about property changes. The county’s Conservation Planner, Lorien Lemmon, believes the internships benefit not only the Authority but also the students, teaching them about mapping and data-gathering, as well as the geography and history of the county.



The Easement Authority is always looking for summer interns. If you know of a student who’s focusing on environmental studies and may be interested in interning next summer, contact Lorien Lemmon at llemonn@clarkecounty.gov.

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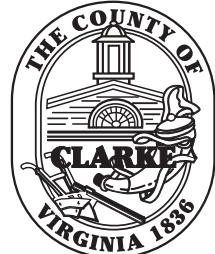
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