

It's up to us to protect our land

Rupert Cutler

Cutler is the chairman of the board of directors for the Western Virginia Water Authority.

Every year for the past 10 years, a friend of mine in Pennsylvania, Cordelia Scaife May, gave our regional land conservation organization, the Western Virginia Land Trust, an unrestricted grant of \$40,000. It was the single largest gift the land trust received each year, 25 percent of its annual operating budget. May died recently. Her foundation has decided to restrict its grants to the Pittsburgh area. That vital grant will no longer be coming to our Roanoke-based land trust. This has the board of the land trust worried. How will it make up for the loss of that precious grant?

I think we should consider this an opportunity for those of us who live here to take responsibility for the future of our land trust so it does not have to rely on outsiders for support. Since Barbara Lemon, Jay Turner and others formed it in 1996, the Western Virginia Land Trust has done a great job saving our natural environment. It has preserved 56,000

acres of farmland, wildlife habitat, watersheds and scenic views around Roanoke, much of it along the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail. It has acquired rights of way for our popular regional greenway trail system.

As a trustee of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, I see the opera-

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tions of land trusts across Virginia and can say without qualification that the Western Virginia Land Trust is the equal of any land trust organization in the commonwealth. Its staff of Roger Holnback and David Perry is able and effective. Their success, and the need for more open space protection in our region, warrant the financial support of folks like us who live here, where they do their good work.

Think of the open space land resources at risk. Views from the parkway and the AT are being

degraded by residential and commercial construction as you read this newspaper. This erosion of the beauty of these views lessens their appeal to visitors as well as to us, affecting both our economy and our quality of life. WVLT staff know who owns the critical "viewshed" properties and are asking them to

donate conservation easements to save the views.

Protecting our drinking water supply at Carvins Cove from development is well begun, but the job is only half done. One conservation easement there is recorded, but winning Roanoke City Council action to donate a second easement on the balance of the cove to protect all 12,000 acres will take some doing, led by WVLT staff. Then we should see that as much as possible of the valley's scenic icon, Mill Mountain, also is given conservation easement

protection.

Greenway users need the land trust's help to acquire trail rights of way. Trout anglers need its help to protect mountain streams. Our undeveloped mountain ridgelines give the Roanoke Valley its unique scenic character, and those resources are at risk. Farmers markets depend on local farms and orchards for their produce. Conservation easements slow the conversion of farms, orchards and forests to sprawl development.

Making up for the loss of the grant from Pittsburgh will not be easy, but it can be done by those of us who benefit directly from the land trust's work. As you complete your charitable giving for 2008, please consider making a generous tax-deductible contribution to the Western Virginia Land Trust. We can no longer take for granted that a generous outsider will step in to support the work of our own land trust. We need to show that we care enough about the beauty of our region to step up ourselves.

The Western Virginia Land Trust's address is
722 First St., Suite L, Roanoke, VA 24016