
BLUE RIDGE LAND CONSERVANCY

2020-2023 Strategic Plan



DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

The total population of the entire Blue Ridge Land Conservancy (BRLC) service area is estimated at 938,178 with the most densely populated areas located in the cities of Roanoke, Salem, Lynchburg, Danville and Martinsville and the counties of Roanoke and Montgomery.[2] Population growth from 2010 to 2019 is evidenced in both the Blue Ridge and Central Virginia regions with an overall decline in the population in the Southern Virginia region during the same time. The Blue Ridge region is largely White except in the city of Roanoke where there is a larger proportion of African Americans and Hispanics and fewer whites. In comparison the Central Virginia and Southern Virginia regions are more racially and ethnically diverse with the greatest percentage of African Americans and Hispanics overall living in the Southern Virginia region. As is the trend nationally, more individuals who live in the rural communities of the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy service area are 65 years of age and older as compared to those living in the cities of Lynchburg, Roanoke, Salem, Montgomery County (largely because of the Virginia Tech population) and Virginia as a whole.

The following tables delineate the Demographic make-up of the three service areas. Additional US Census demographic and socioeconomic status indicators are located in Appendix 4: Census Data.

**Blue Ridge Land Conservancy
Demographics**

Locality	Population			Race and Hispanic Origin			Age
	Population Estimate 2019	Population Estimate 2010	Population, % change 2010-2019	White (%)	Black or African American (%)	Hispanic (%)	Persons 65 years & older (%)
<i>Bedford</i>	78,997	74,929	5.40%	89.60%	7.20%	2.40%	21.80%
<i>Botetourt</i>	33,419	33,152	0.80%	94.10%	3.30%	1.80%	23.30%
<i>Craig</i>	5,131	5,131	-0.90%	98.10%	0.40%	1.60%	24.10%
<i>Floyd</i>	15,749	15,291	3.00%	95.50%	2.00%	3.00%	23.50%
<i>Franklin</i>	56,042	56,128	-0.20%	89.60%	7.90%	2.90%	24.20%
<i>Montgomery</i>	98,535	94,422	4.40%	86.50%	4.30%	3.50%	13.20%
<i>Roanoke</i>	94,186	92,465	1.90%	87.90%	6.40%	3.30%	21.80%
<i>Roanoke City</i>	99,143	96,910	2.30%	62.50%	28.70%	6.10%	15.90%
<i>Salem City</i>	25,301	24,836	1.90%	87.30%	7.00%	3.20%	18.50%
<i>Service Area</i>	506,503	493,264	2.70%				
<i>Virginia</i>	8,535,519	8,001,049	6.70%	69.40%	19.90%	9.80%	15.90%

[2] Ibid

DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN (CONT'D)

Central Virginia Land Conservancy Demographics

Locality	Population			Race and Hispanic Origin			Age
	Population Estimate 2019	Population Estimate 2010	Population, % change	White	Black or African American	Hispanic	Persons 65 years & older (%)
			2010-2019	(%)	(%)	(%)	
<i>Amherst</i>	31,605	32,354	-2.30%	76.90%	19.10%	2.40%	21.60%
<i>Appomattox</i>	15,911	15,028	5.90%	78.70%	18.50%	1.90%	21.20%
<i>Buckingham</i>	17,148	17,140	0.00%	63.30%	33.70%	2.40%	20.20%
<i>Campbell</i>	54,885	54,809	0.10%	81.50%	14.80%	2.90%	20.30%
<i>Nelson</i>	14,930	15,015	-0.60%	85.00%	11.40%	4.30%	28.20%
<i>Lynchburg</i>	82,168	75,534	8.80%	66.30%	28.00%	4.50%	14.50%
<i>Service Area</i>	216,647	209,880	3.20%				
<i>Virginia</i>	8,535,519	8,001,049	6.70%	69.40%	19.90%	9.80%	15.90%

Southern Virginia Land Conservancy Demographics

Locality	Population			Race and Hispanic Origin			Age
	Population Estimate 2019	Population Estimate 2010	Population, % change	White	Black or African American	Hispanic	Persons 65 years & older (%)
			2010-2019	(%)	(%)	(%)	
<i>Halifax</i>	33,911	36,253	-6.50%	61.20%	36.30%	2.20%	24.80%
<i>Henry</i>	50,557	54,182	-6.70%	74.40%	22.60%	5.80%	24.50%
<i>Patrick</i>	17,608	18,500	-4.80%	92.50%	5.30%	3.20%	26.80%
<i>Pittsylvania</i>	60,354	63,469	-4.90%	76.20%	21.50%	2.80%	23.30%
<i>Danville</i>	40,044	43,071	-7.00%	45.30%	49.20%	4.10%	20.10%
<i>Martinsville</i>	12,554	13,814	-9.10%	48.80%	47.30%	5.40%	19.20%
<i>Service Area</i>	215,028	229,289	-6.20%				
<i>Virginia</i>	8,535,519	8,001,049	6.70%	69.40%	19.90%	9.80%	15.90%

As a land trust, the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy

1. Conserves new land;
2. Protects the land already conserved;
3. Engages the public.

The 24-year old organization has experienced significant growth with the merger with the Central Virginia Land Conservancy (CVaLC) and the creation of the Southern Virginia Land Conservancy (SVaLC) as well as one in six conservation easements signed in the past few years. To address this growth, the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy Board of Directors and staff began a process to update their Strategic Plan with the creation of a Board Strategic Planning Committee. In November 2019, they contracted with a Consultant Team led by CommunityWorks and the Council of Community Services of Roanoke Virginia to design and facilitate a strategic planning process to include:

1. Collection and analysis of data from appropriate community stakeholders.
2. A vision statement, describing the organization’s aspirations and why they exist.
3. A revised mission statement to reflect the organization’s growth.
4. Strategic goals and initiatives for the next 3 to 5 years.
5. An annual planning calendar linking the Strategic Plan to annual objectives, budgeting and long-term capital planning.

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT	DATA ANALYSIS	STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE	FINAL PLAN
Primary data collected from Board, staff, donors, and landowners via surveys and online focus groups; Secondary data collected from outside sources and Executive Director interview June - July 2020	Review of all data collected; Report findings to Strategic Planning Committee and Board of Directors August 2020	Develop goals and objectives for inclusion in plan; Draft mission and vision statements September 2020	Final plan presented to the Board for approval October 2020

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

A Landscape Assessment was conducted beginning in February 2020 to evaluate the current environment, resources, opportunities and challenges that impact the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy (BRLC) as well as what may influence the strategic direction of the organization moving forward. It is important to note that this work was temporarily halted from March 2020 to June 2020 due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and Governor Ralph Northam's Executive Order 51 on March 13, 2020 declaring a State of Emergency that mandated social distancing and limited crowd sizes for meetings. As a result, the work that resulted from June 2020 to October 2020 was performed virtually.

The Landscape Assessment included:

- Executive Director and Strategic Planning Committee interviews that assessed land conservation trends, as well as local, state, and national policies and their impact on BRLC's catchment area and services.
- Evaluation of BRLC's current infrastructure (staffing and governance), operations, and programs.
- Collection of secondary data that included demographic and socioeconomic status indicators for the 16 counties and 5 cities served by BRLC.
- Primary data collection included key informant interviews and surveys targeting BRLC staff, Advisory Board members, and Board of Directors as well as stakeholders, donors and landowners in the 16 county and 5 city region.



National and State Land Conservation Trends and Organizations

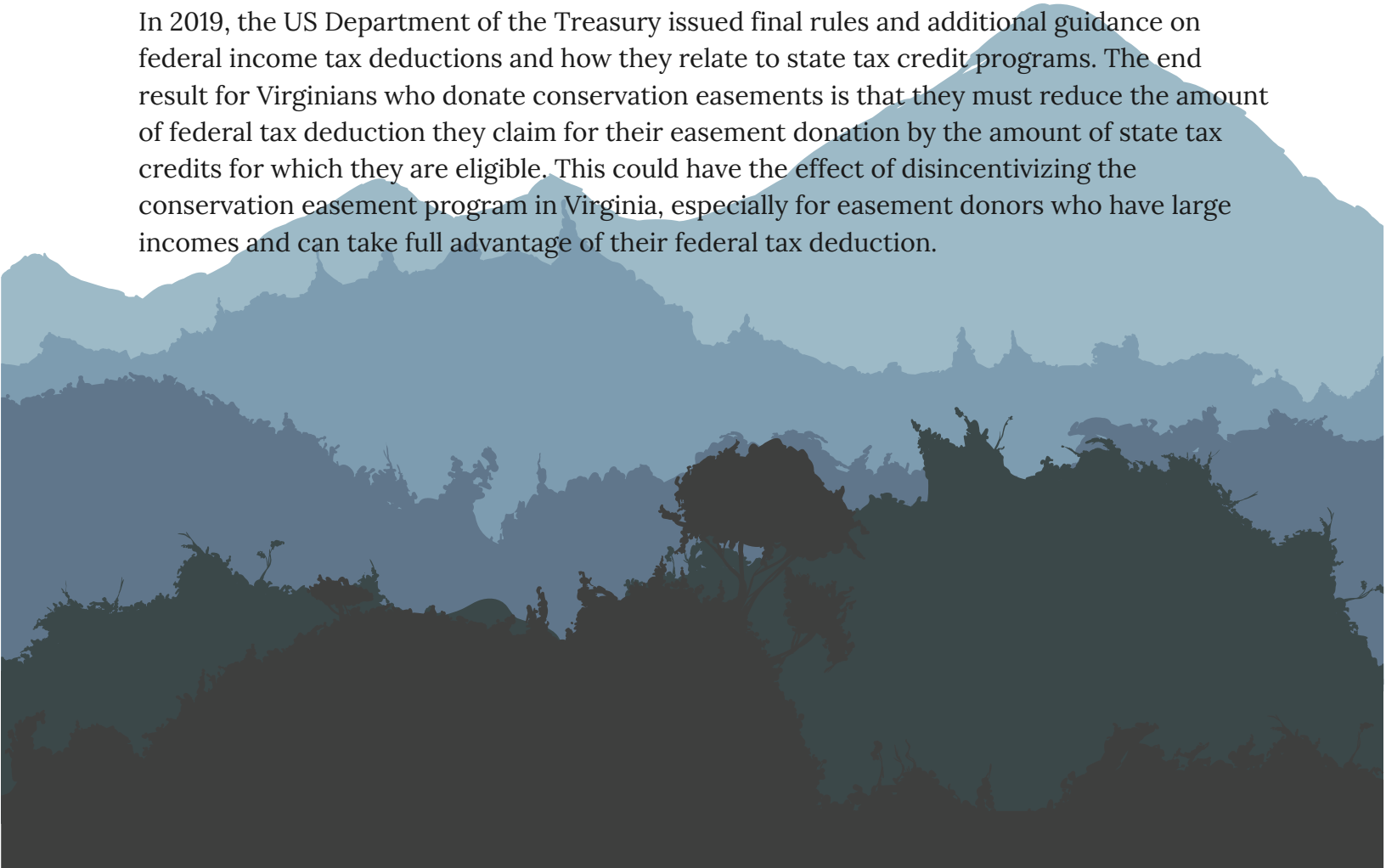
Federal and State Incentives and Legislation

The federal government and the Commonwealth of Virginia consider conservation easements to be charitable donations. There are tax incentives available for conservation easement donors including federal tax incentives like the enhanced easement tax incentive; Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit; and estate taxes.

Conservation easements allow for a federal tax deduction to the land owner based on the value of the development right they are giving up. This amount is determined by an appraisal. The IRS has oversight over this incentive program and the US Congress controls federal dollars allocated for conservation programs.

The Commonwealth of Virginia offers tax credits for conservation easements and grants to buy land benefiting farmers. The Commonwealth currently has the best state tax credits for land conservation in the United States. With the current Democratic controlled General Assembly, there has been increased legislation to increase efforts to clean up the Chesapeake Bay with laws to control livestock nutrients flowing into the watershed which is monitored by the Department of Environmental Quality. There are macro trends in real estate markets that are keeping development of land down.

In 2019, the US Department of the Treasury issued final rules and additional guidance on federal income tax deductions and how they relate to state tax credit programs. The end result for Virginians who donate conservation easements is that they must reduce the amount of federal tax deduction they claim for their easement donation by the amount of state tax credits for which they are eligible. This could have the effect of disincentivizing the conservation easement program in Virginia, especially for easement donors who have large incomes and can take full advantage of their federal tax deduction.



National and State Organizations

Advocacy, education, and training are an important part of the land conservation community.

The Blue Ridge Land Conservancy plays an active role as a member and partner in several organizations that work to support land trusts and including:

- The Land Trust Alliance (www.landtrustalliance.org) serves as an accrediting body and national leader for policies, trainings, and partnerships that lead to increased land conservation; high performing land trusts; and work to prevent threats that endanger conserved lands.
- Virginia's United Land Trusts (VaULT) (<https://vaunitedlandtrusts.org/who-we-are/>) and the Virginia Conservation Network (<http://www.vcnva.org/about-us/>) that are membership organizations in Virginia that providing provide resources, networking, and training for its members.

There are several other land trusts and organizations located statewide and/or in areas contiguous to the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy's service area that execute and monitor conservation easements, educate, and advocate in Virginia including:

- Capital Region Land Conservancy dedicated to serving the City of Richmond and the Counties of Chesterfield, Henrico, Hanover, Goochland, Powhatan, New Kent, and Charles City.
- Ever Green Team serves Southside Virginia east of Halifax County. (website is temporarily unavailable). Blue Ridge Land Conservancy shares Halifax County with this organization.
- New River Land Trust serves the New River region of Southwest Virginia including the counties of Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, Pulaski and Wythe and the towns of Radford and Galax. The Blue Ridge Land Conservancy share the counties of Floyd and Montgomery with the New River Land Trust.
- Piedmont Environmental Council headquartered in Charlottesville focuses on nine counties and one city in the northern Piedmont of Virginia: Albemarle, Charlottesville, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock.
- Valley Conservation Council serves 11 counties in northwest Virginia from Frederick County south to Botetourt County which includes the Alleghany and Blue Ridge Mountains and the Potomac and James Rivers encompassing the Shenandoah Valley, the Upper James River, and the Alleghany Highlands. Blue Ridge Land Conservancy shares Botetourt County with this organization.
- Virginia Department of Forestry.
- Virginia Outdoor Foundation

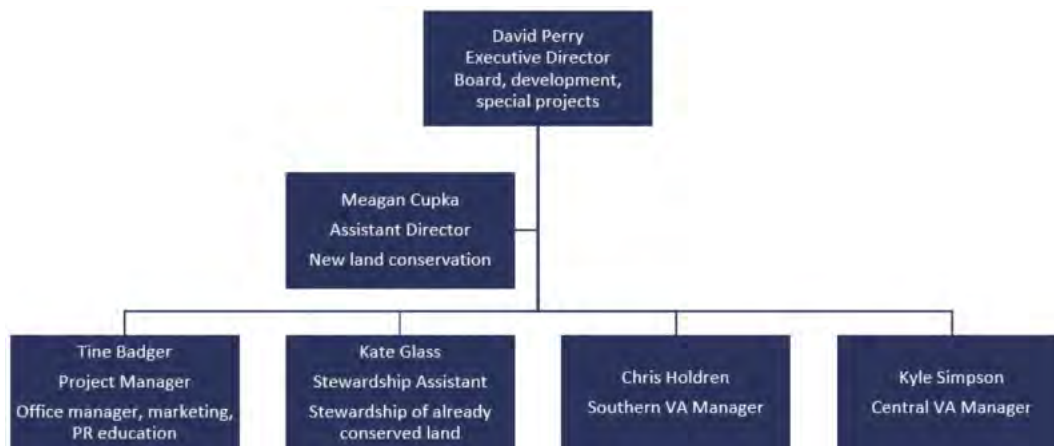


There are currently no grassroots efforts for land conservation west of the New River Land Trust's region including nine counties in far Southwest Virginia other than what is provided by the Virginia Department of Forestry or Virginia Outdoor Foundation.

Organizational Infrastructure, Operations and Programs

Infrastructure and Governance

The current staffing profile for the organization includes:



The Executive Director and Assistant Director are both 1.0 FTE's, while the Project Manager and Stewardship Assistant are 0.5 FTE each, and the Southern and Central Virginia Managers are 0.3 FTE's each. Both the Central and Southern Virginia Manager positions are grant funded.

The Board of Directors consist of 12 to 30 members. There are two Advisory Boards, one serving Central Virginia (permanent Board Committee) and the other serving Southern Virginia (unofficial committee at this time). There are two Central Virginia Advisory Board members who are appointed as permanent representatives to the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy Board of Directors. In addition to the two Advisory Boards, there are multiple Board committees including:

- Executive Committee
- Education and Public Relations Committee
- Finance Committee (active during budget development)
- Development Committee
- Nomination Committee
- Planning Committee
- Stewardship Committee
- Special Events Committee
- Government Relations Committee
- Special Committees as designated by the Board of Directors

Operations and Programs

The Blue Ridge Land Conservancy offers three primary programs and services:

1. Land conservation
 - a. Landowner education about conservation options
 - b. Acquisition of new conservation easements
 - c. Acquisition of fee lands
2. Stewardship
 - a. Monitoring conserved properties
 - b. Handling easement violations
3. Education and outreach
 - a. River and Bay Day programs for fourth graders
 - b. Outdoor Adventure Series (weekend hikes and other programs for families and the general public, on conserved properties if possible)

These programs and services will continue with the addition of the Central Virginia and Southern Virginia Land Conservancies with a possible change in scope, geography, or audience.

The Blue Ridge Land Conservancy has a diverse revenue stream from conservation easements, donations, fundraisers, endowment proceeds, state tax credits, and grants. Their largest source of revenue is from donations. Currently fundraising is needed to expand efforts in the Central Virginia and Southern Virginia Land Conservancy service areas.



Primary Data Collection

- Board and Staff Visioning Survey
- Stakeholder and Informant Focus Groups
- Landowners' Survey

Board and Staff Visioning Survey

In June, 2020, Blue Ridge Land Conservancy staff, Advisory Council members, and Board of Directors were invited to participate in a visioning survey. This survey consisted of five questions about the organization as it exists today and how it may look in the future. In all, there were 20 responses to the survey.

The survey responses centered around 5 common themes:

- Operations
- Land Conservancy
- Partnerships/Collaborations
- Governance
- Communications/Outreach & Advocacy

The visioning survey results were presented to the board and staff via a virtual meeting on July 8, 2020.

Stakeholder and Informant Focus Groups

During the month of July, 2020, strategic planning consultants held virtual focus groups in each of the organization's regions to gather data from stakeholders identified by the staff and Strategic Planning Committee. Consultants worked with staff to create a format for the focus groups that included an overview of the organization, an overview of the strategic planning process, and 5 questions about the organization and its work in the present and the future. A total of 15 individuals participated in the focus groups.

Information gathered from the stakeholder focus groups was compiled and analyzed leading to six common themes:

- Land Conservancy/Preservation
- Quality of Life – Health, Recreation
- Education, Outreach, Advocacy
- Funding
- Partnerships
- Governance – Mission, Vision, Values

Landowners' Survey

In July, 2020, an invitation to complete a Landowner survey was mailed to landowners in the Central and Southern operational areas of the organization. Paper surveys were included along with a Blue Ridge Land Conservancy brochure, a link to submit the survey online, information about a raffle for completion of the survey, and a return envelope. The landowner survey consisted of a total of 11 questions. Surveys included an opt-in raffle for a \$50 gift certificate to the winner's choice of restaurant. The raffle information stated that a winner from each of the three areas would be chosen at random. A total of 50 surveys were received via the online survey link and paper survey returns.

The landowner survey responses varied greatly, with some respondents indicating they had no knowledge of the organization and others having conserved land with the organization. Altogether, the common themes of the landowner survey were:

- Preservation/Protection/Conservation
- Education, Outreach
- Controlled/Managed Development
- Regulations, Constraints, Taxes/Fees for Landowners
- Funding
- Long-Term Planning and Vision

It was clear from multiple respondents that it is important that their land be kept in their family, for farming and personal recreational use. Overall, there was a general sense that the preservation of land, water, animals, and farms is very important, but there is a strong sense of distrust and unfamiliarity among this group of survey respondents.



VISION & MISSION STATEMENTS

On Thursday August 20, 2020, the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy staff underwent a facilitated process led by the CommunityWorks team to draft a Mission and Vision statement for the organization for review by the Strategic Planning Committee and ultimately approved by the Board of Directors. A Mission/Vision Worksheet was given to the staff in preparation for discussions.

The group discussed the need for distinction between what is preservation versus conservation as well as addressing misconceptions around the use of land.

On September 18, 2020, staff and the Strategic Planning Committee of the board worked to solidify the vision and mission statements as follows:

Vision Statement

Communities with abundant conserved lands and waters to meet the needs of all living things.

Mission Statement

We protect the lands and waters you love, forever.



STRATEGIC GOALS



Land Conservation



Sustainable Funding



Infrastructure and Capacity



Marketing and Outreach



Governance

GOAL STATEMENTS AND STRATEGIES

Land Conservation

BRLC will build a partnership-based land conservation and stewardship program that works with landowners to permanently protect land.

Strategies:

1. We will develop a long-term plan for strategic land conservation.
2. We will continue to play an active role as a partner to advocate for land trusts, nationally, statewide, and locally.
3. We will grow partnerships with other organizations and land trusts to serve diverse landowners.

Sustainable Funding

BRLC will strengthen the long-term financial sustainability of the organization.

Strategies:

1. We will assess the long-term financial sustainability of the organization.
2. We will create and implement development plans for each of the three service areas.

Infrastructure and Capacity

BRLC will have the capacity to carry out the work of the organization.

Strategies:

1. We will define who and where we serve.
2. We will assess the internal staff capacity and will take an active approach to increasing staff diversity.
3. We will support staff to develop professional skills to meet the needs of their position.
4. We will identify infrastructure needs in each of the three service areas.



GOAL STATEMENTS AND STRATEGIES (CONT'D)

Marketing and Outreach

BRLC will promote a broad-based understanding of land conservation and connect people with the places they love.

Strategies:

1. We will identify our individual constituencies and develop a marketing and outreach plan that appeals to them.
2. We will execute a marketing and outreach plan to engage with diverse audiences and the community broadly.

Governance

BRLC will have a governance structure that is best equipped to manage the future growth and sustainability of the organization.

Strategies:

1. We will develop a governance structure that addresses the unique three-region nature of the organization.
2. We will develop staff and board processes to ensure alignment with BRLC strategic plan.
3. We will have a board composition that reflects the areas we serve.

