



ALLIANCE

FOR THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

*Conserving our Land, Water,
and Way of Life*

2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Letter from the Executive Director, Kate Wofford



What a year— 2020-2021 brought so many challenges, including to folks who call the Shenandoah Valley home. One year ago, Alliance staff and board were still adjusting to a new way of working safely and effectively in a global pandemic. It was apparent that COVID was going to be our norm for some time.

But the difficult year was not without silver linings. COVID gave us a renewed appreciation of place. Visitation at the parks and public lands in our region set records. People relied on their neighbors. Families turned to local farms, dairies and orchards when global food systems were disrupted. And natural areas provided a source of solace in a stressful time.

The mission of the Alliance— “to advocate, educate, and connect people to conserve the natural resources, cultural heritage, and rural character of our region” remained as important as ever, and we took it seriously.

We stepped into a leadership role in the Shenandoah Rail Trail Exploratory Partnership working to convert the unused rail corridor from Broadway to Front Royal into a 49-mile multi-use trail. We also launched the revolving Shenandoah Valley Fund with our partners in the Shenandoah Valley

Conservation Collaborative, recognizing that the up-front costs of a conservation easement to preserve family land for future generations were a barrier for many of our Valley landowners. Importantly, we formed the All Voices Shenandoah committee with Alliance board members and staff and are actively working to ensure that our programs and policy recommendations don't perpetuate historical inequities.

Meanwhile, your county coordinators were tuning into countless hours of virtual local government meetings, pushing to make sure that public meetings were accessible to all and keeping community members informed and involved despite the distancing limitations of COVID.

Through all of this, we were bolstered and inspired by you and your support. Your contributions this year, often accompanied with notes of encouragement, were especially heartfelt knowing it was a tough year for all. Sincerely – thank you.

I am humbled by the resiliency of Valley communities, and the Alliance staff and board, who rose to the occasion. I hope you are as inspired as I am by this report of what we've accomplished together. As always, please reach out with your thoughts and ideas – we are successful because of your engagement and your generosity.



VISION

A Shenandoah Valley where our way of life is sustained by rural landscapes, clean streams and rivers, and thriving communities.

MISSION

Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley advocates, educates, and connects people to conserve the natural resources, cultural heritage, and rural character of our region.



P.O. Box 674
New Market, Virginia 22844
540.908.3914
info@shenandoahalliance.org

 shenandoahalliance.org
 @shenandoahalliance
 @shenandoahalliance

Alliance Staff

Your county coordinator provides expertise and guidance for community members seeking to participate more actively in the local planning decisions that determine the future of our rural working landscapes, natural resources, and livable communities.

While high-profile issues like a future Shenandoah Rail Trail or the defeated Atlantic Coast Pipeline get abundant coverage, it's the day-to-day work of these county-based programs that remains the heart of our work to protect the land, water and vibrant communities in the Valley.

The partnership between Alliance county coordinators, local elected officials, and engaged community members results in comprehensive plans and land use decisions that better protect land and water while promoting growth that complements our agriculture and tourism economies.



KATE WOFFORD
Executive Director
kwofford@shenandoahalliance.org



ERIN BURCH
Communications Manager
eburch@shenandoahalliance.org



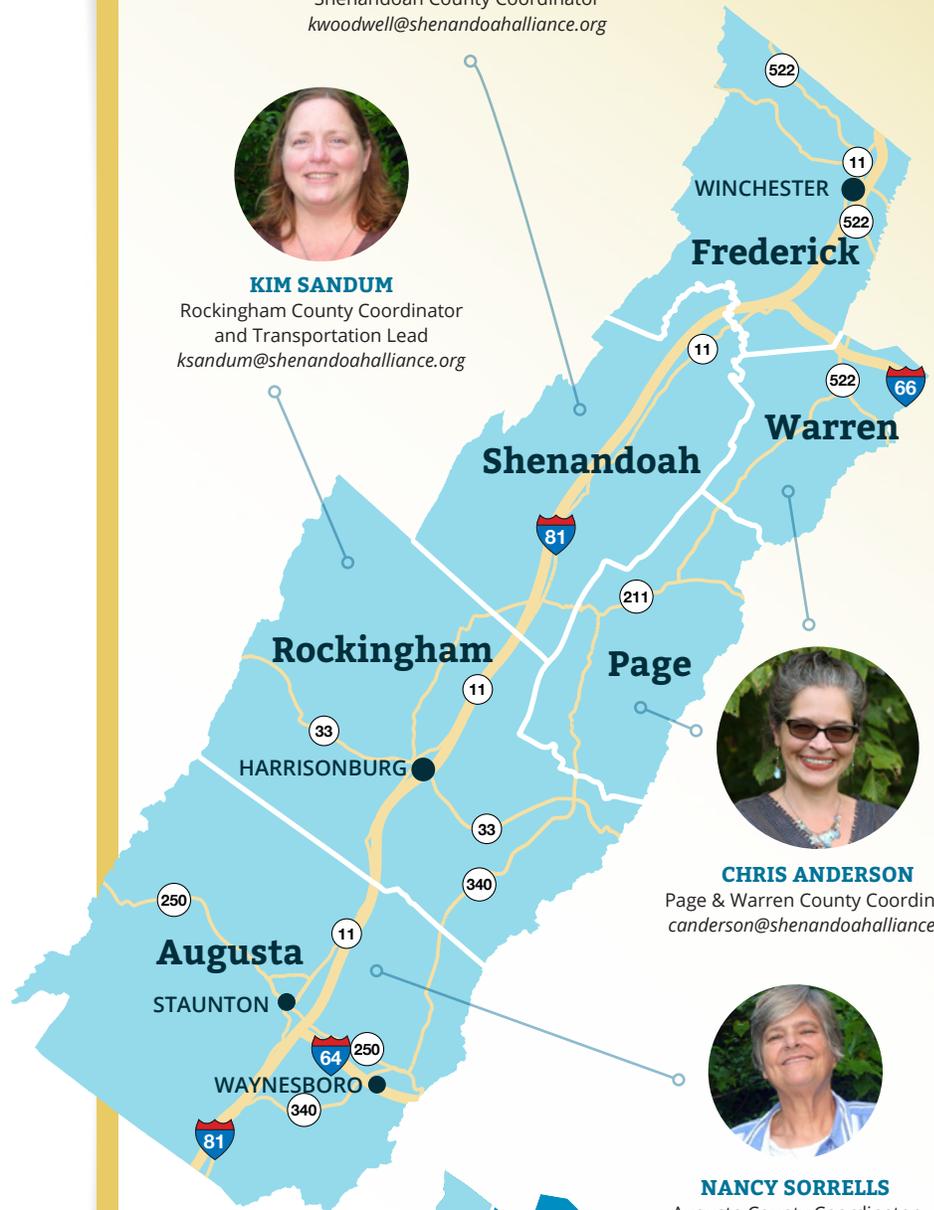
KEVIN TATE
Project Manager
Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative
ktate@shenandoahalliance.org



KIM WOODWELL
Alliance Program Director and
Shenandoah County Coordinator
kwoodwell@shenandoahalliance.org



KIM SANDUM
Rockingham County Coordinator
and Transportation Lead
ksandum@shenandoahalliance.org



CHRIS ANDERSON
Page & Warren County Coordinator
canderson@shenandoahalliance.org



NANCY SORRELLS
Augusta County Coordinator
nsorrells@shenandoahalliance.org

Board of Directors

The Alliance is led by a talented and engaged volunteer board of directors with deep community connections throughout our service area.



Christine Andreae
WARREN
COUNTY



Joan Comanor
SHENANDOAH
COUNTY



Sarah Francisco
AUGUSTA
COUNTY



Dolly Frazier
ROCKINGHAM
COUNTY



Lee Good
ROCKINGHAM
COUNTY



Rod Graves
PAGE
COUNTY



Lisa Anne Hawkins
ROCKINGHAM
COUNTY



Joe Lehnen
SHENANDOAH
COUNTY



Carolyn F. Long
SHENANDOAH
COUNTY



Robert Whitescarver
AUGUSTA
COUNTY

Strategic Goals

Promote land use and transportation policies that respect the Valley's natural and cultural resources and traditional communities

Mobilize citizens on regional issues of importance

Foster land and water conservation through projects and programs that ensure clean and plentiful water, protected farm and forest land and preserved cultural resources

Support economic development that is in keeping with the Valley's unique character and resources

Cultivate an active, educated, and informed public

The Alliance:

- Values land, water and community vitality in the Shenandoah Valley;
- Brings people together to protect shared interests, natural resources, and a better way of life in the Valley;
- Mobilizes and informs citizens on issues that affect Valley residents and visitors;
- Believes in a culture of working together and helping all communities speak with a unified voice on the issues that affect them the most;
- Finds common ground with a non-partisan approach.



PROMOTE

*We **promote** land use and transportation policies that respect the Valley's natural and cultural resources and traditional communities.*

A Thoughtful Approach to Solar Energy Siting

As Virginia transitions to renewable energy, Shenandoah Valley localities are facing complex land use planning decisions about utility-scale solar siting on farmland and open space. This is a big deal in our region.

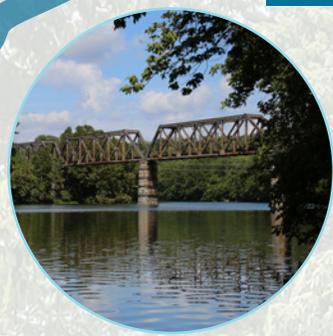
In response, in 2019, we developed a set of resources and tools for updating planning documents and evaluating proposals that we provided county officials. Since then, your county coordinators have been deeply involved at the county level, advocating that projects are compatible with the agricultural-based economies, clean water goals, and scenic and cultural resources. In Page, Chris Anderson encouraged county residents to weigh in during a year-long process to create a solar ordinance. In Rockingham and Augusta, Kim Sandum and Nancy Sorrells, respectively, had a seat at the table as members of the board-appointed committees to update each county's planning documents to refine and define the vision of solar on the landscape. In Shenandoah, Kim Woodwell followed several applications through the county process and tracked the progress of the first development in our region near Mount Jackson.

At the state policy level, the Alliance is working to increase the share of solar that gets built on rooftops, parking lots, and previously degraded lands. In addition, finding ways to integrate distributed and community solar projects into the local planning mix of renewable energy allows more folks to contribute to the goals and benefit from the new solar-powered economy.



FRONT ROYAL

STRASBURG



TOMS BROOK



WOODSTOCK

SHENANDOAH RAIL TRAIL

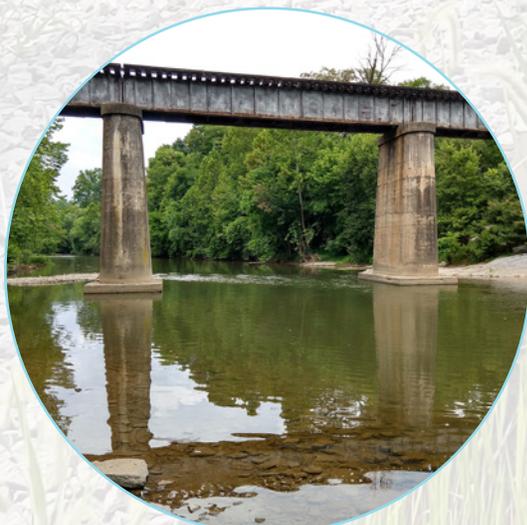
EDINBURG



MOUNT JACKSON



NEW MARKET



TIMBERVILLE



BROADWAY

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We **mobilize** citizens on regional issues of importance and **support** economic development that is in keeping with the Valley's unique character and resources.

SUPPORT + MOBILIZE

Imagine a nearly 50-mile long multi-use trail connecting three counties and nine towns through the northern Shenandoah Valley. Incredible, right? The Alliance is all in to work with you to make this vision a reality.

We are delighted by the progress of the **Shenandoah Rail Trail Exploratory Partnership**, a public-private effort to convert the discontinued Norfolk Southern line from Broadway to Front Royal into a walking and biking trail. Because of our long experience in community engagement, the Alliance is well suited for our leadership role in this project. Kim Woodwell and Erin Burch lead the community outreach efforts of the Partnership, working to ensure that our trail is created in the vision of the communities through which it passes. Kate Wofford sits on the governance committee and heads up the fundraising committee.

The potential benefit to Shenandoah Valley communities is enormous. It would turn an unused resource into an asset— connecting the communities along the route in a way they haven't been connected since the trains ran. It would provide economic development in the towns along the way and small business opportunities for their residents. And, of course, it would be a great way for Valley residents to actively enjoy the things we love about this place— views of the mountains, the working landscapes that shape our culture and the beautiful North Fork of the Shenandoah River.

SHENANDOAH TRAIL

There's a lot to catch up on if you haven't been following this exciting project, so please also visit shenandoahrailtrail.org to learn more.



When asked for feedback on the idea of the Shenandoah Rail Trail, these are words most frequently used by survey respondents.

The Alliance helped gin up lots of participation in the survey (more than 9,000 responses!), including more than 61% from communities along the corridor. We were not surprised to see that local folks love the idea of the rail trail.



FOSTER

We *foster* land and water conservation through projects and programs that ensure clean and plentiful water, protected farm and forest land and preserved cultural resources.

Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative



Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative

The Alliance is pleased to host the now 16-member Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative (SVCC), working to increase farmland protection and clean water restoration in six Valley counties. Partners in the SVCC include regional land trusts, conservation and watershed nonprofits, and state and federal conservation agencies, working together on shared goals to improve water quality, build healthy soils, and protect working lands.

Kevin Tate, who joined the Alliance team as Project Manager for the SVCC in September 2020, is responsible for partner coordination and project monitoring and evaluation. Kevin left an agricultural extension position in California supporting strawberry growers to return to the Valley where his family has been farming for six generations.

The expanded SVCC spent its first year identifying shared priorities, creating collaborative processes for decision making and communication, and generating strategies to implement more conservation practices. SVCC also launched the Shenandoah Valley Fund, a revolving fund designed to help defray up-front conservation easement costs for landowners who have decided to protect their land for future generations. The interest-free loan is repaid once the landowner receives the tax benefit from the easement, thus making the funds available for the next landowner in a continuous chain.

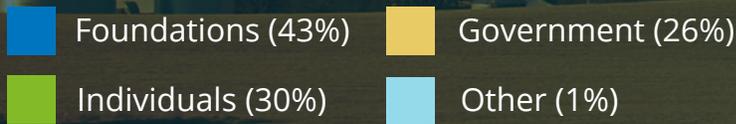
Summer 2021 kicked off field tours hosted to showcase the practices Valley farmers have implemented that improve farm production and benefit natural resources. These events demonstrated the realities of how conservation fits on working farms and inspired much farmer-to-farmer discussion about creative solutions to resource management.

PHOTO BY KEVIN TATE

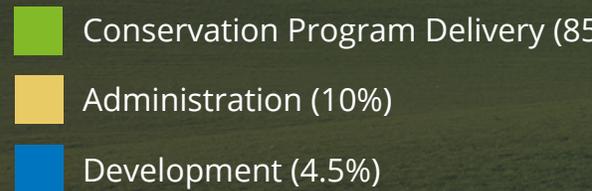
As long as there are people like you who care about the Shenandoah Valley, our work will continue.



2020 Sources of Organizational Support



2020 Program and Operating Expenditures



"We became contributors to the Alliance legacy group in Augusta County back in 2015 when everyone was rallying to fight the now-defeated Atlantic Coast Pipeline. We've watched the Alliance expand into an organization capable of improving land-use planning at the county level while tackling regional issues like our transition to renewable energy. As active volunteers of the Friends of the Middle River, we appreciate the Alliance's partnership efforts to raise the bar for land conservation and clean water in the Valley. For these reasons, we are happy to support the Alliance annually and commit to staying involved throughout the year."

— Joe and Liz McCue, Verona, Virginia

"Having grown up in Rockingham County, I've seen a lot of change in my lifetime. Remembering the construction of Interstate 81 as a boy and observing the changes to the Valley that ensued is dramatic. If you're not a local, take a moment to revisit some of the history and photos of the earlier Valley to put this into perspective. We still have some of the best farmland around, and protecting what remains of our rural character, open spaces and communities is why I support organizations like the Alliance."

— James Flory, Dayton, Virginia

Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley is the leading, unified voice for conserving our region's land, water, and community. As a nonprofit, we are fortunate to receive annual support from foundations, grants, and individuals. We are honored stewards of every dollar, and we believe our people are our programs.

Our finances are externally audited by certified professionals each year, and our experienced and capable Board of Directors reviews and approves our budget thoughtfully. The return on investment for Alliance support is actively delivered in our region at every community meeting, in every coordinated advocacy letter, and in every important policy discussion.

At every level, our resources are directed toward ensuring current and future Valley residents and visitors alike can enjoy scenic landscapes, abundant outdoor activities, clean water, vibrant communities, and safe travels.

You may consider a gift to a particular advocacy issue, a specific locality, or our overall efforts. Our 700 steadfast supporters:

- Live both inside and outside the Shenandoah Valley;
- Give both general and issue-specific gifts of all sizes;
- Donate both monthly and annually; and
- Share a common thread of passion and concern for the future of this region.

"Returning from Idaho to our home in the Page Valley has confirmed that we live in a very special part of the world. I feel reassured knowing the Alliance staff and board are bringing their expertise to local land use decisions that help keep the Shenandoah Valley a wonderful place to live, work and visit. John and I are happy to support and invest in this important work that benefits us all."

— Babette Thorpe, Luray, Virginia

"I believe in keeping Shenandoah County's working farmland open and productive for the future. Honestly, there are few things in this world that are more important to me. That's why I decided in 2017 to permanently protect my family's cattle farm with a conservation easement. It's also why I support Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley. It's wonderful how they have joined the county-based organizations together and now are working throughout the Valley to make sure that new farmers have a place to make a living and continue our friendly, agricultural way of life."

— Dee Hockman, Strasburg, Virginia



P.O. Box 674
New Market, Virginia 22844



“The more we formally honor the unique places and resources that surround us, the better our chances to preserve them.”

— NANCY SORRELLS, SPRING 2021 RIDGE AND VALLEY

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TO LEARN MORE AND JOIN US.**

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