



# CAP Newsletter

## Fall 2012

Enhancing Rockingham's rural heritage,  
livable communities and natural resources.



*Bob Threewitts and his grandson at the spring source. Bob and Susan Threewitts make investments in the farm looking forward to the day when their son will be steward of the family land.*

### Threewitts Farm Investments Protect Water and Soil, Yet Public Benefits Threatened by Loop Road Project

On a tailgate tour of the Threewitts family farm near Keezletown, it quickly becomes clear that Bob and Susan Threewitts possess a passion and vision for land conservation. The family produces hay, corn, beef cattle and poultry while employing an array of best management practices on the farm to improve water quality and preserve productive soil.



*Bob Threewitts*

The Threewitts demonstrated their extraordinary stewardship by working closely with public and private conservation agencies, a growing trend in Rockingham County. But the public benefits of the investments by the Threewitts and other farm landowners in both agriculture and water quality could be lost one day to construction of a highway bypass, or loop road, around Harrisonburg.

The Threewitts' 300 acres, tucked along Massanutten Mountain, was established as a homestead in the early 1800's. It has been in the family for more than 100 years and now consists of three farms that Bob and Susan operate with their son, Chris. Bob, president of the Rockingham Farm Bureau Association, also serves as a consultant on animal nutrition and Executive Vice-President of the Virginia State Feed Association.

The public-private investments on the Threewitts' farm have really paid off. Testing by Virginia Tech students after the fencing project was completed found that the water leaving the farm was cleaner than when it entered the property. In addition, there are several productive springs on the farm which run clean and clear thanks to the Threewitts good

farm practices. In sum, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) estimates that the conservation practices not only reduce run off of nutrients and bacteria in the water, but also save tons of topsoil annually from runoff and erosion.

Bob Threewitts feels that "the wave has caught on" as farmers across the County begin to take advantage of available funds for conservation and preservation practices. He acknowledges the initial wariness for some landowners, but he said that in his personal experience, the NRCS programs are "not making land unusable or even practices that are difficult to implement by any overly strict requirements or limitations". He specifically noted the flexibility and willingness of program officials to work with individual needs, such as flexible plans for fencing and the CREP buffer.

The benefits to Rockingham County residents of these investments are clear. Productive soil and clean water is maintained at a far lower cost than through treatment. Farms also become more productive, contributing to the County's important agricultural sector.

But Bob Threewitts remains concerned about the persistent threat of a new highway bypass through eastern Rockingham County. He points out that a loop road would not only lead to direct loss of prime farmland. It would fracture the land, leaving parcels that aren't close enough for development or useful for farming anymore, eroding the county's agricultural sector over time. That would be a waste of the significant public and private investment in farm stewardship in the area.



*The proposed loop road corridor is a big unknown for the future of the Threewitts Farm (above) and it threatens the farm's conservation improvements, like the stream fencing and tree plantings (top).*

*Continued on Page 3*

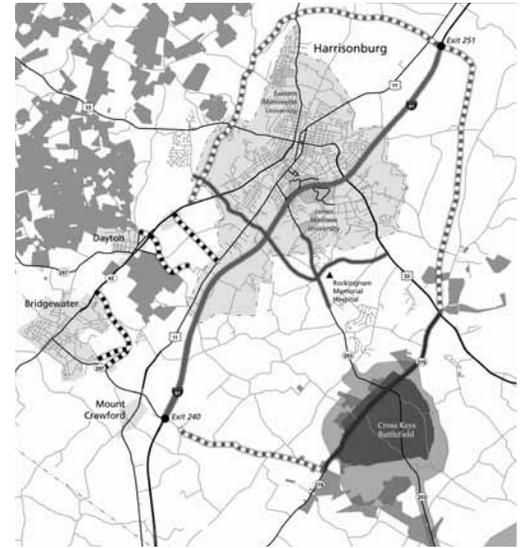
## CAP Supporters Weigh in on Loop Road

We were disappointed in February when regional transportation planners opted not to remove the controversial Loop Road from the Harrisonburg Rockingham transportation plan. The community has rejected plans for a Harrisonburg Loop Road/ I-81 bypass multiple times – in 2000, 2004, 2005 and 2006.

Hundreds of residents have turned out at public hearings to oppose a new highway corridor through the County's rural areas, expressing their concerns about the impacts on productive farmland, Civil War battlefields and natural resources, as well as the high cost to local taxpayers of providing public services to the sprawling development that comes with new highways. CAP has consistently challenged the need for a destructive new north-south corridor when traffic congestion throughout the region is caused by inadequate east-west road capacity to serve residential communities and job centers. Upgrades to existing roads, like the Stone Spring Connector, will best serve our region, not a costly loop road bypass.

But CAP supporters have not given up. Dozens sent comments to the Harrisonburg Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) during the public comment period last spring. These comments make a difference.

Decision makers signaled that they may support removal of the Loop Road project when the County updates its Comprehensive Land Use Plan in 2014. If it were deleted from the Comp Plan, other regional planning documents, such as the MPO plan and the City of Harrisonburg transportation plan, are likely to be amended to conform to the County plan. The ultimate goal is for VDOT to do the same, when we will finally be rid of the threat of an unnecessary and damaging Loop Road. CAP remains vigilant, ready to remind our elected officials and planners that Rockingham County residents strongly oppose a Loop Road or highway bypass through our rural areas.



*The Loop Road would pave through productive farmland, Civil War battlefields, and natural resources, as well as increase taxes to pay for the sprawling development that comes from new highways. For full map, see [www.PreserveRockingham.org](http://www.PreserveRockingham.org).*

# THANK YOU!

*Thanks to all the CAP supporters who wrote to the head of the U.S. Forest Service over the summer to ask that the agency stand firm and keep natural gas fracking out of the George Washington National Forest.*



*Forest tracts and industrial natural gas fracking well pads create a jarring contrast in Pennsylvania's Tioga State Park. Image Courtesy of Dick Martin of [www.PaForestCoalition.org](http://www.PaForestCoalition.org).*

## Forest Service Must Stand Firm on Fracking

Last year, forest planners recommended a ban on horizontal drilling (fracking) on the George Washington National Forest to protect public drinking water and other forest resources. This wise precaution was based on the unknown risks of fracking and its industrial impacts.

However, the Forest Service has been under tremendous pressure from the gas industry to delete the ban from the final forest plan, which will guide forest management for the next 10-15 years. Despite strong public and local government support for the fracking ban (including letters from Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg), planners are considering opening up parts of the national forest to this controversial type of shale gas drilling.

CAP and its conservation partners have encouraged the Forest Service to stick with the original proposal and keep harmful fracking out of our surrounding public forest lands, which represent nearly 25 percent of all the land in Rockingham County. The final George Washington Forest plan is slated to be released by the end of the year.

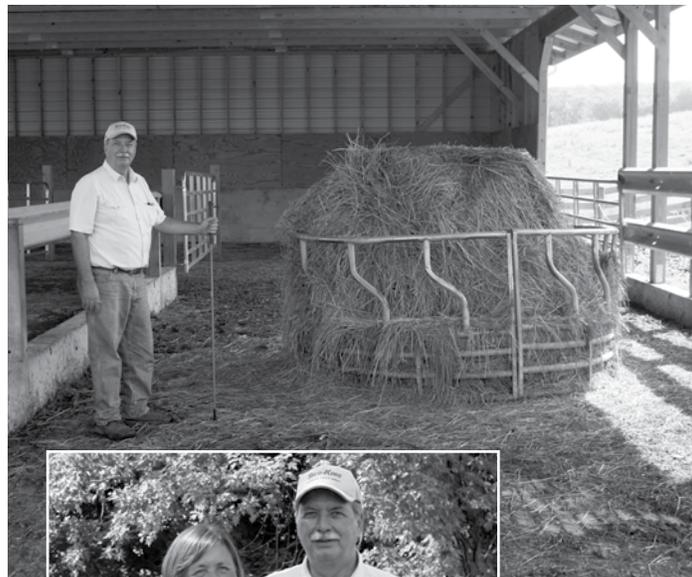
**Threewitts Farm Investments (Continued from Page 1)**

Bob and Susan Threewitts made these investments with their son in mind, looking forward to the day Chris serves as steward of the family land. The loop road corridor, which remains on county, city and regional planning maps, is a big unknown for the 300 acres that has been so carefully tended by the Threewitts family.

**AGRICULTURAL BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON THE THREEWITTS' LAND**

*The extensive agricultural best management practices reflect the Threewitts' commitment and the technical and financial support from diverse agencies..*

- Fencing to restrict livestock access along more than 2 miles of 3 different creeks, including Cub Run, and 3 new stream crossings with culverts, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
- 10-foot setbacks along waterways to filter soil and fertilizer run-off, with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.
- Tree planting along stream banks and a hillside to hold soil and filter nutrients, with Cargill Corp. and local 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA), as well as the Virginia Department of Forestry.
- 7 new livestock waterers in pastures, served by redeveloping an old spring that once served the farm 100 years ago. Water flows by gravity through the 7 waterers until the final overflow is returned to Cub Run.
- A new winter feeding barn and summer shade plantings in a pasture to reduce the impact on soil and water when livestock spend a lot of time in just 1 or 2 places, with partial funds by the Environmental Quality Initiatives Program through the NRCS.



*Above: This is the feeding barn mentioned in the article. Left: Bob and Susan Threewitts*

**CAP Helps Town of Dayton Plan for Future Growth**

Every day bikes, horses and buggies share the streets with cars and pedestrians in the traditional town of Dayton. The charming town provides the backdrop for one of the most popular fall festivals in the Valley and has many features to be proud of. So when it was time to review Dayton's five year comprehensive plan CAP took a role in reviewing the draft for ways to protect the charm of the town even as it prepares for new growth.

CAP supporters make it possible for us to step in and encourage good planning when towns like Dayton are at a crossroads. And we applaud Dayton for working hard to plan for future growth while maintaining its distinct character.

**Community Alliance for Preservation**

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*Dayton Days 2012, courtesy of Silver Lake Mill.*

Community Alliance for Preservation  
2879 Rawley Pike  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

*Enhancing Rockingham's  
rural heritage,  
livable communities  
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## Farms Come First in Rockingham

There's nothing like discovering a farm stand on a back road and stopping for friendly conversation and freshly picked produce. But that activity was technically not allowed in Rockingham County until this spring because there were no provisions for farm produce stands, pumpkin patches or other seasonal activities in the County's zoning ordinances.

Rockingham's community development staff created the innovative Farms First Enterprise Program and zoning ordinance to correct the situation. They considered ways to allow the popular retail activities, those associated with a good harvest in our agricultural areas, without denigrating the rural character of the area itself. The common sense Farms First program permits existing farms to conduct seasonal activities after applying for a permit for a small fee. Participating farms will be included in the County's planned agritourism marketing promotions. Permanent, year-round, commercial farm activities still require a Special Use Permit approved by the Board of Supervisors, while Farm First allows small-scale seasonal activities to be addressed by county staff. CAP provided strong support for adoption of the Farms



*The commonsense Farm First program promotes small-scale farm activities, like selling farm fresh eggs west of Dayton.*

First Enterprise ordinance at the public hearing when a misunderstanding threatened to derail this good work. This type of new zoning ordinance makes sense for the top farm County in Virginia, increasing opportunity for farmers without threatening agricultural areas with excessive commercial uses.

**COMMUNITY  
ALLIANCE FOR  
PRESERVATION**

*Find out about  
issues that affect  
Rockingham's  
rural heritage,  
ag economy, and  
livable communities and  
how to get involved.*

**www.PreserveRockingham.org • 540-209-2552 • 2879 Rawley Pike, Harrisonburg, VA 22801**