

YRSCB Top of the Basin Tour

October 27, 2009



Members of the Steering Committee met at the Exchange Hotel in Gordonsville, and followed our guide Greg Wichelns to Chicken Mountain, where we found the mid-19th century home called Rockwood. This home, a mix of Gothic and Greek Revival style architecture, sits atop the mountain overlooking 300 acres of pasture and forest. We were greeted by the owner, Ann Stelter, and her mother, with hot cider and

stories of the home once owned by the great nephew of James Madison, Colonel John Willis. Of particular interest to the group was the fact that the home sits upon the divide of the York and Rappahannock watersheds. Springs on the property feed both, and much of the property is in conservation easement. It was good to see that such care for the land was taking place in the headwaters of these two Virginia rivers.



Greg led us to Montpelier, where we had lunch and learned about their educational programs. Christian Cotz and Sandy Mudrinich then led us through the old growth forest and showed us a recently cleared area which will be used for outdoor classroom space.



We then visited Monk Sanford's farm, which is just down the road from Montpelier and Rockwood. Monk met us at his dairy, where his 200 head herd was just being milked and released to the loafing area. He shared the numerous efforts he's made there on the farm, including fencing all streams, placement of 19 troughs for watering, planting cover crops of barley and oat, weekly rotational grazing between 30 acre pastures,

waste storage lagoons, soil testing and 800 acres in conservation easement. The farm is situated in a beautiful location and he proudly shared that his farm was used as the model for the VA Farming license plate. Monk was also the recent recipient of the Clean Farm Award and serves as a model farmer and steward of the land in the headwaters of the York basin.

We wrapped up the tour back at Montpelier. Everyone seemed to learn a lot more about what is happening on the ground in the upper watershed. A few of us got a special tour of the newly renovated home of James and Dolly Madison, just in time to beat the rain.

[Link to Photo Album](#)