



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 019-0091

1. General Property Information

Property name: Mount Airy

Property address: 1120 Mount Harmony Road

City or Town: Keysville

Zip code: 23947

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Charlotte County

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building X Site _____ Structure _____ Object _____

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: Part of Tax Parcel #40-A-12B (13 ac) and of the entire "home farm" (455 ac)

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban _____ Suburban _____ Town _____ Village _____ Hamlet _____ Rural X

Briefly describe the property's overall location and setting, including any notable landscape features:

Mount Airy is a mid-19th plantation house located in Charlotte County on Route 654 (approximately one mile north of Virginia State Route 40, halfway between Charlotte Court House and Keysville). This area has also been known historically as "Eureka" and also as "Eureka Mills." The tract of land on which the house sits (also known as Mount Airy) originally totaled 1,060 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres on the waters of Spring and Spencer Creeks. About half of the present farm's 455 acres were within that original boundary.

A local historian described this large and stately house, which was positioned at the center of such a large tract of land, as "one of the most beautiful, productive, and typical southern plantations (to be found) at the outbreak of the Civil War" (Priddy). No doubt the name, Mount Airy, arose from its location on the plantation's highest point and from the breezes that tend to flow up from the surrounding bottom lands.

The view from the house today, looking north and east, has changed very little in the 150 years since an article highlighting this farm was printed in the Charlotte Gazette. The writer, from an elevated point, describes the "beautiful valley" and the "lengthy reach of rich flat lands, covered, almost as far as the eye could stretch, (in a) beautiful carpet of green..." (Cox). Today the farm and the surrounding properties remain undeveloped and in agricultural use. Within very close proximity along Roanoke Creek and its tributaries are four large land conservations. If the applicants are successful in their efforts to enter Mount Airy into a conservation easement

this year, land protected (in perpetuity) from subdivision and commercial development in the Eureka area will total over 3,300 acres.

In addition to its high and rolling hills, fertile low grounds, and winding creeks, the proximal landscape features a natural springhead located approximately 50 yards to the north of the house, which flows steadily even in dry seasons. Older members of the Watts family remember a spring house, situated against the rocky ridge, where milk and butter were kept cool.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Greek Revival

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here:

Unknown, but many of the house's architectural details can be found in pattern books such as Asher Benjamin's *The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter* published in 1850. The interior trim is nearly identical to that of the nearby Watkins House. The applicants wonder whether the owners utilized similar pattern books or perhaps the same carpenter.

If the builder is known, please list here: Unknown

Date of construction (can be approximate): 1852

Narrative Description (Please do not exceed one page in describing the property):

Briefly describe the property's general characteristics, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions or other major alterations.

During a 1998 architectural survey of Charlotte County funded by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Mount Airy was identified as a structure of significance (019-0091). The house is a two-story frame dwelling in the shape of an "L." It is composed of two, three-bay, single-pile sections which run north to south and east to west—essentially an expanded version of the center-passage house which, by 1852, had been the distinctive style in Virginia for 200 years (Foster 94, 103-4; Fischer 265-7). These houses were fundamentally rectangular blocks with a center passage flanked by two large rooms. On the main level, these were typically the parlor and dining room. Mount Airy's "L," however, creates a second center hall and a third large room at the back of the house. The overall effect is one of balance, elegant symmetry, and grandeur.

As mentioned in the book, *Charlotte County...Rich Indeed*, Mount Airy features many architectural elements in the Georgian style (Ailsworth, et. al. 395; Foster 66, 120), including a low-pitched, cross hipped roof with broad brick chimneys at each end. Two formal entryways are centered on the long sides of the sections (the west and north elevations) and feature transoms and sidelights. It features Greek Revival details, including temple front porches with their Tuscan columns, and the heavy molded woodwork which suggests classical details in marble or stone (Foster 234). These Greek Revival elements, in the opinion of the applicants, are the most prominent and defining architectural features of Mount Airy. A note about the porches: The most recent record of the north porch is found in Watts family pictures from the 1940s, which show that the woodwork is slightly different from the west (or front) porch. The front porch was intact until 2025 when it collapsed. The applicants plan to reconstruct both porches.

The rooms and hallways at Mount Airy are quite grand. Ceilings on the first floor are 10 feet high and 8 feet high on the second. The six large rooms are 19-foot squares separated by 12-foot hallways and staircases. The back hallway also provides a staircase from the first floor to the dirt floor basement—a passageway, the applicants are told, which was used by servants to bring food from the outdoor kitchen to the dining room during the time of slavery.

On the main level of the house, the center “summer halls” have doors on both ends, such that, with all four doors (north, south, east, and west) opened on a hot day, the breeze could be drawn into and through the house to keep the rooms cool (Fischer 265-7, Foster 94).

Older members of the Watts family describe the original interior trim color as off-white or “oyster.” As was typical of Greek Revival houses, the woodwork, much of which has been preserved in good condition, is heavy and simple. Interesting details include bold trim around broad doorways and windows, high baseboards, double long panels on doors and along the sides of staircases, and built-in cupboards. More ornate work can be found in the parlor and main stairwell, which feature crosstetted architraves, corner blocks, a molded handrail with scrolled end, finials, and, in the parlor, a more ornate mantle than is found elsewhere in the house. The scrolled newel post is a particularly notable feature. It features unusual architectural details, including the newel post and the staircase paneling. The curved newel post is reminiscent of craftsman Thomas Day’s work. There is no evidence it came from his workshop, suggesting it was inspired by Day’s style. It is reported that the parlor mantle was originally painted to look like marble (Ailsworth, et. al.). Examples nearly identical to these elements can be found in Asher Benjamin’s *The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter*, a pattern book published in 1850.

The roof of the house is of standing-seam metal, and the foundation is red brick, three layers thick. Watts family members report the bricks were made on-site by the enslaved residents of the plantation. County records demonstrate the builder, Captain Samuel F. McGehee, did, in fact, own many slaves. The framing is impressive: oak timbers (likely cut at the water-powered sawmill on Spring Creek) are fastened with mortise and tenon joints. The original white clapboard siding remains intact under aluminum siding, which was installed by the Watts family, but the original six-over-six, double-hung windows (taller on the first floor than the second) were replaced in the 1990s. Each of the six great rooms has two windows, wide-plank pine floors, and a center fireplace with its original wooden mantle. Sheet rock replaced plaster in the 1980s when the house underwent a renovation.

At an unknown point in time (before 1911) a nursery was added to the east side of the house. This later became the kitchen and was in use as late as the early 2000s when the house was last occupied. This old addition has since fallen into disrepair and has been removed. Plans are in place to rebuild the kitchen in the same location. Sometime during the mid-1900s, a bathroom was constructed at the inside corner of the “L” on the first floor. This room, while in a convenient and minimally disruptive location, does impose approximately nine feet into the corner room on the first floor. A bathroom on the second floor was also added, exterior to the inside corner of the “L” and supported by the roof of the back porch. This second-floor bathroom (as well as the porch) were badly damaged and had to be removed also. Plans are in place to build a 12-foot square column exterior to the inner “L” corner which will connect the two hallways on the first floor and extend to the second floor for a bathroom.

In a bullet list, include any outbuildings or secondary resources or major landscape features (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

- There is a well house in the yard, north of the house which we know from photographs was there as early as the 1940s. It is made of cinderblock.

- There is a dairy barn across Route 654 which was also identified in the county architectural survey as a secondary structure of interest. While the barn remains in the Watts family, it is not part of the property presently owned by the applicants.

4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property.

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Over the years, Mount Airy has come under the ownership of several prominent Virginia families and some notable men, including three captains of the Confederate army. Charlotte County land records show that, by the late 1840s, Samuel F. McGehee, in addition to a large tract of land, had also acquired three mills: Brooks Baker's grist and sawmills (located at the confluence of Spring and Spencer's Creeks) and Thomas Watkins's mill further up Spring Creek (DB 26/6; 27/23). Considering the property had three mills, a blacksmith shop, and storehouses, Mount Airy was evidently among the largest plantations in the area (Priddy).

In addition to being a planter, Samuel McGehee was a delegate in the Virginia General Assembly and a member of historic Briery Church (Priddy). At the beginning of the Civil War, Capt. McGehee raised an artillery company which became part of the 22nd Virginia Battalion of the Confederate States Army, and Samuel's son, Edward, later took over as Captain of the company (Priddy). When the war ended, the old plantation economic system collapsed, and Capt. McGehee was forced to sell Mount Airy and all his lands at public auction (Priddy, DB 33/485). The property was purchased by William Morton of neighboring Roanoke Bridge (great-grandson of early pioneer Col. Joseph Morton) who then sold it to Captain Joshua Warren White, the husband of his niece, Bettie A. Morton (DB 33/485; 34/217). When Capt. Edward McGehee died in the 1930s, his daughter-in-law, Thomasine McGehee, wrote a novel about Mount Airy and the McGehee family, using fictitious names. The novel, *Journey Proud*, which was published in 1939, is probably based on the stories she and her husband heard from Capt. Edward McGehee or other members of the McGehee family who lived there. While fiction, it has value as a potential secondary historical record.

Captain White, Mount Airy's third owner, was also a member of the wealthy planter class. His family owned large tracts of land in Perquimans County, NC, where he lived until the end of the war (Perquimans Co. Records, Winslow). In the new, agricultural economy of the south and under Captain White's management, Mount Airy (Eureka Mills) again thrived (Cox). According to articles in the Charlotte Gazette printed in the 1870s, corn, oats, wheat, clover, timothy, and tobacco were growing at Mount Airy, and it had become a bit of an agricultural hub. In 1874, Eureka Mills Grange was established at Mount Airy and Capt. White was elected Master of the Virginia State Grange at Richmond. During this time, Eureka Mills (located at the fork of Spring and Spencer's Creeks below the house) contained a flouring mill, "with its ponderous wheel," a lodging house, a storehouse, cabins, barns, and a post office which was open from 1872-1905 (Genealogy Trails). All were operated by Captain White who was also owner of the Richmond newspaper "The Virginia Patron." Sadly, both Captain White and his wife died young, just ten years after purchasing Mount Airy. They left behind seven orphaned children ranging in age from four to seventeen. The White children's uncle, Lee W. Morton, of neighboring Elmshade, managed the Mount Airy estate until the children were grown.

In 1911, John Wilson Watts, a successful farmer and real estate businessman from Alexander County, NC (the applicants' great-grandfather) purchased Mount Airy and its remaining 530 acres from Joshua Warren White, son of Captain White (the other half having been dispersed among two of Capt. White's daughters). John Wilson Watts also died just ten years after acquiring the farm, leaving his widow, Fannie L. White (no relation to Captain White) with four young children and a very large farm to manage through the 1920s and into the

Great Depression. Parcels of land were sold one by one over the years to make ends meet, and still, the house was nearly lost on more than one occasion due to financial hardship and the wear of time and weather. Mount Airy has belonged to the Watts family for 115 years. Both the applicants' father and grandfather were born in the house, and so, the house, in addition to its rich architectural and historical value, has tremendous sentimental value to the applicants and members of the Watts family who call it home. For all these reasons, the applicants endeavor to restore the house and preserve it into the future.

Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property, such as deeds, census and tax records, and/or published articles and books. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

Works Cited

Ailsworth, Timothy, et. al. *Charlotte County... Rich Indeed: A History from Prehistoric Times Through the Civil War*. Whittet and Shepperson, 1979.

Asher, Benjamin. *The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter: Illustrated by Sixty-Four Engravings, Which Exhibit the Orders of Architecture, and Other Elements of the Art, Designed for Use by Carpenters and Builders*. Benjamin B. Mussey, 1850.

Blanton, Alison S., et. al. *Historical Architecture Survey of Charlotte County, Virginia*. Hill Studio, P. C., 1998.

Charlotte County, Virginia, Deed Books 21, 25, 26, 27, 33, 34, 53, 60, 68, and 76. Charlotte County Clerk's Office, Charlotte Court House, Virginia.

Cox, Leonard. "Eureka Mills." *The Charlotte Gazette*, vol. 2, no. 8, 2 July. 1874, pp. 2.

Fischer, David Hackett. "Virginia Building Ways: English Origins of Chesapeake Houses." *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, Oxford UP, 1989, pp. 264-74.

Foster, Gerald. *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

Genealogy Trails. "Charlotte County, Virginia Post Offices."
https://genealogytrails.com/vir/charlotte/hist_postoffices.html, accessed June 4, 2026.

McGehee, Thomasine. *Journey Proud*. The MacMillan Company, 1939.

Perquimans County, North Carolina. The Will of Joshua White. Will Book H. 1865. Accessed through the NCGenWeb Project website on July 14, 2026. <http://ncgenweb.us/perquimans/joshua-white-1865-will/>.

Priddy, A. S. "Some Old Charlotte Families: The McGehee Family." *The Charlotte Gazette*, vol. 60, no. 7, 7 Sep. 1933, pp. 3.

Winslow, Ellen Goode Rawlings. *History of Perquimans County*. Edwards & Broughton Co., 1931.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: X Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: John Walter Watts II, Bethany Laurel Watts Webb, Samuel Wilson Watts

organization: Mount Airy Farms, LLC

street & number: 474 Eureka Mill Road

city or town: Keysville state: Virginia zip code: 23947

e-mail: mountairyfarmsllc@gmail.com telephone: 434-465-3765

Legal Owner's Signature: _____

Date: _____

• • Signature required for processing all applications. • •

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Bethany "Laurel" Watts Webb

Daytime Telephone: 434-465-3765

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: _____

organization: _____

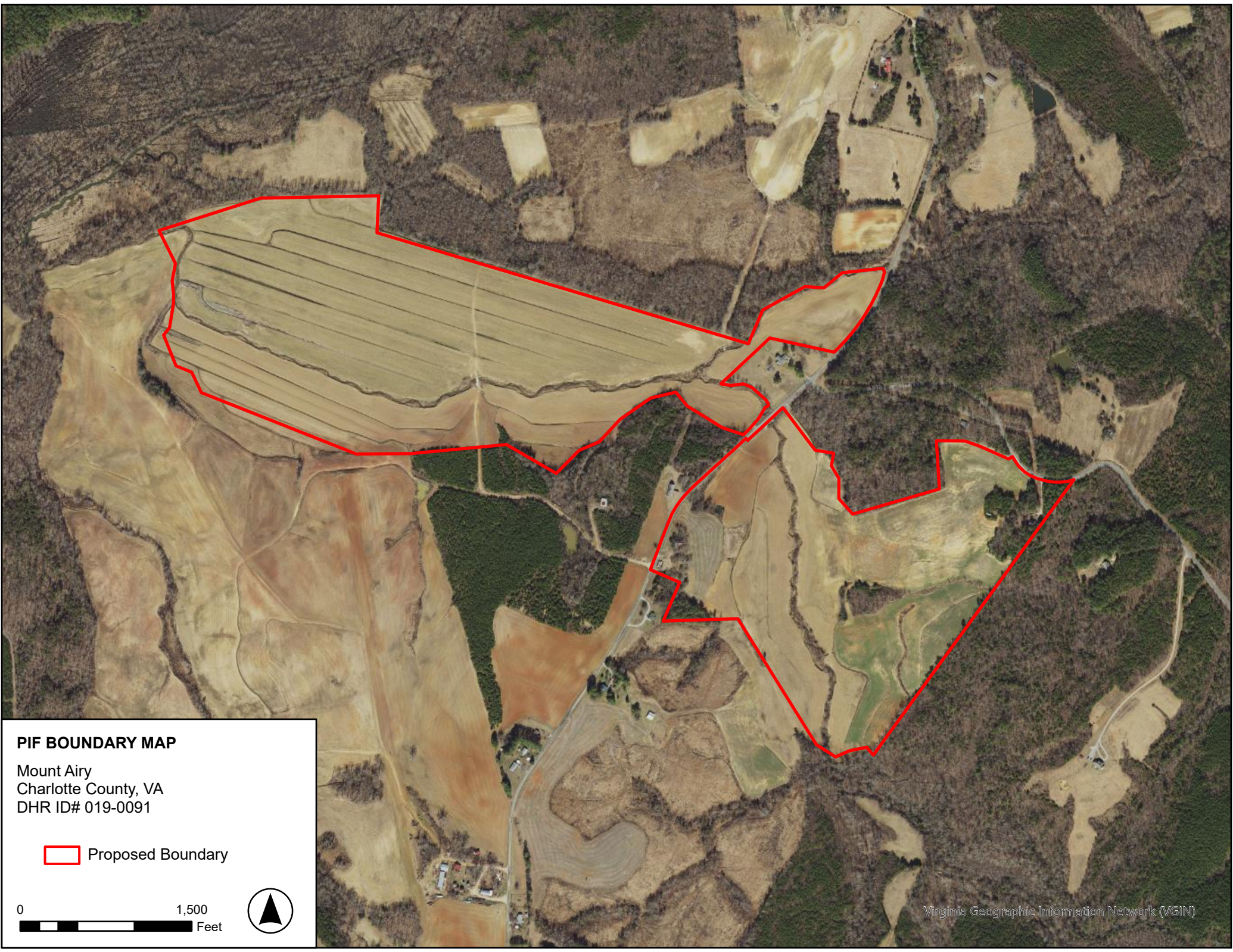
street & number: _____

city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____

e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Date: _____

PLEASE DO NOT ATTACH CONTINUATION SHEETS TO THIS FORM. THANK YOU!



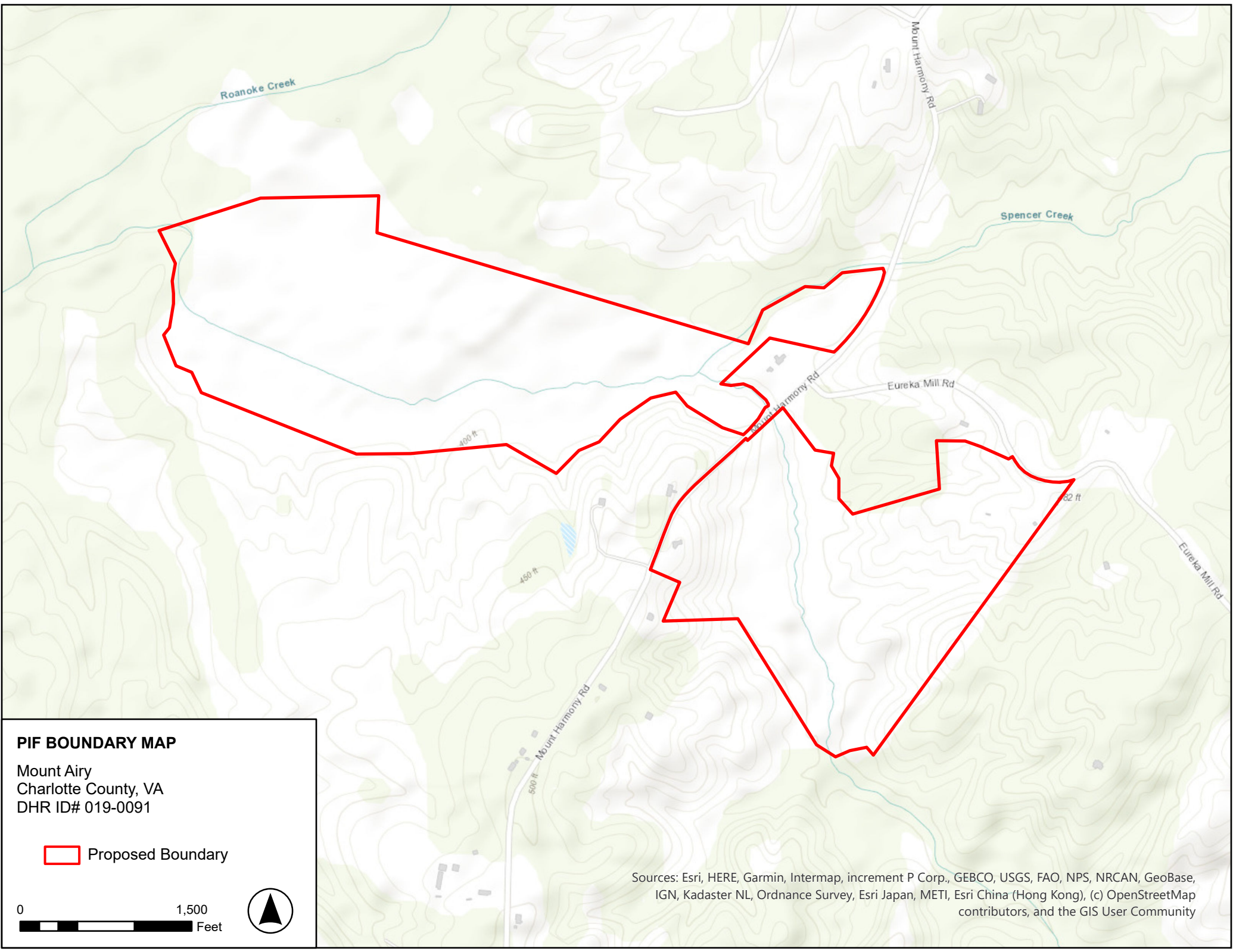
PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Mount Airy
Charlotte County, VA
DHR ID# 019-0091

 Proposed Boundary

0 1,500
Feet

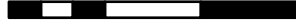




PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Mount Airy
Charlotte County, VA
DHR ID# 019-0091

 Proposed Boundary

0 1,500
 Feet



Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community





