There are places in our country where a handshake is still more important than a contract, where caring for land is still more important than being a millionaire. One of those places is the Cacapon and Lost River Valley.” – Peter Forbes

The Cacapon and Lost River Valley in West Virginia is still dominated over large areas by functional and largely intact natural ecosystems. Its forests, which make up approximately 85% of the watershed, are responsible for supporting its unparalleled biodiversity. Founded 25 years ago, the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust, an accredited land trust, has worked since its inception to forge strong relationships with valley landowners who care deeply for their land and who have a desire to preserve traditional land uses, such as farming, logging and hunting.

The trust has focused its work on protecting connected parcels with conservation easements—forming agricultural, forested and wildlife hubs and corridors that are close by or connected to public lands. The trust’s recent book Listening to the Land: Stories from the Cacapon and Lost River Valley (West Virginia University Press, 2013) tells the story of the connection the people of this valley have with the land and chronicles the community’s dedication to land preservation—dedication like that of Ralph Spaid, who turned down millions from developers saying, “It is more than a farm, it is a living landscape of memories for future generations.”

CHRONICLING A Community’s Roots