

# VCN 2008

Prepared by  
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Virginia Commonwealth University



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# About VCN

A white swan is the central focus, standing in a field. In the background, there are other swans and a line of trees under a blue sky. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

## The Voice of Conservation

The Virginia Conservation Network is an independent 501(c)(3) public charity with a membership of more than 100 conservation, environmental, and smart growth groups across Virginia and a 35-year tradition of environmental education and policy research.

The network's mission is: "To protect the Commonwealth's air, land, and water for the benefit of the people, as guaranteed by the Virginia Constitution." In essence, VCN serves as guardian of the public trust by tracking the work of agencies, regulators, and legislators and calling on them to fulfill their constitutional obligation to protect natural resources for the common good.

VCN strives to be Virginia's "Voice of Conservation." Through an open and transparent process, the network convenes environmental advocates forge a common, proactive legislative agenda. A key partnership with the Virginia League of Conservation Voters helps deliver that common agenda to policymakers through white papers, lobbying, and Legislative Contact Teams staffed by constituent volunteers.

The network's role as capacity builder for grassroots organizations goes hand in hand with its role as common-agenda convener. Building stronger grassroots organizations translates into greater political power for Virginia's conservation community.

Each year, VCN hosts Virginia Environmental Assembly., which serves as the network's annual meeting. This report was prepared for the 2008 Assembly, hosted by the Virginia Commonwealth University on Sept. 27, 2008.

## **Bald Eagle Members**

Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
Garden Club of Virginia  
Piedmont Environmental Council  
Southern Environmental Law Center  
Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club

## **Cardinal Members**

Audubon Naturalist Society  
Environment Virginia  
James River Association  
The Nature Conservancy  
Virginia Council of Trout Unlimited  
Virginia League of Conservation Voters • Virginia  
League of Conservation Voters - Education Fund

## **Tiger Swallowtail Members**

Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore  
Coalition for Smarter Growth  
Coastal Conservation Association Virginia  
Episcopal Diocese Committee on the  
Stewardship of Creation  
Elizabeth River Project  
National Parks Conservation Association  
Scenic Virginia  
Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation  
Southeastern Rural Community Assistance Project  
Trust for Public Land  
Valley Conservation Council  
Virginia Native Plant Society  
Wetlands Watch  
Western Service Area of the Virginia Recreation  
and Parks Society  
Wildlife Center of Virginia

## **Dogwood Members**

Alliance for Community Choice in Transportation  
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay  
Appalachian Voices

Arlington Coalition for Sensible Transportation  
Audubon Society of Northern Virginia  
BikeWalk Virginia  
Blue Ridge Environmental Network  
Cabell Brand Center  
Cape Henry Audubon Society  
Capitol Region Land Conservancy  
Chesapeake Climate Action Network  
Citizens for a Fort Monroe National Park  
Civil War Preservation Trust  
Conservation Park of Virginia  
Dan River Basin Association  
Flora of Virginia Project  
Friends of Dyke Marsh  
Friends of Daniel's Run Park  
Friends of Powhatan Creek Watershed  
Friends of Rockfish Watershed  
Friends of Stafford Creeks  
Friends of the Rappahannock  
Friends of the Rivers of Virginia  
Goose Creek Association  
Hands Across the Lake  
Highlanders for Responsible Development  
Lynnhaven River Now  
Northern Neck Audubon Society  
Northern Virginia Conservation Trust  
Partnership for Smarter Growth  
People's Alliance for Clean Energy  
People Protecting Watershed Headwaters  
Potomac Conservancy  
Rail Solution  
Rappahannock League for Environmental Protec-  
tion  
Richmond Audubon Society  
Rockbridge Area Conservation Council  
Rockfish Valley Foundation  
Rural Nelson  
Shenandoah Valley Pure Water Forum  
Upper Tennessee River Roundtable  
Virginia Association of Soil and  
Water Conservation Districts

Virginia Audubon Council  
Virginia Bicycling Federation  
Virginia Bluebird Society  
Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust  
Virginia Forest Watch  
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy  
Virginia Society of Ornithology  
Virginia Sustainable Building Network  
Virginia Wilderness Committee  
Western Virginia Land Trust  
Wild Virginia

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Programs Coordinator

# Research



## 2008 Highlights

Thanks to a clear and open process, more than 50 environmental nonprofits now actively participate in the VCN policy workgroups, including Piedmont Environmental Council, Southern Environmental Law Center, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Sierra Club, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Scenic Virginia and many more. These workgroups are the research engine behind VCN's common agenda for environmental advocacy. They consider everything from wetlands permitting to mass transit spending to home weatherization programs.

VCN workgroups produced 16 white papers for the 2008 edition of the *Virginia Conservation Briefing Book*, which was unveiled before more than 100 activists at the VCN Legislative Workshop in December 2007. The *Briefing Book* is published in cooperation with the Virginia League of Conservation Voters and provided to each member of the General Assembly. The 2009 edition will debut at the capital on December 6, 2008.

In keeping with VCN's role as the Virginia affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation, network staff are also working with NWF and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to organize a summit of wildlife advocates, hunters and anglers, and biologists. The goal is to identify wildlife management strategies that help Virginia's wildlife adapt to global warming and build consensus for global warming solutions.

# Advocacy

## 2008 Highlights

A record 100+ individuals attended the network's annual Legislative Workshop in December 2007 and twice that attended the January, 2008, Conservation Lobby Day. By coordinating with the Garden Club of Virginia VCN was able to educate and inspire more conservation-minded citizens than ever before, demonstrating to lawmakers the depth of support for Virginia's environmental permitting boards and investments in sustainable agriculture to protect water quality. Many of those in attendance were volunteers in the Legislative Contact Teams (LCT) program jointly administered by VCN and the Virginia League of Conservation Voters Education Fund. Others elected to join this corps of citizen lobbyists as a result.

The landmark Lobby Day turnout was crucial in VCN's legislative victories this year. The network realized three of its primary objectives:

- protecting the integrity of the state's citizen environmental boards,
- blocking a proposal to open the door to uranium mining in Virginia, and
- defeating a developer-backed bill to end proffer payments that help localities control growth.

The network anticipates fighting the uranium-mining battle again in 2009 and will also seek to move a recalcitrant General Assembly toward more progressive energy and global warming policies.

# Outreach

## 2008 Highlights

As part of the network's commitment to coalition building, VCN has joined a 501(c)(3) "table" convened by the Virginia Organizing Project. This forum enables VCN to work with faith groups, unions, professional associations, and others to promote coordinated civic engagement.

In anticipation of the biggest election turnout in memory, VCN is asking its member groups help build a statewide list of conservation-minded Virginians by soliciting e-mail addresses at polling places on Election Day. This approach, used effectively by Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) and the Alliance to Save the Mattoponi in the past, will yield new online advocates for the common agenda. It will also produce new members and volunteers for participating organizations.

That power-building project is part of a larger outreach effort that aims to turn armchair environmentalists into armchair activists. With invaluable assistance from PEC and grant support from the National Wildlife Federation, VCN is overhauling its website, [www.vcnva.org](http://www.vcnva.org). The new site will be in place by November, 2008. Perhaps the most important component of the site is the integrated e-mail-activism system, which allows individuals to voice their concerns to legislators, regulators and local officials with the click of a mouse. The cost of the software required is prohibitive for most VCN members, but they will have access to it through VCN's common agenda.



# Organizational Development

## 2008 Highlights

In 2008, VCN moved to a three-person full-time staff, up from a single executive director in 2005. This benchmark testifies not just to the confidence of donors and grant-makers, but to the vision of those members who set out to reinvigorate the network earlier this decade. VCN now boasts separate staff coordinators for its member—capacity building and policy programs.

In 2008 VCN received grant funding to conduct a survey of its affiliated conservation organizations, which has already informed the network's core programs. For example, smaller organizations consistently rank fundraising among their top needs, and VCN responded with a panel of foundation funders and professional grant writers at its 2008 annual meeting.

The information will also provide valuable guidance as VCN undertakes a strategic planning process in 2009. In order to move to the next level of organizational growth, the network needs an up-to-date strategic plan. Recognizing this, the VCN board has secured grant funding to hire facilitators with the Institute for Conservation Leadership. This strategic planning process aims to lend clarity to the network's broad mandate via clearer project prioritization and written work and fundraising plans.

# Thank You

## 2008 Conservation Award Winners

Hon. John. W. Warner, Jr.  
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Robert Burnley  
Catharine Gilliam  
Lisa Guthrie  
Dan Holmes  
Caleb Jaffe  
Marsha Merrell  
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Joseph Tannery

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Virginia Climate Initiative

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