



**Virginia Conservation Network Response to 2021-2022 Biennium Budgets**

Investing in our natural resources is essential to ensure every Virginian has access to clean air, clean water, and our natural landscapes. Our 2021 – 2022 budget priorities include a commitment to meet Virginia’s Chesapeake Bay cleanup commitment, investments in land conservation programs, and ensuring resources for our natural resources agencies, specifically the Department of Environmental Quality.

The following outlines Virginia Conservation Network comments in response to the Virginia House and Senate 2021-2022 biennial budget.

Governor Northam invested \$733 million in natural resources in his landmark budget introduced in December. The House & Senate bills both reduce the overall funding level for natural resources set forward by the Northam Administration, however, we are pleased to see some much-needed increased investments in critical environmental programs.

**Meeting Our Commitments to Restore the Chesapeake Bay & Our Rivers**

In order to meet our Chesapeake Bay cleanup goals by 2025, VCN called on Virginia to invest in Governor Northam’s Bay cleanup plan (Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan) including:

- \$100 million per year for Virginia Agriculture Cost Share program, according to the Agricultural Needs Assessment.
- At least \$80 million per year for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund to invest in pollution reduction projects and help localities meet their local water quality needs on time.
- At least \$55 million per year for upgrading the nutrient pollution reduction capabilities of significant wastewater facilities discharging to the Chesapeake Bay and tributaries.

The following outlines the budget allocations by the Governor, House & Senate:

Budget	2021			2022		
	Governor	House	Senate	Governor	House	Senate
Agriculture	\$47,000,000	\$47,000,000	\$76,000,000	\$42,000,000	\$42,000,000	\$ -
Stormwater	\$182,000,000	\$92,000,000	\$50,000,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Wastewater	\$120,000,000	\$40,000,000	\$60,000,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

VCN supports fully funding these programs and calls on the General Assembly to give these programs the resources needed to meet our Chesapeake Bay cleanup goals. In addition, VCN has the following positions on clean water budget line items:

- Support: 373 #1h – Provides stable funding for Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) by moving \$4.5 million to base technical assistance funding.
- Oppose: 377 #4s – Would block Virginia from requiring technology upgrades at wastewater treatment plants within the James River watershed, which receives 76% of the nitrogen pollution released by Virginia’s permitted facilities. Virginia’s legislators should reject this budget language, which would stall progress on our Chesapeake Bay Cleanup Plan and prevent an open and inclusive regulatory process for wastewater treatment upgrades.

## Protecting Virginia’s Landscapes

Virginia’s protected landscapes safeguard our game & nongame wildlife, keep our waterways clean, and help spur our outdoor recreation economy. VCN called on Virginia to meet our land conservation goals by fully funding our land conservation grant programs. Governor Northam proposed a historic \$20 million per year for the Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF), with additional funds for the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund and the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund. While we support \$20 million for VLCF, funding for Farmland and Battlefield Preservation Funds fell short – we called for \$2 million for each.

The following outlines the budget allocations by the Governor, House & Senate:

Budget	2021			2022		
	Governor	House	Senate	Governor	House	Senate
VLCF	\$20,000,000	\$20,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$20,000,000	\$20,000,000	\$5,000,000
Farmland PF	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000
Battlefield PF	\$1,000,000	\$1,250,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,250,000	\$1,000,000

VCN supports funding the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation at Governor Northam’s proposed level of \$20 million per year and calls on the General Assembly to fund the program at this level as well as fully funding the Farmland and Battlefield Preservation Funds at recommended levels of \$2 million per year each.

In addition, VCN opposes language included in Governor Northam’s proposal and maintained in both House and Senate budgets that restricts DCR’s ability to acquire land.

## Restoring & Enhancing Our Natural Resources Agencies

Virginia’s natural resource agencies have suffered decades of cuts, especially the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Governor Northam conducted a full review of DEQs needs to restore the agency and give it the resources needed to increase monitoring, enforcement, and equitable public outreach through Executive Order 6 including \$2.5 million for environmental justice and outreach initiatives. VCN called on Virginia’s General Assembly to restore funding to DEQ to meet the EO6 plan.

The following outlines the cuts the House & Senate made to the Governor’s proposed increases to DEQ:

	2021		2022	
	House	Senate	House	Senate
Water	- \$346,5000	- \$7,550,940	- \$346,500	- \$7926,952
Air	- \$115,500	- \$1,385,500	- \$115,500	- \$1,385,500
Comms / EJ	- \$525,000	\$ -	- \$475,000	\$ -
Land	\$ -	- \$653,500	\$ -	-\$653,500
Total Reduction	- \$987,000	- \$9,589,940	- \$937,000	-\$9,965,952

VCN opposes cuts to Governor Northam’s restored funding for DEQ and looks to the General Assembly to ensure the agency has the resources for increased needs for monitoring, enforcement of pollution control regulations and outreach to all communities.

Additionally, VCN supports the funding levels of all other natural resource agencies included in Governor Northam’s proposed budget.

## **Other Budget Positions:**

### Environmental Justice for All

- VCN Supports: Item 372 #1h – to establish an Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group to further HB704 & SB406.

### Transforming Transportation

- VCN Supports: Senate and House budget provisions reflecting the transportation omnibus bills (SB890/HB1414). Both bills provide a record amount of new funding for transit and rail, as well as increased funding for road and bridge maintenance, but the Senate budget provides more funding more rapidly. Accordingly, VCN supports the Senate funding level.

### Establishment of an Office of Offshore Wind

- VCN Supports: 125 #5h – Governor Northam’s \$275,000 investment towards the establishment of an Office of Offshore Wind. The House cuts this funding to \$250,000. The Senate cuts funding to \$225,000.

### Environmental Literacy

- VCN Supports: 373 #4s – Senate funding level of \$250,000 per year for environmental literacy programs.

### Oyster Restoration

- VCN Supports: \$1.5 million in oyster restoration and \$2.5 million in oyster replenishment each year, and an additional \$10 million for oyster reef restoration in FY 21. Senate funding level for oyster restoration (\$4 million each year), and oyster reef restoration (\$10 million).

### Shoreline Resiliency Fund

- VCN has a long history of supporting the shoreline resiliency fund to protect and ensure communities are prepared for rising sea-levels due to climate change. The fund was left zeroed out in the Governor’s budget, the House budget and the Senate budget.

### Commonwealth Corridor Rail Study

- VCN Supports: 443#1s - the Commonwealth Corridor passenger rail study by the Department of Rail and Public Transportation to connect Hampton Roads, Richmond, Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Roanoke, and the New River Valley.

### School and Child Care Lead Testing

- VCN Supports: 304 #1s – Senate funding level of \$188,024 the first year and \$401,572 the second year and three positions to fund the fiscal impact of Senate Bills 392 and 393 that require local school divisions and child care centers to develop lead testing plans and to conduct testing in accordance with those plans.

### Department of Forestry

- VCN Opposes: Item 107 #2s – Eliminates one of three watershed forester positions created in the Governor’s budget.
- VCN Opposes: Item 107 #3s – Reduces funding and staffing for the Hardwood Forest Habitat Initiative created in the Governor’s budget.
- VCN Supports: Item 107 #1s – Creates a Southwest Virginia forester position.