

# ESTABLISHING DEDICATED FUNDING FOR INCREASED CONSERVATION

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Virginian's identities and quality of life are rooted in our land. We take pride in our stunning and iconic landscapes: the rugged Appalachian Mountains, fertile Piedmont, tidal rivers flowing across the coastal plain to the Chesapeake Bay. Virginia's natural resources support local economies; form the foundation of our culture and diverse communities; and sustain the health of our people, our wildlife, and our water. But the demands facing Virginia's landscapes are growing and Virginia needs to increase the scale and speed of its conservation efforts. Virginia needs to establish a dedicated funding source to meet these challenges.

## CHALLENGE

Virginia faces dual threats of climate change and biodiversity loss. From stormwater and nutrient runoff (see *Tackling Polluted Stormwater & Restoring Local Water Quality*, pg 5, to air pollution (see *Improving Environmental Enforcement & Transparency*, pg 129), habitat loss and fragmentation (see *Ensuring Resilient Ecosystems Through Wildlife Corridor Protection*, pg 19), and increased development pressure (see *Conserving Virginia's Landscapes for the Future*, pg 31), as well as our looming 2025 Chesapeake Bay cleanup targets, Virginia's environment faces many challenges that Our Common Agenda addresses. And while the challenges and solutions are often starkly different, one common thread among them all is the need for more government funding to implement our solutions.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare both the necessity and desire of Virginians to get outdoors for recreation and mental health, with Virginia State Parks seeing over a 14% increase in visitation across the Commonwealth during a single month during the pandemic,<sup>1</sup> but also the inequities in access to the outdoors (see *Ensuring Virginians Have Daily Access to the*

*Outdoors*, pg 51) and the disproportionate health burdens carried by marginalized and underserved communities (*Improving Environmental Enforcement & Transparency*). Again, there are policy proposals through Our Common Agenda regarding these issues, but we cannot address these issues without adequate state funding.

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## SOLUTION

Virginia can take pride in its many past conservation achievements. However, if we are to meet the growing challenges facing the Commonwealth and address historic inequities, Virginia must establish a consistent, robust source of dedicated funding for conservation.

A dedicated revenue stream can enhance our existing conservation programs, increasing the scale and rapidity of projects to meet the growing demands placed on Virginia's environment. It will also allow for establishing new programs designed to specifically address conservation issues and marginalized communities that current programs are ill-equipped to address.

This dedicated funding must be used to supplement increased general fund appropriations for conservation initiatives. Overall funding must be increased to meet the challenges facing the Commonwealth. This increased funding will allow Virginia to fully capture available federal funding opportunities, such as the stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund,<sup>2</sup> Forest Legacy Program,<sup>3</sup> Agricultural Conservation Easement Program,<sup>4</sup> and Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program,<sup>5</sup> maximizing the outcomes Virginians receive for every dollar invested.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a source of dedicated funding<sup>6</sup> that provides a minimum of \$300 million per year to natural resource conservation. This total includes the needs identified in *Conserving Virginia's Landscapes for the Future*. The remaining funds would address the identified gaps in Virginia's conservation programs, both in the scope of work and communities served, as identified throughout *Our Common Agenda*.

Direct the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources to convene a workgroup to study and provide recommendations on how Virginia can increase the proportion of available federal funding for conservation that Virginia is able to capture.



Early Morning at Stoney Lookout  
Image credit: David Petersen