

VIRGINIA CONSERVATION NETWORK RESPONSE TO FY23–24 BIENNIAL BUDGET

Investing in our natural resources is essential to ensure every Virginian has access to clean air, clean water, and our natural landscapes. Our 2023–2024 budget priorities include a commitment to accelerate Chesapeake Bay clean up goals, invest in clean transportation, and fund the preservation of our natural landscapes.

The following outlines Virginia Conservation Network’s budget priorities and the actual allocations in the Virginia House and Senate 2023-2024 biennial budget.

PROTECTING VIRGINIA’S WATER RESOURCES

In order to protect our water resources and meet our Chesapeake Bay cleanup goals by the 2025 deadline, VCN called on Governor Northam and the General Assembly to fully invest in our clean water resources in the FY23-24 Biennial Budget:

- \$200 million for the Virginia Agricultural Cost Share Program
- \$160 million for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund
- \$150 million for the Wastewater Nutrient Removal Program
- \$883 million for Richmond’s Combined Sewer Overflow System
- \$1.5 million in competitive grants for environmental education

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

Budget	FY 2023			FY 2024		
	Governor	House	Senate	Governor	House	Senate
Water Quality Improvement Fund	\$314M	\$314M	\$314M	\$26M	-	-
Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program	\$230.5M	\$256.5M	\$230.5M	\$26M	-	-
Stormwater Local Assistance Fund	\$100M	\$25M	\$50M	-	-	-
Wastewater Nutrient Removal	\$69M	\$72M	\$69M	-	-	-
Combined Sewer Overflow Systems	\$165M	\$62.5M	\$165M	-	-	-
Environmental Education Grants	\$250K	\$250K	\$250K	\$250K	\$250K	\$250K
Urban and Community Forestry	\$3M	-	\$1.5M	\$3M	-	\$1.5M

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, below is the status of VCN supported clean water budget amendments in the biennial budget:

Budget Amendment	Status	Description
296 #2h	Amended	\$600K per year to the Virginia Department of Health to continue studying the occurrence of PFAS in the Commonwealth’s public drinking water. *Amended to \$60K for FY23
374 #2h	Accepted	\$300K per year to the Department of Conservation and Recreation to develop and implement a statewide environmental literacy plan.
374 #2s	Accepted	\$350K per year to the Department of Conservation and Recreation to develop and implement a statewide environmental literacy plan.
374 #2h	Accepted	\$300K per year to the Department of Conservation and Recreation to develop and implement a statewide environmental literacy plan.

Budget Amendment	Status	Description
374 #3s	Accepted	\$3.6M per year to the Soil and Water Conservation Districts for administrative support to meet Virginia's Bay TMDL goals.
374 #1s	Accepted	
374 #3h	Accepted	
374 #1s	Accepted	
374 #6h	Rejected	Increased funding per year to districts for routine maintenance for district-owned dams and expand the use of remote monitoring to all district-owned dams.
374 #4s	Accepted	
377 #1h (Oppose)	Accepted	Delays the prohibition on the use of polystyrene containers by two years.
377 #1s (Oppose)	Accepted	Delays the prohibition on the use of polystyrene containers by five years.
378 #4h	Rejected	\$300K per year to the Department of Environmental Quality to test fish in Virginia waterways for PFAS chemical contamination.
378 #6h	Rejected	\$320K to Department of Environmental Quality to support surface and groundwater testing for per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), "forever" chemicals linked to harmful health and environmental impacts.
378 #1s	Accepted	
378 #13h	Rejected	
382 #1s	Accepted	Funding for 2 new staff to prepare statewide mussel restoration plan.
388 #1h	Rejected	Funding for 1 new staff to do oyster stock assessment.
388 #1s	Rejected	
486 #7s	Rejected	\$3.0M in federal American Rescue Act Plan funds for improvements to the Fredericksburg Wastewater Treatment Facility

CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Virginia's protected landscapes safeguard our wildlife, keep our waterways clean, and help spur our outdoor recreation economy. In Our Common Agenda, VCN called for full funding for Virginia's land conservation:

- \$80 million for the Virginia Land Conservation Fund
- \$10 million for the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund
- \$10 million for the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund
- \$40 million for multi-use trails
- \$100,000 for trail tourism promotion
- Increased funding for BIPOC historic resources

The following outlines the budget allocations by the Governor, House, and Senate.

Budget	FY 2023			FY 2024		
	Governor	House	Senate	Governor	House	Senate
Virginia Land Conservation Fund	\$20M	\$10M	\$32M	\$10M	\$10M	\$20M
Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund	\$3.375M	\$875K	\$4M	\$3.375M	\$875K	\$4M
Multi-use Trails*	\$233M	\$57M	\$90M	-	-	-
Trail Tourism	\$1.1M	\$1M	\$1.1M	\$1.1M	\$1M	\$1.1M
BIPOC Historic Preservation	\$5M	\$2.5M	\$5M	\$5M	\$2.5M	-
Tribal Land Conservation	\$12M	-	-	-	-	-

*Includes Caboose Bill funding

In addition, below is the status on VCN's supported land conservation line items:

Budget Amendment	Status	Description
375 #14h	Rejected	\$40M each year for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation
375 #1s	Amended	\$20M in FY23, \$30M FY24 for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation. *Amended to \$12M in FY23, \$10M in FY24
382 #2s	Accepted	\$5.0M over the biennium to establish a Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund and implement the Wildlife Corridor Action Plan
c-76 #2h	Rejected	\$2 million for renovations of the Department of Wildlife Resources' Aquatic Wildlife Conservation Center to support recovery of Virginia's freshwater mus-sels.

TRANSFORMING TRANSPORTATION & BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Transportation represents the largest source of carbon emissions in Virginia. In order to change that, we need to shift to a cleaner, balanced, and more equitable transportation system. However, a continued focus on highway construction and expansion, a lack of safe and convenient alternatives to driving, and no cap on greenhouse gas emissions means that the Commonwealth still has a lot of work to do. To improve reliable, accessible transportation which meets our climate goals, VCN requested:

- \$200 million for the Virginia Housing Trust Fund
- Increase the share of state and regional funding for transit, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure to 50% by 2030
- \$2 million for air quality monitoring

The following outlines the budget allocations by the Governor, House, and Senate.

Budget	FY 2023			FY 2024		
	Governor	House	Senate	Governor	House	Senate
Virginia Housing Trust Fund	\$125M	\$55M	\$125M	\$175M	\$55M	\$175M
Public Transit	\$750.9M	\$750.9M	\$750.9M*	\$766.1M	\$766.1M	\$766.1M
Rail	\$431M	\$431M	\$431M *	\$367M	\$367M	\$367M
Air Quality Monitoring	\$5.5M	-	-	\$5.5M	-	-

*To be updated once the Senate Bill is engrossed.

In addition, below is the status on VCN's supported transportation budget line items:

Budget Amendment	Status	Description
121 #1h	Rejected	Provides funding for the Virginia EV Rebate Program.
121 #2s	Rejected	
121 #6h	Rejected	\$20M per year for the Driving Decarbonization Grant Program Fund.
121 #1s	Amended	\$20M per year for the Driving Decarbonization Grant Program Fund. *Amended to \$10M per year
126 #4h	Amended	\$10M per year for the Virginia Rural EV Charging Network Program. *Amended to \$5M for FY23; \$0 for FY24. Supports tourism more generally by targeting interstate highway travelers.
447 #1s	Rejected	\$900K per year for the Transit Transition Fund.
452 #2h	Rejected	\$15M for VDOT to establish a grant program to expand EV infrastructure in rural and underserved localities.
479.2 #1h	Rejected	\$20M from ARPA funds for incentive and retention bonuses for the transit work-force.
479.2 #3s	Rejected	

Although VCN has no position on proposals to eliminate the grocery tax, the current proposal must keep public transit and passenger rail funding intact. Federal relief funds cannot backfill any such gaps created by lifting the grocery tax, as those operating dollars serve as the foundation of the commonwealth’s rail service expansions and as critical matching dollars for federal transit funding.

*the transportation budgets include troubling earmarks for highway expansion – sidestepping the SMART SCALE funding prioritization process, including \$50 million to widen I-64 and \$10 million to extend Nimmo Parkway in the House budget, and \$190 million to widen I-64 in the Senate budget. VCN opposes any moves to subvert the SMART SCALE process.

DEFENDING CLIMATE POLICY

VCN requested to support clean energy development through the budget:

- \$4 million to increase low-income clean energy access for the Clean Energy Advisory Board

Budget	FY 2023			FY 2024		
	Governor	House	Senate	Governor	House	Senate
Low-to-Moderate In-come Solar Loan	\$30M	-	\$10M	-	-	-

VCN have positions on the following budget amendments line items to undo clean energy legislation and flood resilience through the budget process:

Budget Amendment	Status	Description
113 #1h (Oppose)	Accepted	Directs \$11.4 million from Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative auction proceeds to the town of Hurley for flood relief.
114 #4h (Oppose)	Accepted (Bill died)	Removes \$95.0 million from non-general funds each year to reflect the repeal of the Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Act pursuant to House Bill 1301
374 #5h (Oppose)	Accepted (Bill died)	Removes \$85.0 million from non-general funds each year to reflect the repeal of the Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Act pursuant to House Bill 1301
374 #6h (Oppose)	Accepted	Takes \$25 million from the Community Flood Preparedness Fund for the Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund pursuant to HB 1309.
374 #4s (Support)	Accepted	Out of the amounts appropriated for Dam Inventory, Evaluation and Classification and Flood Plain Management, \$10 million from the General Fund for the Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund consistent with the provisions of SB 756.
4-5.12 #1g (Oppose)	Not included	This amendment directs state agencies and entities to begin terminating the Commonwealth’s participation in RGGI and prohibits the expenditure of revenues generated from participation in RGGI without prior approval of the Governor.
4-14.00 #3g (Oppose)	Not included	The exact effect of this budget amendment is highly uncertain, but attempts to address electric utility rate review for RGGI costs incurred prior to the proposed repeal of RGGI. While enhanced ratepayer protections should be explored, these complicated policy decisions cannot be fully evaluated in the budget process, without public and stakeholder involvement, and as part of a repeal effort.