

INVESTING IN VIRGINIA'S HERITAGE & FUTURE

Michael Kane // Piedmont Environmental Council // mkane@pecva.org

Elizabeth Mizell // Blue Ridge PRISM // beth@blueridgeprism.org

Alan Rowsome // Northern Virginia Conservation Trust // arowsome@nvct.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Virginia's coast, piedmont, and mountains, we have a wealth of natural and cultural resources that are closely tied to the state's heritage and integral to its future. These resources are assets vital to the state's economic, social, and environmental health. Caring for these assets and ensuring they are accessible to every Virginian requires state investment in conservation. Thanks to forethought from past administrations and legislatures, Virginia has strong programs and tools. These mechanisms simply need sufficient, consistent, and dedicated funding to ensure Virginia's future generations have the kind of Commonwealth we want to leave to them.

CHALLENGE

Now is the time to expand conservation efforts. Without conservation, we will lose the places that grow our food, ensure the quality of our drinking water supplies, preserve habitat for wildlife, sequester carbon, and provide healthy outdoor spaces for Virginia families.

Across the demographic spectrum, Virginians have a conservation ethic. However, recent state budget spending on natural resources, state parks, and recreation is less than one percent. The 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan calls for additional funding.¹ The consequences of this lack of spending are real: lost opportunities to conserve more land and insufficient public access to lands that are already protected.

Virginia needs to fund existing and proven conservation mechanisms commensurate with demand and to match other sources of funding. Increasing state funding for conservation will leverage unprecedented federal dollars through the Great American Outdoors Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and strong private-sector support for conservation. If state matching funds are not provided to unlock these federal dollars, Virginia will miss out.

Our conservation efforts must acknowledge historic and current disparities in the allocation of resources and the related impact on some segments of the population, most notably native peoples and more broadly people of color. Addressing conservation needs and opportunities presents a vivid demonstration of a shared commitment to overcome past inequity, expand accessibility, and provide protection of our land and water resources important to all.

SOLUTION

More than 80% of land in Virginia is privately owned. Tools and funding are needed for landowners to conserve their land. Fortunately, the Commonwealth has effective land conservation programs already in place, but they must be funded robustly and consistently to meet the growing demands of our time:

LAND PRESERVATION TAX CREDIT (LPTC)

One of the most successful and progressive private land conservation programs in the country. It encourages voluntary land conservation by providing tax credits equal to 40% of the value of donated land or conservation easements.

VIRGINIA LAND CONSERVATION FOUNDATION (VLCF)

Provides state matching grants on a competitive basis for the protection of open spaces and parks, natural areas, historic areas, and farmland and forest preservation.

VIRGINIA FARMLAND PRESERVATION FUND

Provides matching funds to leverage significant local, federal, and private funding sources to protect the state's best farmland.

VIRGINIA BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION FUND

Provides matching funds to leverage significant local, federal, and private funding sources to preserve historically-significant places.

BLACK, INDIGENOUS AND PEOPLE OF COLOR (BIPOC) HISTORIC PRESERVATION FUND

This new fund improves the preservation of BIPOC historic and cultural resources.

VIRGINIA OUTDOOR FOUNDATION'S GET OUTDOORS PROGRAM

An existing program that is much more accessible for small rural and urban localities and nonprofit organizations than Virginia's other grant programs.

These essential programs must be augmented by a permanent, dedicated source of revenue that serves the wide array of conservation needs and opportunities, from pocket parks to productive farmland. Programs that support urban conservation and underserved communities with a sustained source of reliable funds will also allow localities to better plan their outdoor recreation infrastructure investments with certainty that their needs will be met.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

\$90 million per year to the LPTC. The entire 2% of the Transfer Fee should go to managing the LPTC and stewardship of protected land, no amount should be diverted to the General Fund.

\$30 million per year for the VLCF.

\$5 million per year for the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund.

\$5 million per year for the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund.

\$5 million per year for the new Virginia BIPOC Historic Preservation Fund

\$5 million per year to extend Virginia Outdoors Foundation's Get Outdoors program (GO) throughout the Commonwealth.

Support additional staff at state agencies: VOF, DCR, DOF, DWR, and VDACS' Office of Farmland Preservation. Bolster professional resources available from the Office of the Attorney General and Department of General Services to ensure the effectiveness of conservation agencies.