

A vibrant photograph of a sunflower field with tall grasses against a clear blue sky. The sunflowers are in full bloom, showing bright yellow petals and dark brown centers. The grasses are tall and thin, with some seed heads visible. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

ANNUAL REPORT



VIRGINIA CONSERVATION NETWORK
Spring 2024 - Winter 2025



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear VCN Partners and Supporters,

Our conservation movement continues to drive meaningful progress at the state level, and together, we are strengthening our collective impact.

Through our highly coordinated efforts, our Network has advanced critical environmental initiatives in Virginia—expanding access to solar energy, increasing investments to keep water clean, building desirable and affordable communities, and more. As we pushed forward on policy, we also deepened our engagement and relationships with people across the state:

- A new working group built shared trust and vision between VCN Partners on how to build and site large-scale solar in the Commonwealth.
- A two-day educational retreat for a bipartisan mix of Virginia lawmakers dove deeper into clean energy and utility policy.
- Staff recommitted and strengthened our work to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in the conservation community.

The progress we've made together is both inspiring and impactful. Thank you for being part of this movement and for supporting VCN's work. As you read the following pages, you'll see how we are not only achieving real policy victories but also building a stronger, more engaged environmental community. I look forward to strengthening our work at the state level with you in 2025 and beyond.



A handwritten signature of Mary Rafferty in black ink.

Mary Rafferty
Executive Director
Virginia Conservation Network

A YEAR OF DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT



155
155 PARTNERS FROM 83
ORGANIZATIONS CAMPED OUT
FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING &
PARTNER RETREAT

23
23 TRAININGS HOSTED ON
EVERYTHING FROM CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY



4
THE SECOND ANNUAL
CONSERVATION AWARDS
RECOGNIZED FOUR VCN
CONSERVATION CHAMPIONS



BY THE NUMBERS



106
106 LEGISLATOR MET WITH
CONSTITUENTS AT CONSERVATION
LOBBY DAY

6
6 VIDEOS HIGHLIGHTED THE
IMPACT OF FEDERAL FUNDING ON
CLIMATE SOLUTIONS IN VIRGINIA



455
A RECORD 455 ADVOCATES GATHERED
ACROSS 11 WATCH PARTIES FOR THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY PREVIEW

DEEPENING OUR ROOTS



BUILDING SHARED TRUST ON SOLAR & NATURAL RESOURCES

Through educational webinars, a two-day retreat with field trips, and countless individual conversations, the workgroup successfully brought partners together to gain an increased understanding of one another's perspectives on how and where to build large-scale solar while protecting our natural resources.



EDUCATING VIRGINIA LEGISLATORS AT UTILITY UNIVERSITY

A bipartisan mix of lawmakers and their staff learned from policy experts about the State Corporation Commission (SCC), the interplay between state agencies and the legislature, energy demand and the larger grid system, current clean energy policies, and decarbonizing the electricity sector.



HOSTING OUR INAUGURAL FELLOWSHIP DAY AT THE CAPITOL

VCN's Fellows hosted the first Intern/Fellow Day, bringing together interns and fellows from across our Network organizations. This event allowed us to create bonds and strengthen friendships across sectors by blending education, networking, and firsthand exploration of Virginia's Capitol.

STRENGTHENING OUR IMPACT



DEEPENING OUR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TRAININGS & ADVOCACY

In addition to our annual training on what advocacy 501(c)(3) nonprofits can (and can't) do during election season, we invited partners to a new training on how to spot and combat disinformation in our media and how nonprofits can play a role as trusted messengers to our communities.

SELLING OUT OUR 4-PART RACIAL EQUITY LEARNING SERIES

VCN partnered with Ebony Walden Consulting again to deepen VCN Partners' racial equity journey through a 4-part virtual training series open to our Network. The sessions focused on embedding racial equity, justice, inclusion, and belonging principles within an organization.



MAKING CONNECTIONS TO DISCUSS TOXIC PFAS

Our most popular educational webinar, with over 190 registrations, facilitated a discussion between farmers, legislators, and environmental experts sharing how farms using sewage sludge pose a risk to our health, businesses, and local communities.



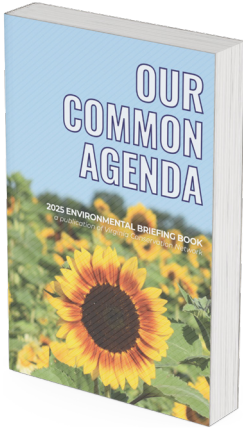
OUR COMMON AGENDA

CRAFTING OUR SHARED POLICY PRIORITIES

Our Common Agenda is the most comprehensive overview of Virginia’s environmental policy landscape. A collection of papers written by, vetted through, and voted on by our 170+ Network Partners, this briefing book serves as an educational tool for policymakers and conservation advocates alike to highlight state-level solutions for some of our most pressing environmental issues.

Our Common Agenda is published annually and widely circulated to policymakers, educational institutions, civic leaders, environmental advocates, and the public.

Our Common Agenda process saw increased engagement across our Network:



WORKGROUPS & CAMPAIGNS

As a facilitator for strategic action, VCN coordinates issue-based workgroups and campaign teams to share regular updates, strategize, and coordinate efforts between environmental advocates. Campaigns are organized between 4 main workgroups:

CLIMATE & ENERGY



WATER & FLOOD RESILIENCE



LAND USE & TRANSPORTATION



LAND & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



In addition, VCN works with partners to convene campaign teams and subgroups of the workgroups that work together to coordinate strategic advocacy.

On average, 35 individuals representing 23 organizations participated in each work-group’s monthly calls, and a total of 85 organizations participated in at least one work-group meeting in 2024.

See the highlights of our workgroup’s efforts over the past year in the following pages.

THE ENERGY WORKGROUP STARTS
BRAINSTORMING BRIEFING BOOK PAPERS AT THE
ANNUAL IN-PERSON WORKGROUP MEETING

VCN ENERGY WORK GROUP
MAY 22, 2024



ENERGY WORKGROUP PARTNERS

Appalachian Voices
BlueGreen Alliance
Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Clean Virginia
Climate Action Alliance of the Valley
Climate Cabinet Education
Community Climate Collaborative
EcoAction Arlington
Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
Generation180
Mothers Out Front
National Parks Conservation
Association

National Resource Defense Council
New Virginia Majority
Piedmont Environmental Council
Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Sierra Club- Rappahannock Group
Southern Environmental Law Center
The Nature Conservancy
Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action
Virginia Interfaith Power & Light
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Wild Virginia

CLEAN ENERGY & CLIMATE JUSTICE

- ACHIEVING 100% CLEAN ENERGY
- REJOINING THE REGIONAL GREENHOUSE GAS INITIATIVE
- ACCELERATING TRANSPORTATION ELECTRIFICATION
- DECARBONIZING BUILDINGS
- MAXIMIZING OFFSHORE WIND GENERATION
- LOWERING COSTS & POLLUTION WITH ENERGY EFFICIENCY
- MAXIMIZING THE ROLE OF DISTRIBUTED ENERGY RESOURCES
- DEPLOYING LARGE-SCALE SOLAR WHILE PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES
- APPROACHING NUCLEAR & HYDROGEN DEVELOPMENT WITH CAUTION
- PREVENTING PIPELINE HARMS
- RECLAIMING COAL MINES
- CURBING ELECTRIC UTILITIES' POLITICAL INFLUENCE
- SHIFTING UTILITIES' INCENTIVES FOR EQUITY & AFFORDABILITY

TRANSITIONING TO A CLEAN ENERGY ECONOMY

VCN's Energy Workgroup saw several significant milestones this year:

- The Circuit Court of Floyd County ruled that the regulatory action removing Virginia from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative was "unlawful" and "without effect."
- Virginia is leading the country's offshore wind industry with the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project, the largest in the country, which is currently under construction.
- \$156.1 million to support solar to Virginia Energy will support low-to moderate-income households through the Solar For All grant program.
- Bipartisan support for rooftop solar increased amongst lawmakers in the General Assembly session.
- As energy demand from data centers grows, VCN's energy workgroup worked to increase the visibility of and to stop the build out of new proposed natural gas plants.





PARTNERS TEST OUT ELECTRIC BICYCLES AT THE ANNUAL MEETING & PARTNER RETREAT

LAND USE & TRANSPORTATION WORKGROUP PARTNERS

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley
American Battlefield Trust
Bike Walk RVA
Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Coalition for Smarter Growth
Community Climate Collaborative
Drive Electric RVA
East Coast Greenway Alliance
Generation180
Greater Richmond Fit4Kids
Mothers Out Front
National Parks Conservation Association
Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets

Partnership for Smarter Growth
Piedmont Environmental Council
Rockbridge Conservation
RVA Rapid Transit
RVA YIMBY
Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Southern Environmental Law Center
The Nature Conservancy
Virginia Bicycling Federation
Virginia Capital Trail Foundation
Virginia Interfaith Power & Light
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Virginians for High-Speed Rail
Virginia Transit Association
Washington Area Bicycling Association

LAND USE & TRANSPORTATION

- SUSTAINABLE HOUSING GROWTH
- RESPONSIBLE DATA CENTER DEVELOPMENT
- TRANSFORMING TRANSPORTATION
- MODERNIZING PUBLIC TRANSIT
- EXPANDING RAIL
- SAVING PEDESTRIAN LIVES
- TRAILS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH
- MODERNIZING PUBLIC TRANSIT

DEVELOPING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

The Land Use & Transportation Workgroup continued pursuing transportation emission reduction goals by supporting vehicle electrification, public transit, community smart growth, and walking and bicycling safety. The workgroup saw success in the **passage of the Intelligent Speed Assistance Program** which will reduce vehicle speed to protect people from car injuries and fatalities.

The workgroup also pursued new goals this year, including ensuring safe, sustainable, and affordable housing as a climate solution.



EMERGING ISSUE: DATA CENTERS

As a campaign team for land use, the Data Center Reform Coalition continued the critical work of protecting our communities and natural resources from data center development. The group focused on data transparency, state oversight, ratepayer protections, and energy efficiency for tax incentives.



LAND CONSERVATION WORKGROUP PARTNERS

Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley
American Battlefield Trust
American Farmland Trust
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Blue Ridge PRISM
Capital Region Land Conservancy
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
East Coast Greenway Alliance
Environmental Defense Fund
Friends of the James River Park
National Parks Conservation Association
Nature Forward
Northern Virginia Bird Alliance
Northern Virginia Conservation Trust

The Nature Conservancy
Piedmont Environmental Council
Preservation Virginia
Rockfish Valley Foundation
Scenic Virginia
Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition
Trust for Public Land
Valley Conservation Council
Virginia Association for Parks
Virginia Capital Trail Foundation
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Virginia Trails Alliance
Virginia's United Land Trusts
Wildlands Network
Wild Virginia

LAND & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

- LAND CONSERVATION BENEFITING ALL VIRGINIANS
- PROTECTING HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES
- COMPOSTING FOR WASTE REDUCTION AND SOIL HEALTH
- PRESERVING WORKING FARMS AND FORESTS
- BUILDING A STRONG OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY
- INVESTING IN ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC LANDS FOR ALL
- CONNECTING WILDLIFE HABITATS FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES
- PROTECTING MIGRATORY FISH SPECIES
- RESTORING THE OYSTER
- PROTECTING FRESHWATER MUSSELS
- MAXIMIZING TREE CANOPY
- PREVENTING HARMS FROM INVASIVE PLANTS

PROTECTING OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

In partnership with the Virginia United Land Trusts (VaULT), Virginia Conservation Network oversaw the growth of Our Virginia Outdoors: a nonpartisan coalition in Virginia promoting the outdoors. Our Virginia Outdoors made headway in building the coalition that advocates for dedicated funding for our parks, public lands, trails, and natural resources.

The VCN land conservation workgroup successfully passed legislation that will **require labeling of invasive species at point of sale** to fill the retail knowledge gap for consumers to avoid the unwanted spread of invasive plant species in our communities.





VGN'S WATER WORKGROUP PARTNERS MET WITH
REP. ROB WHITMAN FOR CHESAPEAKE BAY DAY

WATER WORKGROUP PARTNERS

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Appalachian Voices
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Chesapeake Conservancy
Chesapeake Legal Alliance
Clean Fairfax Council
Clean Virginia Waterways
Environmental Defense Fund
Friends of Buckingham
Friends of the Rappahannock
James River Association
Environment Virginia
Environmental Defense Fund
Lynnhaven River NOW

National Parks Conservation
Association
Nature Forward
Piedmont Environmental Council
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Rockbridge Conservation
Shenandoah Riverkeeper
Southern Environmental Law Center
Virginia Association of Soil & Water
Conservation Districts
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
Wetlands Watch
Wild Virginia
York River Steward

CLEAN WATER & FLOOD RESILIENCE

- PREVENTING POLLUTED STORMWATER RUNOFF
- INVESTING IN WASTEWATER IMPROVEMENTS
- SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE FOR CLEAN WATER
- ENFORCING WATER QUALITY STANDARDS
- STOPPING PFAS AT ITS SOURCE
- REDUCING WELL WATER NITRATE CONTAMINATION
- PREVENTING HARMS FROM METAL MINING
- PROTECTION FROM TOXIC COAL ASH
- ENSURING LONG-TERM FLOOD RESILIENCE
- BUILDING COASTAL RESILIENCY WITH LIVING SHORELINES
- SAFEGUARDING VIRGINIA'S WETLANDS
- DISCLOSING FLOOD RISK
- ELIMINATING PLASTIC POLLUTION
- PLASTIC-TO-FUEL: A FALSE SOLUTION
- IMPLEMENTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
- ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

RECOMMITTING TO THE HEALTH OF OUR WATER

The Water Workgroup worked throughout the year to support Chesapeake Bay restoration goals. In December, Chesapeake Bay state governors officially **recommitted to the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort** ahead of the 2025 deadline.

The resilience campaign team continued to push the needle on statewide resilience planning and preparedness. Water Workgroup Partners worked to increase the visibility of Community Flood Preparedness Fund funding available for communities to develop flood resilience plans and projects. Over **\$162 million of Community Flood Preparedness Funds has been awarded** to localities across the state following the most recent grant round. The next round of awards will be announced May 2025.

The **Office of Commonwealth Resilience was established this year** and has started hiring staff to oversee the distribution of flood resilience funds across the state.



VCN NETWORK PARTNERS

BALD EAGLE



CARDINAL

- Alliance For The Shenandoah Valley

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

CASA

Climate Cabinet Education

Community Climate Collaborative

Environment Virginia

Friends Of The Rappahannock

Garden Club Of Virginia

Generation180

Greater Greater Washington

James River Garden Club

Land Savers United DBAs

Lynnhaven River Now
- Mothers Out Front

Natural Resources Defense Council

New Virginia Majority

Potomac Conservancy

Potomac Riverkeeper Network

Powered By Facts

Shenandoah National Park Trust

Shenandoah Valley Conservancy

The Conservation Fund

The Nature Conservancy In Virginia

Virginia Interfaith Power & Light

Wetlands Watch

TIGER SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY

- Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance

Appalachian Voices

Bike Walk RVA

Blue Green Alliance

Blue Ridge Prism

Capital Region Land Conservancy

Capital Trees

Center For Progressive Reform

Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Clean Fairfax Council

Coalition for Smarter Growth

Cowpasture River Preservation Association

East Coast Greenway Alliance

Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at James Madison University

Fairfax County Park Foundation

Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
- Friends of the Lower Appomattox River

Indigenous Conservation Council

Keep Virginia Beautiful

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Nature Forward

New River Land Trust

Northern Virginia Bird Alliance

Oceana

Partnership for Smarter Growth

Rockbridge Conservation

RVA Rapid Transit

Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition

Solar United Neighbors

Southwings

Spotswood Garden Club

Trust for Public Land

Unitarian Universalist Church of Roanoke
- UVA School of Law, Environmental, and Regulatory Law Clinic

Virginia Association for Biological Farming

Virginia Association for Parks

Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action

Virginia Native Plant Society

Virginia Organizing

Virginia Wilderness Committee

Virginia's United Land Trusts

Virginians for High Speed Rail

Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Wild Virginia

Wildlands Network

DOGWOOD

- Back Bay Restoration Foundation

Black Family Land Trust

Boxwood Garden Club

Bus Riders of Roanoke

Advocacy Group

Clean Virginia Waterways

Climate Action Alliance of the Valley

Concerned Citizens of Charles City County

Drive Electric RVA

Ecoaction Arlington

Elders Climate Action- VA Chapter

Friends of Accotink Creek

Friends of Buckingham

Friends of Dyke Marsh

Friends of the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail

Friends of the Rivers of Virginia

Garden Club of Norfolk

Garden Club of the Middle Peninsula

Greater Richmond Fit4Kids

Groundwork RVA

Henrico Conservation Action Network

Hunting Creek Garden Club
- Lake Anna Civic Association

Loudoun Climate Project

Mattaponi & Pamunkey Rivers Association

Mill Mountain Garden Club

Nelson County Garden Club

New River Valley Bicycle Association

Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets

Rail Solution

Rappahannock League for Environmental Protection

Rappahannock Valley Garden Club

Rivanna Conservation Alliance

RVA YIMBY

Shenandoah Green

Sierra Club – Chesapeake Bay Group

Sierra Club – Falls of the James Group

Sierra Club – Great Falls Group

Sierra Club – Piedmont Group

Sierra Club – Potomac Region Outings

Sierra Club – Potomac River Group
- Sierra Club – Rappahannock Group

Sierra Club – Roanoke Group

Sierra Club – Shenandoah Group

Sierra Club – York River Group

Southside ReLeaf

Surfrider Foundation – VA Chapter

Sustainable Mobility For Arlington County

The Clinch Coalition

TrailHead Collective

Tree Fredericksburg

Virginia Bicycling Federation

Virginia Council of Trout Unlimited

Virginia Green Travel Alliance

Virginia Society of Ornithology

Virginia Transit Association

Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association

Washington Area Bicycle Association

Winchester-Clarke Garden Club

YIMBY Hampton Roads

YIMBYs Of Northern Virginia

York River Stewards

ABOUT VCN

VCN coordinates over 170 environmental nonprofits working in the state of Virginia to build a powerful, diverse, and highly-coordinated conservation movement through four main working groups: Water, Energy, Land & Wildlife Conservation, and Land Use & Transportation.

VCN is a facilitator of strategic action, a resource for Network Partners statewide, and a constant conservation presence in Virginia's Capitol. Staff focus on strengthening the conservation community as a whole and winning environmental victories that benefit all Virginians.

2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Pamela Bingham
- Jeanette Cadwallender
- Karen Campblin
- Elizabeth Christeller
- Kendyl Crawford*
- Daryl Downing
- John Eustis
- Karen Forget*
- Mike Gerel
- Weston Gobar
- Jeremy Hoffman
- Chris Miller*
- Stewart Schwartz
- Clarence Tong*
- Calandra Waters Lake
- Kate Wofford*

*Executive Committee

NEW BOARD MEMBER

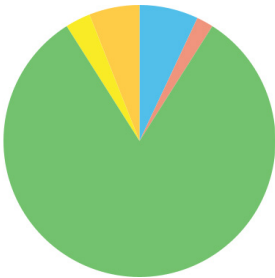


Mike Gerel, Virginia Science Manager at Chesapeake Bay Foundation, after getting voted onto VCN's Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting & Partner Retreat.

FINANCIALS

2024 INCOME

- 7% Partnership Dues
- 2% Individual Donations
- 82% Foundation Grants
- 3% Event Income
- 6% Partner Projects



2024 EXPENSES

- 68% Personnel
- 4% Travel
- 5% Events
- 11% Partner Projects
- 12% Office, Tech, & Administration



VCN STAFF



MARY RAFFERTY
Executive Director



PAT CALVERT
Program Director – Clean Water & Land Conservation



LILLIAN ANDERSON
Program Director – Clean Energy & Climate Justice



NICOLE VAUGHAN
Director of Communications



BRITTNEY BEAZLEY
Director of Operations & Fundraising



JAIME TREJO-ANGELES
Communications & Trainings Senior Associate

NEW STAFF SPOTLIGHT



FATIMA KAMARA, Policy Manager–Land Use & Transportation
Fatima Kamara spent the past two years as a Housing Justice Organizer in St. Louis, Missouri. During her time in St. Louis, Fatima became increasingly engaged in the bike, walk, and trail community and realized she wanted to focus her career on supporting smart growth communities. Fatima graduated from American University with a degree in Psychology.



LAURA BOWER, Administrative Assistant
Originally from Illinois, Laura has called Virginia home for the past several years. She has previous experience in the insurance and customer service industries, but is thrilled to be a part of VCN as she has a strong passion for the environment and conservation efforts. Laura graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in Secondary Education and Teaching.



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