

# SUPPORT HB549

Topic: Conservation and replacement of trees during construction process

Bill Patron: Delegate Patrick Hope

## OVERVIEW:

Virginia lost more than 500,000 acres of forest and tree canopy in the 10 years between 2013-2023, a trend driven by increasing energy infrastructure, road construction and development. This loss threatens public health, water quality, and climate resilience, as Virginia's 16 million acres of forest currently offset approximately 40% of the Commonwealth's greenhouse gas emissions while reducing urban heat and improving air and water quality.

HB549 is a local option bill that provides localities additional authority to establish tree canopy goals and enables all localities to adopt tree preservation ordinances — authority that was previously limited to Northern Virginia localities. By expanding local tools to conserve existing trees and requiring meaningful replacement after development, HB549 will help slow and ultimately reverse Virginia's accelerating loss of tree canopy.

## REASONS TO SUPPORT:

- Incentivizes the retention and protection of existing trees during development.
- Reduces the timeframe to establish replacement canopy from 20 years to 10 years, which will result in additional trees being planted post-construction.
- Increases replacement canopy percentages for the largest residential lots from 30% to 35% and adds replacement standards for mixed-use development.
- Removes the existing ceiling on tree replacement requirements, allowing localities to set higher standards to meet climate, water quality, or urban heat reduction goals.
- Strengthens enforcements by increasing penalties for violating tree canopy ordinances to \$2,500.



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This position was taken by Virginia Conservation Network (VCN)'s Legislative Committee and Board of Directors and is supported by Virginia's conservation community. For a complete list of VCN positions, visit [www.vcnva.org/bill-tracker](http://www.vcnva.org/bill-tracker). VCN is committed to building a powerful, diverse, and highly-coordinated conservation movement focused on protecting our Commonwealth's natural resources today and for tomorrow.