

Dear Members of the Executive Board and General Board:

VIRGINIAforever has continued lobbying for additional state appropriations for water quality and land conservation. Our lobbying is guided by VIRGINIAforever's adopted 2025-2028 Natural Resources Investment Plan.

The House and Senate appropriations committees released on Sunday, February 2, their respective versions of an amendment FY24-26 biennial budget. Further details were released on Tuesday, February 4. We have been assessing the House and Senate amendments. We now want to report to you where things stand.

In short, the House and Senate budgets amendments better support VIRGINIAforever's water quality requests than our land conservation requests.

Water Quality

Between what the Governor, House, and Senate proposed for three major water quality programs, VIRGINIAforever is generally pleased. We are especially pleased by what the House and Senate proposed for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund.

- **Water Quality Improvement Fund.** – The WQIF is the state-local cost-share program for improvements to wastewater treatment plants.
 - The Governor proposed \$17.4 M to WQIF.
 - The Senate agreed to the \$17.4 M to WQIF.
 - The House agreed to the \$17.4 M, plus added another \$31.2 M to make up for an anticipated biennial \$48 M shortfall.

- **Stormwater Local Assistance Fund.** – The SLAF is a state-local cost-share program for local stormwater improvements.
 - The Governor proposed no additional SLAF funds.
 - The House proposed \$50 M in additional SLAF funds.
 - The Senate proposed \$40 M in additional SLAF funds.

- **Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program.** – This is the all-important Ag BMP cost-share program.
 - The Governor proposed an additional \$26.3 M to the Ag BMP fund.
 - The House agreed to the additional \$26.3 M to the Ag BMP fund.
 - The Senate agreed to the additional \$26.3 M to the Ag BMP fund.

Land Conservation

VIRGINIA*forever* remains disappointed in the Governor's and General Assembly's lack of support for what historically have been very successful land conservation programs.

- **Virginia Land Conservation Fund.** – The VLCF is a grant program supporting the conservation of critical open-space lands, parks and natural areas, forests, and important historic and cultural lands.
 - Neither the Governor, House, nor Senate proposed additional VLCF funds.
- **Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund.** – The FFPF is a grant program supporting the conservation of important farmlands and forestlands.
 - Neither the Governor, House, nor Senate proposed additional FFPF funds.
- **Virginia Get Outdoors Fund.** – The Get Outdoors Fund is a grant fund for small, rural, and urban localities and nonprofit organizations to increase access to open spaces.
 - Neither the Governor, House, nor Senate proposed additional Get Outdoors funds.
- **Virginia Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund.** – The BIPOC fund provides grants for the acquisition, protection, and rehabilitation of tribal lands and historical and archeological sites of significance to the Commonwealth's Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
 - The Governor proposed no additional BIPOC funds.
 - The House proposed an additional \$2 M to the BIPOC fund.
 - The Senate proposed no additional BIPOC funds.

State Parks

VIRGINIA*forever* supports the expansion of existing state parks, the acquisition of lands for new state parks, and funds for their proper maintenance and upkeep.

- **Deferred Maintenance Support.** – It's well known that Virginia's State Parks have hundreds of millions worth of deferred maintenance.
 - The Governor proposed no additional deferred maintenance funds.
 - The House proposed \$20 M in additional deferred maintenance funds.
 - The Senate proposed no additional deferred maintenance funds.
- **Proposed New Oak Hill State Park.** – There is a proposal for the Commonwealth to receive, essentially as a gift, approximately 1,240 acres in Loudoun County for a new Oak Hill State Park. This land (and house) is the historic home of President James Monroe. More than \$40 M has been committed for its acquisition and start-up costs. In the budget, there has to be at least authorization for the Commonwealth to receive this property and related funding that may come with it.
 - The Governor proposed no amendment for the creation of this new state park.
 - The House authorized the Department of Conservation and Recreation to acquire the Oak Hill property and authorized \$1.25 M (Non-General Fund) for staff positions and operations.
 - The Senate included no amendment for the acquisition and creation of this new state park.

Next Steps

VIRGINIA*forever* will continue lobbying the House and Senate budget conferees – those senior legislators tasked with hammering out the differences between the House and Senate budget versions – and encourage them to support those budget amendments most advantageous to VIRGINIA*forever*'s positions.

We expect the House and Senate budget conferees to work quickly, as there are not many especially substantial amendments that will require extended negotiations.

The next week will be critical for VIRGINIA*forever*'s ongoing lobbying.

Thank you for all you do to support VIRGINIA*forever*.