



Quarter 1 2013 Newsletter

VIRGINIAforever Advocates for Increased Funding for Land and Water in 2013 General Assembly Session

VIRGINIAforever spent the 2013 legislative session urging members of the General Assembly to support funding for strategic water quality programs including the proposed water quality improvement bond package, support for Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts and cost share for agricultural best management practices and land conservation. VIRGINIAforever also supported funding for valuable land preservation programs including the Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credit Program, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation and the Office of Farmland Preservation.

Specific priorities for the 2013 session included:

- Support for the Governor's decision in not decreasing funding to the 47 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts. However, there remains a gap in the amount of funding provided and the districts' ability to meet all of their current statutory obligations. Furthermore, additional funding for technical resources is needed to administer other programs to help farmers achieve and account for the voluntary use of Ag BMPs
- Support for the additional \$2 million in oyster replenishment funding proposed by the Governor
- Support for the restoration of the \$400,000 reduction for farmland preservation
- Support for the water quality improvement bond package

Key outcomes of the session included securing an additional \$1.5 million in oyster replenishment funding and reducing the cut to the Office of Farmland Preservation. We also saw the passage of Delegate Lee Ware's [HB 1398](#) which makes it possible for monies intended for land preservation funding to remain a part of the puzzle in supporting the Commonwealth's land preservation grant programs. HB 1398 passed the House and Senate with overwhelming majorities. VIRGINIAforever continues to advocate for this bill to ensure it is signed by the Governor.

A significant investment was made with the adoption of the water quality bond package which provides bond authorization for several projects including wastewater treatment plant upgrades,

improvements to the Richmond and Lynchburg CSO systems, and the stormwater local assistance fund. VIRGINIA*forever* thanks the Governor and members of the Virginia General Assembly for placing a high priority on these critical needs.

Chesapeake Bay Foundation's "State of the Bay" Report Shows Improvement in the Health of the Bay

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation issued its 2012 "State of the Bay" report in January 2013. The report showed that the health of the Bay improved one point over the last report in 2010, and was up four points since 2008, a 10 percent improvement in less than five years. Of the 13 indicators that make up the report, five improved, seven stayed the same, and only one declined.

Highlights of the report included:

- Levels of phosphorus pollution improved, as did levels of dissolved oxygen, resource lands, oysters, and crabs
- Underwater grasses were the only indicator that declined, a result of higher water temperatures that caused eel grass die offs in the lower Bay and heavy rains that washed sediment and pollution into local waterways

CBF points out that although progress has been made, much work remains to be done to stay on track to meet the goals of the Bay Clean Water Blueprint.

The full report can be found at <http://www.cbf.org/about-the-bay/state-of-the-bay/2012-report>

Member Spotlight: Virginia Association for Parks

Thirty-five state parks, 59 state natural areas and 22 national parks, monuments and historic sites are located across the Commonwealth. The Virginia Association for Parks is the nonprofit umbrella organization for the respective citizen support groups and individual volunteers supporting these parks and sites. Leading VAFP's efforts of today is VIRGINIA*forever* Board Member Johnny Finch.

VAFP, an all-volunteer effort, is supportive of all parks within the Commonwealth, advocating for park issues at local, state and national levels. They also offer free technical advice and assistance to those who wish to form a new support organization, and they conduct semi-annual conferences that include training sessions and networking opportunities for attendees to exchange ideas.

Virginia's State Park System has regularly been ranked among the most frugally funded in the nation, routinely ranking between 44th and 50th among the states in proportion of state budget dedicated to parks. Despite this, according to Finch, "The State Park System has proven to be

one of the best investments Virginia has ever made, providing state and local economies an annual return of more than 11 fold on the General Fund appropriation investment.”

VAFP ascertains that parks provide improved mental and physical health of those who use the parks to exercise, recreate and relax. In order to maintain our state parks, Virginia needs to make adequate investments in its State Park System by providing the requisite appropriations. VAFP urges support for these measures.

For more information on VAFP, please visit <http://www.virginiaparks.org/>

To nominate a member to be featured in our next e-newsletter, please email info@virginiaforever.org

Round-up of 2012 End-of-Year Activities

The fourth quarter of 2012 was a busy time for *VIRGINIAforever*. In October, *VIRGINIAforever* hosted its signature event – the Bridge Builder Roast. The 2012 roast honored Senator Donald McEachin and Senator John Watkins of the Virginia Senate for their efforts to protect Virginia’s land and water. The Honorable Doug Domenech, Virginia’s Secretary of Natural Resources, presided over the event as the Master of Ceremonies. Eva Teig Hardy, Senate Minority Leader Dick Saslaw and Dr. Bob Holsworth shared good-natured observations and personal stories about each senator.

In December, *VIRGINIAforever* hosted its annual Budget Briefing meeting in which state secretariats and agency heads presented details related to the Governor’s proposed budget amendments to the 2012-2014 spending plan. Honorable Doug Domenech, Virginia’s Secretary of Natural Resources; David Paylor, Director of the Department of Environmental Quality; David Johnson, Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation; and Travis Hill, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, made presentations during the briefing.

The *VIRGINIAforever* Inaugural Progress Report was also produced and distributed in December. The report, which highlighted natural resources funding initiatives and recent land conservation and water quality improvement efforts, was unveiled at the Budget Briefing meeting, emailed to all *VIRGINIAforever* supporters, and distributed to Virginia lawmakers. To view the report, please visit <http://www.virginiaforever.org/20121220VFReportWeb.pdf>

Very truly yours,



Robert L. Dunn
Chairman