



April 16, 2020

Members, Virginia House of Delegates
Members, Senate of Virginia
State Capitol
Richmond, Virginia 23219

RE: Continued investments in land, water, and farmers

Dear Members of the General Assembly:

VIRGINIAforever remains grateful to Governor Northam and all members of the General Assembly who collaborated on a new 2020-2022 budget that made new investments in Virginia's natural resources.

It includes funds for *outdoor spaces*, *clean water infrastructure*, and *farmers*.

We now remain mindful that in the midst of this unprecedented pandemic you will return to Richmond on April 22 for the Reconvened Session and will consider the Governor's proposed amendments to the current budget and the new biennial budget.

As you prepare for the Reconvened Session, VIRGINIAforever asks that you consider the following as it relates to funding our natural resources.

- *Virginians are relying more than ever on access to and use of our outdoor spaces*

In this COVID-19 era, Virginians are turning in growing numbers to our state and local parks, state forests, natural area preserves, and wildlife management areas, trails and our lakes, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay.

The budget approved by the General Assembly on March 12 included \$20 million for the Virginia Land Conservation Fund and more than \$33 million for state parks and other infrastructure improvements.



Individual Members: Robert Burnley • Pamela Faggert • Adrienne Kotula • Maureen Matsen • Bruce Wingo

Emeritus Members: Robert Dunn • Johnny C. Finch • Henry P. Long • Carol Wampler

- ***Now is the time to take advantage of low interest rates and invest in clean-water infrastructure***

The pandemic doesn't minimize our need to continue focusing on improved stormwater and wastewater investments. Borrowing costs are among the lowest in history, and the need to improve and maintain Virginia public and private infrastructure hasn't gone away. Federal clean water mandates – such as the Chesapeake Bay's 2025 clean-up deadline – remain in effect.

The General Assembly's budget includes \$50 million (bonds) for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund and \$50 million (bonds) to the Water Quality Improvement Fund for wastewater treatment improvements, and \$11.5 million (cash and bonds) for oyster reef restoration as well as funds for other clean-water infrastructure.

These natural resources infrastructure investments are important – even beyond the environmental benefits, they will help keep Virginians working.

- ***We must support Virginia's farmers***

Our farmers continue their work through this pandemic to ensure the security of our food supply. You know that the annual documented need for agricultural BMPs is about \$100 million. Virginia's farmers have been true partners in cost-share programs to protect local streams and rivers. And even during this pandemic, our farmers want to continue investing soil and water conservation measures.

The budget you passed includes more than \$66 million (cash) over the biennium to support Ag BMP cost-share programs.

VIRGINIAforever recognizes that in the mere month since the Regular Session's adjournment, the pandemic has dramatically changed Virginia's budget outlook. We know the future is uncertain.

We do believe that continued investments in Virginia's natural resources will be an important part of Virginia's ability to successfully get through the COVID-19 era – our parks and outdoor spaces will provide needed respites, continued infrastructure work will help keep Virginians working, and our farmers will remain a vital part of our Commonwealth's supply chain and link to cleaner lands and waters.

We thank you for your leadership during these challenging times and for your work to improve Virginia's natural resources.

Sincerely,



Matthew S. Wells
WestRock

Board Chair
VIRGINIAforever



Kendall E. Tyree, Ph.D.
Virginia Association of Soil & Water
Conservation Districts
Board Vice-Chair
VIRGINIAforever