



February 22, 2021

Members, House Appropriations Budget Conference Committee
Members, Senate Finance & Appropriations Budget Conference Committee
Pocahontas Building
Richmond, Virginia 23219

RE: VIRGINIAforever budget priorities

Dear Members of the Budget Conference Committee:

VIRGINIAforever remains grateful to Governor Northam for the emphasis he has placed on natural resources in his proposed 2020-2022 biennial budget – and we remain grateful to you for your continued support for increased natural resources investments.

VIRGINIAforever is comprised of leading business and environmental organizations, and we advocate for state investments in water quality and land conservation. Our advocacy is based on VIRGINIAforever's unanimously adopted Five-Year Plan. This plan has been communicated to you and also can be found at www.VIRGINIAforever.org.

The Time is Now for Increased Support for Virginia's Natural Resources

Virginia's lands and waterways grow more precious and in need of protection as our population continues growing. Virginia's population has more than doubled in the last 50 years – with much of that growth having been accelerated over the last 20 years.

- Virginia has lost some 500,000 acres of forested land due to urbanization and land-use changes over the last 20 years. (VA Dept. of Forestry)
- Virginia's state parks system continues to see a rise in visitors, with 7.8 million visitors in 2020, a 13% increase over 2019, as people sought more outdoor activities during the pandemic. (VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation)

Continued on page 2



Individual Members: Elizabeth Andrews • Robert Burnley • Pamela Faggert • Adrienne Kotula • Maureen Matsen • Dr. Mamie A. Parker

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

- Virginia has almost 16,000 miles of rivers, almost 95,000 acres of lakes, and more than 2,100 sq. miles of estuaries on the EPA's 2020 "impaired waters" list. (VA Dept. of Environmental Quality)

Also, as you know, Virginia is facing the 2025 deadline to meet our Chesapeake Bay policy goals, with much of the to-be-achieved progress to come from the agricultural sector that remains under financial strain.

No matter the measure of stress, demand, or impact to Virginia's lands and waters, there can be a clear need demonstrated for increased state funding.

As you begin your budget conference deliberations, the VIRGINIAforever board of directors encourages you to support the following. We hope that the mid-session reforecast of revenues – adding some \$730 M in available resources – will allow you to resolve differences with clear favor given to additional natural resources investments.

Water Quality

- Item C-70.50 #1h Water Quality Improvement Fund; \$150 M (bonds) to support wastewater treatment plant improvements per HB 2129 and SB 1354
- Item 379 #1h Stormwater Local Assistance Fund; \$26 M
- Item 373 #4h Agricultural BMPs cost-share, including Technical Assistance; \$30 M
- Thank you for the additional \$12 M for DEQ staffing.

Land Conservation

- Governor's Proposal Virginia Land Conservation Fund

We ask that the conference committee include \$10 M for VLFC that the General Assembly approved in the 2020 Special Session and which the Governor and House proposed be retained.

Additionally, and importantly, we ask that you do not divert VLFC funding to specific projects as was proposed by the Senate.

- Item 97 #1h Farmland Preservation Fund; \$1 M
- Thank you for the additional \$1 M for DCR's Natural Heritage program

Thank You

VIRGINIAforever recognizes that the General Assembly often has multiple policy goals for its natural resources investments. Over the years, we have strived to put forward strategic, reasoned, consensus-, and budget-based suggestions for natural resources investments that will help meet broad policy goals.

We thank the General Assembly for welcoming our Five-Year Plan, which supports the budget priorities we advocate for in this letter.

Sincerely,



Matthew Wells
Chair, Board of Directors
VIRGINIAforever



Kendall Tyree
Vice Chair, Board of Directors
VIRGINIAforever