



VIRGINIA *forever*
OUR LAND. OUR WATER. OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

Natural Resources Investment Plan

2025-2028

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 3 | Mission of **VIRGINIA** *forever*

Page 4 | Board of Directors

Page 5 | **VIRGINIA** *forever* Natural Resources Funding Goals 2025-2028

Page 7 | Recognizing Progress Made and Understanding the Challenges Ahead

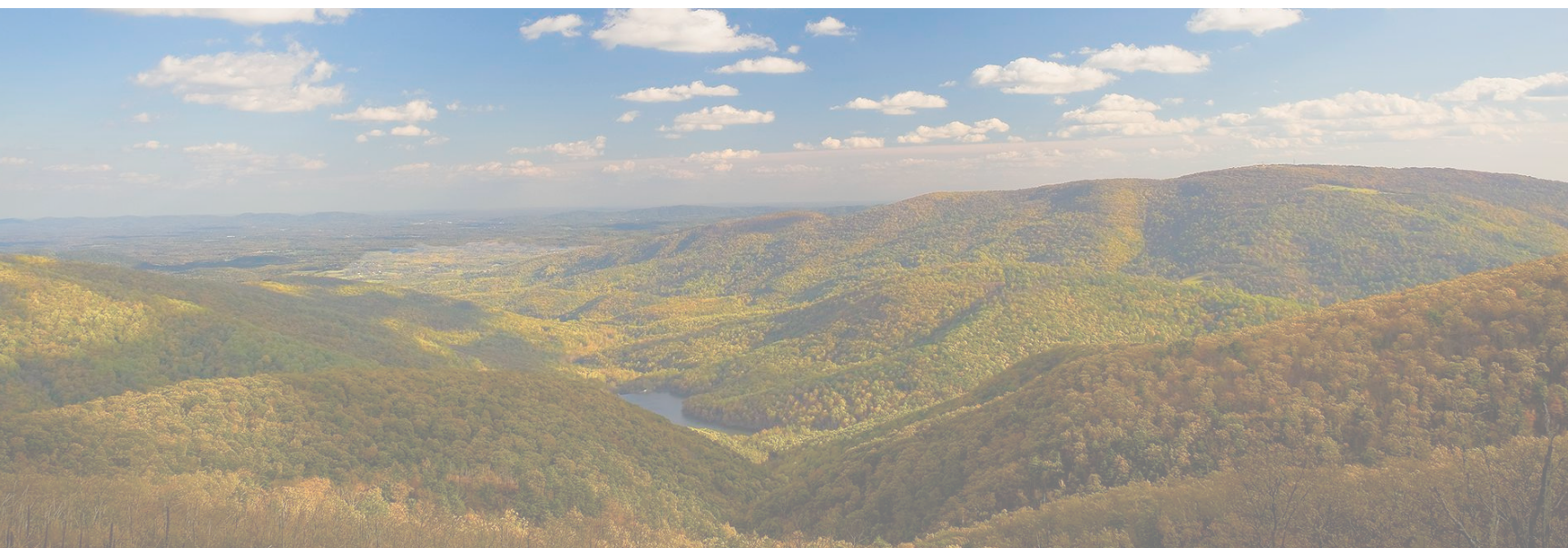
Page 9 | Land Conservation and Public Access in the Commonwealth

Page 13 | Water Quality in the Commonwealth

Page 18 | A Resilient Commonwealth

Page 19 | Conclusion

Page 20 | Resources Index



OUR LAND. OUR WATER. OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

VIRGINIA*forever* is a unique, diverse coalition of businesses, environmental organizations, and outdoor enthusiasts that advocates for increased government funding for water quality improvements and land conservation across the Commonwealth. We are the only statewide organization that has a primary focus on increasing funding for natural resources protection.



COMMIT

Protection of natural resources is a key component of the Constitution of Virginia, and the state has an obligation to invest in the land and waters of the Commonwealth. VIRGINIA*forever* is committed to supporting funding for critical land and water protection.

ADVOCATE

VIRGINIA*forever* brings together businesses and environmental groups to work hand-in-hand to advocate for funding in the Commonwealth of Virginia's state budget that protects land conservation and water quality.

JOIN

VIRGINIA*forever* is proud to be an effective advocate for protecting the best of Virginia's natural resources. However, future success can only be accomplished if we continue to speak with one voice about the importance of land and water investments.

OUR LEADERSHIP

Our Board of Directors guides our strategic direction and all advocacy efforts.

Peggy Sanner, Chair*

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Phil Abraham, Vice-Chair*

Virginia Association for Commercial Real Estate

Jim Thornton, Treasurer*

Huntington Ingalls Industries

Parker Agelasto

Capital Region Land Conservancy

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Elizabeth Andrews

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Virginia Poultry Federation

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Tyson Foods

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Potomac Conservancy

Mark T. Bowles*

McGuireWoods Consulting

Robert Burnley

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Home Builders Association of Virginia

Tee Clarkson

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Corey Connors

Virginia Forestry Association

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Rails to Trails Conservancy

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RES

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New River Land Trust

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Lynnhaven River NOW

Katie Frazier

Farm Credit of the Virginias

Ted Henifin**

HRSD

Kristen Hughes Evans

Sustainable Chesapeake

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Tim Kennell*

Virginia Association of Parks

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Cristi Lawton

Keep Virginia Beautiful

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Smithfield Foods

Henry P. Long**

TJ Mascia

Davey Mitigation / Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc.

Maureen Matsen

Charles G. McDaniel

Hilldrup Companies

Jamie Mitchell*

HRSD

Chrissy Noonan*

ReedSmith LLP

Dr. Mamie A. Parker*

MA Parker Associates

Eric Paulson

Virginia State Dairymen's Association

Molly Parker*

Dominion Energy

David Paylor

Reed Perry

Chesapeake Conservancy

Chris Pomeroy

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Erik Rison*

WestRock

Nikki Rovner*

The Nature Conservancy

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Northern Virginia Conservation Trust

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Kendall Tyree*

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Carol Wampler**

Jenny West*

The Wildlife Foundation of Virginia

Mark Williams

Luck Companies

Cliff Williamson*

Virginia Agribusiness Council

Andrea Wortzel

Troutman Pepper

*=denotes Executive Board member

**=denotes Emeritus Board member

NATURAL RESOURCE FUNDING GOALS

2025-2028

LAND CONSERVATION & PUBLIC ACCESS

- 🍃 \$220 million total for land conservation grant programs (\$50M per year in 2025-2026; \$60M per year in 2027-2028)
 - \$30M per year in 2025-2026; \$40M per year in 2027-2028 for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation
 - \$5M per year for the Get Outdoors Fund
 - \$5M per year for the Virginia Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund
 - \$5M per year for the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund
 - \$5M per year for the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund
- 🍃 \$360M total for Land Preservation Tax Credit (\$90M per year through 2028)
- 🍃 \$550M total for state parks, other public lands, and trails

TOTAL: \$1.13 BILLION OVER FOUR YEARS

WATER QUALITY

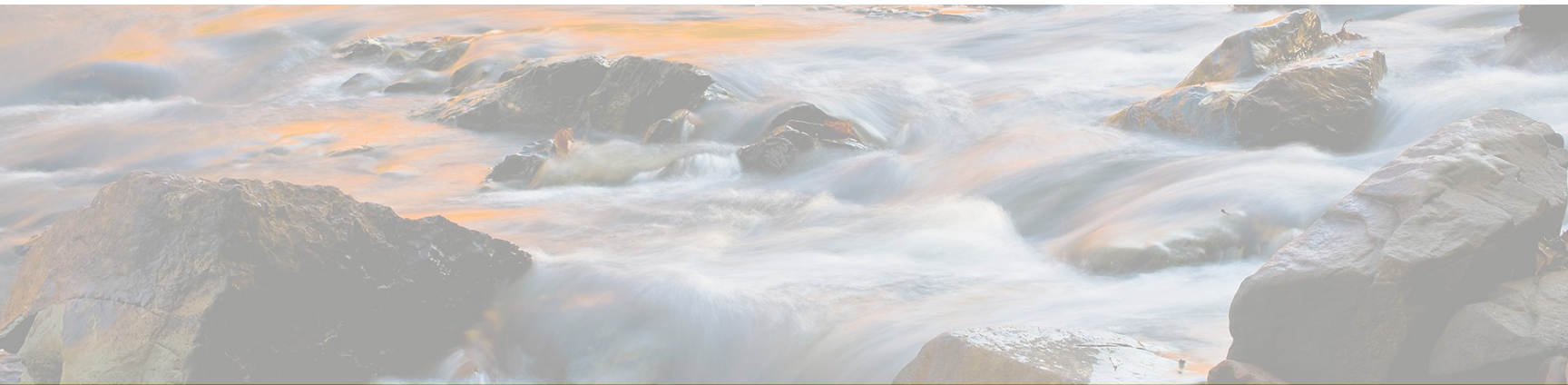
- 🍃 \$988 million total for wastewater treatment plant upgrades (\$200M per year in 2025-2026; \$244M in 2027 and \$344M in 2028)
- 🍃 \$200 million total for stormwater projects (\$50M per year through 2028)
- 🍃 \$894.2 million total for the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share program (\$540.5M in 2025-2026; \$353.7M in 2027-2028)

TOTAL: \$2.082 BILLION OVER FOUR YEARS

RESILIENCY

- 🍃 \$400 million total for resiliency efforts across the Commonwealth (\$100M per year 2025- 2028)

TOTAL: \$400 MILLION OVER FOUR YEARS



RECOGNIZING PROGRESS MADE AND UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

This is the third comprehensive plan for investing in the Commonwealth's land and water VIRGINIA*forever* has released. Previous plans were released in 2015 and 2020, and those plans covered a respective 5-year period. Confident that our plans have served as useful guidance for decision makers during Virginia's biennial budget process, we now offer our plan for the next two biennia.

In continuing our efforts to set attainable goals for funding Virginia's land conservation, public access, and water quality improvement priorities, VIRGINIA*forever* is unveiling its newest path forward in Virginia's Natural Resource Investment Plan 2025-2028. This plan, guided by state agency needs assessments and other research, sets forth funding targets over four years, including the next biennial budget (2025-2026) for Governor Youngkin to propose and implement, and the following budget (2027-2028) for Virginia's next governor.

The most recent state budget begins to make long-needed investments in land and water. This funding is already being put to work in communities across the Commonwealth. However, due to a significant backlog of funding needs, we need to not only sustain the current level of funding but increase our investments. Virginia cannot be a national leader in attracting new businesses without ensuring the most vital input—land—remains available for our already robust tourism, agriculture, and forestry economies. By the same token, the quality of our water is foundational to the health of our economy and the health of our citizens.

Natural Resource Investments Strengthen Virginia's Economy

Virginia's economy relies on our diverse natural treasures. The Chesapeake Bay, our rivers and streams, our state parks, farmlands, forests, open spaces, and battlefields all support Virginia jobs, tourism, and commercial activity across the Commonwealth.

In 2021 and 2022 combined, commercial seafood landings in Virginia were valued at nearly \$400 million, according to the NOAA Fisheries database. In addition, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) commissioned a study and found that for 2019, Virginia's seafood industry provided a \$1.1 billion economic impact, supporting over 7,000 jobs and providing over \$26 million in local, state, and federal taxes. This impressive impact underscores the tremendous value state investments in water quality improvements, especially in the Chesapeake Bay, have had on our statewide economy.

Similarly, our land-based natural resources also continue to provide strong contributions to the Commonwealth's economic well-being. This includes our working farmlands and forestry sector. The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service found for 2021, Virginia's economy saw benefits from agriculture and forestry industries by a combined \$106 billion in output, which supported nearly a half million jobs. Specifically, agriculture industries contributed \$82.3 billion in economic impact with over 380,000 jobs, and forestry industries contributed \$23.6 billion and over 108,000 jobs.

The Commonwealth's waterways, viewsheds, and protected areas are key drivers in attracting visitors from outside Virginia. In 2022, Virginia benefitted from \$30.3 billion in direct visitor spending, which amounts to a total \$46.1 billion total economic impact, according to the Virginia Tourism Corporation. Our lands, waters, wildlife, and historic natural resources are what visitors come here to see. They come here and spend money to fish, boat, hike, bike, and drive around our beautiful Commonwealth.

Indeed, outdoor recreation is a significant source of revenue for our economy. For 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis found outdoor recreation activity added \$9.4 billion in added economic value and supported over 100,000 jobs. At our state parks alone, over 7.8 million visits were made in 2021, generating a total \$32.8 million in state revenue, according to the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Public Support for Natural Resource Funding is Strong

In 2021, a bipartisan research survey showed nearly 80 percent of Virginians support dedicated funding to protect Virginia's land, water, and wildlife. This includes more than three quarters of Virginians who say natural resource investments should remain a priority, even in times of budget constraints due to other economic influences. The survey also found that over 80 percent of Virginians recognize the importance natural resource funding has on our economy.

Similar 2021 research conducted by Gallup confirms concerns remain a high priority from Virginians regarding the health of our rivers, lakes, and streams.

In recognizing the clear economic benefits and strong public support, VIRGINIA*forever* recommends the following funding levels for a range of conservation priorities. Our diverse coalition of businesses, environmental organizations, and outdoor enthusiasts has relied on the various needs assessments from related state agencies and determined the funding targets we believe will accelerate Virginia's outdoor economy and public enjoyment of our natural treasures. We owe it to future generations to invest in these treasures.

VIRGINIA*forever* encourages our elected leaders and other decision makers to use this Natural Resource Investment Plan as a blueprint for success in the development of upcoming biennial budgets.

LAND CONSERVATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Land Conservation Grant Programs – \$220 Million Over Four Years

The Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) provides critical funding for the protection of Virginia's farmlands and forests, parks and natural areas, and lands of cultural and historic significance. This is the only comprehensive land preservation funding that specifically addresses the priorities of the Virginia Outdoor Plan, the Conserve Virginia priority lands, and the Natural Heritage program. According to VLCF's 2022 report, demand for grants greatly exceeds the funding provided.

The program has been extremely valuable and effective despite being significantly underfunded relative to clear demand. Over the lifetime of the program, VLCF has received 455 project applications requesting more than \$170 million in funding, which is more than twice the available amount of appropriated funds. Increased funding for VLCF will bring a more sustainable funding baseline, better keep pace with the rising cost of lands, allow for more projects to be funded each year, and serve as an important match for federal dollars. Increased funding will also help bring more certainty to a proven program that is returning an incredible investment to Virginia's agricultural and forest industry. VLCF conservation projects often secure borders of state parks and preserves and are used to purchase inholdings within those parks, which protect habitat, create management efficiency, and cut down on maintenance needs.

VIRGINIAforever recommends increased funding for VLCF to \$30M per year in 2025-2026, and to \$40M per year in 2027-2028.

Current funding is at just \$16M per year.

Other important land conservation grant programs have also been instrumental in Virginia's ability to preserve our open spaces, farmlands, forests, and other historical landmarks.

The **Virginia Outdoors Foundation's Get Outdoors Fund** is an accessible grant opportunity for small, rural and urban localities, as well as for nonprofit organizations to increase access to safe open spaces in their communities. Projects include planning, capacity building, programming, and infrastructure, with priority given to shovel-ready projects with tangible and measurable results. In its first three years, the Get Outdoors Fund received 341 applications and was able to fund 30 percent of the projects in 53 different localities. The Virginia Outdoors Foundation currently funds this grant program out of its budget.

The **Virginia Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund** provides grants for the acquisition, protection, and rehabilitation of tribal lands and historic and archaeological sites of significance associated with Virginia's Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. In 2023 the fund received \$5m but did not receive funding for 2024.

The **Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund** provides competitive matching grant opportunities for the protection and preservation of the Commonwealth battlefield lands. Virginia's most recent state budget provides just \$1.5M in funding for grants; however, it does include \$10M in funding for two identified projects.

The **Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund** is a unique tool to incentivize local governments to invest in farmland protection. Localities with established purchase of development rights (PDR) programs are eligible to apply for these funds. Since 2000, more than 335,000 acres of Virginia farmland have been lost to non-agricultural uses. Currently, this Fund receives only \$875,000 per year.

For each of these targeted funds aimed at preserving Virginia's historic, cultural, and agricultural lands, **VIRGINIAforever recommends funding each program at \$5M each year over the next four years.**

Continuing and Growing the Land Preservation Tax Credit – \$360 Million Over Four Years

In 2023, the Commonwealth celebrated the permanent protection of one million acres protected through the Land Preservation Tax Credit (LPTC). More than five times larger than the Shenandoah National Park, the land protected through this nationally acclaimed program benefits all Virginians by providing clean air and safe drinking water, increasing access to nature, and supporting job-sustaining industries such as agriculture and forestry.

In addition, the resulting land protection is essential to meeting an array of public policy objectives ranging from farmland protection and climate resilience to meeting the goals of the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort.

Since its establishment in 2000 with unanimous approval by the General Assembly, the LPTC is the single-largest factor in Virginia's land conservation success, dramatically increasing the pace and scale of conservation in the Commonwealth. In the 35 years prior to the passage of the LPTC, according to Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) data, roughly 175,000 acres had been permanently protected by conservation easements in Virginia. In the 22 years since, more than seven times that amount, totaling more than 1,275,000 acres, have been conserved statewide, making Virginia a national leader in private land conservation.

The current annual cap of \$75 million for the program was established in 2015. As land values continue to increase, fewer acres are being protected each year through the LPTC. Consideration should be given to returning the tax credit to 50 percent of the fair market value of the land or interest in land conveyed so that more landowners are able to afford to donate easements, and the financial incentives are more competitive with increasing development pressure

VIRGINIAforever recommends increasing the annual cap for the LPTC to \$90M per year over the next four years.

Public Access at State Parks and Other Public Lands and Trails – \$550 Million Over Four Years

Access to, and the quality of, our state parks and other public lands remains a top priority for VIRGINIAforever. Currently, our state park system has a deferred maintenance backlog of \$280 million. Beyond this very unfortunate backlog, new infrastructure and new parks are needed to keep up with growing demand. Some parks require early weekend closing to new visitors due to capacity.

Based on these needs, DCR's capital request for state parks and natural areas for the 2025-2026 biennium totals \$300 million. For state parks, this includes \$45 million to begin addressing the maintenance backlog, and \$60 million for state natural area preserve acquisition and public access. Doubling the amount requested for the biennium would total \$600 million for four years, which is above VIRGINIAforever's recommendation.

DCR is not the only state agency providing recreational opportunities for the public. The Department of Forestry and Department of Wildlife Resources are both seeking to take advantage of increased federal dollars for conservation land acquisition, and both agencies must have funding access to match those federal dollars. Two primary sources of funding, the federal Forest Legacy Program and the Pittman-Robertson program both require a 25% match.

Regarding trails, the five multi-use trails that have received \$1 million each of the \$93 million appropriated in the current biennium will cost, by conservative estimates, more than \$430 million to complete.

The examples above demonstrate a need that exceeds the funding level that we are recommending. **VIRGINIAforever's recommended funding levels represent a minimum amount needed to meet growing demands for Virginia's state parks, public lands, and trails and to ensure the Commonwealth remains a recreation destination.**

Land Conservation Program Operations

Virginia state agencies that own and maintain public lands continue to have staffing needs to meet growing demands. Ensuring state agencies have the necessary staff in place is critical to caring for these natural treasures and making them safe and accessible to the public.

The Commonwealth's Natural Area Preserve System and state park system both continue to see an increased number of visitors, underscoring the need for adequate staffing and the ability to remain fully open and operational.

Similarly, lands placed under conservation easement that are held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) require adequate staff for stewarding the easement. This includes maintaining landowner relations and conducting annual monitoring visits. Specifically, VOF holds more than 4,400 open space easements across the Commonwealth, spanning more than 880,000 acres. In addition, the Department of Forestry holds 205 conservation easements, permanently protecting more than 94,000 acres of vital forest and farmland.

Supporting the funding needs to sufficiently staff Virginia's land conservation programs, including our state parks and other accessible protected spaces, should remain a priority as appropriation considerations are made.



WATER QUALITY IN THE COMMONWEALTH

The Chesapeake Bay—an iconic element of Virginia’s cultural identity and quality of life—has long been recognized as an important economic engine throughout the region. While work to restore the Bay and its tributaries and other Virginia waterways has been proceeding for decades, Virginia’s efforts in recent years have focused on reducing pollution from wastewater facilities, the agriculture sector, and stormwater runoff to meet the goals identified in Virginia’s Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and the Chesapeake Bay TMDL—goals to which Virginia, neighboring states, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are committed.

Virginia has made material progress to reduce the pollution in Bay waters. In fact, from 2010 to 2021, Virginia has reduced nutrient pollution reaching the Bay by more than 11.7 million pounds of nitrogen and 786.6 million pounds of phosphorus. However, while the targeted date for achievement of the WIP goals looms, substantial funding will be needed to accomplish the remaining work.

Water quality is important to all citizens in the Commonwealth, and our Southern Rivers’ creeks and tributaries outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed have ongoing needs as well. Water quality funding is essential to protect the uses of local water quality like fishing and other recreational purposes statewide.

To help lawmakers plan and appropriate the funding needed to meet the WIP’s water quality goals, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and DCR prepare and deliver to the legislature periodic needs assessments for each of the pollutant source sectors. This funding is also needed on a statewide level to reflect the water quality needs of all Virginians. VIRGINIA*forever* has relied extensively on these needs assessments, as well as on detailed discussions with agency leaders and other experts in developing its recommendations for state water quality funding.



Wastewater Treatment Improvements – \$988 Million Over Four Years

Virginia's wastewater facilities have led the way in pollution reduction. Reliable funding from the state, matched by local funds collected from ratepayers, has powered an extraordinary spate of construction over the last two decades to modernize and enhance the nutrient-reduction capabilities of many of these plants, and our rivers are already showing significant improvement. To help meet the Chesapeake Bay TMDL/WIP, many critical multi-year nutrient removal wastewater projects are in construction or upcoming in the near-term in various regions of the Commonwealth. As reflected in the needs assessment for the next four years developed by DEQ for this sector, inflation has continued to put upward pressure on funding needs.

Consistent with the annual cash flow needs for these construction projects as shown in the DEQ needs assessment, **VIRGINIAforever recommends appropriating \$200M per year in 2025-2026, \$244M in 2027, and \$344M in 2028.** These amounts are based on the needs of current and planned projects in various regions of the Commonwealth.

Stormwater Management Improvements – \$200 Million Over Four Years

Stormwater, which is runoff from precipitation on the numerous roadways, roofs, sidewalks, and other hard surfaces covering urban and suburban lands, is a major source of pollution to the Commonwealth's waterways. Under both federal and state law, many large localities, universities, and entities that directly manage stormwater are subject to municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permits that require adoption of best management practices to clean runoff before it reaches streams and rivers.

For localities in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, these permit requirements have been phasing in over the past ten years and will more than double over the next five years.

To assist localities and others working to meet these sometimes-costly requirements, the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF) provides state grants of approximately 50 percent (more for fiscally stressed localities) of an eligible project's costs.

In prior years, funding to support SLAF grants has not met the need as measured by needs assessment and WIP targets for stormwater. The most recent needs assessment prepared by DEQ for the next four years, together with information collected from localities, indicates an annual need for SLAF grants of at least \$40 million and likely more as localities focus closely on projects with complete needed upgrades.

The MS4 program, which attacks stormwater pollution through direct regulation, is an unquestionably important program, but approximately 70 percent of the stormwater-caused pollution load comes from unregulated sources, including a myriad of small localities and other sources. To effectively address this persistent pollution load, many Virginia legislators and stakeholders are working on furthering existing programs and developing new programs, which may include flexible, voluntary options that could feature state payments upon verification of water quality results. One such existing program, the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP), administered by Virginia's Soil & Water Conservation Districts, is a community/urban cost-share program that provides financial incentives as well as technical and educational assistance to property owners installing eligible Best Management Practices. To boost the development and implementation of such new and needed programs, funding should be appropriated annually in the approximate amount of \$10 million per year.

Consistent with estimated needs for SLAF grants and to begin addressing unregulated stormwater sources, **VIRGINIAforever recommends \$50M per year over the next four years.**

Agricultural Best Management Practices – \$894.2 Million Over Four Years

Agriculture is Virginia's largest industry, spanning the largest land area in the Commonwealth with over 7.7 million acres, or thirty percent of Virginia's total land area. It is not surprising, therefore, that agricultural operations collectively contribute more nutrient pollution to waters in the Bay watershed than any other industry in the state, and achieving pollution reductions on farmlands is critical to protecting the health of Virginia's waters.



**THE VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL COST-SHARE PROGRAM
HAS ASSISTED THOUSANDS OF FARMERS IN
IMPLEMENTING MORE THAN 50 DIFFERENT TYPES OF
BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.**

Fortunately, farmers are committed to protecting the natural resources on which they depend, and the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) program continues to be a model for success by providing substantial funding to assist those who adopt one or more effective best management practices (BMPs) that reduce soil and fertilizers from entering neighboring waterways. For the first time, FY2023 appropriations funding the VACS program fully met the level called for in the annual funding needs assessment developed by the DCR. High demand demonstrates strong justification for increasing investments in this proven program and demonstrates the need for meeting future needs assessments. The Commonwealth also funds the Soil and Water Conservation Districts who deliver to farmers indispensable technical assistance with implementing BMPs. Together, this funding promotes the implementation of conservation practices that not only improve water quality, but also that bolster soil health, drought resistance, productivity, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat.

Virginia has made progress in reducing agricultural pollution, yet significant work toward achieving and maintaining WIP goals for this sector remain. Previous funding that lagged water quality needs and farmers' requests has been an important reason for the slow progress. As our farmers compete in a global commodity market, meeting their financial and technical needs through these programs is critical to their success.

VIRGINIAforever recommends supporting the VACS program at levels consistent with the needs assessment developed by DCR. The total need for the first biennium is currently estimated at \$540.5M (2025-2026), although recent appropriations may reduce the need for that period. The total need for the second biennium is \$353.7M (2027-2028). These numbers include \$312.9M for technical assistance over the next four years.

Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF)

To ensure continued and reliable support for water quality improvement projects, the General Assembly established the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF) in 1997, which provides grants for point and nonpoint source pollution prevention, reduction, and control from a dedicated 10% of annual state budget surpluses. This arrangement has enabled historic improvements in the water quality of our waterways over the last several decades. Virginiaforever urges legislators to stay the course, continuing to dedicate all WQIF funds to water quality.

Water Quality Program Operations

Efforts to improve water quality throughout Virginia and in the Chesapeake Bay are directly dependent on the great staff at our state agencies. The ability to continue making progress and to meet the goals of the Commonwealth hinges on equipping agencies with the workforce necessary to do the job.

As previously outlined, Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts are responsible for implementing important components of the VACS program, which require staff in all regions across the Commonwealth. Conservation Districts are also responsible for providing other services, like education and assistance and coordination with the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Moreover, staff at DCR are required to verify and inspect best management practices and to provide other support services, including data development and programmatic assistance for nutrient management and Virginia's Resource Management Plan.

DEQ staff also remain critical to implementing water quality improvements in an effective manner, managing the various programs dealing with Chesapeake Bay restoration, permitting approval, technical assistance related to regulatory compliance, and more. In fact, the reduced federal role in wetlands management will require appropriate staffing levels at DEQ to protect this precious resource.

Ensuring adequate funding to support the staffing needs at these agencies is essential to seeing continued water quality improvements in the Commonwealth.



A RESILIENT COMMONWEALTH

Responding to Impacts from Climate Change – \$400 Million Over Four Years

VIRGINIA*forever* in its last natural resource funding recommendations acknowledged the growing threat of climate change and its impacts to the land and water resources we strive to protect. As both our coastal and inland communities contemplate resilience management projects and preparedness, the demand for state funding support is certain to increase.

Estimates of the impacts from climate change, including sea level rise and inland flooding, indicate that making Virginia and Virginians resilient to these changes is a mammoth task and estimated to cost tens of billions of dollars. Currently, Virginia has no formal needs assessment process to help policy makers and appropriators quantify the precise and manageable costs of responding to known resilience needs in the next four years.

However, an important indicator can be found in reviewing resilience project funding by the Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF) to date. The CFPF is currently funded from the auction proceeds Virginia receives in its participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) program—participation which is in doubt after 2023. To date, the CFPF has received on average \$30-35 million per quarter, or \$120 million annually, which is then awarded by DCR for eligible resilience projects.

Although this amount, totaling \$240 Million in a biennium, is significant, it does not demonstrate a measurement of need. In fact, the CFPF program is already oversubscribed, meaning that the demand for funding to support eligible projects exceeds the funding available.

As more localities seek DCR funding to develop and implement resilience plans, the number of eligible projects will grow. It is expected that over the next two biennial periods (by 2028), the total demand for resilience funding through the CFPF will materially exceed \$400 million.

To respond to these anticipated needs, VIRGINIA*forever* recommends the General Assembly appropriate \$100M per year over the next four years for a total of \$400M across two biennial budgets.

CONCLUSION

VIRGINIA*forever* is a unique business and environmental coalition committed to protecting and promoting Virginia's natural resources via increased funding to support proven programs and policies. Our advocacy in support of previous funding recommendations over the last decade has yielded promising results and lays the groundwork to do more. We are grateful to the General Assembly for the commitments and consideration given to these important priorities but respectfully encourage favorable actions on the increased recommendations documented in this plan.

Despite difficult fiscal circumstances, including cost increases from very challenging inflation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia has since set record budget surpluses and benefitted from substantial infusions of federal stimulus spending. This gives lawmakers the opportunity to make these critical natural resource investments that will continue to benefit Virginians and our economy.

The recommendations set forth in the Natural Resources Investment Plan are based on deliberative analysis of previous and existing funding, as well as the public needs assessments for programs administered at Virginia state agencies. Meeting these needs is key to the future success of existing programs and to meeting the Commonwealth's constitutional obligations.

As investments are made in our land and water programs, VIRGINIA*forever* recognizes the important role state agencies play in meeting the desired outcomes. For this reason, ensuring adequate staffing and operational funding is also an area that deserves careful consideration. Guaranteeing Virginia's natural resources agencies are equipped to perform their essential functions in an efficient manner is paramount to the ultimate protection of our land and water.

VIRGINIA*forever* encourages members of the General Assembly to recognize the vast benefits natural resource investments carry, and to give these recommendations full consideration.

2025-2028 NRIP Resources Index

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Database

Virginia's Seafood Industry Provides \$1.1 Billion Boost to State's Economy, Virginia Agriculture and Consumer Services Press Release, December 2022

The Economic Impact of the Agriculture and Forest Industries in Virginia, UVA's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, November 2022

Economic Impact of Visitors in Virginia, Virginia Tourism Corporation, June 2023

New Statistics for Outdoor Recreation, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, February 2023

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Agency Update, Presentation to Senate Finance and Appropriations, January 2023

Survey of Virginia Voters Shows Overwhelming, Consistent Support for Conservation Funding, New Bridge Strategy and FM3 Research Polling Memorandum, June 2021

Water Pollution Remains Top Environmental Concern in U.S., Gallup, April 2021

Photography by Ben Greenberg



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