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Proposed General Assembly Budget Amendments Would Lend Major Support to VIRGINIAforever Priorities

RICHMOND, Va. (February 8, 2024) – Members of the House of Delegates and Senate are proposing hundreds of millions of dollars in additional funding to the state’s biennial budget to promote, improve, protect, and provide access to Virginia’s lands and waters.

Overall, Virginia legislators have submitted nearly 50 budget amendments for additional funding to boost conservation and clean water programs and protect Virginia’s natural resources.

“This General Assembly has shown its commitment to prioritize environmental protections with funding levels that would make great strides towards improving water quality in our streams, rivers, and the Bay, while protecting open-space lands and expanding opportunities for Virginians to enjoy the Great Outdoors,” said VIRGINIAforever Chair Peggy Sanner.

VIRGINIAforever’s mission is to increase state appropriations in two areas: land conservation and water quality. Increased state funds for land conservation go to the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, the Land Preservation Tax Credit, and acquisition of lands for state parks, state forests, and natural area preserves. Increased state appropriations for water quality includes programs to reduce pollution to local streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay from wastewater treatment plants, stormwater, and agricultural lands.

Legislators’ budget amendments over the biennium supporting land conservation include: \$60 million for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, which protects open-space lands, farmlands, forests, and lands of historic or cultural significance (Del. Carr and Sen. Favola); \$10 million for the Farmland Preservation Fund (Sen. Favola); \$10 million for the Black, Indigenous and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund (Del. McQuinn and Sen. Favola); \$10 million for the Virginia Outdoors Foundation’s Get Outdoors Fund (Del. Carr and Sen. Favola); \$130 million for state parks improvements (Del. Lopez and Sen. Marsden); and \$200 million for the State Parks Conservation Resources Fund (Sen. Marsden).

“We are also pleased to see the governor and General Assembly continue to invest in preserving important open-space lands and improving state parks as well as programs to encourage Virginians to use these important recreational areas,” said Ms. Sanner. “As Virginia’s population continues to grow, it’s very important that our citizens have more state parks, state forests, natural area preserves, and trails to enjoy.”

Legislators' budget amendments for water quality improvements include \$400 million over two years for the Water Quality Improvement Fund (Del. Bulova and Sen. Marsden), the state-local cost-share program to improve locally owned sewage treatment plants; an additional \$100 million more for Richmond's CSO project to protect the cherished James River (Del. Carr, Sen. Hashmi and Sen. Bagby); \$30 million for Alexandria's CSO project; and \$25 million to continue improvements to Fredericksburg's wastewater treatment plant (Sen. Durant). Legislators also proposed more than \$35 million annually for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (Del. Bulova and Sen. Marsden).

"The General Assembly has clearly demonstrated that dramatically improving Virginia's waters is a top priority," said Sanner. "It takes major investment in agricultural BMPs, wastewater treatment plants, and suburban and urban stormwater projects to meet the state's water quality improvement goals. We're encouraged that lawmakers recognize this and are proposing to invest so heavily."

About VIRGINIA*forever*:

VIRGINIA*forever* is a diverse coalition of businesses, environmental organizations, and outdoor enthusiasts that advocates for increased 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. VIRGINIA*forever* is a 501 ©4 organization. For more information about VIRGINIA*forever* and its work, please visit www.VIRGINIAforever.org.

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