



August 22, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Youngkin,

We applaud your administration's efforts to make historic investments in conservation and preservation. We continue to support your administration's focus on Chesapeake Bay 2025 Goals, expanding public access to outdoors spaces, and strengthening resiliency across the commonwealth. Investments in land conservation can help make progress on all of those goals. Land conservation provides opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism, protects water quality, and protects the land base needed to support our farm and forest industries.

The current budget begins to make long-needed investments in land and water. This funding is already being put to work in communities across the commonwealth in recently funded Preservation Trust Fund projects, establishing the Office of Trails at the Virginia Department of Transportation, and beginning to address state park maintenance needs.

However, due to a significant backlog of funding needs, increased investment in our outdoor spaces is necessary. Our natural resources can provide Virginia with the foundation to be a national leader in attracting new businesses and ensuring the most vital input - land - is available for our already robust tourism, agriculture, and forestry economies. But without adequate funding, Virginia cannot deliver on its commitments.

Below is a comprehensive list of all the programs that we recommend for increased or initial funding. We strongly urge the establishment of dedicated sources of revenue for natural resources so that all of these needs can be met on an ongoing basis with stable, predictable levels of funding.

This letter is sent on behalf of the organizations who are members of the Our Virginia Outdoors coalition. Please contact Maribel Castañeda (maribel@vcnva.org) with any questions about this letter.



cc: The Honorable, Jeff Goettman, Chief of Staff to Governor Youngkin
The Honorable Stephen E. Cummings, Virginia Secretary of Finance
The Honorable Matthew J. Lohr, Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry
The Honorable W. Sheppard Miller, III, Virginia Secretary of Transportation
The Honorable Travis A. Voyles, Virginia Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources
Ali Ahmad, Director of Policy to Governor Youngkin

Advancing Chesapeake Bay 2025 Goals, expanding public access to the outdoors, and strengthening resiliency across the commonwealth.

2024-2026 Budget Requests

Grant Programs for Parks and Open-Space, Farms and Forests, and Historic and Cultural Lands, Virginia agencies manage competitive land conservation grant programs.

- **\$30M (currently funded at \$16M) for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation,** provides state matching grants on a competitive basis for the protection of open spaces and parks, natural areas, historic areas, and farmland and forest preservation.
- **\$5M (currently funded at \$875,000) for the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund.** Since 2000, more than 335,000 acres of Virginia farmland have been paved over or otherwise converted to non-agricultural uses. Localities with established purchase of development rights (PDR) programs are eligible to apply.
- **\$5M (currently funded at \$1.5M) for the Battlefield Preservation Fund,** provides state matching grants on a competitive basis for the preservation of battlefield land.
- **\$5M (currently funded for FY23 only. Governor Youngkin included an additional \$5M in his proposed budget.) for the Virginia Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund.** This fund will provide 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.
- **\$5M to the Virginia's Outdoors Foundation's Get Outdoors Program,** provides grants for projects that increase access to safe open space in Virginia's communities. An accessible grant for small rural and urban localities and nonprofit organizations.

Virginia's Outdoor Recreation Economy: Parks, Trails, and Water Access, Over the last several years, Virginians have increased visitation to our parks and green spaces, emphasizing how important these places are. But this increased use of our public lands has placed additional strains on managing them. Increased funding is needed to ensure that parks, open spaces, and trails continue to meet the recreational needs of Virginians and support the outdoor recreation economy.

- **\$500,000 to develop a scope of work and plan** to study the economic impact and financial outcomes for outdoor recreation and related tourism as recommended by the current Virginia Outdoors Plan. To be administered by the Virginia Tourism Corporation and Secretariat of Commerce and Trade.
- **\$41M per year in recurring, state-derived VDOT funding,** adjusted for inflation from 2022 dollars, for the Office of Trails to plan, construct, and maintain trails in the Commonwealth.
- **\$1M for grant match funds for low-income communities, communities of color, and smaller localities with populations under 25,000** for better connectivity to transportation and recreation, to be administered by VDOT.
- **\$1.5M in state-derived trail funding to the Department of Conservation and Recreation to match the Federal Recreational Trails Program grant program.**
- **\$57M per year for the Department of Conservation and Recreation's State Parks** to support essential staffing, programs, and backlog of maintenance issues.
- **Establish a \$1M, 50-50 matching grant program** to be facilitated by DCR to encourage localities to invest in capital improvement projects or invasive species management in local parks.

Private Land Conservation, More than 80% of the land in Virginia is privately owned. Strong land conservation policies and incentives are essential.

- **\$90M for The Land Preservation Tax Credit (LPTC),** This year Virginia celebrated one million acres protected by the LPTC. Virginia has one of the most successful and progressive private land conservation programs in the country. Conservation easements donated using the LPTC have dramatically increased the number of miles of permanent riparian buffers along the commonwealth's streams and rivers, an important investment in protecting clean water for our citizens and businesses, and for our aquatic resources. The LPTC encourages voluntary land conservation by providing taxpayers, who make gifts of land or conservation easements, with tax credits equal to 40% of the value of their donated interest. Landowners with lower incomes who are unable to use all of their tax credits are able to sell their credits to other taxpayers.
 - The entire 2% of the transfer fee should go to managing the LPTC and stewardship of protected land; no amount should be diverted to the general fund. This fee is paid by taxpayers utilizing these credits and was set up to fund stewardship activities of the state agencies, local governments, and land trusts that have the responsibility to ensure permanent conservation. The \$466,600 that has been diverted to the general fund should be returned to supporting these critical activities.
- **Create a Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund and appropriate \$5M** to it over the biennium to attract additional private investments to that fund and help leverage the many new and expanded federal funding grants currently available to VDOT and the DWR for funnel fencing, culvert improvements, and other wildlife crossing and passage infrastructure projects.