

## 2022-24 Strategic Plan

### Department of Conservation and Recreation [199]

#### Mission, Vision, and Values

##### Mission

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) provides opportunities that encourage and enable people to enjoy, protect, and restore Virginia's natural and cultural resources.

##### Vision

DCR, with the cooperation of our partners and customers, is a leader in 1) providing tangible and lasting improvements to the quality of Virginia's resource lands and waters and the many species and habitats which they support; 2) serving as trusted stewards of the natural, cultural, and recreational resources placed under our care; 3) promoting the conservation and enjoyment of Virginia's diverse and unique environment and rich cultural legacy for future generations; 4) protecting the public's safety through conservation law enforcement efforts and promoting flood resilience, and 5) recognizing the value of its dedicated and committed workforce.

##### Values

DCR is committed to the highest ideals in the stewardship and protection of the Commonwealth of Virginia's natural and cultural resources and the people whom we serve.

#### Agency Background Statement

The Virginia General Assembly established the State Commission on Conservation and Development in 1926. The original Commission consolidated the powers and duties of the Water Power and Development Commission, State Geological Commission, State Geological Survey, State Geologist, and the State Forester. Throughout the years, the Commission experienced several name changes and varying responsibilities.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), as it is known today, was developed in 1989. DCR is a state agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia, situated in the Executive Branch of government under the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources. As the state's lead conservation agency, DCR protects what Virginians care about – open space, clean water, natural habitat, safe infrastructure, and access to the outdoors.

Currently, DCR responsibilities include:

- Working with localities and farmers to minimize nonpoint source pollution into Virginia's waters and the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Providing for the proper and safe design, construction, operation, and maintenance of dams. Promoting flood resilience.
- Managing 41 state parks, of which many have newly constructed or renovated cabins, yurts, camping, meeting facilities, and visitor centers.
- Coordinating recreational and environmental programs throughout Virginia, including trails, Virginia Scenic Rivers, State Park master planning, and State Park design and construction.
- Focusing on science-based conservation to protect Virginia's native plant and animal life and the ecosystems upon which it depends. Identifying, inventorying, and protecting natural communities and rare plants and animals.
- Serving as a central contact, repository, and clearinghouse for land conservation interests in Virginia. Developing land conservation data and online mapping tools and providing up-to-date information to enable timely conservation decisions.
- Managing the Commonwealth's Natural Area Preserve System totaling 66 Natural Area Preserves.
- Providing long-term protection and outdoor recreation access to some of the state's most ecologically important and unique lands and waters.

#### Agency Status *(General Information About Ongoing Status of the Agency)*

DCR strives to improve the effectiveness of our natural and cultural resource programs to conserve, protect, enhance, and advocate wise use of the Commonwealth's unique natural, recreational, scenic, and cultural resources. The successes achieved by the agency are attributed to the dedicated and knowledgeable staff who focus on soil and water conservation, dam safety and floodplain management, Virginia's state park system, natural heritage, planning and recreation resources, design and construction, public communication and operational and administrative processes and procedures. Achievements have been further attainable due to positive and productive partnerships, leadership support, citizen involvement, and hundreds of volunteers.

The agency recognizes the importance of identifying and addressing challenges that affect progress to ensure we continue to meet and exceed our mission objectives.

In preparation for upcoming years and our desire to continuously improve in the next stages of our conservation and recreation programs, the agency continues to focus on key deliverables and current performance and explore ongoing challenges, including but not limited to:

- The safe operation and maintenance of dams
- Flood preparedness and assistance with flood recovery Dam safety and resilience across the Commonwealth
- Overall water quality and issues related to rivers, streams, and the Chesapeake Bay
- Preservation of natural areas, compliance with latest EPA rulings
- Connectivity opportunities to address visitor and operational concerns
- An aging infrastructure within Virginia State Parks
- The potential impact of funding changes to federally supported conservation programs
- Protection and preservation of the Commonwealth's biodiversity

## Information Technology

DCR relies heavily on Information Technology (IT) for day-to-day central operations that serve all agency divisions and that meet the needs of citizens and stakeholders. Most notably, DCR utilizes IT systems to:

- Track payments to Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts for cost-share and operational support. Host Conservation Application Suite Modules such as Agricultural Cost Share and Nutrient Management.
- Manage electronic information on dams, provide tools to quickly identify if a property is within the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), and manage data related to flood resilience planning.
- Support the management of information on rare species, natural communities, and protected lands in the area of natural heritage.
- Track all identified dams in Virginia to determine hazard status and the level of compliance to protect public safety.
- Maintain agency real estate information.
- Host the State Parks' reservation center.
- Allow all divisions access to Geographic Information Systems (GIS); and
- Facilitate central office operations including, but not limited to, financial reporting and data management; grant management; Human Resource data management and reporting; Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) application; telecommunications; and applications development.
- Improve mobile connectivity throughout Virginia State Parks that impacts operations, customer satisfaction and safety.

Internal Process Automation is an operational necessity for the agency. DCR has designed and built several applications to address specific business needs where enterprise applications do not exist or to interface with an existing enterprise application, with more applications being developed.

## Workforce Development

DCR has continued its efforts to ensure the agency has a skilled workforce capable of delivering effective, mission-driven programs and services to meet the diverse needs of the Commonwealth. However, similar to the challenges facing other state agencies, DCR has experienced first-hand the effects of an increasingly competitive labor market which has fueled significant concerns related to recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

Over the past several years, the agency has generally held a steady vacancy rate of ~6%--equating to a churn of roughly 20-25 vacant positions at any given time. However, with changes to the labor force participation rate occurring at a rapidly increasing rate, upward pressure on wages, and simply fewer workers overall to do the work of the agency, the churn rate has doubled in 2022 and is projected to continue an upward trajectory. Additionally, several roles now require multiple recruitments or extensions to find suitable applicants. On average, positions take 20-50% longer to fill than five years ago. Some positions have been vacant for over 12 months while in active recruitment.

These concerns have further underscored a need to provide better career pathing and skill development for employees, a significant gap identified multiple times over for DCR and traced back to the agency's decentralized approach to training and development. The agency has added an Organizational Development position to DCR's Office of Human Resources (OHR) to remedy these issues. This position focuses on mapping out internal supervisory/leadership development (using Natural Resources Conservation Service competency models), creating internal credentialing tracks, establishing formal mentoring programs, and collaboratively working to improve existing professional development activities within the agency.

In addition, OHR has used a task force approach to allow multiple stakeholder groups to provide input and assistance across three (3) key areas: Attraction & Recruitment, Retention & Inclusion, and Education & Training. The Attraction & Recruitment stakeholder group mainly focuses on tasks designed to optimize applicant pools and hiring processes (including career fairs, outreach efforts, etc.). The Retention & Inclusion stakeholder group has primarily focused on tasks to address identified internal needs through targeted communication efforts, focus groups, and internal surveys. The Education & Training stakeholder group has primarily focused on providing organization-wide learning opportunities which help foster an environment conducive to retention.

## Staffing

Authorized Maximum Employment Level (MEL)	524
Salaried Employees	452
Wage Employees	1,035
Contracted Employees	10

## Physical Plant

The DCR Central Office is in Richmond. The agency maintains multiple field offices throughout the Commonwealth for State Parks, Natural Heritage, Soil and Water Conservation, and Dam Safety/Floodplain Management programs.

DCR housing is a requirement of employment for most conservation officers and other key staff to provide constant public safety and security throughout the Virginia State Parks system. In addition, the agency is responsible for developing and managing facilities and infrastructure in the State Park and Natural Area Preserve systems. DCR is responsible for the care and maintenance of over 1200 individual structures, most in the State Parks system. Many are historically significant and eligible for listing on the National Register for Historic Places.

Providing and maintaining adequate funding is necessary for DCR to properly maintain and address aging infrastructure and address ongoing facility development and expansion.

## Key Risk Factors

### SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION.

**Continued Support for Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts** - DCR continues to provide programmatic and financial support to Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts) to reduce nonpoint source pollution generated from agricultural and urban runoff sources. DCR recognizes that local Districts have limited resources and need financial and technical assistance from DCR. Within its existing resource base, DCR will continue to provide funding for agricultural conservation practices and technical implementation assistance to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of pollution reduction practices. Adequate funding assistance is critical to meet pollution reduction goals outlined in Virginia's federally approved Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and other local total maximum daily loads. The stability of the funding at consistently high levels is essential for Districts to have the certainty needed to expand their capacity to deliver conservation programs. For FY23, there was a record deposit of \$313 million for best management practices, support for Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and water quality special projects.

**Implementation of Stream Exclusion Practices** - In FY19, full funding was provided for the farmers and landowners who signed up in 2015 to implement stream exclusion practices, which entails fencing livestock away from streams and establishing vegetative buffers along streams. Stream exclusion is a key practice under the Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and provides significant local water quality benefits by reducing bacteria impairments and reducing sediment and nutrient pollution. Additional incentives and several new options were added to stream exclusion practices in FY21 and FY22, and these practices remain in demand.

**Necessary Water Quality Nutrient and Sediment Reduction** - The Resource Management Plan Program and the Nutrient Management Program are key components of the Chesapeake Bay WIP. As of June 2022, 546 Resource Management Plans have been developed, and 188 have been certified as fully implemented. While the agency's primary focus has been on the development of plans, additional resources have been directed toward assisting farmers with fully implementing their plans and achieving certification.

**Increasing Staff Costs** - Recent years have seen increasing costs for staff and their associated fringe benefits. These rising costs have not been matched with increases in the federal grants used to pay for many of the Division's staff. In fact, the federal Section 319 and Chesapeake Bay grants have been either contracting or becoming more constrained in how they can be used. The resulting grant shortfalls have placed additional pressure on the Division's general fund budgets, necessitating budget requests for additional funding. Each year the shortfall increases, and another general fund request is needed. If not approved in the budget, the shortfall would result in the need to lay off some Division staff that are critical to mission execution.

**Need to Engage Participating Landowners** - The incentive programs offered by the Division rely on the cooperation and participation of private landowners. As we approach the Chesapeake Bay 2025 deadline, many of the landowners that are willing and able to participate in our programs have done so. These landowners were the "low-hanging fruit." Moving forward, the Division's programs will need to reach higher and deeper to find landowner participants. This will likely increase the outreach, education, and technical assistance costs associated with finding new participants.

**Rising Costs and Supply Chain Shortages** - the rising costs of materials, seed, fertilizer, and labor, compounded by supply chain shortages since the COVID 19 pandemic, as well as an insufficient number of engineering and other technical support staff at both DCR and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and a lack of qualified contractors, are impacting the ability to complete the needed number of agricultural best management practices to meet water quality goals.

## DAM SAFETY AND FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT.

**Increasing Support of Virginia's Dam Safety Program** – To promote public safety, particularly during storm events, DCR has focused on continuing to bring dams of regulated size into compliance. An inventory of aging dams, dams without hazard classifications, and dams with high downstream consequences is of concern. Identifying and understanding the risks associated with this amplifies the importance of continued and increasing support of Virginia's Dam Safety Program to protect life and property.

**Increasing Support of Virginia's Floodplain Management Program** - To increase resilience to flooding, DCR Floodplain Management has focused on outreach and education regarding flood awareness and the importance of flood insurance coverage, building community capacity, planning efforts, identifying gaps in flood data and providing resources for flood protection projects. DCR has worked closely with the Secretary of Natural Resources and Special Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Adaptation and Protection in implementing EO24 and EO45. DCR has also worked with affected state agencies to complete EO45 development standards for state agencies to comply with for construction activities within floodplains. DCR is required by state law to complete an Outreach and Engagement Plan by December 2022, to revise the Coastal Resilience Master Plan by December 2024, and the Virginia Resilience Master Plan by December 2026.

## STATE PARKS.

**Significant Aging Infrastructure** – Today's Virginia State Park system includes significant infrastructure. Assets currently inventoried include over 2,800 improvements with a replacement value of \$1,246,773,008. Additionally, Virginia State Parks has over 682 miles of built trails. Maintenance of these facilities is a continuously under-met need, and Virginia State Parks estimates the deferred maintenance backlog at \$276 million.

**Staffing and Operating Deficiencies:** In a 2022 report to the Virginia General Assembly, the total identified funding needs for Virginia State Parks is \$158,753,697. With a then-current general fund appropriation of \$21,617,218 and a 5-year average state park revenue stream of \$25,700,000, a gap of \$111,436,479 to full funding remains.

**Recruiting sufficient staff** is also an ongoing issue. Staffing of Virginia State Parks consists of approximately 20% full-time equivalent (FTE) employees (297 positions) and 80% hourly employees (1150 positions), on average. An over-dependence upon hourly employees coupled with difficulties in recruiting those employees has resulted in high staff turnover and state parks with critical staffing shortages. With a staffing profile comprised of 80% hourly employees, a crucial need for Virginia State Parks is converting a significant portion of hourly positions to classified employee positions. Classified employees are covered by the Virginia Personnel Act and include the majority of salaried individuals employed by the Virginia State Parks. The report identified a need to add 304 classified positions to support the system.

**Growth of the Virginia State Park System** - Virginia started with six parks in 1936 and has now grown to 41 operational and staffed locations as of 2022, with five additional properties in various stages of acquisition and development. Parks have become year-round, 24/7 operations, and managing a park is like running a small town. There are educational programs, water and sewer systems, emergency and public safety operations, physical plant operations, community and public relations, marketing, and complex administrative functions (procurement, revenue management, recruitment, hiring, etc.) that require a broad skill set within a park staff that may only consist of 2-10 full-time employees. A series of bond-supported capital programs since 1992 have greatly expanded the number of parks and the number of campgrounds, cabins, visitor centers, conference facilities, swimming areas, trails, and other facilities within the system. A 2021 inventory identified over \$1.2 billion in infrastructure assets within the Virginia State Park system. However, staffing and operational funding for this expansion have been only partially provided, and supplemental funding that had been gained was reduced during the recent economic recession.

**Sustaining Operations** - The park system has also worked hard to carry its weight. Over the past few decades, the agency has reassessed fees, added revenue-producing facilities, recruited private concessionaires, and instituted a major retail merchandising program. As a result, in FY21, the Division of State Parks derived 59% of its operating budget from visitor revenues and only 41% from General Funds. State Parks conducted a comprehensive fee review of cabins, camping, and parking in 2018 and implemented market reasonable fee increases in April 2019. The agency will continue to review fees and pursue revenue opportunities as they arise; however, potential opportunities for developing additional visitor revenue may be limited, and fee increases must be weighed against possible negative impacts to park access and visitation. The amount and value of general fund contributions have remained relatively level through the last ten years. However, this funding does not meet existing staffing, operational, or maintenance needs due to inflation and additional regulatory requirements.

## NATURAL HERITAGE AND NATURAL AREA PRESERVE SYSTEM.

**Antiquated Data** - Managing Virginia's rare species habitats and natural communities, more than ever, requires thorough current data on these resources. At this time, about 30% of the community and species information in the Natural Heritage Resources database is over 25 years old and thus deemed historic and sub-optimal for use in land use and conservation decisions. This challenge and this decay of the data that have driven the success of this DCR Division over the past 30 years cannot be overcome without an increased general fund budget for staff and operating expenses for the Natural Area Preserve System. Accelerating shifts to Virginia's climate will amplify the impacts on sensitive biological habitats, adding another degree of difficulty to maintaining these databases, resources, and the preserve system.

**Inadequate Staffing for Public Access on Natural Area Preserves** – Demand for public access lands for outdoor recreation is consistently increasing, with clear evidence provided by visitation numbers across all public lands in the US; visitation numbers in parks and preserves in Virginia; and responses trends to the Virginia Outdoors Survey (VOS) over the past 15 years. In 2006 the VOS ranked "visiting natural areas" as the 11th most popular outdoor activity. In 2017, "visiting natural areas" was the #1 most popular and the #1 most needed, according to Virginians. Providing this public access is important and deserving of adequate resources: funding and staffing. Per the Natural Area Preserves Act, the purpose of Virginia's Natural Area Preserves is the conserve the best examples of Virginia's natural heritage resources and to manage those preserves for the long-term persistence and enhancement of these resources. Stewardship challenges are expanded and increased on public access preserves to create interpretive experiences, maintain facilities, ensure public safety, and manage the resources with the inherent impacts of public use. Not only wear and tear on facilities (e.g., boardwalks, bridges, parking areas, gates, signs, and trails) from vehicle and foot traffic, but public access also exacerbates other stressors to the natural heritage resources; the increased need for erosion and sediment control measures, increased need for controlling invasive species, which are dispersed on, and between preserves and other public and private lands increasingly with vectors of people, pets and vehicles. Staffing to meet the current stewardship needs on natural area preserves is insufficient, and moreover, in the face of increased public use of existing preserves. Without adequate funding and staffing resources, natural area preserves cannot be sustainably managed to enable and expand public access opportunities and will need to be closed to the public periodically, if not permanently. And, without the resources necessary, DCR will not be able to increase the public access opportunities on preserves to meet the demands of Virginia's citizens and visitors and support the Commonwealth's desire to increase outdoor access opportunities.

**Inadequate staffing for Environmental Review Support to Regulatory Agencies** - DCR's Environmental Review team has a stellar reputation for high-quality customer service with conservation partners, regulatory partners, and the private sector. However, additional general funded, classified positions in the Environmental Review (ER) section are needed. Less than 3 FTE are under increasing demands of deadlines to review ~3,000 projects annually, developing detailed comments and collaborating with partners and DCR staff to ensure expeditious and high-quality reviews. Though much streamlining has been accomplished over years of efforts, more could be done with the right-sized capacity. Demands on ER from a resource standpoint and the sheer number of reviews per year are increasing with time. These staff also require significant training to be most effective and productive – upwards of one year per staff person to gain experience with an array of project types and partners. With additional FTEs in ER, we would have the capacity to meet the ER needs for DCR and partners (including DEQ, VMRC, DWR, VDACS, VDOT, USF&WS, and USFS), and less time and productivity would be lost in times of wage staff vacancy and during training of new wage staff.

**PLANNING AND RECREATION RESOURCES.**

**Aging Workforce and Infrastructure** - Reduction in staffing levels within the Planning and Recreation Resources Division (PRR) has presented the agency with a significant challenge in maintaining the level of service desired by programs within DCR and localities across the Commonwealth. As funding has not kept pace with minimum operating costs for the Division, the Division's budget is currently subsidized by funding from State Parks. A loss of this supplemental funding would most likely result in layoffs and reduced services. The agency continues to look for innovative ways to address the needs of the Division, including critical succession planning, as over 50% of the Division's staff are at or are reaching retirement eligibility in the next five years. This past year, one-quarter of the Division has retired. The Division focuses on strategies to address and efficiently manage the recreational grant program, State Park master planning requirements, new legislative programs, technical support, and an aging infrastructure within the State Park System. Also, as the Planning staff has been reduced, the number of state parks has increased. The lack of staff will impact the quantity and quality of products that the PRR division can deliver.

**GENERAL OPERATIONS.**

**Staffing and Funding** - Limitations on staffing and funding have presented challenges to the operations and programs in state parks (including law enforcement), natural heritage, recreation planning, dam safety, and programs delivered to Soil and Water Conservation Districts. DCR continues to look for innovative solutions to address adequate staffing within its existing general and nongeneral fund resource bases.

**Information Technology** - DCR has recognized that its information technology platform needs continued development to enhance operations and to improve broadband and cellular connectivity in Virginia State Parks.

**Finance**

**Financial Overview**

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) receives funding from a mixture of sources. For fiscal year 2023, DCR received approximately 72 percent from the Commonwealth's general fund, 2 percent from the federal government, and 26 percent from nongeneral fund revenues.

**Biennial Budget**

	2023	2023	2024	2024
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	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	431,138,368	172,452,771	92,076,890	146,799,665
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

## Revenue Summary

Visitors to the State Parks System pay admission and parking fees. Fees are also charged for services such as cabin rentals, camping, swimming, boat and canoe rentals, and special events. The funds collected are used to support the State Parks System and to meet customer demand for services.

Revenues from the recordation fee are used to support the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund, a sub-fund of the Water Quality Improvement Fund. The funds are disbursed via Soil and Water Conservation Districts, for agriculture best management practice cost-share, in accordance with state law. The recordation fee revenues dedicated to the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund consist of 50 percent of a \$20 fee collected on every deed.

## Agency Statistics

### Statistics Summary

The statistics below provide a snapshot of major DCR program activities. For the number of jobs resulting from state park operations, the figure is derived from a model developed by the National Park Service that looks at factors such as park visitation, park spending, and employment.

### Statistics Table

Description	Value
Number of dams regulated by the Department to ensure public safety and property protection	2,695
Number of NFIP participating communities	292
Number of natural areas managed for the benefit of the rare plants, animals and natural communities	66
Number of state parks open to the public	41
Number of state parks under development	4
Estimated number of jobs resulting from state park operations in 2021	4,511
Number of land trust operating in Virginia	43
Number of written natural heritage information request answered per year	2,903
Number of species new to science discovered by, or with key assistance from, DCR	48
Number of species new to Virginia discovered by DCR	391
Number of overnight reservations sold in state parks in 2021	142,514
Number of attendees to educational and interpretive programs in 2021	237,638
Number of volunteer hours in state parks in 2021	214,521
Annual economic impact of state park system benefits	324,000,000

## Customers and Partners

### Anticipated Changes to Customer Base

DCR's Division of Dam Safety and Floodplain Management expects the number of property owners protected by dam safety action to increase with time as dams of potential regulated size are evaluated and brought under regulation.

The number of local governments coordinated with DCR under the National Flood Insurance Program is expected to increase. Under this program, DCR assists localities with floodplain ordinances in order to help them achieve compliance with Federal Emergency Management Agency standards and guidelines related to floodplains.

The State Parks system will continue to develop and adapt customer services to follow changes in demand within the limits of available resources. Changes have been made and will continue to be made in the areas of electronic and social media, expanding seasons of operation to meet greater year-round demand, accommodating new forms of outdoor recreation, and expanding overnight camping facilities with the addition of yurts in several parks.



## Current Customer List

Predefined Group	User Defined Group	Number Served Annually	Potential Number of Annual Customers	Projected Customer Trend
Recreationalist	Recreational Users (campers, picnickers, hikers, etc.)	10,474,134	11,500,000	Increase
Farm/Forest Owner	Agricultural Producers Participating in Cost-Share and nutrient management planning	6,000	47,000	Increase
Property Owner	Dam Owners	2,000	3,000	Increase
Natural Resources and Earth Science	Users of Environmental Databases and Tools	1,466	2,000	Increase
Taxpayer	Land Preservation Tax Credit Applicants	182	400	Stable
Local or Regional Government Authorities	Local Governments and PDCs including 21 PDCs, 95 counties, 38 cities, 191 towns, and 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts	392	392	Stable
Property Owner	Downstream Owners Protected by Dam Safety Actions	43,000	65,000	Increase
Organization	Conservation Organizations and Land Trusts	50	100	Increase
Non-Profit Agency (Boards/Foundations),	Stakeholder Groups	30	75	Increase
State Government Employee	Employees of the DCR	1,096	2,128	Stable
Volunteer	Park and Natural Area Volunteers	3,200	12,000	Increase
General Assembly	Legislators and Support Services Staff	100	300	Increase
Organization	Media Outlets	338	338	Stable
Interstate Entity	Breaks Interstate Park	1	1	Stable
Interstate Entity	Chesapeake Bay Program (US EPA, CBC, VA, MD, PA, NY, WV, DE, DC	1	1	Stable
Interstate Entity	Chesapeake Bay Commission	1	1	Stable
Higher Education Institutions	Colleges and Universities	40	60	Increase
State Agency(s),	State Agencies	40	50	Increase
Federal Agency	Federal Agencies	12	12	Stable
Governor	Administration	1	1	Stable
Governor	State Boards and Foundations	9	9	Stable
Attorney General	Office of the Attorney General	1	1	Stable

## Partners

Name	Description
Federal Agencies	U.S. Forest Service; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Department of Defense; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Natural Resources Conservation Service; National Park Service; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Environmental Protection Agency; Federal Highway Administration; Bureau of Land Management; Federal Emergency Management Agency; Farm Service Agency
State Agencies	Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Virginia Department of Historic Resources; Virginia Department of Environmental Quality; Virginia Department of Forestry; Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources; Virginia Department of Transportation; Virginia Outdoors Foundation, Virginia Department of General Services; Virginia Department of Energy; Virginia Department of Health; Virginia Institute of Marine Science; Virginia Marine Resources Commission; Virginia Department of Taxation; Virginia Department of Planning and Budget; Virginia Department of Accounts; Office of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion; Department of Housing and Community Development; Virginia Department of Emergency Management; State Corporation Commission; Virginia Resources Authority; Office of Attorney General
Other States	Delaware; Kentucky; New York; North Carolina; Tennessee; West Virginia; Maryland; Pennsylvania; District of Columbia

General Assembly/Legislative Branch	Virginia House and Senate members and their legislative aides; Division of Legislative Services
Local Governments	Water and Sewer Authorities; Emergency Managers; Local Planning, Zoning and Building Officials; Parks and Recreation Departments; Engineering and Public Works Officials, County, City, and Town Administrators/ Managers
Soil and Water Conservation Districts	47 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Regional Planning District Commissions	Virginia Planning District Commissions, Municipalities, Park Authorities, Middle Peninsula Public Access Authority
Boards and Foundation	Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, Board of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, Virginia Cave Board, Virginia Outdoors Foundation Board, Commonwealth Transportation Board, Art and Architectural Review Board, State Water Control Board, Virginia Resources Authority Board
Professional Organizations	National Association of State Outdoor Recreation Liaison Officers, Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals, National Recreation and Park Association, Virginia Recreation and Park Society, Virginia Land Stewardship Partners; National Association of State Park Directors, Association of Southeastern State Park Directors, Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals, National Association for Interpretation, National Association of Chiefs of Police, International Association for Society and Natural Resources, Virginia Green Travel Association, Virginia Green Travel Alliance.
Stakeholder Organizations	Private Campground Association, Recreational Advocacy Groups, Virginia Recreation and Parks Society, Recreational User Clubs and Associations (Good Sam Club, Airstream Club, College Outing Clubs, etc.), Soil and Water Conservation organizations, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, James River Association, East Coast Greenway Alliance, Chesapeake Conservancy, Friends of the Rappahannock, International Mountain Biking Association, Scenic Virginia, Virginia Horse Council, Virginia Association for Parks, Friends of the Rivers of Virginia, Virginia Lakes and Watershed Association, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Virginia Native Plant Society:ACLU-Virginia Chapter; Appalachian Voices; Center For Sustainable Communities; Chesapeake Climate Action Network ;Elizabeth River Project; Environmental Defense Fund; Land Trust Alliance; League of Conservation Voters; Lynnhaven River NOW; Mothers Out Front; Northern Virginia Conservation Trust; PEW; Rappahannock United Way; Resilient Virginia; Sierra Club Virginia Chapter; Southeast Regional Community Assistance Project (SERCAP); Southern Environmental Law Center; Southern Poverty Law Center; SouthWings; Virginia Coastal Alliance; Virginia Conservation Network; Virginia Interfaith Power & Light
Agricultural Community	Agricultural producers, Virginia Agribusiness Council, Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia Grain Producers Association, Virginia Small Grains Association, the Cattleman's Association, the Poultry Federation
Land Conservation Organizations and Land Trusts	Virginia Outdoors Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, American Battlefield Trusts; private land trusts
Volunteers and Volunteer Groups	Friends of State Park Groups, Virginia Master Naturalists, Natural Area volunteer stewardship committees, Virginia State Parks: Alternative Spring Break Program, Alumni Association, Camp Host Program, Citizen Support Organizations and Friends Group, Corporate Partnerships, Group Projects, Internship Program, Virginia Association for Parks, Youth Conservation Corps, and AmeriCorps.
Chesapeake Bay Program	Includes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia, Delaware, and the District of Columbia
Development Community, Environmental Consulting, Engineering Firms	Consulting companies working with DCR to obtain natural heritage resources, conservation priorities and dam safety data, information, maps and other geospatial products.
Educational Institutions	Virginia Colleges and Universities; Out of State Colleges and Universities
Tourism	Virginia Tourism Corporation
Native American Tribes	Individual Indian Tribes

## Major Products and Services

DCR's services are categorized into the following focus areas:

### **SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION**

- DCR collaborates closely with the state's 47 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, farmers, urban and suburban landowners, and



other land managers to improve water quality and control runoff pollution.

- DCR provides tools and information to the 47 local Districts in conjunction with providing operational and technical financial assistance to protect Virginia's waterways and facilitate good conservation practices.
- DCR oversees the voluntary Resource Management Plan Program, a component of the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program, which encourages farmers, through a comprehensive plan, to reduce erosion, exclude livestock from streams, establish stream buffers, and use nutrient management planning.
- The agency also helps implement conservation measures by teaching citizens and businesses nutrient management techniques that keep pollution from reaching nearby streams and faraway waterways, such as the Chesapeake Bay.

## **DAM SAFETY AND FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT**

- DCR provides regulatory oversight for the Commonwealth's Dam Safety Program.
- DCR provides regulatory support and oversight for the Commonwealth's National Flood Insurance (NFIP) program.
- DCR administers grant funds to provide for engineering studies for spillway or dam rehabilitation design; dam break inundation zone mapping; emergency action plan development; dam rehabilitation; floodplain projects proposed by local governments and private entities to advance education, public safety, and infrastructure protection; and flood resilience efforts that support local capacity building, planning, studies and prioritizes nature-based projects.
- DCR manages and updates the Dam Safety Inventory System (DSIS), a web-based program that provides dam owners, emergency officials, and DCR staff with current electronic data related to dams.
- DCR provides support to local communities to help ensure compliance with NFIP requirements and other flooding-related outreach and communications, as well as post-disaster recovery support.
- DCR manages and updates the Virginia Flood Risk Information System (VFRIS). This web-based program allows users to quickly locate and identify properties within the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA).
- DCR manages and implements the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan, the Coastal Resilience Master Plan, the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan, and all associated data resources.

## **STATE PARK MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS**

- DCR continuously develops, manages, and protects Virginia's system of 41 state parks totaling 77,000 acres, including 2060 campsites, 293 cabins, beaches, day-use areas, special event venues, equestrian areas, liveries, mountain bike centers, museums, educational and interpretive programs, yurts, boat launches, retail operations, a chairlift, wastewater and water systems, and over 680 miles of trails.

## **NATURAL HERITAGE**

- DCR is responsible for the biological inventory and stewardship of Virginia's Natural Heritage Resources, which are the habitat of rare, threatened, or endangered plant and animal species or state-significant natural communities.
- Services provided by DCR include a database of Virginia's natural heritage resources along with an array of GIS-based models and map products that enable customers (i.e., local, state, and federal government partners, private sector, non-profits, land trusts, landowners) to make informed land conservation decisions, and perform environmental assessments of proposed developments. These data, online resources, and staff expertise also inform and streamline the environmental review process, supporting other regulatory agencies.
- DCR also manages the Commonwealth's Natural Area Preserve System totaling 66 Natural Area Preserves, providing long-term protection and outdoor recreation access to some of the state's most ecologically important and unique lands and waters.
- DCR maintains ConserveVirginia, the Commonwealth's comprehensive prioritization/map of land conservation priorities via collaboration with partner agencies on over 20 input datasets and provides this resource to partners and the public through an interactive mapping website.

## **PLANNING AND RECREATION RESOURCES**

- DCR is responsible for creating and updating the Commonwealth's comprehensive outdoor recreation and open space planning document, the Virginia Outdoors Plan.
- DCR develops and updates master plans for state parks, designs and constructs recreation facilities for state parks and natural area preserves and provides grants and technical assistance related to land use and outdoor recreation.
- DCR administers a statewide system of trails, the statewide Scenic Rivers Program, and coordinates with the Virginia Department of Transportation on the administration of the Scenic Byways program.
- DCR administers a series of federal grant programs that impact land preservation and recreation facility development, namely Virginia's shares of the federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

## **LAND CONSERVATION**

- DCR administers a statewide land conservation grant program through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.
- The agency verifies the conservation value of donations of real property interests for which donors request state land preservation tax credits of \$1 million or more.

## **REAL PROPERTY**

- DCR's Real Property Office (RPO) acquires land for Virginia State Parks and the Virginia Natural Area Preserve System. RPO also works with the State Parks and Natural Heritage Divisions to delineate and enforce boundaries for DCR-owned lands. DCR works with landowners near parks, and natural area preserves to protect properties with open-space easements and to provide stewardship for those easements.
- The agency collaborates with the Department of General Services and the Office of the Attorney General in reviewing and processing land acquisition (capital outlay) projects and other real property transactions such as utility and access easements that benefit or impact DCR lands. This includes handling multifaceted issues relating to the deed, survey, title research and review, and drafting land conservation documents.
- Throughout the acquisition process, the agency manages many private contractors such as title companies, appraisers, and surveyors and coordinates acquisition project closings, including the hand-delivery of signature documents. The agency maintains constant communication with landowners, land trusts, and other land conservation partners.
- DCR is responsible for drafting, processing, and maintaining the leases of DCR lands and leasing lands for DCR use, not including employee housing leases. This includes Temporary Transfer Agreements (TTAs) with other agencies.

## BOARD STAFFING

- DCR provides support and staffing for the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, the Board of Conservation and Recreation, the Virginia Cave Board, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, and technical and advisory committees and workgroups for Scenic Rivers, State Trails, State Park Master Planning, Invasive Species, Agriculture Best Management Practices (BMP) Cost-share Program, Agriculture BMP Engineering, Conservation Planning and Soil and Water District Dam Owners.

## Performance Highlights

**Performance Measures.** DCR's performance measures provide the public with information regarding the ongoing successes of the soil and water conservation, dam safety and floodplain management, state park system, natural heritage, recreational resource, and land conservation programs.

**Allocated Funding** - In Fiscal Year 2021, DCR allocated over \$45 million in cost share and technical assistance funding to Soil and Water Conservation Districts to assist farmers with implementing effective practices to reduce pollution. In Fiscal Year 2022, DCR allocated over \$79.5 million in cost share and technical assistance funding to Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Each of these years, an additional \$6.2 million for local operational costs were also provided. In Fiscal Year 2023, DCR allocated over \$131.4 million in cost share and technical assistance funding to Soil and Water Conservation Districts and increased the operational funding to \$9.8 million per year. We anticipate Fiscal Year 2024 will be at levels comparable to 2023 based on the funding provided in the 2023-2024 biennial budget.

**Updated Grant Program** - Increased funding over the last several years provided to the Soil and Water Conservation District Dam Maintenance, Repair, and Rehabilitation Fund grant program has resulted in the completion of needed maintenance to District-owned dams. The 2022 General Assembly allocated over \$45 million for rehabilitation of District-owned dams.

**Improvement to the Dam Safety Information System (DSIS)** – DCR has made continual improvements to capture dam safety data and enhance management abilities to the database to ensure critical data is available to emergency managers and the public. Improvements include 1. A user payment portal to allow dam owners to pay required fees online; 2. An emergency dashboard that provides rainfall data and informs users which dams have reached a stage 1, stage 2 or stage 3 emergency; 3. A grants management module to allow dam owners to apply for funding opportunities online; and 4. A floodplain management module has been integrated to manage the regulatory requirements of the floodplain management program. Development is underway to implement a dam safety inspection app that will simplify the administrative work necessary to perform and enter inspection reports in DSIS.

**Virginia Flood Risk Information System (VFRIS)** - DCR continues to improve VFRIS to provide risk information to communities. With contractor support, VFRIS was migrated from VIMS to DCR. VFRIS was then transitioned to an ESRI platform to allow DCR to have control of data management and inputs. VFRIS is currently being evaluated for additional upgrades to allow 3-D modeling and more user-friendly risk communication.

**Completed the Review of Grant Applications** - The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approved more than \$2.5M in grant applications during SFY2020 - SFY2022 from the Dam Safety Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund Grants Program as follows: SFY2020 - \$206,098; SFY2021 – \$726,039.35; SFY2022 - \$1,600,001. Funding for dam repairs was offered for the first time during the SFY2022 grant round. These funds assist dam owners and communities in addressing flood and dam risks. More than \$32M was awarded from the Community Flood Preparedness Fund as follows: Round 1 - \$7.7M; Round 2 - \$24.7M. This fund provides direct support to localities to address flooding issues. Funding is provided for capacity building, planning, studies and projects. More than 70% of funds awarded were provided to low-income geographic areas.

**Established New Training** - FEMA L:273 Managing Floodplain Development through the NFIP (revised & piloted in VA 2019) –Covers the basic foundations of Floodplain Management and the National Flood Insurance Program.

- FEMA E:386 Coastal Construction—A comprehensive approach to planning, siting, designing, constructing, and maintaining homes in the coastal environment and the FEMA P-55, Coastal Construction Manual (technical guidance).
- Community Rating System—In-depth course on the Community Rating System, series requirements, advancing CRS ranking, and

strategies to implement higher standards for floodplain management.

- **Substantial Damage Estimation Tool 3.0**— Computer-based training of the FEMA SDE tool, which assists state and local officials in estimating substantial damage for residential and non-residential structures. The tool assesses damage caused by flood, wind, wildfire, seismic and other events.
- **Substantial Damage Estimate Administrative Procedures**—Full-day workshop for localities and regional entities to develop a strategy and standard operating procedure for floodplain damage assessments, permitting, and development in the post-disaster environment.
- **Virginia Flood Risk Information System & Flood Risk Products**—Overview of the digital tools and resources used for evaluating flood risk and increasing awareness.
- **Elevation Certificates**—Overview of the elevation certificate: who, what, where, when, why and how to complete the standard data collection form.
- **Floodplain Ordinance**—Overview of the Code of Federal Regulations & Commonwealth floodplain management requirements, State Model Ordinance, FEMA Region 3 Checklist, and implementing higher standards for resiliency.
- **Building Codes & DRR 1206**—In-depth review of the NFIP/ASCE/ICC applicable codes and provisions, which collectively reduce flood risk. Overview of Section 1206 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act, which supports the enforcement of floodplain management after a declared disaster.
- **Dam Safety Inventory System** – overview of system tools and access requirements

**New Programs:** State-funded Community Flood Preparedness Fund, FEMA High Hazard Potential Dam Program, Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund (SFY2023)

**Identification of Dams of Regulatory Size:** Completed review of more than 800 dams with unknown regulatory status and identified more than 500 dams of regulatory size. Began Letter of Engagement notifications for dams of regulatory size without a required hazard classification.

#### **Coastal Resilience Master Plan Framework and Phase 1 Publication**

**Enhanced Customer Service at Virginia State Parks** - State parks received high customer service ratings reflecting that 91% of visitors rate their visit as excellent or good.

**Enhanced Lodging at Virginia State Parks** - Positive feedback has also been received regarding the construction and availability of new cabins, yurts, and lodges.

**Initiated Volunteerism** - Virginians demonstrated their commitment and support of Virginia State Parks by donating 214,521 hours of their time for volunteer projects.

**Positive Numbers on the Economic Impact Report** - The Virginia State Parks Economic Impact Report 2021 by Longwood University revealed the annual scope of state park system benefits to be \$324 million in economic impact and 4,511 jobs. Every \$1 of general fund support for state park operations brings in \$14.46 in fresh money to the Commonwealth.

**Initiated the Opening of New State Parks** - Since 2019, Virginia State Parks have celebrated opening three new state parks: Seven Bends State Parks in Shenandoah County, Machicomoco State Park in Gloucester County, and Clinch River State Park in Russell and Wise Counties in Southwest Virginia.

**Received Donation of 7,200+ Acre Conservation Landscape in Southside** – In 2021, a renowned conservation philanthropist acquired and donated an \$11.5M property to DCR, understanding the property's value to biodiversity conservation and public access. In the future, with needed support, DCR endeavors to restore the property's natural heritage resources through active management (e.g., prescribed fire) to develop a one-of-a-kind interpretive public access resource that features the biodiversity uniqueness and resilience, and cultural significance of this property.

**Establishment of 66th Natural Area Preserve** – In November 2021, DCR collaborated with the Virginia Chapter of the Nature Conservancy to acquire and dedicate Virginia's 66th Natural Area Preserve. Piney Grove Flatwoods Natural Area Preserve harbors multiple rare species habitats, including the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, a uniquely communal species, resident at the Preserve year-round and representing the most northern population in North America.

**Additions to Natural Area Preserves** – In CY 2021, the Natural Heritage Program and Real Property Office staff added 630 acres to three NAPs: The Cedars, Difficult Creek and Bush Mill Stream NAPs. All additions provided critical protection and management capabilities for natural heritage resources (§10.1 209-217). Additions to The Cedars NAP were funded by USF&WS Recovery Land Act grant funds, among others, in 2020 and 2022, totaling nearly \$1.8M in federal funds used to conserve some of Virginia's most significant natural communities and habitats for rare plant and animal species.

**ConserveVirginia 3.0** - In October 2021, DCR's Natural Heritage Division completed and released the second update to the ConserveVirginia map, identifying 7.8M acres of highest conservation priority unconserved lands across the Commonwealth. This update synthesizes 24 mapped data inputs from various partners, divided into seven categories: Agriculture & Forestry; Natural Habitat & Ecosystem Diversity; Floodplains & Flooding Resilience; Cultural & Historic Preservation; Scenic Preservation; Protected Landscapes Resilience; and Water Quality Improvement. The categories contain more than 6.09 million acres of agricultural and forest lands. ConserveVirginia is available for public use and is incorporated into decision-making and project scoring for Virginia Land Conservation Foundation and Land Water Conservation Fund grant programs.

**Expedited Environmental Review** - In 2021, DCR's Natural Heritage Environmental Review section sent out 2,903 responses to clients and partners. All except 34 projects were delivered on time (1% of all projects reviewed). 2,055 projects were submitted using the Natural Heritage Data

Explorer (NHDE) website (71% of overall projects received in 2021), and 774 were "no comment" projects submitted through NHDE. The NHDE enables an initial response to projects within 5 minutes, such that submitters are immediately apprised of next steps; when this response is a "no comment," projects are supported to move forward through the permitting process without further delay pertaining to DCR review. Projects reviewed include development and conservation projects, informing conservation partners of various resource values for their pursuit of funding and the ultimate management of the property if conserved. The NHDE was first developed by Virginia DCR and has since been replicated by a dozen other state Natural Heritage Programs to lead to significant streamlining in other states' environmental review and permitting processes.

**Green Initiatives in State Parks** - Virginia State Parks implemented numerous best management practices, including changing the retail product lines in park gift shops to reflect environmentally friendly products, removing small individual soap containers in cabins and replacing with centralized dispensers and installing water bottle filling stations to reduce plastic bottle use. State Parks received numerous awards at the Virginia Green Travel Awards in 2021.

**Environment Education and Interpretation** - Park visitors, can access quality interpretive programs on the natural world, outdoor recreation, history and culture, either by attending ranger-led or self-guided programs. In 2020, Virginia State Parks launched a series of virtual interpretive programs and self-guided tours in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. Many programs meet Virginia's standards of learning, so schools visit parks for special programs or DCR staff go to the classroom to introduce students to park experiences. The Library of Virginia, Science Museum of Virginia and multiple public libraries throughout the Commonwealth offer a program that allows families to check out backpacks that include supplies to facilitate nature exploration and consists of a park pass for visiting a park at no cost. DCR will reestablish the Office of Environmental Education to work with K-12 schools to raise awareness about a range of environmental and natural resource issues.

**Youth and Career Development Programs.** The Youth Conservation Corps brings youth ages 14-17 to live and work in a state park for three weeks in the summer. State Parks strives to interest youth and young adults in conservation and stewardship as well as possible careers in Natural Resources. In its 22nd year, this program has an alumnus of nearly 3,000 youth. Additionally, the Virginia Service and Conservation Corps use the federal Americorps program for college-age and young adults to work for five to nine months in resource management, interpretation, volunteer recruitment and general park operations.

**Innovations Continued** - DCR remains on the leading edge of biodiversity conservation innovation within the Network of Natural Heritage Programs, covering all of Canada, the 50 states of the U.S. and 19 Latin American countries.

**Pioneering Development** - The Natural Heritage Program's pioneering development of an online information portal, *Natural Heritage Data Explorer*, is being replicated in more than a dozen states and provinces. In Virginia, this tool is being further innovated by adding predictive suitable habitat models for all state and federal threatened and endangered species in the Commonwealth.

**Updated Maps and Models** - Multiple models comprising the Virginia ConservationVision conservation planning tools have been updated. A revised Virginia Natural Landscape Assessment maps remaining intact habitat cores throughout the state, ranks and prioritizes these cores based on ecological integrity analysis, and maps key interconnecting corridors between the highest ranked cores.

**Continued Field Discoveries of New Species** - 35 species new to science and 350 native species not previously recorded in Virginia have been found by staff scientists. DCR-Natural Heritage is embarking on the fifth year of using mobile technology to collect field data on rare species and natural communities.

**Efforts Achieved in Public Access to Trails and Natural Preserve Areas** - In December 2017, a 3.5-mile hiking trail and parking area were completed in the town of Cleveland, Virginia, accessing Cleveland Barrens Natural Area Preserve, including an ADA-accessible viewing area for the scenic Tank Hollow Falls. In addition, by the end of 2018, after three years of hard work by DCR and many dedicated partners, the Bald Knob Natural Area Preserve will be opened to the public, offering an interpretive trail focused on rare natural communities and the largest known population of Piedmont Flameflower in the world.

**Drafting the 2023 Virginia Outdoors Plan** – With support from the Planning and Recreation Resources staff and in the collaborative efforts of strategic partnerships across the Commonwealth, the 2023 *Virginia Outdoors Plan* (VOP) is being drafted. The VOP is the Commonwealth's official open space, recreation, and conservation plan. The plan will be completed with 50% of the cost funded by a federal grant.

**Completed Capital Construction Projects** - During this performance cycle, DCR's Design and Construction Section completed several capital construction projects totaling over \$10 million, with numerous other funded construction projects in the planning and design stages. A historic renovation of a 19th-century children's home called the Inn at Foster Falls at New River Trail State Park has been completed, and one pool renovation at Pocahontas State Park has been completed. Multiple maintenance reserve renovations have also been completed.

**Promoted Scenic Rivers Program** - DCR continues efforts to enhance the awareness of the Virginia Scenic Rivers Program. This, along with staff outreach efforts, has increased inquiries about possible designations and extensions. To increase external partnerships, DCR has entered into an agreement with VCU to collaborate and coordinate Scenic River Studies.

**Advancing State Trails** - through the work of the State Trails Advisory Committee and DCR's partnership with the Virginia United Land Trust to hold a joint annual conference on Land Conservation and Greenways. Performance Highlights include: State Trails Sign Plan published to encourage consistency along multijurisdictional trails, publish quarterly Greenways and Trails E-newsletters to keep trail planners and advocates informed (open rates are consistently above 30%), developed a trails track and coordinated field trips on trails during the annual Land Conservation and Greenway conferences, developed a State Connecting Trails map, story map itineraries for attractions near state parks and inventoried scenic assets along the Potomac Heritage Trail through task agreements with the National Park Service, continue to improve the trails and trailheads database with input from trail providers.

**Administered Recreational Grants** —In 2022, DCR administered eight recreational grants totaling over \$1.5 million in federal funding. These grants will be managed by DCR staff over the next three years to ensure the completion of the engineering and construction phases of each project. To date, DCR has administered 330 Recreational Trail Program grant projects and 452 Land & Water Conservation Fund projects.

**American Battlefield Protection Program Coordination** –DCR continues cooperation with the NPS, American Battlefield Trust and other non-profits utilizing American Battlefield Protection Program funding. In FY 2019, DCR passed through 12 grants for approximately \$6.8 million, protecting 566+/- acres of battlefield lands. DCR collected \$15,000 in fees for serving as the governmental sponsor for these ABPP grants. DCR currently has 20 active grants in the amount of \$4.9 million, scheduled to protect 1069 +/- acres of battlefield lands. DCR anticipates passing through an additional 12 grants in FY 2020 and anticipates 12 new grants resulting in \$12,000 in revenue to recover administration costs.

**Continued Progress with Land Conservation Efforts** - DCR continues to further the Commonwealth's land conservation progress by assisting landowners, land trusts, and other agencies. This will be accomplished by providing state-of-the-art land conservation planning information, maps, and intranet mapping tools, tracking conserved lands, matching grants through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, and reviewing state land preservation tax credits as state law requires.

**Launched a New Database** – DCR's Natural Heritage Program updated the Commonwealth's first comprehensive, continually maintained, Geographic Information System (GIS) data layer for Virginia's protected conservation lands. This database includes mapped boundaries and attributes for public and private lands with various conservation, recreation, and open-space roles. Virginia's CLD is nationally recognized for its accuracy and completeness and is the source for Virginia information to the national Protected Areas and Conservation Easements Databases.

**Diversity and Inclusion** - DCR initiated Diversity and Inclusion training and increased awareness among personnel and within recruitment efforts.

### Selected Measures

Measure ID	Measure	Alternative Name	Esitimated Trend
199.0001	Number of agricultural acres with conservation best management practices state-funded through the Department's agricultural cost-share program, in support of statewide water quality goals.		Improving
19950314.001.004	Number of dams with Regular Operation and Maintenance Certificates		Improving
19950317.001.003	Number of natural heritage resources observed in the field.		Improving
199.0002	Number of acres conserved for land conservation purposes within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.		Improving
19950404.001.004	Agency administrative cost per state park reservation made.		Improving
19950317.001.002	Number of critical projects completed annually that restore and enhance threatened natural heritage resources.		Maintaining
19950314.001.005	Number of National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) participating communities compliant with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain regulations.		Maintaining
199.0004	Number of Virginia State Park Visitors		Improving

### Agency Goals

- Enhance public safety by administering effective dam safety and flood plain management programs with greater emphasis on service to dam owners, local floodplain administrators and stakeholders.**

**Summary and Alignment**

Dams are regulated to ensure safe design, operation, and maintenance. Dams provide many benefits to communities, including storage of water for drinking, hydroelectric generation, flood control, recreation, economic opportunities, agricultural and improved wildlife habitat and food for migrating birds DCR protects life and property in Virginia by mapping, identifying, classifying, and regulating dams. Additionally, education of the public and local governments promotes compliance with regulatory requirements and maintenance schedules, resulting in increased public safety. DCR also works to protect citizens from the impacts of flooding through outreach and education of communities, partners, and stakeholders about the impacts of development within floodplains. DCR aids communities in the development and support of resilience strategies and projects for the protection and restoration of stream channels and floodplains to carry the natural flows.

**Objectives**

  - » **Reduce potential loss of life and property damage due to severe flooding and dam failures.**

*Description*

Throughout Virginia, there are thousands of lives, homes, businesses, and properties placed at risk during floods and dam failures. DCR programs relating to the enforcement of the Virginia Dam Safety Act, the Impounding Structure Regulations, and the Federal Floodplain

Management requirements seek to protect lives and property.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Increase the number of communities compliant with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program.
- Increase the number of communities participating in the Community Rating System that requires higher standards and provides lower flood insurance premiums.
- Increase the number of dams with regular operation and maintenance certificates that meet defined safety standards and reduce the number of dams in poor or unsatisfactory condition through dam owner training, compliance assistance, grants to assist dam owners, and enforcement as required.
- Increase the number of known regulated dams with hazard classifications with a state scan using aerial photography, LiDAR (light detection and ranging) data, followed by field visits as required.
- Assist communities with their flood preparedness and flood recovery through training, resilience planning, grants and loans for capacity building, studies, and flood prevention projects, and onsite assistance with recovery after floods occur.

#### *Measures*

- ◆ Number of dams with Regular Operation and Maintenance Certificates
- ◆ Number of National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) participating communities compliant with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain regulations.

### • **Improve the quality of Virginia's waters and the Chesapeake Bay through non-point source pollution reduction programs.**

#### **Summary and Alignment**

Virginia's waterways and the Chesapeake Bay must be protected from run-off pollution. By promoting sound agricultural best management practices and urban nutrient management, Virginia's waterways, and the living systems, economies, and way of life they support, will be protected for future generations.

#### **Objectives**

- » **Provide cost-share support to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts) to support their effective local delivery of soil and water conservation programs and services.**

#### *Description*

Cost-share funding assistance is provided to Virginia's 47 local Districts to enable them to support and assist agricultural producers in addressing state soil and water initiatives. District boards are made up of locally-elected directors and appointed persons.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Provide cost-share funding assistance to 47 Districts in support of water quality initiatives.
- Provide Districts with adequate financial support to deliver programs consistent with applicable regulatory and statutory requirements.
- Allocate cost-share assistance funding to target those areas that have the greatest potential to generate agricultural nonpoint source pollution.
- Enhance the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Cost-Share Program (VACS) to ensure the efficient implementation of BMPs on agricultural lands to meet the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) goals by 2025.
- Provide Districts with engineering assistance to ensure practices are properly sited, designed and constructed.
- Provide effective and efficient data services through the Conservation Application Suite to track program funding and practices.

#### *Measures*

- ◆ Number of agricultural acres with conservation best management practices state-funded through the Department's agricultural cost-share program, in support of statewide water quality goals.

- » **Provide administrative and operational funding to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts) to support their effective local delivery of soil and water conservation programs, services, and flood control.**

#### *Description*

State funds made available to Virginia's 47 local Districts enable them to support and assist in addressing state soil and water initiatives



and ensure the safe condition of their flood control structures. District boards are made up of locally-elected directors and appointed persons.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Seek Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approval of Soil and Water Conservation District (District) agreement performance deliverables prior to July 1st annually.
- Establish annual grant agreements with 47 Districts, specifying funding amounts and performance deliverables, based on available funding.
- Issue funding to all Districts according to grant agreement timelines.
- Assess fulfillment of performance deliverables for each DCR/District grant agreement (47) and present to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board.

#### *Measures*

### » **Provide technical support for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts).**

#### *Description*

Provide technical assistance to Districts to support their effective local delivery of soil and water conservation programs and services. This technical assistance is in the form of funding to Districts to support staff that deliver direct assistance to landowners and operators in support of the cost-share program.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Provide Districts with adequate financial support to deliver programs consistent with applicable regulatory and statutory requirements.
- Provide technical assistance funding to 47 Districts which enables them to deliver technical assistance in support of water quality.
- Provide training to Districts to assure consistent delivery of state and federal cost-share programs.

#### *Measures*

### » **Improve and protect water quality, especially in the Chesapeake Bay and drainage basins Outside the Chesapeake Bay through implementation of programs serving the agricultural and urban communities.**

#### *Description*

Reducing nonpoint source pollution from agricultural and urban sources is critical to improving water quality and addressing impaired waters in the Chesapeake Bay and drainage basins outside the Chesapeake Bay. In accordance with the Chesapeake Bay TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) and in coordination with the other Chesapeake Bay states and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Virginia must meet specified river basin allocations for Virginia Bay tributaries and river segments for nutrients and sediments, in order to meet certain milestones for water quality. Strategies, when fully implemented, will meet the reductions needed to remove the Chesapeake Bay and Virginia Bay tributaries from the federal list of impaired waters. Implementation of TMDL plans in drainage basins outside of the Chesapeake Bay will address those impairments.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Enhance outreach in concert with the 47 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the farm community, to target farmers for adoption of effective best management practices and to implement the Resource Management Plans Program.
- Develop and fund strategic water quality initiatives and Cooperative Nonpoint Pollution Control Programs with Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and other partners to address agricultural/urban/suburban best management practices.
- Identify and engage federal, state, and local programs that can assist in implementing best management practices.
- Target cost-effective agricultural best management practices (BMPs) for state financial support through DCR's agricultural BMP cost-share program.
- Promote nutrient management on golf courses and other managed turf areas throughout the Commonwealth.
- Promote implementation of Nutrient Management Plans on agricultural lands.
- Promote transportation of poultry litter from high concentration counties to areas of the state where it can be used.
- Promote livestock stream exclusion best management practices.

- Support verification that older agricultural best management practices continue to function properly.  
Measures

- **Enhance opportunities to participate in natural resource-based recreation opportunities.**

**Summary and Alignment**

Virginia's natural and cultural resources provide opportunities for many to experience the outdoors and our shared history through recreational and educational opportunities. Increased awareness of natural and cultural resource recreational and educational possibilities can expand usage. However, expansion of usage must be done in a way that is sustainable and ensures the long-term protection of the natural and cultural resources.

**Objectives**

» **Provide outstanding state park facilities, services, and programs while protecting and promoting stewardship of the natural and cultural resources of the Commonwealth.**

*Description*

Virginia's award-winning state park system promotes a conservation ethic and provides the natural resources, facilities, services, and programs for visitors to enjoy outdoor recreational opportunities and appreciate our natural and cultural heritage resources.

*Objective Strategies*

- Address maintenance needs at state parks.
- Foster the development of support groups and continue to use and increase volunteerism.
- Maintain existing, and develop additional, public and private partnerships to further programs and operations.
- Operate and maintain a statewide system of state park lands, facilities, programs and services and ensure public satisfaction with state park facilities, services and programs.
- Provide premier new facilities in state park and natural areas.
- Provide and expand interpretive and educational program offerings.
- Provide and improve merchandise and food services programs.
- Provide and improve multi-faceted public awareness information using the website, media, marketing, and promotions.
- Provide effective staff training including but not limited Basic Ranger Training Academy, Program Support Training, customer service training, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training, Law Enforcement Training, Interpretive training, etc.
- Refine and implement resource management plans and maintain current master plans for parks.
- Collaboratively plan and develop state parks with internal and external stakeholders.
- Add new state park properties focused on natural and cultural resources that are worthy of statewide preservation and protection.

*Measures*

- ♦ Agency administrative cost per state park reservation made.
- ♦ Number of overnight visits to state parks.
- ♦ Number of park day users.
- ♦ Number of Virginia State Park Visitors
- ♦ Percent of excellent or good responses on the State Park Customer Satisfaction Survey.

» **Develop and update State Park Master Plans in accordance with §10.1-200, Code of Virginia.**

*Description*

DCR serves as the lead outdoor recreation planner for the Commonwealth. As such, the Department is regularly charged by the legislature, executive branch and others with completing special studies, surveys, and park master plans. In addition, DCR authors the statewide comprehensive recreation planning and land conservation document every five years known as the Virginia Outdoors Plan. Completion of these responsibilities in a quality manner and within the prescribed time periods is essential to advancing outdoor

recreational opportunities in Virginia.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Develop master plans for all new sites within 3 years of final property acquisition.
- Maintain a schedule of master plan updates to ensure existing plans are updated every 10 years and prior to major changes proposed by construction.

##### *Measures*

- ♦ Number of state park master plans, outdoor recreation plans, scenic river, scenic byway, and trails studies and surveys completed annually.

### » **Develop and implement the Virginia Outdoors Plan according to §§10.1-200 and 10.1-1021 of the Code of Virginia.**

#### *Description*

DCR serves as the lead outdoor recreation planner for the Commonwealth. As such, the Department is regularly charged by the legislature, executive branch and others with completing special studies, surveys, and park master plans. In addition, DCR authors the statewide comprehensive recreation planning and land conservation document every five years, known as the Virginia Outdoors Plan. Completion of these responsibilities in a quality manner and within the prescribed time periods is essential to advancing outdoor recreational opportunities in Virginia.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Publish and distribute the 2023 Virginia Outdoors Plan in accordance with the National Park Service schedule and guidelines.

##### *Measures*

- ♦ Number of "Virginia Treasures" annually conserved or completed.

### » **Provide financial assistance for recreational development**

#### *Description*

DCR administers outdoor recreation grant programs, principally 2 federal programs: the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). LWCF grants are awarded to state and local governments. RTP grants are awarded to state, federal and local governments, and/or 501(c)(3) organizations. In order to meet this objective, DCR will award open space and recreational grant funds to qualified applicants and administer the grant programs in compliance with state and federal requirements. The Department will ensure that all potential customers (grant recipients) receive grant announcements in a timely fashion and receive guidance on the application requirements.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Conduct federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Recreational Trail Program (RTP) grant rounds according to established procedures and available funding.

##### *Measures*

### » **Complete the construction of Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) capital and major maintenance projects within budget, on time, and meeting quality construction and conservation standards.**

#### *Description*

There are numerous types of capital projects including: debt-financed, general fund-supported, maintenance reserve, special-funded, and dam rehabilitation projects. Completion of projects on time and within budget is affected by numerous factors including weather, staffing, availability of materials, contractor schedules, health of the overall construction industry, and multiple internal/external project reviews/approvals, etc. DCR staff provides design and construction project management.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Conduct construction projects in compliance with awarded contracts.
- Develop state park and natural area preserve facilities that enhance customer satisfaction with the state park and natural area preserve systems.

##### *Measures*

- **Advance the protection, conservation, and stewardship of Virginia's natural heritage resources, significant natural areas, and conservation lands.**

#### **Summary and Alignment**

DCR is responsible for ensuring that the Commonwealth's biological diversity and natural areas are conserved for future generations and available for outdoor recreation. Programs that promote good stewardship, conservation, and protection help to ensure that these assets will be preserved for Virginians to enjoy and as an economic asset as a tourist attraction for present and future generations.

## Objectives

### » **Conserve the natural diversity of biological resources of the Commonwealth through inventory, protection, and stewardship.**

#### *Description*

Virginia has a rich diversity of plants, animals, and natural communities. Southwestern Virginia, for example, has been identified as one of only six biological diversity "hotspots" in the United States. Statewide, Natural Heritage biologists have discovered 35 species new to science and over 350 species never before recorded in Virginia. The efficient management and dissemination of the gathered conservation information in a timely and cost-effective manner, and the protection and proper habitat management of the Commonwealth's native species and significant natural communities on public and private lands continue to be priorities of this program.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Conduct field surveys to locate new natural heritage resource mapped locations and update existing locations. In particular, focus inventories on areas not surveyed in more than 25 years as well as on unsurveyed areas.
- Conserve key additions to natural area preserves based on conservation status of natural heritage resources, focusing on those unprotected and of highest conservation priority, resiliency of the natural area preserves system and stewardship needs.
- Implement a minimum of 80 stewardship projects annually (prescribed burns, invasive species control, habitat restoration, outreach and education, etc.).
- Implement monitoring of natural area preserve deeds of dedication and open space easements on an annual basis.
- Improve capacity to work with localities on land use and planning decisions. Strive for local data agreements, including comprehensive plan updates, with 100% of localities within the coastal zone and 75% statewide.
- Incorporate all natural heritage resource element occurrence field data into Biotics, a highly integrated information management system, within 1-year of observation.
- Maintain the conservation lands database and report on the Commonwealth's goals to permanently protect for conservation purposes land statewide in conjunction with private and public partners.
- Maintain, restore, and enhance species and natural communities by actively managing Natural Area Preserves and assisting other resource managers.
- Protect and conserve natural heritage resources through information sharing and partner assistance.
- Provide karst technical assistance to landowners and public and private agencies and organizations.

#### *Measures*

- ♦ Number of critical projects completed annually that restore and enhance threatened natural heritage resources.
- ♦ Number of natural heritage resources observed in the field.

### » **Conserve important resource lands and meet Virginia's land conservation goals.**

#### *Description*

DCR's Land Conservation programs assist in identifying and conserving important resource lands and meeting Virginia's land conservation goals through outreach, and training. This support benefits Virginia's land trust and conservation community, in addition to assisting landowners with conservation interests. This includes providing staff support for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) Board and supporting effective administration of the VLCF grant program and conservation plan. This also includes the effective evaluation of certain land preservation tax credit requests and the annual issuance of funds to land trusts, conservation organizations, and state and local governments for stewardship responsibilities assumed through the conservation of properties resulting in tax credits. DCR's Natural Heritage program supports both the Chesapeake Bay Agreement's land conservation goal and current Governor's land conservation efforts.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Assist local land trusts with land preservation efforts.
- Coordinate with other state agencies involved in land conservation.
- Coordinate with the Department of Taxation to determine the amount of land, conservation values and the location of property preserved through the Land Preservation Tax Credit program.

- Maintain and utilize DCR's Conservation Lands Database to track progress towards Virginia's land conservation goals and other conservation tools to identify lands worthy of protection. Provide data and conduct analyses to support conservation prioritization, tracking of and reporting on Virginia's land conservation progress.
- Provide specialty workshops to build organizational and professional capacity for land conservation.
- Provide staff coordination for awarding and implementing Virginia Land Conservation Foundation grants and stewardship payments.
- Verify the conservation value of all donations of real property interests requesting \$1 million or more in Land Preservation Tax Credits using the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation Conservation Value Criteria.
- Maintain and update ConserveVirginia (per Va Code § 10.1-104.6:1), Virginia's land conservation prioritization strategy/map. As lead on this effort, DCR works with various agency and non-profit partners to update and integrate over 20 datasets of top land conservation priorities, no less frequently than every two years, and makes this resource available to partners and the public via an interactive mapping webpage (Natural Heritage Data Explorer), and via download for others' internal uses in conservation decision making.

Measures

- ◆ Number of "Virginia Treasures" annually conserved or completed.
- ◆ Number of acres conserved for land conservation purposes within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

» **Coordinate DCR's environmental review responsibilities.**

*Description*

DCR serves as the key coordinator for environmental review of project development plans that may impact the state's natural, scenic, and recreational resources.

*Objective Strategies*

- Review projects from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), and other project sponsors and distribute within two business days to the appropriate persons within DCR to ensure that all relevant areas of concern are properly addressed.

Measures

• **Provide efficient and effective administrative support.**

**Summary and Alignment**

DCR's many program units require effective and efficient administrative functions to support the delivery of mission critical products and services. Through increased uses of technology, streamlined process management, and accurate financial reporting, information can be collected from and disseminated to our customers and partners resulting in a high level of customer satisfaction.

**Objectives**

» **Ensure that resources are used efficiently and programs are managed effectively, and in a manner consistent with applicable state and federal requirements.**

*Description*

Administration, Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Procurement, Policy, Public Communications and Marketing, and the Director's Office provide the infrastructure to the Department's Divisions for the delivery of programs and services in support of DCR's mission to provide opportunities that encourage and enable people to enjoy, protect, and restore Virginia's natural and cultural resources.

*Objective Strategies*

- Perform administrative, procurement, human resources, finance, information technology and policy operations in a timely manner and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- Enhance Department business administrative training programs.
- Enhance workforce development and diversity programs.
- Update the Agency's Policies and Procedures and ensure that staff are trained on and properly implementing the contents.

Measures

## Supporting Documents

Title

File Type