

Memorandum

To: Board of Trustees
From: Anna G. Chisholm, Deputy Director
Date: 9/29/2022
Re: Strategic Plan Update

In preparation for the board's upcoming strategic planning discussion, staff thought it would be helpful for the trustees to have on hand a summary progress report of the plan's progress. Included here is the strategic plan with color coding to indicate the status of the objective as either completed (green), in-progress (yellow) or under re-evaluation (gray).

For a fuller briefing on the strategic plan, please refer to the latest staff briefing of March 2022 which can be accessed here: [March 2022 Strategic Plan Update](#).

Additional background material which may be helpful for discussion of the state of land conservation, please review Virginia Conservation Network [INVESTING IN VIRGINIA'S HERITAGE & FUTURE \(vcnva.org\)](#)

Executive Summary: [Investing in Virginias Heritage and Future one-pagers.pdf \(vcnva.org\)](#)



Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023

Letter from the Executive Director and VOF Board of Trustees Chair



In 1965, the Virginia Outdoor Recreation Study Commission produced *Virginia's Common Wealth*, “an analysis of the present and future outdoor recreation demands on the Commonwealth, an inventory of the State’s recreation resources and facilities ... [and] a long-range comprehensive plan of action, The Virginia Outdoors Plan, to meet these demands.”

The commission was chaired by Senator FitzGerald Bemiss, who wrote in the introduction, “The rich and varied resources of the Virginia Outdoors are indeed our Common Wealth, and every Virginian justly expects to enjoy its benefits.... The opportunities for enjoyment are severely limited by inadequate facilities and by a threatened and diminishing supply of enjoyable lands and waters.”

The report included 21 recommendations that became the basis for the Virginia Outdoors Plan, which remains the state’s comprehensive plan for land conservation, outdoor recreation and open-space planning. The report also recognized the potential of citizens to contribute to these efforts through private philanthropy. To facilitate such philanthropy, the commissioners recommended the establishment of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

Since that time, VOF has preserved more than 830,000 acres of open space—nearly two acres every hour. Today, VOF’s portfolio is among the largest in the nation. We have been tremendously successful at conserving rural open space, especially farms and forests, and this work has yielded many critical public benefits, including protected watershed, viewsheds, and wildlife habitat. But we have much work to do in Virginia’s most populated regions. By 2018, we had protected land in all but two Virginia counties, but in just 16 of its 38 independent cities.

Through discussions with legislators, as well as feedback in the Virginia Outdoors Plan surveys, we have been hearing a desire among citizens for more access to open space near their homes. To close this gap, VOF has allocated more than \$2 million from our Preservation Trust Fund (PTF) in recent years for projects that will provide new opportunities for public access to open space, particularly in urban and suburban communities. They include a new hiking trail and kayak/canoe launch area on the Elizabeth River in Virginia Beach, an historic African-American cemetery in Richmond, and an 18th-century home and garden in downtown Alexandria that will be turned into a public museum. These efforts build upon VOF’s long history of working on public access projects, from the Bull Run Mountains in Northern Virginia that we own and manage as a natural area preserve, to the numerous state and local parks and forests that we helped to facilitate on behalf of the Commonwealth.

We will continue protecting Virginia’s world-class farmland and forestland, and we are excited about the prospect of doing more public access conservation in the future and expanding the number of communities that benefit from our work. Our board is eager to build new partnerships and explore innovative ways of protecting open space for recreation and education with the same efficiency and effectiveness that has defined our program for more than 50 years. This strategic plan will help to guide those efforts.

Thank you for your support and partnership as we work toward a better future for all Virginians.

Ms. Eleanor Weston Brown, VOF Board of Trustees Chair ❧ *Ms. Brett Glymph, Executive Director*

Introduction

In 2018, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation began an initiative to develop a five-year strategic plan. As a first step, the Foundation completed a SWOT analysis to identify the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses (the S and W) as well as external opportunities and threats that could have a significant impact on the organization's future (the O and T). Input for the SWOT was obtained in meetings with the Foundation staff and the Board of Trustees and, via a survey, from organization stakeholders. Those providing SWOT input also offered ideas regarding a vision for the organization and possible strategic goals.

Following the SWOT analysis, the Foundation's leaders met several times to finalize the plan that is presented here. The Foundation wishes to thank all who took time to share their perspectives.

Virginia Outdoors Foundation Achievements



380,814 ACRES
of USDA-designated prime
farming soils



340,615 ACRES
of the highest conservation priority forests



4,253
miles of streams
and rivers

111
miles along designated
scenic rivers

333
miles of threatened
and endangered
species waters

625,349
acres in the
Chesapeake Bay
watershed



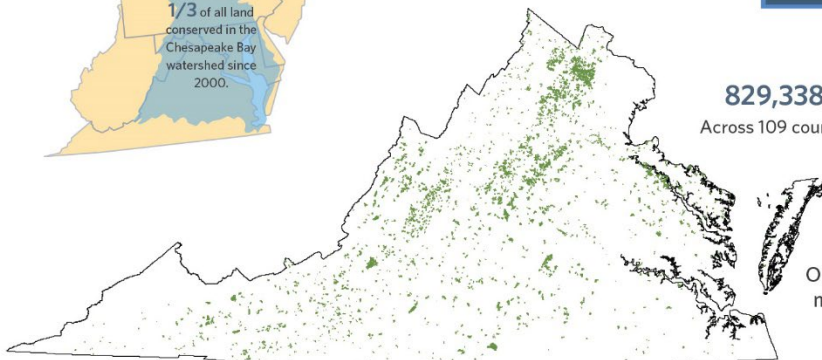
147 MILES
along designated
hiking and biking trails



275 MILES
along designated scenic roads



829,338 ACRES
Across 109 counties and cities



4,189
Open-space easements —
more than any land trust
in the nation

Virginia Outdoors Foundation Vision

Creating a vision naturally requires a look forward. But the Virginia Outdoors Foundation found its vision by rediscovering words from *Virginia's Common Wealth*, produced by the Virginia Outdoor Recreation Study Commission, in 1965.

Virginia Outdoors Foundation Vision

Protect the quality of Virginia's outdoors and make its resources available to its people.

Virginia Outdoors Foundation Goals for 2019-2023

- 1 Advance the integrity and durability of our work.
- 2 Engage VOF's unique abilities to serve the Commonwealth's conservation goals.
- 3 Increase and diversify our revenue sources.
- 4 Increase VOF's visibility.
- 5 Optimize our organizational structure and effectiveness.

Goal 1: Advance the integrity and durability of our work.

Objectives	Strategies
O1.1: Reduce risks for lawsuits and misunderstandings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a risk assessment of easement portfolio and develop a plan to reduce the likelihood of future litigation. • Offer opportunities and incentives for easement restatements. • Update the monitoring process. • Design and communicate a “call VOF before you plan” process. • Develop recommendations for attorney/donor discussions of donor obligations.
O1.2: Cultivate stronger relationships with Easement Owners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a central VOF information/help phone number (e.g., 311). • Overhaul communication tools. • Increase proactive contacts (e.g., monitoring visits) with current landowners.
O1.3: Develop stronger enforcement tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the revision of easement templates. • Include project-specific reminders in communications with prospective donors. • Review and revise disclosure and disclaimer documents and add a “truth-in-lending” statement to information provided to prospective donors. • Explore possible implementation of fines for certain violations to reduce the need for more complicated legal action.

Completed
In-progress
Re-evaluate

Goal 2: Engage VOF’s unique abilities to serve the Commonwealth’s conservation goals.

Objectives	Strategies
O2.1: Capture citizen and community interest in support of land conservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate a campaign to expand VOF’s relevance to all citizens of Virginia. • Expand work with local governments to understand and help them achieve their land conservation goals.
O2.2: Maximize the impact of VOF’s conservation activities to achieve the best outcomes for the Commonwealth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage public funds for conservation projects. • Prioritize the importance of projects based on significant public benefit. • Capitalize on alignment with Administration land conservation goals when practical. • Expand protected lands to include all counties and independent cities.
O2.3: Explore innovative and creative approaches to encourage and capitalize on conservation opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a diverse tool box for a variety of conservation activities. • Utilize fee ownership as an important conservation tool with plan in place to identify appropriate long-term owner. • Develop owned lands guidelines. • Initiate a project that has the potential to protect targeted drinking water supplies.

Completed
In-progress
Re-evaluate

Goal 3: Increase and diversify our revenue sources.

Objectives	Strategies
O3.1: Assess and improve current fee structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the \$1 recordation fee. • Restore the tax credit transfer fees to full funding. • Review and revise the internal VOF fee schedule as needed.
O3.2: Improve processes and options for private philanthropy and other avenues for revenue growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage private gifts of money, land and stock. • Seek and take advantage of public and other grant opportunities. • Invest all funds appropriately in accordance with the Investment Policy to maximize returns for VOF and dedicated funds. • Promote TERRA (Targeted Environmental Remediation and Restoration Accounts) as a vehicle for new sources of funding. • Develop a budget request to increase General Funds

Completed
In-progress
Re-evaluate

Goal 4: Increase VOF's visibility.

Objectives	Strategies
04.1: Celebrate and share our successes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate ambassador lands (a few owned properties that invite the public to connect to the land and VOF's mission of conservation) into messaging. • Develop and present at least eight to twelve major stories each year that convey VOF's most important public benefit accomplishments. • Find creative ways to feature existing public access lands. • Attend and present VOF's story at key conservation events.
04.2: Engage with public and private partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a process of publicity oversight for public access, Forest CORE and other grant-funded projects. • Explore the idea of offering classes or public engagement sessions on land conservation to current and prospective easement owners. • Seek opportunities to partner with agencies, institutions and organizations to access owned lands for research and education. • Communicate compatible opportunities and resources to easement owners.
04.3: Use more diverse tools to tell our story.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve VOF's website through redesign. • Install and maintain site appropriate informational signage that conveys VOF's role in owned lands and conservation projects with public access. • Adopt consistent uniform and branding policies. • Expand the use of social media to deliver VOF's message.

Completed

In-progress

Re-evaluate

Goal 5: Optimize our organizational structure and effectiveness.

Objectives	Strategies
O5.1: Embed a clear organizational philosophy that informs all decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement an effective decision-making and input process.
O5.2: Enhance the work environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve internal communication channels. • Improve salaries and benefits. • Consolidate GIS work. • Evaluate the feasibility of locating offices to connect the physical location to the work we do. • Enhance teamwork and regional and/or central management of projects. • Support staff training and continuing education. • Develop a succession plan.
O5.3: Improve work processes and tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a records management policy and program. • Complete implementation of Terra Trac. • Document and improve work procedures and employee work profiles to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Completed
In-progress
Re-evaluate