



# Strategic Plan

7/1/2023 – 6/30/2028

## 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.

For nearly 60 years, VOF has worked with landowners, as well as public and private organizations, to make Virginia a national leader in land conservation. We have protected more than 900,000 acres in hundreds of communities, from the western highlands through the vast piedmont to the coastal plain. Whether the land is used as a family farm, a public park, or as habitat for wildlife, the benefits to Virginians will be enjoyed for generations to come.

As we continue to build partnerships and explore innovative ways of protecting open space, this strategic plan will help to guide those efforts. If you see strategies in this plan that align with your own goals, whether as an individual or as a member of a conservation organization, we encourage you to reach out to our staff to discuss ways we can work together.

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

*Dr. Elizabeth H. Crowther, VOF Board of Trustees Chair & Ms. Brett Glymph, Executive Director*

## Introduction to 2023 Strategic Plan

In 2019, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation's implemented a five-year strategic plan that has guided the organization's work since its inception. As the 2019-2023 strategic plan approached its sunset date, an update was necessary to address emerging opportunities and challenges.

This update builds on VOF's vision and goals using insightful input from Foundation staff and the Board of Trustees.

## 2019 Strategic Plan Achievements

The 2019 plan included five strategic goals supported by 14 objectives to be achieved through the implementation of 53 strategies.

- Strategies completed: 37 (69.8%)
- Strategies in progress as of the writing of this update to the plan: 10 (18.9%)
- Strategies re-evaluated for inclusion and/or revision in this update to the plan: 6 (11.3%)

Major focal points in the 2019 plan are revenue generation for general operations, risk management and due diligence. Due to the nature of VOF's work, you will find some symmetry in the draft plan with the 2019 plan; however, the draft plan contains refined goals and objectives to reflect achievements, next steps and changed circumstances.

## 2023 Plan

Major topics that emerged in the planning sessions were: 1) increased state/federal grant funding for acquisitions; 2) administrative remedies for easement compliance; 3) evolving law and policy on charitable gifts of easements (IRC 170(h)); 4) community-based conservation and 5) open-space land conversion for renewable energy development.

**Increasing Revenue for Acquisitions.** Significant investment in conservation through state and federal programs is available today. VOF should position itself to be a key player in leveraging grant funding for project acquisition in furtherance of the Commonwealth's land conservation goals to increase public access, water quality protection and resilience.

**Creating Administrative Remedies for Easement Enforcement.** Lawsuits can be unwieldy, expensive and unpredictable, and moreover, conservation easements have not fared well in Virginia's highest court. As such, VOF should seek out alternative paths for easement enforcement through linking easement compliance with preferential taxation under Virginia Code Section 10.1-1009.

**Keeping Pace with Evolving Law and Policy on Charitable Gifts of Easements.** Recent changes to the body of law around charitable gifts of easements have created uncertainty and increased due diligence costs for landowners. This, coupled with the reduced tax benefits associated with easement donation, has increased the burden on landowners when contemplating charitable gifts of easements. VOF should engage policy makers and stakeholders to seek out solutions to keep conservation easement donation a viable option for landowners. (Hanger Budget Item to review tax credit efficacy)

**Community-Based Conservation.** Expanding the reach and impact of land conservation to all Virginia citizens through partnership work and grant funding provides VOF an opportunity to cultivate a deep conservation ethic across the Commonwealth. A widely shared conservation ethic ensures that land conservation will remain a priority of policy makers, budget writers, taxpayers and citizens. Eighty percent of Virginians live in a town, city or urbanizing county and a community-based conservation

approach must include engagement with that 80% to understand their needs and open pathways for dialogue on the importance of open-space conservation for healthy communities, both rural and urban.

Renewable Energy Development. Transitioning to renewable energy will require millions of acres to be enrolled in wind and solar generation. Major public investment and policy targets are increasing the pressure on undeveloped, open-space land and it is likely we will see major conversion of farms and forests in the near term. VOF should review its Energy/Infrastructure and Diversion/Conversion policies to ensure best practices, which review should include stakeholder engagement to better understand the state of renewable energy development and its potential impacts on land conservation.

# Virginia Outdoors Foundation Vision

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

## Virginia Outdoors Foundation Goals for 2023-2028



## Strategic Measures

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation monitors its progress and results through the following measures.

- Cumulative number of acres of land conserved
  - Acres conserved in each of the three main Virginia watershed destinations: Chesapeake Bay, Chowan/Pamlico and Mississippi
  - Acres of USDA-designated prime farming soils and FCV forestland conserved
  - Miles of land conserved along designated hiking and biking trails
  - Miles of land conserved along designated scenic roads and scenic rivers
  - Miles of land conserved adjacent to streams and rivers
    - Miles conserved on waterways with one threatened or endangered species
    - Miles conserved on TMDL or impaired waterways
- Cumulative number of counties and cities with a VOF project or conserved land
- Cumulative number of open-space easements
- Annual revenue received from external grants
- Annual and cumulative number of projects funded by VOF grants
- Annual and cumulative dollars spent on projects funded by VOF grants
- Number of visitors to VOF’s Bull Run Preserve and other reserves

**Goal 1: Engage VOF’s unique abilities to maximize the impact and reach of land conservation throughout the Commonwealth.**

Objectives	Strategies
<p>1.1: Maximize conservation activities to support Commonwealth of Virginia goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.1A - Prioritize Chesapeake Bay goals in our conservation work.</li> <li>• 1.1B - Protect a million acres by 2028.</li> <li>• 1.1C - Partner with other entities to collaborate on large-scale conservation initiatives.</li> <li>• 1.1D - Explore opportunities (e.g., wildlife crossings) to protect wildlife habitats.</li> <li>• 1.1E - Support other programs that are state funded, such as Soil and Water District Best Management Practices (BMPs).</li> <li>• 1.1F - Use and share relevant data to inform and demonstrate the results of our work.</li> </ul>
<p>1.2: Explore innovative and creative approaches to encourage and capitalize on conservation opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.2A - Advertise and promote conservation opportunities on existing conserved land.</li> <li>• 1.2B - Cultivate a shared conservation ethic by highlighting exemplary stewardship and best management practices on VOF projects.</li> <li>• 1.2C - Explore opportunities for federal funding in pursuit of landscape-scale projects.</li> <li>• 1.2D - Proactively seek high-value conservation lands.</li> <li>• 1.2E - Explore the use of virtual platforms and other technology to engage a broader range of people.</li> </ul>

**Goal 2: Create more opportunities for Virginia citizens to access and enjoy the benefits of its natural resources.**

Objectives	Strategies
2.1: Support community conservation projects and local and state government conservation activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2.1A - Look for gaps in Virginia Outdoors Plan to fund projects.</li> <li>• 2.1B - Complete a project in every jurisdiction.</li> <li>• 2.1C - Assist localities with their conservation goals or outdoor opportunities.</li> </ul>
2.2: Publicize and support outdoor opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2.2A - Support programming at Bull Run Mts. Natural Area Preserve.</li> <li>• 2.2B - Increase VOF activity at House Mountain.</li> <li>• 2.2C - Prioritize projects for the creation and protection of trails.</li> <li>• 2.2D - Find new ways to engage more people with VOF-protected lands (e.g., apps such as the All Trails app) to share outdoor opportunities.</li> </ul>

### Goal 3: Increase and diversify revenue to support conservation programs.

Objectives	Strategies
3.1: Leverage private, federal, and state funding sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3.1A - Complete a review of all conservation-related federal grants available to VOF; apply for eligible conservation grants.</li></ul>
3.2: Improve processes and options for philanthropy and other avenues for revenue growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3.2A - Encourage gifts of money, land and stock.</li><li>• 3.2B - Plan fundraising goals and avenues to support grant programs.</li><li>• 3.2C - Broaden VOF's planned giving outreach.</li></ul>



## Goal 4: Enhance partnerships and advance policy innovations to support our work.

Objectives	Strategies
4.1: Cultivate stronger relationships with landowners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.1A - Educate landowners about available conservation programs and incentives.</li> <li>• 4.1B - Publicize the amendment initiative.</li> <li>• 4.1C - Explore the idea of offering classes or public engagement sessions on land conservation to current and prospective donors.</li> <li>• 4.1D - Support partners who are working on family land retention, generational transfer and heirs land issues.</li> <li>• 4.1E - Utilize VOF properties to demonstrate best practices and stewardship principles.</li> </ul>
4.2: Cultivate stronger relationships with local governments, state partners and like-minded groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.2A - Increase collaboration with local governments on conservation acquisitions through grant programs and technical assistance.</li> <li>• 4.2B - Evaluate the feasibility of tying easement compliance to preferential taxation.</li> <li>• 4.2C - Enhance working relationships with state agencies to capture efficiencies and achieve better conservation results.</li> <li>• 4.2D - Continue to participate in and make presentations at educational events that reach a broad audience working in the land conservation realm (e.g., VaULT and LTA conferences).</li> <li>• 4.2E - Partner with groups to facilitate links between land conservation and direct benefits to a community.</li> </ul>
4.3: Ensure protection of conservation lands from conversion to industrial-scale renewable energy development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.3A - Study public policy, emerging technologies and associated land use demands of renewable energy to understand impacts to conservation lands.</li> <li>• 4.3B - Strengthen the Energy and Infrastructure Charter, Model Deed and Conversion/Diversion Policy to prevent negative impacts from renewable energy.</li> <li>• 4.3C - Educate and collaborate with stakeholders on the importance of avoidance of conservation lands.</li> </ul>
4.4: Mitigate challenges presented by financially lucrative, competing uses of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.4A - Maintain awareness of financial incentives that are complementary to our work and those that conflict.</li> </ul>

Objectives	Strategies
land and reductions in incentives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.4B - Explore ways to address the decrease in financial incentives associated with tax deductibility of land conservation gifts.</li> <li>• 4.4C - Continually update conservation documents to reflect legal and regulatory changes.</li> </ul>

**Goal 5: Optimize organizational effectiveness.**

Objectives	Strategies
5.1: Enhance the work environment and communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.1A - Improve internal communication channels.</li> <li>• 5.1B - Adopt standard practices to make meetings more efficient.</li> </ul>
5.2: Cultivate internal talent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.2A - Establish a pilot program that provides opportunities for staff members to expand their knowledge through involvement in internal service projects.</li> <li>• 5.2B - Establish a mentorship program.</li> </ul>
5.3: Improve work processes and tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.3A - Implement one location to store procedures, policies and other guidance documents.</li> <li>• 5.3B - Clarify and document the decision-making process.</li> <li>• 5.3C - Review and update work procedures.</li> </ul>