



REGION **1**  
*LENOWISCO*

### Introduction

The LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region includes the municipalities of the LENOWISCO Planning District, which is made up of Lee, Scott and Wise counties, the city of Norton, and the town of Pennington Gap. It is located in far southwestern Virginia and shares borders with Tennessee to the south and Kentucky to the west. The mountainous land is a beautiful setting for living and recreation. Coal, natural gas, forestry and agriculture provide the economic base for this region.

Natural beauty is abundant here and can be enjoyed in many public recreational areas, parks and forests. Natural resources are diverse and abundant, making this region one of the most important for environmental and conservation planning in the state. Horseback riding, hiking and bicycling trails crisscross the national forest lands offering visitors access to breathtaking scenic vistas and remote mountain hideaways. Sections of the Guest and Clinch rivers are state scenic rivers that, along with other rivers in the region, provide opportunities for water-related activities.

### Regional Focus

**Table 1.1 Most-Needed Outdoor Recreation Opportunities**

LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region

activity	% of households in	
	region	state
Water access	55	43
Parks	52	49
Natural areas	49	54
Trails	45	43
Scenic drives (driving for pleasure)	43	29
Historic areas	37	39
Playing fields, sports and golf facilities	15	22

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey. For sampling purposes, data from the LENOWISCO and Cumberland Plateau regions were grouped.

**Table 1.2 Top 10 Outdoor Recreation Activities By Participation**

LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region

activity	% household
Driving for pleasure	79
Visiting natural areas	74
Walking for pleasure	61
Freshwater fishing	58
Visiting parks (local, state & national)	56
Swimming/outdoor pool	47
Hunting	39
Visiting working farms, petting zoos, corn mazes, etc.	38
Sunbathing/relaxing on a beach	37
Picnicking away from home	35

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey.

For sampling purposes, data from the LENOWISCO and Cumberland Plateau regions were grouped. Visit [www.dcr.virginia.gov/vop](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/vop) to view regional participation rates for more than 100 activities.

### Regional Featured Projects

To be considered a regional featured project, a project must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Has statewide or regional significance.
- Addresses top statewide or regional needs identified by the Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey.
- Has involvement and support from multiple jurisdictions in the region.
- Able to be initiated within the next five years.

Featured projects for the LENOWISCO recreation planning region:

- Continue to move forward the Clinch River Valley Initiative in Wise, Russell, Tazewell and Scott counties.
- Construct Powell River boat access and a bridge.
- Increase the Big Cherry Reservoir trail system.
- Expand the Spearhead Trail system.
- Upgrade access and facilities at the Flag Rock Recreation

Area on the lower slopes of High Knob.

- Implement the Breaks Interstate Park master plan.
- Implement the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail.
- Initiate the Powell River Trail North
- Connect towns through trails in Appalachia, Big Stone Gap and St. Paul.

### Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact

**Table 1.3 Per-Capita Spending on Parks and Recreation**

LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region

locality	dollars
Lee County	4.68
Scott County	16.29
Wise County	1.30
Town of Big Stone Gap	146.69
Town of Wise	31.94
City of Norton	105.23
Statewide	71.09

Source: Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, "Comparative Report on Local Government Revenues and Expenditures," 2016.

**Table 1.4 Virginia State Parks 2017 Attendance and Economic Impact**

LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region

state park	location	overnight visitors	day-use visitors	total visitors	economic impact
Natural Tunnel	Scott County	17,728	244,321	262,049	\$6.4M
Southwest Virginia Museum	Wise County	395	131,473	131,868	\$2.5M
Wilderness Road	Lee County	0	173,874	173,874	\$5.0M

Source: Virginia State Parks

### Regional Health

**Table 1.5 Health Trends**

LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region

locality	adult smoking (% of adults)	adult obesity (% of adults with BMI over 30)	physical inactivity (% of adults age 20 or over reporting no leisure time/physical activity)	access to exercise opportunities (% population with adequate access to locations for physical activity)	air pollution – particulate matter (micrograms per cubic meter)
Lee County	20	29	31	52	9.6
Scott County	18	31	33	47	10
Wise County	21	31	35	76	9.3
City of Norton	19	26	23	99	8.9
Statewide	17	27	21	81	8.7

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



Views from High Knob | Lynn Crump/Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

### Outdoor Recreation Interface with Virginia Tourism

The Virginia State Tourism Plan was completed by Virginia Tourism Corp. in March 2013. In 2017, Virginia Tourism compiled “Nature & Outdoors” recommendations in Appendix 13 for each recreation planning region.

### Regional Historic Resources

The LENOWISCO region is set apart by a wealth of historic resources that reflect the significance of mining, timber, and other extractive industries to the growth of this area. Larger towns such as Wise and Big Stone Gap contain excellent examples of mid-19th through early 20th century residential and commercial buildings, many exhibiting the use of exotic materials and sophisticated design elements intended to convey the importance of both owners and industries. Smaller “company towns” such as Stonega and Derby contain the rows of identical houses that defined such towns, as well as the schools, churches, and company stores that supported those who worked in the mines. Along the steep mountainsides are caves and rockshelters that contain evidence of early human use and habitation, while the river valleys are home to farms and homesteads representative of immigrant settlement from the early 19th century onward.

Appropriate conservation activities may include installation of highway markers to commemorate historic locations and events, placement of historic properties on the Virginia Landmarks Register or National Register of Historic Places, and placement of historic preservation and open space easements. Conservation targets include: 19th century farmsteads, dwellings, and commercial buildings/districts; late 19th and early 20th century company towns and coal camps; coke ovens and other processing facilities; and significant prehistoric habitation sites. Information about historic buildings, structures, and archaeological sites is maintained in the permanent files of the Department of Historic Resources and is available to local planners.

**Table 1.6 Regional Historic Resources**

LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region

resource	location
Cumberland Gap Historic District	Lee County
Southwest Virginia State Historic Museum	Big Stone Gap, Wise County
Carter Family Fold	Scott County
Stonega and Derby Historic Districts	Wise County
Hotel Norton	City of Norton

Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

### Land Conservation

**Table 1.7 Conserved Lands**

LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region

locality	easement acres	ownership acres
City of Norton	0.00	298.73
Lee County	615.74	21,621.56
Scott County	1,486.32	35,214.27
Wise County	279.41	39,797.27
<b>Total</b>	<b>110,916.73</b>	

Source: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Protected Lands Inventory.

## Natural Area Preserves and Natural Heritage Resources

The LENOWISCO region is located in one of the most biologically rich areas in the world. The Powell, Clinch and Holston rivers and associated streams support a great variety of mussels, fishes and other aquatic species found nowhere else on the planet. Much of the district is underlain with limestone, which supports many rare plants and plant communities above ground and an abundance of caves and cave-dwelling animals below ground. While three natural area preserves have been established here — all in the Cedars region of Lee County — the majority of the critical habitat remains unprotected.

DCR recommends that conservation activities and land protection efforts in the region focus on unprotected Essential Conservation Sites and all unprotected portions of Natural Area Preserve resiliency areas. Secondly, strategic land conservation should expand upon existing managed areas and seek connectivity via protecting and/or managing intact ecological cores and natural vegetation cover between currently protected lands. Finally, attention on remaining unprotected natural heritage resources within the region should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The appropriate conservation activities and methods of protection will vary with each site but may include placing the site on Virginia’s Registry of Natural Areas; developing a voluntary management agreement with the landowner; securing a conservation easement through a local land trust; acquiring the site through a locality or local land trust; dedicating the site as a natural area preserve with the current owner; or acquiring the site as a state-owned natural area preserve.

Conservation targets of special significance include:

- Significant caves and karst areas
- Improving water quality for globally rare aquatic communities
- Terrestrial limestone communities
- Establishment of segments of the Virginia Karst Trail at The Cedars Natural Area Preserve and other public lands on significant karst areas.

Information about the location of conservation sites and the natural heritage resources they contain, as well as management assistance, is available to local planners from DCR’s Natural Heritage Program. For more on the Natural Heritage Program, see Chapter 11 and Appendix 11.

**Table 1.8 Natural Area Preserves**

*LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region*

preserve name	owner	locality
Fletcher Ford	The Nature Conservancy	Lee County
The Cedars	DCR and The Nature Conservancy	Lee County
Unthanks Cave	DCR	Lee County



*The Cedars | Irvine T. Wilson/ Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation*

**Table 1.9 Natural Heritage Resources**

*LENOWISCO Recreational Planning Region*

Number of occurrences of rare species and significant natural communities	1,078
Number of different rare species and significant community types (natural heritage elements)	275
Number of globally rare natural heritage elements	97
Number of species listed as federally endangered or threatened	39
Number of species listed as state endangered or threatened	39
Number of terrestrial conservation sites identified by DCR	72
Number of conservation sites with little or no protection	32
Number of partially protected conservation sites	25
Number of well protected conservation sites	15

*Information as of Feb. 28, 2018. Source: Virginia Natural Heritage Program.*



*Cedars Appreciation Day | Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation*