



REGION **6**
*Central
Shenandoah*



Calm waters | Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Introduction

The Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region includes the counties of Augusta, Bath, Highland, Rockbridge and Rockingham counties, the cities of Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton and Waynesboro, and the towns of Bridgewater, Broadway, Craigsville, Dayton, Elkton, Glasgow, Goshen, Grottoes, Monterey, Mount Crawford and Timberville.

The region reaches from the Blue Ridge Mountains on the eastern boundary to the Allegheny range along the western part of the region. Nestled between these mountains, Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley contains beautiful, bountiful and diverse landscapes of fertile farmland, rolling fields and forests that serve as the basis for its major industries — agriculture, forestry and tourism. The headwaters of numerous streams provide fishing, swimming, canoeing and camping opportunities.

Regional Focus

Table 6.1 Most-Needed Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region

activity	% of households in	
	region	state
Natural areas	65	54
Historic areas	47	39
Parks	38	49
Trails	38	43
Water access	35	43
Scenic drives (driving for pleasure)	32	29
Playing fields, sports and golf facilities	11	22

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey.

Table 6.2 Top 10 Outdoor Recreation Activities By Participation

Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region

activity	% household
Driving for pleasure	83
Visiting natural areas	80
Walking for pleasure	69
Visiting parks (local, state & national)	59
Sunbathing/relaxing on a beach	44
Swimming/outdoor pool	43
Visiting historic areas	41
Swimming/beach/lake river (open water)	39
Gardening	37
Viewing scenery	35

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey. Visit 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 Central Shenandoah region:

- Complete restoration of the Blue Ridge/Crozet Tunnel and develop connector trails on both sides of the tunnel in Augusta County.
- Complete the master plan for the 13-mile trail to connect Brushy Hills Preserve Brushy Blue Greenway (west of Lexington) to the Blue Ridge Parkway (east of Buena Vista).

- Replace the Chessie Tail bridge over South River and complete the trail connection from Lexington to Buena Vista.
- Develop access points along the Upper James River Water Trail and the potential Maury River Water Trail.
- Develop a state park in Highland county.
- Develop and expand options for safe bicycle routes in the region based on the Bike the Valley Campaign.
- Expand the South River Greenway in Waynesboro.
- Develop the Arcadia Initiative as a multijurisdictional effort to preserve large landscapes for the protection of wildlife migration and forest ecology.

Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact

Table 6.3 Per-Capita Spending on Parks and Recreation

Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region

locality	dollars
Augusta County	20.98
Bath County	74.57
Highland County	27.75
Rockbridge County	41.43
Rockingham County	18.94
Town of Bridgewater	135.06
Town of Broadway	54.72
City of Buena Vista	146.05
City of Harrisonburg	96.03
City of Lexington	82.92
City of Staunton	101.68
City of Waynesboro	143.16
Statewide	71.09

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

Table 6.4 Virginia State Parks 2017 Attendance and Economic Impact*Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region*

state park	location	overnight visitors	day-use visitors	total visitors	economic impact
Douthat	Bath, Alleghany counties	84,005	139,273	223,278	\$6.8M
Natural Bridge	Rockbridge County	0	182,558	182,558	\$5.3M

Source: Virginia State Parks

Regional Health

Table 6.5 Health Trends*Central Shenandoah 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)
Augusta County	16	34	25	54	9
Bath County	17	29	27	100	7.9
Highland County	15	26	24	24	7.7
Rockbridge County	16	25	27	66	8.6
Rockingham County	14	26	24	63	9.1
City of Buena Vista	21	26	22	82	8.4
City of Harrisonburg	21	25	27	66	8.6
City of Lexington	19	26	20	80	8.4
City of Staunton	17	27	24	100	8.7
City of Waynesboro	18	30	23	69	8.7
Statewide	17	27	21	81	8.7

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



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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 Central Shenandoah region encompasses the heart of the Shenandoah Valley, and is characterized by a mixture of open farmland and population centers with often-vibrant historic downtowns. The Valley saw countless battles over the duration of the Civil War and this region contains multiple battlefield sites, many of which are under conservation easement and accessible to the public. The Central Shenandoah region is part of the Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area, a historic and scenic region that runs from Gettysburg to Monticello and encompasses battlefields and other historic sites of great significance to American history. Rural historic districts offer both scenic drives and views of grand manors and modest farmsteads. Cities and towns in this region contain historic districts as well as individual historic properties that include the birthplace of President Woodrow Wilson and the campus of the Virginia Military Institute. Upland areas contain evidence of prehistoric habitation, while the wide floodplains along the Shenandoah River and its tributaries contain extensive Late Woodland village sites.

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, 19th and early 20th century dwellings and commercial buildings/districts; Civil War battlefields and associated resources; and significant prehistoric habitation sites. Information about historic buildings, structures and archaeological sites is maintained in the permanent files of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and is available to local planners.

Table 6.6 Regional Historic Resources

Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region

resource	location
Mansion House	Highland County
Cross Keys Battlefield Properties	Rockingham County
Paxton House (Glen Maury)	Rockbridge County
Swannanoa	Augusta County
Woodrow Wilson Birthplace	City of Staunton

Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources



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Land Conservation

Table 6.7 Conserved Lands

Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region

locality	easement acres	ownership acres
Augusta County	23,643.48	222,164.48
Bath County	28,628.20	202,161.66
City of Buena Vista	0.00	121.40
City of Harrisonburg	17.09	155.00
City of Lexington	7.71	0.00
City of Staunton	246.82	0.00
City of Waynesboro	0.00	22.95
Highland County	14,685.01	88,801.34
Rockbridge County	42,424.22	96,607.33
Rockingham County	7,253.09	179,403.28
Total	906,343.06	

Source: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Protected Lands Inventory

Natural Area Preserves and Natural Heritage Resources

The Central Shenandoah region has the greatest variety of rare species and significant natural communities of all the planning districts in Virginia. Spanning from the highlands of the Blue Ridge, across the Shenandoah Valley and into the highlands of the Allegheny Mountains, the district encompasses a wide variety of habitats. Much of the region is underlain by limestone, which is interlaced with caves, supporting an abundance of rare animal species, including endangered bats and invertebrates specific to individual cave systems. High-elevation forests, on opposite sides of the district, harbor their own endemic salamanders, as well as outstanding examples of several forest communities. And at the foot of the Blue Ridge, along the eastern side of the valley, lie a string of natural sinkhole ponds that are home to several endangered plants, including Virginia sneezeweed, swamp pink and northeastern bulrush.

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 in the region include:

- Significant caves and karst areas.
- Shenandoah Valley sinkhole pond communities and other biologically significant wetlands, including habitat for Virginia sneezeweed.
- Establishment of segments of the Virginia Cave and Karst Trail on public lands with 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 6.8 Natural Area Preserves*Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region*

preserve name	owner	locality
Cowbane Prairie	DCR	Augusta County
Deep Run Ponds	DCR	Rockingham County
Folly Mills Fen	Private	Augusta County
Goshen Pass	DCR	Rockbridge County
Mount Joy Pond	DCR	Augusta County

Table 6.9 Natural Heritage Resources*Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region*

Number of occurrences of rare species and significant natural communities	1,264
Number of different rare species and significant community types (natural heritage elements)	416
Number of globally rare natural heritage elements	107
Number of species listed as federally endangered or threatened	14
Number of species listed as state endangered or threatened	34
Number of terrestrial conservation sites identified by DCR	180
Number of conservation sites with little or no protection	58
Number of partially protected conservation sites	66
Number of well protected conservation sites	56

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