



CHAPTER **1**

*Virginia's Plan  
for Outdoor  
Recreation and  
Land Conservation*



The Tobacco Heritage Trail, Lunenburg County | Kelly J. Mihalcoe LLC/Virginia Tourism Corp.

## The Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

The benefits of outdoor recreation to our health, well-being and quality of life have been documented for decades so it is not surprising that 70 percent of respondents to the 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey (VODS) believe that access to outdoor recreation is very important. Research on public health has confirmed what people seem to intuitively know, that being outside is good for your health.<sup>1</sup>

The benefits of outdoor recreation do not stop with human health. Outdoor recreation is supported and is largely made possible through land conservation. These two important arms of land use planning dovetail to stimulate local tourism, which by extension, benefits Virginia's economy wherever there is an abundance of recreating opportunities.

### 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey Reports

Over two-thirds (70 percent) of those responding to the 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey consider it "very important" to have access to outdoor recreation opportunities. This response is a 15 percent increase from the 2011 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey.

## Background

The 2017 VODS provides guidelines for Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) development, helping the Virginia Department of Conservation and Development (DCR), regional planners and local governments understand the attitudes and desires of Virginians regarding outdoor recreation, thus assisting all of us in planning for a brighter, healthier future for all Virginians.

The VOP is Virginia's plan for outdoor recreation and land conservation and it meets National Park Service requirements for Virginia to participate in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program. This program provides 50 percent matching funds to state agencies and localities for the acquisition and

development of outdoor recreation resources. The VOP serves as a guide for protection of lands through actions of the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation. The plan also identifies resources, organizations and partners responsible for implementing plan goals and managing outdoor recreation, open space and conservation lands. Further, the VOP is a guide that:

- Assists local governments, local and regional planners and private sector partners with their recreation and land conservation planning.
- Highlights the importance of state-recognized scenic and cultural resources.
- Identifies trends.
- Identifies long-term recreation and land conservation needs.

### Vision

The VOP guides communities in how to connect people with outdoor recreation opportunities and natural and scenic resources important to Virginians' quality of life. As we conserve these resources, Virginia will increasingly be recognized as a destination for exploring natural beauty and rich history.

### Mission

To provide guidance and direction to local, regional and state recreation planners, land managers and land conservation practitioners who work to meet the need for outdoor recreation and land conservation important to natural, cultural and scenic resources and Virginians' quality of life.

## Virginia Outdoors Plan Requirements

The legal authorities for Virginia to develop a broad-based land conservation and recreation plan may be found within federal and state codes.

**Land and Water Conservation Fund Requirements**

The Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (Title 16 U.S.C., Chapter 1, Subchapter LXIX, Part B, 4601-4 et seq.) establishes the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Section 4601-8(d) specifies, “[a] comprehensive statewide outdoor recreation plan shall be required prior to the consideration by the Secretary [of Interior] of financial assistance for acquisition or development projects.” The legal authority for Virginia to participate in the Land and Water Conservation Fund program is with DCR as stated in the Code of Virginia, §10.1-200.

According to the Code of Virginia §10.1-207, DCR is responsible for developing a long-range comprehensive outdoor plan for the Commonwealth. Additionally, to be eligible for grants, every state must prepare and regularly update a statewide recreation plan (sometimes called a SCORP). Most SCORPs address the demand for and supply of recreation resources (local, state and federal) within a state, identify needs and new opportunities for recreation improvements and set forth an implementation program to meet the goals identified by its citizens and elected leaders.

The VOP is the official state comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP).

Title 10.1, Chapter 10.2 of the Code of Virginia titled, “Virginia Land Conservation Foundation” (§§10.1-1017 et seq.), requires development of a comprehensive land conservation plan. In an effort to ensure that funds are expended in a guided manner, §10.1-1021 subsection 1 of state code directs the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation to prepare a comprehensive plan. The foundation determined these requirements would be met by

expanding the scope of the plan as directed by section §10.1-1021 of the Code of Virginia. Code §10.1-1018(E) states:

*“[t]he board shall seek assistance in developing grant criteria and advice on grant priorities and any other appropriate issues from a task force consisting of the following agency heads or their designees: the director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the state forester, the director of the Department of Historic Resources, the director of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the executive director of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. The board may request any other agency head to serve on or appoint a designee to serve on the task force.”*

In addition, §10.1-1026 establishes that

*“[a]ll state officers, agencies, commissions, boards, departments, institutions and foundations shall cooperate with and assist the foundation in carrying out its purpose and, to that end, may accept any gift or conveyance of real property or interest therein or other property in the name of the Commonwealth from the foundation.”*

**VOP Partnerships**

Partnerships are critical to successful implementation of outdoor recreation and land conservation initiatives in Virginia. Partnerships and coordination with multiagency and nonprofit organizations need to expand for Virginia to realize continued success in outdoor recreation and land conservation. Partnership opportunities are recognized throughout this VOP. Partnerships include many local and regional organizations. Statewide organizations directly involved in implementing 2018 VOP recommendations include:

**Agencies and Organizations Who Partner for the VOP Implementation**

federal agencies	state agencies	statewide committees	regional organizations
National Park Service	Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Coastal Zone Management Program	Virginia Outdoors Plan Technical Advisory Committee	Planning District Commissions
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Virginia Department of Forestry	State Trails Advisory Committee	Virginia Recreation and Parks Society
U.S. Forest Service	Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries	Virginia Land Conservation Foundation	Virginia Forever
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Virginia Department of Health		Virginia Master Naturalists
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission	Virginia Tourism Corporation		
Federal Highway Administration	Virginia Department of Historic Resources		
	Virginia Museum of Natural History		

## *Features of the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan*

### **Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey (VODS)**

The VODS ranks the most popular outdoor recreation activities and identifies geographic differences. The survey informs recreation providers of growing needs and trends. The full VODS is under Appendix 2.

### **Interactive Mapper**

The VOP Mapper is an online tool for mapping public access to outdoor-recreation and land-conservation information. The information is updated annually by coordinating with each of the 21 recreation regions.

### **Wetlands**

Addressing wetlands in the VOP is a SCORP requirement. The definition of wetlands and protection of wetlands for outdoor recreation planning and development is in Appendix 1.

### **Importance of land conservation**

The protection of natural areas was rated very important by 82 percent of those taking the 2017 VODS. Chapter 12 addresses the status of land conservation in Virginia and statewide land conservation goals for the coming years. Information about the protection of scenic resources is included in Chapter 10.

## *Development of the Virginia Outdoors Plan*

### **Annual Regional Meetings**

Annual meetings are held across Virginia in the 21 planning regions. These meetings provide DCR input on regional outdoor recreation and land conservation projects. A variety of stakeholders are involved in the meetings including: planners, local government employees, regional planning district staff, local state and federal land managers and outdoor recreation professionals, private citizens, community advocates, nonprofits, appointed planning commissioners and elected officials. Regional planning offices coordinate outreach and meeting logistics. The DCR planning staff prepares the agenda, meeting materials and facilitation. Attendees review regional featured projects, outdoor recreation initiatives and trends. Meeting input, conversations and networking result in ideas and plans for leveraging resources for outdoor recreation implementation.

### **Technical Advisory Committee**

The VOP Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), a group of more than 25 external stakeholders, meets annually to discuss topics related to implementation of the SCORP. This group is knowledgeable about Virginia's successes and needs for outdoor recreation and land conservation. Specifically, the committee helps DCR staff identify resources, topics of importance to outdoor recreation and land conservation, and implementation strategies for the SCORP.

### **Review of Other State Agency Plans**

Other state-level plans, including those from the Departments of Historic Resources and Forestry as well as the Virginia Tourism Plan and the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan are reviewed. Overlapping implementation strategies from these plans are considered to leverage grant funding and implementation resources.

### **Research and Evaluation for Outdoor Recreation Trends in Virginia**

Statistics and case studies showing exemplary implementation are incorporated as examples throughout the plan.

### **State Recreation Inventory**

Every five years, Virginia updates the recreation inventory data for each locality. This information is used to inform a statewide recreation survey.

### **Outdoor Industry Association**

The Outdoor Recreation Participation Report tracks Americans' participation in outdoor recreation. An online survey captures responses from over 40,000 Americans ages 6 and older for 114 activities.

### **Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey**

The survey was conducted by the University of Virginia Center for Survey Research contacting 14,000 Virginians with 3,252 responding. This survey report and data provide a basis for evaluating and making statewide and regional recommendations for outdoor recreation and land conservation. This report is posted on the DCR website along with a statewide tool that enables planners to query outdoor recreation activities and the public's perceived need for outdoor recreation.

### **Public Comment**

There were multiple opportunities for the public to be involved in the development of the 2018 VOP. The 2017 VODS reached 14,000 randomly selected households; further, a crowd-sourced survey was posted on the DCR website for input from the general public. Annual regional meetings were open to the public and comments were collected and taken into account regarding outdoor recreation and land conservation needs and trends. The draft VOP was sent to the professional public that was involved in the annual meetings and the VOP Technical Advisory Committee for input prior to the final SCORP publication.

### **Final SCORP**

The 2018 VOP is published at the DCR website.

### *Recommendations for Plan Implementation*

The VOP highlights five-year recommendations for agencies, organizations and individuals that support outdoor recreation and land conservation. Tracking progress and implementation of the recommendations involves the following by DCR:

- An executive summary of the VOP will be published for distribution and the final document will be posted on the DCR website.
- The Virginia Outdoors Plan Technical Advisory Committee will meet annually.
- Annual updates will be obtained from DCR's Office of Land Conservation.

- The 21 recreation regions will meet with DCR staff to update progress on the featured projects.

### *Works Cited*

1. Godbey, Geoffrey, May 2009, "Outdoor Recreation Health and Wellness", Outdoor Recreation Review Group Resources for the Future of Background Study.