

NATURE

VIRGINIA

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Virginia's Great Outdoors

Virginia's lands and waters are second to none in our region. Beyond Shenandoah National Park and our national forests, we have an impressive network of state parks, natural area preserves, wildlife management areas and state forests. The documented social and economic benefits from these places are enormous. Yet Virginia does lag behind our neighbors, both in state funding for conservation and recreation and in the benefits that such investments provide. The proposed Virginia's Great Outdoors Act (see next page) is one way we're striving to take better care of our nature and our people. Your support makes this and all of our work possible, and I hope you can spend time outside this spring enjoying the results!

Bettina K. Ring, State Director



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To learn more and support our work in Virginia, use the QR code or go online to nature.org/virginia.



Kayaking the Clinch River from Old Castlewood to St. Paul © Daniel White/TNC

Conservation Meets Recreation

Springtime is prime time to explore places we protect.

Birding at Warm Springs Mountain Preserve

The Nature Conservancy and partners conduct controlled burns that restore diversity to Appalachian forests and create more wildlife habitat, which is especially critical for species experiencing the steepest declines. Burned areas can be great for birds and for birding, as canopy openings and shrubby growth increase visibility. Visit our Bear Loop Trail on Warm Springs Mountain to see dozens of bird species, including chestnut-sided warblers, indigo buntings and scarlet tanagers. Cerulean and golden-winged warblers also are occasionally spotted. May and early June provide the best birding.

Paddling, Biking and Hiking at Clinch River State Park

TNC's Clinch Valley Program and the state have worked together to assemble over 1,000 acres for one of Virginia's newest state parks. Though expanding and still under development, the park is open for day use. In St. Paul, the Sugar Hill Unit offers nearly 10 miles of trails featuring river and mountain views and remnants of an 18th century settlement. Canoes and kayaks can be launched along the river at Artrip, Carbo and Old Castlewood—the park's first three access sites along a planned 100-mile blueway trail.

Fishing the Mid-Atlantic Seascape

Our Mid-Atlantic Seascape team recently completed field research on the impacts on fish from construction of the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project. This spring, recreational fishing is expected to be productive around the nearly 80 new turbine foundations.

(continued next page)



Nottoway River © Daniel White/TNC; Golden-winged warbler © Scott Keys/TNC Photo Contest 2019; Seagrass volunteers © Alex Novak/TNC

Birding and Paddling in the Virginia Pinelands

Having restored a stable population of red-cockaded woodpeckers and the requisite pine-savanna habitat to our Piney Grove Preserve, TNC continues to work with partners to bring back this globally rare forest across its historic southeast Virginia range. Most recently, we launched a long-term restoration project on 2,000 acres at James River National Wildlife Refuge—one of the best sites in Virginia to see bald eagles, ospreys and myriad other birds. Elsewhere in the Pinelands, spring graces paddlers with abundant flows in the Blackwater and Nottoway rivers and with sightings of brilliant yellow prothonotary warblers along these waterways.

Snorkeling Over Seagrass and Watching Whimbrels on the Eastern Shore

The world's largest seagrass restoration project keeps growing. Our Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve recently documented 10,524 acres in our coastal bays. In May and June, volunteers will be invited to join us again to snorkel for seagrass seeds. And for 10 days in May, we invite the public to join us during our annual Whimbrel Watch. Last year, we counted more migrating whimbrels than ever before: over 10,000 birds!

Explore More Places We Protect

From the Atlantic to the Appalachians, TNC manages a network of preserves where conservation and recreation go hand in hand, and we have helped protect over 125,000 acres of public land. We invite you to explore these special places that, thanks to supporters like you, people can enjoy for many generations to come. Explore [nature.org/vaplaces](https://www.nature.org/vaplaces).



Fortune's Cove Preserve © Christopher Timothy/TNC

NATURE VIRGINIA

Virginia's Great Outdoors Act Gaining Momentum

Protect. Improve. Invest. These three objectives are driving The Nature Conservancy and a coalition of partners' ongoing support for Virginia's Great Outdoors Act. During this year's Virginia General Assembly session, we continued to inform legislators about the benefits to Virginians from proposed annual state investments of \$230 million for conservation and outdoor recreation.



James River © Chris Johnson /TNC Photo Contest 2019

The funds would be used to protect nature, working farms and forests, and important historic and cultural sites; improve state park amenities and access to other public lands and waters; and invest in recreation infrastructure such as trails that serve communities and stimulate local economies. According to Mikaela Ruiz-Ramón, TNC's public funding and policy manager, without this funding, Virginia is ceding an advantage to neighboring states: "We are passing up an easy opportunity to vastly improve Virginians' quality of life, as well as to bring people to our state to enjoy our beautiful outdoors."

If investing in conservation and outdoor recreation is important to you, help us gain momentum by contacting your state representatives and asking them to work with TNC to pass Virginia's Great Outdoors Act. Learn more at [nature.org/takeactionva](https://www.nature.org/takeactionva).