

Our Common Agenda: Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Policy Suggestion Priorities for 2024 General Assembly

Water

- **Safeguarding Virginia's Wetlands**
 - Preserve Virginia's existing "no net loss" approach to wetlands protection
 - Increase funding for DEQ, VMRC, and local wetlands boards to enable the agencies to delineate wetlands, provide quality-control reviews of third-party delineations, and effectively implement wetlands permitting programs
 - Maintain Virginia's ability to enact and implement wetlands protections that are more comprehensive than those under federal law
- **Working with Farmers to Protect Our Waterways-** Support additional financial incentives for long-term conservation practices like stream exclusion fencing and riparian buffers that are critical to meeting the requirements of the Watershed Implementation Plan and excluding livestock from all of the Commonwealth's perennial streams
- **Meeting Wastewater Upgrade Obligations-** Continue supporting the facility upgrade deadlines for the Enhanced Nutrient Removal Certainty Program by fully funding state grants for wastewater treatment upgrades as identified by the Needs Assessment.

Land and Wildlife Conservation

- **Connecting Wildlife Habitats-**
 - Create a Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund and appropriate \$5M to it over the biennium to attract additional private investments to that fund and help leverage the many new and expanded federal funding grants currently available to VDOT and the DWR for funnel fencing, culvert improvements, and other wildlife crossing and passage infrastructure projects.
 - Create a regulatory framework that requires VDOT to include wildlife passage features in known connectivity hotspots whenever bridge or culvert improvement projects are planned.
- **Assessing Tree Canopy Loss-** \$500,000 for DOF to fund a statewide tree canopy and forest health assessment using the high-resolution 2018-2022 dataset to determine the drivers of forest and urban tree canopy loss, including disease (EAB), infrastructure (road widening and linear energy corridors), in-fill and greenfield development, saltwater intrusion, and homeowner removal
- **Strengthening Park Funding-** Establish a \$1M, 50-50 matching grant program to be facilitated by DCR to encourage localities to invest in capital improvement projects or invasive species management in local parks.
- **Investing in Virginia's Heritage and Future-** \$30 million per year for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation

Land Use and Transportation

- **Mitigating Data Center Development's Impacts-**
 - A comprehensive study by The National Academies of Sciences of the impacts of data center development on the Commonwealth's electrical grid, environment, historic and recreational resources, and ability to meet climate goals.
 - Require a grid impact statement be submitted to and approved by the State Corporation Commission for all new data center power demand requests
 - Create a framework for a regional review board that evaluates large data center projects
- **Deploying Utility-Scale Solar Responsibly-**
 - Increase capacity at relevant agencies to implement agrivoltaics pilot programs and provide technical support for localities implementing solar ordinances.
 - Develop regulations to minimize impacts to prime agricultural soils and forested lands and, where unavoidable, to adequately mitigate adverse impacts.
- **Ensuring Consistent Support for Trails-** \$41M per year in recurring, state-derived VDOT funding, adjusted for inflation from 2022 dollars, for the Office of Trails to plan, construct, and maintain trails in the Commonwealth.

Climate and Energy

- **Surging Energy Demand from Data Centers-** The rules governing approval and allocation of costs for new transmission and generation approval should be examined and – if necessary – changed to ensure that parties causing investments bear the costs of those investments, preventing residential energy customers from shouldering this burden.
- **Participating in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative-** Maintain Virginia's participation in RGGI in accordance with the 2020 law

Good Governance

- **Supporting Virginia's Education Workforce-** \$600,000 per year in competitive grants to be managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation Office of Environmental Education to support the development or implementation of school district environmental literacy plans, including stipends for teacher professional development or environmental literacy planning and coordination.
- **Advancing Environmental Justice-** Require all agencies to consult with members of affected environmental justice communities and Tribal Nations early in environmental permitting. Provide meaningful involvement opportunities throughout the permitting process through pre-application notices, public meetings, and communications using methods tailored to affected communities.