

## Virginia Conservation Network Response to 2022 Budget Amendments

Investing in our natural resources is essential to ensure every Virginian has access to clean air, clean water, and our natural landscapes particularly as our Commonwealth and the nation face an unprecedented public health crisis. The conservation community's budget priorities reflect a commitment to Virginia's responsibilities under the Chesapeake Bay cleanup effort, continued investment in our land conservation programs - particularly as our parks, trails, and outdoor places are becoming much needed outdoor refuges during the pandemic - and a restoration of the natural resource's agencies tasked with protecting clean air and clean water for all.

The following outlines Virginia Conservation Network comments in response to the Virginia House and Senate 2021-2022 biennial budget.

### Meeting Our Commitments to Restore the Chesapeake Bay & Our Rivers

In order to meet our Chesapeake Bay cleanup goals by 2025, VCN supports meeting the needs assessments for Governor Northam's Bay cleanup plan (Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan):

- \$100 million per year for the Virginia Agriculture Cost Share program.
- At least \$80 million per year for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund to invest in pollution reduction projects and help localities meet their local water quality needs on time.
- At least \$55 million per year for upgrading the nutrient pollution reduction capabilities of significant wastewater facilities discharging to the Chesapeake Bay and tributaries.

The following table outlines the budget allocations by the Governor, House, and Senate.

	FY22		
Budget	Governor	House	Senate
Agriculture	\$35 million	\$65 million	\$35 million
Stormwater	\$0	\$26 million	\$0
Wastewater	\$0	\$150 million	\$0

VCN supports fully funding these programs and calls on the General Assembly to give these programs the resources needed to meet our Chesapeake Bay cleanup goals. In addition, VCN has the following positions on clean water budget line items:

- **SUPPORT:** [307 #1s](#) - \$60,000 in FY22 for PFAS Drinking Water Study
- **SUPPORT:** [373 #2h](#) - Adds \$500,000 for the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program
- **SUPPORT:** [C-70.50 #1h](#) - \$150,000,000 in bond proceeds to reimburse entities as provided in Enhanced Nutrient Removal Certainty Program established in House Bill 2129 for capital costs incurred for the design and installation of nutrient removal technology for wastewater treatment plant upgrades.
- **OPPOSE:** [114 #1h](#) - changes the intent of an elevated septic system pilot project within rural coastal Virginia away from addressing the needs of existing, inundated septic system owners in favor of new commercial development in protected and sensitive areas.
- **SUPPORT:** [373 #1s](#) - Restores \$170,000 for Environmental Literacy in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- **SUPPORT:** [373 #1h](#) - restores \$170,000 for environmental literacy in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

- **SUPPORT:** [382 #1h](#) - pauses DWR Boat Ramp Access Fees and directs the study to include strategies that can increase access by economically disadvantaged users.
- **SUPPORT:** [124 #1h](#) - \$250,000 to study the health and environmental impacts of gold mining.
- **SUPPORT:** [376 #1h](#) - “Advanced Recycling Study” directs the Department of Environmental Quality to study Advanced Recycling, and report its findings to the Chairs of the House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and Senate Agriculture, Conservation, and Natural Resources Committees by December 31, 2021.

## Protecting Virginia’s Landscapes

Virginia’s protected landscapes safeguard our game and nongame wildlife, keep our waterways clean, and help spur our outdoor recreation economy. VCN called on Virginia to meet our land conservation goals by fully funding our land conservation grant programs.

The following outlines the budget allocations by the Governor, House, and Senate.

Budget	FY22		
	Governor	House	Senate
VLCF	\$10 million	\$10 million	\$10 million
Farmland Preservation	\$250,000	\$1.25 million	\$250,000

VCN supports funding the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation at \$20 million per year and calls on the General Assembly to fund the program at this level as well as fully funding the Farmland Preservation Funds at the recommended level of \$2 million.

VCN is opposed to the Senate proposal to move money from Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) to specific projects (374 #3S). Chickahominy and River Farm are worthy projects, and they should not be funded with VLCF dollars without going through the normal review process. If it is the will of the assembly that the River Farm and Chickahominy Tribe land acquisition projects are to be funded in the budget this year, we urge the Conference Committee to adopt the approach the House has proposed, which is to include a direct appropriation for each of these worthy projects.

VCN supports the Governor and House’s investment of \$5 million for multi-use trail development and further supports the increased capitalization of \$40 million for a statewide multi-use trail initiative by the Senate (447 #1s).

In addition, VCN has the following positions on land conservation line items:

- **SUPPORT:** [373 #2s](#) - Invasive Species Workgroup
- **SUPPORT:** [377 #2s](#) - Erosion & Sediment Control Program: SB 1258 - \$230,000
- **SUPPORT:** [385#1s](#) - \$250,000 to expand Virginia's historical property catalogue to include underrepresented African American and indigenous communities
- **SUPPORT:** [385 #2h](#) - Restores \$159,479 and 1.5 FTEs to establish an underwater archaeology program within DHR.

## Restoring & Enhancing Our Natural Resources Agencies

Virginia's natural resource agencies have suffered decades of cuts especially the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Governor Northam conducted a full review of DEQs needs to restore the agency and give it the resources needed to increase monitoring, enforcement, and equitable public outreach through Executive Order 6.

VCN commends the unified support shown by the Governor, the Senate & the House to re-allocate \$12 million for the Department of Environmental Quality. Additionally, VCN supports the funding levels of all other natural resource agencies included in Governor Northam's proposed budget.

## Transforming Transportation & Building Sustainable Communities

Transportation represents the largest source of carbon emissions in Virginia. In order to change that, we need to shift to a cleaner, balanced, and more equitable transportation system. However, a continued focus on highway construction and expansion, the lack of alternatives to driving, and no cap on greenhouse gas emissions means that the Commonwealth still has a lot of work to do. VCN supports the funding expanding public transportation, growing rail capacity, electrifying vehicle fleets, and curbing vehicle pollution.

- **SUPPORT:** [442 #3s](#) - provides \$5.0 million in federal funds made available for Highway Infrastructure Programs by the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act to the Transit Ridership Incentive Program.
- **SUPPORT:** [443 #1s](#) - provides \$137.6 million from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Act for the purpose of extending intercity passenger rail service from Roanoke, Virginia to the Blacksburg-Christiansburg, Virginia area and increasing the frequency of intercity passenger rail service along the I-81/Route 29 Corridor from Washington, DC. Replaces and removes \$50 million in general funds.
- **SUPPORT:** [113 #2h](#) - \$50,000 for HB 2053: Development and Use of Accessory Dwelling Units
- **SUPPORT:** [125 #1h](#) - \$5,000,000 the second year from the general fund is provided for the Electric Vehicle Rebate Fund consistent with the provisions of the House Bill 1979
- **SUPPORT:** [442 #2h](#) - \$500,000 for DRPT to study the Commonwealth's current public transportation system focusing on the equitable delivery of transportation services and the modernization of transit in the Commonwealth.
- **SUPPORT:** [446 #1h](#) - includes language requiring VDOT to report annually on the status of what transportation infrastructure in the Coastal Shore region is at risk to inundation from sea-level rise and what is being done to address the concerns.
- **SUPPORT:** [97 #2h](#) - Provides additional \$2 million in FY 21 for the Virginia Food Access Investment Program.