

**Board of Conservation and Recreation  
Thursday, April 18, 2024  
First Landing State Park, Virginia Beach, Virginia**

**TIME AND PLACE**

The meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation took place at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 18, 2024, at First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach, Virginia

**BOARD OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MEMBERS PRESENT**

Danielle Heisler, Chair	John W. Inge, IV
Esther M. Nizer, Vice Chair	The Honorable Kyle Kilgore
Chief Walk "Red Hawk" Brown	Camilla Simon
Colonel Eric A. Hoggard	Ross Stewart

**BOARD OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MEMBERS NOT PRESENT**

Susan Allen	Hunter H. Ihrman
The Honorable James Cheng	Kat Maybury

**DCR STAFF PRESENT**

Matthew S. Wells, Director  
Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director (*virtual*)  
Laura Ellis, Deputy Director for Administration and Finance  
Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations  
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison  
Shannon Alexander, Coastal Region Supervisor for Natural Heritage  
Dr. Melissa Baker, Director, Virginia State Parks  
Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy  
Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage  
Whitten Cluff, Executive Assistant for Operations  
David Collett, Western Field Operations Director  
Sean Dixon, Park Manager, Kiptopeke State Park  
Lisa McGee, Director for Policy and Planning (*virtual*)  
Kelly McClary, Director, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources  
David Neudeck, Public Communications and Marketing Director  
Wes Paulos, Public Access Coordinator for Natural Heritage  
Paul Saunders, Senior Policy Analyst  
Timothy Shrader, Eastern Field Operations Director  
Samantha Wangsgard, Chief Environmental Planner  
Bruce Widener, Park Manager, First Landing State Park  
Ann Zahn, District I Manager

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM**

With seven (8) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

**WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER**

Chairwoman Heisler called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and called for introductions.  
Introductions

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 5, 2024**

Mr. Inge moved that the minutes of the January 5, 2024, meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation be approved as submitted. Ms. Nizer seconded, and the motion carried.

**WELCOME TO FIRST LANDING STATE PARK** – *Bruce Widener, Manager, First Landing State Park*

Park Manager Bruce Widener welcomed members and guest to First Landing State Park and provided highlights of park including visitation statistics, strengthening the junior ranger program, and the future renovations of cabins.

First Landing State Park was built in 1936 as one of the original 6 state parks. Their annual visitation is around 850,000 per year. They offer over 600 educational programs each year which serve about 121,000 guests. In the summer, the park offers 12 weeks of Junior Ranger programs and serves around 300 children throughout those weeks.

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT** – *Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director*

Director Wells gave the DCR report. A copy of the written report is included as Attachment A.

Director Wells noted the following:

**Highlights from 2023**

- Sweet Run was opened as DCR's 42<sup>nd</sup> State Park,
- The purchase of Natural Bridge State Park was completed.
- DCR opened the Inn at Foster Falls (New River Trail State Park).
- The Master Plan for Clinch River State Park was finalized.
- DCR staff assisted the Department of Forestry (DOF) in fighting wildfires.
- DCR hired Lesley Start as the Chief of Stewardship for Natural Heritage

**Anticipated in 2024**

- DCR's 43<sup>rd</sup> State Park will be opened in Culpeper
- Ribbon Cutting on the Pamplin end of High Bridge Trail State Park
- The new Trail Center at High Bridge State Park will be opened
- Several State Park Master Plans will be completed, including Mayo River State Park which members visited at the November meeting
- To increase accessibility, chroma viewfinders like the prototype introduced at Natural Tunnel State Park will be installed. Additionally, DCR is developing a pilot project to provide all-terrain wheelchairs at several State Parks.
- Two New Natural Area Preserves (NAPs) will be introduced.
- Buffalo Mountain NAP will be expanded.

**Legislative Update**

There were two agency bills that affected State Parks:

- Prohibiting registered sex offenders who are convicted of a crime against a minor from entering state parks.
- Exempting retail purchases from the Procurement Act (which limits the ability to negotiate with vendors and provide unique items in State Park shops)

Both bills died in committee.

An agency supported bill that formally set up the pilot program or the all-terrain wheelchairs in state parks passed.

Additionally, legislation to add DCR's Law Enforcement rangers to VALORS (the state dedicated law enforcement retirement plan) passed with a reenactment clause.

Two dedicated funding bills died but will likely be reintroduced in future sessions.

- Dedicating a portion of the state income tax to State Parks.
- Broader Virginia Outdoors Act that would have supported State Parks, Natural Heritage, and DWR.

**FINANCIAL REPORT** – *Laura Ellis, Deputy Director for Administration and Finance*

Ms. Ellis gave the financial update as of February 29, 2024.

Financial conditions are similar to what was reported in the prior meetings.

### General Fund Appropriation and Expenditures

<b>FY2024 Legislative Appropriation</b>		<b>\$ 556,564,758</b>
<b>Appropriation Transfers and Adjustments</b>		
Water Quality Improvement Fund Transfers	(341,071,399)	
SWCD Dam Repair	(500,000)	
Dam Safety/Flood Prevention & Protection	(732,147)	
Land Conservation Fund Transfers	(16,000,000)	
Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund	(100,000,000)	
SWCD Owned Dams Major Repairs	(25,000,000)	
Central Appropriation Adjustments	4,421,172	
Discretionary Reappropriated Amounts	23,716,413	
		(455,165,961)
<b>FY2024 Total GF Appropriation Available for Operations</b>		<b>\$ 101,398,797</b>

Ms. Ellis noted that the division's general fund operational budgets are trending where expected.

Division	Division Targets	YTD Actual (As of February 29, 2024)	Target vs Actual - %
Natural Heritage	\$ 5,020,105	\$ 3,150,522	62.8%
State Parks (Incl Breaks)	\$ 33,645,032	\$ 22,119,031	65.7%
PRR (Incl Design & Construction)	\$ 23,644,215	\$ 1,571,423	6.6%
Director's Office - Admin- Finance	\$ 11,695,747	\$ 7,874,476	67.3%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$ 101,398,797</b>	<b>\$ 53,801,319</b>	<b>53.1%</b>

**State Park Operating Revenues  
 July 1, 2023 - February 29, 2024  
 Fiscal Year 2024**

	FY2024 Estimate	YTD Actual (Through February 29, 2024)	YTD Actual /Est.	Prior Year YTD Actual (Through February 28, 2023)
-				
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$ 31,575,216</b>	<b>\$ 21,651,311</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>\$ 20,277,742</b>

Highlights for operating appropriations usage:

- State parks uses about 50% of non-general funds (revenue) to support operations – this allocation chart shows only general-fund (GF) appropriations for operations.
- Planning and Recreation Resources’ (PRR’s) budget is over-inflated with capital projects that go into the operational funds per appropriations.
- Additionally, some of the funding for PRR is, in part, pass-through projects that will be passed out to localities.
- The target vs actual for PRR does not reflect under performance, but instead reflects the pass-through funding that has not been fully expended by the localities.

Ms. Ellis noted that State Parks is trending to meet their expectations for revenue.

**REVIEW OF THE 2025 AND THE 2026 BUDGET** - *Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director*

Director Wells provided an overview of the 2025-2026 budget. He noted that each fall, DCR provides the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB), and the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources (SNHR) with an Internal Decision Packet.

Director Wells noted the Capital Budget needs, totaling over \$363 million included in the Decision Packet.

## DCR FY2025 Capital Budget Requests

Request Title	Total Project Cost	Request Title	Total Project Cost
Critical Visitor Contact Stations at Various State Parks	\$6,600,000	Pocahontas State Park Visitor Center/Education Center/Regional Support Center	\$8,707,500
Buffalo Mountain Resource Protection and Public Access Expansion	\$3,500,000	Critical Expansions to Increase Resiliency and Resource Protection at Existing Natural Area Preserves	\$8,550,000
Expand and Enhance Outdoor Recreation Opportunities in Natural Area Preserves	\$1,738,000	State Park Climate Control in Yurts	\$1,600,000
Group 1 - State Park Interpretive Displays	\$1,235,000	Westmoreland State Park Erosion Response	\$7,150,000
State Park Property Acquisitions	\$12,450,000	Wilderness Road Development	\$3,508,000
Southwest Virginia Cave and Karst Protection	\$850,000	York River State Park Phase II Campground	\$5,860,000
The Cedars Expansion, Recreational Access, and Habitat Restoration	\$3,000,000	Underground Storage Tanks (UST) Replacement	\$13,340,000
Southeast Virginia Fire-managed Biodiversity Hotspot Protection	\$9,900,000	Restoration of the James House at Mason Neck State Park	\$6,373,000
C-50 and C-51 NGF Appropriation	\$22,931,250	Critically Needed Natural Areas Stewardship Mountain Region Operations Center	\$8,740,000
Natural Bridge State Park Renovation and Repairs	\$27,360,000	Critical Maintenance Areas at Various State Parks	\$11,200,000
Adjustments to C-50 Language		Critical Songbird Habitat Acquisition and Restoration on the Eastern Shore	\$1,300,000
Critical Overnight Support Facilities at Various State Parks	\$6,985,000	Clinch River State Park - Phase IA Development	\$23,790,000
Group 2 - State Park Interpretive Displays	\$2,840,000	Renovation or Replacement of Existing Revenue Generating Cabins at Hungry Mother State Park	\$20,350,000
New Natural Area Preserves for Insufficiently Protected Natural Communities and Rare Species Habitats	\$3,355,000	Various Utility / ADA Furnishings and Equipment	\$300,000
Group 3 - State Park Educational and Interpretative Displays	\$3,099,250	Renovation or Replacement of Existing Revenue Generating Cabins	\$14,130,000
Adjustments to C-51 Language		New Revenue Generating Cabins at Various State Parks	\$33,860,000
Widewater State Park Camping and Cabin Facilities	\$23,060,000	Continuation of Deferred Maintenance Backlog	\$45,000,000
State Park Office and Retail Operations	\$20,560,000	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$363,222,000</b>

Director Wells noted that not all budget requests will be met but are presented to show the needs. He advised that the priorities for capital requests include safety and maintenance initiatives.

Operationally, DCR requested several items:

	General Fund FY25	GF NGF FY25	GF Positions	NGF Positions	General Fund FY26	NGF FY26
<b>Natural Heritage</b>						
<b>Expand Environmental Review Capacity to Meet Permit Review Requirements</b>	\$ 169,224		1		\$ 123,418	
Funds support 1 General Funded FTE position in the Environmental Review section to ensure that environmental and permit review is able to meet agency goal of 30 days or less to review permit applications.						
<b>Recovering America's Wildlife Act - Increase MEL</b>				10		
As confirmed by US Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS) leadership, this effort qualifies DWR to receive the additional \$1.1M annually, and DWR has committed to providing these funds to DCR-Natural Heritage for relevant conservation work and on-the-ground action. This request does not entail state funds, but only the increase in MEL to enable DCR Natural Heritage to recruit and fill full time classified positions to focus on the work.						
<b>PRR</b>						
<b>Planning and Recreation Resources Program Operation</b>	\$ 1,356,692	\$ 564,492	5	4	\$ 1,207,796	\$ 564,492
Funds provide critical support for key personnel and projects in the Planning and Recreation Resources Division designed to meet state code requirements, enhance project management, maximize efficiencies, and leverage the use of federal funding support.						
<b>Administrative and Support Services</b>						
<b>Increase administrative support/internal infrastructure stabilization</b>	\$ 803,550		5		\$ 783,101	
This proposal is submitted to address the critical and increasing need of back-office staffing for all agency operations of which the division of Administration and Finance supports. These positions will be distributed across the Finance, Human Resources, IT, and Procurement and Administrative Services divisions.						
	<b>General Fund FY25</b>	<b>NGF FY25</b>	<b>GF Positions</b>	<b>NGF Positions</b>	<b>General Fund FY26</b>	<b>NGF FY26</b>
	\$ 2,329,466	\$ 564,492	11	14	\$ 2,114,315	\$ 564,492

	General Fund FY25	NGF FY25	GF Positions	NGF Positions	General Fund FY26	NGF FY26
<b>State Parks</b>						
<b>Minimum Wage Increase and Compression Adjustment</b>	\$ 1,710,927		0		\$ 3,940,584	
Funds the impact of mandatory minimum wage increases for state parks part-time, seasonal, and temporary workers that comprise up to 80% of the division workforce.						
<b>Enhance State Park System NGF Revenue Generation</b>	\$ 296,688		2		\$ 265,027	
Funds two full time staff members to enhance existing non-general fund revenue generation and identify and implement strategies to increase non-general fund business enterprise revenue generation to support state parks operations.						
<b>State Parks Maintenance Capacity Expansion Program</b>	\$ 750,268		4		\$ 490,268	
Provides funding for four positions to address long term maintenance failures within the State Park System. Positions would enhance the ability of the agency to implement maintenance projects below the \$100,000 threshold, maximize the use of limited maintenance reserve funding, reduce the reliance on outside contractors, and expand maintenance training, improve visitor satisfaction by maintaining quality, and increase agency operational efficiency by speeding up project assessment and completion.						
<b>Hold Culpeper Battlefields Park Operations</b>	\$ 1,279,510		5		\$ 965,170	
Funding requested provides the needed resources to develop and operate Culpeper Battlefields State Park in Culpeper County. This effort supports the acquisition of equipment and vehicles needed to manage the 1,800 acre Culpeper Battlefields State Park in Culpeper County. Also funds 5 FTE to provide for public safety, law enforcement, education, management, visitor services, and maintenance of a new state park unit spread out in multiple separate small tracts across Culpeper County.						
<b>Hayfield State Park</b>	\$ 1,121,556		4		\$ 783,004	
Supports the acquisition of equipment and vehicles needed to manage the 1000 acre Hayfields State Park currently under development in Highland County. Also funds 4 FTE to provide for public safety, law enforcement, education, management, visitor services, and maintenance of a new stat park unit. This state park is in a remote area of the state, over 90 minutes from any additional agency resources for support and emergency response.						

	General Fund FY25	NGF FY25	GF Positions	NGF Positions	General Fund FY26	NGF FY26
<b>State Parks</b>						
<b>Mayo River Operations</b>	\$ 1,121,556		4		\$ 783,003	
Supports the acquisition of equipment and vehicles needed to manage the 600+ acre Mayo River State Park in Henry County. Also funds 4 FTE to provide for public safety, law enforcement, education, management, visitor services, and maintenance of a new stat park unit in Henry County. Acquired by DCR in 2007.						
<b>Complete Minimal Start-up Staffing at Clinch River</b>	\$ 323,122		2		\$ 275,970	
Funds two Park Rangers and needed equipment to provide public safety, maintenance, and visitor services at Clinch River State Park, which stretches for 120 miles along the Clinch River and is comprised of multiple management units and river access facilities that, once fully developed, will serve over 200,000 people annually and have an economic impact on local communities in excess of \$5 million.						
<b>Offset financial impact from free admission to VaNG members</b>	\$ 28,000		0		\$ 28,000	
Provides funding to offset the financial impact of legislation enacted in 2023 to provide free admission and parking at state parks to active duty members of the Virginia National Guard and the Virginia Air National Guard.						
<b>Improving Outdoor Recreation, Safe Public Access, and Management of Natural Area Preserves</b>	\$ 1,911,792		5		\$ -	
Funds support equipment and personnel to support increased public use and access of the Natural Area Preserve system including.						
<b>Totals</b>	<b>General Fund FY25</b>	<b>NGF FY25</b>	<b>GF Positions</b>	<b>NGF Positions</b>	<b>General Fund FY26</b>	<b>NGF FY26</b>
	\$ 8,543,419	\$ -	\$ 26	\$ -	\$ 7,531,026	\$ -

Director Wells reviewed the Governor’s proposed budget:

## Gov's Proposed Budget – State Parks & Natural Heritage

General Fund – Operations & Equipment	FY2025	FY2026	FTE
State Parks – Development of Culpeper Battlefields State Park	\$1,279,509	\$965,169	5
State Parks – Operations of Hayfields State Park	\$1,121,557	\$783,004	4
State Parks – Start-Up Operations at Clinch River State Park	\$323,122	\$275,970	2
Natural Heritage – Emergency Vehicle and Equipment Needs	\$1,430,000	\$38,000	
State Parks & Natural Heritage – Additional Law Enforcement Positions	\$772,000	\$662,000	4
Increase funding for Breaks Interstate Park	\$285,000	\$285,000	
Study on the Potential Acquisition and Development of Oak Hill	\$150,000	---	
Free Admission to State Parks for Virginia National Guard members	\$20,000	\$20,000	

## Gov's Proposed Budget – State Parks & Natural Heritage

Capital & Maintenance	FY2025
Natural Heritage – Protect and expand Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve	\$3,500,000
State Parks – Underground Storage Tanks (UST) Replacement	\$3,000,000
State Parks – Land Acquisition NGF Authorization	\$2,660,000
State Parks – Address Climate Control in Yurts	\$1,600,000
Agency-wide – Maintenance Reserve	\$8,500,000

### Additional Technical Amendment

Technical Amendment	FY2025	FY2026
Agency-wide – Restores 10 NGF Position Authorizations	10 FTE	10 FTE

Director Wells highlighted that the funding for climate control in Yurts is supplemental to funding received from an EDA grant. He noted that these key items were included in the budget prior to the convenience of the general assembly on Wednesday, April 17, 2024.

## Key Budget Items as of 4.16.2024

Positions and funding for Hayfields (4), Culpeper (5), Clinch River (2), and (2) District PS & LE Rangers – locations TBD. Increased funding for Breaks Interstate Park.	Study of Oak Hill as future state park; 1,200-acre home of James Monroe.	UST replacement & yurt climate control.	C-25 language corrected - Gives state parks authorization for acquisition.
VaLORS for DCR LE included – Legislation included re-enactment clause.	10 NGF positions restored for DCR – backend support for Agency.	Wheelchair pilot receives NGF appropriation - study report due Nov. 2026.	Buffalo Mountain funding \$750,000 NGF.
\$4M for renovations of pool @ Natural Tunnel.	\$10M for Capital Development @ Widewater.	Positions and funding for 3 general positions and 2 Law Enforcement positions for Natural Heritage	Funding for Natural Heritage emergency vehicles and equipment.

Director Wells reviewed the budget change that occurred on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. He noted that Governor Youngkin sent about 200 amendments to the passed budget. The House made the determination that these amendments were not specific and severable. This action sends the budget back to the conferee budget initially presented to the Governor.

Differences included in the two forms of the budget:

- Removal of the climate control funding for Yurts in State Parks.
- Addition of 2 positions for Natural Heritage
- The use of General Fund money for capital projects instead of bond funds.

The General Assembly will reconvene in Special Session on May 13 to resume budget negotiations. The intent is to have a final budget by June 13, 2024.

### **MASTER PLANNING REVIEW** - *Samantha Wangsgard, Chief Environmental Planner*

Ms. Wangsgard provided an overview of the Master Planning process.





Ms. Wangsgard advised that the project kickoff stage, the public information meeting, the visitor experience workshop, and the internal needs assessment workshop are vital to the process. She noted that that public input events ensure community engagement.

Ms. Nizer asked how long the Master Process takes.

Ms. Wangsgard replied that the process is ideally completed in 18-24 months, however that can be adjusted if there is need for additional public input or further study.

Chief Brown asked about the final review for master plans.

Ms. Wangsgard noted that there are multiple stages of review that include:

- Advisory committee review
- Public comment meetings
- Internal staff review

Following those reviews, the Master Plan is submitted to the Board of Conservation and recreation for endorsement. The plan then goes to the General Assembly for thirty days. The DCR Director has final approval.

Col. Hoggard asked about the needs assessment.

Ms. Wangsgard replied that the needs assessment is a broad-based process using feedback from public stakeholders regarding what they would like to see in the park in addition to the internal operations needs of the park, including capacity, infrastructure, financial, and staffing needs. The process is typically handled within the agency, however DCR has retained consultants as needed to assist with the workload.

Ms. Wangsgard review the State Parks currently in the Master Planning review process.

Southwest Virginia (SWVA) Museum:

- Has completed the public comment meeting.
- Is currently in the draft stages of the Master Plan.

Chief Brown asked if Native American voices were being represented in the SWVA Museum Master Plan, stating that a map in the Virginia Atlas (1988) that showed the Cherokee being present in SWVA. He advised that the presence of the Cherokee has been largely left out of the history of that region.

Mr. Collett responded that SWVA has a lot of intersectionality of cultures in the area, including indigenous ones. Wilderness Road State Park, SWVA Museum, Hungry Mother and other parks are part of the story of the crossroads between cultures. The Museum, specifically, has some exhibits in the archives and on display that does reference indigenous cultures and the melting pot of that area.

Ms. Wangsgard commented that the agency in-house cultural resources staff can review what resources are available.

Dr. Baker advised that Virginia State Parks are investing in cultural resource management and noted that DCR has hired a dedicated Cultural Resource Manager. With the new Chief of Education and Interpretation DCR can build a better capacity for resource management.

Ms. Wangsgard reviewed the remaining five Master Plans under review.

Machicomoco State Park:

- Has completed:
  - Public Information Meeting
  - Initial Advisory Team Meeting
  - First public input survey
  - Visitor Experience Workshop
- Is undergoing their needs assessment.

Lake Anna State Park:

- Has completed:
  - Public information meeting
  - First public input survey.
- Is undergoing their needs assessment.
- Next week will be the visitor experience workshop, leading into the needs assessment workshop.
- Working with staff onsite to do outreach during national kids in parks day.

High Bridge Trail State Park:

- Has completed:
  - Initial scope visit.
- Internal project kickoff is in July.

Mayo River & Sweet Run:

- Has completed consultant interviews and initial selections.

- Is undergoing negotiations with the consultants on project scope, schedules, and budgets.

Ms. Wangsgard noted that the following State Parks are scheduled for review in the next cycle:

- Shenandoah River
- York River
- Wilderness Road
- Staunton River

**STATE PARKS SYSTEM: OPERATIONAL UPDATE** – Dr. Melissa Baker, Director, Virginia State Parks

Dr. Baker gave the operational update for Virginia State Parks.

Parks experienced record visitation in 2023. This was the highest visitation since visitation counting was recalibrated in 2018 to be more accurate and exceeded the goal set for 2024.

## Overnight Visitation – Occupancy

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
<b>Cabin</b>	93.28%	81.88%	76.47%	77.67%	71.73%	60.24%	45.08%	55.89%	73.76%
<b>Camping</b>	62.31%	50.49%	52.08%	52.39%	32.81%	16.90%	9.65%	16.31%	30.98%
<b>Camping Cabin</b>	67.26%	50.44%	51.99%	52.01%	46.06%	16.89%	15.77%	14.17%	39.87%
<b>Equestrian Camping</b>	21.57%	15.97%	27.30%	30.06%	14.56%	4.88%	3.81%	4.08%	13.57%
<b>Lodge</b>	69.43%	48.68%	48.97%	51.42%	55.71%	50.73%	24.65%	26.44%	49.24%
<b>Yurt</b>	64.91%	51.45%	52.13%	48.45%	34.17%	12.91%	18.92%	19.12%	32.38%

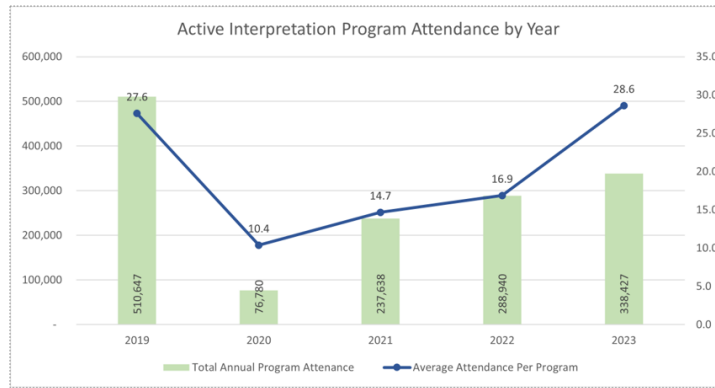
### Highest Occupancy Per Month

	July	Sept	Nov	Jan	Mar
<b>Cabin</b>	CLSP	KPSP	DOSP	LASP	KPSP
<b>Camping</b>	FLSP	SHSP	DOSP	POSP	SHSP
<b>Camping Cabin</b>	LASP	SHSP	POSP	POSP	SHSP
<b>Equestrian Camping</b>	DOSP	JRSP	SRSP	OCSP	OCSP
<b>Lodge</b>	CL/HM/SH	HMSP	SHSP	SHSP	DOSP
<b>Yurt</b>	FLSP	FLSP	FLSP	SHSP	FLSP



State Park cabins had a high occupancy rate even in the winter months as the parks move to move of a year-round operation. Yurts are very popular in the parks but need climate control.

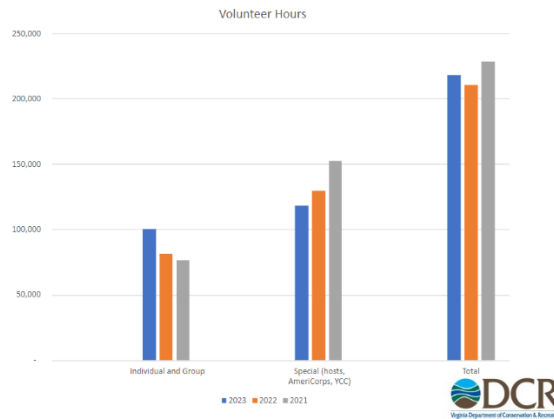
Park program attendance per program has returned to pre-COVID levels and continues to grow.



Dr. Baker reviewed the park volunteer hours. She noted that State Parks has 35 full time employees. Volunteer hours are the equivalent of an additional 105 full-time employees.

## Volunteer Hours

- 218,147 Hours
- 105 FTE Equivalent



Dr. Baker reviewed State Parks revenue numbers and noted that there has not been a fee increase since the COVID pandemic.

## Revenue

	FY21 Budget	FY21	FY22 Budget	FY22	FY23 Budget	FY23
Cabins	6,891,707.00	(7,908,430.14)	6,954,717.70	(7,330,818.96)	7,549,554.00	(7,140,443.51)
Camping	6,021,204.00	(8,289,954.52)	7,912,720.47	(8,805,012.34)	8,209,387.00	(8,661,905.39)
Conference	195,521.12	(166,413.61)	270,932.86	(29,487.96)	290,258.00	(78,757.14)
Educational	103,499.45	(36,659.13)	137,287.54	(136,174.90)	130,458.00	(103,680.15)
Food and Beverage	393,342.00	(161,295.74)	456,584.29	(271,673.23)	375,094.00	(348,158.25)
Merchandise	3,096,491.62	(4,125,569.52)	3,738,991.59	(4,209,913.63)	4,156,888.00	(4,180,702.11)
Other	1,097,145.33	(1,326,914.39)	1,206,484.17	(1,625,306.28)	1,342,230.00	(1,531,228.68)
Parking & Admission	6,085,228.00	(8,101,386.57)	6,992,849.47	(6,923,919.10)	7,425,757.80	(6,954,226.40)
Reservation Fee	994,683.95	(1,979,684.67)	1,244,276.79	(1,383,068.19)	1,243,928.00	(1,676,656.04)
Swimming	463,500.00	(466,331.08)	613,404.49	(586,563.67)	875,451.00	(573,402.26)
<b>Revenue Total</b>	<b>25,342,322.47</b>	<b>(32,869,741.00)</b>	<b>29,528,249.37</b>	<b>(31,302,034.12)</b>	<b>31,599,005.80</b>	<b>(31,249,839.01)</b>

Dr. Baker reviewed the following key accomplishments.






## FY 2024 Key Accomplishments

<b>Career Path Enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Ranger – Maintenance/Facility Operations @ FL</li> <li>• District Ranger - PS&amp;LE @ D3</li> <li>• Evaluating expansion of APM LE Optional Positions</li> </ul>	Equipment Investment FY24 \$2.1M; improved ordering processes	Maintenance funding Investment at District Level - FY24 \$2M	Launch of GIS Portal
SWVA Museum Master Plan completed under new guidance and Machicomoco well underway	Successful completion of Phase 2 Cabin Renovations @ DO & FS	Opened a completely renovated, 50 amp campground and restroom at WE	Transition of Sweet Run to full State Park operation with grand opening
The final west end mile into Pamplin acquired and trail constructed at HB	ValORS !	Asset Management Contracts in Final Stages	Launch of PS&LE Field Ops (Mobile CAD) (rollout started March 2024)
Successful firearms transition of LE staff from .40 to 9mm	Starlink pilot project beginning April 2024	12 Pilot Natural Resource Management Plans completed and 12 in queue for 2024	Released Tribal Consultation Best Management Practices
Over 60 Rangers were certified as ATV Riders - ATV Safety Institute	13 Rangers were certified in the pilot training program for UTV Drivers – Recreational Off Highway Vehicle Association (ROHVA)	Over 600 Rangers have completed the DCJS Human Trafficking Awareness training	
Two Park Ranger Career Development interns were hired full time (currently 11 former interns in State Parks and 1 in Natural Heritage - several attending this meeting)	Chief of Education and Interpretation		

### STATE PARKS MAINTENANCE

Dr. Baker provided an overview State Park maintenance and needs. She noted that there is a deferred maintenance backlog due to funding and staffing.

## Types of Maintenance

 <b>Routine Repair and Maintenance</b> grounds keeping, facility cleaning, HVAC filters, etc.	 <b>Ordinary Repair and Maintenance</b> fixture replacements, painting, simple siding or roofing patches, plumbing repairs	 <b>Deferred Maintenance</b> result of inadequate routine maintenance due to staffing and funding	 <b>Maintenance Reserve</b> Funding allocated as part of the legislative budget process for maintenance projects in excess of \$5,000	 <b>Capital Projects</b> Funding allocated as part of the legislative budget process for new construction or rehabilitation of capital assets.
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Dr. Baker noted that the estimated ordinary maintenance cost is 2-4% of the facility value. The current value of parks assets is at \$1.2 billion which translates to a need of \$25-52 million annually.

Deferred Maintenance Backlog



**Most Recent Estimate - \$346 million** \$45 million funded in prior biennium



**Only captures MR and Capital** Value over \$5,000



**Conditions Continually Changing** Update effort underway. Will always be slightly out of date.



**Update Effort Underway** will bring 277 new projects onto the list totaling 365 deferred maintenance projects.

## Path to Success



**Adequate Funding**  
 Operational Funding/Staffing for Ordinary Repair and Maintenance  
 Capital and Maintenance Reserve



**Increased Number of Specialized Staff**  
 Park Ranger Maintenance  
 Skilled Trades Specialists  
 DAC Project Managers  
 Procurement Officers  
 Administrative Staff



**Flexibility in State Processes**  
 Work with County Building Officials  
 Streamlined Administrative Processes

**NAMING OF A NEW STATE PARK IN CULPEPER** – *Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations*

Mr. Stovall advised that DCR currently operates two state parks that have the purpose of protecting and interpreting Civil War battles. Those are Staunton River Battlefield and Sailor’s Creek. This is the model DCR will employ in Culpeper.

When completed the park in Culpeper will cover 1,200 acres in multiple spaces across the county. Each location was the site of significant action during the Civil War.

Mr. Stovall advised that the Code of Virginia calls upon the Board of Conservation and Recreation to review Master Plans and advise the Director on decisions concerning State Parks, including naming.

Mr. Stovall noted that the recommendation of the Department was that the new park be named Culpeper Battlefields State Park. He advised that some groups advocated for the naming of specific battles, but that the agency believes that limits the ability to interpret each of the locations in context. The project has the endorsement of local government in Culpeper.

**BOARD ACTION**

Mr. Inge moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation endorse the name Culpeper Battlefields State Park for the new park in Culpeper County. Mr. Kilgore seconded, and the motion carried.

**ENHANCING OUTDOOR ACCESS AT NATURAL AREA PRESERVES** - *Wes Paulos, Public Access Coordinator for Natural Heritage*

Mr. Paulos gave an overview of public access at Natural Area Preserves.

## Accessibility

More than ADA compliance

- Creating new access in underserved communities
- Providing access for varying forms of mobility
- Considering types of recreation based upon what the public needs/desires.
- Interpreting to the masses



## Retrofitting Natural Area Preserves

Accessible parking, trails and signage

- Most preserves were built without accessible parking spaces
- Most trails did not use universal design
- Signage was developed with a narrow constituency in mind



## Retrofitting NAP's

Accessible signage for maps

ACCESS INFORMATION									
Trail		Grade		Cross Slope		Tread Width		Surface	
Name	Length	Typical	Maximum	Typical	Maximum	Typical	Minimum	Type	Worst Condition
Ash to Kings Trail	7.4 mi	8.2%	0.38 mi @ 21% - 35%	6.1%	0.23 mi @ 20% - 31%	18 in	3.5 mi @ 15 in	Soil	0.1% @ Soft
Waterfall Trail	0.2 mi	12.1%	21 ft @ 42%	5.9%	95 ft @ 13% - 17%	26 in	55 ft @ 6 in - 18 in	Soil	100% @ Hard
Upper Waterfall Loop	4.4 mi	10.3%	476 ft @ 21% - 35%	5.4%	573 ft @ 16% - 23%	106 in	0.31 mi @ 15 in - 18 in	Soil	100% @ Firm
Overlook Trail	2.8 mi	8.4%	2322 ft @ 16% - 32%	5.9%	438 ft @ 16% - 30%	17 in	15 in	Soil	100% @ Firm
North Kings Loop	1.7 mi	11.5%	768 ft @ 21% - 38%	6.3%	376 ft @ 16% - 37%	57 in	0.6 mi @ 6 in - 15 in	Soil	60% @ Firm



## Retrofitting NAP's

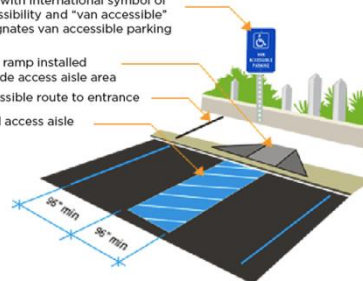
Accessible parking and access lanes

Sign with international symbol of accessibility and "van accessible" designates van accessible parking

Curb ramp installed outside access aisle area

Accessible route to entrance

Level access aisle





## Upcoming Workshop

DCR sponsored event in Richmond, VA this September, conducted by the National Center on Accessibility.

This workshop will cover the fundamentals of accessibility for parks and recreation professionals to effectively improve access to all. Topics may include:

- Summary of accessibility legislation,
- Interacting with people with disabilities,
- Accessibility vs. usability,
- Programmatic access,
- Service animals and mobility devices,
- Parking and accessible routes,
- Interpretation and exhibits,
- Trails and recreation facilities,
- Water and boating access,
- Access to buildings and structures,
- Field work experience



### **NATURAL AREA PRESERVES EXPANSION** – Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage

Mr. Bulluck provided a brief update regarding Natural Area Preserve (NAP) expansion.

#### **Ellett Escarpment**

##### Natural Area Preserve

- Virginia's 68<sup>th</sup> Natural Area Preserve
- Montgomery County
- 33.46 acres
- Fee simple acquisition
- \$293,500 VLCF grant

##### Natural Heritage Resources

- Ellett Valley Millipede
  - Three known locations in the world
  - Federal species of concern
  - State endangered
- Ellett Valley Cave Beetle



#### **Brock's Gap**

##### Natural Area Preserve

- Virginia's 67<sup>th</sup> NAP
- Rockingham County
- 244 acres
- Fee simple and easement
- \$895K VLCF Grant

##### Natural Heritage Resources

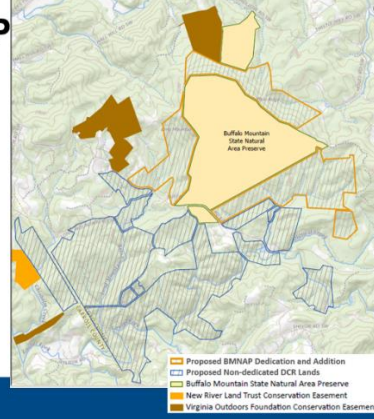
- Northern White Cedar Forest Community (globally and state imperiled)
- Wood turtle (state listed threatened, federal species of concern)



## Buffalo Mountain NAP

Abundant High Priority Conservation Values

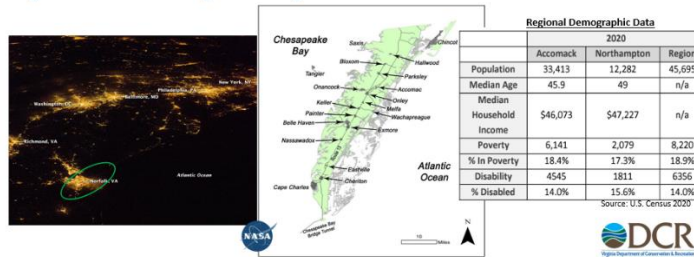
- B1 Conservation Site, 30 documented NH resources, 3 found nowhere else in Virginia
- Conserve Virginia priorities of floodplain resilience, forestry, water quality improvement, protected landscape resilience, and natural habitat & ecosystem diversity
- Will protect 22,615 feet of intermittent streams and 3.6 acres of outstanding wetlands to have at least 100 ft. of buffer



**DCR ON THE EASTERN SHORE** - Shannon Alexander, Natural Heritage Coastal Region Supervisor and Sean Dixon, Manager, Kiptopeke State Park

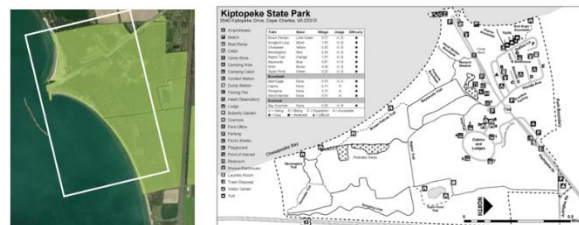
## Eastern Shore Snapshot

Regional Visitor and Population Figures and Trends



## Kiptopeke State Park

Key Information



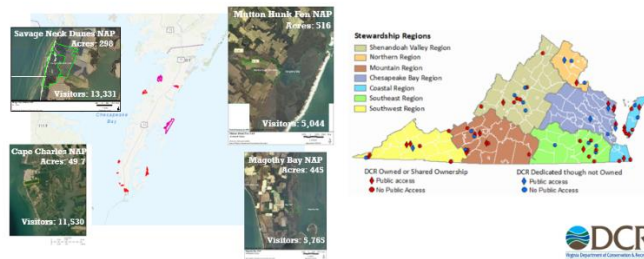
## Park Statistics

2022 PARK STATS	RECREATIONAL AMENITIES	OVERNIGHT AMENITIES
FT Employees: 7	562 acres	138 Campsites
Wage Employees: 18	5 miles of trails	4 Cabins
2022 Attendance: 364,364	Beach programs	5 Lodges
Budget: \$582,691	Birding programs	4 Yurts
Revenue: \$1.63 million	Fishing	1 Bunkhouse camping lodge
Volunteer Hours: 8,269	Kayaking	
Economic Impact: \$13.3M	Crabbing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The park opened on Memorial Day 1992.</li> </ul>	Hiking	
	Biking	
	Picnicking	
	Environmental education	
	Playground	
	Picnic shelters (2)	
	24-hour fishing pier	



## Eastern Shore Natural Area Preserves

### Key Information

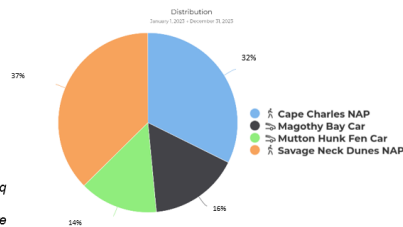


## Natural Area Preserve Statistics

### 2023 Coastal Regional STATS

Number of Preserves: 12  
 Acres: 22,676  
 Eastern Shore Acres: 12,874  
 Miles of Trails: 6.69  
 FT Employees: 2  
 Wage Employees: 2  
 2023 Attendance: 36,030  
 Volunteer Hours: 1,212  
 Research Permits: 12

- The first NAP in the region was acquired in 1989.
- The first NAP on the Eastern Shore acquired in 1998.
- The most recent acquisition was in 2021.



## DCR on the Eastern Shore

### Summary Points

- Both KSP and the NAPs are important for outdoor recreation for both residents and visitors to the region.
  - *The demand has been increasing and is anticipated to continue to increase.*
- High Priority Infrastructure Maintenance
- Need for additional interpretive resources:
  - Chief Ranger Visitor Experience at KSP;
  - Signage and self guided resources at NAPs.
- Coastal conditions, sea level rise and erosion particularly, create costly challenges and negative impacts to natural resources.
- Invasive species remain a large obstacle to protecting biodiversity.



### PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Director Wells advised that the next meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation would be held on October 2-4, 2024, at Douthat State Park.

Chief Brown invited members to attend the Spotswood Treaty Tributed at the Governor's Mansion on April 23 and the Green Point Powwow on July 6.

Director Wells noted that member terms are expiring for Ms. Heisler, Ms. Simon, and Mr. Inge. He thanked them for their service and advised that the Governor's office will be acting regarding reappointments or replacements.

### ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 12:33 p.m.

ATTACHMENT A

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

In January, a detailed accomplishment report was provided to the Board for their review and consideration. Since January, DCR Divisions associated with the Board of Conservation and Recreation report the following significant achievements.

**Virginia State Parks**

- **Volunteer Statistics:** In 2023, volunteers donated 218,147 hours of service to Virginia State Parks. As the 2023 rate of \$32.59 per volunteer hour, volunteers provided over seven million dollars (\$7,109,280) worth of work to Virginia State Parks. Volunteers served the equivalent number of hours of 105 full-time employees. In 2023 volunteers reported 7,454 more hours than the 2022 total of 210,693 hours, reflecting an increase in all categories (individual, group, AmeriCorps, and Camp Houst) except for Youth Conservation Corps as the program was on pause in 2023.
- **Combatting Human Trafficking:** A total of 550 State Park Rangers, staff, and volunteers have completed Human Traffic Awareness Training. This training meets Virginia Department of Health requirements for hotels and other overnight facilities. The training was set up in collaboration with the Department of Criminal Justice Services.
- **Workplace Safety Training:** New and returning site safety officers from all Virginia State Parks completed training on assessing site safety, documenting staff training and worker's compensation claims, reviewing and updating Emergency Action Plans, conducting basic playground inspections, and other relevant topics.
- **Youth Conservation Corps:** Park personnel are working to implement changes to the Youth Conservation Corps program., which was temporarily suspended last year to allow staff to review policy and safety protocols. Interest in the program is strong, with about 300 applications for the 80 Crew Members slots, so it is sure to be a competitive year for the program.

**Virginia Natural Heritage Program**

- **Invasive Species Working Group:** Staff led an Invasive Species Working Group (ISWG) meeting including the Secretaries of Natural and Historic Resources, and Agriculture and Forestry, and staff from Departments of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Forestry, Wildlife Resources, Conservation and Recreation, Transportation, Environmental Quality, Virginia Tech, and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. The ISWG approved interagency development of staffing/budget needs to better implement the state's Invasive Species Management Plan, per 2023 General Assembly assignment to the agencies. The ISWG also approved the updated Virginia Invasive Plants List and DCR's Invasive Plant Assessment Protocol, which is used to assess plants for potential addition to the state list. The staffing/budget needs were presented as part of a broader Invasive Species in Virginia presentation, to and per invitation from, the Commerce, Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee of House Appropriations.

- **New Species Discovered:** DCR Natural Heritage Karst Scientists were published in the Journal of Subterranean Biology. Their publication named and described a cave beetle species confirmed to be new to science, and discovered in a Bath County, Virginia cave.
- **Saving the Rusty Patch Bumblebee:** DCR Natural Heritage staff were invited to serve on a team to begin development of a monitoring plan for the Federally Endangered Rusty Patch Bumblebee. The initial meeting included federal and state experts from agencies throughout the eastern U.S. range of this species. The three-day workshop began the development of a monitoring plan which will provide the basis of a federal recovery plan for the species, including proposed habitat conservation and management actions, to support to the end-goal of down-or/de-listing the species.
- **Cleaning up the Cedars Natural Area Preserve:** DCR Natural Heritage Southwest Regional Stewardship staff coordinated and participated in a volunteer clean-up of a large sinkhole at The Cedars Natural Area Preserve. Sinkholes are features of a karst landscape, where soluble limestone near the ground surface dissolves over time (i.e. millennia), creating depressions that serve as conduits for surface water (and pollution), into groundwater, which sources drinking water wells and sensitive subterranean (cave) habitats for various rare species. The Friends of the Cedars, and DCR Natural Heritage staff worked to remove and properly dispose of several truckloads of metal, tires, bedsprings, washing machines, household debris, and various other household appliances.

### Planning and Recreation Resources

- **Historic River House Preservation at Chippokes State Park:** The Design and Construction section of Planning and Recreation Resources completed renovations to the River House at Chippokes State Park. The renovations included siding replacement and roof replacement to ensure a watertight envelope for the historic structure.
- **Virginia Outdoors Plan:** PRR staff completed the written draft of the Virginia Outdoors Plan. This event marks the first time ARC-GIS and story boards have been used for the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Upon approval, PRR staff will request public comment prior to the Governor's adoption of the plan.
- **Master Planning:** PRR completed two public informational meetings for Lake Anna State Park and Southwest Virginia State Park Master Plans in February. The meetings were well received by the public and both were broadcasted virtually.
- **Westmoreland State Park Bathhouse Renovations:** The Westmoreland Bathhouse- renovation project in Campground B is now complete. The project included grading and adding additional RV campsites to campground B as well as a full renovation to the campground bathhouse. The campground opened to the public March 1<sup>st</sup>.
- **Renovation of Croaker Landing at York River State Park:** The Design and Construction staff completed the renovation of the Croaker Landing Pier and boat ramp project at York River State

Park. The work included three piers with ADA access as well as the dredging of the boat channel in the river. The project was funded with Maintenance Reserve funds from FY2023.

- **Grant Funding Opportunities:** Three grant opportunities managed by DCR have been advertised for Virginia. Grants opportunities include Land and Water Conservation funds (LWCF). Outdoor Recreation Legacy Program (ORLP) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The total available funds for each program varies. Localities of Virginia state agencies and tribes may all complete during the application process.

### **Land Conservation and Real Property Office**

- **Protection of Battlefields:** Capital Region Land Conservancy completed at FY23 VLCF grant for \$588,250, together with funds from the American Battlefield Protection Program, by acquiring and conserving 41 acres at Willis Church and New Market Roads, in eastern Henrico County. The property is within the core area of the Battles of Glendale, Malvern Hill, Deep Bottom I, and Deep Bottom II. The Board of Historic Resources holds a historic preservation and open-space easement over the property that allows for the restoration of the landscape to its agricultural uses and prior battlefield conditions. The property will be open to the public daily and is adjacent to Richmond National Battlefield Park with frontage along scenic Route 5. Local neighborhood groups voiced support for the project, many of which have placed an emphasis on preserving sites pertinent to the U.S. Colored Troops (the Battles of Deep Bottom I and II) and greater connectivity of conserved lands around Malvern Hill.
- **Clinch River State Park Expansion:** On January 8, State Parks acquired the “Dickenson Tract” as a 0.293-acre addition to the Artrip Bent Unit of Clinch River State Park in the Town of Cleveland in Russell County.
- **Lyndhurst Ponds Natural Area Preserve Expansion:** On January 31, Natural Heritage acquired the “Waynesboro Nurseries II Tract” as a 26.153-acre addition to Lyndhurst Ponds Natural Area Preserve in Augusta County.
- **Difficult Creek Natural Area Preserve Expansion:** On February 23, RPO closed on the acquisition of the “Clay Tract” at Difficult Creek Natural Area Preserve in Halifax County. The 2.16-acre addition was a strategic inholding and connector to the Falkland Farms Conservation Area across the road. The project was funded by a VLCF grant.
- **Preservation of Mayo Island:** RPO Staff coordinated with the Capital Region Land Conservancy (CRLC) and the City of Richmond, as well as staff from DCR Floodplain Management and VLCF, to develop the first draft of the deed of easement for Mayo Island in downtown Richmond. The easement will protect the open-space on the island and act as the funding mechanism for CFPF grant award and a VLCF grant award for the City’s purchase of the island and restoration as a future park. Part of this coordination included a site visit and tour of the island and several meetings with stakeholders.