

Mr. Hunter H. Ihrman, Chair
Colonel Eric A. Hoggard, Vice Chair
The Honorable Duane Adams
Ms. Susan Allen
Chief Walt "Red Hawk" Brown
Ms. Gretchen Byrd

The Honorable James Cheng
The Honorable Douglas Domenech
Mr. John W. Inge, IV
The Honorable Kyle Kilgore
Mr. Ross Stewart
Ms. Jennifer Walle Boyd

AGENDA

- I. Welcome & Call to Order – Mr. Hunter Ihrman**
- II. Shenandoah National Park – Mr. Tracy Stakely, Park Superintendent**
- III. Approval of Minutes – Mr. Hunter Ihrman**
- IV. Director’s Report – Director Nikki Rovner**
- V. Financial Report – Ms. Laura Ellis**
- VI. Review and Approval of Proposed State Parks Master Plans – Ms. Kelly McClary & Mr. David Bryan**
 - a. Mayo River State Park**
 - b. High Bridge Trail State Park**
- VII. 100 Years of DCR – A Century of Conservation – Mr. Frank Stovall**
- VIII. Growing the Next Generation of Conservation Leadership – Mr. Eric Hougland, Ms. Scarlett Stevens, Ms. Nancy Heltman and Ms. Jessica German**
 - a. Youth Conservation Corps**
 - b. Ranger Conservation Corps**
 - c. Skillbridge**
- IX. Review of a New Agency Easement Amendment Policy – Director Nikki Rovner, Mr. Frank Stovall, Mr. Brian Fuller**
- X. Public Comment – Chair**
- XI. Announcements & Adjournment – Chair**

III. Approval of the Minutes

VIRGINIA BOARD OF CONSERVATION & RECREATION

Board of Conservation and Recreation

Friday, January 9, 2026

Pocahontas State Park

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation took place at 9:07 a.m. on Friday, January 9, 2026, at Pocahontas State Park.

BOARD OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Hunter H. Ihrman, Chair
Chief Walt "Red Hawk" Brown
The Honorable Douglas Domenech
Ms. Gretchen Byrd
Mr. Ross Stewart
Mrs. Susan Allen
Ms. Jennifer Walle Boyd

BOARD OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Colonel Eric A. Hoggard, Vice Chair
The Honorable James Cheng
Mr. John W. Inge, IV
The Honorable Duane Adams
The Honorable Kyle Kilgore

STAFF PRESENT

Andrew Smith, Acting Director
Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations
Laura Ellis, Deputy Director for Administration and Finance
Dr. Melissa Baker, Director, Virginia State Parks
Tim Shrader, Easter Field Operation Manager
Whitten Cluff, Executive Assistant for Operations
Lisa McGee, Director of Policy, Planning, and Legislative Affairs
Kelly McClary, Division Director, Planning and Recreation Resources
David Bryan, State Parks Planner
Josh Ellington, Chief of Resource Management
Lesley Starke, Stewardship Chief
Sharon Partee, Director of Finance
David Neudeck, Public Communications and Marketing Director
Breanne Lindsey, Board & Constituent Liaison

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With seven (7) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Ihrman called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. and called for introductions.

APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 2, 2025, MINUTES

BOARD ACTION

Mrs. Allen moved to approve the October 2, 2025, Board meeting minutes as presented. Chief Brown seconded the motion, which was approved by Allen, Brown, Byrd, Domenech, Ihrman, Stewart, and Walle Boyd.

ANNUAL FOIA TRAINING – *Ms. Breanne Lindsey, Board & Constituent Liaison*

Ms. Lindsey presented an overview of the Freedom of Information Act as it pertains to Board members.

ANNUAL RENEWAL OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING POLICY – *Ms. Breanne Lindsey, Board & Constituent Liaison*

In accordance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, which requires annual adoption of a Board Virtual Participation Policy: Ms. Lindsey provided an overview of the current policy.

BOARD ACTION

Mrs. Allen moved to approve the Virtual Meeting Policy as presented. Mr. Stewart seconded the motion, which was approved by Allen, Brown, Byrd, Domenech, Ihrman, Stewart, and Walle Boyd.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT – *Mr. Andrew W. Smith, DCR Acting Director*

Acting Director Smith provided an overview of DCR's accomplishments in 2025. DCR continued to carry out its mission to conserve, protect, and enjoy by expanding its public lands and improving outdoor recreation access. He continued by providing the following highlights:

- The agency expanded public lands by creating two new natural area preserves, Eastern Divide and Brocks Gap, and acquired lakefront property to expand Caledon State Park.
- Hayfields State Park officially opened as Virginia's 44th state park on October 20, 2025, preserving 1,034 acres in Highland County and generating strong public engagement, with nearly 193,000 people reached on social media.
- In its 26th year, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation awarded \$15.5 million in grants, supporting major conservation projects that preserved natural areas for educational purposes, expanded the James River Park System, and grew Caledon State Park.
- DCR entered a Good Neighbor Agreement with the U.S. Forest Service, providing about \$5 million over 10 years to support biological inventories, NEPA requirement assistance, record updates, and assessments of special biological areas.
- DCR's Natural Heritage developed a new GIS layer through a NOAA-funded project to support coastal conservation planning by identifying adjacent lands that enhance the resilience of protected areas.
- Public access increased through key land acquisitions, the opening of new visitor and recreation facilities, expanded camping and water access opportunities, continued trail development at multiple preserves, and reconstruction of a boardwalk trail will be underway at North Landing River Natural Area Preserve.

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- Historic preservation and amenities were enhanced with renovations to the CCC-era Douthat Lodge and the start of restoration on over 30 cabins at Westmoreland and First Landing state parks.
- State park planning advanced with the completion and approval of Lake Anna’s 10-year master plan and the review of Machicomoco’s plan, both designed to guide balanced conservation, recreation, and education through stakeholder and community input.

Following Acting Director Smith’s update, the Board discussed whether Hayfield State Park has undergone an assessment of Indigenous influence in the area. Staff indicated that the master planning process has not yet begun, but that such an assessment should be included as part of the plan. The Board also discussed variations in staffing levels across state parks and the range of hiking and recreational activities available at those parks.

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

Ms. Ellis reported on the financial conditions of DCR:

Financial Report – January 9, 2026

General Fund Appropriation & Expenditures

- Fiscal Year 2026 Total Legislative Appropriation:
\$107,947,574
- Total transfers and adjustments: (\$15,765,324)
- Fiscal Year 2026 Total Legislative Appropriation Available for Agency Operations:
\$92,182,250

Figure 1: Appropriation Transfers & Adjustments:

FY2026 Legislative Appropriation	<u>\$ 107,947,574</u>
Appropriation Transfers and Adjustments	
Governor’s Veto	(500,000)
WQIF Reserve	(2,583,531)
Dam Safety/Flood Prevention & Protection	(732,147)
Land Conservation Fund Transfers	(16,000,000)
SWCD Dam Repair	(1,500,000)
Mandatory Carryforward	1,388,796
Central Appropriations	3,685,535
CTO funds for assessment	476,023
	(15,765,324)
FY2026 Total GF Appropriation Available for Operations	<u>\$ 92,182,250</u>

Figure 2: General Fund Division Budgets and Expenditures Through November 30, 2026.

	YTD Actual	Target vs Actual -%
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Division	Division Targets	(November 30, 2025)	
Natural Heritage	\$ 6,500,945.00	\$ 2,712,552	41.7%
State Parks	\$ 38,659,525.00	\$ 27,231,903	70.4%
PRR (Incl Design & Construction)	\$ 4,237,268.00	\$ 1,317,118.74	31.1%
Director's Office – Admin-Finance	\$ 14,187,360.00	\$ 7,665,678	54%
Grand Total	\$ 63,585,098.00	\$ 38,927,252	61.2%

*Notes: State Parks reflects only General Fund appropriations and expenditures, approximately 50% of the total parks budget. PRR appropriations include significant capital project pass-throughs for specific locality projects, including locality-owned boat ramps (\$6M), swimming facilities (\$9M), and other similar items.

Figure 3: State Park Operating Revenues July 1, 2025, through November 30, 2025

	FY26 Estimate	YTD Actual (Through November 30, 2025)	YTD Actual /Estimate	Prior Year YTD Actual (Through November 30, 2024)	YOY Change
Grand Total	\$ 33,666,754	\$ 16,857,969	50%	\$ 17,077,506	-1%

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET – Mr. Andrew W. Smith, DCR Acting Director

Acting Director Smith provided the following briefing on the Governor's Budget:

Governor Youngkin's Proposed FY27 Budget Adjustments for DCR¹

Operating Budget Summary

Biennium	Fiscal Year	Source	GF	NGF	Total
2020-2022	2021	Chapter 1, 2022 Acts of Assembly	\$133,055,585	\$57,858,814	\$190,914,399
2020-2022	2022	Chapter 1, 2022 Acts of Assembly	\$152,961,045	\$58,058,814	\$211,019,859
2022-2024	2023	Chapter 1, 2024 Acts of Assembly	\$431,138,368	\$172,452,771	\$603,591,139
2022-2024	2024	Chapter 1, 2024 Acts of Assembly	\$556,564,758	\$146,799,665	\$703,364,423
2024-2026	2025	Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly	\$456,615,201	\$211,635,974	\$668,251,175
2024-2026	2026	Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly	\$107,947,574	\$149,423,979	\$257,371,553
2026-2028	2027	Governor's Proposed Budget	\$256,795,331	\$300,090,049	\$556,885,380
		<i>Base Budget</i>	\$107,947,574	\$149,423,979	\$257,371,553
		<i>Addenda (Changes to the Base)</i>	\$148,847,757	\$150,666,070	\$299,513,827
2026-2028	2028	Governor's Proposed Budget	\$110,924,189	\$158,034,338	\$268,958,527
		<i>Base Budget</i>	\$107,947,574	\$149,423,979	\$257,371,553
		<i>Addenda (Changes to the Base)</i>	\$2,976,615	\$8,610,359	\$11,586,974

Positions Summary

Biennium	Fiscal Year	Source	GF	NGF	Total
2020-2022	2021	Chapter 1, 2022 Acts of Assembly	435.50	46.50	482.00

¹ All text and data in this section was taken from the 2026 Executive Budget Document as posted on the webpage of the Department of Planning and Budget and accessed on December 23, 2025.

<https://dpb.virginia.gov/budget/buddoc26/partb/officeofnaturalandhistoricresources.pdf>

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2020-2022	2022	Chapter 1, 2022 Acts of Assembly	443.50	46.50	490.00
2022-2024	2023	Chapter 1, 2024 Acts of Assembly	474.50	49.50	524.00
2022-2024	2024	Chapter 1, 2024 Acts of Assembly	480.50	50.50	531.00
2024-2026	2025	Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly	512.50	53.50	566.00
2024-2026	2026	Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly	514.50	57.50	572.00
2026-2028	2027	Governor's Proposed Budget	514.50	70.50	585.00
		<i>Base Budget</i>	<i>514.50</i>	<i>57.50</i>	<i>572.00</i>
		<i>Addenda (Changes to the Base)</i>	<i>0.00</i>	<i>13.00</i>	<i>13.00</i>

Operating Budget Amendments

- Adjust appropriation for centrally funded changes to Line of Duty Act premiums and enrollment: Adjusts appropriation for Line of Duty Act premiums and enrollment changes budgeted in Central Appropriations, Item 469 N. of Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly.

	FY 2027	FY2028
General Fund	\$18,035	\$18,035

- Adjust appropriation for centrally funded minimum wage increases: Adjusts appropriation to reflect the assumed increase in the Virginia minimum wage effective January 1, 2026, and budgeted in Central Appropriations, Item 469 Q. of Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly. The amounts provided support the annualized general fund cost of increasing the Virginia minimum wage from \$12.00 per hour to \$12.89 per hour or the equivalent annual salary of \$26,811. The actual minimum wage for January 1, 2026, will be communicated by the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Industry by October 1, 2025.

	FY 2027	FY 2028
General Fund	\$92,886	\$92,886
Nongeneral Fund	\$13,018	\$13,018

- Adjust appropriation for centrally funded salary increases for state employees: Adjusts appropriation for the salary increases for state employees budgeted in Central Appropriations, Item 469 R. of Chapter 725, 2025 Acts of Assembly.

	FY 2027	FY 2028
General Fund	\$2,185,115	\$2,185,115
Nongeneral Fund	\$305,110	\$305,110

- Support algal bloom remediation at Lake Anna: Provides funding in the first year for harmful algal bloom remediation efforts.

	FY 2027	FY 2028
General Fund	\$750,000	\$0

- Provide nongeneral fund appropriation and positions for participation in a cooperative agreement with the United States Forest Service: Establishes federal and special nongeneral fund appropriation and positions to support participation in a ten-year cooperative agreement with the United States Forest Service. This agreement will designate funding for critical trail maintenance, arborist work, and infrastructure repair across state parks and adjacent federal lands.

	FY 2027	FY 2028
Nongeneral Fund	\$1,474,052	\$1,551,784
Positions	13.00	13.00

- Transfer cash between funds within the agency: Authorizes the agency to transfer \$2.4 million from the State Park Acquisition and Development Fund to the Natural Area Preservation Fund. These funds were received through the sale of property originally intended to become a preserve.

Capital Project Requests

- Acquire Oak Hill and establish as a state park: Authorizes the Director, Department of Planning and Budget, to establish a capital and operating appropriation for the Department of Conservation and Recreation to acquire Oak Hill upon meeting specified conditions.
- Provide additional federal appropriation for natural area preserve acquisitions: Allocates additional federal appropriation for the project in anticipation of awards.

	FY 2027	FY 2028
Nongeneral Fund	\$10,200,000	\$0

Following Acting Director Smith’s overview of the Governor’s Budget, the Board discussed Oak Hill State Park and the potential impacts of the 2026 General Assembly legislative session on the park. The Board discussed the structural conditions at Oak Hill State Park and noted that the structures are in better condition than expected, considering their age.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED MACHICOMOCO STATE PARK MASTER PLAN – Ms. Kelly McClary, Director, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources

Prior to presenting an overview of the Machicomoco State Park Master Plan, Ms. McClary announced that David Bryan has been selected as the new State Park Planner for the Planning and Recreation Resources (PRR) Section. She also thanked Chief Brown for his assistance with the Master Plan and for his service on the Advisory Committee.

The Board’s role is to review the plan and, if deemed acceptable, recommend its adoption. If the Board recommends adoption, the plan is forwarded to the General Assembly for review. Upon approval by the General Assembly, the plan is then submitted to the DCR Director for approval. Ms. McClary then provided an overview of the Machicomoco State Park Master Plan:

- Machicomoco State Park is located along the York River in Gloucester County, Virginia, and consists of two administrative units, the Main Unit and the West Unit, totaling more than 1,000 acres. Ownership of the West Unit was transferred to DCR in 2006, followed by the Main Unit in 2020, with park operations commencing in 2021.
- The park’s interpretive area highlights Virginia Indian history through educational programming and interpretive displays. Cultural resources reflecting Native American history at both units of the park date to the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.
- Essential visitor experiences designed to convey the park’s story and resources include the interpretive area, Timberneck House, the cartop boat launch road, the waters surrounding Machicomoco, the campground experience, access to unimpaired natural areas, views of the York River and associated marshes, and immersive passive recreation opportunities within the West Unit.
- A public information survey was conducted to gather public input regarding desired park features. Survey responses indicated that outdoor recreation and public events were top priorities. In addition, respondents emphasized Tribal history and noted the strong connection between Indigenous groups and the park’s land and waterways.

Ms. McClary provided the goals of the park:

- Goal 1.0 – Protect, conserve, and enhance the cultural, historic, and natural resources of the park.
- Goal 2.0 – Create a welcoming and safe environment for all visitors to learn about and gain a better understanding of the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the park.
- Goal 3.0 – Provide a range of day-use and overnight opportunities, facilities, and amenities for visitors to the park.
- Goal 4.0 – Provide programming for natural, cultural, and historic education and interpretation.
- Goal 5.0 – Continue to collaborate across sectors to provide mutually beneficial efforts to enhance Machicomoco State Park and the surrounding region.
- Goal 6.0 – Continue to administer and manage the park professionally and transparently, which fosters the public’s trust.

Ms. McClary concluded the plan overview by reviewing the three phases of each unit and the staffing needs of the park:

- The proposed development for the Main Unit is organized into three phases and includes construction of a maintenance facility, longleaf pine management, a visitor center, meadow development, cabins, an outdoor classroom, and related improvements.
- The proposed development for the West Unit is also organized into three phases and includes waterfront safety improvements, development of a picnic area, an ADA-accessible trail, shoreline stabilization, a ranger residence, a fishing pier, and related improvements.
- Staffing needs for the park were presented by phase and included current staffing levels, immediate staffing needs, and additional positions anticipated for phases two and three for both park units. Current staff positions include a Park Manager, Chief Ranger – Law Enforcement, Chief Ranger – Visitor Experience, Office Manager, Park Ranger – Maintenance, and Park Ranger – Law Enforcement. Immediate staffing needs include a Park Ranger – Maintenance and a Park Ranger – Resource Management. Additional staffing anticipated during phases two and three includes an Assistant Park Manager, Office Assistant, Supervisory Park Ranger, Volunteer Coordinator, Education Specialist, Park Ranger – Maintenance, Park Ranger – Law Enforcement, Park Ranger – Resource Management, and Park Ranger – Custodial.

Following Ms. McClary’s overview of the Master Plan, the Board discussed various components of the plan. Chief Brown encouraged the Board to approve the Master Plan, noting that Machicomoco State Park is the only state park in Virginia that recognizes all three Virginia Indian language groups and emphasizing the importance of preserving this history. The Board also discussed agricultural activities at the park, including the farming of soybeans and corn; the partnership with the Fairfield Foundation to repair the Timberneck House; the anticipated 30-year timeframe for completion of the Master Plan’s phased development; and proposed amendments to the Executive Summary of the Master Plan suggested by Board members.

BOARD ACTION

Chief Brown moved to approve the Master Plan with recommended amendments by the Board to be considered by staff prior to submission to the General Assembly. Mrs. Allen seconded the motion, which was approved by: Allen, Brown, Byrd, Domenech, Ihrman, Stewart, and Walle Boyd.

ADOPTION OF THE 2027 BCR CALENDAR – *Mr. Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations*

Mr. Stovall provided a reminder of the remaining meeting dates in 2026:

- April 29 – May 1, 2026: Shenandoah National Park
- October 7-9, 2026: Breaks Interstate Park

Mr. Stovall provided recommended dates and locations for the Board of Conservation and Recreation meetings through 2027 for approval as follows:

- January 8, 2027: Pocahontas State Park, Chesterfield, VA
- April 14-16, 2027: Hungry Mother State Park, Marion, VA
- October 6-8, 2027: Westmoreland State Park, Westmoreland, VA

BOARD ACTION

Mrs. Allen moved to approve the 2027 meeting dates as presented. Ms. Byrd seconded the motion, which was approved by Allen, Brown, Byrd, Domenech, Ihrman, Stewart, and Walle Boyd.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Ihrman announced that the next meeting is scheduled for April 29 through May 1, 2026, at Shenandoah National Park.

Mrs. Allen recognized the work of DCR staff and Chief Brown for their efforts related to the Machicomoco Master Plan.

Mr. Ihrman recognized Dr. Baker, Director of the Division of State Parks, who has resigned to accept a position in another state. The Board expressed gratitude for Dr. Baker's six years of service with the agency, noting her leadership during the COVID-19 response and her dedicated efforts to increase access to state parks for persons with disabilities, ensuring that parks are accessible to all.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:42 a.m.

V. Financial Report

VIRGINIA BOARD OF CONSERVATION & RECREATION

General Fund Appropriation and Expenditures

FY2026 Legislative Appropriation

\$ 107,947,574

Appropriation Transfers and Adjustments

Governor's Veto	(500,000)
WQIF Reserve	(2,583,531)
Dam Safety/Flood Prevention & Protection	(732,147)
Land Conservation Fund Transfers	(16,000,000)
SWCD Dam Repair	(1,500,000)
Mandatory Carryforward	1,388,796
Discretionary Carryforward	18,197,506
Central Appropriations	4,429,322
CTO funds for assessment	476,023

3,175,969

FY 2026 Total GF Appropriation Available for Operations

\$ 111,123,543

Division	Division Targets	YTD Actual	
		(March 31, 2026)	Target vs Actual - %
Natural Heritage	\$7,714,500	\$5,008,869	64.9%
State Parks	\$38,659,525	\$34,405,875	89.0%
PRR (Incl Design & Construction)	\$21,139,304	\$3,018,378	14.3%
Director's Office - Admin- Finance	\$14,931,149	\$12,631,956	84.6%
Grand Total	\$ 82,444,478	\$ 55,065,078	66.8%

State Park Operating Revenues

July 1, 2025 - March 31, 2026

Fiscal Year 2026

	FY26 Estimate	YTD Actual (Through March 31, 2026)	YTD Actual /Estimate	64%	Prior Year YTD Actual (Through March 31, 2025)	YOY Change

IX. Open Space Easement Acquisition and Stewardship Policy

VIRGINIA BOARD OF CONSERVATION & RECREATION

Board of Conservation and Recreation - Staff Report

TOPIC: Land Conservation, Policy

SUBJECT: Open Space Easement Acquisition and Stewardship Policy

- Recent and ongoing concerns regarding easement amendments, review, and enforcement have identified the need for DCR to craft and adopt a formal policy statement to guide the agency in the stewardship of numerous conservation easements that the agency holds across the Commonwealth. A draft policy has been developed by agency staff and is attached to this staff summary report.
- Specifically, the policy is crafted to 1.) provide statewide consistency; 2.) protect the public interest; 3.) guide DCR's long term easement stewardship responsibilities; 4.) promote collaboration and transparency; 5.) ensure compliance with statutory requirements; 5.) support informed decision making; and 6.) provide structured guidance for assessing and managing enforcement, amendments, and conversion/diversions.
- The draft policy provides guidance and direction to ensure that DCR:
 - a. Protects conservation values in perpetuity
 - b. Applies clear and consistent standards for easement acceptance
 - c. Upholds rigorous due diligence standards
 - d. Maintains high-quality baseline documentation and records
 - e. Monitors easements proactively
 - f. Ensures predictable, transparent, and regular communication with easement landowners
 - g. Applies uniform processes for reviewing improvements and reserved rights requests
 - h. Prevents and addresses non-compliance through a graduated, education-focused approach to enforcement
 - i. Considers amendments only when conservation is positive
 - j. Applies strict standards for conversion/diversion processes
 - k. Requires fair and transparent fees to ensure that the cost of amendments and easement-related work is paid for by those applying for amendments and conversions, and that work is not burdened directly on the taxpayers
 - l. Sets and maintains high standards for coordination, communication, and conduct
 - m. Operates in a transparent manner and protects the public trust

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact that stems from policy adoption. Future requests for amendments or conversions/diversions will have a fiscal impact in the form of fee revenue assessed to the applicant, reducing

the taxpayer responsibility associated with these administrative functions. The agency receives very few of these requests; however, they can be very costly to manage.

BOARD RESPONSIBILITY / AUTHORITY:

The Board of Conservation and Recreation is empowered in Section 10.1-107 of the Code of Virginia to advise the Director of DCR and the Governor on a variety of issues. While the board cannot adopt, create, or establish agency policy, it can review, advise on, and endorse policy proposals at the director's request.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommendations: 1. Reviewing the proposed policy statement and receiving information from staff regarding the proposed policy statement; and 2. Advising the Director of DCR on the proposed policy statement.

	<p>DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES Section: General Administration</p>
<p>SUBSECTION: Open-Space Easement Acquisition and Stewardship</p>	<p>No.: XXX Eff. Date: XX/XX/XXXX</p>

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear, consistent, and agency-wide framework for the acceptance, administration, monitoring, interpretation, enforcement, and amendment (as applicable) of open-space easements held by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Open-space easements are essential tools for permanently preserving the Commonwealth's natural, scenic, historic, cultural, ecological, and recreational resources in furtherance of DCR's mission and the purposes of the Open-Space Land Act (OSLA).

This policy affirms DCR's responsibility to ensure that each easement entrusted to the agency is protected in perpetuity and managed according to the highest standards of conservation practice. It establishes the expectations, authorities, and principles that guide DCR staff in evaluating proposed easements, conducting due diligence, documenting and preserving conservation values, monitoring properties, reviewing proposed improvements, addressing non-compliance, and administering amendments or conversion/diversion requests per the Code of Virginia. These functions are integral to DCR's statutory and programmatic obligations to safeguard open space for the benefit of present and future generations.

Specifically, this policy is intended to:

1. **Provide statewide consistency** in how DCR staff evaluate, accept, and steward open-space easements, ensuring that decisions are grounded in clear and objective standards.
2. **Protect the public interest** by maintaining the integrity, conservation purpose, and legal durability of all easements, including those supporting state parks, natural area preserves, other publicly-protected lands, and natural, ecological, historic, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources.
3. **Guide DCR's long-term stewardship responsibilities**, including annual monitoring, record management, landowner engagement, and equitable enforcement of easement terms across all properties in the program.
4. **Promote collaboration and transparency** with landowners, co-holding partners, and other conservation entities by clearly articulating the agency's expectations, processes, and responsibilities throughout the life of an easement.
5. **Ensure compliance with statutory requirements**, including OSLA, associated regulations, and administrative procedures governing real property transactions, public records, and capital outlay approvals.
6. **Support informed, consistent decision-making** by DCR staff when evaluating proposed development, improvements, resource management actions, or changes to property ownership or conditions, ensuring such decisions reflect both the deed's terms and the conservation values documented in the Baseline Documentation Report (BDR).

7. **Provide structured guidance** for assessing and processing proposed easement amendments and conversion/diversion (“1704”) requests, ensuring such actions occur only when fully consistent with statutory requirements and result in conservation-positive outcomes.

By establishing these purposes, DCR commits to a high standard of permanent stewardship, consistency, professionalism, and public accountability in managing open-space easements across the Commonwealth.

II. Scope

This policy applies to all DCR employees and agency-engaged workers (consultants, contractors, interns, volunteers) who perform tasks related to easement evaluation, acquisition, monitoring, enforcement, data management, and landowner engagement. It is written for internal use by DCR staff and may also be consulted by agency partners to understand DCR’s practices and standards.

III. Authority

1. DCR holds open-space easements under the **Open-Space Land Act (OSLA), Va. Code § 10.1-1700 et seq.**
2. Amendments and conversions/diversions follow **OSLA, per Va. Code § 10.1-1704.**
3. Legal sufficiency for real property transactions involving the Commonwealth is reviewed by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), capital outlay approvals may be required from DPB (CO-2), and Governor Decision Briefs may be required for donations, as applicable.

IV. Definitions and Acronyms

Agency or DCR: the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Amendment: a revision of an easement to strengthen or enhance its protection of conservation values

BDR: Baseline Documentation Report

Commonwealth: the Commonwealth of Virginia

Conservation Values: the natural, historical, cultural, or recreational resources located on a tract of land

ConserveVirginia: the data-driven Geographical Information Systems model to prioritize potential conservation areas across the Commonwealth (Va. Code § 10.1-104.6:1)

Conversion/Diversion: the conversion of a portion of an easement due to a public necessity and the diversion of that open-space protection to a suitable replacement property (Va. Code § 10.1-1704)

DCR Field Staff: State Park managers or Natural Area Preserve regional stewards, or their designees

Division: the division or subdivision of a tract of land into defined lots which can be separately conveyed by sale or lease, and which can be altered or developed

Grantor: a landowner (including their representatives) who conveys an easement

Easement: an open-space easement conveyed to DCR under the Open-Space Land Act (Va. Code § 10.1-1700 et seq.)

Easement Property: the tract of land, parcel or acreage which is encumbered by an easement

Execution: the act of signing the easement and/or BDR

FMR: Field Monitoring Report

FOIA: the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (Va. Code § 2.2-3700 et seq.)

IRC: Internal Revenue Code

LNS: Landowner Notification Summary

LOQ: Landowner Questionnaire

Manager: Real Property Manager or designee

OAG: the Office of the Attorney General

OSLA: the Open-Space Land Act (Va. Code § 10.1-1700 et seq.)

Recordation: the act of presenting the executed easement to the local Circuit Court Clerk and the subsequent entering of the easement into the public record

RPO: Real Property Office of DCR

Stewardship Specialist: DCR staff processing new easement and stewardship requests in RPO

V. Statement of Policy

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) shall administer, steward, and enforce all open-space easements held by the agency on behalf of the Commonwealth in a manner consistent with OSLA, applicable federal and state requirements, the agency's enabling authority, and the standards and procedures established by this policy and related supporting documentation.

This policy establishes the agency's commitments to ensure that easements are protected in perpetuity, that conservation values are preserved or enhanced, and that DCR maintains a transparent, consistent, and professional stewardship program.

Accordingly, it is the policy of DCR to:

1. **Protect Conservation Values in Perpetuity** by safeguarding the natural, ecological, historic, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources identified as conservation values in each easement, ensuring that these values remain intact for present and future generations. This includes maintaining the integrity of undeveloped landscapes, ecological functions, and public benefits articulated in the easement terms.
2. **Apply Clear, Consistent Standards for Easement Acceptance** by evaluating proposed easements using the agency's established acceptance criteria, including adjacency to publicly-protected land, alignment with DCR's mission, presence of ConserveVirginia priorities, regional or statewide conservation significance, water quality benefits, and DCR's long-term capacity to steward the easement. DCR shall only accept easements that demonstrably advance statutory and programmatic conservation purposes.
3. **Uphold Rigorous Due Diligence Standards** by ensuring that every easement under consideration undergoes consistent, documented review, including analysis of draft deeds, surveys, title

commitments, BDRs, and local Comprehensive Plan compliance. DCR shall not proceed to execution or recordation until the Real Property Office (RPO), the Director, and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) have verified legal sufficiency and program alignment.

4. **Maintain High-Quality Baseline Documentation and Records** by requiring and maintaining accurate, complete BDRs for all easements, documenting property conditions at the time of conveyance and serving as the principal reference point for future monitoring and enforcement. BDRs and associated materials shall be retained as permanent documents of record and managed consistently with FOIA and other applicable requirements.
5. **Monitor All Easements Annually and Proactively** by conducting annual stewardship monitoring in accordance with established procedures that include Landowner Questionnaires (LOQs) or Field Monitoring Reports (FMRs). At a minimum, it shall be the policy of the agency to conduct FMRs once every five years and LOQs every year that an FMR is not completed. Monitoring shall be timely, consistent, and thorough; shall document conditions and changes; and shall proactively address potential noncompliance through early communication with landowners. DCR field staff engaged in monitoring shall document observations, but may not interpret easement terms, which is the responsibility of RPO.
6. **Ensure Predictable, Transparent Communication with Landowners** by maintaining open, constructive, and consistent communication with landowners throughout the life of an easement. This includes providing Landowner Notification Summary (LNS) letters at recordation and upon changes in ownership, issuing timely responses to written requests, and offering technical guidance to support voluntary compliance.
7. **Apply Uniform Processes for Reviewing Improvements and Reserved Rights** by reviewing all proposed improvements or activities requiring approval, including construction, timbering, subdivision, utilities, or changes to riparian buffers, using a structured evaluation process that includes deed consultation, site-specific analysis, calculation of impervious surfaces, coordination with relevant DCR divisions, and a written response within established timelines. Approvals shall be issued only when fully consistent with the easement terms and conservation values.
8. **Prevent and Address Non-Compliance Through a Graduated, Education-Focused Approach** that addresses potential violations through a sequence of education, early engagement, corrective guidance, and formal enforcement, as applicable. Minor violations generally shall include an opportunity to cure within 90 days, while significant or ongoing violations shall be escalated in consultation with the OAG. DCR shall pursue negotiated solutions where possible and litigation only when required to uphold the public interest.
9. **Consider Amendments Only When Conservation-Positive** by recognizing that easements are intended to be perpetual and that amendments shall be considered only under limited circumstances in which the proposed change provides a clear conservation benefit, improve enforceability, correct errors, or add acreage or restrictions. Amendments shall not be used to weaken protections, reduce conservation values, or result in prohibited private benefit. All amendments require Director approval and OAG review.

10. **Apply Strict Standards for Conversion/Diversion (1704) Requests** by administering all requests under Va. Code § 10.1-1704 to convert or divert open-space land solely in accordance with statutory requirements, including determinations of essentiality, locality comprehensive plan consistency, and substitution of replacement land of equal or greater fair market *and* conservation value with equivalent usefulness and location. DCR shall coordinate with the OAG, the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources (SNHR), and other relevant entities to ensure legal sufficiency and conservation integrity.
11. **Require Fair and Transparent Fees to Support Stewardship** through the establishment and assessment of appropriate fees for BDR preparation or review, amendment applications, and 1704 reviews, consistent with program costs and complexity. Fees shall support stewardship capacity and ensure that DCR can maintain long-term responsibilities associated with perpetual easements. It shall be the policy of the agency that the cost for amendments and diversions be borne by those applying for such amendments or diversions, and not by the taxpayers of the Commonwealth unless such amendment or diversion is initiated by the agency.
12. **Ensure High Standards of Inter-Division Coordination and Professional Conduct** through the practice of coordinated stewardship among DCR offices and divisions, including but not limited to RPO, the Division of State Parks, the Division of Natural Heritage, the Division of Planning and Recreation Resources, and other divisions whose expertise is essential to evaluating resource impacts and protecting conservation values. All staff engaging with landowners shall conduct themselves in a professional, respectful manner that reflects DCR's role as the Commonwealth's lead conservation agency.
13. **Maintain Transparency and Public Trust** by demonstrating accountability and stewardship excellence through accurate records, clear procedures, and principled decision-making. As easements represent a permanent public commitment, DCR shall implement this policy to maintain the confidence of landowners, partners, the public, and the Commonwealth.

In carrying out this policy, DCR affirms its obligation to serve as a reliable, consistent, and conservation-driven steward of the Commonwealth's open-space lands, ensuring that every easement entrusted to the agency is managed with diligence, fairness, and fidelity to its perpetual purpose.

VI. General Policy Provisions and Procedures

The Agency will develop, adopt, and maintain an Open-Space Easement Manual, which shall be reviewed by support staff, approved by the Director, and will provide clear and actionable guidance and procedures for the following:

1. Easement evaluation and acceptance
2. Standard terms for deed guidance
3. Due diligence and transaction review
4. Monitoring and communication standards
5. Interpretation of reserved rights and proposed improvements
6. Enforcement for non-compliance
7. Amendments
8. Conversion and diversion
9. Fees and assessments
10. Records and data management

VII. Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities are established by this policy:

Agency Director: final approval of interpretations (as necessary), easement acceptance, amendments, and certain enforcement actions; signs deeds and BDRs; approves conversion/diversion recommendations.

Deputy Director of Operations: program oversight; elevates significant matters and ensures resourcing when available, manages processes that involve the OAG, DPB, SNHR, or the Governor.

Real Property Manager (or designated program manager): supervises stewardship operations; ensures due diligence; leads acceptance/amendment packages; coordinates OAG/DPB/Governor processes.

Stewardship Specialist: primary contact; conducts monitoring; manages LOQs/FMRs; issues LNS; drafts correspondence; coordinates reviews; maintains records.

State Park and Natural Area Preserve Field Staff: support monitoring as observers/change-detectors; provide resource input for interpretation; do not render legal interpretations.

VIII. Related Documents and Resources

DCR Open-Space Easement Manual

Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed and revised accordingly as dictated by changes in state or federal laws, state policy, or as agency business needs necessitate. Recommended Lead Unit: Operations.

NOTE: Any revision to this policy or revision to the procedures and forms associated with this policy must be made pursuant to DCR Policy #100: SECTION: General Administration; SUBSECTION: Departmental Policy and Procedures Management.

Approval Signatures

This policy will remain in effect until otherwise rescinded or revised by written policy. Any exceptions to this policy must be approved in advance and in writing by the Agency Director.

Nicole M. Rovner, Director
Department of Conservation and Recreation

Signature Date

Policy Revision History

DATE	ACTION	DESCRIPTION

XI: Announcements and Adjournment

VIRGINIA BOARD OF CONSERVATION & RECREATION

I. **Approved 2026 Board of Conservation and Recreation Meeting Dates**

January 9, 2026	Pocahontas State Park, Chesterfield, Virginia
April 28 – 30, 2026	Shenandoah National Park, Luray, Virginia
October 7-9, 2026	Breaks Interstate Park, Breaks, Virginia

II. **Approved 2027 Board of Conservation and Recreation Meeting Dates**

January 8, 2027	Pocahontas State Park, Chesterfield, Virginia
April 14-16, 2027	Hungry Mother State Park, Marion, Virginia
October 6-8, 2027	Westmoreland State Park, Westmoreland, Virginia*

*Location is dependent on the completion of the cabin restoration project at Westmoreland.

The information provided on the following pages is for the Board’s awareness only and will not be presented to the Board. Please feel free to reach out to DCR Staff with any questions or comments. Contact information can be found at the bottom of each section.

Report to the Board: Capital Projects

VIRGINIA BOARD OF CONSERVATION & RECREATION

Department of Conservation and Recreation KEY CAPITAL PROJECT SUMMARY

Douthat Lodge Renovations

Objective: This project scope included the renovation of the existing historic CCC lodge at Douthat State Park. The renovations to both the exterior and interior of the historic CCC lodge, built in the 1930's, included mechanical and electrical upgrades, ADA access improvements and modern amenities such as kitchen and bathroom upgrades. This project was funded with American Recovery Program funds.

Budget:

Resources	Expenditures	Encumbered	Remaining
\$1,200,000	\$1,100,000	\$15,300	\$84,700

Status: Complete

Completion Date: Complete Fall 2025

**Figure 1: Interior:
Douthat Lodge**



Leesylvania State Park Pier Renovations

Objective: This project scope included the major renovations and partial demolition of the fishing pier at Leesylvania State Park. The work included the demolition of the roof and a portion of the pier that was destroyed in a recent storm. The renovation was deemed an emergency, and design and construction began promptly. The project was funded with Maintenance Reserve funds.

Budget:

Resources	Expenditures	Encumbered	Remaining
\$ 585,000	\$ 412,012	\$ 91,789	\$ 81,199

Status: Complete

Completion Date: Spring 2026

Figure 2:
The pier at Leesylvania State Park



Twin Lakes Cabin Renovation

Objective: This project scope included the rehabilitation of an existing cabin at Twin Lakes State Park. The work included a condition evaluation and structural renovation to ensure the cabin is safe for public occupancy. The project was deemed an emergency following a storm event. The work also included mechanical, electrical and siding repairs. The project was funded with Maintenance Reserve general funds.

<i>Budget:</i>	Resources	Expenditures	Encumbered	Remaining
	\$150,000	\$ 115,660	\$ 27,780	\$ 6,560

Status: Complete.

Est. Completion Date: Spring 2026

Figure 3:

Before and After: Twin Lakes State Park Cabin.



First Landing and Westmoreland State Park Cabin Renovations

Objective: This project scope includes the renovation of over 30 cabins at Westmoreland and First Landing State Parks. The scope includes renovations to both the exterior and interior of historic CCC cabins built in the 1930's and block cabins built in the 1950's. The work includes mechanical and electrical upgrades, ADA access improvements and modern amenities. This project was funded with Virginia Public Bond Authority (VPBA) bond funds.

Budget:

Resources	Expenditures	Encumbered	Remaining
\$ 16,158,000	\$ 1,763,398	\$13,646,048	\$ 748,554

Status: The project is being constructed.

Est. Completion Date: Summer 2027

Figure 4: Westmoreland State Park: Cabin construction



Machicomoco State Park: New Ranger Residence

Objective: This project scope includes the new construction of a ranger residence at Machicomoco State Park. The project includes the new construction of a 1,500-sf residence, with a new septic system and parking area, to serve as a home for the park's law enforcement. This project was funded with the 2021 Virginia Public Bonds approved by the General Assembly.

<i>Budget:</i>	Resources	Expenditures	Encumbered	Remaining
	\$ 700,000	\$ 99,978	\$569,005	\$ 31,017

Status: This project is being constructed.

Est. Completion Date: Summer 2026

Figure 4: Machicomoco State Park, New residence



Project	Status (2026)
UST at False Cape and Belle Isle	Design
NRT Repair/Replace Trestles	Complete
New Residence, Grayson	Construction
New Residence, Caledon	Construction
New Residence, Shenandoah River	Construction
New Residence, Lake Anna	Construction
New Residences, Seven Bends	Construction
New Residences, Natural Bridge	Construction
New Residence, Machicomoco	Construction
New Residence, York River	Construction
Campground Infrastructure, Grayson	Complete
Belle Isle Manor Improvements	Design
WE Renovate Existing Cabins	Construction
FL Renovate Existing Cabins	Construction
Various Critical Bathhouse Renovations	Design
WE Road and Bank Stabilization	Construction
NH Southwest Region Improvements	Construction
NH North Landing River Site Access	Construction
Crow's Nest Raven Road Parking Area	Construction
Various Roofs Central VA	Construction
Various Roofs Northern VA	Construction
Various Roofs Eastern VA	Complete
Various Roofs Southwestern VA	Construction
LE Infrastructure Improvements	Construction
Natural Tunnel Pool Renovations	Design
Various HVAC Replacements	Construction
Various Paving Repairs	Construction
Kiptopeke Boat Ramp	Design
Claytor Lake Marina Renovations	Design
Various Repair Sewage Systems	Construction
Sweet Run Residence Repairs	Construction
Widewater Shoreline Renovations	Design
Kiptopeke Pier Repairs	Construction
Shot Tower Repairs	Design
Various Residential/ Cabin Repairs	Construction
Leesylvania Pier Repairs	Construction
Twin Lakes Cabin 6 Emergency Repairs	Complete
York River Visitor Center Repairs	Construction

Contact Information

Additional questions regarding capital projects may be directed to:

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