

**Virginia Land Conservation Foundation  
Working Group Meeting  
Wednesday, February 22, 2017  
Richmond, Virginia**

**WORKING GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT**

The Honorable Albert C. Pollard, Working Group Chair  
R. Brian Ball  
Glenda C. Booth

**WORKING GROUP MEMBERS NOT PRESENT**

Jay Ford

**DCR STAFF PRESENT**

Clyde E. Cristman, Director  
Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage  
Suzan Bulbulkaya, Land Conservation Analyst  
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison  
Kirsten Hazler, Landscape Ecologist  
Danette Poole, Director, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources  
Sarah Richardson, Land Conservation and Real Property Manager  
Katrina Rockenbach, Archivist and Database Specialist  
Thomas Smith, Deputy Director for Operations

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Martha Little, Virginia Outdoors Foundation  
Mike Santucci, Virginia Department of Forestry  
Andy Sorrell, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Nikki Rovner, The Nature Conservancy

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Pollard called the meeting to order and asked for introductions. Next, the following presentations were given to provide information on available land conservation tools.

**PRESENTATIONS**

*Overview of ConservationVision: Tools for Strategic Conservation Planning – Jason Bulluck*

Mr. Bulluck gave a presentation regarding Virginia's ConservationVision, which he explained is a database that includes a statewide biological inventory. ConservationVision assists in the protection and stewardship of biodiversity by maintaining a statewide database for conservation planning, project review, land protection for the conservation of biodiversity, and the protection and ecological management of natural heritage resources.

Assessment of biodiversity importance, conserved statistics and management of lands all contribute to the prioritization of biodiversity.

Virginia Conservation Lands are mapped in ConservationVision. Data includes all conserved lands in Virginia at the tract level, including:

- Federal – National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- State – State Parks and Natural Areas Preserves
- Local – Parks, Purchase of Development Right lands
- Private – Land Trust holdings, TNC Preserves, Conservation Easements

Attributes that are tracked include:

- Name, Owner, Manager
- Managed area type,
- Acreages (deed and GIS),
- Biodiversity Management Intent
- Legal Protection Status

*ConservationVision* includes seven map layers:

1. Ecological Model (2007): The Virginia Natural Landscape Assessment (VaNLA) is used to identify and rank core areas based on their contributions to a functional ecological network. Inputs into this model include: depth of interior habitat, core size, length of interior streams, wetland abundance, diversity of wetland types, and presence of Natural Heritage resources.
2. The Virginia Watershed Model (2017) is used to identify lands that are most important for protecting water quality and maintaining watershed integrity. Inputs into this model include: watershed integrity, landscape position, soil sensitivity, and land cover.
3. The Virginia Cultural Model (2007) identifies the relative cultural and historic values of lands. The Division of Natural Heritage partners with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to develop this model. Inputs include: Archaeological and architectural sites such as National Historic Districts, National Historic Landmarks, National Historic Register Sites and other state inventoried sites eligible for possible National Register and easements. American Indian areas are also included.
4. The Virginia Agricultural Model (2015) quantifies the relative suitability of lands for agricultural activity across the state. Inputs include soil quality score, foodshed score, and land cover score.
5. The Virginia Forest Economics Models (2008) map the relative value of forest lands with economic value. Inputs include: soil productivity, riparian and wetland features, steep slopes, rare, threatened or endangered species, land use taxation values, stumpage value, historic timber harvests, and distance to mills.
6. The Virginia Recreational Model (2007) maps the relative recreation value of lands. Data layers include: access points, trails (blueways, greenways, birding trails), parks (federal, state, local), Department of Game and Inland Fisheries hunting and fishing data, and beaches.

7. The Virginia Vulnerability Model (2015) quantifies the predicted relative risk of conversion from “natural”, rural, or other open space to urbanized or other built-up land uses. Inputs include travel time and conservation status.

*ConservationVision* is utilized to assess and score land conservation opportunities and to develop a set of land conservation goals and strategy to achieve them. Other agencies and programs also implement tools available through *Conservation Vision*:

- Natural Heritage Data Explorer
- LandScope America
- VOP Mapper
- Coastal GEMS
- ArcGIS Online
- GIS Model data
- Technical reports
- Partner Support

#### *Virginia Land Conservation Summary – Tom Smith*

Mr. Smith gave an overview of conserved lands in Virginia and addressed the question of how much land remains to be protected using the data provided through *ConservationVision*.

Currently there are 4,021,678 permanently protected acres in Virginia. These areas include all fee simple and conservation easement protected lands in Virginia by private, local, state and federal agencies. The number of acres protected by category, and the remaining number of acres that are not protected based on *ConservationVision* are as follows:

##### Wetlands

- 375,296 acres protected
- 2,191,279 acres remain unprotected

##### Natural Areas

- 585,146 acres protected
- 1,000,065 acres remain unprotected

##### Natural Landscape Assessment

- 2,742,887 acres protected
- 11,136,375 acres remain unprotected

##### Forest Lands

- 2,773,221 acres protected
- 14,626,242 acres remain unprotected

##### Agricultural Lands

- 387,238 acres protected
- 4,455,049 acres remain unprotected

#### Battlefields

- 117,783 acres protected
- 829,114 acres remain unprotected

In total, 16% of Virginia is permanently protected, leaving 84% unprotected. These tools can be helpful in making policy decisions related to funding and targeting priority landscapes for protection.

#### *Virginia Outdoors Plan – Danette Poole*

Ms. Poole explained that the *2013 Virginia Outdoors Plan* is Virginia's 10<sup>th</sup> Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation (SCORP).

The outdoor recreation objective of the plan is to provide guidance to all levels of government and the private sector in meeting the state's conservation, outdoor recreation, and open space needs.

The land conservation objective of the plan is to provide guidance for land protection through the actions of the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.

The *Virginia Outdoors Plan* is a requirement of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program. The plan provides guidance for grant fund allocation to state and local projects.

Ms. Poole reviewed results from the *2011 Virginia Outdoor Demand Survey*. The most popular activities remain:

- Walking for pleasure
- Visiting historic areas
- Visiting parks (local, state, national)

The 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan will focus on "The Benefits of Outdoor Recreation."

Regional meetings are held in all Planning District Areas on an annual basis.

The schedule for development of the *2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan* is as follows:

- Fall 2016 – Regional meetings
- Winter/Spring 2017 – Inventory & Survey
- Spring 2017 – VOP TAC meeting
- Fall 2017 – Post draft VOP
- Fall/Winter 2017-2018 – VOP public meetings, webinar
- Layout for web
- 30-day comment period
- Spring 2018 – Final VOP to NPS for approval

#### **DISCUSSION OF VLCF GRANT SCORING CRITERIA** – Sarah Richardson

Ms. Richardson led a discussion of the grant scoring criteria. She referenced project scoring in the Farms and Forestland Category for the most recent grant round. She stated that every category has different scoring criteria, and Appendix Six has criteria for all categories.

It was noted that the scoring process begins with the amount appropriated to the VLCF and that the statute directs that these funds be distributed among the various statutory categories.

Mr. Sorrell reviewed the Farmlands category and explained how the criteria are applied to each application. There are two major categories for evaluation within the farmlands category: land evaluation and land use. More points are given for larger parcels with productive farmlands and soils. The criteria were recently amended to award more points for parcel size versus vulnerability. Also, more points are awarded for implementation of Best Management Practices.

These concerns and suggestions were expressed by working group members:

- More points should be given for parcels that implement and maintain Best Management Practices.
- With regard to scoring, it was not relevant that a neighbor may have placed land under an easement.
- It was noted that the focus of the Virginia Outdoors Plan is on recreation, which may not be relevant in all of the grant categories.

#### **VLCF VISION/MISSION STATEMENT**

Mr. Ball expressed that it often feels like the Board is simply reactive to the recommendations made by staff and that members would like to be more actively involved and have a greater understanding of the grant process.

Staff was requested to consider presentations about how data is gathered and used in the scoring process. The VLCF should answer the question of what lands are important to be protected and how they should be protected.

Mr. Pollard advised that the next step is to take this discussion to the full Board. He asked that staff make the same three presentations to the full Board at the next meeting. This will assist members in understanding the thought process that goes into considerations.

Then the Working Group will work on the development of goals or a mission statement. This should address what lands should be protected. There should also be background information that addresses the rate the Commonwealth is losing wetlands, battlefields and other lands.

The Working Group will not meet again prior to the next full Board meeting.

Ms. Richardson advised that, based on the final approved budget from the General Assembly, staff would recommend a VLCF Board meeting date in May or June to begin a new grant round.

The meeting was adjourned.

