

Our Virginia



2024 IMPACT REPORT



FROM THE DIRECTOR

A Historic Collaboration



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

ON THE COVER: Skiff off Cedar Island on the Eastern Shore © Daniel White/TNC; **INSETS, LEFT TO RIGHT:** TNC Land Steward Brian Willis © Daniel White/TNC; Longleaf pine © Erika Nortemann/TNC; American oystercatchers © Daniel White/TNC; **THIS PAGE:** Bettina K. Ring © Daniel White/TNC; Map © Chris Bruce/TNC and Danielle Kulas/TNC

Our Virginia team recently joined with Nature Conservancy colleagues in Maryland, North Carolina and South Carolina on a proposal to bring our science and our conservation expertise to bear on the region's climate challenges. I'm thrilled that our collaboration will continue, thanks to a historic \$200 million EPA grant that will bolster the funding we need to implement nature-based climate solutions (see page 4).

With more than \$47 million coming to Virginia, we look forward to working with the commonwealth, as well as our regional colleagues, to implement one of the largest-ever grants for natural climate solutions. An award of this size means several things. First, the EPA recognizes that our natural resources are vital to mitigating climate change. Moreover, the grant makes an emphatic statement that investing in nature pays off in myriad environmental, economic and community benefits.

This grant also represents a tremendous amount of trust in The Nature Conservancy—from the quality of the science that guides us to our track record of bringing people together to get things done. To that end, it gives us the flexibility to approach each project with the most appropriate tool from our conservation toolbox: land acquisition, habitat restoration, conservation easements, carbon agreements and more.

To maximize our impact in Virginia, TNC will focus on protecting, enhancing and restoring forests and wetlands. Some of our specific goals include conserving an additional 36,000 acres of hardwood forests in the Appalachians, nearly 8,000 acres of longleaf pine ecosystem and 150 acres of tidal wetlands. In addition to capturing carbon, this work will lower wildfire and flood risks and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation.

The magnitude of the climate challenge makes public-private partnerships critical, and it's TNC supporters like you who make them possible. Your support enables us to follow the science, get results on the ground and earn public trust. Thank you for helping us demonstrate how conservation contributes to a healthy environment, economy and society!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bettina K. Ring".

Bettina K. Ring, State Director



P.S. You can make a difference today! Scan the QR code to give online or mail the enclosed envelope with your year-end gift.

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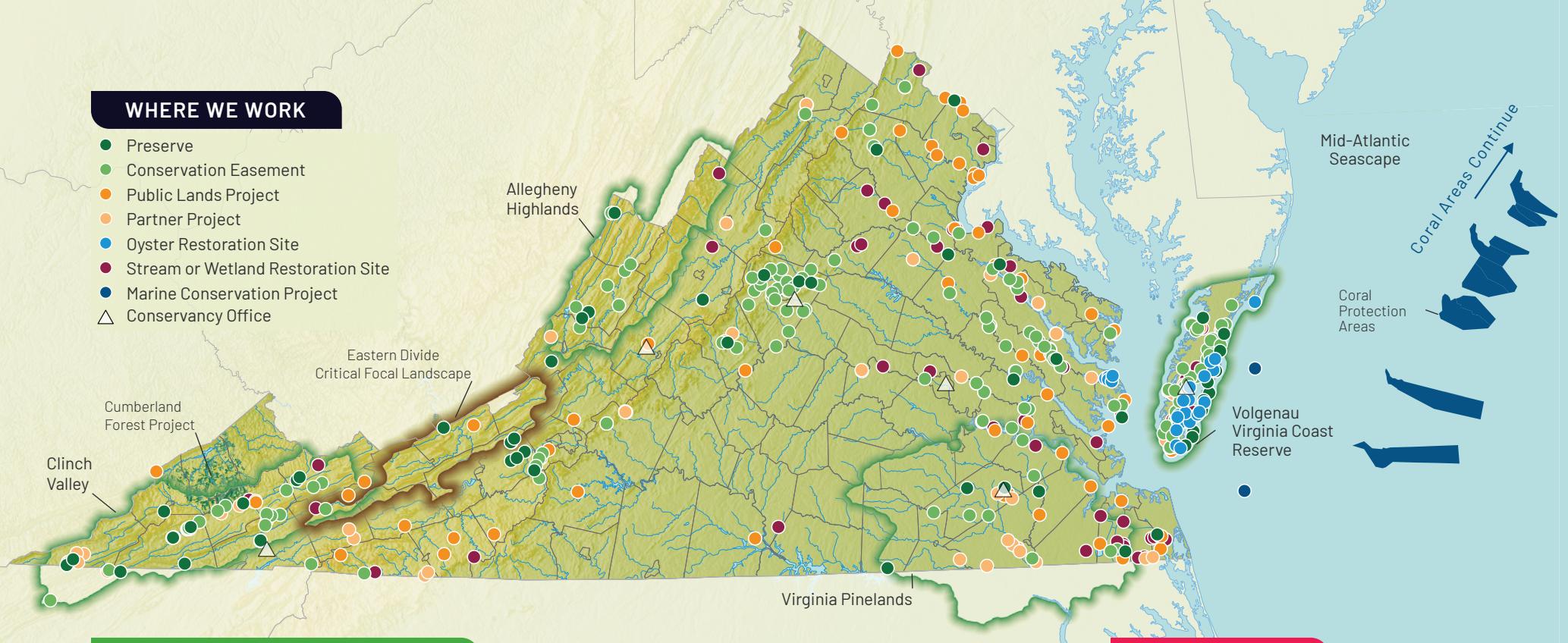
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WHERE WE WORK

- Preserve
- Conservation Easement
- Public Lands Project
- Partner Project
- Oyster Restoration Site
- Stream or Wetland Restoration Site
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- △ Conservancy Office



OUR GLOBAL GOALS FOR 2030

We're racing to hit these targets to help the world reverse climate change and biodiversity loss. Together, we find the paths to make change possible.

**3B**

Avoid or sequester 3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually—the same as taking 650 million cars off the road every year.

**4B**

Conserve 4 billion hectares of marine habitat—more than 10% of the world's oceans—through protected areas, sustainable fishing and more.

**100M**

Help 100 million people at severe risk of climate-related emergencies by safeguarding habitats that protect communities.

**30M**

Conserve 1 million kilometers of rivers—enough to stretch 25 times around the globe—plus 30 million hectares of lakes and wetlands.

**650M**

Conserve 650 million hectares—a land area twice the size of India—of biodiverse habitats such as forests, grasslands and desert.

**45M**

Support the leadership of 45 million people from Indigenous and local communities in stewarding their environment and securing rights.

BY THE NUMBERS

500K

Acres that The Nature Conservancy has protected across Virginia

253K

Acres across three states being managed under TNC's Cumberland Forest Project

126K

Acres of public land across Virginia that TNC has worked with partners to protect

A wide-angle landscape photograph of a mountain range during autumn. The foreground and middle ground are filled with forested hills, their slopes covered in a mix of green, yellow, and orange leaves. In the lower-left foreground, the text 'Virginia to Share Historic Grant from EPA' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif letters. The background shows more mountain ridges, with a thick layer of white clouds or fog settling in the valleys between them. The sky above is a clear, pale blue.

NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Virginia to Share Historic Grant from EPA

In July, the Environmental Protection Agency announced one of its largest grants for nature-based climate solutions, awarding The Nature Conservancy \$200 million to support our work across Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and South Carolina. Between January 2025 and January 2030, this funding will support projects focused on improved forest management, peatland restoration and tidal wetland enhancement—three areas identified as having the highest potential reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

For Virginia's share, TNC will receive \$47.2 million to conserve forests and improve forest management across the Appalachians and Southeast Virginia, as well as to restore tidal wetlands in Eastern Virginia, all of which will involve collaborating across state lines to maximize climate benefits.

"We are looking forward to further collaboration with the Commonwealth of Virginia and the states of North Carolina, South Carolina and Maryland to bring natural climate solutions to the challenges we are all facing," says Bettina Ring, TNC's Virginia state director. "At TNC, we recognize the numerous environmental, economic and community benefits our natural resources can provide if we support their resiliency and sustain them for future generations."

"Being awarded one of the largest grants in the history of the EPA demonstrates that the agency also recognizes our natural resources are vital to mitigating climate change," Ring adds. This award is part of an even larger grant from an EPA program established in 2022 through the Inflation Reduction Act.



Since the EPA program funds both state-and TNC-led projects, our four TNC programs and respective state governments teamed up on the grant proposal and submitted it under our newly formed Atlantic Conservation Coalition. The estimated impact of the coalition's proposed actions—at a minimum—will be equivalent to taking more than 6.67 million gas-powered vehicles off the road each year.

"This \$200 million grant will enable TNC to increase carbon reduction efforts in the Appalachians, an area that our research has identified as a globally significant biodiversity hotspot," says TNC CEO Jennifer Morris. "The forests, peatlands and wetlands across Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia have incredible power to sequester carbon, as well as to support the lives and livelihoods of the people who live there."



ONLINE | Learn more at nature.org/epagrant

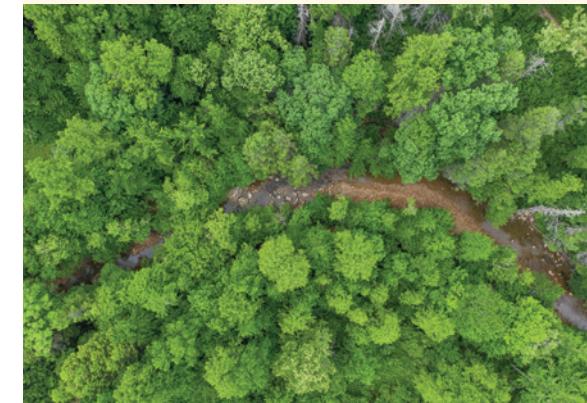
How TNC Will Use the EPA Funds

Maryland: \$42.5 million to support land protection and improve forest management across 28,897 acres of forest in the Appalachians

North Carolina: \$67.8 million to restore and protect peatlands (equivalent to removing vehicle emissions from 57,000+ to 1.4 million cars annually)

South Carolina: \$39 million to conserve 25,000 acres of riverine bottomland hardwood forest on the coastal plain

Virginia: \$47.2 million to conserve forests and improve forest management across the Appalachians and Southeast Virginia, as well as restore tidal wetlands in Eastern Virginia



OPPOSITE PAGE: Cumberland Forest Project © Byron Jorjorian; THIS PAGE: American oystercatcher flying over Eastern Shore wetlands © Daniel White/TNC; Little Clear Creek © Cameron Davidson

Singing the Praises of Longleaf Pine and Electric Vehicles

Story and Photography by Daniel White, Senior Writer

Retired musician and Nature Conservancy trustee Bill Owen has become known across the South for singing the praises of longleaf pine. At Raccoon Creek Pinelands, his farm in Yale, Owen has worked with TNC and myriad restoration partners to plant more longleaf pine than anywhere else in Virginia.

I've visited before to document plantings and observe prescribed burns that enable longleaf systems to thrive. But this summer, as Owen takes me on a tour of the farm, our conversation turns from fire to Lightning—as in his Ford Lightning pickup truck.

Clean. Quiet. Fast. The words repeat like a chorus as Owen explains why he's happy he switched to electric vehicles (EVs). In addition to the truck, which he owns and uses primarily around the farm, Owen leases an electric Mustang that he drives on longer trips.

To demonstrate the truck's power, Owen turns onto an empty rural highway and punches the accelerator. The truck surges forward, almost silently, and I'm completely surprised by the sudden weight of gravity pressing me into the seatback.

Steering us onto a rough two-track into a grove of pines, Owen tells a story about another time the Lightning's performance proved to be, well, shocking. "Raccoon Creek hosted Martha Williams, who was the then-new director of

the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service," he says. "We had all of the conservation leadership in Virginia here, and I had hired a 30-person bus." The tour was going as planned—until the bus became hopelessly stuck.

The group discussed calling for a tow truck or tractor. "Then I said, 'You know, I've got this new electric truck,'" Owen continues. "Everybody's like, 'No way,' but I sent somebody racing to the house to get this," he says, pointing to the steering wheel. "It pulled that bus right out. Not even a hiccup." He adds, chuckling, "That was great publicity for it."

Owen acknowledges that EVs won't meet everyone's needs, at least until the range and charging infrastructure expand. "But the improvement that's happened with electric cars since they first came out has been staggering," he says, and they fit his lifestyle well.

If you mostly drive within a 300-mile radius of home, he explains, then EVs have the advantage, including minimal maintenance. "There's no oil to change, and there's really no tune-up involved," he says. Owen's vehicles have seen the inside of a shop only for tire rotations and annual state inspections.



The attribute that most influenced Owen's transition to EVs, though, is that they're simply cleaner. And that's where his priorities and TNC's align. In Virginia, personal vehicles generate more greenhouse gas emissions than any other sector.

According to Lena Lewis, who manages TNC's Virginia energy and climate policy work, consumers need options to enable easier, faster transitions to EVs. "The single most effective thing most Virginians can do to lower your carbon footprint is to switch from gas-powered to electric vehicles," Lewis says.

“ The improvement that's happened with electric cars since they first came out has been staggering.”

— Bill Owen, TNC Virginia Trustee

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bill Owen; **THIS PAGE:** Recharging the Lightning at home; Bill Owen and canine companion Moxley with Owen's electric truck in the Raccoon Creek Pinelands



Interns Gain Diverse Experience

By Evelyn Zelmer, 2024 Lands and Lives Project Intern

The Nature Conservancy's second cohort of paid summer interns wrapped up their 10-week assignments in August. Under TNC's Short Term Experience Program (STEP), the interns served in diverse roles determined by staff needs in locations ranging from the Eastern Shore to the Clinch Valley. Here, interns share their reflections on their TNC experience.



ONLINE | Explore STEP at nature.org/learningva

THIS PAGE: Interns touring Piney Grove Preserve with Virginia Pinelands staff © Taylor Fanelli/TNC; **INSET:** Evelyn Zelmer © Brian van Eerden/TNC



ALAYNA KNAPP, Carbon Sequestration Analyst
Intern (Richmond), William & Mary

I see this as a first step towards doing important conservation work that has real consequences because, even though my work at school has been really fun and has had some local consequences, it's much less application based and more research based. But this role is working towards an end product that can be used to make real progress in the future.

ALEX LAPLACE, Tidal Wetlands Intern
(Charlottesville), University of Virginia

I've always had a passion for helping the environment. I love nature. I've always interacted with it with my family. It just brings me a great sense of peace. But if you're only ever in a classroom, it's difficult to have real deliverable impacts on these places that you care about.

DUNCAN GRIFFITHS, Conservation Easement
Stewardship Intern (Charlottesville), William & Mary

We visited one property that the owner primarily uses for hunting, and he was showing us all the ways that he wants to plant trees or do stuff to try and encourage the deer to come, and he was very knowledgeable about the nature on his property. It was interesting for me to hear how even people like loggers and hunters, who we usually think of as extractive, still want to protect the land.

COLLEEN STROUD, ArcGIS Field Maps Intern
(Charlottesville), Villanova University

I'm building a foundation for future data monitors or site monitors to map what they find in the field. It's a really effective way to learn how conservation is actually done. Like from the Stewardship Team who's out there cutting down dead trees to map-based jobs like mine, it's just not your typical internship experience.

DAVID KANCZUZEWSKI, Conservation Forestry
Intern (Clinch Valley), Indiana University South Bend

Basically, that path of interest in nature, conservation, and forestry led me here, and now I've gotten to learn what it looks like to manage land. And this is honestly the most generous program that I've ever been a part of. I have never had the organization that I'm working for be so willing to work with you.

BENJAMIN GRIMES, Stream Connectivity
Assessment Intern (Clinch Valley), North Carolina
State University

I got to do a mussel habitat evaluation. I was able to go out with my supervisor into the Clinch River and go snorkeling to look for the mussel species that were in the river. I think we found maybe a dozen that were endangered species. And he told me that, in the span of just a few hours, I'd probably handled more endangered species than a lot of people would in their entire lifetime.

EMORY HARNED, Coastal Conservation Intern
(Eastern Shore), Virginia Tech

The eelgrass project that I was working on this week—that's the largest seagrass restoration on the planet. At TNC, you're living in history. You're contributing to history. And if there's one thing you're guaranteed in this program, it is to learn. That's what has really intrigued me all summer.

MELANIE YORK, Public History Intern (Eastern
Shore), University of Virginia

Brownsville Preserve stands on a former plantation, so this work is really important. It's researching this history for the descendants that are still living. It's also about including more voices in conservation, even by proxy, just letting the community know that TNC is interested in learning about this and how the environment interacts with history.

JASMIN ESCALANTE, Community Engagement
Intern (Eastern Shore), Eastern Shore Community
College

I took my supervisor to a Hispanic-owned store that I worked at last summer, and then we were able to advertise TNC's Latino Conservation Week Picnic at the storeowner's church. I spoke and translated in front of about 200 people, and I had never done something like that before. Then, at the picnic, no one in attendance had known that a preserve existed here. People were engaged.

CHARLOTTE WELSBY, Preserve Accessibility
Intern (Charlottesville), Davidson College

You can have so much impact in a role like mine in accessibility, or in a role about policy work. And it's great that TNC genuinely trusts us to do good work and important things. Like, all of the maps I'm making are going to go on the website and at the preserves. I just like to see that our work actually makes an impact.

CHRIS TIMOTHY, Land Stewardship Intern
(Charlottesville), James Madison University

During the interview process, my supervisor was interested in my photography, even though that wasn't in the job description. TNC really tried to adapt the role to what my interests were. I mentioned the possibility of completing drone training, and they immediately were like, "We could do something with that."

EVELYN ZELMER, Land & Lives Project Intern
(Richmond), University of Richmond

I love history, geography, conservation, poetry, journalism, visual art. My time at TNC has assured me that I don't have to neglect any of my skills or interests to enter the professional world. Conservation needs communicators and creatives as much as it needs scientists.

2024

HIGHLIGHTS

⬇ BUILDING APPALACHIAN EXPERTISE

A fire team conducts training exercises in this rendering of our future conservation center at Hobby Horse Farm. © Bushman Dreyfus Architects



⬆ CARPENTERS' BENCH

Volunteer John Carpenter built and donated this bench for Fortune's Cove Preserve. TNC dedicated it to Max Carpenter, John's father, who inspired his son's love of nature and woodworking. © Christopher Timothy/TNC



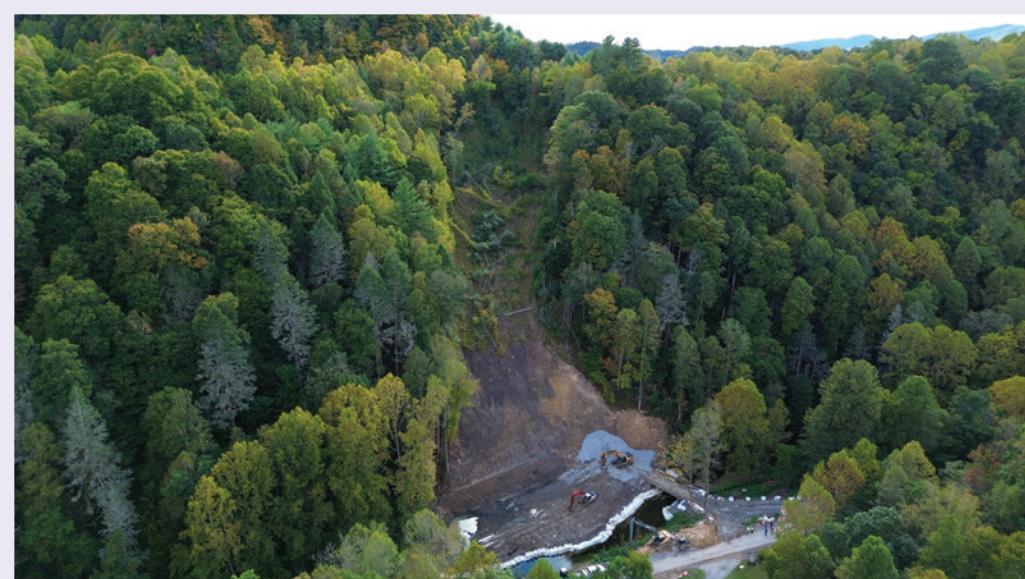
↑ BANDS FOR BABY BIRDS

Our Center for Conservation Biology partners band red-cockaded woodpecker nestlings at Piney Grove Preserve and track the population, which remains stable at around 100 birds.
© Daniel White/TNC



⬇ CAMP CREEK CLEANUP

The national Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has boosted state efforts to repair abandoned mine lands. Virginia Energy is cleaning up this landslide at Camp Creek in the Cumberland Forest. © Link Elmore/TNC



⬇ SEAGRASS RESTORATION BENEFITS CLIMATE

Volunteers continue to grow the world's largest seagrass restoration project, and a recent TNC study is measuring this long-term partnership's benefits, which range from enhancing habitat to capturing carbon emissions. © Bo Lusk/TNC

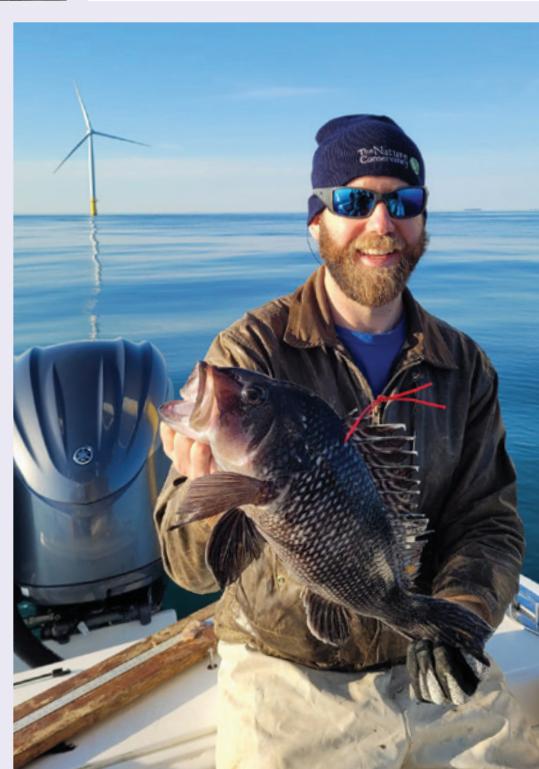


See the latest Virginia photos! Follow us at [instagram.com/nature_va](https://www.instagram.com/nature_va)



↑ BURNING AND LEARNING

Our Allegheny Highlands program area serves as a center for fire-team training in the Appalachians. Practice burns like this one build experience and hone skills. © Laurel Schablein/TNC



⬅ FISH STUDY NEARS FIN-ISH

Marine Scientist Brendan Runde has completed field work and will report findings in 2025 from our study on the impacts of offshore wind construction on fish behavior. © Andy Shin

Conservation News, Science and Inspiration

SUPPORTING SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA COMMUNITIES

IN JUNE, THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA'S

College at Wise, The Nature Conservancy, the Cumberland Forest Limited Partnership, and the Anne and Gene Worrell Foundation announced the 2024 award recipients of the Cumberland Forest Community Fund. Now in its third year, this competitive local grant program supports nature-based economic and community development projects within our Cumberland Forest Project's seven-county Virginia footprint.

The towns of Cleveland, Dungannon, Honaker and Richlands, along with Appalachian Sustainable Development, Breaks Interstate Park, Friends of the Buchanan County Library and Mountain Kids Inc., received a total of \$100,000 for projects such as a community garden expansion, an aquatic research station and recreation area improvements.

"We are inspired by this year's recipients," says Nick Proctor, community outreach manager for TNC's Clinch Valley program. "The awarded organizations are leading the way to create opportunities that benefit community, nature and economy in Southwest Virginia."



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The awarded organizations are leading the way to create opportunities that benefit community, nature and economy in Southwest Virginia."

— Nick Proctor, Clinch Valley Program



Helping Hands

OUR HEARTS AND THOUGHTS ARE with the dedicated first responders; impacted people and their families, friends, and colleagues; and all others affected by Hurricane Helene. In Southwest Virginia, we are grateful for the TNC Clinch Valley staff, community members and many other volunteers who joined together to provide on-the-ground support in hard-hit areas such as Damascus and Taylors Valley.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Cumberland Forest Community Fund grant recipients © Chelsea Bowers/TNC; **ABOVE:** Hurricane impacts in Southwest Virginia © Meg Short/TNC

Protecting a Coastal Community

AS 2023 NEARED ITS END, SO DID A NEARLY

four-year restoration project just offshore from Wachapreague. Volunteers helped our Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve team put the last oyster castle in place, completing a pilot living-shoreline project designed to strengthen a marsh island and help buffer the town's waterfront.

"We used oyster reefs to stem erosion and fortify the island shoreline against storms," says TNC Coastal Scientist Bo Lusk. The low-lying Eastern Shore town is susceptible to climate impacts such as rising sea levels and stronger, more frequent storms. As storms push larger waves from the Atlantic Ocean toward the mainland, marsh and barrier islands serve as natural buffers that deflect and disperse some of that energy.

The restoration site stands between the town and a broad bay whose waters have been chipping away at these protective marshes. TNC and our partners undertook this project to test different structures on which oysters can live and build, as well as to measure how effectively these ever-growing reefs can stem erosion and enable the marsh to spread.

Over the project's course, 160 volunteers helped deploy 10,000 concrete castles, and they helped make and install 1,600 Oyster Catchers—a new design by Sandbar Oyster Company using lighter, biodegradable materials. Already, the once-crumbling island shoreline is teeming with oysters.



TOP: TNC's Bo Lusk assembling oyster castles © Mark Schwenk; **BOTTOM:** Oysters thriving on castle structures and strengthening the shoreline © Bo Lusk/TNC

Measuring the Benefits of Seagrass Restoration

EVERY SPRING, DOZENS OF VOLUNTEERS BRAVE the chilly seaside waters off Virginia's Eastern Shore to collect seeds as part of the largest, most successful seagrass restoration project in the world. TNC and partners have returned seagrass meadows to 10,000 acres of bay bottoms since the habitat nearly disappeared during the 1930s.

Our understanding of seagrass benefits has also expanded thanks to a two-year study completed this year by TNC scientist Mariana Camacho. Camacho's conclusions will be published in a report that quantifies the myriad benefits. These include "blue carbon" storage, the long-term containment of carbon dioxide within the seagrass itself and in the soils from which it grows.



Bay scallop in restored seagrass meadow © Jay Fleming



Restoring Chesapeake Bay Wetlands

Watermen pulling crab pots © Daniel White/TNC

IN APRIL, KATI BOOTH TRANSITIONED FROM OUR STATEWIDE WETLAND and stream restoration team to lead Virginia's work protecting and restoring wetlands in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Booth collaborates with TNC Bay team colleagues in Maryland, Delaware and Pennsylvania—along with conservation and government relations staff—to advance our ambitious goals:

- **Enhance habitat** across nearly 1,000 acres through strategic wetland, stream and oyster restoration projects and partnerships
- **Improve water quality** feeding into the Bay by addressing agricultural nutrient and stormwater impacts on freshwater tributaries across more than 200,000 acres
- **Restore a healthy Chesapeake Bay**, supporting 3,700+ plant and animal species; thriving local communities; and sustainable industries such as fisheries, farming, and tourism

Investing in Virginia's Great Outdoors

JUNE IS GREAT OUTDOORS MONTH IN VIRGINIA. AS THE 2023

proclamation notes, Virginians do have a great deal to celebrate, including 43 state parks and 66 natural area preserves. “And yet, when you look at the state budget and ask whether we are putting money toward this as a priority, the answer is a resounding ‘no,’” says Mikaela Ruiz-Ramón, TNC’s public funding and policy manager in Virginia.

The maintenance backlog of state parks alone totals roughly \$300 million, according to the Department of Conservation and Recreation. “There is so much demand for programming and overnight stays at state parks that isn’t met because money hasn’t consistently been put in for cabins, camping facilities, and other basic utilities like electricity, plumbing, and roads,” says Ruiz-Ramón.

The good news is that TNC is working with a coalition to advance Virginia’s Great Outdoors Act in the General Assembly. The bill would increase funding to repair and improve existing parks and trails, invest in new resources, and protect our most valuable natural spaces so that the outdoors is accessible to all.



Clinch River access near Artrip © Cameron Davidson

Celebrating Virginia's Bounty



Upweller's Josh Chapman with Piney Grove IPA
© Daniel White/TNC

OUR THIRD ANNUAL OKTOBERFOREST

Fest took place in September on the beautiful grounds of Fine Creek Brewing in Powhatan. Headlining the festival were our four collaborative brews starring wild ingredients carefully foraged from TNC conservation sites:

- **Allegheny Highlands Farmhouse Ale:** Brewed by Fine Creek with sassafras leaves from Warm Springs Mountain Preserve

- **Barrier Islands Gose:** Brewed by Väsen Brewing Company with eelgrass from the Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve
- **Clinch Valley Amber Lager:** Brewed by Sweetbay Brewing Company with red spruce tips from Clinch Mountain
- **Piney Grove IPA:** Brewed by Upweller Beer Company with longleaf pine from Piney Grove Preserve

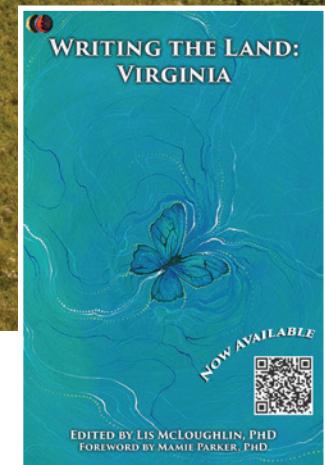
Eight guest brewers offered a variety of other craft beers featuring local ingredients. While enjoying the flavors of Virginia, including oysters and farm-to-table fare, hundreds of attendees also engaged TNC staff in robust conversations about our work. As people learn how products they love depend on nature, we hope they are inspired to help us protect it.

Virginia Conservation Lands Inspire Poetry

In 2023, six poets each “adopted” a Nature Conservancy preserve or project in Virginia to visit periodically for literary inspiration. The poems they created from these experiences in nature were published this year in the anthology *Writing the Land: Virginia*, which also includes poetry from 11 similar collaborations across the state and a foreword by TNC trustee Dr. Mamie Parker. Enjoy this sampling of poetry inspired by some of Virginia’s most special lands and waters.



ONLINE | More poems and video readings at nature.org/virginiapoetry



Clinch Mountain © Kyle LaFerriere; **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Doug Van Gundy © Daniel White/TNC; Jonathan Cannon © Evelyn Zelmer/TNC



Warm Springs Mountain, August

by Doug Van Gundy

I look east on a clear day from Flag Rock across the valley-and-ridge – out over Big Piney and Beards Mountain, through Panther Gap to Little North in the blue distance, toward the coastal plain and the Chesapeake, and I’m taken by a romantic and wrong-headed vision, imagining the masts of ships well beyond the horizon, their pilots and passengers yet to set foot on this land they believe is unknown and unnamed.

Likewise, looking west, out over the Warm Springs Valley toward the plateau, across the Jackson River to Back Creek Mountain and Allegheny beyond that, and beyond even that, the accordion of ridges that stretch to the Ohio, I can almost see ghosts of smoke rising against the late-summer haze from the stick-and-mud chimneys of cabins built by Scots and German and English settlers.

I even imagine looking straight down at my feet through the accumulated strata of earth and time, deposit and upheaval, continental drift and Appalachian orogeny, eventually arriving at the bottom of a Cambrian sea, its mollusks and sea fans buried beneath millions of years of quartz and shale and sand.

Dreaming like this in the here-and-now, I almost overlook the mushrooms and mosses turning last year’s leaves and limbs to soil, and the oaks and hickories turning the morning sunlight into leaves and acorns, and down the ridge, high up in the canopy, a pileated woodpecker drumming as he excavates the dead trunk of a decades-old chestnut tree, hollowing out a home.

“ My Warm Springs Mountain poem looks down through the layers of Earth and time and then basically says that looking at that is a fallacy because you miss the things that are right in front of you.”

— Doug Van Gundy

TNC’s Warm Springs Mountain Preserve and adjacent Hobby Horse Farm are a center for Appalachians conservation. Poet and musician Doug Van Gundy teaches at West Virginia Wesleyan College.

On Land under Perpetual Conservation Easements

Buck Mountain Creek, VA

by Jonathan Cannon

Cold comfort, the Frost Moon exposed tendon, broken bone. The hide bunched at the fetlock like a slipped sock where the deer caught the wire as it leapt, flipped, hung spraddled there until I cut it down unceremoniously, unsure whether it would live or die.

A ghostly rag snagged in the last flood, a blackened host of leaves in the rood of a sycamore: I look for assurances that death here isn’t in its final senses.

The land’s intact, these tracts redeeded to their primal natures – so always the creek, its lifeblood everywhere. Somewhere the deer.

Bone shine, shadow limbs, midnight blue sky, from which to conjure perpetuity.



Buck Mountain Creek is one of 35 sites totaling nearly 7,000 acres where TNC conservation easements help protect the Rivanna River watershed. Author and poet **Jonathan Cannon** retired from the University of Virginia School of Law and previously served as general counsel for the EPA.



Two Lines

by *J. Indigo Eriksen*

I would tell you of the two lines wrapped around a pine tree that announce the red-cockaded woodpecker; and how the fire-browned leaves of the understory mean light and breath; I would show you that these locked gates transform into the long lives of forest.

I would tell you of a cypress swamp in the ancestral lands of the Nottoway. Of moonlight filtering through pine. Of a hidden flower, only two of which exist now. Of enslaved bodies buried without namestone. Of the old war and the new one coming.

I would tell you the gps coordinates, the passcode for entry, the hidden key. If only you didn't demand this as your birthright. If only you wouldn't carve your name into the bark. If only you could break open your marrow and let loose your wild spirit. If only you were still. If only you might hold the call of the bird above you in palms gentle, and bend.



*In 2024, TNC is celebrating 25 years of protecting Piney Grove Preserve—now encompassing some 4,000 acres—as the launching pad for restoring the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and rare longleaf pine. Raised in Virginia and Colorado, **J. Indigo Eriksen** teaches at Northern Virginia Community College.*

Piney Grove Preserve © Robert B. Clontz/TNC; Courtesy of Indigo Eriksen; Courtesy of Luisa A. Igloria; **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Black skimmers © Daniel White/TNC; Clinch River © Byron Jorjorian; Fireflies © Paolo Taranto/TNC Photo Contest 2022; Courtesy of Tramere Monroe

Hog Island

by *Luisa A. Igloria*

The sun dips beneath a horizon of barrier islands, marshes filled with traces of the winged and wild-footed.

Skimmers in spring, migrants wheeling toward the salt of other seasons.

On one side, the water; on the other, the land—acres that yielded corn, tobacco, barley, cotton. And where

are the quail that loved fields of castor bean, that thrashed

in the wake of rifle fire? This time of year, everything in the landscape tints to the color of bronze and rust, registry pages inked in sepia with names and weights; the worth of indentured bodies. Palimpsest

means the canvas we see

floats on a geology of other layers— sedimenting until the sea works loose

what it petrifies in salts and lye, what it preserves for an afterhistory with no guarantee.



*Hog Island is part of the chain of barrier islands protected by TNC's Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve—the largest expanse of wilderness along the U.S. Atlantic coast. **Luisa A. Igloria**, the most recent Poet Laureate of Virginia, teaches at Old Dominion University.*



To Be Both

by Chelsea Krieg

Before frost settles onto the cordgrass, the sun-tipped monarch will alight on the goldenrod near an abandoned spider web. Before the kestrel lifts from the snag's skeleton, the yaupon holly will root into the sand, its scarlet berries peppering the beach. Before the marsh wren skitters across the fallen pine where little nest polypore make cups for rain to fill, leopard frogs will leap into puddles along the footpath. Before I know the names of every tree and birdsong along the saltmarsh,

I will hold my daughter. And I will finally understand that it is possible to be both the doe standing in the clearing, and the fawn leaping through the meadow, scared, and on her own.

Headquartered at Brownsville Preserve near Nassawadox, TNC's Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve protects some 40,000 acres of Eastern Shore lands and waters—one of the most important outdoor laboratories in the world. Raised in Chesapeake, **Chelsea Krieg** teaches at North Carolina State University.

from Clinch Cumberland

by Tramere Monroe

My flowing is like blood
Where mussels filter me
Protecting me from harm
Clinging to the unclean
If I am alive
Then those who dwell in me live
Not as the undead
Floating as pollution does
Tell me,
What is the heartbeat of a river
Perhaps it is the bass flinging itself
In mid-air and plunging back into me



Building on our Clinch Valley program's decades of experience in community-based conservation, sustainable forestry and carbon markets, TNC acquired 253,000 acres in 2019 to launch our tri-state Cumberland Forest Project. Poet and nature lover Tramere Monroe lives in Roanoke.

Do Drink the Water

Celebrating 5 Million Trees with the Dave Matthews Band

The Dave Matthews Band's commitment to reforestation dates back at least two decades. In 2003, DMB helped The Nature Conservancy and our partners plant nearly 1,000 native trees at Forks of the Rivanna River, a wetland and stream restoration project near the band's hometown of Charlottesville. The band has also supported longleaf pine restoration in Southeast Virginia.

Since 2020, as champions of TNC's global **Plant a Billion Trees** campaign, Matthews and his bandmates have helped put 5 million more trees in the ground around the world. That's 5 million opportunities for nature to provide clean drinking water, filter our air, help curb climate change, and create homes for thousands of plant and animal species.



nature.org/plantabillion



Scan to hear Dave Matthews's poem "Forest" and why the band supports TNC ▶



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INSIDE: MORE CONSERVATION NEWS FROM ACROSS VIRGINIA



Expanding Clinch River State Park

IN LATE 2023, TNC'S CLINCH VALLEY PROGRAM ACQUIRED a scenic 146-acre property along a horseshoe bend in the Clinch River. The land will be transferred to the state to expand Clinch River State Park. Program director Brad Kreps calls this key addition to the park “a big win for nature and people in Southwest Virginia.”

Clinch River State Park © Office of the Governor