

**Board of Conservation and Recreation  
Friday, January 3, 2025  
Pocahontas State Park**

**TIME AND PLACE**

The meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation took place at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, January 3, 2025, at Pocahontas State Park.

**BOARD OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MEMBERS PRESENT**

Esther M. Nizer, Vice Chair	Hunter Ihrman
Chief Walt "Red Hawk" Brown	Kat Maybury
Colonel Eric A. Hoggard	John W. Inge, IV
Susan Allen	Douglas Domenech

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

The Honorable James Cheng  
The Honorable Kyle Kilgore  
Gretchen Byrd  
Ross Stewart

**DCR STAFF PRESENT**

Matthew S. Wells, Director (remote participation)  
Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director  
Laura Ellis, Deputy Director for Administration and Finance  
Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations  
Dr. Melissa Baker, Director, Virginia State Parks  
Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy  
Whitten Cluff, Executive Assistant for Operations  
Lisa McGee, Director for Policy and Planning  
Kelly McClary, Director, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources  
David Neudeck, Public Communications and Marketing Director  
Paul Saunders, Senior Policy Analyst  
Emi Endo, Senior PR and Marketing Specialist  
Bryce Wilk, District Manager, Central District, Div. Of State Parks  
Kristal McKelvey, Chief of Recreation Grants, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources  
Allison Tillett, Environmental Program Planner, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources  
Joshua Ellington, Chief of Resource Management, Div. Of State Parks  
Veronica Flick, Chief of Business Administration and Revenue, Div. Of State Parks

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM**

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

## **CALL TO ORDER**

Vice Chair Nizer called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and called for introductions.

## **FOIA REFRESHER** – *Lisa McGee, Director for Policy and Planning*

Ms. McGee presented an overview of the Freedom of Information Act as it pertains to Board members, as well as an overview of pertinent administrative procedures.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM OCTOBER 3, 2024**

### **BOARD ACTION**

Mr. Ihrman moved that the minutes of the October 3, 2024, meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation be approved as submitted. Ms. Allen seconded, and the motion carried.

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

Director Wells provided the Board with the following report:

Your Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation continued to carry out its mission to Conserve, Protect and Enjoy in 2024, expanding its public lands and making improvements to make outdoor recreation more accessible. Here are some highlights from the past year.

- **Biodiversity hotspot in Southeast Virginia:** A project to acquire 1,900 acres of contiguous forest in Suffolk for a new natural area preserve received a \$5.6 million federal grant. The preserve would protect one of the largest unprotected blocks of contiguous forest in the Albemarle- Pamlico watershed region.
- **New and expanded public lands:** The agency completed 12 acquisitions to protect 1,320 acres for Virginia State Parks and natural area preserves.
- **25 years of land conservation grants:** The Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, which celebrated its 25th anniversary, awarded \$14.4 million in grant awards to conserve 11,220 acres around the commonwealth. The 28 projects include a potential future state park at Oak Hill and the expansion of Caledon State Park.

- **Opening with a bang:** Culpeper Battlefields State Park opened as Virginia's 43rd state park. It is still under development but is currently comprised of more than 1,000 acres at the Brandy Station and Cedar Mountain Civil War battlefields as well as three other sites. Much of the land is already open to the public and includes trails and interpretive signs maintained by the American Battlefield Trust, Friends of Cedar Mountain Battlefield, or the Brandy Station Foundation.
  - **Recovering from Hurricane Helene:** The impacts from deadly Hurricane Helene, which hit Southwest Virginia in late September, will continue to be felt for months. Flooding, damaged campgrounds, yurts and other buildings forced the temporary closure of nine Virginia State Parks and four natural area preserves. Agency staff cleared trails of downed trees, repaired facilities, and supported local emergency services.
  - **Invasive plant list:** Thirteen more species that pose a threat to the state's ecosystems were added to the Virginia Invasive Plant Species List. The plants on the list, which now includes 103 species, threaten Virginia's forests, marshes, wetlands and waterways. Landowners and land managers are encouraged to plant native species instead of Italian arum, nandina and others.
  - **Wildlife Biodiversity Resilience Corridors:** The Virginia Natural Heritage Program created a new map of high-quality, connected habitats in Virginia that support native wildlife. These key corridors for wildlife biodiversity are being investigated for measures such as wildlife crossings to both improve driver safety and help stem biodiversity loss.
  - **Making the outdoors more accessible:** Virginia State Parks launched several accessibility initiatives to ensure more visitors can enjoy the beauty of the outdoors.
    - *All-terrain wheelchairs* were introduced at six parks, allowing individuals with mobility challenges to explore trails that might otherwise be inaccessible. (Visit <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/all-terrain-wheelchairs> for more information and the reservation request form.)
    - Additionally, Virginia State Parks installed *EnChroma-adapted viewfinders* for colorblind guests at each of its parks, becoming the first state park system in the nation to offer them at every location. The initiative received nationwide attention, including coverage from The New York Times, NBC Nightly News and FOX Weather.
    - Natural Bridge State Park also became the first state park in the U.S. to install the *RightHear Accessibility system*, improving accessibility for blind and visually impaired visitors. This innovative technology uses a network of beacons to provide real-time, location-based audio guidance via a smartphone app, helping guests navigate the park's trails and facilities.
  - **Preserving history:** The Inn at Foster Falls, an iconic structure located within New River Trail, was honored with a 2024 Virginia Historic Preservation Award. These awards are presented annually by Preservation Virginia to recognize exemplary historic preservation and historical research in the commonwealth. The full-service inn, the first of its kind within the Virginia State Parks system, offers 10 unique rooms for overnight guests, stately banquet and meeting rooms, a catering kitchen and beautiful two-story porches.
  - **Refreshing facilities:** Douthat and Fairy Stone completed phase two of extensive renovations to 26 of their cabins, enhancing visitor experience and preserving the historical elements of these cherished parks. Updates include modernized kitchens and bathrooms, improved heating and cooling systems, and structural repairs.
  - **State park master plans:** The 10-year master plan for Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park was adopted, outlining a comprehensive vision for the park's future development and preservation. This plan
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focuses on enhancing visitor experiences preserving the region’s rich history and promoting community engagement.

- The following parks are creating or updating their 10-year master plans. This process involves gathering input from stakeholders and the community to shape a vision that balances conservation, recreation and education.

- Sweet Run State Park in Loudoun County
- Mayo River State Park in Henry County (not developed)
- High Bridge State Park near Farmville
- Lake Anna State Park in Spotsylvania County
- Machicomico State Park in Gloucester County

- **Honored for innovation:** The Virginia State Parks Resource Management team received the 2024 National Association of State Park Directors Innovation Award for their GIS Portal project. The portal serves as a comprehensive resource for park field staff, empowering them to make well-informed decisions.
- **Isopod species discoveries:** Staff at the Virginia Natural Heritage Program published a new book about several newly discovered species of isopods who live in cave, karst and shallow groundwater in Virginia and the Appalachians. Their research found that Virginia is extraordinary in terms of isopod biodiversity and dozens of species face extreme threat of extinction.
- **Mussel richness map:** Biodiversity data specialists at the Virginia Natural Heritage Program developed a new map of that identifies potential habitats of native freshwater mussels, the most imperiled group of animals. The data-driven tool is designed to help guide Chesapeake Bay restoration and conservation efforts.
- **Looking Ahead:** DCR has contracted Brockenbrough and STACH, PLLC to conduct a feasibility study for Oak Hill, which was funded in FY25. The executive summary will be completed on January 3, 2025, and will be reported to the General Assembly in March of 2025.

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

Ms. Ellis reported on the financial conditions of DCR:

**Financial Report – January 5, 2025**

*General Fund Appropriation & Expenditures*

Fiscal Year 2025 Total Legislative Appropriation:	\$377,268,801
Total transfers and adjustments:	(\$265,965,768)
Fiscal Year 2025 Total Legislative Appropriation Available for Agency Operations:	\$111,303,033

Figure 1: Appropriation Transfers & Adjustments:

FY2025 Legislative Appropriation

\$ 377,268,801

**Appropriation Transfers and Adjustments**

Water Quality Improvement Fund Transfers	(138,076,028)
Land Conservation Fund Transfers	(2,583,531)
Dam Safety/Flood Prevention & Protection	(5,732,147)
Land Conservation Fund Transfers	(16,000,000)
Dam Safety transfer to Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund	(100,000,000)
SWCD Dam Repair	(1,500,000)
City of Norfolk	(25,000,000)
Central Appropriation Adjustments	1,726,999
Mandatory Carryforward	3,712,942
Discretionary Carryforward	17,485,997

(265,965,768)

Figure 2: General Fund Division Budgets and Expenditures Through August 30, 2024.

Division	Division Targets	YTD Actual of November 30, 2024	(As % Target vs Actual -
Natural Heritage	\$ 7,817,195.00	\$ 2,252,314	28.8%
State Parks	\$ 37,679,722.00	\$ 27,429,031	72.8%
PRR (Incl Design & Construction)	\$ 23,057,686.00	\$ 1,731,666	7.5%
Director's Office - Admin- Finance	\$ 13,465,175.00	\$ 6,691,313	49.7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$ 82,019,778</b>	<b>\$ 38,104,324</b>	<b>46.5%</b>

\*Notes: State Parks reflects only General Fund appropriations and expenditures, approximately 50% of the total parks budget. PRR appropriations includes 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, 2024, through August 30, 2024.

	FY25 Estimate	YTD Actual (Through November 30, 2024)	YTD Actual /Estimate	Prior Year YTD Actual (Through November 30, 2023)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$ 32,318,211</b>	<b>\$ 17,077,506</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>\$ 18,145,839</b>

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE – Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director**

Director Wells provided the Board with an update on the upcoming short session of the Virginia General Assembly.

**GOVERNOR’S BUDGET– Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director**

Director Wells provided the following briefing on the Governor's Budget:

**Governor Youngkin’s Proposed FY26 Budget Adjustments for DCR**

Operating Budget Summary

Biennium	Fiscal Year	Source	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund	Total
2020-2022	2021	Chapter 1, 2022 Acts of Assembly	\$133,055,585	\$57,858,814	\$190,914,399
2021-2024	2022	Chapter1, 2024 Acts of Assembly	\$431,138,368	\$172,452,771	\$603,591,139
2020-2022	2022	Chapter 1, 2022 Acts of Assembly	\$152,961,045	\$58,058,814	\$211,019,859
2021-2024	2023	Chapter1, 2024 Acts of Assembly	\$556,564,758	\$146,799,665	\$703,364,423
2024-2026	2025	<b>Governor's Proposed Budget</b>	<b>\$403,565,201</b>	<b>\$211,635,974</b>	<b>\$615,201,175</b>
		2024 Appropriation	\$377,268,801	\$211,635,974	\$588,904,775
		Governor's Amendments	\$26,296,400	\$0	\$26,296,400
2024-2026	2026	<b>Governor's Proposed Budget</b>	<b>\$107,154,574</b>	<b>\$149,423,979</b>	<b>\$256,578,553</b>
		2024 Appropriation	\$106,220,728	\$148,389,674	\$254,610,402
		Governor's Amendments	\$933,846	\$1,034,305	\$1,968,151

Positions Summary

Biennium	Fiscal Year	Source	General Fund	Nongeneral Fund	Total
2020-2022	2021	Chapter 1, 2022 Acts of Assembly	435.50	46.50	482.00
2021-2024	2022	Chapter1, 2024 Acts of Assembly	474.50	49.50	524.00
2020-2022	2022	Chapter 1, 2022 Acts of Assembly	443.50	46.50	490.00
2021-2024	2023	Chapter1, 2024 Acts of Assembly	480.50	50.50	531.00
2024-2026	2025	<b>Proposed Positions</b>	<b>512.50</b>	<b>53.50</b>	<b>566.00</b>
		2024 Appropriation	512.50	53.50	566.00
		Governor's Amendments	0.00	0.00	0.00
2024-2026	2026	<b>Proposed Positions</b>	<b>514.50</b>	<b>57.50</b>	<b>572.00</b>
		2024 Appropriation	512.50	53.50	566.00
		Governor's Amendments	2.00	4.00	6.00

Operating Budget Amendments

- Deposit part of the surplus to the Water Quality Improvement Fund and the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund: Provides the required 15 percent of the Part A mandatory surplus to the Water Quality Improvement Fund Reserve. Out of the remaining amount, \$17.4 million is provided for deposit to the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund to support Agriculture Best Management Practices needs in the next biennium.

	FY 2025	FY 2026
General Fund	\$26,296,400	\$0

- Initiate membership in the Virginia Law Officers' Retirement System for conservation officers: Provides funding to support the department's membership in the Virginia Law Officers' Retirement System. Chapter 416, 2024 Acts of Assembly, which would add conservation officers to the program, requires reenactment by the General Assembly in the 2025 session.

	FY 2025	FY 2026
General Fund	\$0	\$610,000

- Increase positions to provide oversight and assistance for districts: Authorizes the agency to support three additional positions from interest earnings in the Water Quality Improvement Fund and the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund to support efforts of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

	FY 2025	FY 2026
Nongeneral Fund	\$0	\$462,541
Positions	0.00	3.00

- Provide funding for district dam rehabilitation engineers: Authorizes the agency to utilize interest earnings in the Soil and Water Conservation District Dam Maintenance, Repair, and Rehabilitation Fund to support administration of the fund.

	FY 2025	FY 2026
Nongeneral Fund	\$0	\$355,393

- Provide support for capital outlay in the Division of Planning and Recreation Resources: Establishes funding and two positions to support project managers in the Division of Planning and Recreation Resources for design and construction. The section manages all maintenance, capital, and small technical projects across the department.

	FY 2025	FY 2026
General Fund	\$0	\$323,846
Positions	0.00	2.00

- Establish a nongeneral fund revenue specialist position: Provides appropriation and one position, supported by the State Park Conservation Resources Fund, to establish a revenue specialist to analyze and optimize park revenue.

	FY 2025	FY 2026
Nongeneral Fund	\$0	\$216,371
Positions	0.00	1.00

### Capital Project Requests

- Provide additional appropriation for state park acquisitions: Authorizes additional nongeneral fund appropriation and updates the list of parks for which the department is authorized to complete land acquisitions.

	FY 2025	FY 2026
Nongeneral Fund	\$0	\$10,399,475

### BREAK

The Board adjourned for a break at 10:51 a.m.

### CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called back to order at 11:04 a.m.

**VIRGINIA OUTDOORS PLAN** – *Kelly McClary, Kristal McKelvey, & Allison Tillett*

The Board was provided with background and an update on the 2024 Virginia Outdoors Plan. The following topics were discussed:

- Land and Water Conservation Fund apportionment process
- Outdoors Plan development and implementation process
- Differences in and components of the 2024 Outdoors Plan
- 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey and Results
- Grants
- Outdoors Plan implementation years: 2025-2030

**2026 MEETING DATES** – *Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations*

Mr. Stovall provided recommended dates and locations for Board of Conservation and Recreation meetings through 2026 for approval as follows:

- January 9, 2026: Pocahontas State Park, Chesterfield, VA
- April 28-30, 2026: Shenandoah National Park, Luray, VA
- October 7-9, 2026: Break Interstate Park, Breaks, VA

**BOARD ACTION**

Ms. Allen moved that the Board approve the 2026 meeting dates and locations as presented. Mr. Ihrman seconded, and the motion carried.

**ELECTION OF A NEW CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR** – *Esther M. Nizer, Vice Chair*

**BOARD ACTION**

Col. Hoggard nominated Ms. Nizer for Chair of the Board of Conservation and Recreation. Ms. Allen seconded, and the nomination carried.

Chair Nizer asked for nominations for Vice Chair.

**BOARD ACTION**

Ms. Allen nominated Mr. Ihrman for Vice Chair of the Board of Conservation and Recreation. Col. Hoggard seconded, and the nomination carried.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Jennifer Wampler addressed the Board to compliment and thank DCR staff on the creation of the Virginia Outdoors Plan.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT**

Chief Brown announced that he has provided the Department with a map detailing where all indigenous tribes were located in the 1600's.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:22 p.m.