

# VIRGINIA OUTDOORS FOUNDATION

## land

## Ensuring Adequate Funding

### Statement of the Issue

Virginia has one of the most successful land conservation programs in the nation, with hundreds of thousands of acres in land protected by conservation easements donated to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, a quasi-governmental state agency. As with all state agencies, VOF has seen its share of the General Fund shrink. Unfortunately, this critical agency has taken a double hit to its budget, because a significant portion of its funding comes from a \$1 deed recordation fee. As the real estate market has collapsed, the recordation fee revenue to VOF has dropped by 30%. VOF needs adequate funding in order to help conserve the lands most important to Virginia's health and economy.

### Background

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) was created by the General Assembly in 1966 to promote the preservation of open-space lands. The idea behind the creation of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation was among the recommendations of the 1964 Virginia Outdoor Recreation Study Commission, which also suggested the creation of a Historic Landmarks Commission, a system of scenic byways, and an enlarged state park system. On June 13, 1968, the first VOF easement was recorded – 102 acres in Goochland County. Today, the VOF holds the at least 75% of all easements in the Commonwealth of Virginia, protecting more than 530,000 acres.

As a quasi-governmental agency, VOF is funded through the state General Fund, as well as through a \$1 fee on every deed recorded in



counties and cities where VOF holds an easement which was enacted in 2004. At the height of the real estate market, this recordation fee yielded nearly \$1 million per year, but today, it brings in just \$600,000 annually. Combined with the \$1.95 million allocation from the state's General Fund, VOF's current annual budget is approximately \$3 million.

As the largest easement holder in Virginia, VOF is responsible for both working with landowners to put new lands under easement, and ensuring the permanence of easement donations already made to the state. Virginia's generous Land Preservation Tax Credit, a growing climate of conservation, and Governor Kaine's ambitious 400,000 acre land conservation goal has brought a flood tide of landowners to the doors of VOF. For the past several years, there have been more landowners who want to protect important scenic, historic and natural lands throughout Virginia

# Recommendations: VOF Funding

Ensure that the Virginia Outdoors Foundation has adequate operating funds to work with every landowner who can make a meaningful contribution to the protection of Virginia's critical resources and then monitor and defend those conservation easements over time.

- Support an increase in the current deed recordation fee from \$1 per deed to \$2 per deed.
- Support a long-term increase in VOF's annual budget through General Fund allocation and the recordation fee to at least \$5 million per year to adequately meet the needs of all landowners who wish to donate easements, while maintaining a robust easement stewardship program.

than VOF can afford to work with in one year, even before funding cuts strained the agency's resources.

In addition to working with landowners who wish to place new lands under easement, VOF's other challenge is the massive responsibility of ongoing stewardship of their more than 2,700 conservation easements. Each property must be monitored for compliance with the terms of the easement on a regular basis, and VOF's stewardship staff must respond to landowner questions and requests for easement interpretation. This responsibility is ongoing and is critical to ensuring that the conservation easements which the citizens of the Commonwealth have paid for with the generous Land Preservation Tax Credit are upheld and enforced into the future.

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## Contact

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