

# The 2004 VCN Legislative Priorities

**Natural Resources Funding** - - Obtaining adequate funding for Virginia's natural resources programs is a VCN legislative priority. This over-arching issue affects all aspects of the Commonwealth's efforts to protect its atmosphere, land and waters from pollution, impairment or destruction. Natural Resource functions receive only 0.6% of Virginia's general fund allocations and a total of 1% of general and non general funds. VCN believes that Virginia cannot meet its Constitutional authority to protect the state's environment at this level of funding.

**Adequate Public Facilities Legislation** - - Coordinating the pace of development with the provision of adequate public facilities is a VCN legislative priority. In 2003 a special committee of the Commission on Growth and Economic Development made significant progress in approaching a fair and balanced approach with regard to school facilities. Continuing that progress toward enactment of adequate public facilities legislation is critical for Virginia's environment.

**Air** – multi-pollutant “Clean Smokestack” Legislation - - Cleaning up power plant emission is a VCN legislative priority. Power plants are Virginia's largest source of Sulfur Dioxide, Nitrogen Oxides, Mercury, and other air toxics. VCN supports legislation similar to that adopted in North Carolina, which places system wide caps on these emissions.

**Land Use and Transportation in the I-81 Corridor** - - Careful planning and consideration of alternatives in the I-81 corridor is a VCN legislative priority. The proposed widening of I-81 and the manner in which truck traffic will be handled is of great significance for the Commonwealth. The air quality, environmental, and land use implications of alternatives are varied and significant. It is essential that appropriate forethought, including consideration of alternatives such as an independent rail authority option be part of any legislative approach.

**Water policy and permitting** - - Continuation of efforts to develop comprehensive water resources planning is a VCN legislative priority. Currently, there is no comprehensive system to plan and manage Virginia's water resources. Significant progress was made in 2003 following the adoption of SB1221 that established a program for a comprehensive water resources plan and local water supply plans. This work must continue if Virginia is to properly address water quality and the management of this critical natural resource.

**Budget Related Items** - - Many items will be taken up under the budget process rather than as new legislative initiatives and will be addressed in that context. While other items will be added as we moved forward in the session, initial budget-related environmental items include:

- \* Moving the Department of Forestry to the Natural Resources Secretariat
- \* Adequate funding for the agricultural vitality program
- \* The application of forestry user fees for program funding