A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I don’t have to tell you that we are in an unprecedented moment in time. We are amidst a pandemic, the highest unemployment in recent history, and a renewed civil rights movement - not to mention, the impending threat of climate change. It would be easy for any one of us to use this as a moment to throw in the towel but, in picking up this book, you are joining me in being part of the solution. Thank you.

The last six months have shown that now, more than ever, we must invest in solutions for our environment. As we face a public health crisis that attacks our respiratory system, increasing local air quality has never been more important. Access to outdoor spaces for all Virginians – from trails in our neighborhoods to the banks of our local waterways – are critical as individuals look for opportunities to get out of their homes to restore their mental and physical health. As global markets are tested and stretched thin – the importance of local food systems and locally produced clean energy are key to creating resilient communities.

Our Common Agenda is your road map for state-based policy solutions to start to address these and other environmental problems facing our Commonwealth. A collection of papers written by, vetted through, and voted on by our 130+ Network Partners, this book is an educational tool for policy makers and conservation advocates alike. Our authors ground their research and findings in science and present practical policy solutions that are equitable for all Virginians. (See How The Briefing Book Gets Made (p. vi) for more information on how our Common Agenda is drafted each year.)

As you read through the policy ideas for the upcoming year you’ll see an increased focus on tackling pollution from the transportation sector – Virginia’s largest source of carbon pollution while we look to continue to enforce and enhance the climate gains made last year for Virginia’s utility sector. In addition, we are just a few years away from Virginia’s deadline to meet our goals in the Chesapeake Bay clean-up plan increasing the urgency of clean water investments that have proven successful over the last decade. As our trails, campgrounds, and waterways see increased visitors, we provide solutions for increasing access for all outdoors. In addition, you’ll see that each of our policies seeks to ensure environmental justice for all.

These are just a few highlights from this year’s Common Agenda briefing book. As the partnership of 130+ conservation organizations we believe that if we work together, we can solve Virginia’s biggest environmental problems and leave the Commonwealth better than we found it for the next generation. I’m looking forward to working with you on whichever topic or topics interests you most. Feel free to reach out to me, my team, or any of the authors in this book for more information.

Mary Rafferty
Executive Director