

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

An Overview

Conserve, protect, enhance and advocate wise use of the commonwealth's unique natural, historical, recreational, scenic and cultural resources.

Our livelihood, quality of life and future depend on how wisely we manage our natural resources. That is why the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) works to give individuals, businesses, communities and all levels of government the tools and information needed to make wise decisions in conserving our natural and recreational resources. We do this through planning, funding, education and, in a few cases, regulation.

DCR's work falls into several broad categories. Perhaps most visibly, the agency manages, protects and provides access to numerous state parks throughout the commonwealth. About 7 million visitors a year enjoy breathtaking beauty and modern facilities in Virginia's award winning state parks.

Similarly, DCR manages an ever-growing number of natural area preserves. Particularly significant natural resources are protected in the preserves, and many provide opportunities for hiking and nature observation.

Parks are models of conservation

Most people know state parks are great places to enjoy the outdoors, but the parks, along with natural area preserves, also serve as models of conservation. As well, they serve as centers for environmental education – places where children and grown-ups alike learn about the value of our natural resources in our daily lives.

Closely tied to land management, DCR identifies, inventories and protects rare plants, animals and communities. Virginia is an ecological crossroads, rich in plant and animal species found at few other places in the world. DCR's natural heritage database of these resources is recognized as the best in the state and one of the best in the Western Hemisphere.

Fighting nonpoint source pollution

DCR also protects and manages water and soil resources across the commonwealth. Staff does so in programs for runoff pollution control, flood protection and so on. DCR is the state's lead nonpoint source pollution prevention agency, and it uses financial incentives to farmers, nutrient management training and watershed-based planning to address the issue.

The agency also helps the state's 47 soil and water conservation districts protect Virginia's waterways. These are voluntary programs providing clients with tools and information needed to make the best decisions. Even where DCR has regulatory power - dam safety, stormwater management, and erosion and sediment control - staff stresses training and technical assistance as well as compliance.

In a similar vein, DCR staff works with localities to promote land use that minimizes runoff pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay and waters that feed it. More particularly, DCR professionals ensure that local governments' zoning ordinances, regulations and comprehensive plans comply with Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. The staff also provides training and technical and financial assistance to localities and local groups in the state's Tidewater region.

And DCR provides many public and private interests with grants, financial incentives, planning, training and technical expertise in a variety of areas involving open space protection, land use and outdoor recreation. These include scenic rivers, scenic byways, greenways, park design, programs for local parks and recreation professionals, and more. DCR is responsible for creating and updating the state's comprehensive outdoor recreation and open space planning document, the *Virginia Outdoors Plan*.

The agency also supports various semi-public entities including the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Land Conservation Foundation, the Cave Board and several standing citizen boards.

DCR by the numbers

Land management, parks

- 35 state parks, 4 undeveloped parks
- 54 natural areas and preserves
- 3 associated properties
- Total of more than 112,000 acres
- 530 miles of trails
- 237 cabins (at Bear Creek Lake, Belle Isle, Chippokes Plantation, Claytor Lake, Douthat, Fairy Stone, First Landing, Hungry Mother, James River, Kiptopeke, Lake Anna, Occaneechee, Smith Mountain Lake, Southwest Virginia Museum, Staunton River, Twin Lakes, Westmoreland), as well as 19 family lodges
- 1,834 campsites in 25 different parks
- More than 80 picnic shelters
- 23 visitor centers
- 11 swimming beaches and 5 pools
- 2 restaurants, 19 snack bars

State park attendance

- 7,534,960 (2009)
- 7,250,019 (2008)
- 7,452,271 (2007)
- 7,077,217 (2006)
- 6,996,375 (2005)
- 6,997,889 (2004)
- 6,296,108 (2003)
- 7,008,004 (2002)
- 7,017,052 (2001)
- 6,319,300 (2000)
- 5,885,910 (1999)
- 5,491,269 (1998)

8 regional soil and water conservation offices

- Abingdon
- Dublin
- Richmond
- Staunton
- Suffolk
- Tappahannock
- Warrenton

DCR administers:

- The Virginia Dam Safety Act, under which 630 dams are regulated
- 24 Scenic River segments statewide
- The Virginia Cost Share Program, through which conservation practices on 586,149 acres of farmland were installed in 2008
- The Virginia Recreational Trail Grants with 25 approved grants in 2007
- Water Quality Improvement Act Nonpoint Source Funds totaling more than \$150 million since its inception in 1997
- The Virginia Adopt-A-Stream Program with 534 groups having adopted 939 miles of rivers
- The Land Conservation Office and comprehensive Conservation Lands database



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