

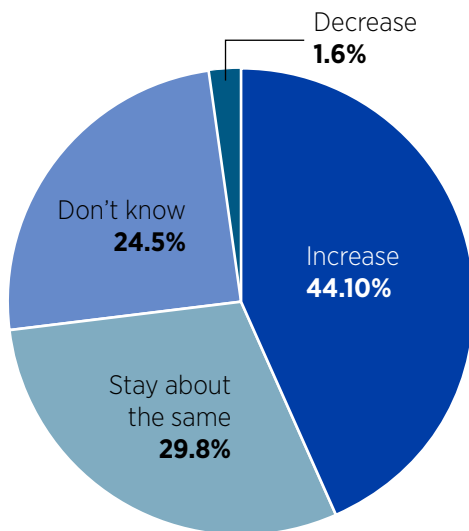


CHAPTER **4**
*Funding Outdoor
Recreation
and Land
Conservation*

Support for Outdoor Recreation and Land Conservation Funding

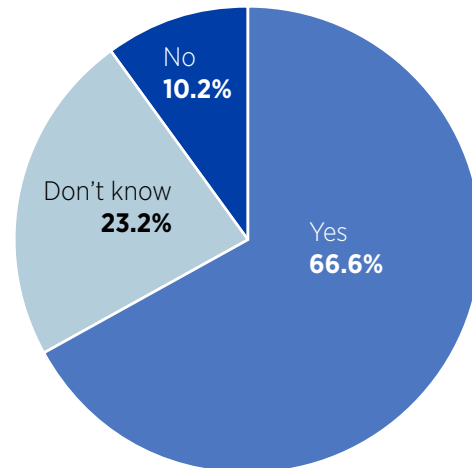
The 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey (VODS) asked Virginians if the state should increase, decrease or keep the current level of state spending for outdoor recreation. Almost half of respondents support an increase in state spending on outdoor recreation, and approximately 30 percent believe that state spending should stay about the same. Approximately one quarter do not know how or if state spending on outdoor recreation should change. The survey shows only 1.6 percent of respondents believe that state spending on outdoor recreation should decrease. This presents an opportunity for education about funding support to sustain state and local parks and recreation areas.

Figure 4.1 State Spending for Outdoor Recreation



The 2017 VODS also asked about spending public funds on natural areas and open spaces. Two-thirds support public spending to prevent the loss of natural areas and open spaces. Twenty-three percent of those surveyed had no opinion on such spending, while just 10 percent were opposed to spending to acquire natural areas as public lands. Younger respondents tended to favor increased spending. (See Appendix 2).

Figure 4.2 Spending to Preserve Natural Areas



Funding Needs

The Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) prioritizes outdoor recreation needs based on public, local and regional input and the 2017 VODS. Funding these needs is a challenge. State natural resource agencies and nearly every local government struggle to meet citizen and visitor demands because of a lack of funding for parks and trails. The reduction of available federal funding, combined with increased costs of construction and project development and the fiscal restraint experienced at the local level throughout the Commonwealth has resulted in fewer public outdoor recreation projects.

The General Assembly should re-establish an appropriation for public outdoor recreation that can be used for land acquisition, new development, rehabilitation and maintenance. The Virginia Recreation and Park Society (VRPS) legislative platform includes support for bonds or dedicated funds for local and state park acquisition, planning and development. VRPS advocates for this dedicated source of funding to be administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). A percentage of the outdoor recreation apportionment should be allocated to fund DCR staff for program administration.

Because there has been a shortage of funding for outdoor recreation over two decades, some recreation departments do not submit requests for capital improvements knowing that they have little to no chance of being funded. The tables below indicate outdoor recreation capital improvement requests submitted by a few Virginia localities. Each locality independently identifies and negotiates funds for outdoor recreation at the local level based on comprehensive master plans and outdoor recreation planning.

Figure 4.3 Limited Locality Survey of 2017 Outdoor Capital Improvement Needs

Virginia counties	FY 2017 outdoor recreation capital improvement needs
Chesterfield	\$23,026,000
Gloucester	\$4,237,173
Isle of Wight	\$7,950,000
James City County	\$7,836,500
Virginia cities and towns	FY 2017 outdoor recreation capital improvement needs
Alexandria	\$53,791,213
Fredericksburg	\$2,619,000
Harrisonburg	\$3,258,500
Herndon	\$4,897,000
Manassas	\$12,010,000
Newport News	\$17,674,000
Norfolk	\$3,800,000
Roanoke City	\$15,283,992
Virginia Beach	\$67,361,970
Williamsburg	\$3,188,000
Winchester	\$17,312,000

Source: VRPS Survey of localities by Carol Steele, VOP Technical Advisory Committee, December 2017

Resources

Grant funds are very specific and must be used to fulfill needs of the grantor programs. Not all the grant programs listed in this chapter will be applicable to every outdoor recreation or land conservation project.

- Funding for outdoor recreation and land conservation (Administering agencies)
- Federal
 - Land and Water Conservation Fund – (National Park Service and DCR)
 - Forest Legacy and other federal programs (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Virginia Department of Forestry)

- Federal transportation grants (Federal Highway Administration and Virginia Department of Transportation [VDOT])
- Virginia Recreational Trails Program (RTP) – (Federal Highway Administration and DCR)
- State
 - State bonds
 - Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF)
 - Recreational Access Program (VDOT)
 - Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program (VDOT)
 - Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund (DCR)
 - Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)–(Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development)
 - Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (DEQ)
- Local
 - Capital funds allocated by localities
 - Local bonds
 - Carry over funding at end of fiscal year closeout
 - Virginia Code §15.2-2316.2 - Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)
 - Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)
 - Private foundations
- Technical Assistance and Partnerships
 - NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (Technical assistance for planning)
 - Coastal Zone Management grants for public access
 - Partnerships to implement projects that meet recommendations in the following state plans:
 - [Virginia Tourism Corporation](#)
 - [Wildlife Management Plan](#)
 - [Virginia Department of Health Plan](#)
 - Today's Treasure – Tomorrow's Trust Virginia's Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan 2016–2021



Bacon Hollow Overlook, Shenandoah National Park | Tony Hall/Virginia Tourism Corp.

Federal Funds

Rules and regulations associated with the use of federal funding are complex and time intensive, which can be a deterrent to prospective grantees. These programs require knowledgeable staff and extensive work associated with grant implementation and reimbursement. Smaller and rural localities, which have fewer staff to manage complicated grant requirements, have greater difficulty meeting these requirements. Reduced funding for technical support at the state level further complicates the use of these funds. Therefore, any potential grantee should consider if they have technical expertise to manage a grant program prior to seeking federal funds.

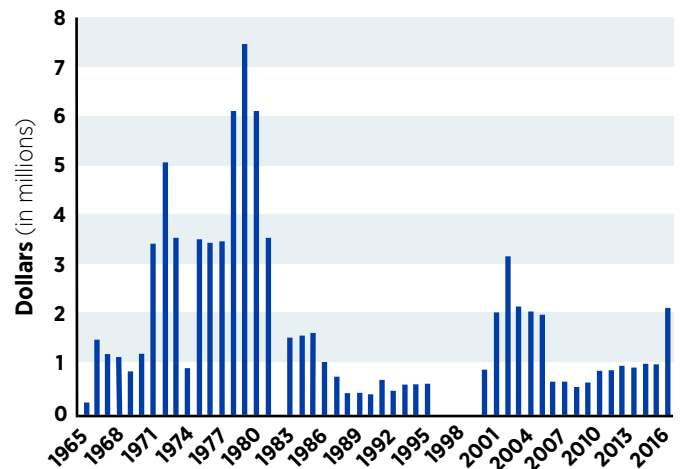
Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 established a federal reimbursement program for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas. The program represents a federal, state and local partnership. A key feature of the program is that all LWCF-assisted areas must be maintained and opened, in perpetuity, as public outdoor recreation areas. LWCF is administered in Virginia by DCR on behalf of the National Park Service.

Revenue for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program (both the federal side and state and local assistance program) is made possible from offshore oil and gas receipts and supplemented by revenue from the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, Public Law 109-432, which was signed into law in 2006. At the beginning of the LWCF program, 1964-1965, the law set aside

\$100 million annually for the first four years for both sides of the program. Increases were made in 1968 to \$300 million and again in 1971 to \$400 million. In 1977, Public Law 95-42 increased the annual funding to \$900 million. While this amount has been authorized since 1978, appropriations and apportionments have been inconsistent. Virginia’s highest LWCF apportionment amount of \$7.5 million was received in 1979. The average apportionment for Virginia between 2000 and 2017 was \$1,345,209. The average apportionment since 2010 was \$1,217,092. From 2006 to 2015 Virginia’s apportionment was less than \$1 million, ranging between \$615,971 and \$966,874. In 2017 the apportionment was \$2,134,167.

Figure 4.4 LWCF Funding





Norfolk Botanical Garden | Kelly J. Mihalcoe LLC/Virginia Tourism Corp.

Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a matching reimbursement grant program for the building and rehabilitation of trails and trail-related facilities. The program is administered by DCR in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration. The RTP is an 80 percent federal and 20 percent local matching reimbursement program that supports projects with primarily recreational rather than utilitarian transportation value. Funding may be awarded to city, county, town or other government entities or registered nonprofit groups partnering with a governmental body. The RTP requires that 30 percent of funds be used for motorized (all-terrain vehicles, dirt bikes, etc.) recreational trail uses, 30 percent for non-motorized and 40 percent for multiuse trails.

State Funds

Conservation Grants

Funding for acquisition and easements through the Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF) has continued through periods of reduced development grants across granting agencies. This funding has secured substantial open space for future generations. While much of this conservation work is solely for preservation, many sites are appropriate for public access. However, the lack of funding for development has prevented the next phase of conservation and public education for many conserved lands. Without public awareness and firsthand experience open spaces, the full benefit of these conservation efforts cannot be achieved.

[Click here to view a list of VLCF-funded projects.](#)

Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund

DCR receives voluntary contributions of income tax refunds from the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund. The fund is used to:

- Acquire land for recreational purposes and preserve natural areas.
- Develop, maintain and improve state park sites and facilities.
- Provide funds for local public bodies pursuant to the Virginia Outdoors Fund grants program.

Half of these funds are granted to localities as 50-percent matching grants to support local recreation projects. The program was established in 1993 but, with the addition of numerous other programs now competing for the same dollars, contributions to this fund have declined in recent years.

Recreational Access Fund Grants

This VDOT program provides funds to develop access to state and local parks and historic sites across the state. Funding levels for this program have not changed in the last 40 years. Once constructed, these secondary roadways are often not given the same level of maintenance priority compared to other state transportation needs.

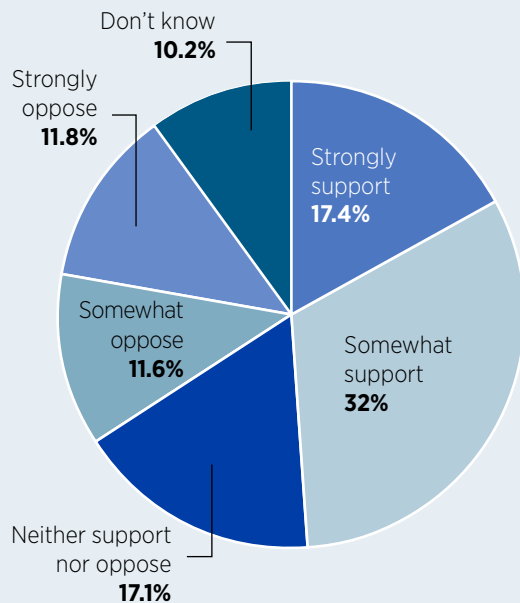
Challenges for Funding Outdoor Recreation and Land Conservation

- Most funding sources have specific targets for land acquisition, land conservation, outdoor recreation or park development and maintenance. While some grant funds may be used for multiple purposes, many are restricted and the maximum award amounts do not meet project needs.
- Many land conservation and recreation projects are funded using multiple revenue sources and grants. This requires intense planning and results in extended staging of funds until the full amount is secured to complete the project, thus jeopardizing rapid response projects. The ability to leverage resources is a key to funding success.
- There is no consistent funding source of state monies to sustain and grow outdoor recreation and land conservation.

What Virginians Think about a State Tax Increase to Fund Outdoor Recreation

According to the 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey, there is significant public support for such spending. Almost half (49.4 percent) of respondents said they would somewhat or strongly support an increased state tax to fund outdoor recreation in Virginia. (See Appendix 2) Households with incomes over \$100,000 were a little more likely to support a tax increase.

Figure 4.5 Support for a State Tax Increase to Fund Outdoor Recreation



Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Potential assets and opportunities for funding outdoor recreation and land conservation

- Coordinate revenue sources to maximize leveraging opportunities.
- Encourage philanthropic giving to enhance citizen support and augment the ability for nonprofit organizations to accomplish land conservation and outdoor recreation projects.
- Enhance outdoor recreation tourism through destination marketing.

- Explore possibilities to establish regional or local special taxes to fund land conservation and outdoor recreation. An outdoor recreation program could be modeled after the 2013 Northern Virginia transportation special regional taxes.
- Develop innovative partnerships between local parks and recreation departments with the local chambers of commerce, industrial parks, local universities and hospitals to establish green spaces that support outdoor recreation and healthy living.
- Fund outdoor recreation in rural areas to support local citizens and tourism opportunities.
- Enable user fees to cover costs of environmental services such as available drinking water and waste management.¹

Recommendations

- Identify funding for both new and improved outdoor recreation facilities to include local, regional and state governments. (Virginia Recreation and Park Society [VRPS], VOP Technical Advisory Committee, State Trails Advisory Committee, DCR, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF).
- Provide outreach, training and sources of available funding to local, regional and state government agencies and nonprofits to sustain and develop outdoor recreation resources. (DCR, DGIF).
- Develop a strategy and recommendations of how to reach elected officials and educate them about expanding the range of tools available for local government to implement outdoor recreation and land conservation. (VRPS, VOP Technical Advisory Committee, State Trails Advisory Committee, DCR, DGIF).

Resources

Headwaters Economics, a nonpartisan nonprofit, published a September 2017 report. The report provides a compendium of options used across the country to fund outdoor recreation. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/state-recreation-funding/>

Works Cited

1. "Investing in the Commonwealth's Land and Water," Virginia Forever's Five-Year Plan 2015-2019, www.virginiaforever.org.