



January 2, 2024

To: The House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees of the Virginia General Assembly

From: Potomac Conservancy

Re: Governor's Proposed 2024-2026 Biennial State Budget

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Potomac Conservancy is encouraged to see Governor Youngkin's budget offer responsible investments in several policies and agencies that advance environmental protections in Virginia and build off existing efforts to bolster a safe and vibrant Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay.

Founded in 1993, Potomac Conservancy is the region's leading clean water advocate, fighting to ensure the Potomac River boasts clean drinking water, healthy lands, and vibrant communities. Potomac Conservancy hopes to make the Potomac region a place where clean water, outdoor experiences, and thriving ecosystems are accessible to and safe for everyone.

To achieve this goal, ***substantive investments must be made in natural resource grants and programs*** throughout the state of Virginia and along the Potomac River. For that reason, Potomac Conservancy supports increased investments for clean water and land conservation policies.

***Virginia's natural resource investments significantly trail other southeastern and mid-Atlantic states***, such as our neighbors North Carolina, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Maryland.

According to the Census Bureau, other states spend about double, as a percent of state budget, what Virginia does on natural resources. In recent years, Virginia's leadership has allowed other state government functions to grow in spending while natural resources have fallen behind.

Unfortunately, this trend continues in the governor's newly announced budget. A variety of grant programs that accomplish natural resource conservation in alignment with Potomac Conservancy's mission saw drastic cuts or stagnant funding.

Together with our partners in the Our Virginia Outdoors coalition, Potomac Conservancy is advocating for ***increased funding in the final budget for these valuable grant programs***:

- ***The Virginia Land Conservation Fund***, which only received level funding at \$16 million per year. We urge this funding to increase to at least \$30 million per year to help meet the demand for lands that can be acquired for conservation purposes.

- ***The Get Outdoors Fund***, which received no funding in the governor's budget. We would urge at least \$5 million per year for this fund to bolster equitable access to outdoor recreation.
- ***The Virginia Black, Indigenous and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund***, which only received \$1 million for 1 year in the governor's budget. We request that this grant program receive at least \$5 million per year moving forward, to protect the sites that tell the full story of Virginia's history.
- ***The Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund***, which saw a 50% reduction in the governor's budget, receiving only \$437,500 per year. We urge legislators to appropriate at least \$5 million per year for this program to aid farmers in their preservation efforts.

Potomac Conservancy recognizes the meaningful investment in the governor's budget of \$15.5 million for the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund over the biennium and urges legislators to keep this funding at its current level when finalizing the budget.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to offer these comments. Potomac Conservancy looks forward to working with all legislators to create a budget that bolsters investments in Virginia's natural resources and helps create a healthy, vibrant Potomac River.