Progress on Virginia’s Land Conservation Goals

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Today’s discussion

• Governor Kaine’s 400,000-acre goal and the Chesapeake 2000 goal
  – What the goals mean
  – How and why they were established

• Important programs

• Status of efforts to meet the goals
• Benefits for
  – Land base for agriculture and forestry Industries
  – Water quality
  – Recreation
  – Wildlife habitat
  – Ecotourism and heritage tourism
  – Air quality
Virginia is changing

• Over the past decade, Virginia has lost over 60,000 acres a year to development.
• This is approximately 165 acres per day (188 acres per day in the Chesapeake Bay watershed).
• The USDA estimates that we lose over 20,000 acres of prime farmland each year to development.
2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey

• “Should the state spend public funds to prevent the loss of exceptional natural areas to development?” YES: 78%

• Importance of protecting Virginia’s natural and open space resources?, 95% said it was either “very important” (67%) or “important” (28%).

• 70% of those surveyed said they favored outright purchase from willing sellers as an appropriate tool for conserving open space.
400,000 – Acre goal

- Chesapeake 2000 goal (signed in 2000): permanently protect 20% of the watershed by 2010
- As of April 2006, PA and MD had already achieved this goal
- December 2005 Virginia Land Conservation Foundation report: VA had 358,000 acres to go
- 400,000 acres statewide was intended to allow us to exceed C2K goal and protect lands in Southside and Southwest Virginia
Chesapeake 2000 Goal

- Error that was made in 2000 was not discovered until autumn 2007
- Baseline calculation mistakenly included National Forest lands in West Virginia (116,511 acres)
- The corrected number (as of 12/31/07): about 312,000 acres to go
Land conservation = acquisition

• Acquire what?
  – Fee simple
  – Conservation easements

• Who acquires?
  – State and federal agencies
  – Private land trusts
  – Local governments

• Acquire how?
  – Purchase
  – Donation
State programs that will get us to 400,000 acres

- Land preservation tax credit
- Virginia Outdoors Foundation
- DHR easement program & Civil War Historic Sites Preservation Fund
- Office of Farmland Preservation
- Virginia Land Conservation Foundation
- State agency land acquisitions
Land preservation tax credit

- Changed 1/1/07
- *Still the most generous tax credit in the nation*
- Tax credit = 40% of the value of the gift (that is, the easement or land)
- TRANSFERABLE
- Statewide rolling cap of $100 million per year (+ inflation adjustment)
- Carry-forward: 10 years
- Donations greater than $2.5 M are subject to DCR conservation value review.
Virginia Outdoors Foundation

- Primarily accepts donated conservation easements
- 461,000 acres under easement
- 2,223 properties
- Rate of donations has accelerated significantly because of the land preservation tax credit
Importance of VOF

About 80% the land protected in Virginia is through conservation easements donated to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.
Department of Historic Resources: Preservation Easement Program

Nationally acclaimed easement program; first in the country to use preservation easements statewide

- Protects landmark properties: sites, buildings, battlefields, etc., from every region and period
- DHR’s portfolio (446 properties) ranges from architectural masterworks to simple structures, representing the breadth of Virginia’s significant cultural assets
- DHR staff also provides architectural and archaeological services and review for thousands of properties held by other public and private holders
Department of Historic Resources:
Civil War Historic Site Preservation Fund

- $5.19M for FY 09 and $190K for FY10
- Matching (at least 2:1) grants for land acquisition
- Sites must be listed in the “Report on the Nation’s Civil War Battlefields” compiled by the federal Civil War Sites Advisory Commission
Department of Historic Resources:
Civil War Historic Site Preservation Fund

Sites eligible include, but are not limited to:
• Appomattox in Appomattox County
• Brandy Station in Culpeper County
• Chancellorsville in Spotsylvania County
• Cold Harbor in Hanover County
• Fredericksburg in the City of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County
• Glendale in Henrico County
• New Market in Shenandoah County
• Petersburg in the City of Petersburg and Dinwiddie County
Office of Farmland Preservation

- Model Purchase of Development Rights program.
- Provides matching funds to localities for PDR programs on a noncompetitive basis.
- Local programs must be certified.
- $4.25 M in grants issued in February 2008.
- FY 09-10 funding: $500K & $1M
Local PDR programs

STATUS OF LOCAL PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (PDR) PROGRAMS

PDR Program Status
- Developed - Funded
- Developed - No Funding
- Development In Progress
- Possible Development
- No Program or Funding

Map Prepared on 1/9/08 by:

DCR
VA Land Conservation Foundation

**Competitive matching grant program for individual projects**

- Eligible: state agencies, local governments, nonprofits
- Grant applications are ranked by an interagency team
- Grants awarded by a Board of Trustees
VA Land Conservation Foundation

Virginia Land Conservation Foundation

- Statutory formula
  - 75% split among 4 categories
    - Open spaces and parks
    - Farm and Forest Land (these categories are split if there is more than $10M in the fund)
    - Natural areas
    - Historic resources
  - 25% to Open Space Lands Preservation Trust Fund
    - Administered by VOF to assist landowners
    - Available for local government projects
Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (continued)

- $12.5 million in FY 06
  - In $10 million grant round VLCF received $30 million in requests
- $2.5 million in FY 07 & 08
- $2.0 million in FY 09 & 10
Agency land acquisition

- Department of Conservation and Recreation: state parks and state natural area preserves
- Department of Forestry: state forests
- Department of Game and Inland Fisheries: wildlife management areas
- 2008 General Assembly has approved the issuance of $30 M in VPBA bonds for state agency acquisition
$30 M VPBA bond: criteria for project selection

- Conservation value
- Ability to maximize acreage per dollar invested
- Ability to complete the project in a timely manner
- The need to achieve some level of geographic diversity
Summary: state programs

- Land preservation tax credit: best in the nation
- VOF: long history, cost effective, landowner-driven, fueled by tax credit
- DHR: receives donated easements and manages a 2:1 grant program
- Local PDR programs, funded through Office of Farmland Preservation: leverages local investment, reflects local priorities
- VLCF: competitive, statewide priorities, leverages private and federal investment
- State agency acquisition: funding authorized by 2008 General Assembly
Accelerating land conservation

- Collective efforts of state agencies and private land trusts
- Overcome obstacles
  - Training of attorneys and other advisors
  - Capacity in agencies and land trust
- Increase awareness and funding
  - Landowner education and outreach
  - Partnership with local governments
400,000 Acres

- Average when goal was set: 56,000 per year
- CY 2006 total: 95,129
- CY 2007 total: 81,041 acres.
- Left to go as of 4/31/08: 157,026
Questions?

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