

State Parks & Natural Areas Overview

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- *State Parks * Soil and Water Conservation * Natural Heritage**
- * Outdoor Recreation Planning * Land Conservation**
- * Dam Safety and Floodplain Management**
- * Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance**



Presentation Summary

- Virginia's State Parks are an essential part of Commonwealth's tourism, outdoor recreation, and conservation efforts. It is a popular system, experiencing tremendous growth, received national recognition, contributes over \$160 M to local and state economies.
- The 2002 GOB is spurring a new round of growth and expansion. DCR is opening more new facilities this year than in any single year since the establishment of the State Park System in 1936.
- Bond projects will help develop numerous parks, provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities statewide, enhance tourism, conserve valuable resources, and contribute to state and local economies.



Presentation Summary

- Land for potentially 6 new State Parks is being acquired with bond proceeds or by separate legislative actions.
- Rebenchmarking of existing State Park staffing and operations remains a top priority. Recent actions by the 2005 and 2006 General Assembly and Governor have greatly aided the operational challenges faced by the State Park System.
- Total additional funds still needed for existing parks are approximately \$5.9 M per year for operational needs, 49 additional FTEs, as well additional one-time funding for vehicle replacement, program support, maintenance and repairs.
- FY 2008 budget request is for \$3.9 M and 38 FTEs.
- Such levels would close the gap identified in SD 4, provide operational support for new GOB cabins, campgrounds, etc. and help bring Virginia more in line with other states. (Additional support will also be needed for increased program offerings and to open new state parks.)

Presentation Summary

- Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System has protected over 40,000 acres of sensitive natural areas during the past 20 years, provided research and educational opportunities, as well as unique recreational opportunities to the public.
- DCR's Natural Heritage Program was recently recognized as the best program in the western hemisphere.
- To date, the 2002 State Parks and Natural Areas GOB has provided for the acquisition of 12 new preserves and targeted additions to 9 existing preserves.

- The acquisitions have more than doubled the amount of sensitive natural area lands conserved during the past four years (2002 – 2006).
- Managing the investments in a growing NAP System remains a challenge. Carrying out stewardship activities and providing public access are increasingly difficult with existing resources.

Virginia State Parks System

- 70th anniversary (1936-2006)
- 34 state parks
- Why Important?
 - Conservation of natural resources for public to enjoy and experience
 - Incorporated into a healthy lifestyle
 - More than 7 million visitors in 2006
 - Account for more than \$160 M in economic impact
- Since 2002
 - Acquiring land for 6 new parks (in various stages)
 - Opened more facilities in 2006 than any year since 1936
 - Progress made on rebenchmarking of staff and operational support
 - Rated among the Nation's Best Campgrounds, Fishing Spots, Scenic Views, Kid-Friendly Parks by 2005 Camping Life Magazine



State Park Bond Projects

- 2002 General Obligation Bond provides for construction of new facilities (such as cabins, campgrounds, visitor centers, meeting halls, etc) to be added to nearly every existing park
- 72 total bond construction projects; 55 underway
- \$53 M spent or obligated
- Priority given to revenue generating projects and visitor comfort and safety
- New facilities turning day use parks into overnight destinations
- Utilizing energy efficient and environmentally friendly construction techniques (Wilderness Road Visitor Center achieved LEED Certification)
- Using prototype designs to expedite state reviews and reduce project costs
- Progress much farther ahead than 1992 Bond
- All construction projects expected to be substantially complete by 2010.



Major construction projects completed

63 new cabins

- James River (18) Occoneechee (13)
- Bear Creek (13) Lake Anna (10)
- Kiptopeke (5) Claytor Lake (4)



192 new campsites

- Pocahontas (63) Lake Anna (47)
- James River (30) Belle Isle (27)
- Chippokes (23)

150 renovated campsites

- First Landing (108)
- Grayson Highlands (23)

3 meeting facilities/centers

- Wilderness Road Center
- Bear Creek
- Claytor Lake



Current and future construction projects

- Cabins (Douthat, Natural Tunnel, Shenandoah River)
- Camping (Grayson Highlands, Holliday Lake, Kiptopeke, Shenandoah River, Sky Meadows)
- Equestrian Facilities (Fairy Stone, James River, Occoneechee, Pocahontas, Staunton River)
- Visitor Centers (Belle Isle, False Cape, First Landing, James River, Sailor's Creek, Shen. River, Smith Mtn. Lake, Staunton River)
- Infrastructure and Miscellaneous Improvements (parking, utilities, picnic shelters, dredging, maintenance areas, etc.)
- Trails (various)



State Park Lands Acquired (2002-2006)

- 33 tracts (including new parks, adjacent properties, in-holdings)
- 4,951 additional acres
- Acquisitions of land for 6 new state parks completed or underway
 - Authority from bond initiative and specific legislative directives



Land for New State Parks

Powhatan

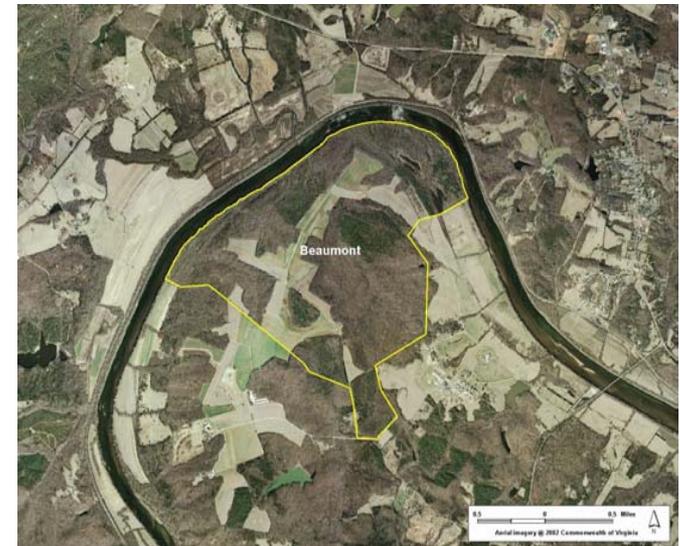
- Appropriations Act in 2003 directed transfer from Beaumont Juvenile Correction Center
- 1,563 acres along the James River
- Transfer complete; Master planning process being finalized
- Proposed as day-use until nearby road improvements can be made

High Bridge Trail

- Legislation in 2004
- 34 mile trail from Burkeville to Farmville to Pamplin
- Master planning process being finalized
- Donation of rail-to-trail corridor from Norfolk Southern expected by end of 2006

Seven Bends

- Shenandoah County
- 307 acres acquired along the North Fork of the Shenandoah River
- Almost 800 additional acres donated by private individual and the Town of Woodstock





Middle Peninsula

- Initial 428 acres along the York River acquired (Gloucester County)
- Land acquired in 2006 using GOB funds (below market acquisition)
- Additional acreage being sought

Widewater

- Stafford County
- 1,100 acres along the Potomac River
- Bargain sale from Dominion Virginia Power
- Land acquired in 2006 using VA Public Building Authority Bonds

Grand Caverns

- Augusta County
- #2 rated Caverns in the United States
- Authorized by 2006 Appropriations Act
- Negotiations started with Upper Valley Regional Park Authority
- Requires Immediate Repairs and Upgrades

State Park Operations Funding

- Needs Identified by 2002 Commission on Future of Virginia's Environment and subsequently revised in 2004 by DCR to reflect demands from new GOB facilities
- Total operating needs for rebenchmarking of existing parks
 - \$12.6 Million additional support per year
 - 127 additional FTEs for existing parks
 - \$4.6 Million in one-time costs (e.g. vehicle and equipment replacement)

- Progress has been made on rebenchmarking existing parks:

<u>Appropriations Act</u>	<u>New Operational Funds</u>	<u>New FTE</u>
• 2005	\$ 4.5 M	57
• 2006	\$ 2.1 M	21

- Remaining need for existing parks:

\$ 5.9 M	49
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- Additional positions will be needed for program interpreters, outdoor adventure leaders, environmental education specialists, etc. to serve visitors' increased needs (1 to 3 per park)
- Additional staff and annual operating support will also be necessary to open 6 new parks for Phase 1 development (day use only)
 - \$2.4 M annually
 - 31 positions
- Once completed, the rebenchmarking will help bring Virginia more in line with other states



FY 2008 Funding Requests

State Park Operations

- \$3.9 M for operations and staffing to continue rebenchmarking
- Would add 38 positions including:
 - 13 Park Rangers
 - 2 Law Conservation Officers (law enforcement)
 - 13 Housekeepers
 - 1 Program Support Tech
 - 7 Trade Technicians
 - 2 System-wide Positions



Supplemental capital request

- Requesting \$23.6 M to supplement 6 GOB projects
 - Shenandoah River State Park (Cabins and Campground Construction) - \$7.0 M
 - Natural Tunnel State Park (Camping Cabins, Campground and Bathhouse Construction) - \$6.1 M
 - Douthat State Park (Cabin Construction) - \$4.9 M
 - Mason Neck (Renovate and Enlarge Visitor Center) - \$1.6 M
 - New River Trail State Park (Renovate Historic Foster Falls Complex) - \$2.8 M
 - Sailor's Creek State Park (Visitor Center Construction) - \$1.2 M



Future Funding Issues to be addressed

- Continue rebenchmarking of existing parks
- Substantial deferred maintenance needs
- New Park Development (Capital funds)
- New Park Operations and Staffing



New Parks – Phase 1 Development

State Park	Capital Costs	Annual Operational Costs	One-Time Costs
Grand Caverns (Augusta County)	\$4.3 M	\$437,000	\$250,000
High Bridge Trail (Rice to Farmville)	\$4.9 M	\$400,000	\$250,000
Middle Peninsula (Gloucester County)	\$9.3 M	\$400,000	\$250,000
Powhatan (Powhatan County)	\$9.4 M	\$400,000	\$250,000
Seven Bends (Shenandoah County)	\$7.3 M	\$400,000	\$250,000
Widewater (Stafford County)	\$9.3 M	\$400,000	\$250,000
Total	\$44.5 M	\$2.4 M	\$1.5 M

Virginia Natural Area Preserve System

Overview

- 20th Anniversary (1986-2006)
- Recognized in 2006 as the outstanding program in western hemisphere
- Why important?
 - Protect rare plants and animals and natural communities
 - Protects biodiversity
 - Provide conservation information to inform land conservation and land use decision-makers
 - Virginia has some of the most diverse communities in the U.S.
 - Offers recreational, research and educational opportunities
- Since 2002
 - Added land to 9 existing preserves and established 12 new preserves
 - Acres protected have more than doubled (from 20,000 to 41,000)
 - Leveraged state bond monies into \$6 M in federal grants
 - Limited ability to staff and improve new preserves will limit access to new preserves in short-term

Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System

2002 Park and Natural Area GOB and VPBA Bond Funding

- Provided \$20 M for land acquisitions
- Over \$12 M spent or obligated
- Remaining \$8 M is targeted for specific sites; in various stages of landowner contract and discussion, etc.
- 48 preserves currently; 50 by December 31st



Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

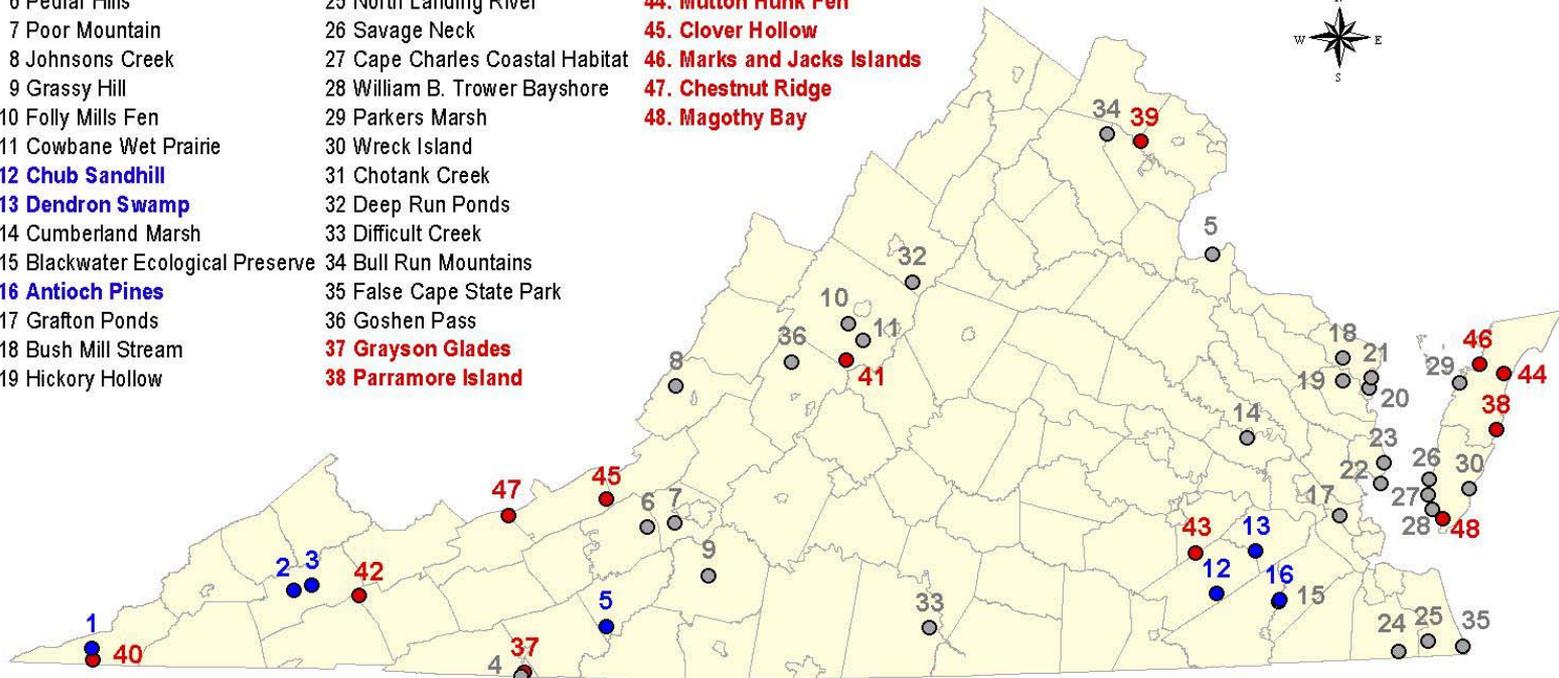
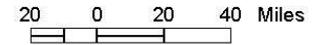
State Natural Area Preserves

- 1 The Cedars
- 2 Cleveland Barrens
- 3 Pinnacle
- 4 Big Spring Bog
- 5 Buffalo Mountain
- 6 Pedlar Hills
- 7 Poor Mountain
- 8 Johnsons Creek
- 9 Grassy Hill
- 10 Folly Mills Fen
- 11 Cowbane Wet Prairie
- 12 Chub Sandhill
- 13 Dendron Swamp
- 14 Cumberland Marsh
- 15 Blackwater Ecological Preserve
- 16 Antioch Pines
- 17 Grafton Ponds
- 18 Bush Mill Stream
- 19 Hickory Hollow

- 20 Hughlett Point
- 21 Dameron Marsh
- 22 New Point Comfort
- 23 Bethel Beach
- 24 Northwest River
- 25 North Landing River
- 26 Savage Neck
- 27 Cape Charles Coastal Habitat
- 28 William B. Trower Bayshore
- 29 Parkers Marsh
- 30 Wreck Island
- 31 Chotank Creek
- 32 Deep Run Ponds
- 33 Difficult Creek
- 34 Bull Run Mountains
- 35 False Cape State Park
- 36 Goshen Pass
- 37 Grayson Glades
- 38 Parramore Island

- 39. Elklick Woodlands
- 40. Unthanks Cave
- 41. Mount Joy Pond
- 42. Red Rock Mountain
- 43. Cherry Orchard Bog
- 44. Mutton Hunk Fen
- 45. Clover Hollow
- 46. Marks and Jacks Islands
- 47. Chestnut Ridge
- 48. Magothy Bay

- Bond Funds - New Natural Area Preserve
- Bond Funds - Natural Area Preserve Addition



Map Date: 11/17/06

New Natural Area Preserves

- Cherry Orchard Bog (Sussex and Prince George Counties)
- Clover Hollow (Giles County)
- Chestnut Ridge (Giles County)
- Elklick County (Fairfax County)
- Grayson Glades (Grayson County)
- Magothy Bay (Northampton County)
- Mark & Jack's Island (Accomack County)
- Mt. Joy Pond (Augusta County)
- Mutton Hunk Fen (Accomack County)
- Parramore Island (Accomack County)
- Red Rock Mountain (Smyth County)
- Unthanks Cave (Lee County)

- Plus additions to 9 existing natural area preserves



Examples of Targeted NAP Acquisitions

Crow's Nest, Stafford County

- Approximately 3,200 acres
- Recognized by USFWS as one of the most significant natural areas
- Has natural, cultural and historic significance
- On hold, pending outcome of local government pursuits

Cypress Bridge, Southampton County

- Owned by International Paper; near the Nottoway River
- Trees up to 1500 years old
- 600 acre tract; 37 acres of Old Growth Swamp Forest
- Bald-cypress, water tupelo, overcup oak, swamp cottonwood, carolina ash



Natural Area Management



Prescribed Burns



Phragmites Control



Rare Species Monitoring



Providing Public Access

Natural Area Operational Support

- DCR's responsibilities to manage and restore a growing preserve system have increased substantially.
- Currently, 3 Operations Stewards and 5 Regional Stewards cover entire state
- Responsible for restoration work, invasive species control, visitor contact, law enforcement, public access, road maintenance, prescribed burning, biological monitoring, etc.
- Challenges to protecting the state's investment in natural areas include disturbance of rare and sensitive plants; limitations on providing public access; reduced stewardship and management of state properties; trespass violations; deterioration of heritage resources; etc.

Conclusion

- Virginia State Parks and Natural Areas are valuable outdoor and economic assets, visited by millions each year.
- Capital investments of over \$200 million provided by the 1992 and 2002 bond packages will greatly enhance park facilities and conservation lands.
- As a result of a decade of growth and the unprecedented growth that will occur in the next several years, the Commonwealth's nationally recognized State Park System and Natural Heritage Program face significant and mounting operational challenges.
- Rebenchmarking of operations and staffing is needed to address unmet needs that began over a decade ago.
- Significant progress was made during the 2005 and 2006 Sessions towards addressing State Park needs.
- Substantial challenges remain.