

Summary of VOP 2024



VIRGINIA OUTDOORS PLAN 2024

Best in Class Recreation for All



Virginia is rich with an abundance of best-in-class outdoor recreational opportunities. The 2024 Virginia Outdoors Plan serves as a five-year roadmap for enhancing outdoor recreation offerings throughout the Commonwealth. This plan demonstrates the Commonwealth's commitment to outdoor recreation, land conservation, and education. In partnership with the great leaders that collaborated on this resource, we are making Virginia the best state to live, work, and recreate.

Throughout the process, we engaged Virginians for their input and insight to enhance Virginia's outdoor experience. I invite all Virginians to utilize the Virginia Outdoors Plan and join our efforts to protect, preserve, and enjoy the Commonwealth's natural resources.



Glenn Youngkin
Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia

WHAT IS THE VIRGINIA OUTDOORS PLAN?

The Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) guides the Commonwealth's communities in connecting people with their most desired outdoor recreation opportunities, and protecting natural and scenic resources that add value to our daily lives. The plan identifies Virginia's strategies, priorities, and planned actions so that the state remains eligible for apportionment funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). With continual funding and fulfillment of LWCF obligations, Virginia will increasingly be recognized as best-in-class for outdoor recreation, and natural and cultural resources stewardship.

KEY PURPOSES OF THE VIRGINIA OUTDOORS PLAN

- The plan is published every 5 years by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
- The plan helps Virginia qualify for federal funds for outdoor recreation through the Land and Water Conservation Fund
- Resources, organizations and partners responsible for managing outdoor recreation, open space, and conservation lands are identified in the plan.
- Survey results give planners, policy makers, and grants managers access to Virginians' preferences and opinions on recreation and conservation needs across the Commonwealth.



*This plan is authored
to meet the outdoor
recreation objectives
and requirements of
the Land and Water
Conservation Fund Act*

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Requirements: The Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (see Public Law 88-578, 78 Stat 897) establishes the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

The LWCF Act at 54 U.S.C. § 200305(d) specifies that a, "statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP)" shall be required prior to the consideration by the Secretary of Interior of financial assistance for acquisition or development projects."

The legal authority for Virginia to participate in the LWCF program is with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, as stated in the Code of Virginia section § 10.1-200.

The preparation of the Virginia Outdoors Plan was financed in part through a Land and Water Conservation Fund planning grant.

IF VIRGINIA IS TO MEET ITS GOAL OF BEST-IN-CLASS OUTDOOR RECREATION, THE FOLLOWING NEEDS MUST BE PRIORITIZED

- A** Demonstrate effective collaboration between recreation resource planners, managers, and community stakeholders.
- B** Prioritize recreation facilities and amenities that improve recreation experiences for all, reach underserved communities and geographic areas, improve safety, enhance the protection of important natural, scenic, and cultural resources, and make positive impacts to community health.
- C** Fund and prioritize facilities maintenance and appropriate development on all local and state recreation lands, and plan for the necessary staff and equipment to do the work.
- D** Improve ecological resiliency and outdoor recreation facilities for long-term resiliency.



“The Virginia Outdoors Plan is an investment in our inheritance. Properly tended it will pay good dividends and appreciate in value. To be effective the effort must be comprehensive, and it must be a continuing one.”

– Virginia Outdoors Plan, 1965

THE VIRGINIA OUTDOORS PLAN IS IN ARCGIS HUB. THIS PRODUCT IS A DIGITAL, LIVING DOCUMENT AND FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND STATEWIDE PLAN.

As an ArcGIS HUB, the new Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) site engages users through collaboration and provides grant-planning resources..

In this new format, VOP recommendations and information are organized by topic with regionalized and interactive data tools (ArcGIS Dashboards, Flourish Studio graphs) derived from Virginia Outdoors Survey results.

Recreation and conservation topics are presented in ArcGIS StoryMaps that integrate spatial mapping resources used in planning, and include the latest linked resources and partnership opportunities for recreation and conservation projects.

Policy-makers can also use the site to learn about recreation and conservation projects, needs, and challenges across the state.

VIRGINIA OUTDOORS PLAN 2024



ArcGIS Dashboards -

Dashboards are composed of configurable elements, such as maps,

lists, charts, gauges, indicators, and tables. Similar to web maps and web layers, dashboards are part of the ArcGIS geoinformation model.

ArcGIS StoryMaps -

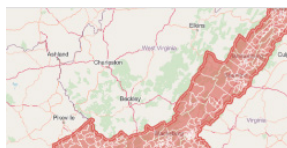
ArcGIS StoryMaps is a story authoring web-based application that allows you to share your maps in the context of narrative text and other multimedia content.

Flourish Studio - Flourish is a tool that helps to create interactive charts, maps and other data-driven visuals.

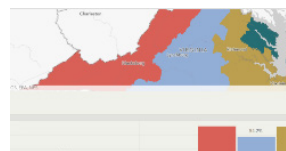
Virginia Outdoors SURVEY RESULTS DASHBOARDS



Demographic Variables in Responses



Region 2 Analysis - Recreation Activities



Recreation Values and Preferences



Region 3 Analysis - Recreation Activities



Region 1 Analysis - Recreation Activities



Region 4 Analysis - Recreation Activities



PLANNING PRIORITIES BY VOP TOPIC

Key survey results point to clear priorities Virginians have for outdoor recreation. Those priorities fall into four broad categories:

EXPANDING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES

First, Virginians have asked for facilities and programs that welcome and meet the needs of users with widely varying needs, backgrounds, experience levels, and abilities.

SAFETY IN THE OUTDOORS

Virginians also want a sense of safety while recreating in the outdoors.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN THE OUTDOORS

Closely related to this is a desire for access to the physical and mental health benefits of being in nature.

RESILIENCE

Finally, survey results and planners indicate a strong need for recreation infrastructure in Virginia that is adequately funded and highly resilient. As Virginia's climate experiences regional changes, recreation and conservation planners' management strategies must also adapt.

FEDERAL AND STATE GRANTS GUIDANCE

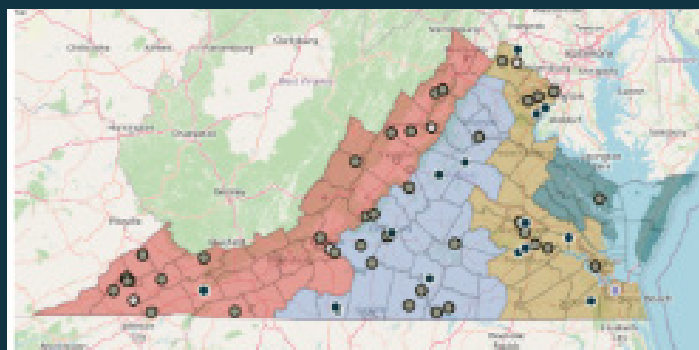
RECREATION GRANTS AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

GRANT PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

NAVIGATING FEDERAL AND STATE REQUIREMENTS

GRANTS 2018 - 2023 DASHBOARD

Outdoor recreation grants that expanded and improved access across the Commonwealth



The information in the VOP applies to a variety of grants that are administered through state and federal agencies and contribute to outdoor recreation planning in Virginia. Grants fund the majority of protected lands, and ultimately provide the people with permanently conserved outdoor recreation resources.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

Virginia’s first Statewide Comprehensive Outdoors Recreation Plan, published in 1965, proposed legislative acts and amendments around the concept of conserving Virginia’s open space. The authors coined the term “Conservation Conscience” to describe public engagement with ecological value and thoughtful development — something the plan’s writers believed all Virginians and governments critically needed. As they stated it, **“Virginia’s resources, abundant as they are, are neither inexhaustible nor indestructible.”**

The Conservation Conscience is the idea that conserving land and waterways for recreational use, for wildlife, and for greater ecological resiliency is an important public value and shared belief, and a key recommendation of the 1965 plan included the need to, **“create greater awareness of the value of natural resources and environmental geography”**.

In other words, people protect what they value, and they value what they understand. The Virginia Outdoors Survey (VOS) results referenced in the 2024 VOP confirm that most Virginians hold this belief. Conservation and outdoor recreation programs persist because of the Conservation Conscience.

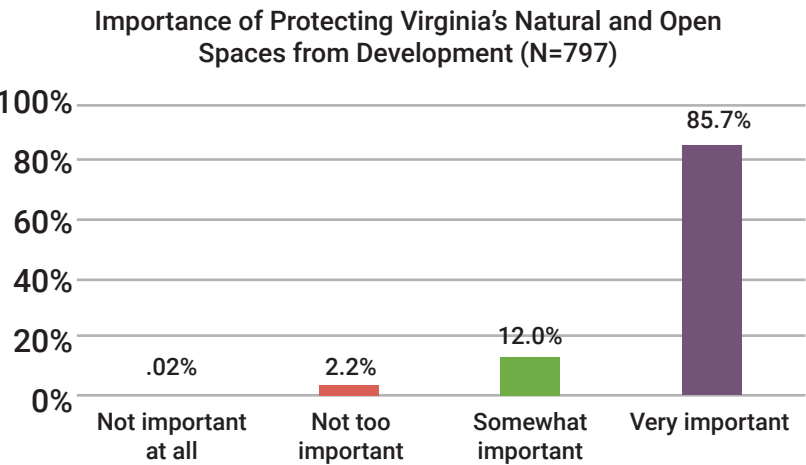


Figure 50 - VOS Report, 2022

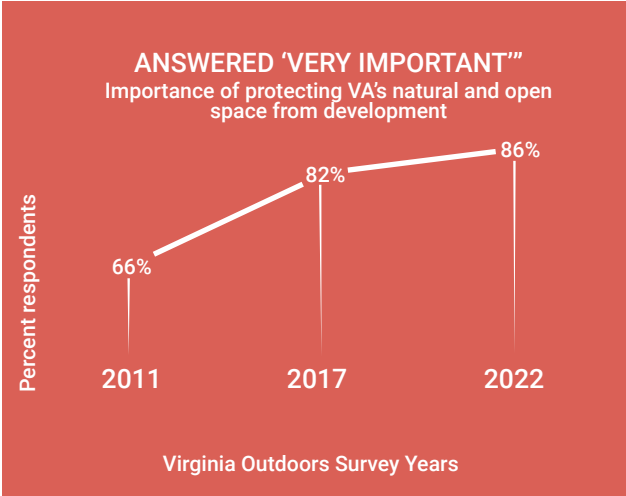
“Once natural lands and historic areas are lost, they are lost forever. Preserve, preserve, preserve.”

Survey respondent,
Virginia Outdoors Survey Report

The state of today’s Conservation Conscience is overwhelmingly positive, regardless of geographic location, age, race, and income. When asked in the 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey how important it is to protect Virginia’s natural and open-space resources from development, most respondents (85.7%) considered protection from development very important, and 12% selected ‘somewhat important’.

Virginians’ collective concern for the natural environment, coupled with the immediate necessity for climate resilient solutions, reveals a remarkable parallel to the 1965 VOP that stated concerns for balancing progress with conserving Virginia’s open space and critical habitats.

The message of the 2024 Virginia Outdoors Plan is that careful consideration is necessary in all development proposals, and allowing the Conservation Conscience to lead these conversations can bring Virginia to an even healthier human and natural environment for all.



Results from the 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey (VOS), together with those from the 2011 and 2017 surveys, demonstrate that broad public support for conserving land is steadily trending upward.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

Natural areas are the most popular selection when Virginians consider which top three recreation resources are most needed. Virginia Outdoors Survey (VOS) results also indicate that 91% of Virginians believe public funds should be used to acquire land to prevent the loss of natural areas. Nearly half of the survey respondents (48.7%) answered that they seek recreation experiences because they want to ‘experience nature,’ with over half (52.7%) citing that recreation reduces stress and improves their mental health. These two responses complement each other and support the need for more conserved areas with recreation opportunities that are comprised of natural landscapes. Recreation in natural landscapes is enhanced when planners can prioritize scenic and wildlife resources in park design and management.

Should State Spend Public Funds to Aquire Land to Prevent Loss of Natural Areas (N=667)

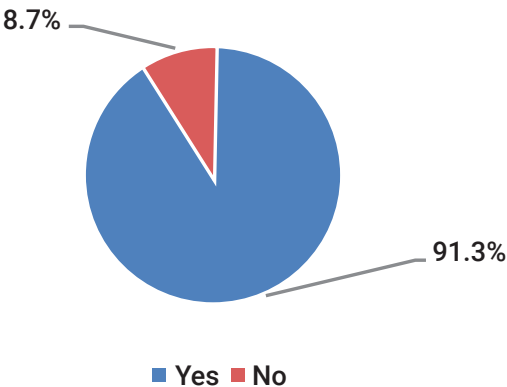


Figure 54 - VOS Report, 2022

PROTECTION OF WETLANDS

Virginia has approximately 1,605,921 acres of non-tidal wetlands, and 195,036 acres of tidal wetlands¹. Virginia’s monitoring and assessment program contribute to no net loss of acreage and functional wetland systems for permitted development that impacts wetlands, and tidal and non-tidal wetlands are generally regarded and protected as ecologically vulnerable and essential to public health. (§§ 62.1- 44.15 (10) and 62.1-44.36 of the Code of Virginia.) The Virginia Outdoors Plan contains key planning tools² with data from statewide wetland monitoring, loss and replacement areas, and strategic conservation or restoration tools for prioritized wetland habitats.

Most Needed Outdoor Recreation Opportunities in Virginia (N=793)

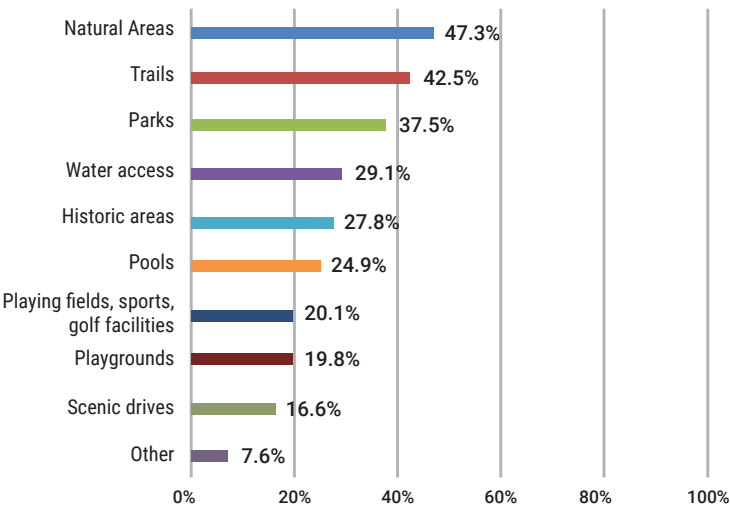


Figure 37 - VOS Report, 2022

1 - VA Department of Environmental Quality

2 - VA Department of Environmental Quality WetCAT, VA Department of Conservation and Recreation Virginia Wetlands Catalog, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory, and 10-year Status and Trends report

RECREATION

The most recent Virginia Outdoors Survey shows that *Virginia residents highly value access to outdoor recreation* and support greater expenditures for outdoor recreation.

Importance of Access to Outdoor Recreation (N=877)

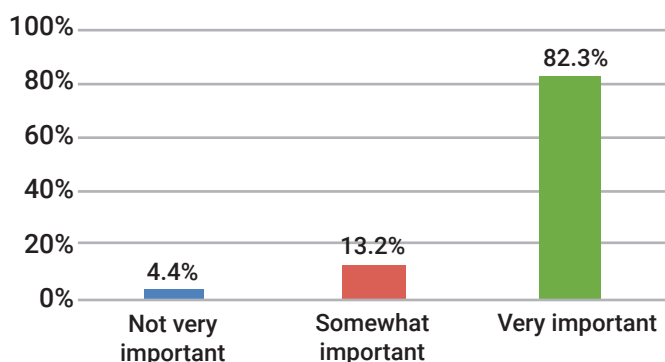


Figure 21 - VOS Report, 2022

State Spending for Outdoor Recreation (N=699)

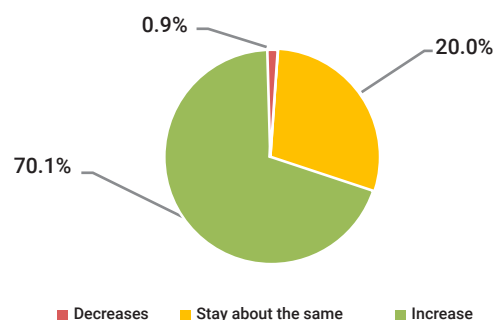


Figure 41 - VOS Report, 2022

Main Reasons for Participating in Outdoor Recreation (N=885)

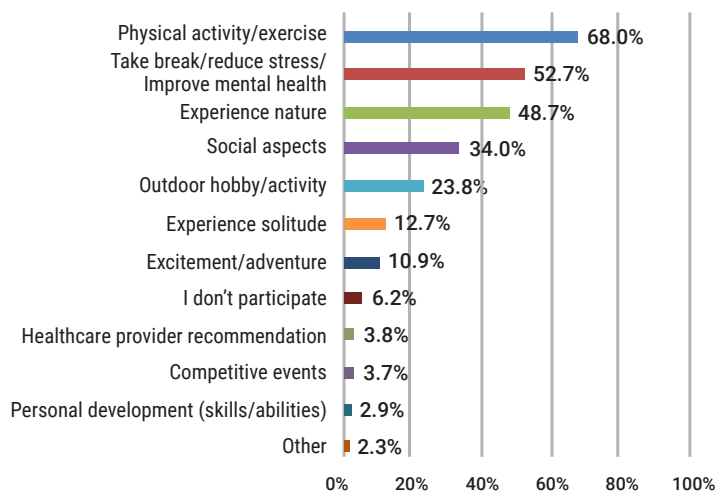


Figure 33 - VOS Report, 2022

Frequency of Participation in Outdoor Recreation (N=878)

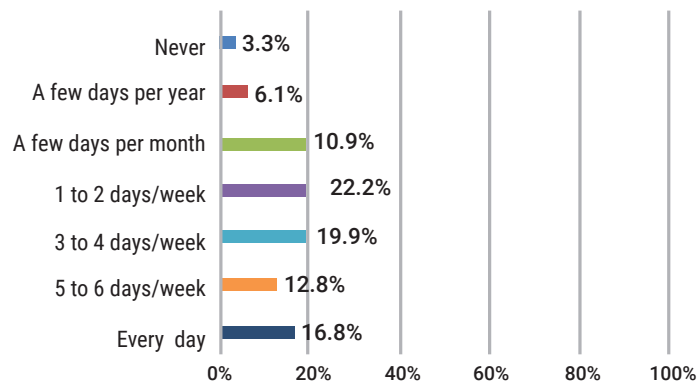


Figure 35 - VOS Report, 2022

RECREATION INVENTORY - PLANNING TOOLS

Publicly owned lands are open-space hubs that can anchor and connect greenways, trails, and water trails across the Commonwealth.

The VOP Recreation Inventory Dashboards give planners a quick reference to the documented inventory within managed recreation lands. The water-based recreation dashboard shows the number of each type of recreation opportunity and location. Conserved Lands, State Parks, and State Forests Dashboards show the location and total acres of the public recreation area.

Water-Based Recreation Opportunities



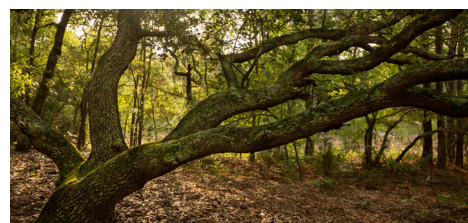
Local Parks and Conserved Lands



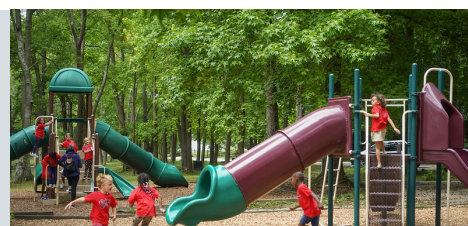
Virginia State Parks



VA State Forests with Recreation Opportunities



Local Parks Amenities

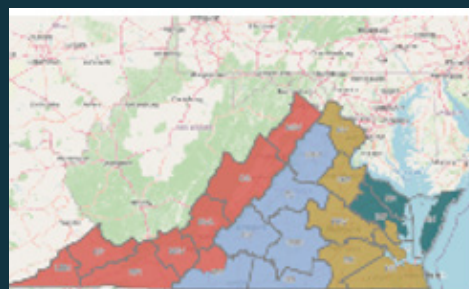


Not all conservation and recreation resources are within managed lands. The Virginia Outdoors Plan Mapper (VOP Mapper) is the online tool for mapping public access to outdoor recreation. Resources in the map include:

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund grant assistance sites**
- **Trails**
- **Trailheads**
- **Scenic byways**
- **Thematic driving trails**
- **Historic resources**
- **Blueways**
- **Scenic rivers**
- **Public fishing lakes**
- **Conserved lands**
- **Water access sites**

Some types of recreation resources are not yet available in a comprehensive, spatial database. The VOP Mapper data will be expanded to include all recreation facilities and amenities across the state during 2024 VOP implementation.

Regional Featured Projects is a progress tracking dashboard. These projects are submitted by Planning District Commissions and have a local and regional focus in scope and planning coordination for recreation resources.



VOP REGIONAL FEATURED PROJECTS

CHALLENGES

The first and most consistently identified challenge is funding. These concerns apply to maintaining Virginia's current recreation infrastructure, as well as supporting future developments that are needed.

Providing adequate recreation facilities is another group of challenges. As Virginia's population increases, and as tourism returns following the pandemic, there is a need for more frequent maintenance, upkeep, and staffing of existing facilities.

Finally, for Virginia to be best-in-class in outdoor recreation, there is a growing need to expand accessibility of its current and future recreational facilities, amenities, and programs.

Expanding access requires improvements in statewide collaboration across agencies and stakeholders. Agencies that administer recreation programs and manage recreation lands need diverse and knowledgeable staff to meet these expectations.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION AND STAFF RESOURCES

Localities and staff across agencies have experienced barriers to data acquisition, which has hampered meeting program goals for recreation planning, outreach, and collaboration.

A robust and comprehensive statewide recreation resource inventory database could alleviate some of the challenges experienced by planners and recreation resource staff across the state.

A comprehensive and accurate database in a geospatial format could also facilitate identification of underserved areas across the state.



*People protect
what they
value, and they
value what they
understand.*

– Director Matthew Wells

VA Department of Conservation and Recreation

Ways Facilities Could Improve Participation in Outdoor Recreation (N=786)

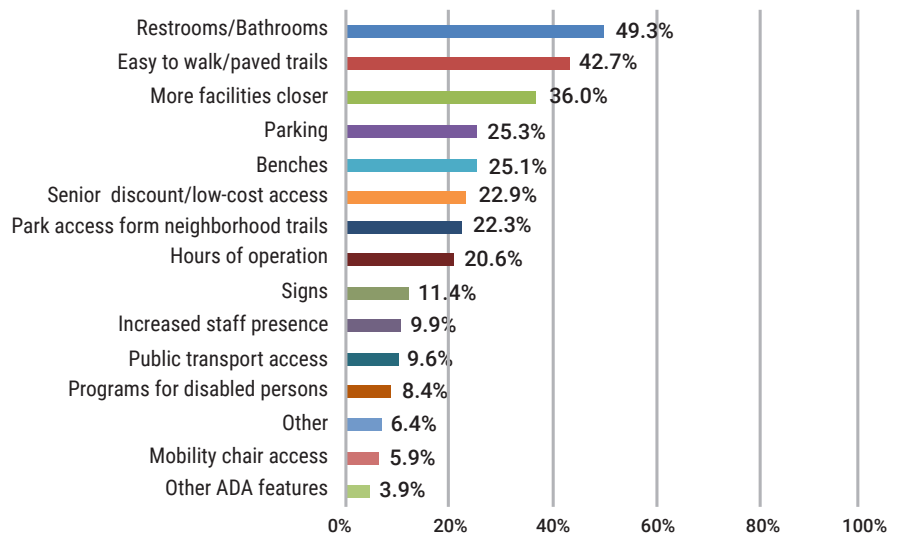


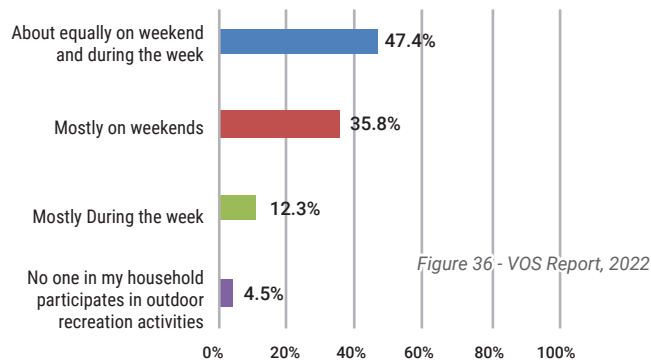
Figure 23 - VOS Report, 2022

Virginians value these facility and staff-oriented investments or improvements

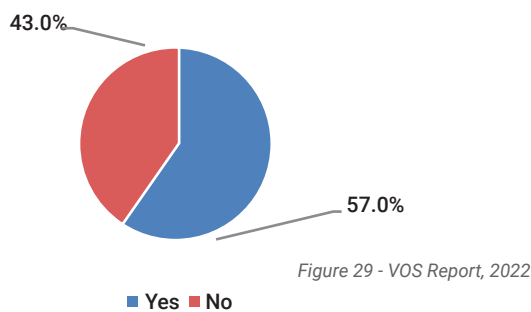


When do you participate in outdoor recreation?

Timing of Participation in Outdoor Recreation (N=862)

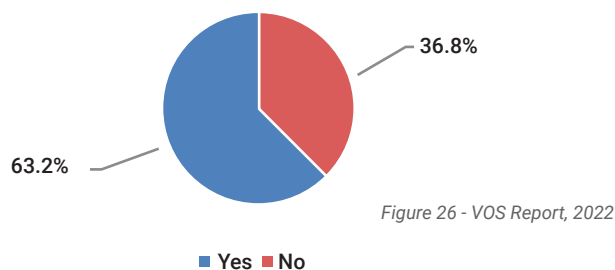


Avoid Visiting a Trail or Park due to Crowding (Ever) (N=755)



Is there a public park within a 10 minute walk from home?

Public Park within Ten-Minute Walk of Home (N=860)



RECREATION PRIORITY – EXPANDING ACCESS

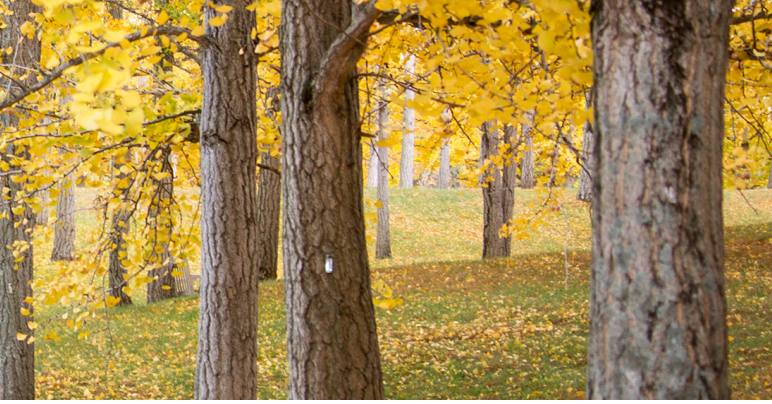
Parks and green spaces have intrinsic value, but they also provide a range of direct and indirect benefits that support healthy, productive lives and resilient, cohesive communities. Quality parks support mental and physical health, serve critical green infrastructure functions, contribute to economic development, act as links in transportation networks, host cultural and social activities, and help give communities a sense of place. In short, they are treasured community assets. However, for residents and communities to take full advantage of these benefits, parks must be accessible and high quality.

RECREATION FOR ALL

Learning new outdoor skills and building on those experiences with repeated exposure and guidance encourages long-term recreation interest. People of all ages and abilities need to be encouraged to try new recreation activities, need access to trails and water recreation, parks and recreation areas, affordable rental or free use of equipment, and guided instruction, if desired. Many people would like someone to join them or teach them an outdoor skill, and many seek solitude and uncrowded trails and campsites.

FOSTER POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Meaningful experiences are foundationally safe and enriching; welcoming and healing rather than intimidating or exclusive. In the VOS results, it is important to also notice



the voices of the minorities, senior citizens, households with children, and perhaps the less noticeable viewpoint of those with different abilities and sensory needs.

User experience should be considered during the design and planning stages of a new recreation area, as well as existing areas that can be improved, to foster a welcoming atmosphere and a sense of belonging. In addition, feeling less-than-welcome in a recreation area may be attributed to common barriers for people with disabilities, demographic and self-identifying factors, or feelings of unpreparedness in unfamiliar recreation areas or with new activities.

RECREATION FOR ALL ABILITIES - DESIGN AND PROGRAMS

A first step in making outdoor experiences more accessible is to recognize barriers people with disabilities may encounter in these environments. Barriers can be related to the physical environment, or the individual's ability to gather information, communicate with staff and other visitors, or fully participate in a program.

The Virginia Outdoors Plan features a planning resource page – Accessible Outdoor Recreation – for education on accessibility in the outdoors, outlines common barriers people with disabilities may encounter, and provides best practices and other resources that improve access in outdoor recreation environments for everyone.



Many parks with walking trails are not wheelchair-friendly, accessible, or safe. Nothing is more disappointing than starting down a path, only to find it blocked by stairs, rocks, or huge roots that the wheelchair cannot travel over. Many family walks had to be stopped for this reason.

- Survey respondent, Virginia Outdoors Survey Report

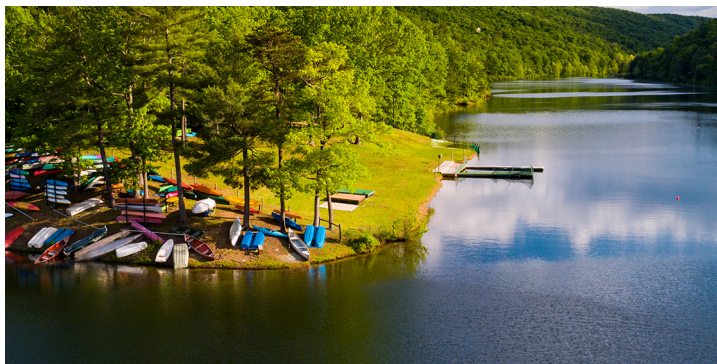
STATEWIDE SURVEY RESULTS - OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES

*Ranked 'Most
Needed'*

Activities people
would like more
access to or or
more participation
opportunities.



TO INTERACT



Water-Based Activities



Nature Based Activities



Sports-Based Activities



Trail-Based Activities

EXPANDING TRAIL NETWORKS

Trails are frequently mentioned and highly valued in surveys about outdoor recreation. Seventy-five percent (75.4%) of Virginians use trails for pleasure or relaxation, 61.6% to enjoy nature and scenery, 56% for health and fitness, and 36.8% use trails to spend time with family and friends. They are an expected recreation amenity within most parks and recreation areas. They commonly support multiple recreation uses or may connect users to significant cultural resources or historic events. A trail's setting, purpose, and recreational focus best determine its planning needs, design, and goals.

Reasons for Using Trails (N=803)

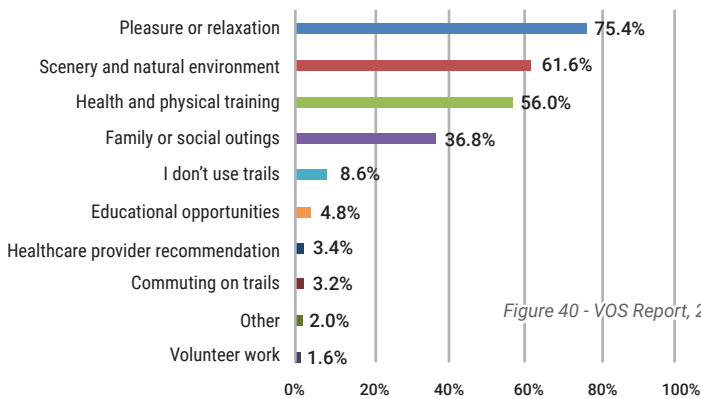


Figure 40 - VOS Report, 2022

BUILDING ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS COMMUNITIES WITH TRAIL NETWORKS

A trails network can lead to walkable communities and access to nearby recreation. Since 58.2% of Virginians say that lack of time, lack of money for travel (20.1%), and lack of nearby parks (16.8%) limits their engagement, closer trails that lead to parks and park access from neighborhood trails are a recreation need.

Thirty-six percent (36%) of Virginians desire more facilities closer to home. A close-to-home trail is generally regarded as one that is a 10-minute walk or bike ride, or 15-minute drive from home. A trail network can connect people to a park and playground so that the journey to the recreation area is part of the recreation experience and no longer requires transportation. Surveyed Virginians indicated that park access from neighborhood trails (22.3%), and easy-to-walk, paved trails (42.7%) could improve participation in outdoor recreation.



Most Important Recreational Trail Amenities (N=725)

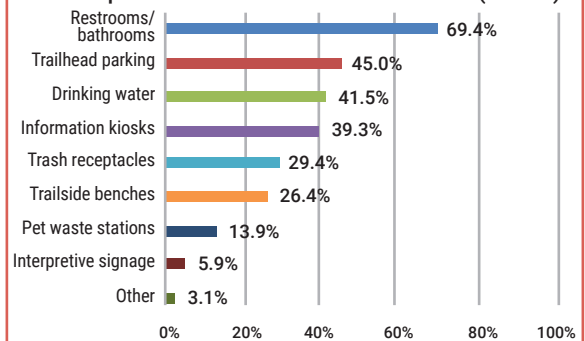


Figure 45 - VOS Report, 2022

**PLANNING
FOR THE
MOST
DESIRED
AMENITIES
- WHAT
AMENITIES
ALONG
TRAILS
ARE MOST
IMPORTANT?**

BECOMING MORE RESILIENT

Protecting and Cultivating Biodiversity
Invasive Species Eradication and Control
Ecological Restoration
Water Quality Improvement
Conserving Open Space
Resources Management
Resilient Infrastructure

As Virginia's climate experiences regional changes, recreation and conservation planners' management strategies must also adapt. On a regional or landscape-level scale, land conservation can facilitate less development pressure in floodplains, more carbon sequestration and less habitat fragmentation. This protects Virginia's most vulnerable species, which will continue to depend on these landscapes as coastlines change, forested and open space is converted to other uses, and migration patterns respond to shifts in new seasonal norms. Outdoor recreation is only possible through investment in recreation amenities, facilities, and support staff. Most outdoor activities are also dependent on the ecological richness of the environment, the quality of the water, as well as investment in high-quality design and construction. Long-term recreational enjoyment is reliant on successful conservation and restoration efforts on land and in water, and responsible use and management of ecologically stressed marine and terrestrial resources.

A person wearing a helmet and gloves is riding a blue mountain bike through a forest. The bike is blue with black tires and handlebars. The rider is wearing a plaid shirt and shorts. The background shows tall trees and sunlight filtering through the leaves.

These are America's Favorite Outdoor Pleasures. They are the simple pleasures - walking, for example, and playing games, and driving through the American countryside. But they require space, under the sky, amongst the trees, beside the waters. They refresh and strengthen a nation because they are fundamental to human development - to balanced living.

- The Virginia Outdoors Plan, 1965

RECREATION PRIORITY

SAFETY IN THE OUTDOORS

Outdoor recreation takes individuals out of the built environments that dominate most Americans' daily lives and into less familiar settings. For this reason, a sense of personal, physical safety in the outdoors is crucial to people's ability to enjoy outdoor recreation. According to results from the Virginia Outdoors Survey, that necessary sense of security in the outdoors comes from adequate staffing, including police officers and rangers; adequate facilities; and cell phone service. Properly maintained facilities and infrastructure such as playgrounds, athletic fields, and bike lanes on roads support physical safety. When recreation amenities and facilities are cared for it is a signal to the community that the investment is valued, and they are welcome to enjoy it. Most importantly, it reduces risk of injury.

HEALTH IN THE OUTDOORS

Outdoor recreation activities and natural settings offer health benefits to individuals of all ages. About half of Virginia Outdoors Survey respondents (52.7%) said one of the main reasons they participate in outdoor recreation was to take a break, reduce stress, and/or improve their mental health. More than two-thirds (68.0%) of the probability sample respondents reported involvement in outdoor recreation primarily for physical activity/exercise purposes. On trails, the leading three motivations among probability sample participants were pleasure or relaxation (75.4%), scenery and natural environment (61.6%), and health and physical training (56.0%).

Physical Improvements Most Important to Ensure safety in Parks and Outdoor Recreation Setting (N=859)

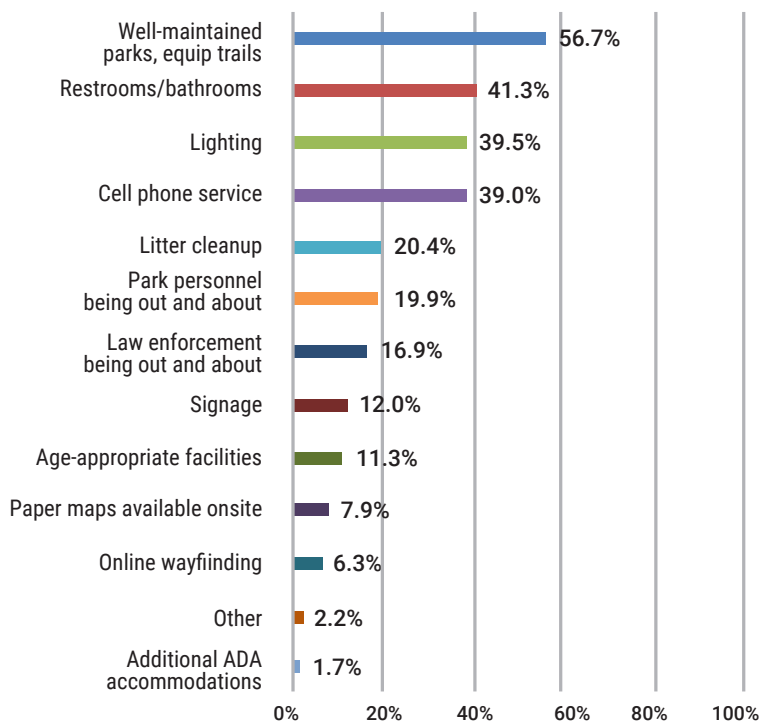


Figure 30 - VOS Report, 2022





GATEWAY FOR FUNDING

Grants fund the majority of Virginia's protected lands, and ultimately provide the people with permanently conserved outdoor recreation resources.

The Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) is required for Virginia to remain eligible to receive federal funds from the National Park Service (NPS) for the Land & Water Conservation (LWCF) annual apportionments.

LWCF is distributed through state administered grant rounds to eligible entities: counties, cities, towns, park and recreation authorities, tribes, or state agencies.

LAND & WATER CONSERVATION STATE & LOCAL FORMULA GRANT PROGRAM (LWCF):

- LWCF is a 50-50% match reimbursement grant program.
- A key feature of the LWCF grant program is the requirement for parks to remain open to the public and maintained as a public recreation area in perpetuity. This requirement ensures recreation uses for future generations.

TYPES OF ELIGIBLE LWCF PROJECTS:

- Acquisition of lands and wetlands for the purpose of passive or active public outdoor recreation. These properties may include new or additions to parks, forests, wildlife management areas, beaches, public parks, and connections such as trails.
- Development of a wide range of outdoor recreation uses and related facilities. This may include sports fields, picnic facilities, land or water-based trails and trailheads, swimming and boating facilities, renovations to eligible facilities, and maintenance facilities specifically for the park.

Additional Grant Programs

Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLP)

A national Federal LWCF program that supports outdoor recreation projects in underserved or disadvantaged communities in urban areas.



Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

Annual apportionment from Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) for 80-20% match reimbursement grant specifically for construction or maintenance of diversified, non-motorized, and motorized trails.



Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF)

State funding to purchase land or conservation easements in five categories including open spaces and parklands.

Additional Federal and State Grant Opportunities

More information available in the Virginia Outdoors Plan Federal and State Grants page.



<https://vop-vdcr.hub.arcgis.com/pages/grants>





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<https://vop-vdcr.hub.arcgis.com>