

**REPORT OF THE  
JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE STUDYING**

# **The Outdoor Recreation Needs of the Commonwealth**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



## **House Document No. 40**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND  
1988**

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Special appreciation to the Division of Parks and  
Recreation for all their assistance.

Report of the  
Joint Subcommittee Studying the Outdoor Recreation  
Needs of the Commonwealth  
to  
The Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia  
February, 1988

TO: Honorable Gerald L. Baliles, Governor  
and  
The General Assembly of Virginia

I. Authority for Study

House Joint Resolution 204 (1987) established a joint subcommittee to study the outdoor recreation needs of the Commonwealth. The subcommittee was directed to assess the long-term needs of both state and local recreation acquisition, development and operational programs and to recommend stable long-term funding sources, including but not limited to park fees, bonding, use of private development of parks land and federal and state trust funds. The subcommittee was composed of eight members representing the House Committees on Conservation and Natural Resources, on Appropriations, and on Roads and Internal Navigation, the Senate Committees on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and on Finance, and two citizen members of the Outdoor Recreation Advisory Board.

II. Background

A. Past Studies

Virginia was the first state to open an entire park system at one time. In 1936, with financial assistance from the Civilian Conservation Corps, Virginia developed six parks (Douthat, Seashore, Hungry Mother, Fairy Stone, Westmoreland, Staunton), all of which continue to operate. Since the inception of the park system state government has assumed a role in providing public recreation. As early as 1953, Governor John S. Battle, by Executive Order, created an Interagency Committee on Recreation. The committee produced the first significant report on the status of recreational opportunities in Virginia. The report, entitled "Recreation as a Function of Government in Virginia," identified the need for state assistance in what was then a relatively new public recreation service.

The recognition of the importance of stable funding for recreation was documented again four years later in the "Report on State Parks, Commonwealth of Virginia" prepared by the Executive Director of the National Wildlife Federation in cooperation with the Virginia State Parks Commission. The report states:

During the CCC and WPA era of the thirties both National and State park systems were vastly benefited by public money and the leadership of the National Park Service. However the park concept including facilities and expansion have chronically suffered from the lack of funds to carry on. No continuity of program due to insecure source of funds has undoubtedly been the greatest evil. Sporadic legislative recognition is not sufficient. Parks as well as other types of business, public and private, must have long-range plans if they are to succeed. A generous handout for a year or two and then a drying up of funds is not conducive to orderly development. The National Park Service and every state in the Union has found itself in this predicament at some time or other.

With respect to Virginia's parks system, the report concludes that state law provides broad authority to administer and expand the state park system, but it does not "provide continuity to financing a function that must be "carried on in part by concessions and in part by requests to the legislature."

In 1965 the General Assembly, recognizing that the Commonwealth had no comprehensive policy or plan for meeting present and anticipated needs for outdoor recreation, statutorily established the Virginia Outdoor Recreation Study Commission. The Commission was to "inventory and appraise the federal, State and local outdoor recreation facilities in Virginia in relation to its estimate of present and projected needs." Under the leadership of Senator Fitzgerald Bemiss, the Commission submitted a report entitled Virginia's Common Wealth, which found that (i) there was a strong and growing demand for more outdoor recreation opportunities and (ii) existing facilities were "inadequate for present demand with serious deficiencies in a number of localities and a variety of state parks." Among the Commission's recommendations were:

1. Adopt a state outdoor recreational and open space policy to guide the state and its political subdivisions;
2. Create a Commission of Outdoor Recreation to guide and coordinate statewide implementation of the Virginia Outdoor Plan;
3. Enlarge and improve the state park system; and
4. Aid localities in resource conservation and development by providing (a) research, guidance and technical assistance, (b) matching funds, and (c) legal powers.

The Commission proposed that within ten years (1966-1976) land should be acquired for thirty-six new parks, twenty of which should be developed within that period. This ten-year initiative was to be funded at \$64 million, of which \$24 million was to come from Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grants and \$40 million from state general fund

appropriations. The Commission's report also noted that the "Division of Parks has been so seriously understaffed that it has been unable to prepare the site plans necessary to full and sound development of trails, campgrounds, and interpretation centers." These previous studies illustrate a continuing concern regarding the state's ability to develop a long-range plan for providing recreational opportunities which will meet an ever-increasing demand.

#### B. Current Situation

The Department of Conservation and Historic Resources, through its Division of Parks and Recreation, is responsible for the planning, operation and maintenance of the state park system as well as providing technical assistance to localities, agencies and organizations in developing or improving recreational programs and facilities. At present the Virginia state park system consists of thirty-six sites, including seven natural areas, six historic areas and twenty-three state parks. In addition, at the local level there are 122 full-time staffed park and recreation departments. Approximately twenty-nine percent of the counties do not have parks or recreation departments.

The state's initial effort to provide a funding source for meeting recreational needs was a result of action taken by the federal government. In 1964, Congress created the Land and Water Conservation Fund (L&WCF) to provide federal agencies, states and localities with financial assistance for the acquisition and development of outdoor recreation areas. These moneys were made available to states and localities on a matching basis. The state also provided general funds to be added to the grant program. The combined federal and state funds became known as the Virginia Outdoors Fund. This fund, with its significant federal contribution, is the primary source of revenue for land acquisition and park development activities. Between 1966 and 1987, \$78,036,538 has been appropriated and obligated through these grant programs.

While the L&WCF has provided the bulk of the moneys available for capital improvement, this program has faced severe budget reductions in the past six years. As recently as 1980 Virginia received more than \$7 million from the L&WCF. In 1987 Virginia's portion of these federal grant funds totaled only \$700,000. The uncertainty of federal funds combined with the fact that the operational budget of the state parks has remained at level funding over the last several years (\$5 - 6 million) has made it difficult to institute an orderly planning process and in some instances precludes construction of projects viewed as vital in meeting the demands of an increasing user population.

### III. Subcommittee Deliberations

The joint subcommittee held five meetings at locations throughout the state (i.e. Fairy Stone State Park, Fairfax County, Hungry Mother State Park, Norfolk and Richmond). At each site the agenda included a

business meeting followed by a public hearing and tour of a state or local park. The subcommittee was impressed by the amount of public interest in outdoor recreation. Attendance for the five meetings exceeded 350, with approximately 250 individuals testifying during the public hearings. Representatives of a variety of interest and advocacy groups, park users, and local government officials documented the need for additional recreational opportunities at both the state and local levels. Many of their comments and suggestions provide the basis for the subcommittee's findings and recommendations.

#### A. Available Alternatives for Financing

The subcommittee reviewed the merits of funding approaches currently used to finance both the operation and capital needs of Virginia's state park system. The primary funding source for Virginia's state parks are general fund moneys, which represent approximately eighty-eight percent of the operating budget and thirty-six percent of the capital budget. The major advantage of the use of general funds is also its major drawback. While general funds are provided annually they are at the same time somewhat discretionary in nature, subject to the priorities established in a specific budget cycle. This makes planning for future development and acquisition difficult.

A second source of revenue is through user fees generated by the parks. Currently \$1.65 million annually is realized through admission and parking fees, concessionaire operations, and rents from cabins and camping spaces. The advantages of these types of fees are that (i) people who actually use the parks contribute towards the cost of operation and (ii) the fees can be tailored to market conditions. Among the disadvantages of such fees is that there is an upper limit on how much revenue can be generated. A significant increase in such fees could present a burden to lower income groups.

An alternative approach for generating significant revenue for operation and capital development is the leasing of parkland for private development. At present no state parks are leasing land, although one developer is interested in building a marina at Leesylvania State Park. Among the advantages of this approach are (i) no state funding would be needed for capital projects, (ii) the active recreation resulting from such development would draw a larger clientele to the parks, and (iii) additional operating revenue would be generated from both the lease and a portion of the developer's profit. There are two potential drawbacks of such an approach: (i) if the developer goes out of business and no one is found as a replacement, the state would have to take over the operation of the enterprise, thus requiring additional staff and (ii) it would encourage commercialization, which might change the character of recreation services.

Several current funding approaches are limited exclusively to the financing of capital projects. The primary source of capital funds for both state and local parks has in the past been the federal L&WCF grants. Typically, sixty percent of these federal funds are awarded to

localities and forty percent go to state parks; however, the federal allocation has steadily declined over the years.

General obligation bonds have been occasionally used for state parks capital projects, e.g. \$5 million bond issue was approved in 1977-78 for capital projects. The advantages of this type of funding are: (i) it provides a large amount of funds where there are extensive capital needs; (ii) since Virginia has a high bond rating, the amount of interest the state would have to pay would be below average; and (iii) the bond would be paid back over the life of the bond requiring less "up front money." The major disadvantages are (i) that a public referendum would be required before the bonds could be authorized for sale and (ii) Virginia has been reluctant to use this type of approach, preferring "to pay as you go."

A final alternative for generating revenue for capital projects is revenue bonds. These bonds are backed by the revenue generated by the capital project the bond is financing. The advantage of this approach is that no state funding would be required. The disadvantage is that state parks do not generate large enough projects that would interest investors in buying revenue bonds.

#### B. Financing of Other State Park Systems

Ms. Phyllis Myers, author of State Parks in a New Era: A Survey of Issues and Innovations, and officials of several state park systems briefed the subcommittee on funding alternatives utilized successfully by other states. Ms. Myers, a senior associate with the Conservation Foundation, indicated that many of the problems faced by Virginia's park system are being experienced by other states. Nationwide, federal funds represented the largest source of funding for acquisition and development of parkland. According to Ms. Myers, because of the decline in the federal commitment, state general funds and general obligation bonds have become the primary sources of revenue.

Under pressure to find additional funding, states in recent years have begun to tap revenue sources not directly generated by park use. Some states have been relying on earmarked or dedicated accounts. Ms. Myers' study points out that Oregon's parks have received funds from the state's highway trust fund between 1929 and 1980. Pennsylvania has used resources from oil and gas leases for recreation and conservation since 1955. Texas passed legislation in 1971 which earmarked a portion of its cigarette tax for state and local parks.

The subcommittee received testimony on some of the innovations for financing state parks from officials of West Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey. West Virginia, unlike Virginia, has a small tax base, which has further eroded with the recent repeal of the business and occupation tax. This resulted in a \$149 million state shortfall. Last

year parks received \$10 million from the legislature. This year the figure has been reduced to \$7.5 million. Given these circumstances, park officials have been challenged to make the park system self-sufficient by 1991. This has meant laying off some staff, closing some facilities, and increasing rents and fees significantly.

With tourism being West Virginia's second leading industry and its only growth industry, the park administration has embarked on a strategy which proposes to use the parks as magnets for tourism. This means incorporating a wide range of private sector ventures into the parks, including golf courses, ski areas, etc. To accomplish this the legislature recently passed a "privatization" bill, similar to Virginia's, which will allow private contractors to obtain a 25-year lease to develop profit making facilities within the state parks. The first contract has been awarded for the construction and operation of a \$2 million aerial tramway. The state will receive a percentage of the profits and after twenty-five years, the operation will revert to the state. It is anticipated that a request for a proposal (RFP) will be put out each month for private development in the parks.

Because of the the dramatic increase in land values and the lack of open space, New Jersey has made the acquisition of land its priority goal in the area of parks and recreation. To accomplish this goal the state created the Green Acres program in 1961. The program was funded initially by a \$60 million Green Acres bond issue. Four subsequent bond issues totaling \$615 million followed at approximately 5-year intervals. During this time 187,719 acres of state park, forest, and fish and wildlife managements lands and 55,053 acres of county and municipal park lands have been purchased. In 1983, with bond funds running out and a demonstrated need for an additional \$400 in projects pending, questions were raised as to the continued use of bonds to service those natural resources programs which required a continuous source of funding for their planning, management and development. The state looked at funding options which would stretch its available acquisition dollars. This led in 1983 to the creation of the Green Trust, a revolving loan fund to allow for 100 percent loans at two percent interest with a pay back over twenty years. To capitalize the trust, a \$135 million bond issue for open space preservation, including state and local park lands, was approved by the voters. Under this bond issue \$83 million was allocated to the Green Trust and \$52 million was reserved for state acquisition and development over a five-year period. Recently, the Governor of New Jersey approved an addition to the trust of \$35 million from a proposed \$100 million bond issue and has lent his support to a large open space bond issue in 1989 to deal with the remainder of the trust's needs and to provide for delayed state acquisition.

A similar concern by the Maryland legislature regarding the rising population and the decreasing availability of recreational open space due to increasing development caused the state to embark on a long-term program of land acquisition. In 1970, Program Open Space (POS) was created to expedite the purchase of public open space lands before land



values inflation rendered them unaffordable and development made them undesirable. The POS has been successful in providing a buffer to urban development. The program has been funded through a combination of general obligation bonds and a 0.5% transfer tax on land sales. The bonds issued in 1969 provided \$20 million. The transfer tax, which was initially used to retire the bonds, now represents the sole funding source for POS. Through 1987 a total of \$383.6 million has been allocated to the program, with half going for state land acquisition and half for local (county and municipal) land acquisition and recreation development. This year program funding will be capped at \$29 million annually. Of the 393,944 total acres authorized for acquisition by the POS, 320,00 have been acquired to date.

#### IV. Findings and Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the General Assembly enact legislation establishing the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund to meet the capital outlay needs of state and local parks. The Fund shall be financed by earmarking one-third of the revenue collected from the grantor and recordation taxes, not to exceed \$24 million annually. (Appendix A)

During the past twenty years states have become increasingly dependent on federal funds to finance their parks and recreational facilities. Since 1965 the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has provided almost \$3 billion in assistance to state and local government. By 1980 federal moneys had become the single most important source for the acquisition and development of park land.

That same year saw the beginning of the federal retrenchment. Virginia received a LWCF grant of \$7.5 million in 1979. By 1986 the federal allocation had declined by ninety percent to \$723,000. Even though Virginia was experiencing a significant federal cut back in program funds the state's capital outlay budget for parks remained at level funding. During the last biennium (FY1986-1988) the Division of Parks and Recreation's capital outlay budget totalled only \$1.5 million, with no funds appropriated for land acquisition.

A recent national survey of state park systems conducted by the Conservation Foundation highlights the current situation facing most states, including Virginia. The study found that state parks "have a sizable backlog of needs due to poorly maintained physical facilities and resources, in large part the result of systemic underinvestment, reduced budgets and heavy visitation."

Because of diminishing federal funds, reduced budgets, and increasing numbers of visitors, the subcommittee believes that a major new capital outlay program for Virginia state parks is essential. Such a program should have as its first priority the upgrading of existing facilities, many of which were constructed when the park system was created in 1936. Division officials estimate that these needs total approximately \$34.5 million, of which \$12.5 million are classified as "immediate needs" and the remainder "essential" needs.

Over the last fifteen years no funds have been appropriated for major state park acquisitions. If the state is to provide recreational opportunities to an increasing population as well as fulfill its mission to protect significant natural, recreational, historic, cultural and scenic resources, Virginia must embark on a planned program of land acquisition. The goal of such a program would be the acquisition of ten new state parks by the year 2000, at an estimated cost of \$25 million. With land values escalating as available open space diminishes, it is crucial that the state include funds in the 1988-1990 biennium budget for the acquisition of the first of these new parks.

Finally, the state should increase the financial assistance to local government for the development of recreational facilities. The General Assembly currently appropriates \$500,000 annually for local park development. With little prospect of continued federal support, state and local government will have to respond to the \$6 million in local grant requests.

The uncertainty of federal funds and the fact that capital outlay projects for recreational facilities have typically depended on annual general fund appropriations have made it difficult for states to develop long-range plans for the acquisition and development of park land. Approximately twenty-five states, recognizing the importance of establishing a stable source of funding, have enacted legislation which earmarks specific revenue sources to supplement such traditional approaches as bond issues, appropriations and user fees. States have chosen to dedicate all or a portion of the revenues generated from such sources as mineral royalties, lotteries, taxes on gasoline utilized by recreational vehicles, real estate transfers, mineral severance, hotel rooms and cigarettes. Although these sources are not, in most instances, directly generated by park use they are in some way associated with resource protection or recreation.

Currently, six states (Arkansas, Florida, Maryland, South Carolina, Washington, Tennessee) earmark a portion of their real estate transfer tax for the acquisition of park land. The dedication of this revenue specifically for parks is based on the rationale that the person who purchases a home or other property for private use has hastened the decline in available open space land. Therefore, that same individual should be required to support the buying of land which will be used and enjoyed by the general public. Virginia's equivalents of a real estate transfer tax are the recordation and grantor taxes. In 1986 the general fund received \$74,280,152 from these taxes. The Department of Taxation estimates that they will generate \$92 million in FY 1987 and \$103 million in FY 1988.

The subcommittee proposes a similar earmarking of revenues for the acquisition and development of state and local parks. By earmarking one-third of the proceeds from the recordation and grantor taxes, not to exceed \$24 million annually, for the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund the Commonwealth will have provided a stable source of

funding. This will enable park officials to develop long-range plans for the improvement of existing facilities and the acquisition of new park land, thereby assuring that the increasing demand for outdoor recreation will be met.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the General Assembly approve the Department of Conservation and Historic Resources' 1988-1990 state parks and recreation budget request of \$60.8 million. (Appendix B)

If Virginia is to meet the challenge of providing adequate recreational opportunities for its residents and visitors it must assume a greater role in funding state and local parks and recreation related activities. The Department's 1988-1990 parks and recreation budget request of \$60.8 reflects such a commitment. The proposal allocates funds for operating costs (\$20.5 million), capital outlay (\$20.6 million) and recreation grants to local governments (\$18 million).

The proposed operating budget is an increase of approximately one-third over the current 1986-1988 amount. Much of this increase is due to the proposed hiring of an additional 37 new field staff and 21 central office staff.

The capital outlay portion of the budget reflects the largest increase in proposed funding. While the 1986-1988 budget allocates \$1.5 million for maintenance and facility improvement the 1988-1990 budget proposes \$12.5 million. In addition, for the first time this budget contains \$8 million for land acquisition, with \$5 million for the acquisition of a new state park on the Eastern Shore and \$3 million for the purchase of natural areas.

The reduction in federal funds means that the state together with the localities will have to provide a larger share of the financing for local recreational facilities. The Department has proposed \$8 million for local recreation grants, an increase of \$7 million over the \$1 million currently appropriated. A major new initiative provides for increased public access to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. This program would make available \$10 million in grants to Tidewater localities for the purposes of constructing or developing additional launching, fishing, swimming, and sunbathing facilities. Participating localities would be required to provide 25% of a project's cost.

The Department has proposed an ambitious but realistic program. The subcommittee believes that such an initiative should be viewed as an initial step in the long-term commitment to upgrade our current parks and provide the foundation for meeting our outdoor recreation needs in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Division of Parks and Recreation as part of its master plan should establish goals for the acquisition of parkland and the preservation of natural areas.

In planning for Virginia's future state park acquisition, two major factors should be considered. First, what amount of additional acreage will be needed in the future and second, what type or location of the acreage would best contribute to Virginia's state park system. According to the Division, an accepted planning standard for state parks is 10 acres per 1,000 population. Based on the current population of approximately 5.7 million, Virginia should have 57,000 acres of state parklands. The Virginia park system totals 51,000 acres, reflecting a current deficit of 6,000 acres. By the year 2000, Virginia's population is projected to be 6.5 million. If the 10 acres per 1000 population standard is to be met, Virginia will need an additional 8,000 acres of state parkland within the next thirteen years.

The criteria for determining the type and location of land to be acquired are that lands must be selected to ensure the protection of important natural resources, while at the same time being suitable for recreational development and accessible to the public. The Division, in its 1984 Virginia Outdoors Plan, identified ten sites for potential state park acquisitions, each selected due to its proximity to water and to the eastern population corridor.

The subcommittee supports the acquisition of parkland along the eastern corridor, especially in light of the new Chesapeake Bay initiative which promotes increased opportunities for public access to the Bay and its tributaries. However, the subcommittee received extensive testimony that there needs to be recognition that a state park represents an opportunity to expand the economic base of a region. The availability of recreational opportunities attracts tourists and is a significant factor in the location of new industry. This is especially important to the economically troubled southwestern region of the state. The subcommittee therefore urges that in formulating the 1989 Virginia Outdoor Plan, the Division of Parks not only reflect existing criteria for the location of a state park but also recognize the economic benefits such a facility can bring to a community and region.

The acquisition of land for new state parks is contingent upon the availability of funds. No general funds for major park acquisition have been appropriated in the last fifteen years. The land which has been acquired has been either donated or financed with federal funds. The subcommittee supports a major new acquisition initiative. Beginning with the 1988-1990 biennium, ten new parks are proposed by the year 2000.

Although not part of the Division of Parks' budget, the Department of Conservation and Historic Resources has proposed the additional acquisition of 147 natural areas ranging from 5 to 2,000 acres to be situated in 58 localities. This would involve the acquisition of

approximately 14,780 acres at a cost of \$4 million over each of the next three bienniums. It is anticipated that private organizations interested in conservation will provide matching funds for the acquisition of such areas. The subcommittee has received a commitment from the Nature Conservancy to provide \$3 million in matching funds over the next three bienniums for the acquisition and management of natural areas. The Department of Conservation and Historic Resources is encouraged to continue its efforts with private organizations and foundations in the acquisition and management of these natural areas.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the salaries of the Commonwealth's park field employees be increased to make them competitive with those offered by other states' park systems and Virginia state agencies.

Testimony offered to the subcommittee indicates that the Department of Conservation and Historic Resources' investment in the training of its park field employees has grown dramatically over the years. Yet, due largely to their relatively low rates of pay, the Department has not been able to retain these employees long enough for that investment to fully mature. The Department testified that one-third of its state park field staff resigned during the period of 1984 through 1987. Of the current ninety-three field employees, 42 percent have less than three years experience with the Division of Parks and Recreation.

The results of questions submitted to park field employees who resigned from their positions between January 1, 1982, and June 30, 1987, support the Department's belief that these resignations were primarily due to the low level of pay. Of the 56 resignations tendered by Superintendent B's, Superintendent A's, Assistant Superintendents, Chief Rangers and Rangers, 43 or 77 percent listed their reason for leaving as "Better Job/Better Pay." The above listed positions comprise approximately two-thirds of the staff of the Division of Parks and Recreation.

Results of a recent Department survey found a disparity between current salaries earned by Virginia's state park field employees and their counterparts in eight similar southeastern states (Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama and Florida). With very few exceptions, these salary figures indicate that the maximum salary offered to Virginia's superintendents, chief rangers and park rangers was lower than those offered for comparable positions in other states. However, entry level salaries offered to Virginia's employees were generally higher than those of the other states. (Appendix C)

The Department indicated that it has previously attempted to raise the salaries of their park field employees. For example, in 1985, the Department attempted to redress the problem of low salaries by requesting that the Department of Personnel and Training (DP&T) regrade many of the positions by two or three grade levels. Following a study by DP&T, salary regrades were

granted but fell well short of those requested. The Department testified that they acquiesced to the recommendations of DP&T in order to provide partial relief to the field staff. They subsequently made a second request for a regrade of personnel. The subcommittee supports the Department's initiative seeking a regrade of its park field employees so their salaries will be in line with comparable positions in other Virginia state agencies as well as other state park systems. If this is not done Virginia's parks will continue to lose experienced and well-trained personnel.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Division of Parks and Recreation expand the recreational opportunities available within Virginia through the promotion of public/private partnerships.

For a number of years, the Virginia state parks have successfully engaged in a partnership arrangement with private sources in the operation of concessionaire facilities within state parks. These concessionaire operations have included the management of swimming facilities, boat-rental facilities, boat-launching facilities, restaurants, snack bars, catering services, horseback riding, etc. Other than recent problems with liability coverage, the partnership has benefited the Commonwealth and local private businesses contracted for such services. Often, the advantages which private sources offer, i.e., purchasing freedoms and the lack of employment restrictions, have resulted in improved efficiency and profitability for these operations.

When the State Park system was created, the development force used to construct the facilities was that of the Civilian Conservation Corps, a federal labor force. Since that time, Virginia has usually employed private construction firms to develop the major facilities in the state parks. Instead of creating an internal construction/development unit that would move from site to site, the parks' administration has sought the efficiency and expertise of private firms.

Officials of the Division have documented in excess of \$40 million in needed construction, repair and renovation of state park facilities. In light of the uncertainty regarding the state's ability to finance this vast array of needs, the Division should expand the private sector's role in the acquisition, development, and operation of state parks. New initiatives which (i) encourage private entrepreneurship in state parks, (ii) establish Friends of Parks programs, (iii) promote nontraditional uses of farm/agricultural land, and (iv) provide for joint land acquisition and management of natural areas between the state and conservation organizations, represent approaches which will increase the recreational opportunities within Virginia.

During the 1987 Session of the General Assembly the Department of Conservation and Historic Resources was authorized "to execute leases for the development and operation of revenue producing capital improvement projects in Virginia state parks..." (§ 10-17.114(D)). This will enable the Commonwealth

to employ more entrepreneurial resources for the development of state park facilities. These private resources could include capital development projects and the operation of park facilities. Currently there are plans to develop a boatel, motel, and boat service facility at Leesylvania State Park using such an approach. The subcommittee encourages private investment in state parks, but recognizes that any proposed development activity should include an environmental impact assessment.

Some needs of the state parks system include only funds for projects, programs, or the purchase of fixed assets. Realizing the community pride and positive benefit that state parks provide localities, the Commonwealth should capitalize on its good standing in communities. Many corporations, small businesses, and individual citizens wish to donate money or provide endowments to their local state parks. To accept such gifts, the Division should establish appropriate management structures to accept and utilize these resources. Similar arrangements have been designed by the National Park Service with their Gifts Program, the State of West Virginia's Friends of Parks program, and the very successful California State Park Foundation, which has raised approximately \$60 million since 1969. Such programs have raised money for land acquisition, planning and operational needs and established a very large and useful constituency base.

A study performed by VPI-SU entitled "The Future of Agriculture, Forestry, Food Industries and Rural Communities in Virginia" recognized the potential the agricultural sector represents for the expansion of recreational opportunities. As the report indicates "Virginia seems ideally suited for a major bed and breakfast industry centered around its historic and natural recreational resources." The promotion of such nontraditional uses of farmland as bed and breakfast, fishing in private ponds, hunting, and camping along the state's Scenic Byway System, will not only mean an increase in the variety of recreational offerings, but also provide an additional source of revenue for our farmers.

Finally, the Division's efforts to acquire new land has been hampered by the fact that private organizations do not have the advantages of conservation easements that government agencies have. Future legislation may result in changes in this area. However, it is important that the Commonwealth continue, and where possible, expand its role in the preservation of open space and natural areas by seeking to strengthen its ties with private conservation organizations.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That a study be conducted to determine how to improve the efficiency of the capital outlay construction process as it relates to the development of state parks.

The current capital outlay process appears to be unnecessary, cumbersome and complex. The process involves the following stages:

budget preparation phase	1.26 years
development phase	1.23 years

access road planning	1.64 years
access road construction	1.86 years
park facility planning	1.64 years
park facility construction	2.44 years

For an existing park, the time frame is significantly less since no roads would have to be constructed. According to park officials some of these activities could occur concurrently, if there is "upfront planning money" and more technical staff. The current technical staff, which consists of one architect, one engineer and a draftsman, have committed most of their time to "heavy maintenance" projects at the expense of pre-planning justification and site development.

While the subcommittee supports the Division's budget request for additional technical staff, the significant problem appears to be a 75 step capital outlay construction process over which the Division of Parks and Recreation has little control. Currently, more than 10 agencies are involved in a development process which takes 8.5 years to bring new parks on line.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Commonwealth provide increased public access for water-related recreational activities.

The 1984 Virginia Outdoors Plan points out that "{A}lthough Virginia is rich in water resources and the demand is great, public access to our beaches, lakes and rivers is inadequate and constitutes a significant limiting factor to the use and enjoyment of our resources."

Much of the testimony heard by the subcommittee supported this concern. A representative of the Southeastern Virginia Planning District Commission testified that a recently conducted study showed that the lack of waterfront access was probably the most critical recreational deficiency in Southeastern Virginia, including a lack of beach access, surfing access, boat ramps and marina slips.

Beach use/sunbathing is the single most popular recreational activity in the Commonwealth, as nearly one-half of the state's residents participate each year. Yet, testimony showed that Virginia currently has only 23 miles of public beach along a shoreline of approximately 5000 miles. Boating is also a popular activity in the state. Currently, there are 445 boat ramps in Virginia. It is projected that by 1990, an additional 105 boat ramps will be needed to accommodate the 81,000 watercraft vying for access to tidal Virginia waters.

The subcommittee believes that in order to meet the demand for water-related recreational activities, Virginia must not only improve the accessibility of its publicly owned areas, but it must also ensure that additional land is acquired to allow for further public access. Much of the impetus for



such an effort could be provided by the proposed local public access grant program. This program would make available \$5 million per year to Tidewater localities for the acquisition and development of additional boat launching, fishing, swimming and sunbathing facilities. Without this dual initiative of improvement and purchase of land suitable for public access, many of the Commonwealth's residents will be denied the continued enjoyment of their favorite recreational activities.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Division of Parks and Recreation should increase its efforts to convert abandoned railroad rights-of-way into recreational trails.

The United States Senate Report on the National Trails System Act, which declares a national policy in favor of establishing and expanding the country's trails in both urban areas and along scenic and historic routes, states in part:

Trails represent a unique opportunity and yet a practical and low-cost method of satisfying the demand for outdoor recreation for our citizens. By their nature, they afford a low-concentration dispersed type of recreation that is sought after today...{T}hey help to satisfy the craving many people have for solitude and the beauty of untraveled lands and water.

The 1984 Virginia Outdoors Plan indicates that walking for pleasure, hiking, bicycling for pleasure and horseback riding are popular activities enjoyed by eighty percent (80%) of the Commonwealth's residents. The plan emphasizes the increased demand for new trails, stating that currently Virginia's trail system needs another 417 miles of hiking trails and 1,777 miles of bicycle trails. By the year 2000, the plan estimates that an additional 1,100 miles of hiking trails and 2,390 miles of bicycling trails will be needed.

Between January 1972 and April 1987, over 368 miles of railroad track were abandoned in Virginia. These abandoned rights-of-way offer an excellent opportunity for the establishment of new recreational trails. They are generally level, already partially developed as trails, and link population centers. A coordinated system of such trails has the potential to link Virginia's open space resources.

There have already been three successful conversions of abandoned railroad right-of-ways in the Commonwealth. A prime example is the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad Trail, which stretches 44 miles through northern Virginia. It receives over one million visitors annually and is, therefore, the most heavily used trail in the country. The New River Trail, which extends for 57 miles from Pulaski to Galax, is the most recent successful conversion project.

These rights-of-way would also serve non-recreational objectives if converted to trail use. Those located in urban areas would supply wildlife habitat and provide transportation corridors for commuters desiring to walk or

bicycle to work. Those located in rural areas would complement existing recreational resources by providing access to lakes, streams, wildlife refuges, and state and federal lands.

The conversion of abandoned railroad rights-of-way would also provide significant economic benefits to adjacent properties. Studies previously conducted show that additional income for local businesses is generated by the spending of trail users. Some localities have discovered that adjacent property land values significantly increased upon the conversion of abandoned rights-of-way into trail use. In some cases, additional income has been generated by charging rent to businesses and utilities for the use of space over and under these abandoned rights-of-way. All of these economic effects expand the tax base and help offset the capital and maintenance costs of these projects.

While there appear to be many positive benefits to rail-trail conversions, several potential drawbacks should be considered by the Division prior to initiating each conversion. First, there could be a loss of property for potential agricultural use in certain areas. Second, there is the possibility that users of trails will damage adjacent property through vandalism, although very few operating trails have reported any such incidents. Finally, there is the potential for litigation when adjacent property owners are denied their right to purchase the right-of-way.

Depending on the availability of funds, the subcommittee encourages the Division of Parks and Recreation to acquire such rights-of-way and increase its efforts to involve volunteers and local governments in the development and management of these trails. The Division should also request the assistance of the United States Department of the Interior prior to converting abandoned railroad rights-of-way into recreational trails. Under existing law, that department is obligated to assist agencies interested in trail conversions and would be able to ensure that adequate staff resources are available to provide educational and technical assistance.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Division of Parks and Recreation increase its efforts to make state park facilities and programs accessible to handicapped and disabled individuals.

While the Virginia Code and federal accessibility requirements help to ensure some degree of accessibility, they do not promote barrier-free site design in many of the important outdoor park and recreational areas (i.e., fishing, swimming, picnicking, camping, and trail areas). Because many of these areas have not been accessible, disabled individuals have been denied the opportunity to participate in the full range of recreational activities enjoyed by their family and friends.

It is important that the Division complete its work on the outdoor recreational design standards for the handicapped and that these standards be

incorporated into the plan of each state park. As part of this effort, the Division should evaluate which program areas have the greatest need for improved accessibility and establish priorities in the allocation of resources to these areas.

The subcommittee also recognizes the therapeutic value of outdoor recreation. As one individual testified "it is an outlet that has much to offer the disabled citizens of Virginia by providing meaningful leisure pursuits, heightening their appreciation of our natural resources, and maximizing their independence in participation, if their special needs can only be accommodated." To ensure that the disabled receive the full benefit from this outdoor experience, park personnel should receive training which will increase their awareness of the recreational needs of the disabled.

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Division of Parks and Recreation increase the number of recreational staff providing technical assistance.

Technical assistance to public and private organizations, local governments, and state agencies has been a long-standing service offered by the Division of Parks and Recreation. The technical assistance unit, consisting of a chief, one program consultant and one therapeutic specialist provide appraisals of local parks and recreation facilities, assists in the comprehensive planning and development of recreation programs, trains professional and lay persons and performs scenic by-ways and river evaluations.

The emergence of the fitness/wellness movement has people of all ages, including older citizens, taking better care of themselves. They are demanding a wide variety of active and passive recreational opportunities. In their attempt to meet these new demands, public and private providers have increasingly sought state assistance in developing specialized recreation programs, and planning new facilities.

In addition, several new state programs will increase the burden now placed on those providing recreation assistance. The State Community Certification Program, administered by the Department of Economic Development, and the Governor's Chesapeake Bay Initiatives will require a significant investment of staff time to perform comprehensive evaluations of local recreation opportunities.

It is clear that these additional responsibilities cannot be satisfactorily accomplished by the current three-member staff. The Division's 1988-1990 biennium budget requests 21 new central office positions. A number of these positions should be allocated for the provision of technical assistance.

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the State Board of Education establish a policy which encourages the cooperative use of school facilities for leisure services. (Appendix D)

The use of school facilities by local recreation departments is an increasing practice across the nation. Schools are the focal point of most communities and are generally located in areas easily accessible to most residents. Dual use of facilities provides many smaller communities with the opportunity for recreational activities which might otherwise not be available. In urban areas where there is increasing pressure on existing facilities, use of schools represents a way to alleviate much of this pressure by providing an expanded number of services to accommodate a variety of needs, especially during the evening hours and summer months when school facilities are underutilized. Currently, under § 22.1-131 of the Virginia Code, school boards may authorize the division superintendent to permit use of the school property "as will not impair the efficiency of the school."

A 1986 study of parks and recreation departments in Virginia indicates that 76 of 85 reported agencies utilize school facilities. While many localities have developed school use agreements, in most cases these agreements are limited to a particular program or activity. Only one-half of the parks departments have written agreements with local school systems. The lack of written agreement or memorandum of understanding can lead to misunderstanding in terms of scheduling, priority of use, and commitment of resources for operation.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the fees and charges for state park facilities be adjusted to a level which reflects the quality of facilities and services provided at the individual parks.

It is the mission of the Division of Parks and Recreation to preserve and protect significant natural resources while providing access to these resources to Virginians of all income levels. The setting of fees and charges is one tool used in accomplishing that mission. It should not be the goal of the state park system to be a totally user supported profit-making endeavor, nor should it be a totally subsidized enterprise. A successful pricing structure should:

- Take into account local demographics;
- Reflect the level of development/activities in the park;
- Provide a measure of control in heavy use areas and an incentive for use during off periods and at underutilized facilities; and
- Help the system reach a specified level of self-sufficiency.

However, such a fee structure should not create unfair competition between the state park and surrounding private facilities.

In 1986, the Virginia State Park System generated \$1.7 million for the general fund. This represented 25.7% of the parks' operating budget. Based

on a recent study, the Division recommends, and the subcommittee endorses, that this proportion of fees to operating costs be increased to 35% over the next five years. At the current level of attendance (3.5 million annually), instituting the fee changes recommended by the study would bring the level to 28% of the parks' current operating budget. In order to reach a 35% level, either attendance must increase by 37% to 5.7 million visitors or, with attendance remaining constant, a 36% increase in fees would be necessary.

*ML*

1 D 8/12/87 Farber C 8/13/87 owj

2 SENATE BILL NO. .... HOUSE BILL NO. ....

3 A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered  
4 10-21.1:1 and in Chapter 8 of Title 58.1 a section numbered  
5 58.1-815, establishing the Open Space Recreation and Conservation  
6 Fund.

7

8 Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

9 1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered  
10 10-21.1:1 and by adding in Chapter 8 of Title 58.1 a section numbered  
11 58.1-815 as follows:

12 § 10-21.1:1. Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund;  
13 purpose--A. All moneys paid into the Open Space Recreation and  
14 Conservation Fund established pursuant to § 58.1-815 shall be  
15 allocated as follows:

16 1. Three-fourths to the Department of Conservation and Historic  
17 Resources for the following purposes:

18 a. To acquire land for recreational purposes and the  
19 preservation of natural areas;

20 b. To develop, maintain and improve state park sites and  
21 facilities; and

22 c. To provide matching fund for federal grants and donations  
23 from private organizations; and

24 2. One-fourth to local public bodies through the Virginia  
25 Outdoor Fund Grants Program.

26 B. For purposes of this section a natural area is an area of

1 land or water where natural ecosystem processes operate relatively  
2 undisturbed and where biological communities, their interactions and  
3 their structures and functions can be studied.

4 C. Any funds remaining in such Fund at the end of a biennium  
5 shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund.  
6 Interest earned on such funds shall remain in the Fund and be credited  
7 to it.

8 § 58.1-815. Disposition of the recordation tax and grantor tax  
9 proceeds; Fund established.--One-third of the state revenue collected  
10 pursuant to §§ 58.1-801, 58.1-802, 58.1-803, 58.1-807, and 58.1-808,  
11 not to exceed twenty-four million dollars annually, shall be paid into  
12 the state treasury and credited to a special nonreverting fund known  
13 as the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund, which is hereby  
14 established. The moneys of the Fund shall be allocated pursuant to §  
15 10-21.1:1.

16

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B. C. LEYNES, JR.  
Director

DIVISIONS  
ADMINISTRATION  
HISTORIC LANDMARKS  
PARKS AND RECREATION  
SOIL AND WATER CONSERVAT

# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

1100 Washington Building, Capitol Square  
Richmond, Virginia 23219 (804) 786-2121

October 19, 1987

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the HJR 204 Subcommittee

FROM: Bud Leynes *Bud*

The information below is a revised summary of state park and recreation related requests for funding and staffing in the 1988-90 budget proposal. Two additional requests, Public Access to the Chesapeake Bay and Outdoor Recreation Promotion, were submitted in the agency's addendum proposal but have not been addressed by the Committee.

	<u>Current</u> 1986-88	<u>Proposed</u> Increase 1988-90	<u>Proposed</u> Total 1988-90
I. State Parks Operating Budget			
A. Park Field Operations			
Positions	97.0	37.0	134.0
Personal Service Funds	\$ 6,151,055	\$ 1,706,005	\$ 7,857,060
Two Grade Increase	-0-	987,540	987,540
Non-Personal Service Funds	<u>3,803,650</u>	<u>3,879,225</u>	<u>7,682,875</u>
	\$ 9,954,705	\$ 6,572,770	\$16,527,475
B. Central Office Operations			
Positions	34.5	21.0	55.5
Personal Service Funds	\$ 2,851,560	\$ 470,250	\$ 3,321,810
Non-Personal Service Funds	<u>369,125</u>	<u>279,560</u>	<u>648,685</u>
	\$ 3,220,685	\$ 749,810	\$ 3,970,495
II. Recreation Grants			
A. Local Recreation Assistance			
Positions	3.0	*	3.0
Personal Service Funds	\$ 213,220	-0-	\$ 213,220
Non-Personal Service Funds	98,390	-0-	98,390
Grants	<u>1,093,300</u>	<u>6,906,700</u>	<u>8,000,000</u>
	\$ 1,404,910	\$ 6,906,700	\$ 8,311,610

\* New positions included in Central Staff Request.



	<u>Current</u> 1986-88	<u>Proposed</u> Increase 1988-90	<u>Proposed</u> Total 1988-90
II. B. Public Access to Chesapeake Bay			
Positions	-0-	7.0	7.0
Personal Service Funds	-0-	\$ 380,400	\$ 380,400
Non-Personal Service Funds	-0-	55,500	55,500
Grants to Localities	-0-	<u>10,000,000</u>	<u>10,000,000</u>
		\$10,435,900	\$10,435,900
III. Outdoor Recreation Promotion			
Positions	-0-	2.0	2.0
Personal Service Funds	-0-	109,200	109,200
Non-Personal Service Funds	-0-	14,800	14,800
Grants to Localities	-0-	<u>876,000</u>	<u>876,000</u>
		\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,000,000
IV. Capital Outlay Budget (GF only)			
A. Maintenance Reserve	\$ 400,000	\$ 1,417,000	
B. New/Improved Facility	1,145,000	11,154,400	
C. Acquisitions			
Eastern Shore	-0-	5,000,000	
Natural Areas**	-0-	3,000,000	
**Matching funds of \$1 million per year are to be provided from The Nature Conservancy.			

Attached are brief descriptions of the Chesapeake Bay Public Access and Outdoor Recreation addendum requests as well as justification for a parks field personnel salary regrade.

bg  
 Attachment

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

1988-90 ADDENDUM SUMMARY

Public Access To The Chesapeake Bay and Tributaries

One of the major initiatives of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement signed by the Governors of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania in August of 1987 was to improve public access to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. This addendum proposal addresses the need to establish a state grant program which would augment existing efforts of 1) the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to construct and maintain boat ramps; 2) the Department of Transportation to provide resources for recreation access; 3) and this department to provide local recreation acquisition and development grants, and public beach conservation and development grants.

This addendum would establish a grant program to make available \$5 million per year in grants to tidewater localities for the purpose of constructing or developing additional boat launching, fishing, swimming, and sun bathing facilities. Participating localities would be required to provide 25% of each project's cost.

Outdoor Recreation Promotion

This addendum request addresses a recommendation contained in the report (HD 21, 1987) of the Joint Subcommittee established to study the Commonwealth's effort to develop tourism. The Subcommittee recommended that the Division of Parks and Recreation, in cooperation with the Division of Tourism, develop a promotion campaign to encourage the use of outdoor recreation facilities. As proposed, this addendum would provide funds, technical assistance and coordination required to create an ongoing campaign to promote resident and non-resident utilization of Virginia's natural, recreational, and historical resources.

\$500,000 per year would be appropriated to:

- a. Provide funding to state outdoor agencies and localities to expand Virginia's tourist industry by bringing more visibility to under-utilized outdoor attractions state-wide;
- b. Coordinate and provide needed expertise for existing and future promotional activities; and
- c. Increase tourist activities by increasing the promotion of "off-season" activities.

SALARY COMPARISONS OF VIRGINIA STATE PARKS FIELD  
POSITIONS TO SIMILAR POSITIONS IN SELECTED STATES (10/16/87)

Virginia	Maryland	West Virginia	Kentucky	North Carolina	South Carolina	Tennessee	Alabama	Florida
Park Supts	Park Managers	Park Supts	Park Managers	Park Managers	Park Managers (Top Parks)	Park Managers	Park Supts	Park Managers
\$19,147 - 28,594	\$23,056 - 41,003	\$15,372 - 30,276	\$18,324 - 35,688	\$17,628 - 33,204	\$17,136 - 27,319	\$18,420 - 29,892	\$21,715 - 36,322	\$17,559 - 32,919
Park Asst Supts		Asst Supt Level	Park Asst Managers		Park Managers (Lower Parks-Assistants)		Park Managers (Assistants)	Park Assistant Managers
\$16,025 - 21,889		\$14,472 - 25,200	\$15,072 - 24,144		\$14,646 - 22,454		\$13,925 - 24,554	\$14,785 - 25,634
Park Chief Rangers		Activities Program Coordinator - (Interpreters)		Park Chief Rangers	Park Assistant Managers (Chief Rangers)		Conservation Enforcement Officers (Chief Rangers)	Park Officer (Chief Rangers)
\$14,655 - 20,019		\$14,472 - 25,200		\$14,952 - 23,208	\$14,646 - 20,759		\$16,556 - 25,168	\$13,378 - 21,480
Park Rangers	Park Rangers	Conservation Aides	Park Rangers	Park Rangers	Park Rangers	Park Rangers	Park Rangers	Park Rangers
\$13,412 - 18,321	\$15,958 - 28,116	\$10,008 - 16,884	\$11,244 - 18,024	\$13,812 - 21,276	\$12,036 - 18,456	\$12,384 - 21,972	\$10,618 - 17,830	\$11,957 - 19,488

1 D 9/11/87 Heard C 9/14/87 jds

2 HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO.....

3 Requesting the State Board of Education to adopt a policy of  
4 cooperative use agreements with local parks  
5 departments.

6

7 WHEREAS, there is increased pressure on recreation  
8 facilities, especially in urban areas; and

9 WHEREAS, schools are the focal point of most  
10 communities and are located strategically within populous  
11 areas which allow for easy access by most residents; and

12 WHEREAS, school facilities are often under-utilized  
13 during the evening hours and summer months; and

14 WHEREAS, the use of school facilities by public  
15 recreation departments is a growing concept across the  
16 nation; and

17 WHEREAS, the 1986 study of parks and recreation  
18 departments in Virginia reports that 76 of 85 reporting  
19 agencies utilize school facilities; and

20 WHEREAS, school use by local recreation departments is  
21 limited to a particular program or area and the agreement is  
22 usually unwritten and informal; and

23 WHEREAS, there is a legislative mechanism allowing  
24 schools to open their doors to public recreation programs  
25 during those times when the school is not being used for  
26 school-sponsored activities; now, therefore, be it







