

**REPORT OF THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION**

**HAYFIELDS FARM PROPERTY:
SUITABILITY AS A RECREATIONAL
AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT AS A
STATE OR REGIONAL PARK**

**TO THE CHAIRS OF THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE AND THE SENATE FINANCE AND
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**



**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
April 1, 2021**

PREFACE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of House Bill 30, Chapter 1289, Item 374.A. 3. of the 2020 Virginia Acts of Assembly that stipulates, "The Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation shall review the Hayfields Farm property, consisting of approximately 1,034.7 acres more or less in Highlands County, Virginia, Tax Parcel #68A17 and #68A18A, located at 524 Hayfields Lane in McDowell, and make recommendations to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees by October 1, 2020, on its suitability as a recreational area pursuant to §10.1-200 et. seq., Code of Virginia, for development as a state or regional park. In its review, the agencies shall consider (i) management of the area or park by a combination of public and private entities; (ii) potential user activities at the area or park, including but not limited to camping, fishing, hiking, bird watching, equestrian activities, and biking; and (iii) operation of the area or park with only those improvements minimally necessary for activities listed herein and consistent with the preservation and protection of the property's conservation values and natural resources."

Time limitations and conditions stemming from the existing Covid-19 pandemic constrained the completion of this feasibility study. Considering these constraints, the agencies were provided an extension from October 1, 2020, to April 1, 2021, to complete their review and provide recommendations.

In consultation with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF), the Department of Conservation and Recreation offers the following report, attachments, and findings resulting from the requested suitability review of the Hayfields Farm property.

CONCLUSION

In accordance with the requirements of House Bill 30 and §10.1-200 of the *Code of Virginia*, the Department, with consideration of time and resource restrictions, conducted a review of existing reports and acquired additional information to develop the following recommendations regarding the Hayfields Farm property (Reserve):

It is recommended that the Hayfields Farm property is suitable for development as a recreation area or a state park based on the site location, the community's desire for an outdoor recreation venue, and the state park system needs, and property availability. However, DCR has significant state park backlogs with existing infrastructure needs and park lands that have not yet been developed that need to be addressed first.

- According to VOF, a group may be interested in a partnership to manage the property. However, due to limitations from Covid-19, a thorough study was not completed of private investment in the site and whether private-public management of the property is a viable option.

- An assessment was prepared by Ascent recommending the Hayfields Farm as a good location for a state park in Highland County. DCR has not completed any additional assessments beyond this report.
- A new regional park authority is not recommended.
- Hayfields Farm Reserve is suitable for user activities that include, but are not limited to, camping, fishing, hiking, bird watching, and biking while still preserving the property's conservation values and natural resources.
- If the site is developed for active recreation, there are site limitations that need to be taken into account, like floodplains, steep slopes, intended conservation of the property, and anticipated easement restrictions as there is presently no easement on the property.
- With initial capital improvements and operational funding, the Department of Conservation and Recreation could manage a limited state park operation at Hayfields Farm (Reserve) with minimal improvements and initial staffing costs totaling about \$12.8 million. Improvements to include, but not limited to, trails, camping, maintenance area, visitors center, staff residence, and access roads. However, time constraints did not allow for bridge and road assessments that will be needed to bring them to VDOT standards.

Suitability As A Recreational Area For Hayfields Reserve Property



Prepared by the Department of Conservation and Recreation

April 1, 2021



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Executive Summary

Highland County has been vying for a state park since it was first mentioned in a state planning document in 1965. Since that time, the citizens have not lost their dedication to acquiring a state park in their county. In 2020, the General Assembly requested a study on the suitability of a recreation area on the Hayfields Farm property owned by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. The study required a review of alternative management possibilities, the suitability of a state or regional park on the site, if the site could be used for various recreational activities, and if the use of the site could be operated with minimal improvements. This report is a culmination of that study determining that with initial capital improvements, the Department of Conservation and Recreation could open a minimal state park operation at the Hayfields Farm property with minimal modifications and initial staffing costs totaling about \$12.8 million. However, DCR has significant existing state park backlogs with existing infrastructure needs and park lands that have not yet been developed that need to be addressed first.

“The outdoor recreation industry does more than bring joy to millions of Americans: It helps drive our economy. In 2020, the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) released updated national statistics and state-level data that formally recognizes the critical role the industry plays in supporting economic growth in the United States. In addition, the BEA found that the outdoor recreation industry is growing rapidly.”⁽¹⁾

Scope of Study

In response to a Virginia General Assembly budget amendment request, House Bill 30, Chapter 1289, Item 374.A.3. of the 2020 Virginia Acts of Assembly, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), in consultation with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF), conducted a study of the Hayfield Farms property for suitability and management as a recreational area.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is responsible for guiding and supporting recreation and conservation throughout the Commonwealth. The VOF is responsible for preserving open space lands for the preservation of natural, scenic, historic, scientific, and recreational assets of the Commonwealth. This report is a result of the feasibility study of the Hayfields Farm property, referred to from here forward as the Hayfields Reserve, owned by VOF.

In 2017 the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) received Hayfields Farm in Highland County as compensatory mitigation from the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC and Dominion Transmission, Inc., satisfying statutory requirements associated with the development of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline through nine (9) open-space easements in Highland, Bath, and Augusta Counties held by VOF.

DCR is aware of few existing easement restrictions on the property at this time. However, conveyance of the property will require approval of the VOF Board of Trustees and the imposition

of an open space easement on the property. VOF's proposed easement restrictions were presented to DCR in February 2021 (see Appendix A). VOF indicated they are willing to negotiate the proposed restrictions to create a state park on the Hayfields Reserve.

This report intends to garner key points from multiple studies, update the pertinent data, and make recommendations on the future management of Hayfields Reserve.

This study's scope is to determine if certain aspects for the future of Hayfields Reserve are suitable for the site. As part of that effort, the following questions were addressed:

- Is the Hayfields Reserve suitable as a recreation area?
- Can the Hayfields Reserve be developed as a state or regional park?
- Can management be a combination of public and private entities?
- Can user activities be developed on the property – including but not limited to camping, fishing, hiking, bird watching, equestrian activities, and biking?
- Can the proposed activities be provided with minimal improvements while still protecting and preserving the site's conservation values and natural resources?

VOF and the Friends of Highland County State Parks have already conducted or requested numerous feasibility studies for the property, concluding that Highland County, the surrounding region, and Virginia would benefit from the property's conversion to a regional or state park facility.



With the limited timeline for the report, DCR and VOF combined efforts to coordinate work in this regard. Representatives of the local Highlands State park Committee, DCR's Planning and Recreation Resources staff, State Park staff, and the Central Shenandoah Planning District

Commission (CSPDC) met onsite for a tour by the property owner, VOF. During this tour, alternatives for the site were discussed and considered. Following further research, collection of data, and ongoing dialogue, recommendations for the project were developed.

Background

The community in Highlands County has advocated for a state park for decades. The first public indication that Highland County should be considered for a state park was in the 1965 *Virginia's Commonwealth* plan for recreation and land conservation, that plan stated –

"Highland County contains high, rugged country. A state park in the area would have a great appeal and would be of substantial benefit to the local economy."

Since that time, there have been numerous efforts to develop a park in the county. The county and others have recently strengthened their efforts with a series of studies to determine if a state park in the county is feasible and which site should be considered for the park.

The Virginia Outdoors plan (VOP), which is updated every five years, specifically references a state park in Highland County or nearby, in the VOP dated 1974, 1979, 2002, 2007, 2013, and as recently as 2018.

After many years of effort for a state park in Highland County, the acquisition of Hayfields Reserve by the VOF has made the opportunity for a state park in Highland County seem more feasible. Following is a chart listing some of the relevant dates and documents regarding this feasibility.

DATE	ACTIVITY/ REPORT - Note that these documents are provided in the Appendix of this report, and the highlighted ones are most often referenced.
November 2015	Real Estate Listing for property
January 2017	Substitute Land Report by VOF
December 2017	VOF obtains ownership/deed of the property
April 2018	Ascent Maple Festival Survey – results in the Ascent Study
May 2018	"Your Sweet Spot in the Mountains: A Feasibility Study for a Virginia State Park in Highland County" by Ascent Consulting Group – w/ recommendations on feasibility of a park on the site; including survey results ⁽¹⁾
July 2018	VOF attends Friends of Highland State Park Meeting
October 2018	VOF Hosts Public Forum in Monterey, VA
January 2019	Hayfields Farm Community Engagement Report provided to VOF by Stantec w/ outreach results and potential planning scenarios
2019	'A New State Park in Highland County: The Sweet Spot in the Mountains" Legislative Package – summary of potential

¹ These highlighted reports are the most comprehensive and explicit regarding the assets and possibilities for the site.

May 2019	VOF Meeting with DCR State Parks
June 2019	VOF Request for Interest on the (RFI) property
July 2019	RFI Proposal received
December 2019	VOF Staff brainstorming session
February 2020	Budget Bill – HB30 (Chapter 1289) Item 374 3review the Hayfields Farm property...
May 2020	" <i>Hayfields Reserve A Remote Treasure of Possibilities</i> " a VOF Summary Report to the VOF Board of Trustees
December 2020	DCR receives the request to work with VOF to do the review
February 2021	VOF provides DCR with a summary of the project, CSPDC Report for Highland State Park Feasibility Study

Over the years, there has been local support for a state park in Highland County. A group of local citizens - the Highland County State Park Committee has worked diligently to garner support from county citizens, visitors, and local legislators to bring a state park to the county. The surveys done by Ascent Consulting Group (Ascent) and Stantec also highlighted the support from within the county. The Ascent effort also surveyed visitors to the county attending the Highland County Maple Festival and found they also supported and would visit a state park in the county. Resolutions or letters of support came from seven organizations between 2014 and 2016⁽²⁾. As discussed in the Ascent and Stantec reports (see Appendix C), these supporting organizations, along with the surveys and community engagement efforts, clearly confirm the support for a state park in Highland County.

Since state parks serve more than just a local community, additional outreach is prudent to assess a broader range of potential visitors to a state park in Highlands County. A comprehensive list of local and non-local organizations and individuals is provided for use at a future time as 'HF Stakeholders' (Appendix B)

Highland County is the least populated county in Virginia with a declining population according to the [2020 population estimates](#) ⁽³⁾ provided by Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. Despite the small population, there is a strong sense of community. Multiple groups and organizations continue to look out for the community and see opportunities for a stronger one. More detailed information on the demographics and community is provided in the Ascent, Stantec, and Central Shenandoah Planning District reports (Appendix C).

Located on the western boundary of Virginia and West Virginia, the county is remote and in need

² Virginia Association of Parks – 2014, Highland County Tourism Council – 2015, Highland County Economic Development Authority – 2015, Highland Center – 2016, Highland County Chamber of Commerce – 2015, Highland County Board of Supervisors – 2014 and 2015, Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission Project List 2015-2016

³ <https://demographics.coopercenter.org/virginia-population-estimates>

of access to outdoor recreation opportunities. Though there is plenty of public land in the county, there are only two public access points to those lands. There is one Virginia State Park, Douthat State Park in Clifton Forge, and no regional parks within an hour's drive of the center of the county. Within a two hours' drive, there is only one other state park, Natural Bridge.

There are no Virginia State Parks within an hour's drive for citizens to the east of Highland County. Although West Virginia has some outdoor recreation facilities within an hour's drive from the



center of the county, it is expected that a Virginia State park within the county will better serve the citizens of Highlands and the adjacent communities. See travel time and outdoor recreation map below.

This lack of access to outdoor recreation could be a contributing factor for the high levels of obesity, 26%, and inactivity, 24%⁽⁴⁾, of Highland County citizens.

⁴ These numbers provided by CSPDC Report for Highland State Park Feasibility Study in the Appendix.

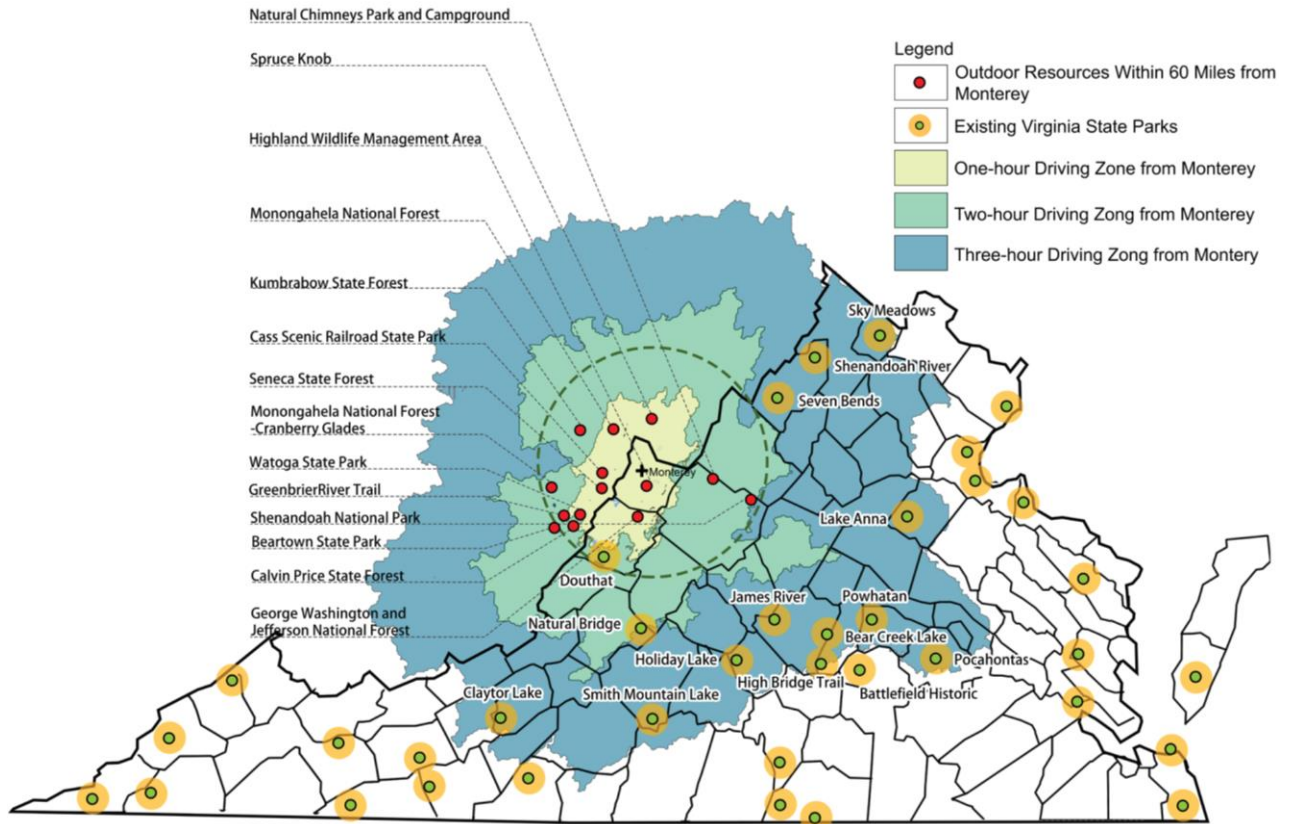


Figure 1 Driving times provided by Ascent Consulting Group

Hayfields Reserve is a 1,034-acre tract in Highland County, Virginia, lying along State Route 678 (Bullpasture River Road). The property has approximately one mile of the Bullpasture River flowing through the center. The property lies between Jack Mountain and Bullpasture Mountain and is approximately seven miles south of McDowell, Virginia. Elevations vary from 1,700 to 2,500 feet



above mean sea level. Along the Bullpasture River are valley pastures, composing about 1/3 of the property. The other 2/3's of the property is heavily wooded and occasionally steeply sloping land. The property is owned by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation and is adjacent to the Highland Wildlife Management Area along the southeast border for approximately a mile.

Suitability as a Recreation Area

An onsite farm manager currently maintains Hayfields Reserve. The property is bisected by the Bullpasture River. The existing farmhouse on the property was erected in the 1880s and renovated in the 1990s with a nearby large barn. There is an additional late-1700's cabin on the western portion of the property. On the western part of the property is a private log home, where the farm manager lives and utility sheds in a maintenance yard. An existing shale pit is present in the northwest corner of the property and has existing access. Numerous ponds and wetlands dot the property.



VOF has developed over five miles of improved trails and begun many other trails across the property that will double the trail mileage. The western portion of the property has a large presence of steep slopes (greater than 30%), as does the eastern portion, but less so. At least 15 Virginia or federally endangered species call this region home and could be impacted by further development of the site.

With over 1,000 acres, Hayfields Reserve is large enough to accommodate local recreation needs. According to the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan, the top needs for recreation in this area are listed as follows:

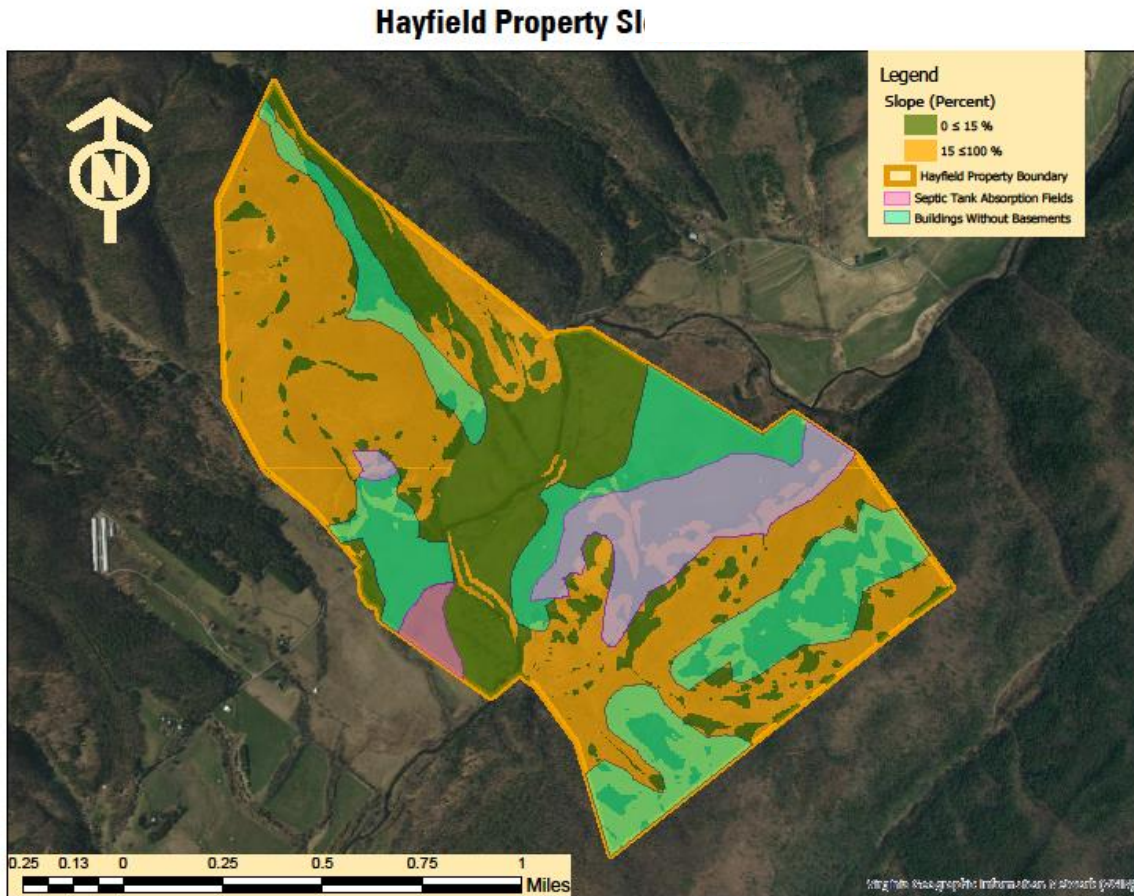
Central Shenandoah Recreational Planning Region

activity	% of households in	
	region	state
Natural areas	65	54
Historic areas	47	39
Parks	38	49
Trails	38	43
Water access	35	43
Scenic drives (driving for pleasure)	32	29
Playing fields, sports and golf facilities	11	22

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey.

There are some additional elements necessary to determine if a particular property is suitable as a recreation area. These are:

- Open fields of 0-5% slope
- Access to potable water
- Easy road access
- Perkable soils for septic
- Opportunities for various activities



Given this review, it has been determined that based on recreational needs for the area, the site location, the community's desire for an outdoor recreation venue, the possibility for the development of outdoor facilities on the property, and the site's availability, that Hayfields Reserve is suitable as a recreation area.

Management Options

If this site is to be used as a state park, it should be a viable destination from outside the county. It needs to be evaluated on its contribution to the whole Virginia State Park system. This evaluation looked at the long history of the Virginia Outdoor Plans to see if a state park in this area was

needed. Other considerations were -- drive times to the closest population centers, the need for state parks based on population projections, a comparison to other state parks with similar activities, suitability of the site to support additional developments, and the uniqueness of the site as an asset to the entire state park system.

Determination of the best management practice for the site as a recreation area included consideration of a public-private partnership and a comparison of regional authorities versus a state park. Consideration of alternative management and use of the site was considered by the



community engagement report of January 2019 Stantec. In that report, several alternative scenarios, including a state park, were evaluated for the site's conservation, economic and job creation, and public access values. The results were mixed, with a majority of the participants supporting a state park or agrotourism on the property.

In June of 2019, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation issued a Request for Information (RFI) to determine if other organizations, whether private or non-profit, were interested in using the site and maintaining the VOF principles. The RFI was put on hold following the General Assembly legislative request, and consideration of the property as a State Park was initiated by the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The VOF has an interested group who may be able to work in partnership to manage the property. A thorough study of private investment in the site was not completed, so it is unknown at this time if private-public management of the property is a viable option.

House Bill 30 also required determining whether the site could be managed by a regional park authority or the state parks. The first step was to look at the existing regional park authorities to see if they could take over the management of this site. Although there used to be regional

Examples of past Regional Park Authorities - **Natural Chimneys Park** was considered a regional park. However, it is now managed by Augusta County Parks and Recreation. At one point it was considered for a state park, but untimely it was decided not to include it in the state park system.

Grand Caverns - In 1974 the caverns and surrounding acreage was gifted to the Upper Valley Regional Park Authority (UVRPA) by its then owner Gladys Kellow and became known as Grand Caverns Regional Park. On October 1, 2009, the Town of Grottoes took possession of its namesake caverns, and consequently, the UVRPA dissolved.

authorities nearby, currently, there are none in the area. At one time, 4-6 different authorities existed across the state. Most dissolved several years ago due to an inability to generate reliable and sustainable funding.

A quick comparison between state parks and two existing regional authorities follows.

	State Park	No. VA. Regional Authority	Southwest Regional Recreation Authority
VA Code Section	10.1-200	15.2-5700	15.2-6016
Members	All jurisdictions	6 jurisdictions	8 jurisdictions
Land Ownership	Virginia	Authority	Authority & leases
General Assembly Funds	YES	NO	YES
Financing from other sources	Grants & user fees	\$4.60 per capita from each jurisdiction, grants & user fees	Some localities, grants, user fees
% of budget generated by park/authority	+/- 60% average between all parks	+/-87%	40-60% depending on year
Population support (2020 est.)	8.59 million	1.8 million	208,150
Recommended Size ⁵	600+; 10 acres/1,000	100-500 acres	100-500 acres
Recommended driving distance	1 hour drive time; +/- 50 miles	45 minutes, 25 miles	45 minutes, 25 miles

Since there is not a regional park authority that can manage the property, one would have to be created to manage Hayfields Reserve. Historically the only park authorities that have been sustainable have a large population and community support – both financially and politically from multiple sites. Regional authorities that managed only one site/property were not sustainable. Thus, the creation of a new recreation authority to manage Hayfields Reserve is not recommended.

Need for a State Park

With limited state park availability in Highland County and adjacent counties, and the general consideration to have a state park within an hours' drive of all citizens, and as illustrated in the time travel map, a state park in Highland County would help to fill the gap in the north-central western part of the state. Additionally, the property has scenic vistas and dark skies that would be a great asset to the entire Virginia State Park system.

Support for visiting a state park was illustrated by both the Ascent and Stantec reports, as was the list of associated supporters. Survey results from local citizens and visitors to Highland County stated that a majority of them would visit a state park in Highland County. The caveat to this is that it included people who had driven to Highland County for the Maple Festival. There were not any

⁵ The highlighted cells are based on the recommendations from the 2007 Virginia Outdoors Plan.

surveys done in other parts of the state.

The property is zoned Agricultural as well as the adjacent properties. In the community engagement efforts, the loss of tax base as the property became public was an expressed concern. Considering the current ownership with the VOF, the additional loss of taxes is minimal. It is anticipated that the resulting economic generation from a state park will more than make up for the loss.



The 2007 Virginia Outdoors Plan recommended that there be 10 acres of state parkland for every 1,000 citizens. Weldon Cooper Institute estimated the population of Virginia in 2020 is 8.59 million. Thus 85,900 acres of state parks are needed to meet Virginia's needs. Currently, there are 75,895 state park acres, a deficit of approximately 10,000 acres. Hayfields Reserve will help to fill this current gap. As Virginia's

population keeps growing, with an estimated population in 2040 of 9.87 million, the need for more state park lands also continues to grow.

Considering the location, the size of the property, the scenic and natural assets, the potential for dark skies programming, and the future needs for a state park, it is recommended that a state park in Highland County is appropriate. However, DCR has significant state park backlogs with existing infrastructure needs and park lands that have not yet been developed that need to be addressed first.

Hayfields Reserve as a State Park

Highland County is recognized for its bucolic scenery, which is expressed in its nickname 'Little Switzerland'. With agriculture its primary industry, the landscape continues to be very rural. In-depth analyses of the county, the site, and the site's natural features are provided in the reports of Ascent, Stantec, and the Substitute Land Report of 2016 by the VOF. (See Appendix C). Additionally, the Ascent Report completed an in-depth study to determine the best site for a state park in Highland County. That report looked at four sites, weighted each site for its potential as a state park, its location within the county, the opportunities for programming on the site, and recommended Hayfields Property.

Friends of Highland County State Park and the VOF each had a feasibility report done on the public perception of the viability of a state park on the Hayfields Reserve property. The 2018 report done for the Friends Group by the Ascent Group did local online surveys and visitor surveys during the



2018 Maple Festival. The report also looked at three other sites to determine if the Hayfields Reserve was the most suited site for a state park, and it was. The Stantec report for VOF was a community engagement process that looked at various development concepts for the Hayfield Reserve. Some of

them were for private or non-governmental entities to manage the site to serve the Highland Community and be an attraction for visitors. Each alternative looked at the potential economics weighed against the conservation value for the site. The most popular uses of the property were a state park and an agro-tourism site.

When state park properties are studied for development, a 'buildable areas' analysis is completed to see how much and where on the property development can happen with the least environmental impact. The following summary map of buildable areas was based on appropriate soils for buildings without basements, septic suitability, steep slopes [less than 15%], floodplain, and natural and historic resources. The final result of this is that approximately 239 acres are suitable for development within the park, or approximately 22%. State parks limits development within a park to 15-20%, so there are opportunities for future development within Hayfields Reserve.

Hayfields Reserve has many attributes, as described in the earlier background section of this study. The Ascent and Stantec reports' results assert that onsite participation would most likely be: Hiking, camping, scenic drives or overlooks, and wildlife observation. Development of the site as a state park will take negotiation between DCR and VOF on the amount of allowed development and use of the site. Preliminary discussions covered these topics and others. As state agencies, relying on our common goals will be critical to come to a collaborative decision.

For DCR to take ownership and manage the site with minimal development, as stipulated in House Bill 30, the following would be required:

- Complete ownership of the entire 1034 acres, without any held back inholdings, and

- An increase in impervious surface cap limitations above ¼ of 1%, suggested by the VOF One-Page of February 2021 (Appendix A)

The advantage of these requirements is that state parks can use the existing facilities, and new facilities will not have to be built for a staff residence, a maintenance yard, and a park office.

A quick look at the assets and challenges of the property is listed below.

ASSETS	CHALLENGES
SIZE - 1034 ACRES	Income production
Willing donator - VOF	Drive time to park
Protect from development	Park not directly off an interstate
Potential Recreation	Existing & proposed inholding
Scenic Beauty & vistas	Proximity to medical care
Varying elevations	WVA parks
Biodiversity, Avian Flyway	22% developable
Potential trails	<1% easement development restriction
Dark skies	Limited population nearby
Potential for camping	Cabin development small
Historical & cultural nearby	Steel bridge restrictions
Water access, Bullpasture River	Route 678 west entrance
Fishing	Need for onsite staff residence
Quiet / remote	Need for onsite maintenance area
Ag demonstration	
Adjacent to WMA	
Useable structures	

A review of the previous studies, onsite data collected, additional information gathered, and recognition of the challenges led to the conclusion that Hayfields Reserve is suitable for the development and management as a state park. With user activities that include, but are not limited to, camping, fishing, hiking, bird watching, and biking while preserving the property's conservation values and natural resources.

It should be recognized that \$12.8M in initial improvements including, but not limited to, trails, camping, maintenance area, visitor center and staff residence, access road, and a bridge would first need to be addressed, among other needs. Time constraints did not allow for bridge and road assessments that will be necessary to bring them to VDOT standards.

Operation as a state park with minimal improvements

After the site visit and review of the data available, it was determined that this site would be a suitable contribution to the state park system. DCR agrees that initially developing the necessary facilities on the site will create an attractive day-use park. With initial capital improvements, Hayfields Reserve is feasible as a state park operation.

However, to make the park fiscally sustainable over time, given the limited amount of funds from the General Assembly, it will be necessary to develop the park into a more traditional state park with developed campsites, cabins, a visitor center, and other supporting facilities. The exact number and size of these impacts will be determined after a full master plan is developed for the



site. Traditionally, 15-20% of parks are developed, and the rest is conserved for future generations to enjoy nature. Negotiation of any easement on the site for a common goal with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation should allow for additional development as needed for the future of the park. Additionally, acquiring adjacent land from willing sellers would allow for the full buildout of the park while adhering to anticipated development restrictions on the property.

The following activities could be supported by the Hayfields Reserve: camping, fishing, hiking, bird watching, and biking. However, these activities will require upgraded facilities to accommodate the public, including upgraded and enlarged parking areas, restroom facilities, and improved trail surfaces. Additionally, the location of the park allows for the opportunity for extended stays due to other nearby destinations and sites of interest. Some of these sites are the McDowell Civil War site, the Highlands Wildlife Management Area, Monterey, and the Green Bank Observatory, just to name a few.

Although this property as a state park will not be one that will contribute the full amount of its operation costs, it will be an asset to the system. To ascertain the suitability of Hayfields Reserve as a state park, a comparison to two other state parks will give an idea of the value and expectations

of the site.

Though the transition of ownership and management can take many forms, ultimately, Hayfields will need to be a stand-alone state park for it to be managed efficiently. Existing agricultural and wetland mitigation sites on the property would be maintained. Management of a state park requires onsite maintenance yard/shop, staff residence, and office. All these needs can be met with existing onsite facilities. If those do not transfer with the property, different accommodations will need to be made at an additional cost.

Following is a comparison chart between Hayfields Reserve (HFR), Seven Bends State Park (SESP) – a brand new day-use park, and Caledon State Park (CLSP), an established day-use park. The numbers for the existing state parks are based on 2020 numbers, with the Local Economic Impact numbers based on the 2020 Virginia Tech Economic Impact Study by Pamplin School of Business.

	HFR	SESP	CASP
Size/acres	1034	1066	2593
Natural Water	Bullpasture R.	NF Shenandoah R.	Potomac R.
Yearly attendance	unknown	87097	93751
60 mile radius - Pop. Density	576,293	1,715,089	5,823,211
distance from state highway(mi.)	7	2	4.8
Operation & Staffing Budget	\$6 to 650,000 estimate	\$376,132	\$609,236
staff- FTE	3	2	3
Annual Revenue	<\$25,000 estimate	\$12,881	\$68,533
Local Economic Impact	unknown*	\$4.3M	\$3.7M
FACILITIES			
Picnic shelters	2	2	1
Car top boat launch	2	2	2 canoe/ kayak landings
vault toilets	2	2	1 restroom
Trail miles	5.3+^	9.9^	16.6
	Proposed		
* - The Ascent study projects full build-out it could provide an economic of \$5,700,000+/-impact.			
^ more trails under construction or possible renovation			

Development of Hayfields Reserve as a park, whether a state park or other, will require a minimal investment of capital funds for facility development and operational funds, including staffing.

Taking into account the above chart, it is recommended that the following facilities be provided or upgraded for public use of the site:

- Bridge stabilization
- 2 picnic shelters
- 2 small parking lots
- 2 vault toilets
- Primitive camping pads with a vault toilet and water
- 2 canoe launches with small parking areas
- 6 miles of trails
- Visitor Center*, utilities* and displays
- Maintenance Area & Utilities*
- Staff residence*

**These items may not be necessary depending on how much of the property transfers to DCR for a state park.*



Finally, this study determines that with initial capital improvements, the Department of Conservation and Recreation can open a minimal operation Virginia state park at Hayfields Reserve with improvements and initial staffing costs totaling about \$12.8 million. This cost does not include bringing the bridge and roads to VDOT standards. However, DCR has significant state park backlogs with existing infrastructure needs and park lands that have not yet been developed that need to be addressed first.

Conclusions

It is anticipated that there will be no acquisition costs for DCR to acquire the property, though there may be transfer costs. Any future development of the site would depend on the facilities identified in the master plan determined by a public input process.

The property called Hayfields Reserve, currently owned by the VOF has been under study since 2015. Many of those studies had similar conclusions on the site resources and recommendations for the future of the property. In response to House Bill 30, Chapter 1289, Item 374.A.3. of the 2020 Virginia Acts of Assembly, DCR, in collaboration with VOF, completed this study to determine the best use of the property for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Careful consideration of the property inventory and public interest determined that Hayfields Reserve is a suitable property to be developed for recreational use. However, if the site is intended to be developed for active recreation, there are site limitations, like floodplains, steep slopes, intended conservation of the property, and anticipated easement restrictions, as there is not an easement on the property at present, that would need to be taken into account.

The large acreage (over 1,000 acres), open areas, scenic vistas, access to the Bullpasture River, dark skies, avian flyway, and its adjacency to Highland Wildlife Management Area are all assets for a property considered as a state park. The property and its assets are suitable for development as a state or regional park if the limitations mentioned can be addressed.

The appropriate management mechanism will make the final determination of the type of park the property becomes. This study evaluated management alternatives for the site, including a private entity, a non-governmental organization (NGO), a regional park authority, and the Virginia State Park system. The VOF has an interested group who may be able to work in partnership to manage the property. Due to the small nearby population and county resources and the fact that a thorough study of private investment in the site was not completed, whether private-public management of the property is viable is unknown.

Further, it was determined that a local or regional management entity for the management of this site would not be sustainable in this area. Management of the site as a park is best accomplished by Virginia State Parks.

An assessment by Ascent recommended Hayfields Farm as a good location for a state park in Highland County. A careful review of the property, location, and assets resulted in a recommendation that the site is suitable for development as a state park.

Study of the property for potential state park development and supporting activities identified numerous potentials for bringing visitors to the site. Hayfields Reserve is suitable as a state park with user activities that include, but are not limited to, camping, fishing, hiking, bird watching, and biking while preserving the property's conservation values and natural resources.

This study determines that with initial capital improvements, the Department of Conservation and Recreation can open a minimal operation Virginia state park at Hayfields Reserve with minimal improvements and initial staffing costs totaling about \$12.8 million. The \$12.8 million includes but is not limited to trails, camping, maintenance area, visitors center, staff residence, and minimal access roads, and a bridge improvement would first need to be addressed. Time constraints did not allow for assessing the bridge and road needs that would bring them to VDOT standards. However, DCR has significant state park backlogs with existing infrastructure needs and park lands that have not yet been developed that need to be addressed first.

Appendices

- A. VOF Hayfields Farm One-Page, December 2020
- B. Stakeholder list
- C. State Park Studies for Highland County

APPENDIX A
VOF Hayfields Farm One-Page, December 2020



In 2017 the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) received Hayfields Farm in Highland County as compensatory mitigation from the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC and Dominion Transmission, Inc. to satisfy statutory requirements associated with the development of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline through nine (9) open-space easements in Highland, Bath, and Augusta Counties held by VOF.

Hayfields Farm consists of 1,034 acres between Jack Mountain and Bullpasture Mountain, approximately seven miles south of McDowell, Virginia. The Bullpasture River flows through the center of the property for just over one mile, sustaining various wildlife and natural communities. Two-thirds of the property is forested, with forty percent classified as high conservation value by the Virginia Department of Forestry. Nearly 350 acres of the farm hold prime soils or farmland of statewide importance, per the USDA. Several ponds exist on the property and numerous buildings and structures, including a picturesque single-lane truss bridge. Hayfields Reserve also shares a boundary of more than a mile with the Department of Wildlife Resource Highland Wildlife Management Area.

To maintain the property's conservation values and natural beauty and meet the statutory requirements, the following conditions may be required and applied to the property through a governing document such as an open-space deed of easement.

Restrictions:

- **Limited Subdivision**
- **Soil Protection** achieved via Impervious Surface Cap Limitation of $\frac{1}{4}$ of 1% (0.0025)
 - Current footprint = 19,282 sq. ft.
 - $0.0025 \times 1,034 \text{ acres} = 2.585 \text{ acres} \times 43,560 \text{ sqft/acre} = 112,602.6 \text{ sq. ft.}$
 - 112,603 sq. ft. (total allowed) – 19,282 sq. ft. (currently) = 93,321 sf. ft. (remaining for additional buildings and structures)
 - recommended building envelopes
- **Water Protected** achieved via Riparian Protection Zone along the Bullpasture River
 - Consider RPZ along other significant tributaries.
- **Forest Protected** achieved via the Model Easement forestry language.
 - Consider a no-cut restriction above the 2,000' contour line east of the Bullpasture River; this is the portion of the forest adjacent to the WMA.

Conveyance

Before conveying all or a portion of Hayfields Farm, which would require VOF Board action, VOF would like to discuss options regarding maintaining ownership of certain portions of the property, in areas west of Bullpasture River Road. Such sites could include defined areas around the Cabin and the modern house and farm buildings.

APPENDIX B – STAKEHOLDER LIST

HAYFIELDS STATE PARK STAKEHOLDER LIST			
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APPENDIX C

State Park Studies for Highland County

DATE	ACTIVITY	
November 2015	Real Estate Listing for property	Virginia Outdoors Foundation – Substitute Land Report, Exhibits – Appendix – Resource 9
January 2017	Substitute Land Report by VOF	Virginia Outdoors Foundation – Substitute Land Report – Appendix – Resource 8
December 2017	VOF obtains ownership of the property	Web Article – Resource 7
April 2018	Ascent Maple Festival Survey	Your Sweet Spot in the Mountains: A Feasibility Study for a Virginia State Park in Highland County – Appendix - Resources 5, Page 4
May 2018	Ascent Final Report – Your Sweet Spot in the Mountains...	Your Sweet Spot in the Mountains: A Feasibility Study for a Virginia State Park in Highland County – Appendix - Resources 5
July 2018	VOF attends Friends of Highland State Park Meeting	Virginia Outdoors Foundation Website
October 2018	VOF Hosts Public Forum in Monterey, VA	Web Article – Appendix - Resources 4.1
January 2019	Community Engagement Report by Stantec Released	Hayfields Farm: Community Engagement Report – Appendix - Resources 4
May 2019	VOF Meeting with DCR State Parks	Web Article – Appendix – Resources 4.2
June 2019	VOF Request for Interest on the (RFI) property	Virginia Outdoors Foundation Website
Summer 2019	VOF hosts RFI related property Tours	Virginia Outdoors Foundation Website
October 2019	RFI Proposal received	Virginia Outdoors Foundation Website
December 2019	VOF Staff brainstorm session	Virginia Outdoors Foundation Website
2020	...Hayfields Farm property as a state park ...	Budget Bill – HB30 (Chapter 1289) Item 374 3.
May 2020	Hayfields Reserve VOF Report to BOT	Hayfields Reserve: A Remote Treasure of Possibilities & Appendix – Resources 2 and 3
February 2021	Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission	CSPDC Report for Highland State Park Feasibility Study – Appendix – Resources 1.1
March 2021	VOF to DCR Conveyance request	Hayfields One-Page, Appendix – Resources 1