

**REPORT OF THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND
RECREATION AND THE STATE TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

2025 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATE TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, CHESAPEAKE AND NATURAL
RESOURCES; THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND
NATURAL RESOURCES; AND THE CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION**



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Acronyms

CTB – Commonwealth Transportation Board

DCR – Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

FHWA – Federal Highway Administration

FY – Fiscal Year

LAD – Local Assistance Division

LWCF – Land and Water Conservation Fund

NPS – U.S. National Park Service

PRR – Planning and Recreation Resources Division

RTP – Recreation Trails Program

SCORP – Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

SOP – Standard Operating Procedure

STAC – State Trails Advisory Committee

STO – State Trails Office

TMPD – Transportation and Mobility Planning Division

VDOT – Virginia Department of Transportation

VOP – Virginia Outdoors Plan

VPRA – Virginia Passenger Rail Authority

Preface

This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of [§ 10.1-204.1](#) of the 2015 Virginia Acts of Assembly (House Bill 1542; Delegate Lingamfelter, amended in 2020). Enactment Section A of § 10.1-204.1 stipulates that “the Committee shall be appointed by the Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and shall be composed of a representative from the Department of Wildlife Resources, the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. National Park Service; the Virginia Director of the Chesapeake Bay Commission; and nonlegislative citizen members, including representatives from the Virginia Outdoors Plan Technical Advisory Committee and the Recreational Trails Advisory Committee and other individuals with technical expertise in trail creation, construction, maintenance, use, and management.” The State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) examine and provide recommendations regarding:

- Options to close the gaps in a state system of trails as described in § 10.1-204;
- Creative public and private funding strategies and partnerships to leverage resources to fund the development of trails;
- Integrated approaches to promote and market trail values and benefits;
- The development of specialty trails, including concepts related to old-growth forest trails across the Commonwealth;
- Strategies to encourage and create linkages between communities and open space;
- Strategies to foster communication and networking among trail stakeholders;
- Strategies to increase tourism and commercial activities associated with a state trail system;
- Strategies to enhance the involvement of organizations that promote outdoor youth activities, including the Boy Scouts of the U.S.A. and Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. and the 4-H program of the Virginia Cooperative Extension; and
- Other practices, standards, statutes, and guidelines that the Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation determines may enhance the effectiveness of trail planning across the Commonwealth, including methods for receiving input regarding potential trail impacts upon owners of underlying or neighboring properties.

This report summarizes staff initiatives and STAC work for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, including progress for current and future plans for a statewide system of attractive, sustainable, connected, and enduring trails.

The first section of the report will cover the progress of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and DCR toward creating a statewide system of trails across the Commonwealth through their respective responsibilities, as well as external initiatives related to trails. The second section of the report, titled “*Committee Progress Report*,” will summarize the two STAC meetings of FY25.

Staff Progress Report

Introduction

Multiple state agencies play a role in the Commonwealth's planning and administration of trail-related work. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) coordinates with the State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) on trail-related topics. DCR is also responsible for leading the submittal process for Rails-with-Trails project proposals, the administration of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Recreational Trails Program, and the creation of the Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP).

STAC was first established in 2015; since that time, other bodies, including the State Trails Office within the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA), have become involved. Each agency's role in trail development and management continues to evolve as specific responsibilities are identified. VPRA was established in 2020 to "promote, sustain, and expand the availability of passenger and commuter rail service in the Commonwealth."¹ The State Trails Office was established in 2022 by the General Assembly with directives for the following initial tasks:

- Develop a state trails plan, and state trails information clearinghouse, consistent with recommendations in the January 2022 Report of Virginia Multi-Use Trails Initiative²
- Coordinate with the STAC and the DCR

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

Virginia Outdoors Plan

The Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) is Virginia's comprehensive outdoor recreation plan, or Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)³, and is required by the Land and Water Conservation Act of 1965 to ensure DCR's eligibility for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a grant program administered by the DCR on behalf of the U.S. National Park Service (NPS).

The NPS distributes apportionments from this program to state agencies and localities each year and is the authorizing body when approving applications from DCR on behalf of the state and local applicants. These funds are distributed as a match reimbursable grant process and require a 50/50 match for park development and to protect lands in perpetuity for public outdoor recreation.

The VOP must be updated every five years and aims to organize many topics in a usable resource for planners throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia to consider multiple dimensions of public recreation in proposed parklands. It provides state agencies and localities with the information they need when preparing competitive grant applications.

The 2024 VOP was presented in a digital format. This format enhances audiences' ability to utilize the plan and its data and incorporates input from regional planning districts, other state agencies, and STAC. The VOP is available at <https://vop-vdcr.hub.arcgis.com/>.

¹ Virginia Passenger Rail Authority, *About*, <https://vapassengerrailauthority.org/about/>

² Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment, *Virginia Multi-Use Trails Initiative*, 2022.

³ U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service. *Land and Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program Federal Financial Assistance Manual*, Volume 71, 2021. <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/document/lwcf-requirements.pdf>

Recreational Trails Program Grant Round

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) federal reimbursement program utilizing Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds for building and rehabilitating trails and trail-related facilities. It is administered at the state level by the DCR. It is one of the only grant programs to fund both new trail construction and existing trail maintenance and amenities.

Historically, trail maintenance and amenity projects have not competed well against new trail construction projects in the open RTP grant round and DCR Planning and Recreation Resources (PRR) staff managing grants and trails received feedback from localities and nonprofits about the need for trail maintenance funding. In response, the DCR is alternating eligibility with new trail construction eligible in even years and trail maintenance and amenities eligible in all years, most likely to be competitive in odd years.

For the 2025 RTP grant round, \$1.7 million in funding was available and twenty-four applications were received for maintenance and amenity projects. Selected projects are pending grant authorization by FHWA as of August 2025.

The next grant round is anticipated to be held in the spring of 2026.

Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)

State Trails Office

The 2022 State Budget negotiations resulted in the General Assembly authorizing the establishment of the State Trails Office (STO) and directing VDOT to staff the office. \$800,000 was allocated to establish the office, and to support the development of the Statewide Trails Plan and the State Trails Information Clearinghouse, also known as the Resource Hub.

The STO was previously housed within two VDOT Divisions; Local Assistance (LAD) and Transportation and Mobility Planning (TMPD). In October 2025, the STO transitioned to being fully housed within LAD.

The 2022 budget negotiations also included a one-time allocation of general fund monies for trail development and identified five trail projects. During the Summer 2024 Special Session, the General Assembly provided additional general fund monies to the Fall Line Trail project, making it the sixth General Assembly-identified trail. In total, over \$86 million was allocated among the six projects.

The six General Assembly-identified trails are:

- [Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail](#)
- [Eastern Shore Rail Trail](#)
- [Tobacco Heritage Trail](#)
- [Peaks to Creeks Trail](#)
- [Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail](#)
- [Fall Line Trail](#)

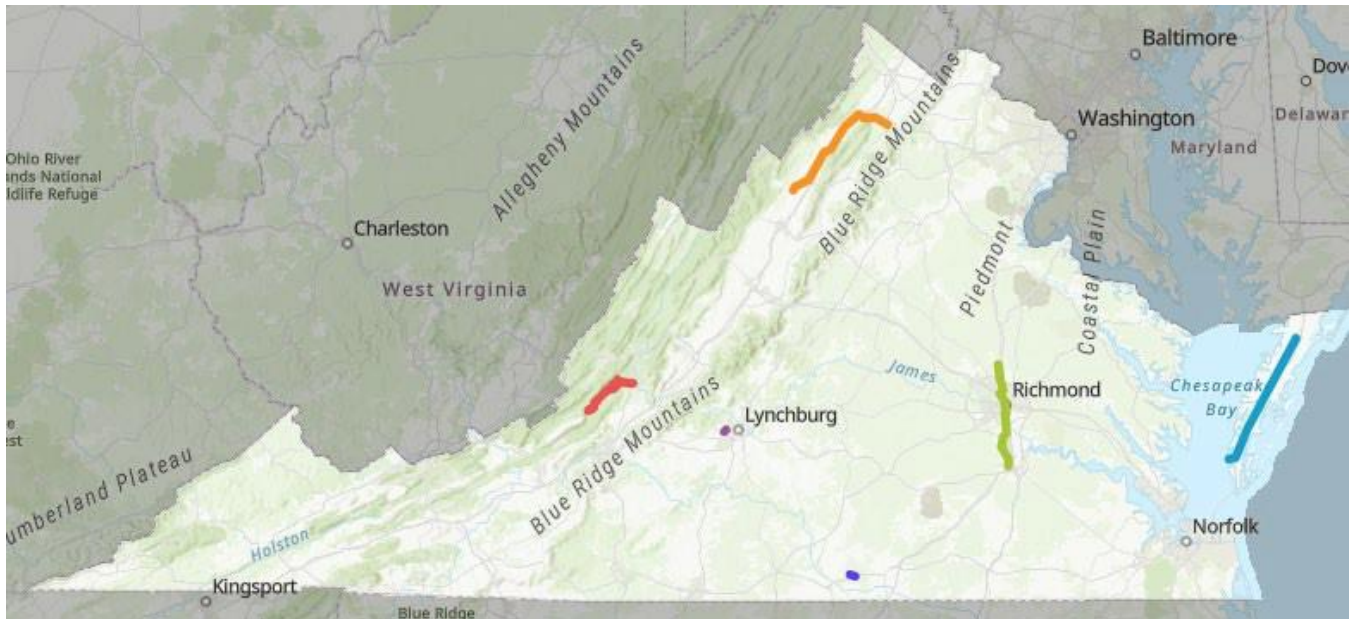


Figure 1 General Assembly Identified Trails (Source: Virginia Department of Transportation)

To view and learn more about the six General Assembly Identified Trails, use this dashboard link: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/2f557ebdb3de4576a9522cc1f26eacd3>.

State Trails Office Initiatives

Per direction from the General Assembly, the STO's initial responsibilities include:

- Developing a Statewide Trails Plan and State Trails Information Clearinghouse, consistent with recommendations in the January 2022 Virginia Multi-Use Trails Initiative¹ report
- Coordinating with the State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

As an additional initiative, the State Trails Office is developing a Trail Type and Surface Selection Guide to assist localities and regions in choosing trail surfaces that best suit their specific contexts

Statewide Trails Plan

The first phase of the Statewide Trails Plan was completed in spring 2024 and is awaiting final approval before public release. The second phase of the plan is underway and currently undergoing final review, with completion anticipated by year's end and/or early 2026.

Resource Hub

The STO is currently developing a Trails Resource Hub, which will serve as a centralized location for trail-related information to support the planning and design efforts across the Commonwealth. Resources have been collected from various state and federal agencies, as well as nationally recognized trail organizations.

¹ Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment, *Virginia Multiuse Trails Initiative*, 2022.

A major component of the Resource Hub will be the Statewide Trails Inventory Mapping Data Viewer. The STO is aggregating statewide trail data from VDOT TMPD, DCR, and other partners to build this database. The Resource Hub will be hosted on an online ESRI GIS platform, with its first iteration expected to go live in Fall 2025.

Virginia Trail Type and Surface Selection Guide

The Virginia Trail Type and Surface Selection Guide is nearing completion and is expected to be finalized by the end of 2025. This guide provides context-sensitive surface selection guidance for a range of trail types across the Commonwealth. It outlines each trail type, recommends suitable surfaces, and identifies anticipated user groups. The guidance will be incorporated into the VDOT Road Design Manual (RDM).

The STO will continue coordinating and collaborating with DCR and members of the STAC as these efforts move forward.

Transportation Alternatives Program

VDOT's LAD also administers the federal reimbursement-based Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), which occurs every two years. TAP provides funding through a competitive grant process for projects that expand non-motorized travel choices, such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

The 2022 State Budget directed the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) to set aside \$7 million in FY23 and \$7 million in FY24 from funds received for TAP under 23 USC 133(h) for regional multi-use trails.² [3]. The \$14 million was allocated to 18 trail projects, with priority given to new regional trails, projects that improve connectivity of existing trail networks, and projects that promote geographic diversity in trail location.

The 2025 funding cycle is now underway, with numerous trail proposals currently under review.

Committee Progress Report

The State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) met twice during Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. The first meeting was held virtually on November 14, 2024, and the second was held in person at the VaULT Land and Conservation Greenways Conference on April 29, 2025. Holding one virtual meeting each year allows broader participation.

Fall 2024 STAC Meeting

The meeting was held virtually on November 14, 2024, and 33 members attended, along with 6 DCR staff and 3 VDOT staff. The meeting included updates from VDOT's STO and two member reports. The first member report was presented by the Virginia Creeper Trail Conservancy describing the impacts to the Virginia Creeper Trail from the damage caused by Hurricane Helene. The second was a report by the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, which provided information regarding the wayfinding and amenities study for the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail.

The VDOT update included the STO website and Resource Hub, updates to the State Trails Plan, the Trail Design Guide, and cost guidelines.

The meeting also included an online poll to adopt the updated Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) document that was presented to the membership at the previous meeting. The SOP document was passed as presented.

² Commonwealth of Virginia Legislative Information System, *State Budget 2002 Special Session I Budget Bill – HB30 (Chapter 2)*, <https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/item/2022/2/HB30/Chapter/1/452/>

It included procedures for committee size, member appointment procedures, voting, meeting logistics, and member organized sub-committees.

2025 STAC Meeting

Over 50 people attended the STAC meeting at the Virginia United Land Trusts meeting in Lynchburg on April 29, 2025.

DCR staff members presented the newly released 2024 Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP). The presentation included information on how to use the online plan for obtaining information on recreation in Virginia. Also included was information on demographics, survey data, and grant funding. The VOP is available online at the website <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/vop>.

The VDOT STO updated the membership on the current state of progress on General Assembly-identified trails, a trail surfacing study, ongoing work on the Resource Hub and the Trail Design Guide.

The presentations were followed by an informal session, during which attendees had the opportunity to speak with the presenters and ask questions.

Future STAC Meetings

In keeping with previous years, the next STAC meeting will be held virtually in November 2025 and by an in-person meeting in the spring of 2026. Spring meetings are held in conjunction with the Virginia United Land Trusts' Land Conservation and Greenways Conference, which will be held in Newport News.

Conclusion

The State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) was first established in 2015 in accordance with the requirements of [§ 10.1-204.1](#) to assist the Commonwealth in developing and implementing a statewide system of attractive, sustainable, connected, and enduring trails. Since that time, the role of trails has continued to evolve. In this last reporting year, as evidenced in the preceding Staff and Committee reports, numerous initiatives have been undertaken, resulting in significant financial, staff, and advocacy investments in Virginia trails, with multiple agencies working toward establishing new trails and filling gaps in existing trail networks.

Commonwealth staff supported trail development through the Recreation Trails and Transportation Alternatives programs. As the VDOT State Trails Office progresses on the state trails plan and other initiatives, DCR will continue to provide guidance and help coordinate with them and other partners. In addition to the initiatives undertaken by Commonwealth staff, the STAC met once virtually and once in person in FY25.