OFFICE OF WORKING LANDS PRESERVATION ANNUAL REPORT

A program of the Virginia Department of Forestry

Robert W. Farrell
State Forester
Virginia Department of Forestry

Dec. 1, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In compliance with Virginia Code § 10.1-1119.2 (see Appendix 5), the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) assumed the duties of the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) on July 1, 2024. This change resulted in the formation of the new Office of Working Lands Preservation (OWL). OWL now manages both the former OFP responsibilities and DOF's existing easement program, continuing all activities previously handled by the Forestland Conservation team. This annual report highlights the key achievements of OWL during the period of Dec. 1, 2024, to Nov. 30, 2025.

Significant accomplishments for OWL during this reporting period include the following:

- Continued to work with key agriculture, conservation, and government partners to refine and improve the programs previously administered by OFP, such as the allocation process for state matching funds to local purchase of development rights (PDR) programs;

- Allocated $437,500 in Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) state matching funds to six local PDR programs;

- Worked with local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs to permanently preserve 206.26 acres (five easements) of working farm and forest land. OWL provided $682,429.72 of the $1,069,567.78 total purchase price and transaction costs paid for these easements;

- Through DOF's open-space easement program, conserved five properties totaling 2,181 acres of land;

- Re-established agreement with Virginia Cooperative Extension to reimburse VCE for the farm and forest legacy planning workshops conducted to help landowners and professional service providers transition existing agricultural and forestal operations;

- Hosted, in coordination with the Virginia Farm Bureau and other key partners, a strategic planning session to determine the future of the Virginia Farm Link Program.

Overview

Section 10.1-1119.2 of the Virginia Code requires the State Forester to submit a written report on the operation of OWL to the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources by Dec. 1 of each year.

The following are the specific powers and duties of OWL as established in § 10.1-1119.2 of the Code of Virginia:

"1. To develop, in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, the American Farmland Trust, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Virginia Association of Counties, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension, (i) model policies and practices that may be used as a guide to establish local purchase of development rights programs; (ii) criteria for the certification of local purchase of development rights programs as eligible to receive grants, loans, or other funds from public sources; and (iii) methods and sources of revenue for allocating funds to localities to purchase agricultural and forestal conservation easements;

2. To create programs to educate the public about the importance of farmland and forestland preservation to the quality of life in the Commonwealth;

3. To provide technical, professional, and other assistance to farmers on matters related to farmland and forestland preservation;

4. To provide technical, professional, and other assistance to local governments interested in developing additional farmland and forestland preservation policies and programs. Such policies and programs shall include (i) use value assessment and taxation pursuant to §§ 58.1-3230 and 58.1-3231; (ii) transfer of development rights pursuant to Article 7.1 (§ 15.2-2316.1 et seq.) of Chapter 22 of Title 15.2; (iii) agricultural and forestal districts pursuant to Chapter 43 (§ 15.2-4300 et seq.) of Title 15.2; and (iv) establishment of local lease of development rights; and

5. To administer the Virginia Farm Link Program established pursuant to § 10.1-1119.4."

In addition, the office administers the allocation of state matching funds to local PDR programs:

> "State grants shall be distributed to local purchase of development rights programs under policies, procedures, and guidelines developed by the Office of Farmland Preservation. In general, for each $1 in grant moneys awarded by the Office, the applicable local purchase of development rights program of the county or city shall be required to provide a $1 match. However, as part of these policies, procedures, and guidelines developed by the Office, the Office shall include incentives that recognize and encourage counties and cities participating in use value taxation pursuant to Article 4 (§ 58.1-3229 et seq.) of Chapter 32 of Title 58.1."

In establishing OFP and, subsequently, OWL the General Assembly created a program to address two challenges that threaten the future viability of Virginia's agriculture industry sector. The first of these challenges is an aging farm population coupled with the difficulty young prospective farmers face when seeking to enter the profession. The average principal farm operator in Virginia is 59.2 years of age, and more than 40 percent of principal farm operators are aged 65 or older. There are five times as many producers over the age of 65 as there are under the age of 35. According to the American Farmland Trust (AFT), nationwide, 371 million acres of agricultural land owned by aging landowners is expected to change hands over the next 15 years.

The second challenge relates to the continued loss of farm and forest land to developed uses in Virginia. In 2020, AFT released a report entitled "Farms Under Threat: the State of the States" that analyzed nationwide data to determine the total loss of agricultural land. Nationally, between 2001 and 2016, 11 million acres of farmland and ranchland were converted to urban and highly developed land use (UHD) or low-density residential land use (LDR). UHD represents what is typically thought of when discussing development – the urban and suburban creep surrounding established urban centers. LDR represents the conversion of agricultural land to large-lot housing development. AFT's analysis found that LDR often leads to UHD development. In addition, AFT created the Nationally Significant farmland designation to identify the most productive, versatile, and resilient land for sustainable food and crop production. AFT found that between 2001 and 2016, 4.4 million acres of Nationally Significant land were converted to UHD and LDR land uses.

In Virginia, 339,800 acres of agricultural land were converted to UHD or LDR land uses between 2001 and 2016. Significantly, 80 percent of that conversion (272,900 acres) was to LDR land use, which fragments the agricultural land base and limits the production, marketing, and management options for the remaining working landscape. Agricultural land located in LDR areas in 2001 was seven times more likely to convert to UHD by 2016, indicating the importance of land use policies that help keep working landscapes intact. Notably, these data do not include the growing threat of conversion to non-residential development, including utility-scale solar, which is a growing industry in Virginia.

These data illustrate a decreasing amount of farmland available for agricultural use in Virginia over time, which has the potential to adversely impact the agricultural industry and Virginia's economy. Agriculture remains Virginia's largest industry. AFT estimated that the farmland converted between 2001 and 2016 into UHD or LDR land uses in Virginia was sufficient acreage to generate $164 million in annual revenue, not including income derived from agritourism activities. This loss also results in increased fragmentation of the remaining farm and forest land. Farmers and foresters will continue to face increasing threats as land prices increase, and fragmentation expands.

In 2004, DOF initiated the Forestland Conservation Program to develop and hold open-space easements on forestland properties. In 2025, DOF recorded five new easements in Amelia, Charlotte, Floyd, and Greensville counties that total 2,181 acres permanently conserved (see Appendix 3). At the conclusion of FY25, DOF held 234 easements on 99,850 acres across Virginia. Approximately 54% of the properties under DOF easement include agricultural operations in addition to forestland. DOF also has a longstanding partnership with VCE to offer the Generation NEXT program to landowners seeking education about the tools and practices to best ensure their properties will remain in production and in family ownership. With the creation of OWL within DOF, Virginia now has a unified resource for landowners and localities seeking assistance on all matters related to the conservation of the Commonwealth's farms and forestland.

In 2025, OWL added two members from staff previously housed under the Watershed Team at DOF: the Potomac Sentinel Landscape Coordinator and the Tidewater Sentinel Landscape Coordinator. These federally funded positions support the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, which was founded in 2013 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense, and Department of Interior. The partnership aims to prevent encroachment on military missions, increase working lands, build resilience against climate-induced hazards, conserve key habitats, benefit water quality, and protect threatened species. The program at DOF seeks to protect Virginia's Security Corridor by conserving its natural resources and connecting landowners with conservation easement programs.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The following are the accomplishments of OWL during the reporting period of Dec. 1, 2024 to Nov. 30, 2025:

ADMINISTERING PDR MATCHING FUNDS

Since its establishment in 2007, OFP staff has worked with local governments, farm and conservation organizations, and other interested parties to establish local PDR programs, which compensate landowners who permanently preserve their land by voluntarily placing a perpetual conservation easement on the property. Twenty-two (22) local PDR programs exist to date in Virginia, six of which have some level of current local funding available.

OFP worked with key stakeholders to develop a two-part certification process for the use of state PDR matching funds. The first part was a certification of the amount of local matching funds that the locality had available for its PDR program. The second part was an application to certify the elements of the local PDR program based on *A Model Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program for Virginia* developed by the State Farmland Preservation Task Force in 2005.

During FY25 state matching funds grant round, OWL allocated $437,500. Localities had until Nov. 22, 2024, to submit their fiscal and program certification forms. Six localities met the fiscal and certification deadline for FY 2025 funding. These six localities certified that they had a total of approximately $30.3 million in non-state funding ($4.0 million in FY25 and $26.3 million from previous years) available to match state funds. The allocations for FY25 were awarded to localities in January 2025 (see Appendix 1).

Localities have up to two years from the execution of the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to close on approved agricultural conservation easements. Typically, localities are afforded a six-month extension to complete and document approved agricultural conservation easements. To mitigate potential disruptions during the transition from OFP to OWL, localities with unspent FY 2023 funds were granted an additional extension. In 2022, the standard IGA template was amended to allow a year-long extension of funds if the funds are committed to an easement purchase also leveraging funding from the National Resources Conservation Service Agriculture Land Easement program. PDR managers requested this change as a result of sometimes lengthy delays during the federal review process.

During the reporting period, $682,429.72 in state matching funds from the Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund (the Fund) were used in part to permanently protect 206.26 acres (five easements) in partnership with local PDR programs. The total purchase price and transaction cost paid for these easements was $1,069,567.78. Since the program's inception in 2007, a total of $14.0 million in state matching funds from the Fund have been used in part to permanently protect 15,208 acres (121 easements) in partnership with 16 local PDR programs (see Appendix 2).

Since assuming the responsibilities of the office, DOF is currently in the process of allocating to local PDR programs the $437,500 available for the FY 2026 grant round. Staff are currently working with the localities to review and approve their applications and deed templates.

PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND EDUCATION ON FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Since the establishment of OFP in 2007, staff have been asked to provide technical assistance to local and state governments, agricultural and conservation organizations, individual landowners and farmers, and others interested in learning more about farmland preservation in Virginia. The recent transition of OFP to OWL presents an opportunity to reevaluate approaches to stakeholder engagement and reach a wider audience.

The following outlines efforts by OFP and OWL to provide technical assistance and outreach on farmland and forestland preservation issues from Dec. 1, 2024 to Nov. 30, 2025:

Workshops/Presentations: OWL delivered 10 workshops/presentations to a wide variety of audiences. Topics included PDR programs, farmland preservation tools and techniques, conservation easements, the Virginia Farm Link program, the Century Farms and Forests programs, future programming for OWL, onboarding of new staff, and Generation NEXT (see Appendix 4).

Outreach: OWL staff conducted outreach directly to landowners, localities, and to partners including the Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia United Land Trusts, Virginia Cooperative Extension, through engagements such as conferences, presentations, and strategic planning initiatives (see Appendix 4).

Committees: OWL staff represented VDACS and DOF as members of the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) Interagency Taskforce, which is administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. OWL staff provided updates to the grant manual, reviewed and scored all of the Farmland and Forestland category grants, and presented the projects recommended for funding to the VLCF board on Nov. 3, 2025.

Website: DOF has developed new web resources to support the functions previously maintained by OFP. With the assistance of Communications staff, OWL has created a landing page for its programs on the DOF website, providing information about the office itself, restriction of development rights programs, Generation NEXT and Virginia Farmlink, and conservation easements. The programs of the office can now be found at DOF.Virginia.gov/land-water-protection/farm-and-forestland-conservation.

Landowner phone calls/emails: OWL communicated with numerous landowners and farmers interested in understanding the range of options for permanently protecting their land. OWL also fielded numerous calls and emails from farm owners and farm seekers interested in the Virginia Farm Link program and the Virginia Century Forest and Farm programs.

VIRGINIA FARM LINK PROGRAM

The office is charged with administering the Virginia Farm Link program. Pursuant to Virginia Code § 3.2-202, the purpose of the Virginia Farm Link program is to do the following:

> ". . .provide assistance to retiring farmers and individuals seeking to become active farmers in the transition of farm businesses and properties from retiring farmers to active farmers. Such assistance shall include, but not be limited to, (i) assistance in the preparation of business plans for the transition of business interests; (ii) assistance in the facilitation of transfers of existing properties and agricultural operations to interested buyers; (iii) information on innovative farming methods and techniques; and (iv) research assistance on agricultural, financial, marketing, and other matters."

The Virginia Farm Link program's core component has long been its accompanying website. In 2020, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation (VFBF) initiated a partnership to modernize and expand this resource. This collaborative effort culminated in the launch of a new website, virginiafarmlink.org, in 2021 with the assistance of a contracted third-party web developer.

Following the transfer of program responsibilities from OFP to OWL, staff re-engaged VFBF in support of the program. After gathering essential feedback from Farm Link users and partnering organizations, it became clear that a comprehensive strategic planning initiative was necessary to accurately assess the website's efficacy, evaluate the program's overall impact, and determine its long-term viability.

In October 2025, DOF and VFBF co-convened a strategic planning meeting. Attendees included several landowners and representatives from VDACS, the American Farmland Trust, the Conservation Fund, Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and Virginia Cooperative Extension. The group affirmed that the core objective of Virginia Farm Link remains a worthwhile and vital endeavor. However, it was determined that the program must be reimagined and restructured to better support the needs of Virginia's farming families, necessitating a greater commitment to investment, partnership, and collaboration.

The strategic group is committed to continuing its efforts to improve Farm Link, with a follow-up meeting scheduled for December 2025.

Throughout 2025, OWL continued to support farmland and forestland transition efforts in re-establishing its agreement with VCE for farm and forestland legacy workshops.

VIRGINIA AGRICULTURE LICENSE PLATES

Chapter 653 of the 2004 Acts of Assembly established a new revenue-generating license plate for supporters of Virginia agriculture. As established in Virginia Code § 46.2-749.102, the annual fee for the Virginia agriculture plate is $25 in addition to the prescribed fee for state license plates. For each $25 fee collected in excess of 1,000 registrations, $15 is credited to a special non-reverting fund known as the Virginia Agricultural Vitality Program Fund established within the Department of Accounts. The revenue generated by this fee is paid annually to the office and to date has been used to fund projects primarily related to the Virginia Farm Link program.

VIRGINIA CENTURY FARM AND FOREST PROGRAMS

In October 2010, OFP was assigned the administration of the Virginia Century Farm program, which honors and recognizes those Virginia farm families whose land has been in the same family and actively farmed for more than 100 years. In July 2024, along with all of the other duties associated with OFP, OWL assumed responsibility for the program.

In April 2025, DOF and VDACS entered into an MOU to re-assign the administration of the Virginia Century Farm Program back to VDACS. As of Nov. 15, 2025, there are now 1,610 certified Century Farms on record since the beginning of the program in 1997.

DOF continues to administer the Virginia Century Forest program, which was established in 2016 to recognize those individuals and families who have made a long-term commitment to enhancing the environment and protecting the quality of life for their fellow Virginians through forestry. As of Nov. 15, 2025, there are 68 certified Century Forests on record.

APPENDIX 1

FY25 ALLOCATIONS FOR LOCAL PDR PROGRAMS

Locality	**Local Funds Available** **(As of Nov 2024)**	**Previous State Funds Remaining** **(As of Nov 2024)**	**FY25 State Funds Awarded**
City of Chesapeake	$2,400,127.20	$340,400.00	$73,628.57
County of Clarke	$321,893.15	$319,335.00	$73,628.57
County of Fauquier	$4,259,972.00	$340,400.00	$73,628.57
County of Shenandoah	$99,214.34	$48,000.00	$69,357.15
County of Stafford	$1,185,588.67	$340,400.00	$73,628.57
City of Virginia Beach	$21,996,824.00	$340,400.00	$73,628.57
TOTAL	**$30,263,619.40**	**$1,728,935.00**	**$437,500.00**

APPENDIX 2

TOTAL ACRES PROTECTED WITH STATE PDR MATCHING FUNDS

AS OF NOV. 15, 2025

Locality	Easements	Acres Protected	*Local Funding	*State PDR Funding	*Other Funding
Albemarle County	17	2,829.51	$2,850,255.20	$2,101,799.89	$0.00
City of Chesapeake	6	267.51	$2,259,766.90	$991,958.95	$0.00
Clarke County	44	3,364.909	$1,438,008.24	$1,438,005.73	$3,248,973.50
Fauquier County	16	4,277.43	$2,867,060.07	$2,284,815.43	$100,000.00
Frederick County	1	89.75	$5,000.00	$130,027.00	$260,000.00
Goochland County	1	500.93	$155,623.50	$155,623.50	$0.00
Isle of Wight County	3	585.40	$1,794,862.79	$1,547,744.21	$0.00
James City County	5	476.16	$1,775,974.11	$994,967.24	$0.00
Northampton County	3	637.25	$139,578.10	$139,578.10	$1,376,000.00
Rappahannock County	2	343.23	$157,431.00	$156,666.00	$0.00
Shenandoah County	2	308.87	$100,000.00	$100,000.00	$525,000.00
Spotsylvania County	2	115.70	$93,072.65	$93,072.65	$147,500.00
Stafford County	9	657.2342	$2,121,817.67	$1,853,905.93	$428,450.00
City of Virginia Beach	8	534.40	$2,849,768.61	$1,887,987.43	$0.00
Warren County	1	50	$64,745.00	$64,745.00	$0.00
Washington County	1	161.24	$41,000.00	$41,000.00	$190,426.00
TOTAL	**121**	**15,208.52**	**$18,713,963.84**	**$13,981,897.06**	**$6,276,349.50**

*Includes easement purchase price and in some cases incidentals such as surveys, title insurance, appraisals, reasonable legal fees, etc.

APPENDIX 3

FY25 ACRES PROTECTED THROUGH DOF'S OPEN-SPACE EASEMENT PROGRAM

Locality	Easement Name	Acres Protected	*Easement Value	*State Funding	*Federal Funding
Amelia County	Stony Point	133	$437,800	-	-
Charlotte County	TCF-Smith	67	$71,000		$71,000
Charlotte County	TCF-Burwell	600	$600,000	-	$600,000
Greensville County	Purgatory Creek	252	$277,000	-	-
Floyd County	Taylor's Mill	1129	$1,242,500	$495,000	-
TOTAL		**2,181**	**$2,628,300**	**$495,000**	**$671,000**

* Easement values are calculated using a qualified appraisal, which are not required for donated easements. State and federal funding sources include the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program.

APPENDIX 4

PRESENTATIONS AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

*DEC. 1, 2024, TO NOV. 30, 2025

- Attended the Rappahannock Landscape Conservation Workgroup session in Orange, Virginia, hosted by the Rappahannock River Roundtable. OWL staff explored opportunities for regional collaboration and growth with partnering organizations (Feb. 25, 2025)

- Presented at the VAULT Land Conservation and Greenways Conference in Lynchburg, Virginia. OWL staff presented topics such as solar regulations and mitigation and convened with conservation professionals and partner organizations to discuss issues impacting easements in the Commonwealth (April 28-30, 2025).

- Collaborated with VCE to host four Generation NEXT Workshops across Virginia (Abingdon, Montpelier, Farmville, and Tidewater). OWL staff provided insights into the easement program at DOF, cost share opportunities, and local conservation programs such as Land Use Valuation, Agricultural and Forestal Districts and Purchase of Development Rights programs (May, August, October and November 2025).

- Presented to the public at Secretary Lohr's Beginning Farm Finance and Conservation Planning Seminar in Suffolk, Virginia. OWL staff shared information regarding DOF cost share programs, conservation easements, and other opportunities for farmers (Sept. 25, 2025).
- Hosted a virtual webinar for local PDR programs explaining the new process for the State PDR Matching Funds program. In 2025, OWL staff worked to incorporate the application process into an online portal, via the System Access Portal for Forestry Grants (Sept. 29, 2025).

- Attended the Virginia United Land Trust's fall retreat to share OWL program updates with the gathering of other agency conservation staff and land trust staff. (Sept. 30, 2025)

- Convened a strategic planning group with representatives from VCE, VFBF, VDACS, VASWCD, the Conservation Fund, and others to determine the viability of Virginia Farm Link and future opportunities to serve landowners (Oct. 27, 2025).

APPENDIX 5

ARTICLE 2.1: OFFICE OF WORKING LANDS PRESERVATION.

§ 10.1-1119.2. Office of Working Lands Preservation established.
A. The Office of Working Lands Preservation is established in the Virginia Department of Forestry under the supervision of the State Forester.

B. As used in this article, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Fund" means the Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund.

"Office" means the Office of Working Lands Preservation.

2024, cc. 10, 146.

§ 10.1-1119.3. Powers and duties of the Office; Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund.
A. The Office shall have the following powers and duties:

1. To develop, in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, the American Farmland Trust, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Virginia Association of Counties, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension, (i) model policies and practices that may be used as a guide to establish local purchase of development rights programs; (ii) criteria for the certification of local purchase of development rights programs as eligible to receive grants, loans, or other funds from public sources; and (iii) methods and sources of revenue for allocating funds to localities to purchase agricultural and forestal conservation easements;

2. To create programs to educate the public about the importance of farmland and forestland preservation to the quality of life in the Commonwealth;

3. To provide technical, professional, and other assistance to farmers on matters related to farmland and forestland preservation;

4. To provide technical, professional, and other assistance to local governments interested in developing additional farmland and forestland preservation policies and programs. Such policies and programs shall include (i) use value assessment and taxation pursuant to §§ 58.1-3230 and 58.1-3231; (ii) transfer of development rights pursuant to Article 7.1 (§ 15.2-2316.1 et seq.) of Chapter 22 of Title 15.2; (iii) agricultural and forestal districts pursuant to Chapter 43 (§ 15.2-4300 et seq.) of Title 15.2; and (iv) establishment of local lease of development rights; and

5. To administer the Virginia Farm Link Program established pursuant to § 10.1-1119.4.

B. State grants shall be distributed to local purchase of development rights programs under policies, procedures, and guidelines developed by the Office. In general, for each $1 in grant moneys awarded by the Office, the applicable local purchase of development rights program of the county or city shall be required to provide a $1 match. However, as part of these policies, procedures, and guidelines developed by the Office, the Office shall include incentives that recognize and encourage counties and cities participating in use value taxation pursuant to Article 4 (§ 58.1-3229 et seq.) of Chapter 32 of Title 58.1.

C. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund. The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. The Fund shall consist of all moneys appropriated to it by the General Assembly and such moneys as may be made available from any other source, public or private. All moneys shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Fund. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used solely for the purposes of carrying out the provisions of this article. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the State Forester.

2024, cc. 10, 146.

§ 10.1-1119.4. Virginia Farm Link Program.
The Virginia Farm Link Program is hereby established in the Office to assist retiring farmers and individuals seeking to become active farmers in the transition of farm businesses and properties from retiring farmers to active farmers. Such assistance shall include (i) assistance in the preparation of business plans for the transition of business interests; (ii) assistance in the facilitation of transfers of existing properties and agricultural operations to interested buyers; (iii) information on innovative farming methods and techniques; (iv) research assistance on agricultural, financial, marketing, and other matters; and (v) assistance in locating conservation programs aimed at improving water quality.

2024, cc. 10, 146.

§ 10.1-1119.5. Reporting requirements.
The State Forester shall submit a written report on the operation of the Office by Dec. 1 of each year to the Chairmen of the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources. The provisions of this article shall not preclude local purchase of development rights programs established pursuant to the Open-Space Land Act (§ 10.1-1700 et seq.) from being eligible to receive grants, loans, or other funds from public sources.

2024, cc. 10, 146.

§ 10.1-1119.6. Review of capital projects and availability of working lands.
In preparing its report on each major state project, as required in Article 2 (§ 10.1-1188 et seq.) of Chapter 11.1, each state agency shall demonstrate that it has considered the impact that project would have on the availability of working farm and forest lands as required in § 10.1-1119.7, and has adequately considered alternatives and mitigating measures. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, in conducting its review of each major state project, shall ensure that such consideration has been demonstrated and shall incorporate its evaluation of the effects that project would have on the availability of working farm and forest lands in its comments to the State Forester and Governor. The procedures for review of highway and road construction projects established in accordance with subsection B of § 10.1-1188 shall include provisions

requiring that the factors listed in § 10.1-1119.7 are considered as part of the review of each project.

2024, cc. 10, 146.

§ 10.1-1119.7. Characteristics to be considered in evaluating impacts on farm and forest lands.

A. In preparing environmental impact reports in accordance with § 10.1-1119.6, state agencies shall consider the impact of the major state project on all farm and forest lands that:
1. Have soil classified as capability class I, II, III, or IV;

2. Have an exceptional combination of physical characteristics for the production of food, feed, fiber, forest products, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerable soil erosion;

3. Are valuable for production of specific high-value food and fiber crops, such as fruits, vegetables, and nursery crops and have a special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality or high yields of such crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods;

4. Are of statewide or local importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forest products, forage, or oilseed crops;

5. Have been recognized under a state program such as the Clean Water Farm Award Program or the Century Farm Program or Century Forest Program;

6. Are part of an agricultural or forestal district or are participating in a use value assessment and taxation program for real estate devoted to agricultural, horticultural, or forest use in accordance with the provisions of Article 4 (§ 58.1-3229 et seq.) of Chapter 32 of Title 58.1; or
7. Make a significant contribution to the local economy or the rural character of the area where the land is located.

B. The governing body of each locality, with the cooperation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, may designate the important farmlands within its jurisdiction. In designating important farmlands the governing body shall demonstrate that adequate provision has been made for nonagricultural uses within its jurisdiction.

C. As used in this article, "farmland" includes all land defined as follows:

"Important farmland," other than prime or unique farmland, is land that is of statewide or local importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, nursery, oilseed, or other agricultural crops, as determined by the appropriate state agency or local government agency, and that the U.S. Department of Agriculture determines should be considered as farmland for the purposes of this article;

"Prime farmland" is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, nursery, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerable soil erosion. Prime farmland includes land that possesses the above characteristics but is being used currently to produce livestock and timber. It does not include land already in or committed to urban development or water storage; and

"Unique farmland" is land other than prime farmland that is used for production of specific high-value food and fiber crops, as determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality or high yields of specific crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.

2024, cc. 10, 146.