

NVCT was proud to work with State Senator Dave Marsden (D-37) to move a critical piece of legislation through the Virginia State Assembly over the last two months. The bipartisan bill made much needed improvements to the incredibly successful Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) grant program that we and so many other conservation organizations utilize to protect natural lands across the Commonwealth. Most notably, this legislation increases Virginia Indian Tribe accessibility to VLCF dollars and puts a greater emphasis on meeting the needs of under-served communities that lack park and outdoor recreation resources. Governor Youngkin is expected to sign the legislation into law in the coming weeks and we look forward to working on its implementation with the state's Department of Natural Resources.

VLCF legislative improvements – Senate Bill 31 (Marsden)

This bill makes a number of relatively small changes to what is fundamentally a successful program. The Virginia Land Conservation Foundation has provided grants for over 20 years, protecting working and natural lands across the Commonwealth. The bill increases accessibility to tribes and makes it more flexible for grantees to complete conservation projects.

Tribal participation:

- **What:** The bill gives Virginia Indian Tribes a larger role in the program by adding a board member to represent Tribes and by making Tribes eligible for grants.
- **Why:** VLCF can help Tribes restore their homelands and conserve them for future generations.

Adding flexibility to requirements for funded projects:

- **What:** Currently, an easement acquired with VLCF dollars must be co-held by a public body, and any land acquired must also be protected by a conservation easement held by a public body. The bill would allow accredited land trusts to hold easements without a co-holder and would allow VLCF to accept a reversionary interest rather than requiring a publicly-held easement.
- **Why:** There is a need for additional avenues for ensuring that VLCF projects protect land in perpetuity. Many public bodies do not consider co-holding to be an effective use of their limited resources. In addition, there was no accreditation mechanism for land trusts when the co-holding requirement was adopted.

VLCF Board to adopt goals and place greater emphasis on meeting needs of under-served communities:

- **What:** Requires the board's annual report to include goals and funding needs for each type of land eligible for grants as well as under-served communities.
- **Why:** To provide better information annually that the General Assembly can use to make funding decisions, similar to what exists now for water quality programs that fund stormwater projects and agricultural best management practices.

Pre-application:

- **What:** Removes a provision adopted in 2019 that required VLCF to hold grant rounds in advance of appropriations being made.
- **Why:** The agency has been unable to implement this provision as intended.

