

Trends

No Data Available

## Legend:

▲ Increase, 
 ▼ Decrease, 
 ➔ Steady

Key Performance Areas

No Data Available

Productivity

No Data Available

## Legend:

▲ Improving, 
 ▼ Worsening, 
 ➔ Maintaining

For more information on administrative key, and productivity measures, go to [www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/agencylevel/index.cfm](http://www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/agencylevel/index.cfm)

Background & History

The State Commission on Conservation and Development was established by the 1926 General Assembly. The original Commission consolidated the powers and duties of the Water Power and Development Commission, State Geological Commission, State Geological Survey, State Geologist, and the State Forester. In 1938 the Commission became the Virginia Conservation Commission and in 1948 was renamed the Department of Conservation and Development. In 1958, the Department became the Department of Conservation and Economic Development (DCED) and DCED contained divisions that addressed: Forestry, Mineral Resources, Parks, Water Resources, Industrial Development, Public Relations and Advertising. In 1984, economic programs were relocated within state government and DCED became the Department of Conservation and Historic Resources (DCHR). In 1989, following the establishment of Historic Resources as a separate state agency, DCHR became the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). By the early 1990s, DCR responsibilities included Stormwater Management, Dam Safety, State Parks, Natural Heritage, and Land Conservation. On July 1, 2013, programs related to stormwater management, permitting, erosion and sediment control, and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, which were housed in DCR's Stormwater Management Division, were transferred to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

DCR works with localities and farmers to minimize nonpoint source pollution into Virginia's waters and the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. The Agency also provides for the proper and safe design, construction, operation and maintenance of dams. DCR manages 36 state parks of which many have newly constructed or renovated cabins, camping, meeting facilities, and visitor centers. It also identifies, inventories, and protects rare plants, animals, and communities and maintains a database of these resources. In the area of land conservation, DCR serves as a central contact, repository, and clearinghouse for land conservation interests in Virginia. DCR also manages eight regional offices.

Primary Product & Services

NONPOINT POLLUTION PREVENTION. DCR works closely with the state's 47 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, farmers, urban and suburban landowners, and other land managers to control runoff pollution. DCR provides tools and information to the 47 local Districts and provides financial assistance to these Districts and farmers to protect Virginia's waterways and to facilitate good conservation practices.

DAM SAFETY. DCR, through the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, requires each owner of a regulated *high, significant, or low* hazard dam to apply for an *Operation and Maintenance Certificate*. It administers funds to provide for qualified dam rehabilitation, dam break inundation zone mapping, and floodplain projects proposed by local governments and private entities in order to advance public safety and infrastructure protection.

STATE PARK/NATURAL AREAS/OPEN SPACE. DCR develops, manages, and protects Virginia's State Park System, Natural Area Preserve System, and 530 miles of trails. DCR is responsible for creating and updating the *Virginia Outdoors Plan*, which is the Commonwealth's comprehensive outdoor recreation and open space planning document, and it provides grants and technical assistance related to land use and outdoor recreation.

NATURAL HERITAGE. DCR is responsible for the identification, protection, and stewardship of Virginia's natural heritage resources, which are defined as the habitat of rare, threatened, or endangered plant and animal species, rare or state significant natural communities, or geologic sites. DCR maintains a database of this information that helps customers perform environmental assessments of proposed developments.

LAND CONSERVATION. DCR administers a statewide land conservation grant program through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation. It also verifies the conservation value of donations of real property interests for which donors request state land preservation tax credits of \$1 million or more.

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BOARD STAFFING. DCR provides staffing for the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, the Board of Conservation and Recreation, and the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, as well as the Cave Board, which is an advisory board.

### Customer Base

DCR has a broad range of customers, ranging from millions of state park visitors to Soil and Water Conservation Districts, farmers, dam owners, the land conservation community, and local governments. DCR expects to see continued growth in citizen awareness and interest in nonpoint source water quality programs, land conservation, and use of state parks and natural area preserves.

### Customer Listing

No Data Available

### Key Agency Statistics

The statistics below provide a snapshot of major DCR program activities. For the number of jobs resulting from state park operations, the figure is derived from a model developed by the National Park Service that looks at factors such as park visitation, park spending, and employment.

### Finances

As provided for in the Appropriation Act (State Budget), DCR's financial resources come from a mixture of funds. For fiscal year 2014, approximately 37 percent of the department's budget comes from the state's General Fund, 10 percent from the federal government, and 53 percent from nongeneral funds from other sources.

On July 1, 2013, major functions in the Stormwater Management Division were transferred to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). As a result of this transfer, DCR's financial resource base has changed, as approximately \$2.1 million in general fund support and \$9.2 million in nongeneral funds were transferred to DEQ, along with 83 salaried positions.

DCR continues to provide financial assistance to 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts to address significant agricultural water quality problems and also provides financial assistance to dam owners in the form of grants and loans from the Dam Safety and Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund.

DCR also manages a capital budget for improvements and acquisitions of state parks and natural areas. The capital improvement program is funded primarily via General Obligation Bonds (GOB). In 2002, GOB initiatives provided \$119 million for capital improvements and land acquisition. Other non-GOB capital projects include the repair and renovation of state park and Soil and Water Conservation District dams, valued at approximately \$30 million, the phase one development of High Bridge State Park (valued at approximately \$7.5 million), the phase one development of Powhatan State Park (valued at approximately \$7.5 million), and the phase one development of Widewater State Park (valued at approximately \$7.5 million).

### Fund Sources

No Data Available

### Revenue Summary Statement

Fees are assessed for numerous services provided at the 36 Virginia state parks such as cabin and campground rentals or parking. These fees are used to support operations and to meet customer demand for services.

Revenues from the recordation tax are used to support the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund, which is a subfund of the Water Quality Improvement Fund. The funds are disbursed, via Soil and Water Conservation Districts, for agriculture best management practice cost share programs, in accordance with state law. The revenues dedicated to the Natural Resources Commitment Fund

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consist of 50 percent of a \$20 fee collected on every deed.

Visitors to the State Parks System pay admission and parking fees. Fees are also charged for services such as cabin rentals, camping, swimming, boat and canoe rentals, and special events. The funds collected are used to support the State Parks System.

### Key Risk Factors

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NONPOINT POLLUTION PREVENTION. DCR continues to provide programmatic and financial support to Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts) in order to reduce nonpoint source pollution, which is typically generated from agricultural, silvicultural, and urban runoff sources. DCR recognizes that local Districts have limited resources and need both financial and technical assistance from DCR. Within its existing resource base, DCR will continue to provide consistent funding for targeted agricultural conservation practices and provide technical implementation assistance to ensure that pollution reduction practices are employed efficiently and effectively. This assistance is critical in order for Virginia to meet pollution reduction goals outlined in Virginia's federally-approved Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and other total maximum daily loads. Within its available resources for fiscal years 2014 and 2015, DCR is providing 100 percent funding for farmers and landowners using stream exclusion practices, which entails keeping livestock away from streams. Stream exclusion is a key practice under the WIP and provides significant local water quality benefits by reducing bacteria impairments and reducing sediment and nutrient pollution.

DAM SAFETY. As part of the DCR's efforts to protect the public and infrastructure within dam break inundation zones, DCR continues to identify a growing number of dams that should be regulated. Through DCR's efforts, several hundred additional dams have been identified and DCR expects that Virginia may ultimately have at least 2,000 dams that will meet the minimal size requirements for regulation once the inventory is completed. Virginia is geographically located in an area that experiences intense storms. This fact, coupled with an inventory of aging dams and more dams lying in high risk areas, demonstrates the importance of continuing to support Virginia's Dam Safety Program.

DCR is currently examining the rehabilitation of Soil and Water Conservation District high hazard dams. There are 12 Districts that are responsible for 104 dams constructed by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Since many of these NRCS dams are reaching the end of their maintenance agreements with Districts, a plan needs to be developed to rehabilitate approximately 50 high hazard dams.

STATE PARKS. In July of 2013, Powhatan State Park officially opened, bringing the number of state parks in the Commonwealth to thirty-six. Land has also been acquired for five additional parks, which are Widewater (Stafford County), Seven Bends (Shenandoah County), Middle Peninsula (Gloucester County), Mayo River (Henry County), and Biscuit Run (Albemarle County). Each state park, including those not yet developed, has (or will have) an adopted master plan identifying facilities needed to bring the park to its desired level of development. There are over 300 major capital projects identified in these publicly-developed plans. Increased demand for services from customers has required DCR to use a combination of seasonal and year-round wage employees and volunteers, and DCR continues to look for ways to meet continued demands within existing resources. Also, there is a need for continued capital improvements to the State Parks System to address general maintenance and infrastructure improvements. In fiscal year 2014, DCR will receive more than \$2.2 million to address general park maintenance and this level of funding represents an ongoing need to address critical maintenance issues.

NATURAL HERITAGE AND NATURAL AREA PRESERVE SYSTEM. Virginia has some of the most biologically sensitive habitats and species populations in the world, and DCR manages the state's Natural Heritage database. As of October 2012, 27 percent of the community and species information in this database is over 25 years old; therefore, DCR continues to seek creative solutions to this aging data problem.

Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System, managed by DCR, has grown significantly in the past ten years and this growth has largely occurred due to expansion because of resources provided in the 2002 State Park and Natural Areas Bond package. The expanding size of the Natural Area Preserve System has increased demands on existing staff for biological resource management such as invasive species control, managed hunts, prescribed burning, and law enforcement. Management complexity has increased due to more required oversight of easements and Natural Area Preserve System boundaries, and the need for increased public access. As public demand for access increases, a corresponding need arises for construction and regular maintenance of bridges, gates, signs, and trails. DCR continues to look ways to creatively manage this demand within existing resources.

GENERAL OPERATIONS. Limitations on staffing and funding have presented challenges to the operations and programs in state parks (including law enforcement), natural heritage, dam safety, and programs delivered to Soil and Water Conservation Districts. DCR continues to look for innovative solutions to address adequate staffing within its existing general and nongeneral fund resource bases. DCR also has recognized that its information technology platform needs internal restructuring to enhance operations, particularly in light of recent program changes. This restructuring has already begun within the scope of existing resources.

### Performance Highlights

**NONPOINT POLLUTION PREVENTION.** In fiscal Year 2014, DCR is able to provide more than \$30 million in funding to Soil and Water Conservation Districts for local operational costs and to assist farmers with implementing effective practices to reduce pollution. DCR works with the farming community, local Districts, and federal agencies to expand and target cost-effective agricultural priority conservation practices (i.e., livestock exclusion and nutrient management) that improve water quality. DCR also continues to pursue necessary levels of funding and technical support to Districts and farmers to meet pollution reduction targets in Virginia's WIP.

**DAM SAFETY.** DCR, upon approval from the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, makes grants or loans to local governments and private entities for the purpose of providing matching funds for flood prevention or protection in order to ensure public safety. Over the past three years, 278 grants have been awarded for a total of \$3.7 million to assist dam owners and localities with improvements to their dams and flood protection projects. DCR has also undertaken an initiative to locate dams of regulated size using aerial photography, topography, and field visits. DCR also uses a system to provide for early warning alerts to emergency responders and dam owners, in order to ensure public safety.

**STATE PARKS.** Virginia's parks have garnered 82 awards. Customer satisfaction is high, with around 93 percent of survey respondents rating their park experience as good or excellent in 2012. In 2001, the State Parks System was awarded the National Gold Medal for excellence in park and recreation management by the National Sporting Goods Association's Sports Foundation, in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association. The State Parks System is currently a finalist for the 2013 National Gold Medal Award again for excellence in park and recreation management, with the award to be determined in the fall of 2013. In 2012, there were over 8.3 million visitors to state parks, which is a seven percent increase over 2011. Working with private sector partners, DCR is actively pursuing the construction of a mountain bike trail at Pocahontas State Park. This venture is expected to bring millions of dollars in economic activity to Virginia as this bike trail will serve as a key ongoing legacy project of the Richmond 2015 UCI Road World Championships. The Virginia Association for Parks has embarked on a major fundraising campaign to create new exhibits at 11 state park visitor centers.

In addition to opening Powhatan State Park in 2013, DCR has also been working in a public private partnership at Shenandoah River/Andy Guest State Park to add a zipline ropes adventure course. The first phase of the project is currently under construction with the expectation that the entire project will be completed by 2014.

**NATURAL HERITAGE AND NATURAL AREA PRESERVES.** The Flora of Virginia Project was begun in 2001 to create a new flora, or plant life inventory, for Virginia as the first flora was published in the mid-1700s. The new *Flora of Virginia* was published in November 2012 by the Flora Project, with DCR as its key partner. It describes nearly 3,200 plant species native to or naturalized in Virginia. This publication will be used by botanists, ecologists, planners, and environmental consultants and had been designated as the official textbook for plant taxonomy at James Madison University. DCR has also significantly expanded its Natural Area Preserve System, which now comprises 61 preserves and 51,678 acres, supporting 390 different and rare species and natural communities.

**LAND CONSERVATION.** DCR will continue to further the Commonwealth's land conservation progress by assisting land owners, land trusts, and other agencies, by organizing educational workshops and conferences for land conservation professionals, providing state-of-the-art land conservation planning information, tracking conserved lands, providing matching grants through the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, and reviewing state land preservation tax credits as required by state law.

DCR has also developed the Commonwealth's first comprehensive, continually maintained a Geographic Information System (GIS) data layer for Virginia's protected conservation lands. This database includes mapped boundaries and attributes for public and certain private lands having various conservation, recreation, and open-space roles.

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES.** A key performance measure tracked by DCR is the number of acres conserved statewide for land conservation purposes. In the second quarter of fiscal year 2010, the Governor established a goal of 400,000 acres over a four-year period, ending in January of 2014.

Performance Measures

## Management Discussion & Analysis

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### General Information about the Ongoing Status of the Agency

DCR continually examines methods to improve services to customers while controlling costs in an environment of limited resources and increasing demands. Following the transfer of certain Stormwater Management Division programs to DEQ in fiscal year 2014, DCR reorganized its remaining nonpoint pollution prevention program to focus on effective pollution reduction practices, such as the use by farmers and other stakeholders of resource management plans and nutrient management plans. In addition to protecting the safety of the public and landowners through the enforcement of the Virginia Dam Safety Act, DCR is also working with customers to perform simplified analyses to determine whether certain dams could qualify for a low hazard classification and thus reduced and streamlined regulatory requirements.

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DCR also continues to add capital improvements to existing state parks and to design new state parks and anticipates updating a minimum of eight State Park Master Plans every year. Within existing resources, DCR maintains a comprehensive Conservation Lands database and continues to build a nationally-recognized Natural Heritage database. It also continues to respond to requests for land conservation information from the general public, other state agencies, land trusts, legal and real estate experts, and landowners.

### Information Technology

DCR relies heavily on Information Technology (IT) for day-to-day central operations that serve all of its divisions and that effectively meet the needs of citizens and stakeholders. DCR's systems also track payments to Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts for cost-share and operational support.

In support of its customers, DCR uses IT to model land use practices used in the clean-up of the Chesapeake Bay and to assist Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the implementation of best management practices on farm land and in the use of nutrient and resource management plans for agricultural planning. IT resources also track all identified dams in Virginia in order to determine hazard status and the level of compliance to protect public safety. DCR uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to support the cataloging of information on rare species and natural communities in the area of natural heritage. GIS data are also used for planning improvements to State Parks and Natural Areas. DCR's IT platform also supports a State Parks reservation center that enhances visitorship. A system is also being developed to address DCR real estate information. DCR continues to work to meet to ensure that all database information is tied together so that information is shared on a timely basis with decision makers.

### Workforce Development

As of June 30, 2013, there was an 18 percent vacancy rate at DCR. Almost 10 percent of the current workplace is eligible for retirement with full benefits. DCR will ensure that its workforce has the environment in which to adapt to frequently changing demands and the problem-solving and analytical skills needed to respond promptly to demands from the public and to complex issues.

On July 1, 2013, specified water quality programs pursuant to Chapters 756 and 793 of the 2013 Virginia Acts of Assembly were transferred to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). When the transfer took place, 83 full-time positions were provided to DEQ along with 2 wage and 16 contract employees. The transfer left DCR with a maximum employment level of 452 salaried positions, and as of July of 2013, 80 of these positions were vacant. Much of DCR's wage workforce provides seasonal help needed in the 36 state parks.

### Physical Plant

Providing and maintaining adequate funding will be necessary in order for DCR to properly maintain and continue to grow its State Park System and its Natural Area Preserve System. The 2002 Parks and Natural Areas Bond and the 2008 Virginia Public Building Authority Bond have created a significant expansion to State Parks and Natural Area Systems. These expansions require public access and facilities development funds. The 2013 General Assembly authorized additional bond projects for Powhatan State Park, Widewater State Park, and for new cabins at various state parks.

In 2013, DCR's central office in Richmond consolidated to one location. Prior to this consolidation, DCR's offices were located in four separate buildings in the State Capitol area rather than in one unified location.