



Tomorrow Woods Forest Conservation Values Reward Program

Landowner Payment Program

Forestry Topic 18

www.dof.virginia.gov

February 2014

The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) has a unique funding program in some areas of Virginia called Tomorrow Woods. The goal of this program is to conserve, establish and enhance forests, with a focus on productive, private working forests. One of VDOF's goal is to work with landowners to protect large blocks of these working forests by keeping them intact and unfragmented through the development of an agreement called a conservation easement. Forest conservation easements protect the ability of current and future landowners to manage their forestland for a sustainable flow of natural goods and services in perpetuity. The Tomorrow Woods program provides funding after the easement is recorded based on the property's forest attributes and easement enhancements selected by the landowner.

The Tomorrow Woods program will operate until funds are expended.

What is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a government agency or land trust that permanently limits future development of the land to protect its conservation values. The terms of the easement are negotiated between the landowner and the organization that will hold the easement, in this case, the VDOF. The terms of the easement are perpetual and apply to all future landowners. The organization holding the easement is responsible for ensuring the easement's terms are followed.

Conservation easements limit the division of the property. However, depending on the size and nature of the property, and the conservation values being protected, it may be possible for the landowner to retain the right to build one or more additional structures, or exercise one or more divisions.

Landowners continue to own, use and control their land, and can sell it or pass it on to heirs. Easements generally allow for the continuation of current uses, such as forest management, agriculture, hunting and fishing. Easements do not require landowners to provide public access.



Landowner Eligibility

The Tomorrow Woods program funding is available to forest landowners and non-profit organizations that own land in the following localities:

- ◆ Amelia, Appomattox, Brunswick, Buckingham, Chesterfield, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Gloucester, Goochland, Greensville, Isle of Wight, Lunenburg, Mathews, Mecklenburg, Middlesex, Nottoway, Powhatan, Prince Edward, Prince George, Southampton, Surry, Sussex and York counties
- ◆ Albemarle, Fluvanna and Louisa counties outside the Rivanna River basin
- ◆ City of Suffolk

Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMOS), Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) and publicly-traded forest industry companies are not eligible.

To participate in the Forest Conservation Values Reward Program, a conservation easement must be recorded.

Minimum Criteria

- ◆ Minimum parcel size of 50 acres with 75 percent forest cover unless the parcel contains more than 100 acres of forest.
- ◆ Forest Stewardship Management Plan or equivalent plan.
- ◆ Potential conservation easements must conform to the locality's comprehensive plan.

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- ◆ Division rights that would have been permitted in the terms of the conservation easement agreement, but were forfeited.
- ◆ Percent forest cover that is rated High Forest Conservation Value

VDOF's Forest Conservation Specialist will calculate the total reward with a **maximum amount of \$20,000**.

Benefits of Donating an Easement

- ◆ Preserves the natural, scenic and historical integrity of their land forever.
- ◆ Establishes a legacy for the landowner's children, grandchildren and subsequent generations.
- ◆ Peace of mind knowing that the land will always be protected from development.
- ◆ Federal and State tax benefits including Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credits (LPTCs).*

Virginia LPTCs are limited on an annual basis, and are provided to landowners on a first-come, first-served basis. Landowners wishing to claim state tax credits in the year their easement is recorded are strongly encouraged to begin development of their easement early in that year.

*VDOF does not give tax advice. Please check with your tax advisor or attorney about qualifying for any tax benefits associated with conservation easements.

Payment Determination

The Forest Conservation Values Reward Program amount is based on the following criteria:

- ◆ Percent of the forest that is protected by the terms of the conservation easement agreement
- ◆ Property acreage
- ◆ Forest management history
- ◆ Percent forest cover

Other Tomorrow Woods Program Benefits

In addition to the land conservation funding, the Tomorrow Woods program also provides landowners with forest establishment, livestock exclusion fencing and forest enhancement incentives. These incentives are available to eligible landowners in the program area, with higher levels of funding provided to land protected by a conservation easement. Please contact your local area forester for more information.

For more information regarding VDOF's Forestland Conservation Program and the Tomorrow Woods Forest Conservation Values Reward opportunity, please contact:

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