



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Contacts:**

Michelle Stoll, Virginia Department of Forestry, (434) 282-4014, [michelle.stoll@dof.virginia.gov](mailto:michelle.stoll@dof.virginia.gov)

Ann Simonelli, The Conservation Fund, (703) 908-5809, [asimonelli@conservationfund.org](mailto:asimonelli@conservationfund.org)

**Images & Map:** <https://bit.ly/3jml7JJ>

### **LAND SECURED FOR VIRGINIA'S NEWEST STATE FOREST**

*The Conservation Fund transfers more than 2,500 acres to the State, ensuring sustainable forest management, protecting wildlife habitat and water quality, and providing recreational access*

**CHARLOTTE COUNTY, Va. (Dec. 3, 2020)** — The [Virginia Department of Forestry](#) (VDOF) and [The Conservation Fund](#) announced today the protection of 2,531 acres of working timberland near the town of Drakes Branch. The land will ultimately become part of Virginia's 26<sup>th</sup> state forest, Charlotte State Forest, and the first publicly accessible state land in Charlotte County.

“Land conservation and retaining forests and farmland are top priorities of the Northam Administration,” said **Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring**. “This property has a rich legacy of forest and wildlife stewardship. The shared vision and dedication among all partners will honor that history while safeguarding water quality along the Roanoke Creek for future generations.”

The 2,531 acres have been sustainably managed for nearly a century for timber resources, high quality wildlife habitat and water resources. Prior to The Conservation Fund's purchase in 2019 through its [Working Forest Fund](#)®, the forest was owned by Thomas Bahnson Stanley, the Commonwealth's 57th governor, and subsequently the Stanley Land and Lumber Corporation, providing shortleaf and Virginia pine, as well as white oak and hickory to local mills for furniture.

Located along Saxkey Road, a designated Virginia Scenic Byway, the upland forests feature critical foraging and potential roosting habitat for federally threatened northern long-eared bats, and the wetlands provide exceptional waterfowl habitat. Now under VDOF ownership, the land will continue to be sustainably harvested for timber under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and American Tree Farm Standards (ATFS), while conserving key habitat areas and providing new public access to outdoor recreation activities, like fishing, hunting and birdwatching.

“We know forests are the key to clean drinking water, vital habitat and provide an abundance of benefits to public health,” said **Virginia State Forester Rob Farrell**. “We are proud of the fact that Virginia's state forests have achieved sustainable certification from SFI and ATFS and pleased that this property in Charlotte County will also be managed to protect and sustain the forest resources while continuing to support the local economy.”

Charlotte State Forest includes approximately 13 miles of the Roanoke and Wards Ford Creeks—two tributary streams to the Roanoke River, a designated Virginia Scenic River. VDOF plans to acquire an additional 2,500 adjacent acres currently owned by The Conservation Fund, creating the fifth largest SFI-certified state forest in the Commonwealth.

“The creation of a new state forest on the Stanley land celebrates a long legacy of well-managed working forests,” said **Heather Richards, Virginia state director for The Conservation Fund**. “We are honored to assist the Commonwealth in the protection of these timberlands to support local forestry jobs, protect key wildlife habitat and provide new public recreational access for a variety of activities in Charlotte County.”

Federal, state and private funding allowed VDOF to acquire the forestland from The Conservation Fund, including from the USDA Forest Legacy Program through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), VDOF mitigation funds, additional LWCF Stateside grant funding administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR), the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) Forest Community Opportunities for Restoration and Enhancement (CORE) Fund, and the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation also administered by DCR.

“The U.S. Forest Service is proud to support and partner with the Virginia Department of Forestry to have this historic and environmentally diverse tract added to the Forest Legacy Program,” said **Susan Granbery, Forest Legacy and Community Forest and Open Space Program Leader for the U.S. Forest Service Southern Region**. “Virginia’s Forest Legacy projects have helped to protect more than 19,000 acres of forest land in the commonwealth, increasing the benefits that forests provide to the public.”

Virginia’s U.S. Congressional delegation representing Charlotte County—U.S. Senator Mark Warner, U.S. Senator Tim Kaine, and U.S. Representative Denver Riggleman—supported the use of federal LWCF funding for this project.

“I’m excited to know that the residents of Charlotte County will have, for the first time, publicly-accessible land that will be preserved for future generations of Virginians. The preservation of over 2,000 acres of working timberland will safeguard vital habitats and provide outdoor recreation opportunities to support the local economy,” said **Senator Mark R. Warner**. “This type of project is exactly why I fought so hard for the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, which provided full and permanent funding for the Land Water and Conservation Fund. I congratulate all the parties involved and thank them for their tireless work to establish Virginia’s newest state forest.”

“I’m excited to see the Virginia Department of Forestry and The Conservation Fund taking this significant step to protect our Commonwealth’s rich history and beautiful landscapes,” said **Senator Tim Kaine**. “Not only will the new Charlotte State Forest ensure our water quality and wildlife habitats are preserved, but it will also provide Virginians with additional public outdoor recreation opportunities.”

“I am proud to support federal funding for the LWCF to make this project possible,” said **Congressman Denver Riggleman**. “Funding the Forest Legacy Program is an essential part of making sure that we protect our precious natural resources, including the Charlotte State Forest.

This is great news for Charlotte County and the 5th District, and I look forward to seeing how my constituents enjoy all of the beautiful resources that this landscape has to offer.”

The Conservation Fund worked with Goldman Sachs to issue the nation’s first green bond solely dedicated to conservation in the United States. Capital from the bond and a loan from the Richard King Mellon Foundation enabled the nonprofit’s purchase of this land as part of 7,888 acres from Stanley in 2019. Its temporary ownership has and continues to provide the State time to determine and secure funding for permanent conservation strategies on most of the land. The Conservation Fund is seeking public and private support to protect the remaining 2,679 acres with conservation easements and a third addition of 368 acres to the state forest. The protection of these additional lands will further secure tributaries to the Roanoke River.

“Around 50,000 visitors to the nearby Staunton River Bridge Battlefield State Park experience these historic forests via canoe and kayak each year,” added **Richards**. “The permanent protection of these lands and their forested river buffers along the Roanoke River will ensure their experience in perpetuity. We’re also grateful for the continued support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, a national leader and advocate for the protection of environmentally sensitive areas through the financing of land acquisition.”

**Sam Reiman, director of the Richard King Mellon Foundation**, said: “The Foundation's partnership with The Conservation Fund spans more than 30 years, and together we have protected nearly 3.7 million acres in all 50 states. This important project in Virginia demonstrates the Fund’s innovative approach to conservation finance and working forest protection, one that has attracted for-profit investment via its green bonds—an affirmation that holds great promise for future land conservation, and that is testament to both the soundness of our conservation strategies, and the Fund's ability to deliver on projects.”

“The Charlotte County Board of Supervisors supports the establishment of Charlotte State Forest and the opportunity to better connect the public to the outdoors in our own community,” said **Chairman of the Charlotte County Board of Supervisors Garland H. Hamlett, Jr.** “This is a rare opportunity for Southside Virginia that protects the environment and benefits the public.”

Virginia forests contribute \$21 billion annually to the state’s economy. Forestry is the third leading industry in the Commonwealth, employing more than 108,000 Virginians in forestry, forest products and related industries. Charlotte County is located within the state’s highest timber producing region. The river, stream and wetland resources on these forests drain into Kerr Lake, which provides drinking water to nearly 500,000 residents in Virginia and North Carolina.

“VOF is excited to support the creation of this new state forest with a grant from our Forest CORE Fund,” said **VOF Executive Director Brett Glymph**. “Public-private partnerships such as these exemplify the spirit with which VOF was established in 1966, and we thank The Conservation Fund and VDOF for their visionary leadership.”

#### **About the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF)**

The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 108,000 Virginians employed

in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide an overall economic output of more than \$21 Billion annually.

Headquartered in Charlottesville, the Agency has forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide citizen service and public safety protection across the Commonwealth, which it's been doing now for more than 100 years. VDOF is an equal opportunity provider.

### **About The Conservation Fund**

At The Conservation Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states since 1985 to protect more than eight million acres of land, including more than 77,000 acres in Virginia. Through our Working Forest Fund®, we aim to permanently conserve five million acres of at-risk working forests to mitigate climate change, strengthen rural economies and protect natural ecosystems. Learn more at [www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org) and [www.workingforestfund.org](http://www.workingforestfund.org).

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