

ALERT—ALERT—ALERT!!!

The Natural Heritage Program within the Department of Conservation and Recreation needs your help ASAP! It is in desperate need of an increase in its budget to manage Virginia's beautiful Natural Area Preserve System. As you know better than most citizens, Virginia's natural areas protect some of the Commonwealth's rarest natural communities and rare species habitat. Since 2002, 29 new Natural Area Preserves, and an additional 35,000 acres have been added to the system, but the budget and staff needed to manage these areas has not kept pace. In fact, Natural Heritage's budget has been cut over the previous ten years.

Over the past three months the Virginia Native Plant Society, through several influential members (Suzanne Jenkins, Alan Ford, Nancy Sorrels and Marcia Mabee), successfully persuaded several key Members of the Virginia legislature to introduce House and Senate FY 2015-16 budget amendments to increase Natural Heritage's budget so that 26 new staff can be added and other costs met.

If your Delegate or Senator is a member of the all important House Appropriations Committee or Senate Finance Committee we need you to contact them TODAY by email or phone. Here is the message:

To Your Delegate: Please support Del. Kilgore's Natural Heritage Budget Amendment, item 358 #3h to increase funding to manage Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System. The number and acreage of natural area preserves has doubled since 2002, but the funding to manage the system has not kept pace and has even been cut. Today, just 40 staff manage this vital public resource compared with 48 staff in 2002. Visiting natural area preserves is the fourth most popular outdoor activity in Virginia, but some preserves have had to close due to lack of resources. Natural Heritage desperately needs 26 additional full-time staff, as well as other operational support. Please support Del. Kilgore's budget amendment. Thank you.

To Your Senator: Please support Sen. Watkins' Natural Heritage Budget Amendment, item 357 #4s to increase funding to manage Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System. The number and acreage of natural area preserves has doubled since 2002, but the funding to manage the system has not kept pace and has even been cut. Today, just 40 staff manage this vital public resource compared with 48 staff in 2002. Visiting natural area preserves is the fourth most popular outdoor activity in Virginia, but some preserves have had to close due to lack of resources. Natural Heritage desperately needs 26 additional full-time staff, as well as other operational support. Please support Sen. Watkins' budget amendment. Thank you.

To check whether or not your Delegate or Senator is a member of the Appropriations or Finance Committee go here: <http://hodcap.state.va.us/publications/2015HouseCommitteeChart.pdf> and here: <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?151+com+S5>

To access your Delegate and Senator's contact information go here: <http://viriniageneralassembly.gov/>

NOTE: If your Delegate is Terry Kilgore, please thank him for sponsoring the Natural Heritage amendment in the House. If your Senator is John Watkins, Creigh Deeds, Janet Howell, or Emmet Hanger, please thank him or her for sponsoring the Natural Heritage amendment in the Senate.

BACKGROUND: For background reading, attached is a letter to General Assembly members that VNPS drafted and circulated to conservation groups urging support for a budget amendment to increase funding for Natural Heritage by \$3,169,129. As you can see, 22 groups signed onto the letter.

ONE FINAL THING TO DO – EMAIL ME, OR CALL ME, AND LET ME KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION -- WHEN AND WITH WHOM. THANK YOU!!!

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