Call to Action

Critical Virginia state budget amendments for statewide positions

<u>What</u>: Critical Virginia state budget amendments to fund Department of Natural Heritage staff, including one Natural Areas Botanist, one State Invasive Species Biologist/Coordinator, and one State Pollinator Biologist are up for a vote right now.

<u>Why</u>: Division of Natural Heritage needs additional funds to adequately protect and manage Virginia's biodiversity, allow for public access to Natural Area Preserves, successfully execute Governor Northam's *ConserveVirginia* initiative, and update their biological data to make good decisions for environmental reviews.

Synopsis (Identical for House and Senate Versions):

These amendments would provide the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program with \$2,062,352 in salary and operating expenses for twenty two full time positions. Positions include: two Regional Stewards, seven Stewardship Technicians, one State Invasive Species Biologist/Coordinator, one State Invasive Species/GIS Field Technician, one Prescribed Fire Manager, one Natural Areas GIS/Information Specialist, one State Pollinator Biologist, one Natural Areas Botanist, one Natural Areas Zoologist, one Environmental Review Specialist, one Grants and Contracts Coordinator, two Land Protection Specialists, one Conservation Planner/Lanscape Ecologist, and one Healthy Waters Coordinator.

These positions will enable staff to provide public access to some Natural Area Preserves (NAP) in accordance with adequate resource management while boosting efforts to manage the natural heritage resources that NAPs are established and managed to protect. Also positions added will provide data analysis and consultation to support environmentally responsible solar and pipeline energy development; strategic application of Governor Northam's ConserveVirginia land conservation strategy; the Commonwealth's Pollinator Protection Strategy; invasive species information and coordination and land protection and restoration projects under the South-River DuPont settlement and Skiffes Creek Settlement.

Official names of Amendments:

House of Delegates:

- Critical Staffing Needs for DCR: Public Access, Natural Areas Stewardship, and Conserve VA (<u>Item 373 #10h</u>, Chief Patron: Delegate Plum, Co-Patron: Carr and Gooditis)
- Critical Staffing Needs for DCR: Public Access, Natural Areas Stewardship, and Conserve VA (Item 373 #3h, Chief Patron: Delegate Willett, Co-Patron: Sickles)

State Senate:

- Critical Staffing: Public Access, Natural Areas Stewardship, and Conserve VA (Item 373#2s, Chief Patron: Hanger)

What can I do?

Natural Resources Subcommittees on the Virginia House Appropriations Committee and Virginia Senate Finance Committee need to see support from their constituents.

The time to act is now. It is best if they can hear from you by **Wednesday, January 29, 2020.** This is ashort deadline. Still send in your support ASAP if you miss Wednesday's deadline, but for greatest impact aim for Wednesday, January 29.

1. Find the contact information for your state senator AND delegate at:

https://whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov/

2. Send them both an email, write, call, or visit with their staff expressing your support for this amendment. Since the deadline on this is short, we recommend that you CALL or EMAIL your representative.

Subject line (Emails):

For Delegates:

Support Item 373 #2H and Item 373 #10H Budget Amendment for Critical Staffing Needs for DCR: Public Access, Natural Areas Stewardship, and Conserve VA

For Senators:

Support Item 373 #2S Budget Amendment for Critical Staffing: Public Access, Natural Areas Stewardship, and Conserve VA

First line (Email/Phone Call):

For Delegates:

I'm writing/calling in support of item 373 #2H and item 373 #10H Budget Amendment for Critical Staffing Needs for DCR: Public Access, Natural Areas Stewardship, and Conserve VA introduced by Delegates Plum and Willett.

For Senators:

I'm writing/calling in support of item 373 #2S Budget Amendment for Critical Staffing: Public Access, Natural Areas Stewardship, and Conserve VA introduced by Senator Hanger.

Email Content Suggestions/Phone Call Talking Points (Note: we recommend writing your own letter – form letters are not as persuasive:)

- Virginia has a well-developed Invasive Species Management Plan, but very little funding for its implementation.
- Since 2002 the number and acreage of Virginia's preserves has doubled, while the number
 of full time staff to manage them has decreased from 48 to 43. As a result North Landing
 NAP has been closed for lack of staffing. Difficult Creek, Crow's Nest, and many other
 preserves have not had adequate public access facilities put in place.
- Not funding will delay progress in restoration activities on NAPs and lead to loss of natural heritage resources across Shenandoah Valley and Southeast regions. Maintenance of public access facilities, monitoring and management of rare species populations and natural communities, prescribed burning, and invasive species management will all be deferred in these regions as well.
- Without funding there will continue to be missed opportunities to interface with the public and assure safe public access to existing and new preserves. There will also be missed opportunities to collaborate with partner agency staff towards the conservation and management of all natural resources and public lands.

- Without funding there will be the lost opportunity of gathering the science and data towards better understanding Virginia's native pollinators their habitat needs and developing and implementing pollinator management strategies.
- 3. The following Delegates and Senators are of particular importance, as they determine whether the amendments reach the floor. If you are their constituent, your opinion could make a large impact in seeing that these amendments are properly considered. However, expressing support to representatives not on these committees can't hurt.

House of Delegates Appropriations Committee (Chair in Bold)

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