

FY27 Grant Manual

Adopted June 9, 2026

Virginia Land Conservation
Foundation

Administered by the Virginia Department of
Conservation and Recreation



I. GRANT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Since 1999, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (Foundation or VLCF), established under Va. Code §§ 10.1-1017 through 10.1-1026, has funded land conservation projects throughout the Commonwealth. The Foundation administers, manages, and holds competitive grant rounds from the Virginia Land Conservation Fund, Va. Code § 10.1-1020 (Fund).

The Foundation administers the Fund to provide grants to state agencies, other public bodies, qualifying nonprofits and state-recognized and federally recognized Virginia Indian Tribes. The grant funds can be used for the costs associated with permanently conserving land throughout the Commonwealth, including the purchase of development rights. VLCF grants are awarded only for acquiring interests in property that have not yet been permanently protected. There are five grant categories set out in Va. Code § 10.1-1020 (D): farmland preservation; forestland conservation; historic area preservation; natural area protection; and open spaces and parks.

VLCF Funds have been awarded to protect more than 198,000 acres across Virginia.

The Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, serving as Administrative Secretary and assisted by an interagency task force, is charged with administering, reviewing, and making recommendations on grant applications to the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources and the Foundation. Using specific criteria defined in each grant category, grants may be awarded for up to 50 percent of total project costs. The program can pay up to 100 percent of these costs for state agencies and eligible Virginia Indian Tribes, Va. Code § 10.1-1020 (A)(2).

Guiding factors for distribution of VLCF funds are set out in Va. Code §§ 10.1-1020 and 1021.1, which specify that at least one third of the funds shall be used to secure open-space easements to be held or co-held by a public body, and that the Foundation shall seek to achieve a fair distribution of land protected throughout the Commonwealth. Additionally, the state budget customarily specifies that no less than 50 percent of the VLCF funds shall be used for projects that provide public access.

The scoring criteria continue to place emphasis on providing grants to underserved communities and areas that have not previously benefited from VLCF grants. The Foundation strives to provide a fair distribution of public access and recreational opportunities, and to preserve open space, natural landscapes, and working lands across the Commonwealth. Additionally, the scoring criteria give precedence to projects that are within ConserveVirginia, as those lands are identified as conservation priorities by our state agency partners and other collaborators. There are seven categories within ConserveVirginia: (i) agriculture and forestry, (ii) natural habitat and ecosystem diversity, (iii) floodplains and flooding resilience, (iv) cultural and historic preservation, (v) scenic preservation, (vi) protected landscapes resilience, and (vii) water quality improvement. All conservation values identified by the applicant in the grant application must be protected in the easement.

Important Program Information

Note: We welcome Virginia's state and federally recognized tribes to apply for VLCF grants. During the application process, VLCF staff is available to provide technical support and guidance (see page 7 for contact information). Since federally recognized tribes are sovereign entities, please contact staff to discuss your proposed project and planned means to conserve the land in perpetuity. Staff will work with each tribe who receives a grant award on a case-by-case basis to incorporate appropriate language that meets required VLCF protections into the final project.

Eligible Applicants

- Applications may be submitted by state agencies, localities, other public bodies, state-recognized and federally recognized Virginia Indian Tribes and registered (tax-exempt) nonprofit organizations that qualify as a holder under Va. Code § 10.1-1009.

Eligible Projects

- Eligible projects must be for acquiring fee-simple title or conservation and open-space easements for the perpetual protection of ecological, cultural or historical resources, lands for recreational purposes, and lands for threatened or endangered species, fish and wildlife habitat, natural areas, agricultural and forestal lands and open space. Projects must protect land in perpetuity through recordation of a conservation easement and/or an open-space easement, or dedication under the Open-Space Land Act.
- If the proposed project seeks reimbursement for the fee acquisition of a property, then the acquisition cannot occur prior to the application deadline for this grant cycle.

- No application relying on eminent domain shall be considered, as Va. Code § 10.1-1023 prohibits the use of VLCF funds to acquire any property interest through eminent domain.
- Projects must be for a minimum of \$20,000 in total expense, or a grant request of no less than \$10,000.
- Applicants must demonstrate that the landowners have been notified and are receptive to the proposed project. Applicants must submit, as part of their application, a signed letter from all of the landowners indicating their willingness to conserve the property.
- The proposed project must be for specific property that meets the criteria for one or more of the five grant categories listed below. Applications that do not identify specific property boundaries will not be considered.
- Only one application may be submitted for a specific property in each grant round.
- Applications for the acquisition of easements on lands currently permanently protected for conservation purposes are not eligible for a VLCF grant unless the project proposes to further protect the property by a more restrictive easement.

Eligible Costs

- The VLCF program can reimburse up to 50% of the appraised value of the subject property (fee simple or easement) and eligible due diligence costs for transactions involving localities or qualified nonprofit organizations, or 100% of such costs incurred by state agencies or state-recognized and federally recognized Virginia Indian Tribes. See Appendix A for eligible expenses.
- If the required 50% match is not determined at the time of the application, a letter confirming that the match will be met must be included with the application. See example letter in Appendix C.
- Possible sources of match funding include: (i) cash or pass-through dollars from other sources, e.g. grants awarded from sources other than VLCF; (ii) bargain sales, i.e., the monetary value of the donated portion of the property; or (iii) other conserved property acquired in fee or restricted by an easement within the previous two years, and not acquired with VLCF funds, so long as the match property is also restricted as approved by VLCF.
- When additional property is proposed as match in a grant application, the match property must be in the proximity of or ecologically connected to the property that is the subject of the grant. The match property must also be protected in the same

manner as the grant property; information on the match property must be included in the application; all due diligence items are also required for the match property.

- Indirect costs cannot be reimbursed or considered as match. These ineligible costs include, without limitation, staff time, overhead, work provided pro bono, or maintenance/operating costs of lands and facilities.

Project Requirements

- If the applicant uses the landowner's surname in the name of the project, then they must first obtain the landowner's permission. VLCF will use the project name provided in the application in public reports to the Governor and the General Assembly and press releases.
- A nonprofit organization seeking to hold an easement must provide documentation in its application that it meets the holder requirements in the Virginia Conservation Easement Act, Va. Code §§ 10.1-1009 to 10.1-1017.
- All nonprofit organization projects, whether fee simple or easement, must be protected by an open-space easement held by a public body (e.g., a state agency or local governmental entity) in perpetuity pursuant to Va. Code § 10.1-1020 (A)(2). A letter from the public body stating that it is willing to consider holding the easement or owning the property in fee must be included with the application.
- VLCF requires certain property protections to further statewide environmental conservation goals, including permanent vegetated riparian buffers on all funded projects with perennial water resources. Additional points may be awarded for greater protections proffered in an application. These protections must be preserved in perpetuity by the deed associated with the project. See Appendix D for all of the required provisions and further information on riparian buffers.
- For projects awarded funding, the requisite public body holder shall include language in the fee-simple deed or in the easement deed that states that the property will be taken under the Open-Space Land Act, Va. Code §§ 10.1-1700 through 10.1-1705, and that the protection is perpetual and not extinguishable except pursuant to the provisions of the Open-Space Land Act.
- Properties acquired in fee or made subject to an easement as a result of a VLCF grant may not be diverted or converted from the approved use for which the grant was made. If a conversion or diversion occurs or if an easement is terminated, then VLCF must be reimbursed for the loss of conserved land. The amount of reimbursement shall be a percentage of the appraised value of the property interest acquired with VLCF funds. The following formula shall be used to calculate the percentage of

reimbursement to VLCF: (full amount of the VLCF grant ÷ appraised value of the property interest at the time of the grant) × 100. As a condition of its grant, the VLCF requires that language be included in the deed of acquisition or easement to such effect.

- If a nonprofit organization is awarded a grant to acquire fee-simple property, it may be sold only if it remains under easement and the VLCF is reimbursed for its proportionate share of the fair market value at the time of the sale (percentage of VLCF reimbursement outlined in the deed × the fair market value of the property at the time of the sale). The fair market value of the property must be supported by a current appraisal. An exception to reimbursing VLCF may be granted if the property is transferred to a public agency and the recorded deed of transfer states the agency agrees to hold and manage the property for the purposes for which it was originally acquired.
- All projects awarded VLCF funds must submit the due diligence documents and invoices specified in Appendix A.
- Grant payments are made as a reimbursement and cannot exceed the amount expended by the grant recipient.
- Grant recipients are required to submit monitoring reports on completed projects to VLCF every five years upon request.

II. APPLYING TO THE GRANT PROGRAM

Applicants may apply to the program in our Grant Management Portal found here: <https://vadcr.webgrantscloud.com/index.do>. Applicants should read through this entire grant manual to become familiar with program specifics and requirements. Please contact staff with questions as you work through the information. We recommend applicants contact the respective category/agency representative found on pages 7-17 below, prior to submitting their application.

Application Information and Deadline

A complete application includes all of the information and documents required by the Grant Management Portal, and as outlined in this Grant Manual. The complete application must be submitted to the Department of Conservation and Recreation no later than **5 p.m. on Friday, August 21, 2026**.

Questions?

- WebGrants Management Portal, ConserveVirginia, GIS, or mapping questions:
 - Gina DiCicco at (804) 837-1819, gina.dicicco@dcr.virginia.gov
 - Damian Martin at (804) 971-0257, damian.martin@dcr.virginia.gov
- General application inquiries:
 - Suzan Bulbulkaya at (804) 371-5218, suzan.bulbulkaya@dcr.virginia.gov
- Category-specific inquiries: See contact information listed under each category below.

Application Categories and Statewide Priority Scoring

1. Farmland and Forestland Preservation
2. Historic Area Preservation
3. Natural Area Preservation
4. Open Spaces and Parks
5. Statewide Priority Scoring

Applicants must select one primary category for their project. A secondary category may also be chosen to increase the possibility of receiving funds but is not required. If you choose a secondary category, make sure to contact the listed agency staff to ensure your project is also eligible under the secondary category. Multiple applications for the same project within the same grant round will not be accepted.

NOTE: The applicant is advised to review the program requirements below carefully as they prepare their application and to determine the best category for their project. See Appendix B for the scoring sheets for each category and the Statewide Priority Scoring for all categories. To get a sense for how your project will score, use the scoring sheet to calculate points under your chosen category **and** the Statewide Priority Scoring criteria. **Make sure your application addresses all the applicable category criteria and the Statewide Priority Scoring criteria to be awarded maximum points.**

Program Requirements by Category

1. Farmland and Forestland Preservation Category – Two funding scenarios are set out in subsections C and D of Va. Code § 10.1-1020, based on the amount of funds appropriated in the state budget for VLCF. If less than \$10 million is appropriated, then there are four grant categories with farmland and forestland preservation sharing one single category (1/4 of funds). If \$10 million or more is appropriated, then there are five grant categories with farmland preservation and forestland preservation being separately funded categories (each category gets 1/5 of funds). For both scenarios, separate scoring criteria

have been developed for agricultural lands and for forestal lands. The applicant should use the set of criteria that is most appropriate for the project being submitted.

A. Farmland Preservation Criteria

Contact: Virginia Department of Forestry, (434) 282-4823

Genny Harris, Working Lands Conservation Specialist, Office of Working Lands Preservation, gennette.harris@dof.virginia.gov

Applications for the permanent protection of agricultural lands will be evaluated according to:

- Soil productivity. The parcel will be ranked based on the percentage that it contains of each of the following soils (as defined in § 10.1-1119.7 of the Code of Virginia) which can be found at <https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>:
 - “Prime farmland” is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, nursery, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerable soil erosion. Prime farmland includes land that possesses the above characteristics but is being used currently to produce livestock and timber. It does not include land already in or committed to urban development or water storage.
 - “Unique farmland” is land other than prime farmland that is used for production of specific high-value food and fiber crops, as determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality or high yields of specific crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.
 - “Important farmland” other than prime or unique farmland, is land that is of statewide or local importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, nursery, oilseed or other agricultural crops, as determined by the appropriate state agency or local government agency and that the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture determines should be considered as farmland.



Please note, if these percentage numbers of soil productivity are not provided in the application, it will be presumed that none of these soils exist on the property.

- Property acreage. The size of the parcel in relation to average agricultural parcel sizes in the locality will be used as a determining factor. More information can be found at www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus.
- Current use of property. Priority will be given to any property that is currently being farmed.
- Adjacency to conserved lands. The degree to which the property is located adjacent to, or nearby, already conserved lands held in perpetuity. Larger blocks of unbroken forest and agricultural lands including forest potentially provide the greatest value and range of benefits from and protection of rural land uses.
- Development vulnerability rank. Using the Virginia ConservationVision Development Vulnerability model, parcels will be evaluated according to their vulnerability ranking. The Development Vulnerability model can be found at www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vaconvisvulnerable.
- Best Management Practices. The existence of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and farm management plans that are currently being utilized as part of the normal operation of the farm, either implemented through state and federal conservation programs or voluntarily implemented without state or federal cost-sharing or technical assistance. Best management practices may include stream fencing, buffers, conservation tillage, cover crops, or animal waste management. Examples of a farm management plan include a grazing management plan; a nutrient management plan; a conservation plan; or a resource management plan, which would include both the conservation plan and nutrient management plan. **If a plan is not provided with the application, it will be presumed that no plan exists.**
- Locality support. Support for the project evidenced by local farmland protection policies, including:
 - Agricultural Zoning. The property is located within an exclusive agricultural zoning district, which primarily restricts land use to farming and forestry activities.
 - Agricultural and Forestal Districts. The project is within an Agricultural/Forestal district, a rural conservation zone that protects farm, forest, and open space lands from conversion to intensive non-agricultural or forestal uses for a defined term.

- Use Value Taxation. The project is subject to agricultural use-value taxation, ensuring eligible land is assessed at its value in use instead of market value. To qualify for agricultural use-value taxation, a minimum of five acres must be a bona fide agricultural operation.
- Purchase of Development Rights Programs. The Virginia Department of Forestry's Office of Working Lands Preservation works with localities to help establish local PDR programs by creating model policies and practices, establishing criteria to certify programs as eligible to receive funds from public sources, and determining methods and sources of funding for localities to purchase agricultural conservation easements. In an effort to support local farmland priorities, points will be awarded to those projects using a local PDR program as match.
- ConserveVirginia (www.dcr.virginia.gov/conservevirginia). The project will be evaluated based on the percentage of the total project area that is included in the ConserveVirginia Agriculture and Forestry category.

B. Forestland Preservation Criteria

Contact: Virginia Department of Forestry, (434) 987-7102

Amanda Scheps, Program Manager, Office of Working Lands Preservation,

amanda.scheps@dof.virginia.gov

www.dof.virginia.gov/conservation/index.htm

Applications for the permanent protection of working forest lands will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Property Acreage. Larger blocks of land under single ownership are more manageable, better protect ecological communities and biodiversity, and better sustain the flow of natural goods and services over time.
- Acres of Forest on the proposed property. Larger blocks of forest under single ownership are more easily managed, better protect the productivity and sustainable flow of natural goods and services from the forest, and better protect forest conservation values (e.g., have larger less-disturbed "core" areas, protect water quality, maintain habitat connectivity, etc.). To be considered for points under this criterion, land must be devoted to forestal use as defined by the State Land Evaluation and Advisory Council's (SLEAC) technical standards for classification of real estate devoted to forestal use. Most critically, the proposed project's acreage must qualify as "Productive Forest Land" or "Non-Productive Forest Land" as defined by SLEAC standards and contain at least 20 acres of forest.



- Land devoted to forestal use that has been recently harvested of merchantable timber, is being regenerated into a new forest and not currently developed for nonforest use qualifies for points under this criterion. In addition, acreage that is under contract to be planted or afforested qualifies for

points. Also, to qualify for points under this criterion, the proposed parcels must be under the same ownership (currently or anticipated after acquisition using VLCF funds) and must be “contiguous.” To be considered contiguous, the proposed parcels must either (a) directly border each other or (b) all border another block of property already owned by the proposed landowner. If multiple, non-contiguous parcels are proposed, only those that separately meet SLEAC standards will receive points.

- Acres of forest with a “high” Forest Conservation Value (FCV) based upon VDOF’s analysis and map (2020 version). See the Forest Conservation Values map on the Natural Heritage Data Explorer or download GIS data from VDOF (see link below). “High” values are those labeled on the map as “5: Outstanding” or “4: Very High”. The FCV analysis ranks the relative conservation value of forestland based on watershed integrity, size of forested blocks, forest management potential, proximity to other conserved lands, threat of conversion, and presence of diminished tree species or significant forest communities. The FCV GIS layer and associated description can be downloaded at:
<https://vdof.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/embedGallery.html?displayapps=true&displayinline=true&group=f40da8804f7645de9f2298945c5d897d>
- Development vulnerability rank. Using the Virginia ConservationVision Development Vulnerability model, parcels will be evaluated according to their vulnerability ranking. The Development Vulnerability model can be found at www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vaconvisvulnerable.
- Adjacency to Conserved Lands. The degree to which the property is located adjacent to, or near, already conserved lands held in perpetuity. Larger blocks of unbroken forest and agricultural lands including forest potentially provide the greatest value and range of benefits from and protection of rural land uses.
- Management of Multiple Resources. The degree to which the property is managed according to a forest stewardship management plan (or equivalent) prepared by a

professional forester. Applicant should provide a copy of a current forest resource management plan and demonstrate how recommendations are being followed to achieve forest management goals. If a plan is not provided with the application, it will be presumed that no plan exists.

- Preservation of forest acreage. The degree to which the applicant is willing to preserve a portion of forest acreage in perpetuity to protect the working forest land base. Land that is not currently forested but that the landowner will afforest and maintain as forest in perpetuity counts. The draft deed or term sheet accompanying the application must include language reflecting this commitment; otherwise this acreage will be assumed to be zero.
- ConserveVirginia (www.dcr.virginia.gov/conservevirginia). The project will be evaluated based on the percentage of the total project area that is included in the ConserveVirginia Agriculture and Forestry category.

2. Historic Area Preservation Category

Contact: Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR), (804) 482-6094

Karri Richardson, Easement Program Specialist, karri.richardson@dhr.virginia.gov
www.dhr.virginia.gov/easements/easement-program-overview

Applications are encouraged for projects that conserve historic resources associated with underrepresented communities. Applications for the permanent protection of historic, archaeological, cultural, or historic landscape resources will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Historic Significance, strong proposals are likely to protect or preserve a resource that:
 - A. Is listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR), found at www.dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers, either individually or as a contributing resource in a listed historic district; or
 - B. Is a battlefield property identified with a priority rating in one of the following reports issued by the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program: "Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields" (1993, as amended), or "Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States," (2007, as amended); contact Karri Richardson at karri.richardson@dhr.virginia.gov if you need a map to confirm the location of the property within identified battlefields; or
 - C. Has been formally determined to be eligible for listing on the VLR by DHR, Va. Code § 10.1 2204, within the previous five calendar years and remains eligible for listing in the opinion of DHR. For assistance in determining whether a property

has been determined eligible for the VLR, please contact DHR Archives at (804) 482-6102. Note: listing on the VLR may be required by project completion for properties awarded funding in order to meet the Virginia Board of Historic Resources (VBHR) Easement Program eligibility requirements.

- D. Integrity. The integrity of the historic resource to be protected or preserved shall be considered. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its historic significance through attributes such as location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



- E. ConserveVirginia (www.dcr.virginia.gov/conservevirginia). The project will be evaluated based on the percentage of the total project area that is included in the ConserveVirginia Cultural and Historic Preservation category.
- Underrepresented Resources. The extent to which the application identifies and documents resources associated with Virginia's culturally diverse history, such as properties associated with people of color (circa 1619-Civil War), the Reconstruction Era (1861-1898), the Civil Rights Movement, LGBTQ, African-American, Asian-American, Latino, Hispanic, Native American and women's history.
 - Threat. Threatened property is defined as property (i) documented to be currently or recently on the market (within the past calendar year); (ii) threatened by development, where plans/ plats have been submitted to or approved by the locality's planning department within the last calendar year; (iii) in an estate that is currently being settled; (iv) adjacent to property currently on the market or sold within the previous calendar year; or (v) with built or other historic, archaeological, or cultural resources that are threatened by demolition, destruction, or development. **Documentation supporting specific threats must be submitted with the application.**
 - Use and Treatment of Historic Resources on the Property. The extent to which plans for future uses of (e.g. historic site interpretation, rehabilitation of the battlefield landscape) or alterations to the property are consistent with historic resource stewardship and protection. All plans must be described in or submitted with the application and must meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (36

C.F.R. Part 68). Plans submitted as part of the application must be approved by DHR before the project receives final VLCF funding.

- **Historic Resource Protection.** The degree to which the applicant is willing to preserve all historic resources on the property in perpetuity in accordance with the DHR's current easement template. Applicants must attach a list or summary of proposed restrictions to be included in the easement based on DHR's current easement template (please do not attach a copy of the easement template to the grant application). Contact Karri Richardson at karri.richardson@dhr.virginia.gov if you need a copy of DHR's current easement template.
- **Adjacency to Conserved Lands.** The degree to which the property is located adjacent to, or near, already conserved lands held in perpetuity.
- **Furthers Public Interests.** The extent to which the project includes specific plans for programs that will further or promote public interests, such as education, research, community outreach, recreation, or heritage tourism promotion. Applications for projects that conserve historic resources associated with underrepresented communities and those that also provide public educational opportunities and share untold stories to advance social equity are particularly encouraged.
- Applicants for funds in this category must provide original digital images no greater than 800 × 800 pixels in dimension. In the case of built cultural or historic structures, these should include images that document the exterior of the primary historic structure and any secondary structures, significant interior spaces and features, and the setting and viewshed of the primary resource. For archaeological sites, applicants should include a general view or site plan and images documenting the condition of the site, stratigraphy (if applicable), and representative features showing the integrity of those features. For battlefields or other landscapes, images should document the overall site, its surroundings and viewshed, and all historic and non-historic structures, roads, and other features within the project.
- If funds are awarded for the purpose of acquiring fee-simple title to or an easement on eligible historic properties, the property owner shall separately offer to convey to the VBHR a perpetual preservation easement on the property to be acquired with the VLCF funds (including any match property). The VBHR shall decide whether to accept the easement offer based on established criteria and existing policies and procedures governing the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Easement Program (Chapter 22, Title 10.1 of Va. Code). DHR staff administers the easements on behalf of VBHR. The property must meet the Easement Program eligibility requirements (see www.dhr.virginia.gov/easements); if not, or if the VBHR declines acceptance of the easement offer, DHR may recommend an alternative easement holder.

All properties acquired with Historic Area Preservation funds shall be open for public access for a minimum of two days each calendar year. Public access shall not disturb any sensitive resources thereon, and may require approval by DHR to ensure that historic resources will not be affected.

3. Natural Area Preservation Category

Contact: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, (804) 371-6205

Rob Evans, Protection Manager, Virginia Natural Heritage Program,

rob.evans@dcr.virginia.gov

www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage



All properties conserved with VLCF funds in this category shall be dedicated as natural area preserves in accordance with Va. Code § 10.1-213. Applications in this category must include land that will contribute to biodiversity values and statewide conservation significance. Applicants are encouraged to contact DCR Natural Heritage well ahead of the grant submittal deadline so that staff and project proponents have opportunities to visit the property, understand natural heritage resource values and the management requirements of the property, to confirm project eligibility and support success. All natural area preserves require some form of stewardship to maintain their integrity in perpetuity. Additionally, some areas have previous disturbance and/or ongoing threats that require restoration and/or abatement, respectively. Applications should describe a plan to address general stewardship needs and the specific threats to the resources and ongoing management needs. Further, the landowner will be required to manage the property in partnership with DCR Natural Heritage in perpetuity.

Projects/Applicants must:

1. address a protection need in the Virginia Natural Heritage Plan, by making a significant contribution to the permanent protection of one or more natural heritage resources, including habitats for rare, threatened, or endangered plant or animal species or state-significant natural communities (please see the NHDE User Guide under the Help tab at <https://vanhde.org/> for more information on natural heritage resources);
2. qualify to be dedicated as a natural area preserve as provided in Va. Code § 10.1-213;

3. have been sufficiently evaluated by DCR Natural Heritage staff (including site visit) for the extent, type, and viability of natural heritage resources present and their management requirements and constraints;
4. be recommended by, via a support letter from, DCR Natural Heritage based on specific criteria listed in Va. Code § 10.1-1022.1 (B);
5. have landowners who understand the requirements of their land being dedicated to the state natural area preserve system and who demonstrate commitment to the requirement for active and ongoing management activities for natural heritage resources on the property;
6. address public access feasibility in light of natural heritage resource sensitivity and management purposes for discussion with DCR Natural Heritage representatives; and
7. ensure that the proposed area for acquisition and the applicant's ability to expend VLCF and matching funds can be conducted within two years of grant award.

Applications for Natural Area Preservation category funding will be evaluated based on specific scoring (Appendix B) that address these project attributes, including the percentage of the property that is included in the ConserveVirginia Natural Habitat and Ecosystem Diversity category.

All properties shall be made available for public access for a reasonable amount of time each year when compatible with, and without disturbing, the sensitive resources thereon. All properties shall be available for DCR Natural Heritage approved research, associated monitoring and necessary stewardship activities.



4. Open Spaces and Parks Category

Contact: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation - Planning and Recreation Resources Division, (804) 508-8896

Kristal McKelvey, Chief Recreation Grants Manager,

recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov
www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning

Applications for the permanent protection and acquisition of public recreational lands or open-space lands will be evaluated

according to the following criteria, in accordance with the 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey and 2024 Virginia Outdoors Plan. The VOP and survey results may be accessed at www.dcr.virginia.gov/vop. To support their narrative responses, applicants are encouraged to submit a conceptual site plan, visualization, or sketch of proposed site features that highlights possible locations for public access, recreational uses, support amenities, conservation areas, and other features.

- Acquires an interest in land that provides increased public access to state waters offering recreational potential.
- Acquires an interest in land that creates new priority public outdoor land-based recreational opportunities or expands existing park systems or other recreational resources to protect public conservation or recreational interests.
- Protects priority viewsheds or land important to the protection of (i) any federally designated Wild and Scenic River or American Heritage River in or adjacent to Virginia, (ii) Virginia's Scenic Rivers, (iii) designated Scenic Roads, (iv) Virginia Byways, or (v) designated scenic lands or recreational trails, including state-wide connecting trails, greenways or blueways. See the VOP Mapper at: www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/vopmapper.
- Supports local or regional plans for parks, open space, and outdoor recreational facilities, or contributes to the protection of a state, regionally, or locally identified conservation corridor.
- Degree to which the grant-funded land is made available for public access and use.
- Recreation Access Need. The project will be evaluated based on whether the area is underserved by public outdoor recreation opportunities and the demonstrated recreation need of its location based on the DCR Nature-based Recreation Access Model and the Trust for Public Land's ParkServe Model. Projects offering land-based recreation opportunities will be scored on whichever model demonstrates a greater need. Projects offering water-based recreation opportunities will be scored on the Nature-based Recreation Access Model's water-based recreation need rating. Information on the Nature-based Recreation Access Model can be found at www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vaconvisrec. ParkServe can be found at: www.tpl.org/parkserve. Data from other sources may also be considered for this criterion if applicant provides the source reference and link to the data justifying that the project area is underserved.
- ConserveVirginia (www.dcr.virginia.gov/conservevirginia). The project will be evaluated on the amount of the total project area that is included in any ConserveVirginia category so long as the project provides daily public access.

5. Statewide Priority Scoring

All applications will also be scored using criteria that prioritize statewide conservation goals. Be sure to review Section VI of Appendix B, pages 34 through 38, for a breakdown of these criteria, which could yield 90 additional points for the application. Also, be sure to address each criterion in your application.

III. APPLICATION REVIEW AND GRANT AWARDS

First Application Review

Applications will be received and reviewed by DCR for eligibility and completeness. Complete applications will be shared with an interagency task force of subject-matter experts for review and scoring.

Second Application Review

The interagency task force will rank the projects and consider geographic distribution, percentage of projects with public access, and those being placed under easement.

Final Review, Grant Award, Notification

Highly ranked applications will be presented to the Foundation for consideration, action, and grant approval. After Board action to approve grants, successful grant recipients will be notified of the pending grant award via email.

IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANT RECIPIENTS

Grant Agreements

Within a few weeks of Board approval, a grant agreement will be emailed to the grant recipient to sign and return the document. After the Executive Secretary has signed the agreement, a scan of the fully executed agreement will be provided to the grant recipient.

Grants are made for a two-year period. Administrative extensions of up to one year may be granted upon extenuating circumstances being documented by the grant recipient. Any additional extension requires approval from the VLCF Board.

Periodic Status Reporting

Grant recipients will report the status of the project twice per year. These progress reports will provide status updates and include any changes in scope or budget for the project.

Changes of Scope

Grantees must inform VLCF when they discover they cannot deliver the total acreage of a project as pledged in their application and grant agreement. Adequate information and a revised budget must be provided to justify a change of scope to their grant award. All requests for changes in scope must be submitted in writing to a grant manager who will guide the grantee through the proper steps pursuant to adopted Board procedures. A PDF of the resolution can be found on the VLCF webpage, <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land-conservation/vlcf>.

Final Steps and Closing

Certain required documents must be provided to VLCF, and approved by VLCF, prior to grant funds being disbursed. These documents are listed in Appendix A.

Under no circumstances will VLCF grant funds be disbursed until all required documents have been provided, reviewed, and approved by VLCF, and all required deeds have been recorded.

For projects that result in multiple easements or transactions, VLCF funding will not be disbursed until all easements are recorded and the entire property described in the application and grant agreement is permanently protected.

Grant payments require five business days advance notice before they can be processed for payment.

If grant funding is provided to a closing agent, then a copy of the recorded deeds must be provided to VLCF within two months after closing.

V. APPENDICES

Appendix A

VLCF Grant Specifications

- I. Required Items in an Application
- II. Additional Recommended Items
- III. Eligible Expenses for the Grant Program
- IV. Documents and Due Diligence Items Required Prior to Payment of Funds for an Awarded Grant

Appendix B

VLCF Category Scoring Sheets and Statewide Priority Scoring

- I. Farmland Preservation
- II. Forestland Preservation
- III. Historic Area Preservation
- IV. Natural Areas Preservation
- V. Open Spaces and Parks
- VI. Statewide Priority Scoring

Appendix C

Example Match Letter

Appendix D

Required Property Protections and Vegetated Riparian Buffer Information

Appendix A – VLCF Grant Specifications

I. Required Items in an Application (the grant application portal will prompt you to upload these items):

1. Minimum of two maps of the project: Aerial map and Topo map (USGS USA Topo Map), both showing any neighboring conserved lands.
2. Minimum of three photographs of the project property, representing the conservation values being protected.
3. A signed letter from all landowners stating that they are willing participants in the proposed transaction.
4. A match letter (see Appendix C) if the required 50% match is not yet in hand or a governing body resolution.
5. For easement projects, a term sheet or draft easement indicating the proposed protections of the project's conservation values.
6. For nonprofit applicants:
 - a. an acknowledgement letter from the public body willing to: hold or co-hold an easement on the property; or hold the property in fee simple, and
 - b. evidence that the nonprofit meets the holder requirements found in Va. Code §§ 10.1-1009 to 10.1-1017.
7. For applications in the Historic Category, additional information and documents specified on pages 12 through 15.
8. Include screenshots of your project in all intersecting layers of ConserveVirginia and any Wildlife Corridors.

II. Additional Recommended Items for an Application:

1. A title commitment for the property if available
2. Forestry plan or agriculture plan if applicable
3. Shapefile delineating the boundary of the project (including any match property)
4. Letters of support and resolutions from governmental bodies for the project

III. Eligible Expenses for the Grant Program are limited to the following items only:

1. The appraised value of the property or interest acquired.
2. Actual expenditures (written expense documentation is required) for:
 - a. Appraisal
 - b. Title search, binder, title insurance
 - c. Boundary survey
 - d. Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (fee acquisitions only)

- e. Legal Fees; Recording Costs
- f. Property Line Demarcation
- g. Easement fees required by public-body holders, up to \$5,000

IV. Documents and Due Diligence Items Required Prior to Payment of Funds for an Awarded Grant:

1. A full appraisal report that meets USPAP Standards, or UASFLA Standards, performed within six months of closing. For any project wherein a fee acquisition and an easement interest are being conveyed separately, both the fee and easement interests shall be appraised separately unless the public body holder waives this requirement.
2. Title insurance commitment within 90 days prior to closing:
 - a. must confirm that the seller or donor owns marketable fee simple title
 - b. encumbrances of record must not impair conservation purposes
 - c. encumbrances of record must be acceptable to VLCF
 - d. for any project wherein a fee acquisition and an easement interest are being conveyed separately, both the fee and easement interests shall be insured under separate policies unless the public body holder waives this requirement.
3. Boundary survey of the project area by a Virginia Licensed Surveyor that meets Va. Administrative Code 18VAC10-20-370 Minimum Standards and Procedures for Land Boundary Survey Practice in effect at the grant application deadline, and dated no more than 20 years before the grant application deadline.
4. Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (fee acquisition only); prepared no more than six months prior to closing
 - a. report and findings must be acceptable to VLCF
 - b. issues revealed may require remedial action
5. The final version of the required deeds for final VLCF approval before closing.
6. Baseline Documentation Report for projects including a conservation or open-space easement.
7. A copy of the settlement statement for each transaction.
8. Invoices of the required documents listed above in Section III.2. for reimbursement.

NOTE: VLCF funds will not be distributed until all due diligence documents have been provided, reviewed, and approved by staff and all required deeds have been recorded. Please contact staff with any questions regarding the timing, requirements, and submittal of these documents.

Appendix B – VLCF Category Scoring Sheets and Statewide Priority Scoring

I. Farmland Preservation Category

	Score
<u>Category I: Land Evaluation (35 points)</u> A. Soil Productivity (20 points) Calculate the percentage of project land in each soils class. Points are awarded based on the combined percentages of these three categories × 20 (e.g., 30% prime, 20% unique and 10% important = 0.60×20, which equals 12 points.) More information on these soil classes can be found in § 10.1-1119.7 of the Code of Virginia. 1. Value the soils classified as “Prime farmland” 2. Value the soils classified “Unique farmland” 3. Value the soils classified as “Important farmland” B. Parcel Size (15 points) Using data from the most recent Census of Agriculture, score the size of the farm as it compares to the average sized farm in the locality. • Larger by 25% or more = 15 • Larger by 0% - 24% = 10 • Smaller by 1% - 24% = 7 • Smaller by 25% or more = 5	
<u>Category II: Land Use (45 points)</u> A. Current use and status of the land (7 points) • Is the land currently being farmed? 7, if yes. B. Proximity to conserved lands (8 points) To what degree is the land adjacent to or in close proximity to other preserved lands, either in agriculture production or non-active in farming? • Parcel adjoins other preserved lands = 8 • Parcel is within one-quarter mile but not adjoining other preserved lands = 6 • Parcel is within one-half mile but further than one-quarter mile of other preserved lands = 3 C. Development vulnerability (15 points) What is the vulnerability rank for this parcel as determined by the ConservationVision Development Vulnerability model (www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vaconvisvulnerable)? Calculate the percentage of project land in Vulnerability Classes II, III, and IV. Points are awarded based on the combined percentages of these three categories × 15 (e.g. 30% Class II, 20% Class III and 10% Class IV = $0.6 \times 15 = 9$ points) D. Conservation Plan/Best Management Practices (BMPs) (7 points) Does the farm have a documented conservation plan for applicable best management practices, or a Nutrient Management Plan for all nutrient applications to cropland, hayland, or pastureland? • The applicant has a documented conservation plan (developed by local Soil and Water Conservation District staff, NRCS, or similar) AND/OR a Nutrient Management Plan (prepared by a DCR certified planner) that outlines the implementation of BMPs = 4 • Provides evidence of plan implementation = 3	

E. Local farmland policy (8 points) Is the project supported by local farmland protection policies? Two points each for: agricultural zoning; agricultural and forestal districts; use value taxation and Purchase of Development Rights projects.	
Category III: ConserveVirginia (20 points) Is the project included in ConserveVirginia? (www.vanhde.org/content/map) Multiply the percent of the property included within the Agriculture and Forestry Category layer by 20 to calculate points. (e.g. 60% of the property is in the Ag and Forestry category; $.60 \times 20 = 12$ points)	

Total Maximum Score 100 points _____

II. Forestland Preservation Category

	Score
1) Property Acreage (10 points) Is the size of the tract adequate to protect and allow for management of forestal resources? Larger blocks of land under single ownership remain more manageable and functional over time. To calculate points for projects up to 499 acres, divide acreage by 500, then multiply by 8. For parcels larger than 499 acres, see points below. - Score: 0 – 499 acres = Property Acreage ÷ 500 × 8 points 500 – 749 acres = 8 750 – 999 acres = 9 ≥1,000 acres = 10	
2) Acres of Forest (20 points) How many acres of the property are currently forested or devoted to forestal use? To be considered forested or devoted to forestal use, acreage must meet the State Land Evaluation and Advisory Council (SLEAC) technical standards for classification of real estate devoted to forestal use. See the grant manual for more detail on which land can qualify as “devoted to forestal use.” For up to 499-acre projects, divide the acreage by 500, then multiply by 18 to calculate points. For parcels larger than 499 acres, see points below. - Score: 0 – 499 acres = Forested Acreage ÷ 500 × 18 points 500 – 749 acres = 18 750 – 999 acres = 19 ≥1,000 acres = 20	
3) Acres of high forest conservation value (FCV 4 and 5) (15 points) Score is based upon VDOF’s analysis and Forest Conservation Values map that ranks relative conservation value of forestland based on water quality, site productivity, terrestrial and aquatic habitat, intactness, and threat to conversion attributes. Find the map here: www.vanhde.org/content/map. To calculate points for projects up to 499 acres, divide High FCV acreage by 500, then multiply by 13. For larger parcels, see below. - Score: 0 – 499 acres = High FCV acreage ÷ 500 × 13 points 500 – 749 acres = 13 750 – 999 = 14 ≥1,000 acres = 15	
4) Development Vulnerability (10 points) What is the vulnerability rank for this parcel using the ConservationVision Development Vulnerability model (www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vaconvisvulnerable)? Calculate the percentage of project land in Vulnerability Classes II, III, and IV. Points are awarded based on the combined percentages of these three categories × 10 (e.g. 30% Class II, 20% Class III and 10% Class IV = 0.6 × 10 = 6 points)	

5) Adjacency to Conserved Lands (10 points) Is the property located adjacent to, or within five miles of, already conserved lands held in perpetuity? To calculate points, subtract the distance from already conserved land in miles from 5 then multiply by 2. Greater than 5 miles receives 0 points. Score: Within 5 miles = $(5 - \# \text{ miles away from conserved lands}) \times 2$	
6) Management of Multiple Resources (5 points) Does the landowner manage the property according to a forest stewardship management plan (or equivalent) prepared by a professional forester and follow plan recommendations to achieve the forest management goals? Score: Owner has an existing management plan that is less than 10 years old, and with demonstrated plan implementation = 5 Owner has management plan but no demonstrated plan implementation = 3	
7) Preservation of Forested Acreage (10 points) Landowner is willing to preserve a proportion of the property in a forested condition in perpetuity. Land that is not currently forested but that the landowner will afforest and maintain as forest in perpetuity counts. To calculate points, multiply percent forested by 10. Score: Percent of property that the landowner is willing to retain as forest $\times 10$	
8) ConserveVirginia (20 points) Is the property included in ConserveVirginia? (www.vanhde.org/content/map) To calculate points, multiply the percent of the property included within the Agriculture and Forestry Category by 20. (e.g. 60% of the property is in the Ag and Forestry category; $0.60 \times 20 = 12$ points)	

Total Maximum Score 100 points _____

III. Historic Area Preservation Category

	Score
1) Historic Significance (Maximum score 30 points) 1. <u>Historic Resource/Property is:</u> - Individually listed on VLR or is a contributing resource in a listed historic district = 25, or - Determined by DHR to be eligible for listing on VLR = 20, or - Civil War, Revolutionary War, or War of 1812 site or battlefield designated as Priority I, II, III, or IV in the Battlefield Reports (see p. 8 of Grant manual) = 25 -AND- 2. <u>Integrity:</u> - Resources that retain a high degree of historic integrity = 5	
2) Underrepresented Communities & Resources (Maximum score 10 points) - Property contains documented resources representing Virginia's culturally diverse history, such as places or sites associated with people of color (circa 1619-Civil War), the Reconstruction Era (1861-1898), the Civil Rights Movement, LGBTQ, African American, Asian-American, Latino, Hispanic, Native American and women's history = 5 -AND/OR- - Property or area has special community significance related to its history, as explained in application = 5	
3) Threat (Maximum score 10 points) - Currently on the market for sale, in an estate being settled, threatened by development, or in imminent danger of demolition = 10 - Recently on the market for sale or sold within the prior calendar year, resource is vacant/unoccupied, or resource is significantly deteriorated and in need of immediate preservation = 5 - No documentation of threat = 0	
4) Use & Treatment of Historic Resources & Property (Maximum score 10 points) - Plans for future use(s) (e.g. interpretation as a historic site, subdivision, timber harvest) of the property are appropriate and consistent with historic resource stewardship and protection = 5, and - Plans for treatment, alteration, and maintenance of historic resources on the property are appropriate and consistent with historic resource stewardship and protection = 5 - No documentation of plans for uses of property or treatment of historic resources = 0	
5) Historic Resource Protection (Maximum score 10 points) - Proposed easement terms and restrictions provide comprehensive protection for historic resources and are specifically consistent with VBHR easement template = 10 - Proposed easement terms and protections for historic resources are acceptable, and generally consistent with VBHR easement template = 5 - No list of easement terms provided = 0	

6) Adjacency to Conserved Land (Maximum score 5 points) • Adjacent to existing conserved land = 5 • In viewshed of, or in close physical proximity to significant historic resources, and/or existing conserved land = 3 • Not in viewshed of, or in close physical proximity to significant historic resources or conserved land, but represents a unique cultural resource within the geographical area = 1	
7) Further Public Interests (Maximum Score 5 points) • Project includes specific plans for programs that promote research, education, community outreach, or heritage tourism = 5 • Project includes general plans for programs to be developed that would promote research, education, community outreach, or heritage tourism = 3 • Project contains no plans that would further public interests = 0	
8) ConserveVirginia (Maximum score 20 points) Is the property included in ConserveVirginia? (www.vanhde.org/content/map) To calculate points, multiply the percent of the property included within the Cultural and Historic Preservation Category by 20. (e.g. 60% of the property is in the Cultural and Historic Preservation category; $0.60 \times 20 = 12$ points)	

Total Maximum Score 100 points _____

IV. Natural Area Preservation Category

	Score
For more information on natural heritage resources see the NHDE User Guide under the Help tab at https://vanhde.org/. 1) Biodiversity Significance (35 points) A. <u>Land Protection Priority</u>: Does the proposed project occur within a conservation site as identified on NHDE? Or is the project adjacent to a dedicated Natural Area Preserve? Maximum score: 10 points Within Documented NH Screening Layer: - Land Protection Priorities = "Action Site" = 10 points - Land Protection Priorities = "Portfolio Site" = 7 points - Land Protection Priorities = "Null" = 2 points AND/OR - Adjoining a dedicated Natural Area Preserve = 4 points B. <u>Parcel Significance</u>: What is the number of natural heritage elements present on the subject parcel or associated with it? Maximum score: 20 points 4 points per essential EO 2 points per viable, extant EO 1 point per viable, extant EO outside parcel(s) but within conservation site that also overlaps the proposed parcel(s) for protection C. <u>Does the project have global significance?</u> (biodiversity rank of conservation site) Proportion of parcel area (acres) within conservation sites, weighted by B-rank Maximum score: 5 points - B1 = 5 points × proportion within conservation site - B2 = 4 × proportion within conservation site - B3 = 3 × proportion within conservation site - B4 = 2 × proportion within conservation site - B5 = 1 × proportion within conservation site	
2) Ecological Integrity (20 points) A. <u>Regional Landscape Integrity</u>: What percentage of parcel area (acres) is within one or more ecological cores, weighted by Ecological Integrity rank (i.e. C-rank)? Maximum score: 10 points (points may add up to more, but 10 points is the max) Parcel is located in a Core ranked: - C1 = 10 points × proportion within ecological core - C2 = 8 × proportion within ecological core - C3 = 6 × proportion within ecological core - C4 = 3 × proportion within ecological core - C5 = 1 × proportion within ecological core AND is any portion of the parcel within the Natural Land Network? - Parcel intersects with the Natural Land Network (1 point) B. <u>Local/Parcel Integrity</u>: How much of the parcel is in a significant natural community (Rank A-C, E)? Maximum score: 5 points - Parcel supports a significant natural community: 75% or more of parcel area = 5, 50-74% = 4, 25-49% = 3, 1-24% = 2 - For parcels with less than 49% overlap with a significant natural community, the following points can be supplemented. If the significant natural community element occurrence is ranked as G1= additional 2 points, if G2 = additional 1 point.	

C. <u>Connectivity with Conserved Lands</u>: Is the parcel adjacent to other conserved lands with high Biodiversity Management Intent (BMI)? Maximum score: 5 points • Adjoins BMI 1 = 5 • Adjoins BMI 2 = 4 • Adjoins BMI 3 = 2 • Adjoins BMI 4 or 5 = 0	
3) Management Needs, Likelihood of Success, and Threat (25 points) A. <u>Management Needs</u>: What is the intensity of current and future management actions needed to successfully maintain/restore natural heritage resources? Maximum score: 10 points Parcel conditions require: • minimal natural heritage resources management = 10 • moderate management = 6 • intensive management/restoration = 3 B. <u>Management Capacity</u>: Does the applicant have proven experience and capacity in terms of staff resources and expertise to address management needs? Maximum score: 8 points Application provides: • a thorough description of both experience and staff capacity = 8 • a cursory description = 4 • not mentioned = 0 C. <u>Site Visit & Owner Conversation</u>: NHP Staff have had timely opportunity to visit tract and discuss with landowner necessary conservation measures and implications of natural area preserve dedication. Maximum score: 5 points • Site visit & discussion = 5 • Site visit only = 3 • Discussion only = 2 D. <u>Threat</u>: Is there high development threat for the project area? Maximum score: 2 points • Tract threat is ranked Class IV or Class V in the ConservationVision Development Vulnerability Model = 2; ranked Class III = 1; otherwise = 0. OR • Data from other sources will also be considered for this criterion if the applicant provides explanatory information and a source reference to document the threat (i.e. tract is on the market for sale or facing imminent conversion threat). = 0 to 2	
4) ConserveVirginia (20 points) Is the property included in the ConserveVirginia Natural Habitat & Ecosystem Diversity Category? (www.vanhde.org/content/map) To calculate points, multiply the percent of the property included within the Natural Habitat & Ecosystem Diversity Category by 20. (e.g. 60% of the property is in the category; $0.60 \times 20 = 12$ points)	

Total Maximum Score 100 points _____

V. Open Spaces and Parks Category

	Score
1) Public Access to State Waters (10 points) Does the project acquire land or an easement that provides increased public access to state waters offering recreational potential? - Public access to state waters that provides boating, fishing, <u>and</u> beach/bank swimming opportunities = 10 - Public access that provides <u>two</u> of those recreational opportunities = 8 - Public access that provides <u>one</u> of those recreational opportunities = 6 - Public access that provides opportunities to view water resources while recreating = 4	
2) Public Access for Land-Based Recreation (10 points) Does the project acquire land or an easement that provides increased public access for land-based recreation? - Project increases recreational opportunities in natural areas (maintained in a vegetated, natural condition with public facilities generally limited to parking, trails, and observation areas) = up to 4 - Project increases recreational opportunities in developed parks (structured environments with amenities and facilities that serve a variety of visitors, interests, activities, and events such as play areas, campgrounds, pools and splash pads, and outdoor sports fields/courts) = up to 3 - Project provides trails for hiking, cycling, and/or horseback riding = up to 3	
3) Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) Outdoor Recreation Priorities (10 points) Does the project address an outdoor recreation needs identified in the <i>Virginia Outdoors Plan</i>? Add all that apply: - Project provides public access to historic areas = up to 2 - Project provides opportunities for viewing wildlife = up to 2 - Provides public access to and conserves significant habitats or natural communities = up to 2 - Project provides or supports dark sky conservation = 1 - Project has a draft conceptual site plan, visualization, or sketch of plans to provide priority recreational support amenities within, such as: restroom, parking, drinking water, information kiosks, trash receptacles, seating, lighting, ADA accessibility features = up to 3	
4) Project Location and Recreational Expansion (10 points) Does the project conserve and create a new outdoor recreational opportunity? Or is it located adjacent to an existing park, protected conservation area, or other recreational resources that expands and protects public recreational interests? - Conserves new stand-alone facility that is critically needed to provide or support recreational activities = 10 - Conserves an in-holding or addition that allows new types of recreation to occur on site = 8 - Conserves a linkage between two or more existing natural areas or parks or conserves land along an existing recreational trail = 5 - Conserves an in-holding or addition that does not expand recreation types offered = 3	
5) Scenic Resources Protection (10 points) Does the project protect scenic viewsheds or land important to the protection of any federally designated Wild and Scenic River or American Heritage River in or adjacent to Virginia, Virginia's Scenic Rivers, designated Scenic Roads, and Virginia Byways, statewide trails, or greenways or blueways?	

- Conserves land adjacent to, or in direct viewshed of one of the listed resources = 10 - Conserves land adjacent to, or in direct viewshed of, an existing recreational trail, water trail, passenger rail, public transit route, or another recreation area = 5			
6) Alignment with Local or Regional Plans (15 points) Does the project support local or regional plans for parks, open space, and recreational facilities, or contribute to the protection of a documented conservation corridor? Include the name and page # of plan cited. - If the project/acquisition is specifically mentioned by location AND purpose/features in a local or regional plan = 15 - If project purpose is mentioned in a local or regional plan or other documents or fulfills a specific need in a local or regional plan = 10 - If area of project has a general reference in local or regional plan or project meets a general goal identified in a plan = 5			
7) Public Access (10 points) Availability of land for public access. Add all that apply: - Number of days site open to the public (365 days per year = 5, 180-364 = 2, less than 180 days = 0) - No user fees required to access site or fee-free options available = 2 - Site can be safely publicly accessed by more than one method of transportation (vehicle, bicycle, pedestrian, equestrian, paddlecraft, motorboat, public transportation) = 3			
8) Recreation Need (15 points) I. Land-based Recreation Need (Maximum score: 10) Will the property provide land-based recreation and is it located in an area of land-based recreation need as identified by either the DCR Nature-based Recreation Access Model (2021) (www.vanhde.org/content/map) or the Trust for Public Land's ParkServe Model? (www.tpl.org/parkserve) (score will be higher of the two if data is available on both models) <table border="1" data-bbox="162 1218 1331 1512"> <tr> <td data-bbox="162 1218 730 1512"> A. DCR Nature-based Recreation Access Model Land-based Recreation Need: - Very High: 10 - High: 8 - Moderate: 5 - Low: 3 - Very low need: 0, but other supporting evidence provided to show need: up to 5 </td><td data-bbox="730 1218 1331 1512"> B. ParkServe Park Need: - Very High: 10 - High: 7 - Moderate: 5 - No need identified in the model, but other supporting documentation provided, such as evidence of no other parks within ½ mile walk: up to 5 </td></tr> </table>	A. DCR Nature-based Recreation Access Model Land-based Recreation Need: - Very High: 10 - High: 8 - Moderate: 5 - Low: 3 - Very low need: 0, but other supporting evidence provided to show need: up to 5	B. ParkServe Park Need: - Very High: 10 - High: 7 - Moderate: 5 - No need identified in the model, but other supporting documentation provided, such as evidence of no other parks within ½ mile walk: up to 5	
A. DCR Nature-based Recreation Access Model Land-based Recreation Need: - Very High: 10 - High: 8 - Moderate: 5 - Low: 3 - Very low need: 0, but other supporting evidence provided to show need: up to 5	B. ParkServe Park Need: - Very High: 10 - High: 7 - Moderate: 5 - No need identified in the model, but other supporting documentation provided, such as evidence of no other parks within ½ mile walk: up to 5		
II. Water-based Recreation Need (Maximum Score: 5) Will the property provide water-based recreation and is it located in an area of water-based recreation need as identified by the DCR Nature-based Recreation Access Model (2021)? - Very High: 5 - High: 4 - Moderate: 3 - Low or very low need but other supporting evidence provided, such as new type of water recreation for area or documented overcrowding at existing nearby sites: up to 3			

9) ConserveVirginia (10 points)

Is the property included in any category of ConserveVirginia and providing daily outdoor recreation access? (www.vanhde.org/content/map)

To calculate points, multiply the percent of the property included within any category of ConserveVirginia and providing daily access by 10. (e.g. 60% of the property is in the category; $0.60 \times 10 = 6$ points)

Total Maximum Score 100 points _____

VI. Statewide Priority Scoring

1. Public Access

Up to 10 points may be given depending upon the extent of access provided to the general public. Points are based on the degree to which the project provides public or visual access.

Maximum 10 points

- Full public access means the property will be available for public visitation 365 days a year with no special permission needed to access the property = 10
- Restricted Public Access means the property is available for public visitation 365 days a year by appointment or with special permission, or only available for public access from 180 to 364 days/year = 5
- Limited Public Access means the property will only be available for public access from 1 to 179 days per year = 3
- Visual access means the applicant can demonstrate the scenic value of the property to the public and that the project will protect the integrity of the public's scenic view = 2

2. Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP)

Up to six points may be awarded to a project that is a VOP regional featured project, or to a project that addresses a recreation or resource conservation topic discussed in the VOP or in a local comprehensive plan. The 2024 VOP includes outdoor recreation priorities and resource conservation recommendations to expand access to the outdoors, improve safety, expand better health and well-being in the outdoors, and provide resilient recreation infrastructure and landscapes.

The VOP can be found at: www.dcr.virginia.gov/vop - see especially Sections 2.1 Recreation for All, 3.1 Recreation Land Conservation, and the VOP Regional Featured Projects dashboard.

Maximum 6 points

- Addresses multiple recreation or resource conservation topics identified in both the VOP and in a local comprehensive plan, or is a VOP regional featured project = 6
- Addresses multiple recreation or resource conservation topics identified in the VOP or in a local comprehensive plan = 4
- Addresses a single recreation or resource conservation topic identified in the VOP or in a local comprehensive plan = 2
- Not identified in VOP or in a local comprehensive plan = 0

3. Virginia Nature-Based Recreation Access Model Identified Need

Up to four points will be given to a project that provides public access AND is located in an area where there is at least a moderate need for recreation access identified in the Nature-

Based Recreation Access Model's terrestrial or aquatic layers found at:

www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vaconvisrec.

Maximum 4 points

- Demonstrated moderate, high, or very high need for terrestrial and aquatic recreational access = 4
- Demonstrated moderate, high, or very high need for terrestrial or aquatic recreational access = 3
- No demonstrated moderate, high, or very high need for terrestrial or aquatic recreational access = 0

4. Protection of Cultural Resources

Up to five points may be given to a project that identifies and protects cultural resources on the property and provides public educational opportunities. Examples include remnants of prior settlements, artifacts, evidence of unmarked burial sites of enslaved or indigenous people, former segregated schoolhouses, sites of early racial integration, historic fence lines, roadbed or railbed systems, evidence of past wharfs, pine tar industry sites, gold mining pits, tobacco barns, witness trees, caves, etc.

Provide with your application photos and documentation of the cultural resources found on site that will be protected by your project. Also, provide draft language to be used in the deed to protect the resources, and indicate whether there will be educational opportunities provided for the public. Example language for the protection of these cultural resources can be provided upon request.

Maximum 5 points

- Provide photographs and other documents to authenticate the resource = 1
- Project will provide educational opportunities for the public, signage, trails, etc. = 1
- Provide draft language to be used in the deed to protect cultural resources = 3

5. Underserved Communities

Up to 10 points may be given to projects that benefit underserved communities. The Social Vulnerability Index created by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science may be used to identify underserved areas of the state. This index is found on the Adapt VA Interactive Map, see link here: https://cmap22.vims.edu/AdaptVA/AdaptVA_viewer.html. Data from other sources will also be considered for this criterion if the applicant provides their findings and the source reference.

Maximum 10 points

- Very high social vulnerability = 10
- High social vulnerability = 8
- Moderate Social Vulnerability = 5
- Low or Very Low Social Vulnerability = 0

6. Additional ConserveVirginia Values

If the project includes conservation values other than the primary application category, then two points may be awarded for each additional identified category if the applicant demonstrates that the property is located within another ConserveVirginia category and the project also protects those respective resources in perpetuity. The ConserveVirginia Deed Review Criteria (www.dcr.virginia.gov/land-conservation/document/conservvirginia-deed-review-criteria.pdf) explains what provisions are needed to ensure each category is protected.

Maximum 12 points

ConserveVirginia Categories:

- Agriculture & Forestry = 2
- Cultural & Historic Preservation = 2
- Floodplains & Flooding Resilience = 2
- Natural Habitat & Ecosystem Diversity = 2
- Protected Landscapes Resilience = 2
- Scenic Preservation = 2
- Water Quality Improvement = 2

7. Water Quality Benefit

Points may be given to a project that protects water quality by requiring permanent vegetated riparian buffers exceeding a width of 35-feet along perennial waters and wetlands. Points will also be awarded for forested buffers that maintain an evenly dispersed minimal 50% forested canopy. Because protecting water quality is a long-standing goal of the Commonwealth supported through many voluntary cost-share and tax-credit programs, these points are awarded to those projects that voluntarily provide greater water quality and habitat protections beyond the required 35-foot vegetated riparian buffers in perpetuity.

Additionally, wetlands provide invaluable protection for water quality, as well as habitat, shoreline stabilization, and flood resilience. In response to rising sea levels, tidal wetlands are naturally moving slowly inland. Man-made barriers including buildings, homes, and roads can prevent these tidal wetlands from migrating inland, resulting in loss of important marsh ecosystems.

To help protect areas identified as potential future migration pathways for tidal wetlands, an additional two points will be awarded to those projects that intersect the Wetland Potential 2050 layer of the AdaptVA map (https://cmap22.vims.edu/AdaptVA/AdaptVA_viewer.html); do not have bulkheads, riprap, buildings, paved roads or other infrastructure and impervious cover that would block upland migration of the adjacent wetlands; and prohibit construction or placement of buildings, paved roads, and other impervious surfaces in those areas. The landowner must agree to these protections that will be included in the final recorded legal documents to receive these two points.

Maximum 20 points

2 points if the project provides protection for migrating wetlands as stated above, PLUS

7 points if the buffer is forested (at least 50% forest canopy) and protected as such in perpetuity, PLUS

- 1'-2,000' of water frontage that is buffered by a 50'-wide buffer = 3
- 2,001-4,000' of water frontage that is buffered by a 50'-wide buffer = 5
- 4,001-6,000' of water frontage that is buffered by a 50'-wide buffer = 8
- 6,001'+ of water frontage that is buffered by a 50'-wide buffer = 10

OR

- 1'-2,000' of water frontage that is buffered by a 100'-wide buffer = 5
- 2,001-4,000' of water frontage that is buffered by a 100'-wide buffer = 8
- 4,001-6,000' of water frontage that is buffered by a 100'-wide buffer = 10
- 6,001'+ of water frontage that is buffered by a 100'-wide buffer = 13

8. Fish and Wildlife Values

Up to 10 points may be given if the application includes information to demonstrate that the project benefits wildlife, habitat, and human/wildlife interaction. The breakdown for this category is: zero to three points for fish and wildlife habitat protection and management (one point for identifying wildlife, one point for protecting habitat, an added point for providing public access to view, hunt, or fish wildlife). An additional three points may be awarded for the identification of Department of Wildlife Resources Species of Greatest Conservation Need or a state or federal threatened or endangered species; with another four points awarded for protection of associated habitat.

For more wildlife information, see: <https://services.dwr.virginia.gov/fwis/> or contact the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, (804) 593-2043.

Maximum 10 points

- Identify wildlife presence = 1; if Department of Wildlife Resources Species of Greatest Conservation Need or State or Federally listed threatened or endangered species is present = additional 3
- Protect wildlife habitat = 1; if DWR Species of Greatest Conservation Need or State or Federally listed threatened or endangered species habitat is protected = additional 4
- Provide public access for viewing or hunting wildlife, or for fishing = 1

9. Protection of Identified Wildlife Corridors

Zero to 10 points may be given to projects that fall within an area designated as a wildlife corridor buffer or an actual corridor in the Virginia Wildlife Corridor Action Plan. DWR and partners developed the Virginia Wildlife Corridor Action Plan identifying vital wildlife corridors, high quality habitat for priority species, and migration routes of native, game, and migratory

species. The plan emphasizes protecting these vital wildlife habitat corridors and their buffers, as well as reducing wildlife-vehicle conflicts, such as collisions, to promote driver safety. Learn more about the plan here: www.dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/corridors.

Wildlife corridors and their buffers are mapped and accessible to the public on the Virginia Natural Heritage Data Explorer (www.vanhde.org). To be awarded points, an application must include a description of how the project will protect the associated wildlife buffer or corridor in perpetuity. For guidance contact the Virginia DWR, (804) 593-2043. If the project intersects both a corridor and a buffer the higher of the two calculated points will be used for scoring. The points are not additive.

Maximum 10 points

- 1%-50% of the property occurs within a designated wildlife corridor buffer and includes deed language to maintain the integrity of the buffer = 2
 - >50% of the property occurs within a designated wildlife corridor buffer and includes deed language to maintain the integrity of the buffer = 4
- OR
- 1%-25% of the property occurs within a designated wildlife corridor and includes deed language to maintain the integrity of the corridor = 6
 - 26%-75% of the property occurs within a designated wildlife corridor and includes deed language to maintain the integrity of the corridor = 8
 - >75% of the property occurs within a designated wildlife corridor and includes deed language to maintain the integrity of the corridor = 10

10. Project Readiness

If the applicant can provide a title commitment insuring the applicant's interest in the property, then three points will be awarded. This will confirm that access to the property and owners of all of the property's rights have been identified, enabling successful completion of the project.

Maximum 3 points

11. Progress Reports

For Grantees with active VLCF grants: The Grantee has submitted their semi-annual progress reports as required for each active grant.

- Yes = 0
- No = -3

Total Maximum Score for Statewide Priorities: 90 points

Appendix C – Example Match Letter

[Date]

Virginia Land Conservation Foundation
c/o Nikki Rovner, Executive Secretary
Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
600 East Main Street, 24th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: VLCF grant application from *[organization]* for *[project]*

Dear Ms. Rovner:

In the grant application submitted by our organization for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation's FY27 grant round, our project budget included a total match amount of \$____.__, of which \$____.__ is to be obtained through grant funding that is not yet committed by any granting agency. We understand that VLCF will not grant funds for a project whose match is uncertain, and we agree that, if this project is funded through VLCF, we will commit our organization's resources to complete the project within the two-year time frame required by the VLCF program.

Sincerely,

[Organization representative]
[Job Title]

Appendix D – Required Property Protections and Vegetated Riparian Buffer Information

To safeguard water quality and the conservation value of land conservation projects, the following protections are to be included in all VLCF projects, whether fee simple or easement acquisitions:

1. Limitations on placement of utilities: Utilities that serve permitted structures on the subject property are allowed. Utilities that do not serve permitted structures on the subject property require the grantee's review and prior written determination that the construction and maintenance of such utilities will not impair the conservation value of the property.
2. To protect water quality, the collective footprint of all impervious surfaces (excluding roads) on the property must be limited to 1% of the area of the property. Limitations above 1% must be explained in the application to be considered. Farmland Preservation easements are limited to a 2% cap on impervious surfaces to accommodate agricultural uses.
3. Agricultural Conservation Plan: If the property contains five acres of land or more in agricultural production, then a written agricultural conservation plan shall be developed or in place that stipulates the use of best management practices for water quality protection (such as proper nutrient management, utilization of cover crops, and stabilization of highly erodible lands). This plan shall be developed in consultation with the local Soil and Water Conservation District or the Natural Resources Conservation Service and shall be implemented and periodically updated by the landowner as long as at least five acres of the property remains in agricultural production.
4. Forest Management Plans: If the property contains 20 acres or more of forest, then a current written forest management plan or Virginia Forest Stewardship Plan shall be in place. A pre-harvest plan is required prior to the commencement of timber harvesting or other significant forest management activities. Such a plan shall be developed by, or in consultation with, the Virginia Department of Forestry or a professional forester meeting the criteria in § 10.1-1181.9 of the Code of Virginia, or be consistent with Virginia's Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality Guide. The pre-harvest plan shall be consistent with Virginia's Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality Guide and include sufficient detail to protect site, soil, and water quality.

An exception to the requirement of a pre-harvest plan may be provided for the following non-commercial, de minimis cutting of trees so long as the activities are consistent with Virginia's Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality Guide: (1) for trail

clearing or daylighting of approved roads not to exceed ten feet on either side of the road; (2) for Grantor's domestic uses, such as firewood or carpentry activities; (3) that pose an imminent hazard to human health or safety; (4) of less than three acres of forest when constructing buildings and structures as allowed in the easement; and (5) removal of invasive species.

5. Vegetated Riparian Buffers and Wetland Areas: An area of land where natural vegetation shall be maintained at 35-feet or more in width along a river, shoreline, perennial stream (depicted on the USGS National Hydrography Dataset: <https://apps.nationalmap.gov/viewer/>), or body of water that has perennial outflow, and within wetland areas stated in the VLCF application or highlighted in the recitals of the deed of acquisition or easement.

Within vegetated riparian buffers and wetlands:

- a) Livestock shall be excluded from the buffers and the adjacent watercourses and bodies of water.
- b) Mowing shall be limited to three times per calendar year.
- c) Earth-disturbing activities, plowing, and dumping are prohibited (however, tree planting; streambank restoration; forest management in accordance with Virginia's Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality Guide; archaeological investigations; and restoration, reconstruction, and maintenance of documented historic landscapes on historic properties are permissible).

The following structures, activities, and landscapes are allowed within the required vegetated riparian buffers and wetland areas on VLCF funded projects:

- a) Buildings, structures, roads or other impervious surfaces existing in the buffer prior to the grant award are permissible and may be maintained but cannot be enlarged within the buffer.
- b) A limited number and size of water dependent structures such as docks or boat launches.
- c) A limited number of stream crossings for livestock, pedestrians, or vehicles. Livestock crossings must be addressed in a written conservation plan that specifies the use of riparian buffers for water quality protection.
- d) Access points to reach the water and structures permitted in the buffer.
- e) Lawns (up to 50 feet of frontage) associated with a primary residence, if the site is not subject to severe erosion and the diminished buffer is offset by nearby buffers that are wider than 35 feet.
- f) Forest management including timber harvesting in accordance with a pre-harvest plan and compliance with Virginia's Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality Guide.