



Va. giving \$3 million for 12 conservation projects; recipients must match

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Grants from an obscure state board will help protect a wild Eastern Shore island, a Civil War battlefield and an old-growth forest.

The projects are among 12 to be aided by \$3 million in grants from the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.

The foundation provides money to nonprofit groups or state agencies to protect historically or environmentally important lands. The recipients must put up an amount that equals or exceeds the grant.

Adding the matching dollars to the \$3 million in grants means more than \$12.25 million will be spent on the 12 projects.

Grant recipients typically protect land by buying it or buying development rights through legal contracts called conservation easements.

The Land Conservation Foundation does not have a steady source of state money, relying instead on appropriations from the General Assembly.

Created in 1999, the foundation got \$1.7 million its first year, \$9.6 million its second year, then no money for the next four years.

Appropriations from the last two General Assembly sessions provided the \$3 million awarded Tuesday, and \$12.5 million to be awarded later.

"We are just so thrilled" that land-protection money is available again, said Nikki Rovner, director of government relations for the Virginia chapter of The Nature Conservancy, an environmental group.

"I think [the legislators] are going to be really happy with what they see is being done with this money."

The Land Conservation Foundation is served by the staff of the state Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The grants include:

- \$500,000 to The Nature Conservancy to buy the Marks and Jacks Island, a 2,000-acre barrier island in Accomack County on Virginia's Eastern Shore. The rare wild island includes salt marshes and resting areas for migrating songbirds.

- \$362,400 to the Brandy Station Foundation to acquire 19 acres of a former Civil War battlefield in Culpeper County.
- \$224,130 to the 500-Year Forest Foundation to protect 225 acres of old-growth northern red oak on Chestnut Ridge in Giles County.
- \$190,500 to the Wildlife Foundation of Virginia to acquire 550 acres in Madison County that will become part of the Rapidan Wildlife Management Area.
- \$258,000 to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation to place a conservation easement on a 1,803-acre Essex County farm that harbors bald eagles and rare plants.

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