

Working to save Virginia's resources
A new coalition plans to lobby lawmakers and raise awareness
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A coalition that includes conservationists, business people and health advocates is working to get more money for Virginia's environmental programs.

Protecting the environment is good for business, said Kim Tingley, former president of the Home Builders Association of Virginia.

"Businesses considering a move to Virginia want to know about the quality of life in the Old Dominion."

The coalition is a first for Virginia, members say. The group plans to lobby the General Assembly and raise awareness about the need to protect land, air and water.

"Virginia's conservation programs remain among the lowest priorities in the state budget," the group said in a statement yesterday.

Virginia traditionally spends less than 1 percent of its budget on environmental protection - the lowest proportion among states.

The coalition includes members who work for such organizations or businesses as the Nature Conservancy and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, which are environmental groups; Smithfield Foods; energy company Dominion; DuPont; the Garden Club of Virginia; and the American Lung Association of Virginia.

In the coalition, the members do not necessarily represent the organizations for which they work.

The group released a poll yesterday that said 61 percent of Virginia voters questioned were willing to "pay a little extra each month" to protect waters, open space, recreation areas, fish and wildlife.

The poll was conducted by the Alexandria-based Tarrance Group, which questioned 600 registered voters July 27-29. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Under Gov. Mark R. Warner's proposed two-year budget, total funding for the environment would increase from \$254 million this year to \$296.1 million July 1, then fall to \$288.6 million a year later.

Warner's biggest new conservation proposal is a \$15 million-a-year fund to preserve land. The money would come from extending a \$10 property-transfer fee that is scheduled to expire this summer.

Still, overall funding for the environment, \$584.7 million over the next two years, would total just under 1 percent of Warner's proposed \$59 billion budget.

"Obviously we could use a lot more money," said W. Tayloe Murphy Jr., Warner's secretary of natural resources, on Friday.

He added, "Given the financial situation we find ourselves in, Governor Warner has been very fair and committed to natural-resource conservation."

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