

Environmental Imperatives for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Charlottesville Virginia

October 8, 2005

The natural heritage of Virginia is in peril. More than 900 species of our native animals are declining in numbers as a result of habitat destruction and the increasing pollution of air and water resources. Decisive steps to save our commonwealth are needed, but **Virginia ranks last in the nation in expenditures for environmental protection.** A group of about ninety citizens, representing seventeen organizations, met at the University of Virginia to discuss problems and solutions. **We recommend the following environmental priorities to our governor, legislature, and the people of Virginia.**

Natural Areas

- A biologically diverse environment provides essential ecological services that are necessary for the physical, social and economic health and well being of Virginia's citizenry. The state should develop a **Biodiversity Action Plan** to include:
 - 1) financial mechanisms for protecting open/green space,
 - 2) protection of remaining natural large blocks of forest and ecosystems,
 - 3) restoration of riparian areas and wetlands, and
 - 4) a broad education and outreach program to provide lawmakers and citizens with biodiversity information.
- The Commonwealth should enforce **best management practices during logging operations**, practice more **sustainable forestry** methods (instead of high grading), and provide financial incentives for rural community based market programs that protect the environment, create jobs in Virginia, and are equitable to all people.
- We urge Senator Allen to co-sponsor the **Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2005** and Congressman Goodlatte to hold Agriculture Committee hearings on this legislation. We also urge the Governor to petition the Forest Service for protection of all **roadless areas** in Virginia's National Forests.

Air & Water Resources

- Reduce the discharge of animal excrement from **factory farms** into our air and water supply and support local family farms.
- Decrease **pesticide and herbicide use** that threatens human and animal health and negatively affects plant diversity, air and water quality. Find other ways to control roadside vegetation, and whenever possible, use native plants for landscaping projects. Never use invasive species.
- Pass the **Clean Water Protection Act**.

- Create a dedicated source of funding for **land conservation** as a means of protecting **water quality**. Virginians must use specific strategies for conserving water and maintaining natural stream flows.
- Institute a more **robust monitoring program** to detect ozone and fine particulate pollution so we can channel resources where needed to clean the air.
- The General Assembly should adopt **stringent standards for air quality** that meet or exceed those recommended by the latest scientific studies. Virginia should sign on to the **Climate Protection Agreement** (Kyoto Treaty) and establish **incentives for pollution reduction** by rewarding businesses and consumers with tax subsidies and procurement goals.

Energy

- Reduce Virginia's per capita energy consumption 50% by the year 2025.
- The Virginia General Assembly should adopt the **Clean Smokestacks 2006** legislation intended to bring energy producing power plants up to modern standards of reduced emissions.
- Virginia should join other coastal states in opposing **offshore exploration and drilling** for oil and natural gas. This would threaten our shorelines and do little to solve the nation's energy problems.
- Adopt standards and incentives for **clean, renewable energy production** and for energy **conservation**. Virginia should invest in sustainable energy instead of giving subsidies to the coal industry or utilities investing in nuclear energy
- Abolish **mountaintop removal** coal mining and all forms of destructive strip mining.
- We encourage all Virginians to **reduce** their use of consumer products and **reuse** these products, whenever possible, to decrease the need for waste disposal.

Transportation & Sprawl

- Virginia must **stabilize the population** by giving localities legal tools to better control growth. This will enable them to protect the environment and provide quality community services.
- Correct the imbalance of funding in the **transportation** budget by investing more money in public (group) transportation and bicycle and pedestrian paths. Prioritize biking and transit on existing roadways with features such as HOV/bus lanes and signal control for public transit.

Governmental

- Pass laws that prohibit energy companies and other corporations from making **campaign contributions** through political action committees.
- **Enforce all existing environmental laws** and regulations.

Participating Organizations:

Sierra Club

People's Alliance for Clean Energy

Charlottesville Center for Peace and Justice

Alternatives to Paving

Virginia Forest Watch

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population

Citizens for Albemarle

Energy Justice Network

Coal River Mountain Watch

Public Citizen

Wildlaw

Voices for Animals

American Lung Association

Southern Energy Network

Nature Conservancy

Chesapeake Climate Action Network.

We are crying for a vision that all living things can share, And Those Who Care are with us everywhere,"

- Kate Wolf