

## **The Virginia State Park and Natural Areas Bond**

### **An opportunity to preserve Virginia's past for the future**

On Election Day, November 5, 2002, Virginians will vote on a \$119 million Virginia Parks and Natural Areas bond referendum. If approved, funds will be used by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to buy land for three new state parks, more land for 11 existing parks, land for 10 new natural area preserves, and additions to eight existing preserves. Money will also be used for specific, much-needed construction, improvement, and repair projects throughout Virginia's 34 state parks.

There are no tax increases associated with this bond. The annual payback is so small, a fraction of state revenues, that no tax increase is necessary to make bond payments, which will take place over many years. Current real estate prices offer the chance to cost-effectively acquire land from willing sellers only.

Our state park system is considered the nation's best run despite ranking 50<sup>th</sup> in percentage of state budget spent on parks and 49<sup>th</sup> in per capita state park spending. Failure to approve the bond would hurt our parks' status as among the finest. Passage of the bond would enable staff to redirect time now spent maintaining aging infrastructure to enhancing the visitor's experience at the park.

Additionally, our internationally recognized Natural Heritage Program has identified 1,450 critical natural areas. Only 36 have been dedicated Natural Area Preserves. Money from the bond will help protect additional natural areas.

Virginia's historic resources will also benefit from the passage of this bond.

Bond projects that support civil war sites and would be of interest to civil war groups are as follows:

- Sailor's Creek State Park – There is \$1.5 million for the development of a new visitor and educational center to explain this important Civil War battle and for the restoration of the historic Hillsman house.
- Staunton River Battlefield State Park – There is \$300,000 in the bond to stabilize the Mulberry Hill Mansion which will be interpreted for the role it played during the Civil War.
- There is acquisition money available which, depending on willing sellers and purchasing priorities, might be used to expand the lands around one or both of the above sites to enhance the resource protection and recreational opportunities of these historic parks.
- A new State Park in the Seven Bends area of the Shenandoah River would be in close proximity to a number of significant historic and civil war areas and would serve as a gateway for them.

Other projects that will protect historic resources include:

- Renovation of historic structures at Chippokes Plantation State Park.
- Renovation of historic Foster Falls complex at New River State Park.

- Renovation of Civilian Conservation Corps visitor center at Staunton River State Park.
- Renovation of historic Karlan Mansion at Wilderness Road State Park.

Passage of this bond referendum will allow for protection of Virginia's natural, historic, and cultural resources which Virginians and the Commonwealth's visitors hold in such high regard. It will also enhance Virginia's tourism industry. Park visitors, nearly 40 percent from outside the state, contributed \$144 million to the state's economy in 2001.

Voter approval of this bond will:

- Protect more of Virginia's unique and threatened land resources for future parks and natural area preserves
- Improve recreational offerings throughout Virginia, allowing families to spend time together in a healthy, natural setting
- Help renovate and protect our historic and cultural resources
- Stimulate our post-9/11 economy, particularly in rural areas

Virginia remains among the fastest growing states. Its population rose statewide from 4.6 million in 1970 to 7.1 million in 2000. This growth led to dramatically increased demand for public recreation offerings and the need to conserve sensitive lands. State park visitation nearly doubled over the past decade – from 3.8 million in 1991 to 7 million in 2001. Such growth makes protecting Virginia's natural, historic, and cultural resources and enabling visitors to enjoy the state's natural places more important now than ever.

For more information, please call the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation at 1-800-933-PARK or visit [www.dcr.state.va.us/bond/](http://www.dcr.state.va.us/bond/).

Please remember to vote on November 5<sup>th</sup>. Your vote is important.