



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

Karl Didier

Karl.Didier@DOF.Virginia.gov

(434) 459-8278

VDOF ESTABLISHES 200TH CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Agency protects water quality with Open-Space Easement Program

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) has announced the creation of its 200th conservation easement in the Commonwealth of Virginia. With the addition of the 1,428-acre property in Wise County known as Pine Mountain, VDOF has now protected 91,597 acres of land, 84,112 acres of forest and nearly 460 miles of streams and rivers.

Using funding earmarked to mitigate the environmental impacts of the construction of Route 460 in southwest Virginia, VDOF collaborated with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to help conserve more than 1,400 acres of managed forests and four miles of headwater streams. According to the [National Conservation Easement Database](#), VDOF is the largest holder of easements in terms of acreage dedicated to conserving working forests in the Mid-Atlantic and southeastern states. All forest management activities on VDOF conservation easements must follow an approved management plan that ensures forest resources are used sustainably.

The Pine Mountain project ensures perpetual protection of a key connecting point in a 125-mile wildlife and recreational corridor that runs from the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee, through Kentucky and Virginia, and into southern West Virginia. The property contains a portion of the Pine Mountain Trail with forests and streams supporting various plants and animals including the threatened black-sided dace, big sandy crayfish and Swainson's warbler, which have been documented in the area.

“Specializing in the creation and stewardship of easements that conserve relatively large, connected expanses of managed forestlands, VDOF’s easement program maintains water quality and wildlife habitat, helps prevent flooding and supports the Commonwealth’s forest products economy,” said VDOF Forestland Conservation Program Manager Karl Didier. “Many people might be surprised to discover that we have an Open-Space Easement Program, let alone its size and impact on Virginia. VDOF looks forward to growing its easement program to ensure that our working farms and forests remain intact and healthy for the benefit of generations to come.”

“The Nature Conservancy identifies Pine Mountain as an essential forested corridor for wildlife movement in the Central Appalachians,” said TNC Clinch Valley Program Director Brad Kreps. “We are pleased to collaborate with VDOF to protect this critical tract along the mountain, which helps stitch together a larger conservation corridor that includes other Nature Conservancy properties and lands managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service.”

VDOF's easement program began in 2004 with the protection of a 244-acre property in Rockbridge County. Since then, the program has grown steadily and now includes easements in 66 Virginia counties. VDOF's easement portfolio includes:

- **“Highlands” easement** – 25,856 acres in Russell County, which represents the largest open-space easement in Virginia history
- **“Feedstone” easement** – 1,101 acres in the Allegheny Mountains of Rockingham County. Surrounded by National Forest, the easement protects the cow knob salamander and unique spotted skunk.
- **“Nottoway Properties” easement** – 838 acres in Southampton County that protects extensive cypress-tupelo forests along nearly three miles of the scenic Nottoway River

For more information about VDOF's Open-Space Easement Program, visit <https://dof.virginia.gov/forest-management-health/forestland-conservation/conservation-easements/>

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About the Virginia Department of Forestry

The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 108,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide an overall economic output of more than \$21 billion annually.

Headquartered in Charlottesville, the agency has forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide citizen service and public safety protection across the Commonwealth, which it's been doing now for more than 100 years. VDOF is an equal opportunity provider.