

SOUTHERN FORESTS PROJECT

VIRGINIA



The Nature Conservancy and International Paper have undertaken a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect ecologically important forests, rivers and streams in 10 southern states. The Nature Conservancy will acquire more than 218,000 acres in the largest private land conservation project in the history of the southern U.S. Partners include state governments, federal agencies, the Department of Defense and timber investment entities.



Aerial view of pine forest at The Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve
© Mark Godfrey / TNC



Brian van Eerden with his daughter explore the pine savannahs at The Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve and adjoining International Paper property
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THE PROJECT

In Virginia, the Southern Forests Conservation project encompasses more than 20,000 acres, including the Conservancy's acquisition of 4,900 acres bordering its Piney Grove Preserve. Piney Grove is home to the northernmost population of the red-cockaded woodpecker, Virginia's rarest bird. Private investors will acquire and hold some 15,930 acres along the Nottoway, Meherrin and Blackwater rivers, and the Conservancy will retain a right of first negotiation on this property.

The Southern Forests Conservation project helps protect all three river systems, including habitat for the endangered Roanoke logperch, imperiled freshwater mussels and migratory fish such as herring and shad.

total (VA) area 20,830 acres
big woods 4,900 acres
nottoway river 6,930 acres
meherrin river (VA) 4,236 acres
blackwater river 4,764 acres
meherrin river (NC) 3,357 acres

river and stream miles protected
Creates opportunities for the protection of up to 60 miles of stream and river frontage in Nottoway, Blackwater and Meherrin watersheds

representative species
red-cockaded woodpecker
neotropical songbirds
roanoke logperch
migratory fish
freshwater mussels

project partners
The Nature Conservancy
International Paper

SOUTHERN RIVERS - NOTTOWAY, MEHERRIN AND BLACKWATER

The Nottoway, Meherrin and Blackwater rivers are the lifeblood of the 4,000-square-mile Southern Rivers conservation area, a top priority for the Conservancy. This predominately rural and forested area, considered the “pine belt” of Virginia, contains expansive swamps harboring centuries-old cypress trees and the northernmost examples of longleaf pine savannas. It supports an exceptional breadth of biological diversity with over 100 rare plants, animals and natural communities, including the northern-most occurrence of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker at the Conservancy’s 2,700-acre Piney Grove Preserve.

The scenic Nottoway River, which runs for a length of roughly 130 miles, begins in Nottoway County and at its confluence with the Blackwater River forms the Chowan River at the North Carolina state line. The great abundance of fishes and mussels in this river is exceptional for the Atlantic Slope, making the Nottoway watershed of very high conservation value. The most viable known population of the endangered Roanoke logperch occurs in the Nottoway.



Aerial view of International Paper pine forest and swampland along the Blackwater River
© Mark Godfrey / TNC

The Blackwater River, a favorite among paddlers, is a classic example of a slow-moving coastal river system flowing through remote, deep swamp forests. It stretches for 105 miles from its headwaters south of Petersburg to the North Carolina state line, where it meets the Nottoway. The Meherrin River basin has its headwaters in the Piedmont of Lunenburg County and flows southeast into the coastal plain of North Carolina, eventually meeting the Chowan River east of Mufreesboro, NC. Like the Nottoway, the Meherrin River supports an exceptional number of fish and mussels. The predominance of forestland is one of the key reasons these waterways remain healthy and intact relative to other aquatic systems.

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