

NATURE

VIRGINIA

Fall 2020 • nature.org/virginia



Locke Ogens © Kyle LaFerriere

The Future Starts Here

This year has presented unusual challenges, to say the least, but I have been inspired daily by the beauty and resilience of nature. The importance of the natural world to our lives has never been more obvious, nor has our obligation to ensure that everyone has access to nature's benefits. I'm optimistic because I can see marked progress in places where The Nature Conservancy works in partnership with communities. On the Eastern Shore, for example, we invite every local student to learn in an extraordinary living laboratory that draws scientists from around the world. As our Virginia Coast Reserve embarks on its next half-century, we will not only produce groundbreaking science and conservation, but also redouble our efforts to engage people in nature. After all, nature supports everyone, and nature needs everyone's support. Thank you for yours.

Locke Ogens, Virginia Director



Dickinson College students help rebuild oyster reefs. © Daniel White/TNC

Living Laboratory

Virginia Coast Reserve hosts college students

As one of the most important living laboratories in the world, the Virginia Coast Reserve attracts scientific researchers from around the globe and has spawned myriad partnerships with colleges and universities. But you don't need a Ph.D. to study in The Nature Conservancy's outdoor lab. "We enjoy nothing more than sharing this special place and the important work we do here with students," says director Jill Bieri. TNC welcomes learners on all levels, from local public-school pupils to graduate students. Earlier this year—before closures and travel restrictions ushered in a new normal—students from Virginia's Old Dominion University and Pennsylvania's Dickinson College undertook week-long projects. See our photo essay at nature.org/vcr.

New Trail Opens in Oyster

Dickinson College students began their week of service with a cleanup in Oyster, removing marine debris and other trash from a restored living shoreline, from the roadsides leading into the village and along the new Oyster Village Horse Island Trail. Featuring a newly constructed parking area and an observation deck, the trail provides public access to TNC's shoreline property and leads to scenic Horse Island Point. The Eastern Shore Community Foundation helped TNC fund the project, and local residents collaborated in the planning process.



A Dickinson College student helps clean up Oyster's shoreline. © Daniel White/TNC

Pinelands Restoration Expands: Thank You, Supporters!

The Nature Conservancy thanks the many Virginia supporters who rose to the challenge of a generous matching-grant opportunity from Richmond's Robert G. Cabell III and Maude Morgan Cabell Foundation. The match unlocked \$1 million to go toward the acquisition of nearly 800 acres adjacent to TNC's Piney Grove Preserve in Sussex County. The Cabell match leveraged additional grants that also enabled TNC to support the Virginia Department of Forestry in acquiring a conservation easement on almost 750 acres of mature hardwood forest extending roughly a mile along the Nottoway River.



Big Woods habitat © Robert B. Clontz/TNC

Located within the larger Big Woods conservation area, these properties will be devoted, where appropriate, to the restoration of rare pine savanna habitat. Restoring this historic habitat also helps rebuild populations of bobwhite quail and the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. Moreover, this project area's proximity to 2 million Virginians will offer much-needed opportunities for outdoor recreation and environmental education, along with a potential influx of economic activity to nearby communities. Learn more at nature.org/VApinelands.



Trailhead at Fortune's Cove Preserve © Daniel White/TNC

Saving a Place for You

Volunteers help keep preserves safe and accessible

A growing body of scientific evidence shows that exposure to nature significantly enhances our mental and physical well-being. Recognizing the importance of access to the outdoors, The Nature Conservancy's Virginia stewardship team, with critical assistance from approximately 60 preserve volunteers, overcame myriad challenges to keep TNC preserves open and safe for visitors to enjoy throughout 2020. With many public lands closed during the spring, TNC preserves saw marked increases in visitation. "Our preserve volunteers really shone this year in monitoring visitation and providing us information to manage that increase safely," says Land Steward Sam Truslow. Serving as TNC's eyes and ears on the ground, preserve volunteers identified issues with physical distancing that staff members were able to address quickly through measures such as redirecting parking and establishing one-way traffic on hiking trails at popular destinations, including Bottom Creek Gorge and Fortune's Cove. Learn more about Virginia preserves and volunteer opportunities at nature.org/virginia.

Virginia Preserves: How to Visit and Volunteer

From sweeping marsh views at Brownsville on the Eastern Shore to seemingly endless vistas from Warm Springs Mountain in the Allegheny Highlands, TNC preserves offer something for every nature lover. For information on volunteer opportunities, email Jen Dalke at jdalke@tnc.org. Learn more about places you can visit at nature.org/virginia.



Fortune's Cove Preserve © Daniel White/TNC