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Looking Back, Moving Forward

In 1955, plans to turn an Eastern Shore barrier island into a bombing range were announced. Schemes to develop other islands would soon follow. These threats set in motion a dynamic that continues to this day of local people joining in partnership with The Nature Conservancy to protect the lands and waters on which their lives depend. Today, more than a dozen natural islands form the heart of the largest protected coastal wilderness in the eastern United States: TNC's Virginia Coast Reserve (VCR). Thanks to many dedicated partners and supporters like you, this year we celebrate VCR's 50th anniversary and embark on our next half-century of scientific discovery and cutting-edge conservation. Your support not only helps nature and people thrive in Virginia, but also sustains one of the most important living laboratories in the world.

Locke Ogens, Virginia Director



American oystercatchers and many other migratory birds depend on the Virginia Coast Reserve for nesting habitat. © Jessica Kirste

Celebrating 50 Years

Virginia Coast Reserve holds key to future resilience

Fifty years ago, The Nature Conservancy protected the first of more than a dozen unspoiled barrier and marsh islands off the Eastern Shore. It took years, but completing the Virginia Coast Reserve was a gamechanger, as this longest stretch of protected wilderness on the Atlantic seaboard drew researchers from around the world and produced groundbreaking science. This science now tells us that these islands and thousands of mainland acres TNC subsequently protected hold the key to fostering more resilient coastal communities and natural systems around the world. TNC's Virginia Coast Reserve represents the future of conservation: protecting and restoring nature, while marshaling its power to save our world. Learn more at nature.org/vcr.

Our Living Laboratory

Scientists from our state and around the globe come to the Virginia Coast Reserve to study a naturally functioning coastal system. This extraordinary living laboratory also hosted nearly 800 local students and teachers last year, and our TNC educators anticipate greater participation in 2020. Fostering the next generation of community leaders is critical to The Nature Conservancy's conservation goals, and our field-science programs serve as a global model for successfully engaging local schools.



Hands-on learning at VCR © Jennifer Davis/TNC



Clinch River © Cameron Davidson; Clinch River cleanup © Travis Dove; Clinch headwater stream © Cameron Davidson

State Protects Clinch Highlands Governor Northam announces historic partnership

The 253,000-acre Cumberland Forest Project ranks among the biggest conservation deals that The Nature Conservancy has ever undertaken in the eastern United States. On the heels of this 2019 acquisition, Governor Ralph Northam announced this past summer that the commonwealth's largest-ever open-space easement will permanently protect nearly 15% (22,856 acres) of the Virginia portion. The Clinch Highlands Easement, which Virginia's Department of Forestry (DOF) will hold in perpetuity, encompasses forested mountains and headwater streams that feed directly into the Clinch River in Russell County. "DOF is a crucial partner because their

ongoing engagement means that the commonwealth will maintain a vested interest in good forest management here in the Clinch Valley," says Brad Kreps, director of TNC's Clinch Valley Program. This stretch of the river features the healthiest remaining habitat for aquatic

"We commend the Northam administration for investing in clean water and healthy forests."

Brad Kreps, Clinch Valley Program Director

wildlife, including imperiled freshwater mussels, and provides drinking water to local communities. "We commend the Northam administration for investing in clean water and healthy forests and for making the Clinch Highlands a top state priority for heightened protection," says Kreps. Similar covenants for other Cumberland sites are expected. Meanwhile, the Clinch Highlands Easement bolsters efforts to revitalize local economies through sustainable forestry and by preserving the viewshed surrounding the forthcoming Clinch River State Park. Learn more at [nature.org/cumberland](https://www.nature.org/cumberland).

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Acres of vital eelgrass habitat restored in coastal bays off the Eastern Shore by TNC, our partners and hundreds of volunteers.

International Studies



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Jackie Colliar of the Waikato-Tainui Māori was among partners from New Zealand who recently studied eelgrass restoration at The Nature Conservancy's Virginia Coast Reserve (top photo). A group from Hong Kong also toured VCR and Chesapeake Bay projects to study benefits from oyster restoration and aquaculture. TNC's eelgrass and oyster restoration projects on the Eastern Shore and in the Bay, respectively, are the largest of their kind in the world—and the world comes to Virginia for expertise and inspiration.