

# NATURE

**VIRGINIA**

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Locke Ogens © Kyle LaFerriere

## With Great Conservation Comes Great Responsibility

At The Nature Conservancy, we hold ourselves accountable not only to you, our members, but also to our partners, the public and even the creatures whose survival remains at stake as we strive to protect the world's natural resources. Our Virginia team works extremely hard to deliver on our promise to maximize your financial support, whether it's Matt Zabik coordinating our annual monitoring of well over 200 conservation easements or Andy Lacatell helping lead one of the world's largest oyster reef restoration projects (see next page). Stewardship, in particular, often goes unsung but epitomizes our long-term commitment to results. Our deep sense of responsibility has been key in earning trust and support from partners around the world who help us achieve lasting, transformative conservation for nature and people.

Locke Ogens, Virginia State Director



Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in winter © Michael Speed

## Baby, It's Cold Outside

Explore your Virginia public lands this winter

As the titular holiday song suggests, winter presents us with choices. It's easy to be torn between the fireplace's roar and the call of the wild beckoning beyond the door. Luckily, Virginia's public lands offer winter activities you can enjoy regardless of the weather or your mood. You can feed the fire inside your cozy park cabin, or venture out on snowshoes or cross-country skis. Winter in Virginia even brings mild sunny days that are perfect for bike rides and hikes. With the leaves down, views open up, wildlife becomes easier to spot and crisp air produces some of the most spectacular sunsets you'll see all year. Many public lands such as Mount Rogers that The Nature Conservancy helped to protect take on a special charm during winter, so we encourage you to plan your next adventure today. Start at [nature.org/vapubliclands](http://nature.org/vapubliclands).

### Virginia Public Lands Day Celebrated

More than a third of the 350,000 acres across Virginia that The Nature Conservancy has helped to protect lie within local, state or federal public lands. In September, TNC joined the commonwealth in celebrating the second annual Virginia Public Lands Day and the 25th anniversary of National Public Lands Day. Virginia state parks hosted diverse service opportunities for people to give back to public lands for everything they provide for us, including clean water, wildlife habitat and recreation. Learn more at [www.neefusa.org](http://www.neefusa.org).



Grayson Highlands State Park © Va. State Parks



Monitoring a conservation easement in Albemarle County © Daniel White/TNC

# What Does “Protected” Mean?

## Conservation requires long-term commitment

While more than a third of the total acres that The Nature Conservancy has helped to protect across Virginia are now in the care of public-land agencies, the remaining quarter-million acres are comprised primarily of TNC preserves and private lands on which we hold conservation easements. Easements are binding, usually permanent legal agreements specifying how property can and cannot be used so that conservation values are protected. But what does “protected” mean? Recording a land acquisition or conservation easement at the courthouse is cause for celebration, but paper doesn’t make a preserve, or an easement. People and persistence do.

**“After we buy land or complete an easement, that’s when land protection work really begins.”**

*Matt Zabik, Conservation Easement Stewardship Coordinator*

TNC holds an easement, nearly half of which Matt inspects personally, while also supporting colleagues across the state who ensure that every easement is monitored for compliance every year. Annual monitoring of both preserves and easements is a commitment that the organization takes extremely seriously, not only to retain the highest Land Trust Alliance accreditation, but also to keep faith with our supporters and partners, including landowners. Regular communications and good relationships are critical to an effective monitoring program and, thus, to long-term conservation. “We work hard to give people confidence that TNC does what we promise,” Matt says.

land or complete an easement, that’s when land protection work really begins,” says Matt Zabik, turning onto the entrance road of an Albemarle County horse farm. The farm is one of 218 Virginia properties on which

## Welcome, Blair Smyth!



Photo courtesy of Blair Smyth

The Allegheny Highlands program welcomes new director Blair Smyth to our team in western Virginia. Meet Blair at [nature.org/SmythQA](https://www.nature.org/SmythQA).

## Piankatank Reef Expanded



© VCU Rice Rivers Center

A major challenge to restoring the Chesapeake Bay’s diminished oyster populations has been a scarcity of natural shells to which juveniles can attach themselves and rebuild reefs. But conservation scientists have found that substitutes such as rock and concrete work just as well. This past July, The Nature Conservancy joined with partners to deploy nearly 4,000 tons of crushed granite in the Piankatank River. Andy Lacatell, Virginia Chesapeake Bay director and a project leader, explained to reporters covering the event that the “golf-ball-size rock” would “provide additional habitat for oysters to grow on.” With 15 acres of new reef added to previously created sanctuary reefs nearby, the Piankatank is now home to about 270 acres of oyster reefs. Andy adds, “Our goal is to restore another 160 acres.”