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New ideas driving conservation

We need tenacity, passion and fresh perspectives to confront our greatest challenges. That's why we're grateful for our STEP interns.

STEP (Short-Term Experience Program) fosters pathways into all types of conservation-focused careers, from land stewardship to marketing. We strive to create an environment where people of all backgrounds, experiences and identities feel welcome.

And every year, participants make substantial contributions. Interns like Amanda Hernandez, who conducted an invasive species inventory at Fernbrook Preserve, or Chloe Magallanes, whose visual stories brought our 30-year wetland program to life. Their efforts propel our work forward in Virginia and beyond.

Bettina K. Ring

Bettina K. Ring, State Director



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To learn more and support our work in Virginia, use the QR code or go online to nature.org/virginia.



Restored portion of Goose Creek within Montvale Park in Bedford County, VA. © Mark Schwenk

Celebrating 30 years of improving wetlands

TNC's Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fund was established in 1995 to support conservation at a meaningful scale. Three decades later, the program – Virginia's only statewide wetland and stream restoration program – has improved more than 21,000 acres of land from the Appalachian Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay and inspired similar programs in other states. Nearly half of that acreage is now public land, including properties managed by Charlottesville, Harrisonburg and Fredericksburg.

To celebrate 30 years of success, we are updating the name of the program to better reflect its purpose.

Going forward, it will be known as the Virginia Stream and Wetland Mitigation Program (SWMP).

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STREAM AND WETLAND
MITIGATION PROGRAM

However, the mission remains the same. "We help to offset unavoidable environmental impacts from infrastructure and development, working to maximize ecological benefits like healthier watersheds and improved wildlife habitats," said Karen Johnson, Director of SWMP. "We've completed nearly 150 projects in 30 years and this work will only become more important in the years ahead as we adapt to climate change and address biodiversity loss." Learn more at nature.org/SWMP



TNC Virginia named top internship employer

In 2025, we were proud to be named a Top Virginia Employer for Interns by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. Read more about the program and our most recent cohort at nature.org/learningVA.



A view of Chance Hines, research biologist with the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary, during his springtime monitoring work. Inset: A close-up of red-cockaded woodpecker chicks. © Ann Nallo

Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Population Reaches New Heights

TNC's Piney Grove Preserve had a record breeding season for red-cockaded woodpeckers in 2025. A new pair (or family group) established themselves at the site and helped produce a total of 48 fledgling woodpeckers. This level of productivity marked an all-time high – a dramatic increase over the previous high of 35 fledglings produced in 2024.

Centuries ago, when European settlers arrived in North America, the red-cockaded woodpecker was one of the most abundant woodpeckers on the coastal plain of the southeastern United States, nesting in excavated cavities of mature longleaf pine trees and other pine species. Over time, overharvesting and an era of fire suppression contributed to the loss of regeneration of longleaf pine and the bird population experienced a steep decline. By 1999 Piney Grove held the last three breeding pairs of red-cockaded woodpeckers in all of Virginia when TNC acquired the property in an effort to prevent the species' disappearance from the state.

The timing of TNC's intervention was critical. Our early years of management were spent stabilizing the habitat and stemming the population decline, gradually introducing controlled burns to thin the canopy of the unnaturally young and dense forest. Longleaf needs fire to thrive, and a more open canopy enables hundreds of types of flora to proliferate on the forest floor, becoming a haven for all sizes of wildlife.

Since 2003, we've planted over 80,000 longleaf seedlings in forest openings across 500 acres of the preserve and the oldest saplings are now over 25 feet tall. It will take another 50 years for the trees to reach a size and condition for woodpeckers to excavate their cavities and another several decades beyond that for the trees to reach a height of 100+ feet. With a lifespan of up to 500 years, longleaf trees can provide nesting and foraging habitat for woodpeckers – and a host of other bird species – for centuries. Explore our Pinelands at nature.org/VAPinelands

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89.5
million

The number of eelgrass seeds broadcast since 1999



Volunteer Camden Whitehead holds collected eelgrass from the South Bay. © Bo Lusk

Collecting native seeds, no matter the season

Native seed collection is a vital part of our conservation work in Virginia, and it happens nearly year-round. Whether it's Piney Grove's beautiful groundcover *lespedeza capitata* (round-headed bush clover) seeds in late fall, river cane rhizomes in the Clinch Valley in late winter for planting around the Clinch and Powell River watersheds, or eelgrass seeds collected in springtime on the Eastern Shore for casting in Burtons, Cobb Island, Hog Island, South, and Spider Crab bays, we can always use volunteers like you to help us and our partners maintain and enhance the important biodiversity of our preserves. Learn more about volunteering in Virginia at nature.org. nature.org/VAvolunteer.