

Welcome to the 2026 Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways Conference!

Who are we?

Virginia's United Land Trusts (VaULT) supports Virginia's diverse conservation community to magnify land conservation efforts and achieve widespread protection of the Commonwealth's natural, cultural, and scenic resources - ensuring their long term benefits for all Virginians. VaULT was founded in 2001 as a partnership between state agencies and nonprofit land trusts.

The State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) was established in 2015 with the passing of House Bill 1542 (2015) creating § 10.1-204.1 of the Code of Virginia. The objective of the committee is to assist the Commonwealth in developing and implementing a statewide system of attractive, sustainable, connected and enduring trails for the perpetual use and enjoyment of the citizens of the Commonwealth and future generations.

Many thanks to those who helped plan the conference and to all presenters for providing interesting, relevant, and meaningful content!

2026 Conference Planning Committee

Mary Bennett, Virginia Department of Forestry | Lora Callahan, Department of Conservation & Recreation | Laura Costadone, Old Dominion University | Kevin Du Bois, Department of Defense | Mary Elfner, The 500 Year Forest Foundation | Taylor Evans, The Conservation Fund | Christy Fisher, City of Suffolk | William Fleming, Virginia Beach Open Space Advisory Committee | Elizabeth Friel, Historic Virginia Land Conservancy | Kindra Greene, Elizabeth River Trail Foundation | Rachel Henley, Virginia Farm Bureau | Helen Kuhns, Coastal Virginia Conservancy | Steve Lambert, City of Virginia Beach | Lucas Manweiler, DEQ - VA Coastal Zone Management Program | Hali Plourde-Rogers, Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust | Rogard Ross, Friends of Indian River | Ellen Shepard, Virginia's United Land Trusts | Natasha Skelton, The Conservation Fund | Kelli Weaver, Virginia Tourism Corporation | Kim Woodwell, Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley | **Program Coordinator:** Amelia Wilt, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust

Field Trip Leaders

Brantley Bisette, Hampton Roads Sanitation District | Kindra Greene, Elizabeth River Trail Foundation | Eddie Harrah, Newport News Parks and Rec | Helen Kuhns, Coastal Virginia Conservancy | Scott Lerberg, Virginia Institute of Marine Science | Stephen Living, Department of Wildlife Resources | Lucas Manweiler, DEQ - VA Coastal Zone Management Program | Brad McDonald, Department of Historic Resources | Wendy Musumeci, Department of Historic Resources | Joel Neville, VSP | Adam Newland, VSP | David Norris, Department of Wildlife Resources | Pam Northam, Elizabeth River Project | Erin Reilly, Virginia Institute of Marine Science | Andrew Rich, Newport News Parks and Rec | Heather Richards, The Conservation Fund | Meagan Thomas, Department of Wildlife Resources | Richard Wiatt, VHB | Lauren Zuravnsky, Hampton Roads Sanitation District | **Field Trip Coordinator:** Taylor Evans, The Conservation Fund

VaULT Board of Directors

Ebonie Alexander | Heather Barrar | Lisa Bieber | Nathan Burrell | Becky Gwynn | Kerry Hutcherson | Mike Kane | Martha Little | Jen Perkins | David Perry | Hali Plourde-Rogers | Alan Rowsome

VaULT Executive Director

Ellen Shepard

Cover photo credit: Ragged Island Wildlife Management Area by Meghan Marchetti, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources



Field Trips, Monday, April 27, 2026

A. Newport News Park Tour, Walk, Talk, & Drive: Join Newport News Waterworks to tour one of the largest municipal parks east of the Mississippi River. At almost 8,000 acres, Newport News Park offers a plethora of examples of successful conservation work. This field trip will highlight the history of the park, reforestation efforts, watershed management, historical preservation efforts, and natural area preservation.

When: Monday, April 27, 2026, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Where: Newport News Park (13560 Jefferson Ave, Newport News, VA 23603)

B. Grandview Nature Preserve, Hike & Bird: Join us for a 4-mile round-trip birding hike through Grandview Nature Preserve, one of Hampton's coastal gems. This scenic walk follows the beach out to Factory Point, offering opportunities to observe a variety of shorebirds, wading birds, and other coastal wildlife along the Chesapeake Bay. Participants will learn about the area's unique coastal habitats, the importance of the Back River estuary, and ongoing local efforts to enhance coastal resilience.

When: Monday, April 27, 2026, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Where: Grandview Nature Preserve Trail Access (State Park Dr, Hampton, VA 23664, GPS: 37.078676509125856, -76.27766520177924)

C. Conservation on the Elizabeth River, Walk, Talk, Bike: Visit the Pru and Louis Ryan Resilience Lab, a global model for coastal resilience, designed to teach the world's coastal residents and businesses how to respond as sea levels rise. This coastal property is protected under a rolling conservation easement which will eventually result in this pillar of resilience to be demolished to allow the waters and marshes of the Elizabeth River to take over. Then, take a short bike ride on the Elizabeth River Trail to learn about the trail's history and future connections, enhancements, and placemaking activities.

When: Monday, April 27, 2026, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Where: Ryan Resilience Lab & the Elizabeth River Trail (4610 Colley Ave, Norfolk, VA 23508)

D. Exploring Catlett Island's Restoration and Monitoring Work for Habitat Resilience, Kayak: Paddle through the Catlett Islands on a kayak tour which explores the diverse wildlife, ecosystems, and restoration of the area with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Virginia. Participants will get to enjoy a 2 hour paddle through slow-moving tidal waters and will have the opportunity to explore Machicomoco State Park on their own after the paddle. Kayaks (single or tandem), life vests, and paddles will be provided.

When: Monday, April 27, 2026, 11:00 a.m. - 2:00/4:00 p.m.

Where: Machicomoco State Park Cartop Boat Launch (GPS: 37.302683, -76.550444)

E. Grafton Ponds Walk & Talk: Come explore and experience the natural beauty and history of the Grafton Ponds property! Owned by Newport News Waterworks, the property includes 5 tracts comprising a total of 550 acres of conserved land protected by a perpetual historic preservation and open-space easement held by the Virginia Board of Historic Resources. While the easement ensures the protection of a critical portion of the City of Newport News water supply, the property also contains numerous well-preserved Civil War defensive earthworks and other archaeological sites. In addition to its historic value, the property includes several specimens of a coastal plain natural pond complex which provides habitat for numerous plant and animal species. The tour will involve a hike across portions of the property to highlight these conservation values and the City's on-going management of the property. The tour will be led by Newport News Waterworks and Virginia Department of Historic Resources staff members.

When: Monday, April 27, 2026, 12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Where: Grafton Ponds (600 Oriana Road, Yorktown, VA 23693, GPS: 37.148645, -76.477939)

E. Tour of Machicomoco State Park, Walk & Talk: Comprised of 645 acres, Machicomoco State Park contains a high diversity of habitats ideal for wildlife viewing including tidal marshes and wetlands, farmed fields, shrubby grasslands, longleaf pine stands, and mixed forest which make this one of the premier wildlife viewing locations along the Commonwealth's Middle Peninsula. When established in 2019, Machicomoco was the first state park celebrating and honoring the history and legacy of the Native Tribes of Virginia. Join staff from Virginia State Parks and The Conservation Fund to learn how the park came to be, take a guided tour of the extensive interpretive facilities and historic Timberneck House (c.1793), with time for a self-guided walk of the miles of trails throughout the park. The

tour will involve a guided hike across portions of the property with additional time to explore exhibits or trails in the park.

When: Monday, April 27, 2026, 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Where: Machicomoco State Park (3601 Timberneck Farm Road, Hayes, VA 23072)

G. Ragged Island Wildlife Management Area, Walk & Talk: Learn about Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources' partnership with Ducks Unlimited, Christopher Newport University and NOAA to restore 6,300 feet of shoreline on the Ragged Island WMA adjacent to the James River Bridge in Isle of Wight County. Participants will have the opportunity to view the restored shoreline and learn about how this partnership helped protect the threatened 1,537 acre marsh at the WMA, including involvement from local universities and school programs.

When: Monday, April 27, 2026, 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

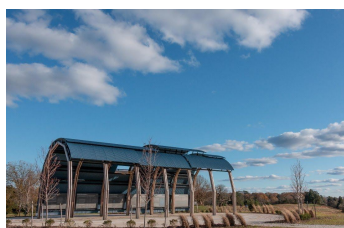
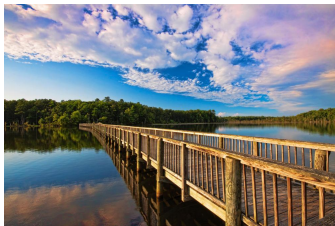
Where: Ragged Island WMA Parking Area (12527 Carrollton Blvd, Carrollton, VA 23314)

Field Trips, Wednesday, April 29, 2026

H. Riverview Farm Park Living Shoreline and SWIFT Facility Tour, Walk & Talk: This tour highlights how Hampton Roads Sanitation District (HRSD), in partnership with the City of Newport News, developed a mile of new trails and boardwalks around Riverview Farm Park as part of the Sustainable Water Initiative for Tomorrow (SWIFT) program. Participants will see how shoreline protection, stormwater improvements, and new public amenities were integrated into a single comprehensive project that strengthens the park and surrounding community.

When: Wednesday, April 29, 2026, 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Where: Riverview Farm Park (105 City Farm Rd, Newport News, VA 23602)



Field trip photo credits (clockwise from top left): Newport News Park by Virginia Tourism Corporation; Grandview Nature Preserve by Mary Bennett, Virginia Department of Forestry; Pru and Louis Ryan Resilience Lab by Elizabeth River Project; Catlett Island by Dave Yeager; Grafton Ponds by Virginia Department of Historic Resources; Machicomoco State Park by Virginia State Parks; Ragged Island Wildlife Management Area by Meghan Marchetti, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources; Riverview Farm Park by Hampton Roads Sanitation District



Tuesday, April 28, 2026, Lunch Keynote

Fort Monroe: The Past and Future of Community Healing



Aazia "Aaz" Mrozinski is the Executive Director of the Fort Monroe Foundation, the philanthropic partner to Fort Monroe National Monument in Hampton, Virginia. In this role, she leads the Foundation's fundraising, strategic partnerships, and programming, working to establish Fort Monroe as a national model for community wellbeing at the intersection of ecology, history, public health, and civic meaning-making. Before joining the Fort Monroe Foundation, Aaz built her career in technology and startup ecosystem development, with experience spanning venture fundraising, innovation strategy, and social entrepreneurship. She served on the Fort Monroe Foundation board for three years prior to assuming the Executive Director role.



Wednesday, April 29, 2026, Lunch Keynote

Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Katie Frazier and Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources David Bulova



David Bulova has over three decades of professional experience in environmental planning. Most recently, he served as a project manager for WSP USA, an international engineering and environmental consulting firm. In that role, David specialized in water resources policy, Chesapeake Bay restoration, municipal and industrial stormwater permit compliance, stakeholder group facilitation, and stormwater finance. David served in the Virginia House of Delegates representing the City of Fairfax and parts of Fairfax County from 2006-2026. In the House, he served in key leadership roles, including chair of the Commerce, Agriculture, and Natural Resources subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, and chair of the Chesapeake subcommittee of the Agriculture, Chesapeake, and Natural Resources Committee. He also served on the Chesapeake Bay Commission, which he chaired twice, and the State Water Commission. In 2019, VIRGINIAforever recognized David with the Bridge Builder award for his contributions to natural

resources stewardship. David and his wife Gretchen both grew up in Fairfax County and have three children. In their spare time, the Bulova family enjoys hiking in Virginia's beautiful parks.



Katie K. Frazier, a native of the Shenandoah Valley, has dedicated her career to supporting the growth of two of Virginia's top industries: agriculture and forestry. With extensive experience in advocacy, Katie has worked tirelessly at both the state and federal levels on a wide range of issues, including soil and water conservation, market and economic development, agricultural research, workforce development, and the preservation of working farms and forests. Since 2018, Katie has served as the Chief Brand Officer for Farm Credit of the Virginias. In this role, she leads the financial cooperative's marketing, legislative and advocacy efforts, education, the Farm Credit Knowledge Center, stakeholder and community relations, and charitable contributions programs. Her previous experience includes serving as the Executive Director of the Virginia Agribusiness Council, a non-profit trade association in Richmond, as well as representation of wineries and grain producers in her advocacy work. Katie resides in Chesterfield

County with her family and is actively involved in her church and local Scouting America Troop.

Tuesday, April 28, 2026

These meetings are open to all conference attendees.

Virginia's United Land Trusts (VaULT) Business Meeting

Local, state, and federal updates as well as nonprofit and VaULT information.

Agenda:

- VaULT member and partner updates
- State updates - DOF and DEQ programs
- Working with localities on resilience planning
- Indigenous Conservation Council of the Chesapeake Bay
- Federal updates - agricultural conservation easement programs and more from NRCS

Speakers:

- Terry Lasher, Department of Forestry, State Forester
- Jonathan Rak, Department of Environmental Quality, Deputy Director
- Christopher Williams, Newport News, Engineering Specialist – Floodplain & Resilience Coordinator
- Hannah Goins (Lumbee), Indigenous Conservation Council of the Chesapeake Bay, Sovereignty Specialist
- Natural Resources Conservation Service staff

State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) Spring Meeting

Trail updates from state officials and partners.

Agenda:

- Introduction to Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Director Nicole Rovner
- High Bridge Trail State Park Master Plan update
- VDOT State Trails Office update
- Natural Heritage Trail maintenance
- Navigating House Bill 2088 – pedestrian rail crossings

Speakers:

- Kelly McClary, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Planning and Recreation Resources, Director
- David Bryan, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Planning and Recreation Resources, Chief Planner
- Ross Tepe, Virginia Department of Transportation Local Assistance Division, State Trails Program Manager
- Cassie Patterson, Virginia Department of Transportation Local Assistance Division, State Trails Program Coordinator
- Wes Paulos, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Planning and Recreation Resources,
- Salim Chishti, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Planning and Recreation Resources, Environmental Program Planner
- Michael Holden, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Natural Heritage, Natural Areas GIS Specialist



Session Descriptions, Tuesday, April 28, 2026

Session A

Forecasting and Counting Trail Use

Trails provide a broad spectrum of people with both transportation and recreation opportunities, so forecasting and counting their usage is valuable. Forecasting trail usage 1) allows planners to propose effective trail locations, and 2) strengthens planners' grant applications for the trail. Two simple methods of forecasting the usage of proposed trails in Virginia will be presented. Counting the usage of a trail, once it has been built, supports constructing future facilities, managing user conflicts, and planning trail maintenance and enhancement. Methods of counting trail usage, and of analyzing those counts, will be presented.

Speakers:

- Shane Sawyer, Virginia Department of Transportation, Active Transportation Programs Manager
- Robert B. Case, PhD, PE, Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization, Chief Transportation Engineer

Session B1

Three Decades of Wetland and Stream Conservation and Innovation

The Nature Conservancy has managed a cutting-edge stream and wetland mitigation program since 1995. The contributions to conservation and restoration, as well as increasing public lands and supporting land trust opportunities throughout Virginia, are highlighted and celebrated during this 30th anniversary. This VA program is the oldest operational in-lieu fee program in the country, is known as successful by regulatory partners, and has been pivotal in restoring and protecting significant landscapes throughout VA and beyond.

Speakers:

- Karen Johnson, The Nature Conservancy, Director, Wetland and Stream Mitigation
- Kelly Ridenhour, The Nature Conservancy, Land Protection Specialist

Session B2

Department of Wildlife Resources Wetland Program Updates

DWR will provide an overview of the Ragged Island WMA Shoreline Protection Project and other Wetland Program updates. The 1.2-mile shoreline project at Ragged Island funded by NOAA and EPA federal grants will safeguard the marsh-dominated WMA. Virginia is taking strong steps to progress wetland habitat conservation goals with the establishment of the Wetland Technical Team and Policy Taskforce. DWR will support 7 new wetland habitat projects with nearly \$50 million in federal grant funding.

Speakers:

- David Norris, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Region 1 Wildlife and Coastal Grants Manager
- Ben Sagara, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Wetland Program Lead

Session C

ArcGIS Workshop

This interactive workshop invites GIS users of all skill levels to learn about some example mapping projects that used innovative techniques or garnered impressive results. Following brief presentations, an overview will be given of the different mapping resources available across Virginia, then time will be left for attendees to share their ArcGIS tips and tricks, and talk through issues they are having so that they can receive guidance. Projects and tools that will be highlighted in mini presentations include the VEVA model, PEC's data center maps, and ASV's mapping of shared priorities among SVCC partners. A computer is not needed to attend, as one will be hooked up to the screen and running ArcGIS for anyone who wants to demonstrate something.

Facilitator:

- Taylor Evans, The Conservation Fund, Field Representative for the Mid-Atlantic

Speakers:

- Lucas Manweiler, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Conservation Coordinator for the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program
- Sarah Parmalee, The Piedmont Environmental Council, Land Use Representative for Culpeper County
- Kevin Tate, Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, Director of Conservation

Session D1

Serving the Commonwealth: Demystifying Board Appointments

Ever wonder how people actually get appointed to Virginia's boards and commissions? This interactive session pulls back the curtain on the appointments process and helps outdoor and conservation leaders see how their skills fit into state-level service. Led by former Director of Gubernatorial Appointments Maribel Castañeda, with perspective from the next administration's appointments office, we'll talk through how to get on the radar, what to expect once you're appointed, and how to make your service count.

Speaker:

- Maribel Castañeda, Office of Governor Abigail Spanberger, Deputy Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources
- Charity Howell, Commonwealth of Virginia, Director of Board Appointments

Session D2

Achieving Synergy: Balancing Risk, Efficiency, and Nonprofit Governance

Are your written policies truly reflecting your current actions? Do your Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) contain contradictions? Are you constrained by outdated processes? It's time to update your foundational documents! This session offers a look into an organization-wide initiative to align a land trust's governance ecosystem and all the lessons learned along the way. Key topics will include strategies for clarifying language to uphold essential policy principles while accurately reflecting day-to-day practice, effective methods for engaging stakeholders throughout the process, and why this exercise in adaptation is vital in maintaining a strong governance structure and the health of your organization.

Speaker:

- Leigh Ross, The Piedmont Environmental Council, Legal Assistant & Records Manager

Student Mentorship Session

Students attending this session will learn about diverse pathways to enter natural, cultural, and scenic conservation professions by direct interactions with current professionals serving as mentors. The session will follow a 'speed dating' format where students will have a short period of time with each mentor to introduce themselves and their interests and to hear about the work of the mentor. Then, after everyone has met, the session will open into a general networking session where students will be able to talk with professionals with whom they feel a strong fit of interests.

Organizers and Mentors:

- Led by Kim Woodwell, Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, Program Director
- Participating professionals have diverse backgrounds and a wealth of experience in nonprofits, governments, and the private sector.

Session E1

Rebuilding Shorelines and Waterfront Trails: How Public and Private Partnerships Can Impact a Community

HRSD's innovative SWIFT aquifer recharge program will provide a sustainable source of groundwater for eastern Virginia. This program is designed to provide significant regional environmental and community benefits. The first SWIFT advanced water treatment facility is under construction at HRSD's James River Treatment Plant. As part of the work there, HRSD restored 900 linear feet of shoreline and created two miles of multi-use trails through a successful public/private partnership with the City of Newport News.

Speakers:

- Lauren Zuravnsky, Hampton Roads Sanitation District, Director of Design & Construction - SWIFT
- Richard Wiatt, VHB, Planning + Design Project Manager

Session E2

Main Street to Meadow: Urban/Rural Trail Corridors

This panel will explore how multiuse trails can bridge the urban-rural divide by serving both recreation and everyday transportation needs. Speakers will discuss strategies for designing trails that respond to the distinct contexts of rural and urban communities, including differences in infrastructure, access, and user priorities. By adapting trail design to local needs, communities can expand equitable access, strengthen regional connectivity, and create a more versatile alternative transportation network.

Speakers:

- Will Gillette, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation, Director of Trail Development - Capital Trail Extension
- Pavithra Parthasarathi, Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization, Deputy Executive Director

- Alister Perkinson, James City County, Assistant Director of Parks & Recreation
- Angela Rico, City of Newport News Department of Engineering, Supervising Engineer - Transportation

Session F1

Rolling Easements: A Conservation Tool for Disappearing Lands

Hampton Roads is the most vulnerable area in the United States to sea level rise. Reducing vulnerability in a densely populated region such as Hampton Roads, where most of the shoreline is owned by private citizens and businesses, options are limited. Coastal Virginia Conservancy is utilizing rolling easements as a tool to support business and landowners with risky shorelines, including the Lou and Pru Ryan Resilience Lab in Norfolk.

Speaker:

- Helen Kuhns, Coastal Virginia Conservancy, Executive Director

Session F2

Roots to Reef: A Mosaic Approach to Shoreline Restoration

In 2025, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation installed a 1,078-foot living shoreline combined with two-and-a-half-acres of oyster reef near Pine Cone Harbour in Hampton, VA. This spring, CBF will convert 3,345 square feet of turf grass into a native high marsh buffer to support marsh migration. The discussion will cover these projects and the research conducted by VIMS CBNERR-VA and Hampton University that supports the projects.

Speakers:

- Kati Grigsby, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Hampton Roads Restoration Coordinator
- Jackie Shannon, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Virginia Oyster Restoration Manager
- Erin Reilly, Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve - VA, Conservation and Restoration Coordinator
- Dr. Deidre Gibson, Hampton University, Chair, Dept. of Marine and Environmental Science

Session G

Conservation Speed-Dating: Connecting Landowners with Their Local Technical Service Providers

In an effort to accelerate adoption of conservation practices, the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative, along with partners associated with several Regional Conservation Partnerships, created an innovative outreach program that allows landowners to meet their local technical service providers through a fun and engaging speed-dating format. This talk will highlight the evolution and successes of these workshops and how to replicate and adapt them to any community. The session will include an interactive mock speed-dating component to help showcase and teach the concept to participants.

Speakers:

- October Greenfield, The Piedmont Environmental Council, Wildlife Habitat Program Manager
- Justin Proctor, Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes, Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative Coordinator
- Kevin Tate, Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, Director of Conservation

Session H

Building the Conservation Community Through Fellowship and Internship Programs

Fellowship and internship programs can provide needed pathways into conservation careers and help us build a more diverse workforce and sustainable base of support. In this interactive session, The Nature Conservancy, Piedmont Environmental Council, Virginia Conservation Network, and Potomac Conservancy who is part of the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Fellowship Program will share their experiences in developing educational and internship programs. What have we learned? How have our programs evolved? What should you be thinking about as your organization develops or builds out such a program?

Speakers:

- Douglas Stewart, The Piedmont Environmental Council, Randal Fellowship Coordinator
- Amanda Gookin, Shenandoah Valley Conservancy, Communications Manager
- Taylor Fanelli, The Nature Conservancy, Short Term Experience Program (STEP) Manager
- Jaime Trejo-Angelos, Virginia Conservation Network, Communications & Trainings Senior Associate



Breakfast Roundtables, Wednesday, April 29, 2026

Stewardship Solutions

This stewardship roundtable invites land trust and partner agency professionals to connect, share challenges, and exchange solutions on pressing land stewardship topics. Discussions will cover monitoring technology, landowner relationships, and resolving violations. This collaborative format fosters peer learning, practical problem-solving, and networking among stewardship practitioners facing evolving conservation and management realities.

Facilitators:

- Lora Callahan, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Real Property Stewardship Specialist
- Valerie Peterson, The Piedmont Environmental Council, Deputy Director of Conservation

Volunteer Management

This volunteer management roundtable will cover best practices for recruiting, engaging and retaining volunteers in conservation work. Discussions will cover volunteer management systems, communications, and volunteer opportunities and events that have proven to be the most effective for participants. Resource sharing surrounding these topics will help all participants strengthen their volunteer programs.

Facilitators:

- Dr. Jackson Bartlett, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River, Executive Director
- Heather Barrar, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River & PlanRVA, Regional Trails Program Director

Conservation Storytelling

This communications roundtable will focus on how land trusts can use storytelling, visual media, and outreach materials to amplify the impact of their work—such as easement, restoration and public access projects. Participants will crowdsource strategies and marketing ideas from each other for communicating through social, traditional, and direct media. The goal is to collect actionable, peer-tested ideas to increase public support and engagement for conservation efforts

Facilitators:

- Marco Sanchez, The Piedmont Environmental Council, Co-Director of Outreach & Communications
- Faith Schweikert, The Piedmont Environmental Council, Communications Specialist

Professional Partners

This professional partners roundtable will explore how professional partners can use this network and better serve the conservation community. Work together to analyze unmet needs and explore how those gaps can be bridged.

Facilitator:

- Andrea M. Reese, Reese Conservation Consulting, Principal

Interest in an Acquisition Workgroup?

VaULT has a very active Stewardship Workgroup. We are assessing the level of interest in establishing an acquisition workgroup. New to acquisition or a veteran, please join if you are interested in being part of an acquisition workgroup. The discussion will measure the level of interest and develop a list of 5-10 topics of interest for future conversations.

Facilitator:

- Emily Bender, Blue Ridge, Central, & Southern Virginia Land Conservancies, Assistant Director
- Matt Gerhart, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, Conservation Director

Launching a Land Conservation Leadership Workgroup

It's important for organizational leaders within VaULT to have a forum where they can engage with other executive level colleagues to offer support, exchange ideas, and recharge in a conducive environment for discussion of the unique challenges that land conservation leaders face.

Facilitators:

- Alan Rowsome, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, Executive Director
- Peter Hujik, Shenandoah Valley Conservancy, Executive Director

Session Descriptions, Wednesday, April 29, 2026

Session I

Crafting a Strong Vision for Trails to Maximize our Investments

Trail building is complex, and for many of us, it feels steered primarily by scarcity and red tape. It doesn't help that these projects usually take decades, and maintaining momentum can be a real challenge. This session will make the case that crafting a strong vision for your trail is essential for getting it funded, built, built well, and used.

Speaker:

- Brantley Tyndall, Sports Backers & Fall Line Trail, Director of Bike Walk RVA

Facilitator:

- Dr. Jackson Bartlett, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River, Executive Director
- Elliott Caldwell, East Coast Greenway Alliance, Virginia and Washington DC Manager

Session J

Where Mission Meets Recreation: Collaborative Conservation Opportunities with Military Installations

This session will provide an overview of how conservation organizations work collaboratively with military installations followed by a specific funding example. The Readiness and Recreation Initiative (RARI) is a competitive grant program using Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars to enhance outdoor recreation while supporting military readiness. Within the Tidewater Sentinel Landscape, RARI offers opportunities to protect coastal and working lands, improve recreation access, and buffer key installations.

Speakers:

- Mary Bennett, Virginia Department of Forestry, Tidewater Sentinel Landscape Coordinator
- Kristal McKelvey, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Chief Recreation Grants Manager
- Vanessa Ehrenpreis, National Park Service | Land and Water Conservation Fund, Supervisory Merit Review Manager | Competitive Programs

Session K

Partners in Protection: Collaborative Fee Acquisitions

From early landowner outreach to long-term stewardship, fee acquisition is both an art and a science. This session explores the full arc of acquiring land in collaboration with local, state or federal land-holding agencies, including negotiation roles, funding coordination, appraisal and compliance requirements, due diligence, and eventual transfer. Participants will learn how strong partnerships, clear communication, and aligned expectations can streamline complex joint acquisitions and ensure durable conservation outcomes.

Speakers:

- Natasha Skelton, The Conservation Fund, Virginia Associate State Director
- Charles Marston, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Real Property Specialist

Session L

Building Advocacy Influence to Achieve Big Conservation Wins

Land conservation organizations often create themselves, or otherwise face, external barriers to being effective advocacy organizations. In this session we will learn how organizations are adding building relationships with policy makers into the culture of their organization. In the field and through office visits, how to establish a relationship and become a trusted source of information.

Speakers:

- Alan Rowsome, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, Executive Director
- Kevin Tate, Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, Director of Conservation
- Lisa Bieber, Northern Neck Land Conservancy, Executive Director

Session M1

How to Work with Volunteers on Natural Surface Trails

Everybody loves having trails in their community, and often the user groups are eager to volunteer. Learn how the Town of Blacksburg undertook a trail assessment and sustainable trail training to better plan and manage volunteer projects. The project is on recently conserved land and demonstrates a unique partnership between a land conservancy, a local government and a passionate user group. Learn what to consider when undertaking a self

assessment, how to evaluate your trail network and how to make sure volunteers and your management plan are on the same page.

Speakers:

- Frank Maguire, Small Mountain Trails, Principal
- Dean Crane, Town of Blacksburg, Director, Parks and Recreation Department

Session M2

Mountains to Sea: Park Design in the Geographic Regions of Virginia

This discussion explores the integration of planning, landscape architecture, civil engineering, and construction oversight to address complex and varied project and site constraints by employing adaptive design methodologies. The focus will be on three public park projects across Virginia's landscape that skillfully balance site constraints, environmental limitations, historic resources, and conservation needs while incorporating educational opportunities, accessibility, passive and active recreation, and the thoughtful integration of greenways and blueways.

Speakers:

- Jessica Mauzy, Kimley-Horn, Landscape Architect, Project Manager
- Greg Schmitt, Kimley-Horn, Civil Engineer

Session N1

The Virginia Wildlife Action Plan: How the Plan Can Guide Land Conservation and Recreational Access

This session will demonstrate how the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan can guide land conservation priorities, provide specific examples of where land conservation has been guided by previous plans, and discuss the species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) that benefited from those efforts. In addition, we will detail several dam removal projects and land management efforts that provided public access or improved river access and also supported conservation of SGCN. The necessity of partnerships to these efforts will also be discussed.

Speakers:

- Becky Gwynn, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Executive Deputy Director

Session N2

Virginia Beach's Open Space Strategies and Achieving Multiple Benefits

Virginia Beach has pursued an open space program for over 25 years, largely with local funding. To date, over 3,000 acres of lands at a cost exceeding \$50 million have been acquired for a variety of uses, including active recreation, historic resource protection, natural resources preservation, and resiliency objectives. The session will explore lessons learned that will provide participants an opportunity to consider ways in which the City's experience can help improve their local initiatives.

Speakers:

- Clay Bernick, Virginia Beach Open Space Advisory Committee, Chairperson
- Corinna Green, Virginia Beach Department of Parks and Recreation, Planner III / Planning, Design & Development

Session O

Absolutely Taxing: Three Trending Conservation-Related Tax Issues (CLE Approved)

This CLE session will cover three tax topics. First, the timely topic of the prohibition against impermissible private benefit to assist in safeguarding the tax-exempt status of land trusts. The session will then focus on the Internal Revenue Code, Treasury regulations and recent Tax Court case law requirements for "sufficient" baseline documentation reports and for the satisfaction of an enumerated conservation purpose (habitat, open space) in a conservation easement deed. [Please review the session materials in advance if you plan to attend.](#)

Speakers:

- Diana Norris, Land Trust Alliance, Conservation Defense Associate Director

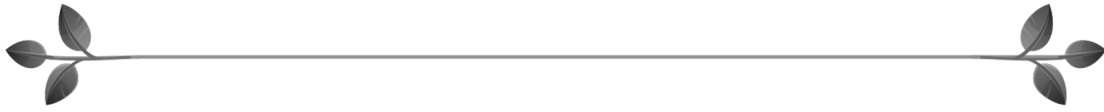
Session P

Integrating Strategic Brand Communications, Advancement and Finance for Conservation

An interdisciplinary team of conservation, branding/communication, advancement and finance professionals will lead an interactive session on nonprofit management skills enabling conservation organizations to navigate economic uncertainty. The team will share their recent work with Shenandoah Valley Conservancy, investing in capacity which resulted in an increase of 90% in unrestricted revenue and an expanded supporter base, enabling the organization to add staff and grow conservation capacity. This case study will provide the framework for facilitated discussions.

Speakers:

- Peter Hujik, Shenandoah Valley Conservancy, Executive Director
- Katie Wallace, Wallace 360, Founder and CEO
- Tim Plant, Pachira Strategies, Founder and CEO
- Rob Mason, R. Mason & Company, Managing Member

**Additional Details**

Tuesday, April 28 Reception Directions (three miles from the Newport News Marriott, not walkable)

Address: Mariner's Museum, 100 Museum Drive, South Courtyard

Thimble Shoals Blvd. to Jefferson Jefferson Ave. Once you get to Warwick Blvd and J. Clyde Morris Blvd/Avenue of the Arts intersection:

- Head southwest onto Avenue of the Arts
- First left onto Museum Drive
- Continue past Lakeside Drive
- Continue straight after the STOP sign
- Park in the last lot on the right
- Follow the pathway through the trees (Lil' Mariners' Play Zone will be to the right)
- Enter at the Business Entrance

**Marriott WiFi**

SSID: VA Land Conservation Conference

PASSWORD: Marriott2026