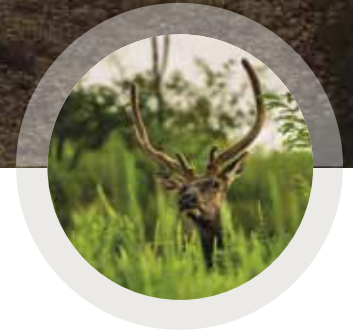
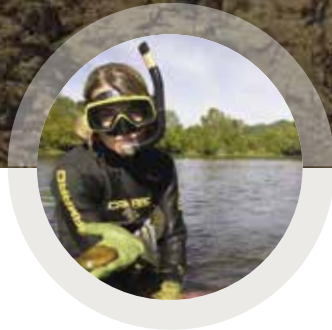


Our Virginia



Elevating Our Appalachians



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

ON THE COVER Shenandoah National Park © Daniel White; INSET, LEFT TO RIGHT © Jack Looney; © Kent Mason; © Steven David Johnson; THIS PAGE Locke Ogens © Kyle LaFerriere Photography

What do our own beloved Appalachian Mountains have in common with the rainforests of Borneo and the Amazon? Or with the rolling, wildlife-rich grasslands of Kenya?

All of these places are home to an extraordinary diversity of life. All are critical to shoring up the resilience of nature and people in the face of a changing climate. All are proving grounds for innovative conservation. And, consequently, all are now designated top global priorities for The Nature Conservancy.

Virginia has played a leading role in elevating the Appalachians. More than 30 years ago, our Clinch Valley Program began as a one-person operation based in Abingdon. It was ambitious—or naive, some might say—attempting to protect river systems that encompass a swath of Appalachia larger than the state of Delaware.

But we trusted where the science was leading us, and that was to the Appalachian rivers harboring the most diverse, most imperiled collection of aquatic wildlife on the continent. As our program grew, we made the then-radical leap of expanding across state lines.

By 2019, our pioneering Conservation Forestry Program and successful entry into carbon markets had made it possible to attract impact investments on a whole new

“As a global priority, our ancient Appalachians are once again on the rise.”

scale. Today, through our Cumberland Forest Project, TNC intends to conserve over a quarter-million acres across Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky.

As a global priority, our ancient Appalachians are once again on the rise. Whether it’s funding from generous supporters like you or organization-wide expertise, The Nature Conservancy is committing resources to a range-wide collaboration spanning Alabama to Canada. Thank you for supporting this vital conservation mission and helping Virginia lead the charge.

Locke Ogens

Locke Ogens
Virginia Director

p.s. Read on to enjoy our spotlight on the Appalachians, along with highlights reaching to the Atlantic!

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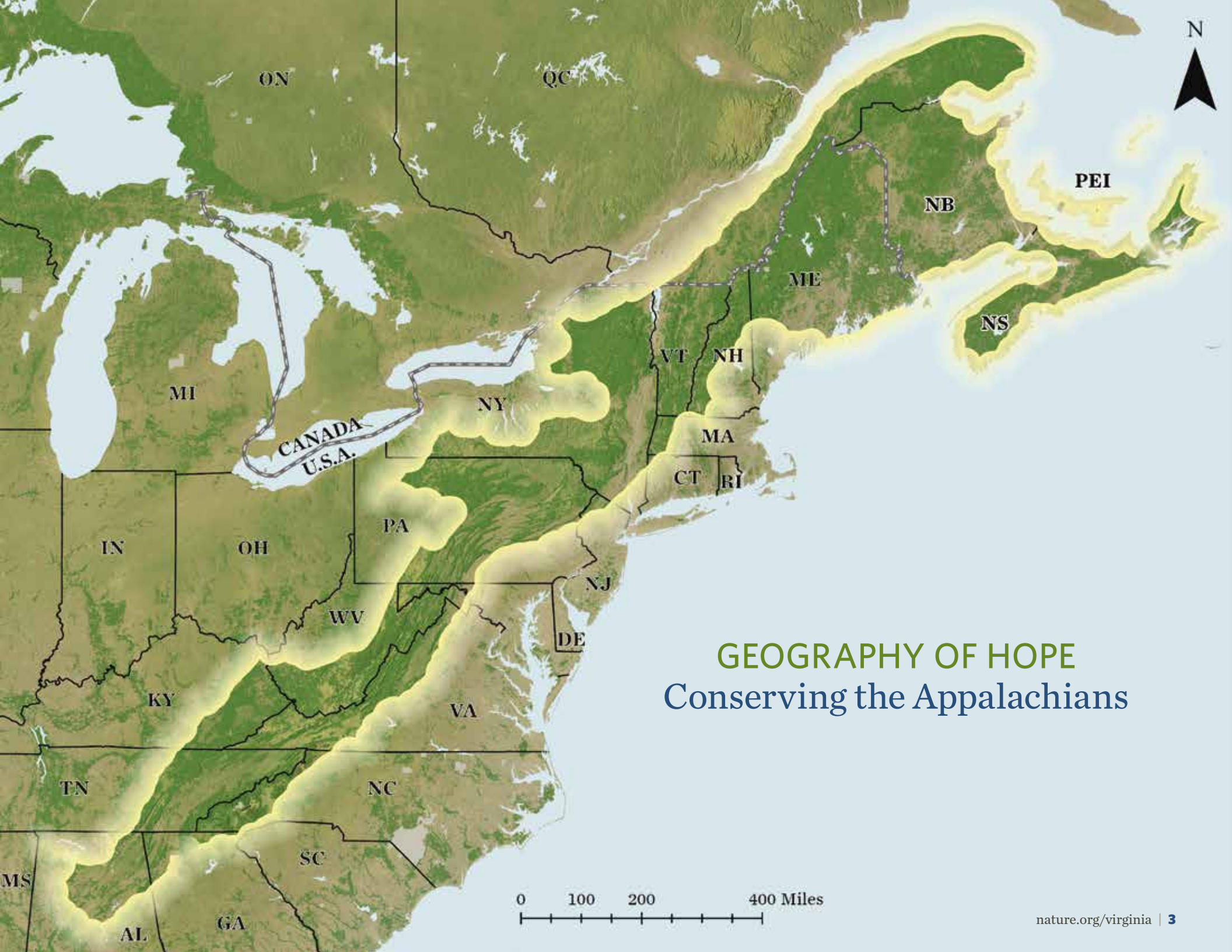
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GEOGRAPHY OF HOPE

Conserving the Appalachians

THE APPALACHIANS

“TNC has really bold, ambitious and effective work going on in Virginia and throughout the Appalachians.”

— Brad Kreps, Director,
Clinch Valley Program

The Appalachians were born from a violent upheaval of rock spanning roughly 2,000 miles from present-day Alabama to Canada. For more than 400 million years, natural forces have sculpted this ancient chain into the forested ridges, valleys, wetlands and rivers we know and love today. Conservation scientists also know the Apps as one of the most diverse, resilient and productive regions on Earth.

Some 16,000 years ago, Indigenous Peoples—including the Cherokee, Haudenosaunee, Powhatan and Shawnee—began living in and stewarding this landscape. Today, at least 22 million people call the region home, and millions more rely on its natural abundance for their health, recreation and livelihoods.

Cumberland Forest Project

Brad Kreps, director of The Nature Conservancy’s Clinch Valley Program, gestures at the surrounding forested ridges during a visit to Dante, a historic coal-mining community near the Clinch River. “This project is on a massive scale,” he says, referring to The Nature Conservancy’s Cumberland Forest Project. The forest rises and rolls as far as the eye can see.

Yet these sweeping views cover only a sliver of the Cumberland property. Kreps also helps coordinate the

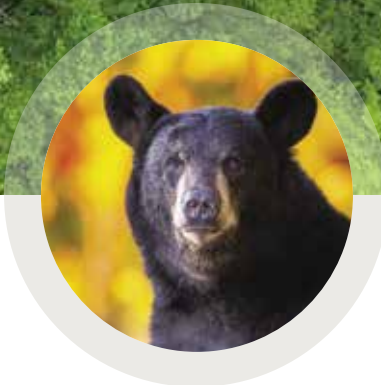
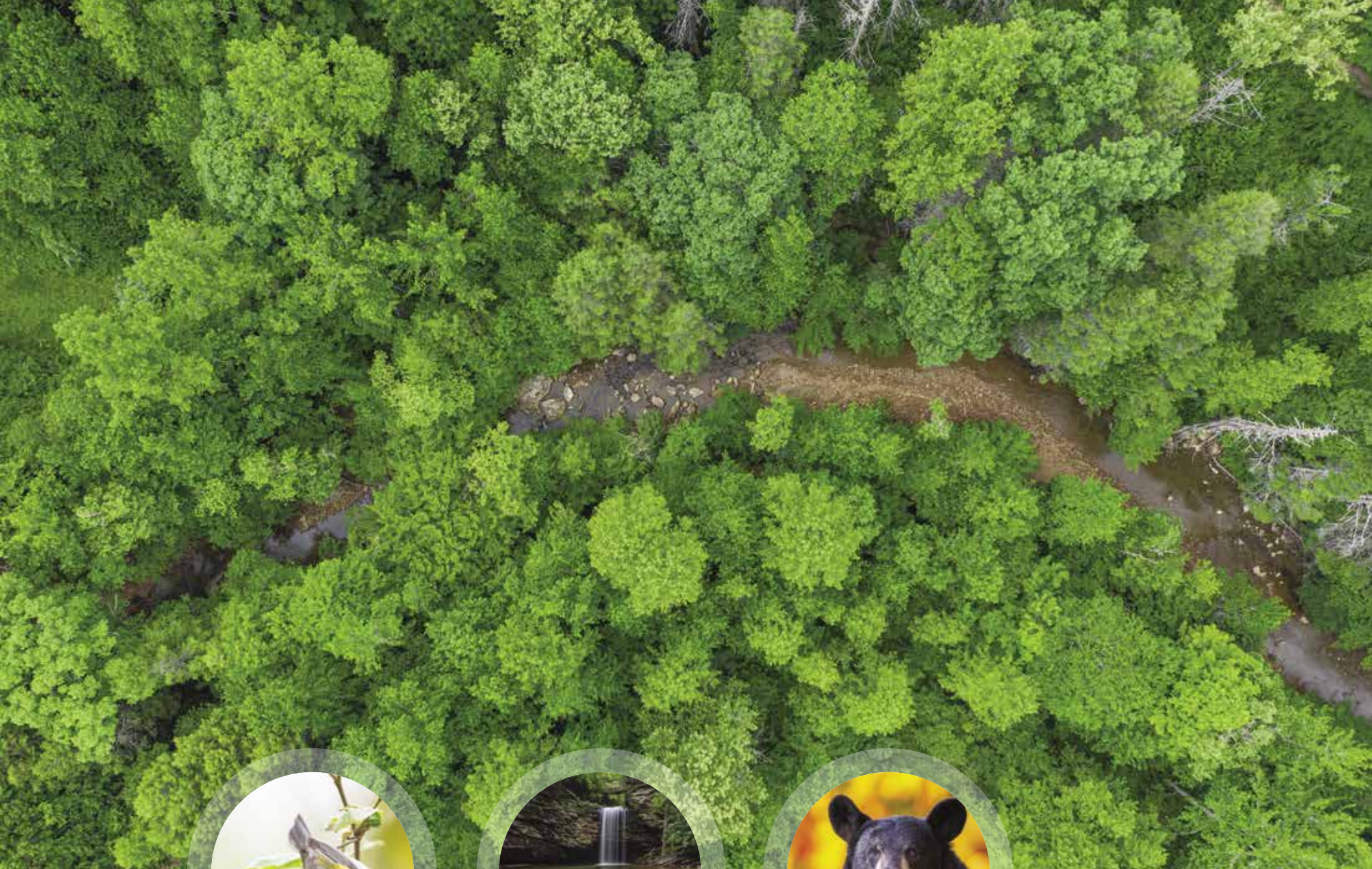
team managing more than a quarter-million acres. Acquiring these vast forests in 2019—153,000 acres in southwest Virginia and 100,000 acres bridging Tennessee and Kentucky—has advanced TNC’s ambitious, multi-pronged goals for this geography of hope in our own time of tumultuous climate change.

For Kreps, it’s a challenging time but also an exciting one in terms of the conservation opportunity. “TNC has really bold, ambitious and effective work going on in Virginia and throughout the Appalachians,” Kreps says. He and his team are especially focused on stewarding vast swaths of private working forests.

A bit farther north, meanwhile, TNC’s Allegheny Highlands program is engaged in restoration partnerships affecting millions of acres of public land. Throughout the Appalachians, our partnerships support three simple but interlocking goals. First, protect and restore natural diversity. Next, minimize climate impacts while enhancing the resilience of nature and people. Third, help struggling communities turn conservation into economic opportunity.

Now in year two, the Cumberland Forest Project is advancing on all fronts, from forest health and carbon storage to enhanced outdoor recreation to generating clean solar energy from former minelands.

ABOVE Cumberland Forest © Byron Jorjorian; OPPOSITE PAGE Aerial view of Little Clear Creek © Cameron Davidson; INSET, LEFT TO RIGHT Golden-winged warbler © Scott Keys/TNC Photo Contest 2019; Little Stony Falls © Steven David Johnson; Black bear © Cassidy Girvin/TNC Photo Contest 2021



Cumberland Forest Community Fund Supports Local Ventures

In July, TNC and UVA Wise announced the first group of grant recipients for the Cumberland Forest Community Fund. The Cumberland Forest Limited Partnership provided funding for this new local grant program, which supports nature-based economic and community development in seven southwest Virginia counties.

“This first set of funded projects will connect people to nature while contributing to economic diversification and community development in Virginia’s coalfields region,” says Kreps. “We couldn’t be happier with UVA Wise as our partner and program manager for the Cumberland Forest Community Fund.” Through a similar partnership with the Clinch-Powell RC&D, the program has funded seven additional community projects in Tennessee.

Where the Elk Roam

Virginia’s last native elk was killed in 1855. After Kentucky began successfully reintroducing elk in 1997, animals began roaming into southwest Virginia. In 2012, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation began capturing elk from Kentucky for release onto a former mining site in Buchanan County, Virginia.

TNC purchased this core elk restoration site in March as part of a 1,100-acre acquisition made possible by our supporters, including the Worrell family and Genan Foundation, and by a generous matching-gift challenge from the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation.

The reclaimed mineland features open meadows surrounded by shady forest. Here, Virginia’s elk herds—now numbering some 250 animals—can alternately graze or seek cover depending on the time of day. TNC’s new elk preserve remains central to ongoing restoration and ecotourism partnerships.

RIGHT Rock climbing at Hidden Valley near Abingdon © Travis Dove; INSET, TOP TO BOTTOM Bull elk © Steven David Johnson; View from Powell Valley Overlook © Travis Dove; SIDEBAR Elk © Kent Mason



Elk Watching in Virginia

TNC is working with members of the SWVA Sportsmen and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to maintain a number of wildlife viewing stations. The most reliable times for elk watching are during the spring calving season and the fall rut, when the sound of bugling rings out in the crisp air as bulls compete to corral the cows.

Breaks Interstate Park on the Virginia-Kentucky state line offers guided tours from late August through October. The Southern Gap Outdoor Adventure Center west of Grundy also offers access to viewing areas. You can also watch a live online elk cam and find a wealth of other information, on the Department of Wildlife Resources website.



ONLINE |
dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/elk



Sprucing Up the Mountains



“Across the Appalachians you feel the power of partnership—the beauty connects everyone, up and down the range, regardless of place or background.”

— Jennifer Morris, CEO

Red spruce forests once dominated high elevations of the central and northern Appalachians. At the turn of the 20th century, spruce timber was harvested at a devastating rate to build everything from furniture to ships. As a result, mature red spruce forests are now scarce and fragmented, isolated “islands” with low genetic diversity.

The good news is a broad and growing movement to restore red spruce and genetic diversity across its native range, a massive effort that touched down this spring in Virginia. Led by Clinch Valley forester Tal Jacobs, TNC planted 25,000 red spruce seedlings across 125 acres on Beartown Mountain in Russell County. The plantings took place on TNC’s Conservation Forestry easement at Rich Mountain and on the state’s Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

“There’s a lot of promise here for future public–private collaboration,” says Jacobs. Partnership is critical to expanding this imperiled forest habitat that is essential to climate resilience. Larger, healthier, more connected spruce forests can offer a vital refuge for wildlife that need to escape hotter, drier conditions elsewhere. Our research partners are studying the seedlings to better understand how genetics can boost the recovery of red spruce forest across the Appalachians.

Clinch River State Park Opens

More than a decade in the making, Clinch River State Park is officially open to visitors. In June, Governor Northam joined a celebration in St. Paul to dedicate Virginia’s 41st state park.

“Clinch River State Park is perhaps the perfect model,” Northam said at the event. “It’s certainly a place that we want to protect, not just for us but for future generations. The park will continue to encourage economic growth by helping make southwest Virginia a world-class outdoor recreation destination,” he added.

The state and TNC have worked with willing landowners and other partners to conserve key properties along the Clinch, which is widely considered one of the most important rivers for imperiled freshwater mussels and other rare creatures. In St. Paul, the park’s Sugar Hill unit offers access to the river for boating and fishing, along with eight miles of trails for hiking and biking. Work is ongoing to add additional access points and recreation amenities along the river’s course through four counties.



ONLINE | Explore our “Geography of Hope” at nature.org/appalachians.

THIS PAGE CEO Jennifer Morris tours the Allegheny Highlands with program director Blair Smyth. © Alex Novak/TNC; OPPOSITE PAGE Clinch River near Artrip © Cameron Davidson; INSET, TOP TO BOTTOM Clinch River State Park © Jack Mayer/Office of Governor Northam; Red spruce seedling © Kathryn Barlow/TNC; Red spruce planting © Kathryn Barlow/TNC



APPALACHIANS BY THE NUMBERS

1.8 Billion

Provides oxygen for 1.8 billion people

\$25 Billion

Generates approximately \$25 billion in recreation spending

1.3 Million

Mitigates 1.3 million tons of pollution

KEY STRATEGIES IN THE APPALACHIANS

- 01** Stitch together a connected landscape of climate-resilient lands, corridors and waters at the pace and scale necessary to mitigate climate change and protect biodiversity
- 02** Leverage land and water conservation to provide critical natural climate solutions for healthy communities and resilient landscapes
- 03** Aid the capacity of local conservation organizations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities to help conserve high-priority lands and waters; ensure that conservation outcomes equitably benefit all who live in and rely on the Appalachians

2021

CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

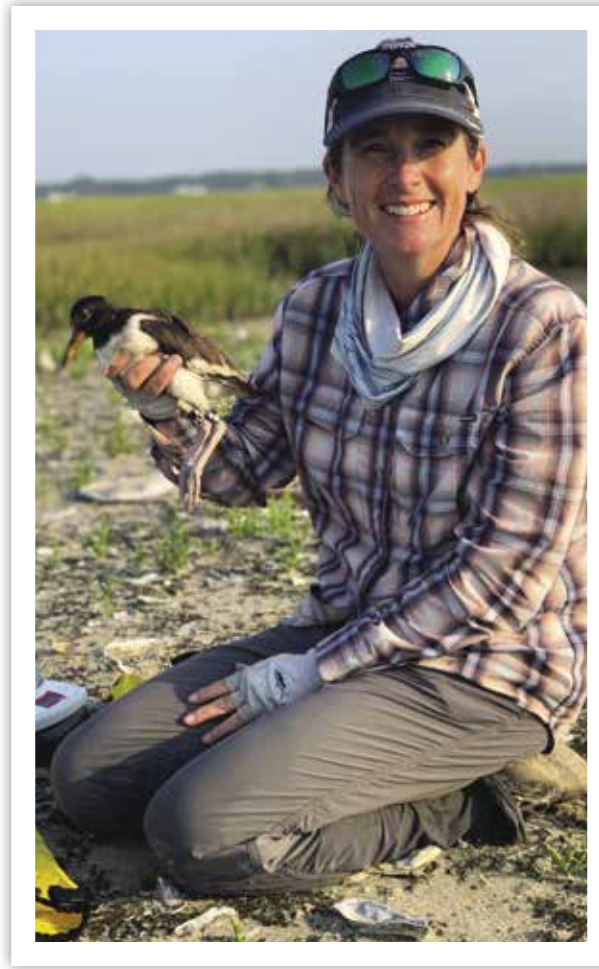
From celebrating 50 years of conservation on the Eastern Shore with our staff at the Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve (VCCR) to setting a new global record for shellfish restoration, we've marked some major milestones this year. To see events like these unfold in real time all year long, follow us on social media.



See the latest Virginia photos! Follow us at [instagram.com/nature_va](https://www.instagram.com/nature_va)

OYSTERCATCHER CATCHER

Alex Wilke, migratory bird team leader on the Eastern Shore, received the American Oystercatcher Working Group annual award, recognizing her contributions to the conservation of this indicator species. © Kristy Lapenta/TNC



SEAL TEAM

In partnership with the Navy, VVCR staff are studying how harbor seals use Eastern Shore habitats—information that can reduce human impacts on these marine creatures. © Kristy Lapenta/TNC



RAISING THE REEF

Our Piankatank River partnership recently became the largest shellfish restoration project in the world. After planned additions are completed next year, it will cover nearly 500 acres. © VCU Rice Rivers Center





PINELANDS PROTECTION

Piney Grove Flatwoods became Virginia's 66th natural area preserve in September. TNC retains ownership of this 446-acre tract, and dedicating it to the Virginia Natural Area Preserve System brings the state's highest level of protection to the heart of Piney Grove Preserve. © Robert B. Clontz/TNC



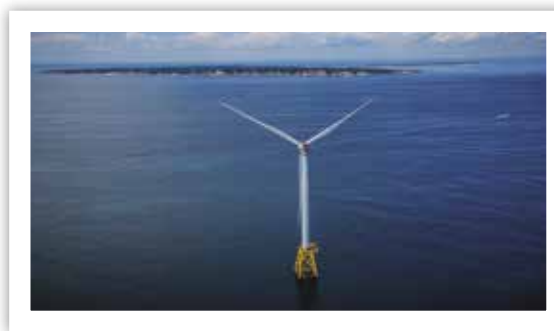
RIBBITED ATTENTION

Wetland restoration isn't usually a spectator sport, but our Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fund team sometimes attracts an audience, such as this toad, when conducting plant surveys. © Holly Lafferty/TNC



GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

Having celebrated 50 years of Eastern Shore conservation with a series of educational programs and exhibits, our VVCR team has embarked on TNC's second half-century of innovative conservation in one of the most important living laboratories in the world. © Gordon Campbell/At Altitude



WINDS OF CHANGE

With more than 200 offshore wind turbines expected to be built in Virginia waters starting in 2024, TNC scientists are identifying ways to avoid or reduce impacts to marine life and habitats. © Ayla Fox

CLIMATE

“The most urgently needed policies are those that will reduce emissions from the transportation sector.”

— Lena Lewis, Energy and Climate Policy Manager

Leading With Science and Nature to Tackle the Challenges of Our Time

An unstable climate and rising seas threaten the things we care about most: the health of our lands and waters, the well-being and prosperity of our communities, and all of our investments in protecting the natural world. The urgency of the climate crisis demands innovation, and science is telling us that nature must be central to our solutions.

Mining the Sun

In September, The Nature Conservancy and Dominion Energy Virginia announced an innovative collaboration to develop one of the first utility-scale solar projects on former surface mines in the coalfields of southwest Virginia. The project followed on the heels of similar efforts undertaken with Charlottesville-based Sun Tribe and D.C.-based Sol Systems.

Collectively, the projects will use nearly 1,700 acres of former minelands within the Cumberland Forest

Project to generate an estimated 120 megawatts of solar energy. On and around the former Red Onion surface mine, for example, Dominion’s Highlands Solar project is expected to generate approximately 50 megawatts. That’s enough to power 12,500 homes at peak output, among other benefits, such as creating clean-energy jobs.

“We hope these collaborations offer a model that can be replicated in other coal mining regions across the United States,” says Brad Kreps, director of TNC’s Clinch Valley Program. The projects help advance TNC’s Mining the Sun initiative. In neighboring West Virginia and around the country, the initiative is showcasing the win-win potential of renewable energy development on previously disturbed lands.

Virginia Passes Clean Car Standards


In February, Virginia legislators voted to adopt new Clean Car Standards. This legislation aims to increase the availability of electric vehicles in Virginia, leading to more consumer choice, improved public health and reduced carbon pollution.

To address our climate crisis and speed our transition to a low-carbon future, “the most urgently needed



policies are those that will reduce emissions from the transportation sector,” says Lena Lewis, TNC’s energy and climate policy manager. Transportation is our largest source of carbon dioxide pollution in Virginia.

“Moreover, nearly 34% of our state’s carbon emissions come from personal-use vehicles—compared to 29% coming from the entire power sector,” Lewis adds. The new standards will go into effect in 2024.

 **ONLINE** | Learn more about our climate work at nature.org/vaclimate.



OPPOSITE PAGE Cumberland Forest © Cameron Davidson; THIS PAGE The former Red Onion surface mine site will be used to generate clean solar energy. © Matt Poe; INSET, LEFT TO RIGHT Electric vehicle charging stations at Shenandoah National Park © Daniel White/TNC

FIRE



Burn Team Shatters Records for Forest Restoration

Over thousands of years, Virginia forests evolved not only to endure but to thrive following fires ignited by lightning or Indigenous Peoples. Decades of well-intended but misguided 20th-century fire suppression have left us with forests that suffer from too much fuel and too little diversity.

For a period that felt like millennia, the pandemic halted efforts to reverse these trends. But The Nature Conservancy and our partners not only returned safely to the fire lines this year, but also shattered previous records for putting good fire back in our forests.

Teamwork and New Technology

Working almost seamlessly, TNC and multi-agency fire teams conducted controlled burns across 36,000 acres in our Central Appalachian Mountains and well over

7,000 acres to the east at Piney Grove Preserve and other key sites in the Virginia Pinelands. Our Virginia team also assisted colleagues to the north on their largest-ever burn, igniting 900 acres at Nassawango Creek Preserve on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

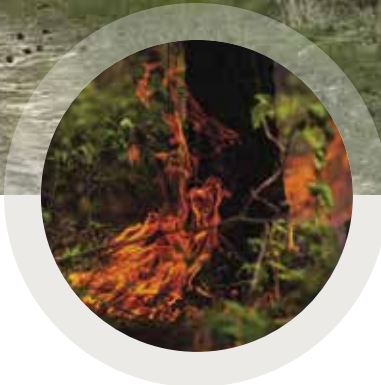
"I would attribute this record-breaking season to three factors," says fire program director Sam Lindblom: "good weather, the maturation of our partnerships and everyone's burning desire, pun definitely intended, to get back to work restoring our forests."

New technology also played a part. In March, our fire team added air support: a new drone specially engineered and equipped for aerial ignition. The drone carries a payload of plastic spheres called "dragon eggs," which are injected with a chemical that causes them to ignite on contact with the ground. Each egg produces a ball of flame roughly equivalent to lighting a crumpled sheet of paper.

Prior to the drone, any aerial ignition required putting crew members aboard helicopters to manually operate a dragon egg dispenser. The most immediate benefit of deploying the drone has been increased safety, as it has replaced many inherently risky helicopter flights.

The drone also reduces risks and fatigue for crew members on the ground, as it can easily access terrain

ABOVE Burn at Piney Grove Preserve © Kyle LaFerriere Photography; Red-cockaded woodpecker on longleaf pine © Carlton Ward, Jr.; OPPOSITE PAGE Spring 2021 burn at Piney Grove Preserve © Rebecca Wilson/DCR; INSET, LEFT TO RIGHT Sam Lindblom with drone © Daniel White/TNC; Burn at Piney Grove Preserve © Kyle LaFerriere Photography; Steve Croy (right) observes a drone demonstration. © Daniel White/TNC



“I would attribute this record-breaking season to ... good weather, the maturation of our partnerships and everyone’s burning desire, pun definitely intended, to get back to work restoring our forests.”

— Sam Lindblom,
Fire Program Director

that can be challenging or even treacherous to reach on foot. Moreover, its imaging technology gives the pilot an eagle’s-eye view to monitor the burn operation.

Back in 2019, TNC hosted a demonstration of the drone based Ignis ignition system at Piney Grove Preserve and invited partners. Steve Croy, a veteran of countless burns during his career with the U.S. Forest Service, recognized a game-changer when he saw one. When cost became the main obstacle to TNC adopting this new technology, Croy tapped his own resources to make it happen.

The Nature Conservancy thanks Steve Croy and all of our partners and supporters whose commitment fueled the flames of an exceptional season for good fire.



ONLINE | Learn more about how we’re using fire to revitalize forest habitat.

In the Pinelands: nature.org/vapineygrovefire

In the Appalachians: nature.org/allegheynyfireva

BELOW Igniting a burn in the Allegheny Highlands
© Nikole Simmons/TNC



THANK YOU

The Nature Conservancy is grateful to those Virginia donors who are investing in our long-term sustainability to advance our conservation agenda. Our thanks to the following **Conservation Heroes** who made outright gifts or pledge and intention payments in the following leadership ranges during the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2020, and ending June 30, 2021:

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NEW COMMITMENTS

We are grateful to the following Virginia donors who made new commitments to advance our conservation agenda during the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2020, and ending June 30, 2021:

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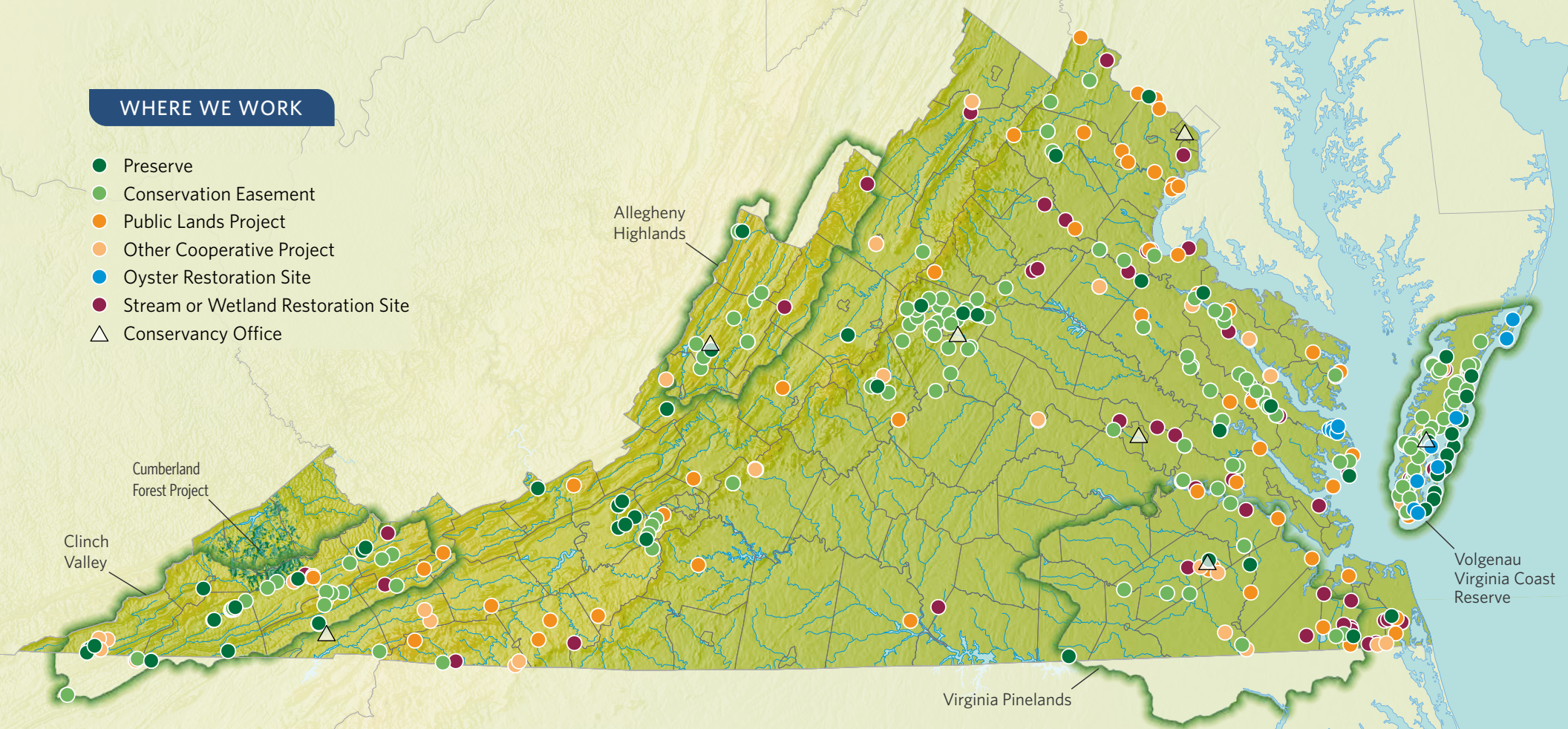
Please bring any errors or omissions to our attention by emailing liz.blaine@tnc.org.



* Legacy Club Member: This is a unique group of supporters who have let us know that they have included The Nature Conservancy in their estate plans and/or have established life-income gifts with us.

WHERE WE WORK

- Preserve
- Conservation Easement
- Public Lands Project
- Other Cooperative Project
- Oyster Restoration Site
- Stream or Wetland Restoration Site
- △ Conservancy Office



BY THE NUMBERS

500K

Acres that The Nature Conservancy has protected across the commonwealth of Virginia



253K

Acres across three states being managed under TNC's Cumberland Forest Project



121K

Acres of public land across Virginia that TNC has worked with partners to protect





The Nature Conservancy in Virginia
652 Peter Jefferson Parkway, Suite 190
Charlottesville, VA 22911
nature.org/virginia

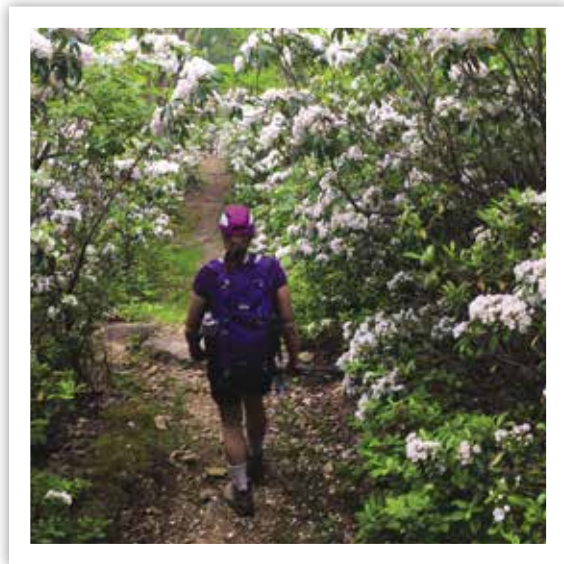
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LEFT TO RIGHT Hiking through mountain laurels © Daniel White; Clinch River mussels © Jon Golden; Appalachian campsite © Jack Looney



INSIDE | Conserving the Appalachians