



More than 22,000 acres of forest land in Russell County to be permanently protected

20 August 2019



RICHMOND, Va. — A partnership between multiple agencies will allow for 22,856 acres of forest land in Russell County to be permanently protected in largest open space easement ever recorded in the Commonwealth, according to Gov. Ralph Northam (D).

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF), and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) all partnered.

"I am excited to announce this unique partnership that will allow for sustainable forestry, improve access to outdoor recreation, and increase protection of wildlife habitat and water quality," said Governor Northam. "This historic open space easement represents exactly what we are aiming for through our administration's ConserveVirginia initiative to protect the highest conservation value lands in the Commonwealth. And in addition to the benefits to our environment and natural resources, sustainably managed forests will make important contributions to our rural economies and support local jobs in Southwest Virginia."

"Forests matter to everyone because they are essential to clean air, clean water, and healthy communities," said Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring. "The Clinch Highlands working forestry easement is unique not only because it is the largest in

the Commonwealth's history, but more importantly because of the many ways it supports the resiliency of the surrounding communities."

"This project is a model for sustainable economic development," said Secretary of Natural Resources Matthew J. Strickler. "Conserving this land as a carefully managed working forest while also protecting a key part of the Clinch River watershed is a huge achievement."

The announcement of this partnership comes following of The Nature Conservancy's Cumberland Forest Project, which recently acquired a quarter-million acres in the Central Appalachian coalfields of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

"The Virginia Department of Forestry is honored to be a part of this unprecedented conservation project and to hold Virginia's largest open space easement ever recorded," said Virginia State Forester Rob Farrell. "The Virginia Department of Forestry is known as an organization that emphasizes leading by example, and so we are pleased to have the opportunity to do so through this innovative project that will protect the environment while supporting local communities."

Source:<https://wcyb.com/news/local/more-than-22000-acres-of-forest-land-in-russell-county-to-be-permanently-protected>