

2026 January EPO Committee Meeting

Collaborative Deer Management on Virginia's NAPs

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CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.



Virginia Natural Heritage Program

conserving Virginia's biodiversity through inventory, protection, and stewardship

Founded in 1989

NatureServe network member

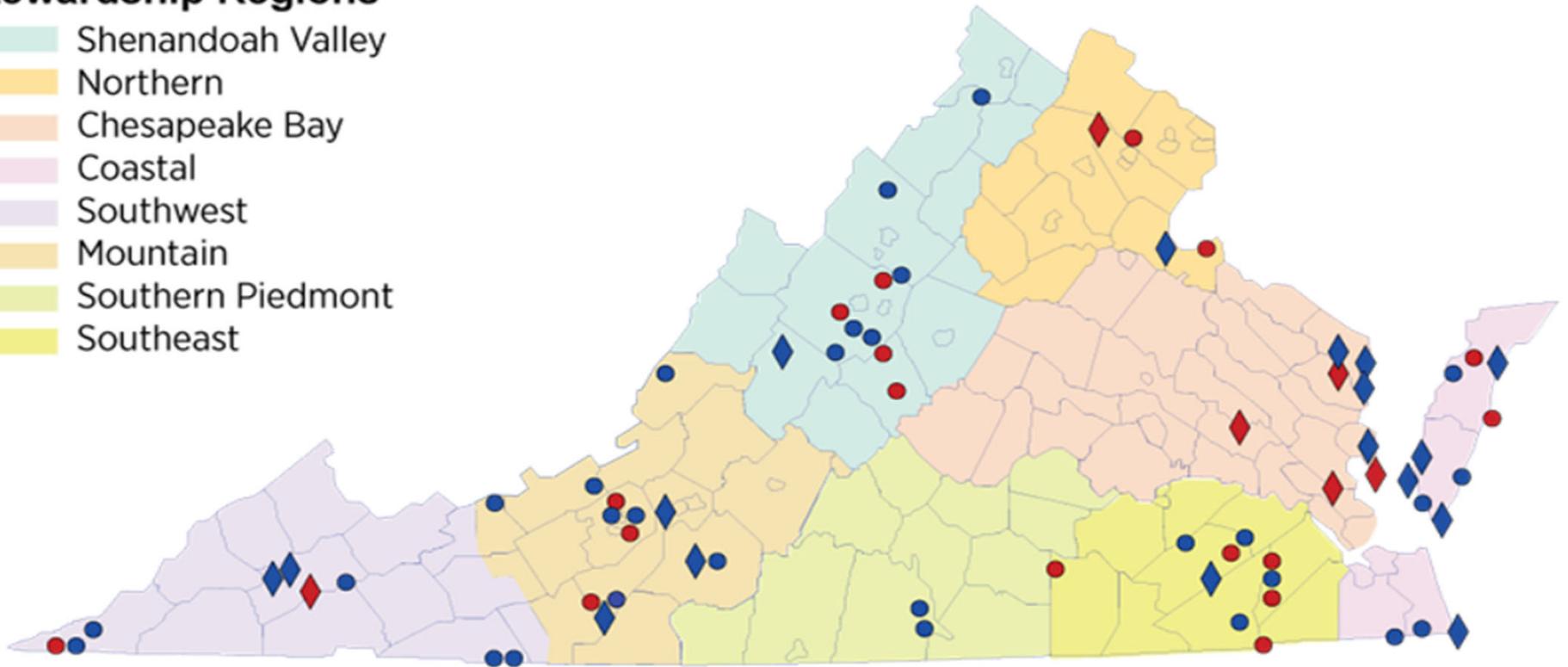
Focused on habitats of rare, threatened, and endangered species, significant natural communities, geologic sites, and other natural features.



Virginia Natural Area Preserves

Stewardship Regions

- Shenandoah Valley
- Northern
- Chesapeake Bay
- Coastal
- Southwest
- Mountain
- Southern Piedmont
- Southeast



HOW DO WE MANAGE DEER ABUNDANCE?

- **Regulated, fair chase hunting**
 - Adjustments made to antlerless (female) harvest opportunity on a biennial basis at the County level
- **Additional programs to increase antlerless harvest at the property level**

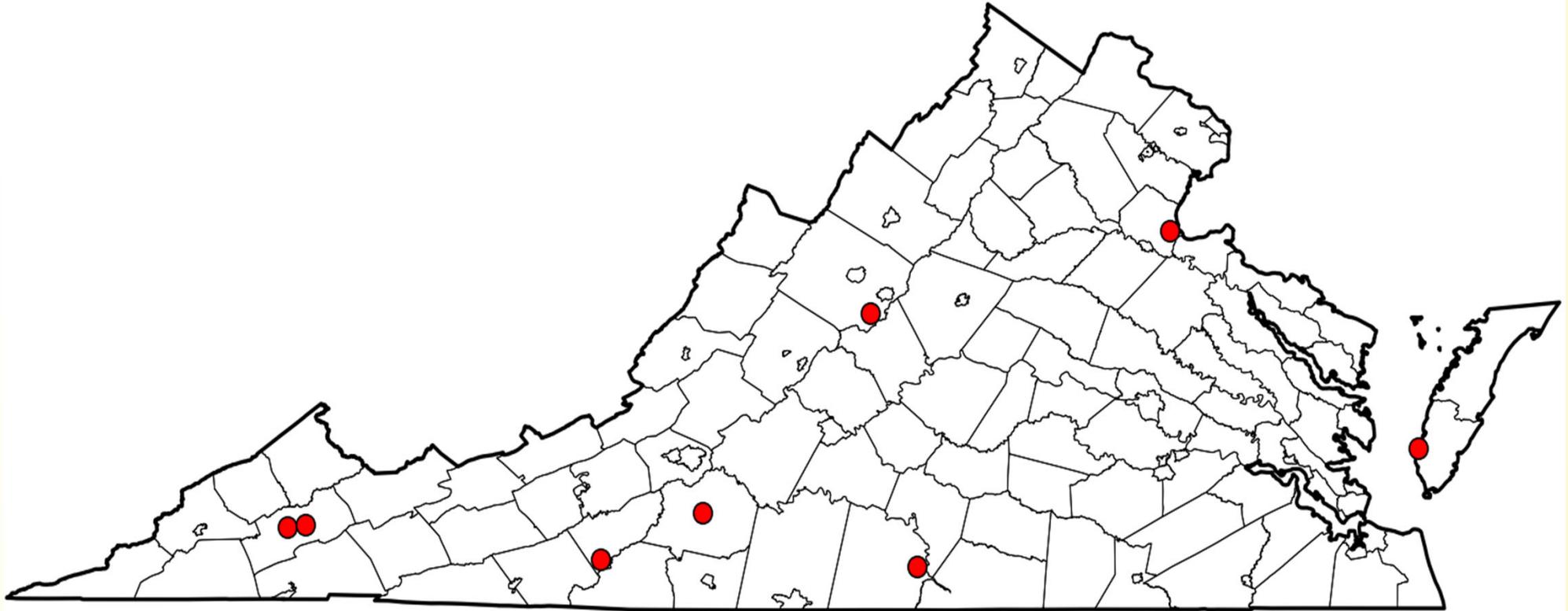


DEER MANAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

- **Initial removal of as many deer as possible (short term)**
- **Focus on female harvest to decrease reproductive potential (long term)**
- **Apply hunting pressure to influence deer behavior (short and long term)**
 - In addition to being harvested on-property, deer move off-property and are more susceptible to harvest elsewhere
 - Fewer deer find refuge on-property due to threat of predation (hunting)
- **Helps address DWR deer population objectives as well as NAP objectives**



2025-26 ENROLLED NAPS





NGO Partner

Special Ops Xcursions

“Our role is to act as the facilitator, bringing together local volunteers, outfitters, and professional guides who generously donate their time to provide no-cost outdoor adventures for active duty Special Operators and their families. The program manages the process of building the event, covering lodging and travel, and providing loaner gear to make the adventure as easy as possible.”





DWR Programs

Hunter Education & Workshops Mentorship Programs



Hunter Education

Workshops and education programs for new hunters or established hunters to gain new skills



Hands on Workshops

Typically hosted onsite or close to the hunt location. These provide participants the necessary skills to be successful.



After the workshop hunts

Conducted with a mentor provided during the instructional portion of the workshop.





DWR Mentorship Program

This program pairs individuals seeking a hunting mentor with an experienced, vetted hunter to guide them through the hunting process.

BOTH Hunter Education programs and workshops as well as the Mentorship program are OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Amplifying Impacts

- Venison donations through Hunters for the Hungry
- Monitoring herd health, vegetation recovery, and habitat resilience
- Use harvest and monitoring data to inform adaptive management



Venison donations



Vegetation recovery



Herd health



Two-Pronged Strategy

- **Population Reduction** — prioritize antlerless harvest to rebalance herds
- **Behavior Change** — maintain sustained hunting pressure to shift movement patterns and reduce browse in sensitive

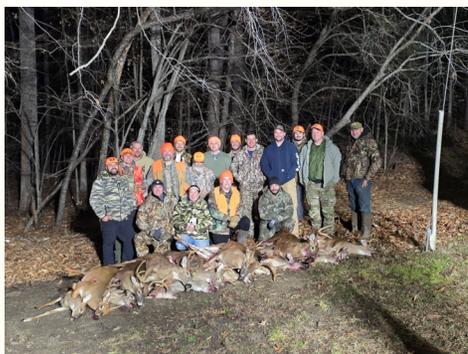


Scalability

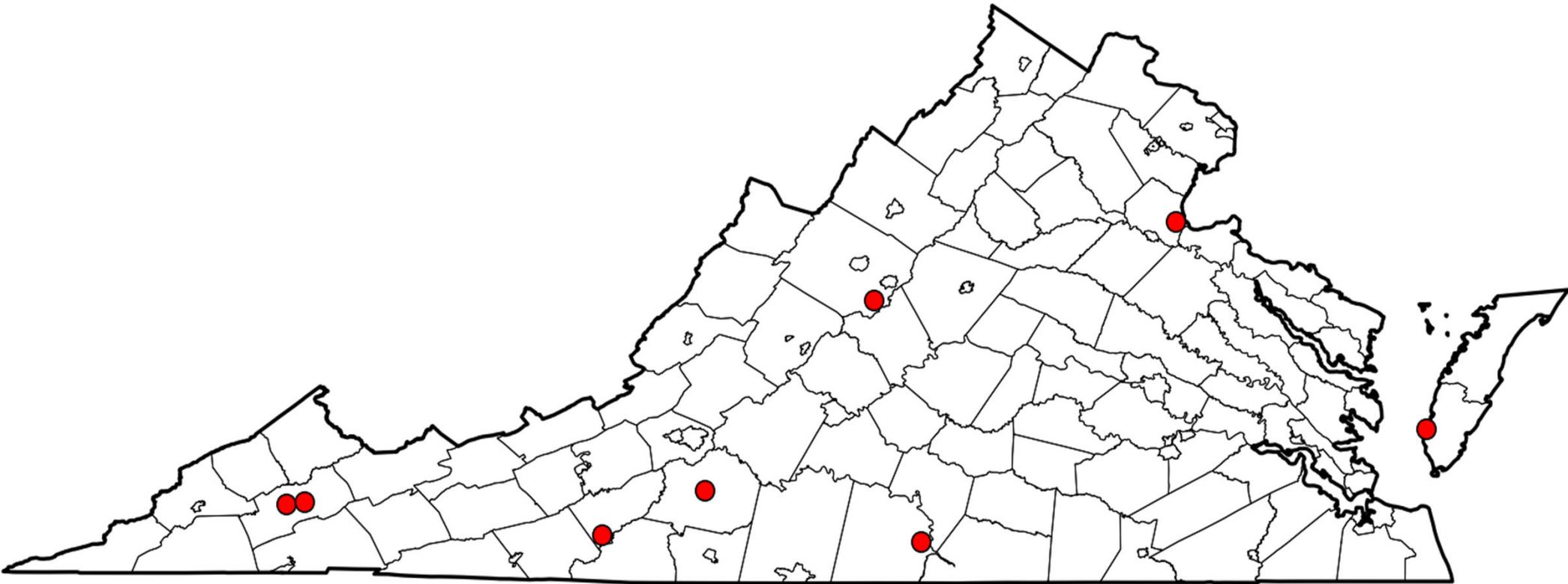
Adaptable statewide via:

- Special Interest Group hunts (e.g., active-duty/veterans, conservation partners)
- Field-based Hunter Education (“Becoming a Virginia Hunter”)
- Hunter’s Ed. volunteers
- Talking with DCR about using State Parks camping/lodging facilities

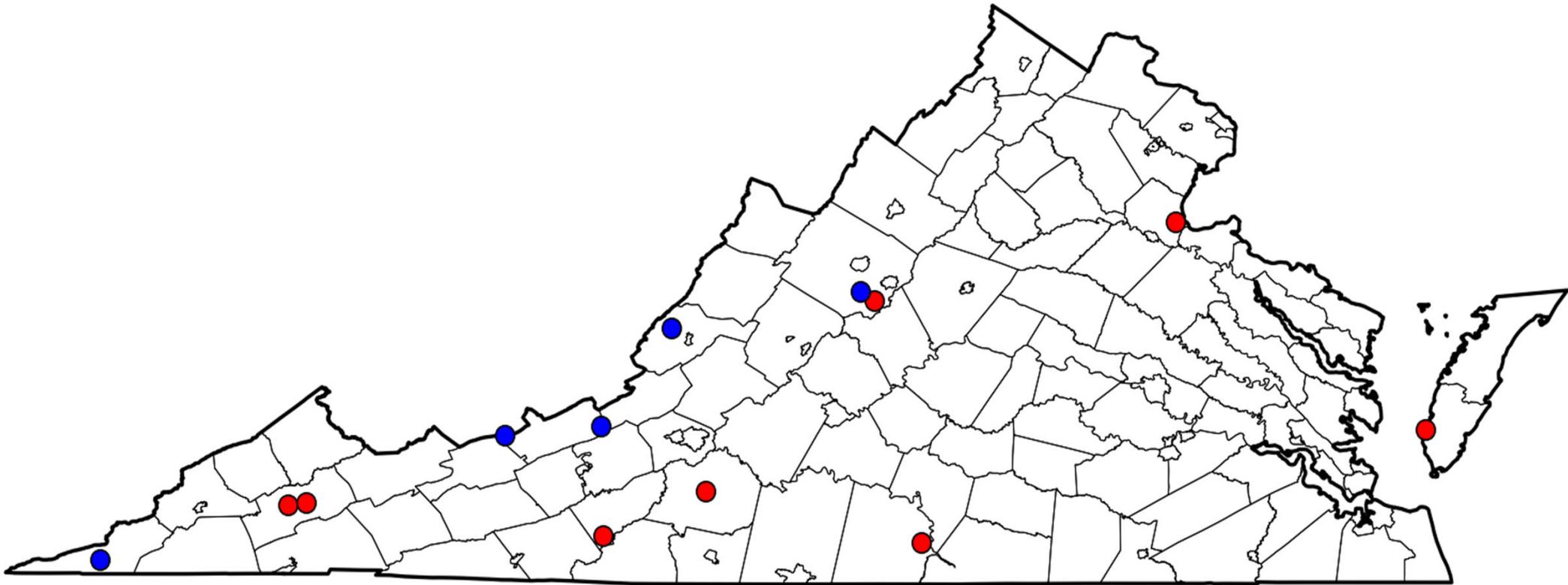
Replicable across additional public lands and NAPs



2025-26 ENROLLED NAPS



2026-27 PROPOSED NAPS



Communicating the Program

Joint DWR/DCR outreach:

- Frame hunting as a conservation tool and hunters as conservationists
- Stand hunting alongside prescribed fire, invasive species control, moist soil management
- Introduce the program to prepare neighboring constituents
 - Some have negative feelings about hunting
 - Some want to hunt these properties
- More compelling story than paying for sharpshooting



Collaboration in Action

- Habitat recovery in sensitive NAP communities
- Sustainable wildlife populations
- Public engagement and hunter development



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Closing Message

- Restore plant communities and habitat resilience
- Strengthen hunter–conservationist connection through Mentored Hunting and Hunter Ed
- Much better story than Sharp Shooting
- Scalable model for stewardship across Virginia
- Opportunity for meaningful collaboration



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Questions?

GET IN TOUCH WITH US

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EXPLORE the Wild

Database and Web App



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2026 January EPO Committee Meeting

What is **EXPLORE^{the}Wild?**

- DWR's primary public access and outdoor recreation discovery platform
- One front door for hunters, anglers, hikers, wildlife viewers, paddlers, boaters, and first-time users
- Designed to reduce friction between Virginians and public lands
- Functions as access infrastructure, not just a digital brochure



- **Recruit**
- **Retain**
- **Reactivate**



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
GAME AND INLAND FISHERIES:
BOATING ACCESS SITE AND
FACILITY MANAGEMENT PLAN

**VIRGINIA
WILDLIFE
VIEWING
PLAN
2021 - 2031**

**VT VIRGINIA
TECH.**
provided by the Virginia Department of Game
Resources Trust Fund, and Virginia Tech.



Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

EXPLORE *the* **Wild**

Goals

- Provide a **single online destination to search** for activity-specific recreation locations
- Help people **find new places** to visit
- Help distribute visitor pressure, **reducing overcrowding and potential user conflicts**
- Support DWR's **R3, Wildlife Viewing, and Boating Access Plans** by helping the public find where to go and what to expect

An R3 Philo

1 of 10



EXPLORE^{the} Wild WEB APP



LOCATION BASED
Search based on location and preferred travel distance to find convenient properties



BASE ACTIVITIES
Search based on Allowable Activity and refine



AMENITIES
Filter based on available amenities such as accessibility and sighting-in range presence



GAME ABUNDANCE
Sort by relative abundance descriptors



FISH ABUNDANCE
Sort by relative abundance descriptions

The screenshot shows the 'EXPLORE the Wild' web app interface. At the top, there are search filters for activities: Hunting (checked), Fishing, Boating, Paddling, Wildlife Viewing, Primitive Camping, and Hiking. Below these are species filters: Deer, Bear, Turkey (selected), Small Game, Waterfowl, Migratory Gamebirds, and Any Species. A search bar shows 'within about: 50 miles' and 'of ZIP Code: 23093'. The results section shows '9 places that match your search are within about 50 miles of Louisa, VA'. Two results are visible: 'Oakley Forest WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA' (22 miles away, Turkey: 3/5) and 'Powhatan WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA' (32 miles away, Turkey: 3/5). A 'Filters' sidebar on the left lists various amenities like Picnic Area, Restroom, Barrier-Free Trails, etc.





OVER
1200
PUBLIC PROPERTIES FOR
OUTDOOR RECREATION

EXPLORE^{the} Wild

96

DWR Properties

122

State Parks & Natural Area Preserves (DCR)

25

State Forests (DOF)

213

Federal Properties (DoD, USACE, USFS, USFWS, NPS, etc.)

195

Town/City/County Parks

692

Virginia Bird & Wildlife Trail Sites

259

Boat Ramps

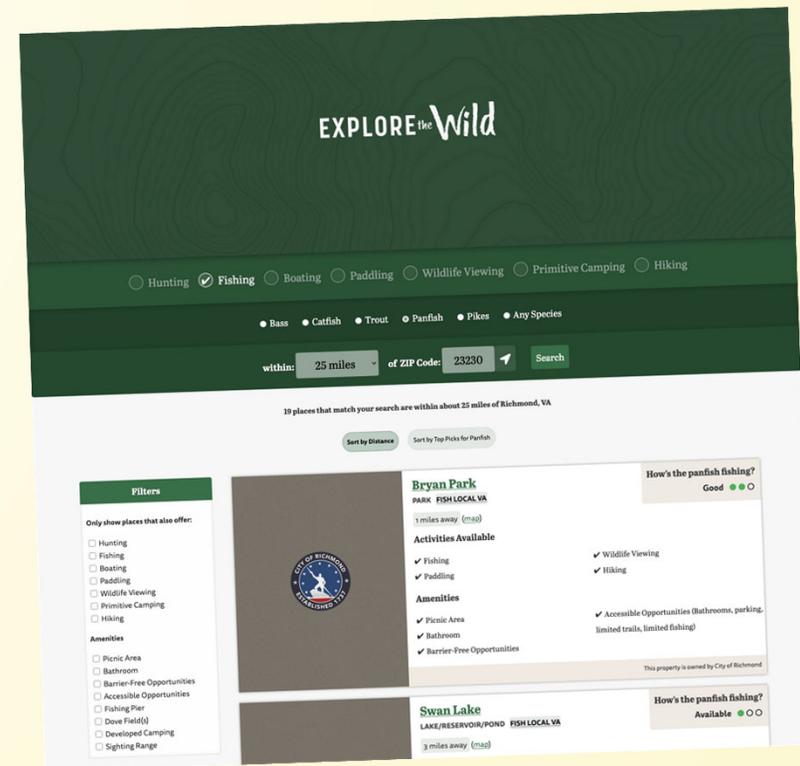
164

Lakes and Rivers

EXPLORE^{the}Wild 2.0

By the Numbers

- Explore the Wild 1.0 launched in March 2024 and has been used more than **650,000 times** by more than **165,000 active users**
- **Two-thirds of users are in Virginia**; the rest are from neighboring states like Maryland, North Carolina, Florida, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania
- **75% of users access Explore the Wild on their phone or other mobile device**



EXPLORE^{the} Wild 2.0

Feedback Informs Direction

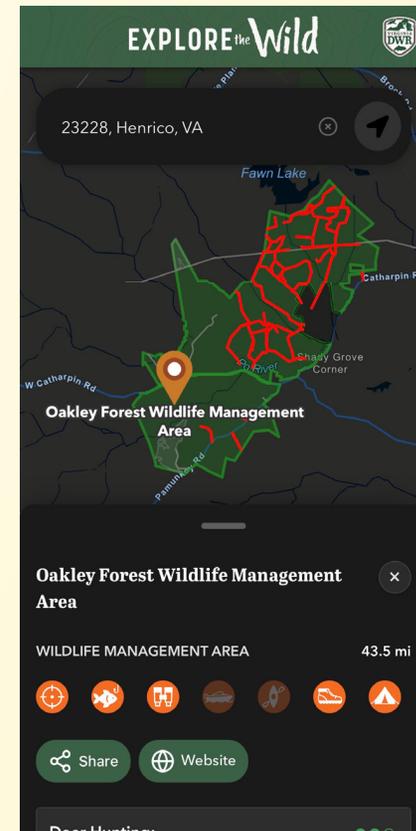
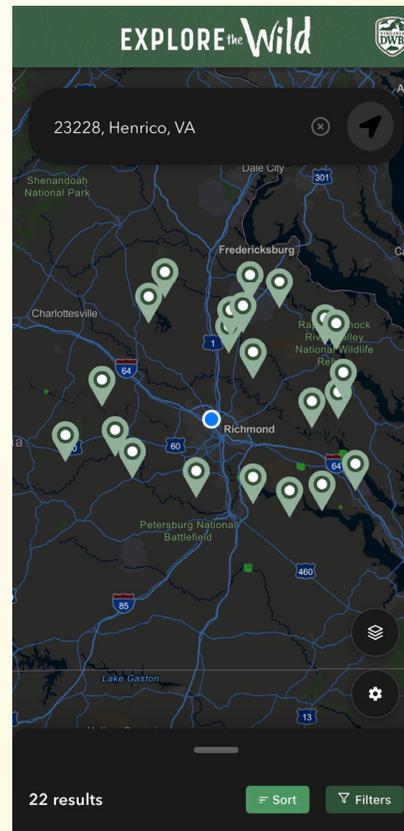
- We've actively solicited user feedback while 1.0 has been available. Most users rate the tool highly and that it helped them find new places to explore—but **the most common request was a way to visualize where these properties are**
- Explore the Wild 2.0 needed to be **designed for mobile** and **centered around a map-based interface**
- 2.0 was built around the **ArcGIS platform**, leveraging the agency's existing Esri licensing
- Allowed us to create a custom product using existing staff and tools, ensuring that both the web application, data, and services are easily maintainable *and* extensible as new data and technologies become available



EXPLORE^{the} Wild 2.0

What's New?

Interactive Map
Custom web application built in-house on top of the ArcGIS platform

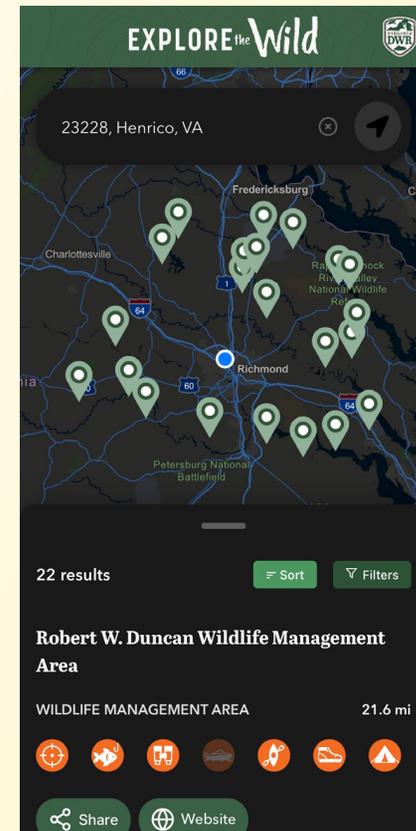
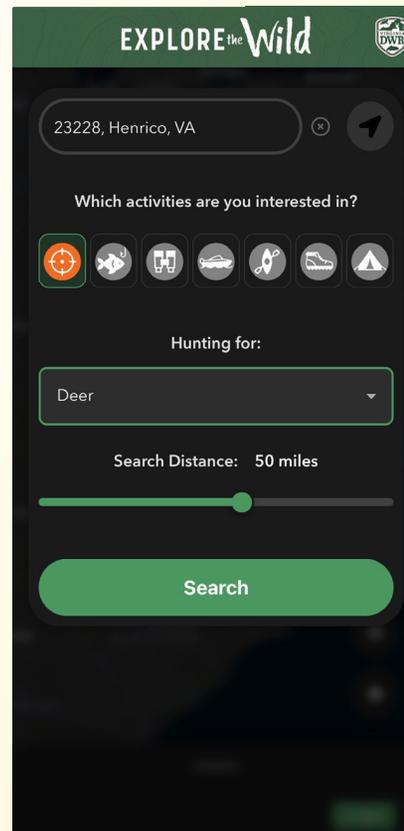


EXPLORE^{the}Wild 2.0

What's New?

Improved Experience

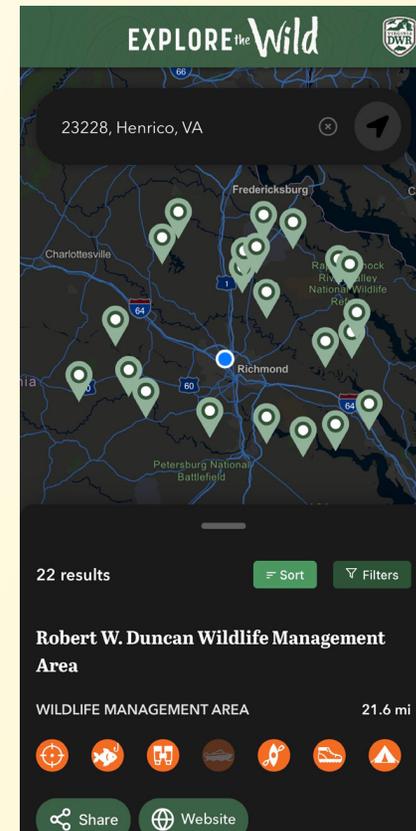
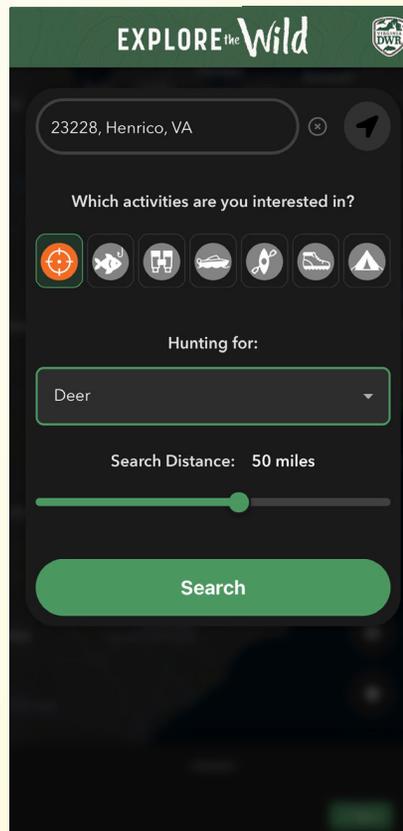
Searches are faster and provide more data and features on both desktop and mobile



EXPLORE^{the} Wild 2.0

What's New?

Robust GIS-based Property Database
Powered by custom geospatial database built in-house

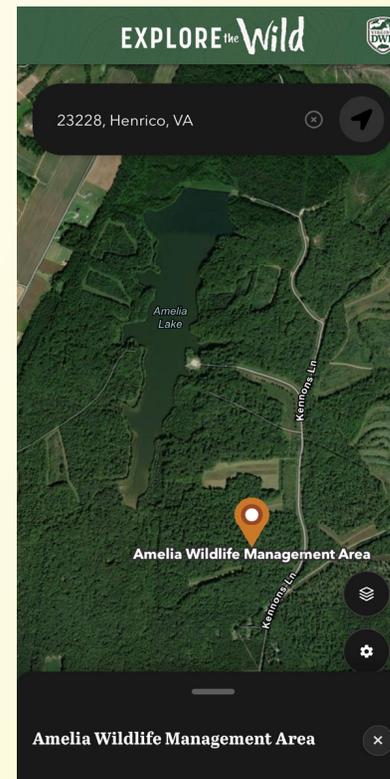
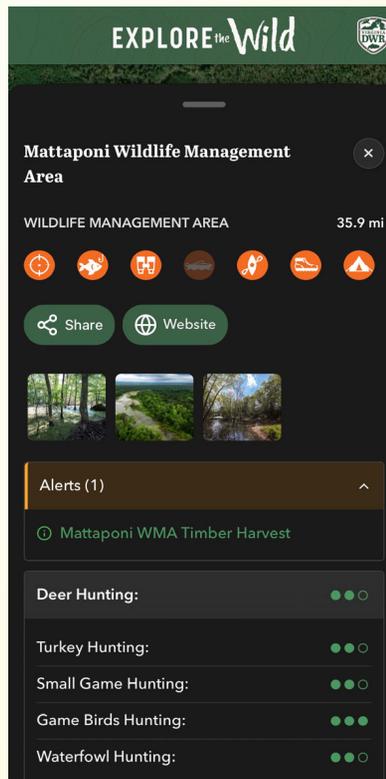


EXPLORE^{the} Wild 2.0

What's New?

New Features

- Expanded property data
- Dark mode support
- Satellite map view
- Property photos
- Integrated alerts
- PWA support
- ... and more!



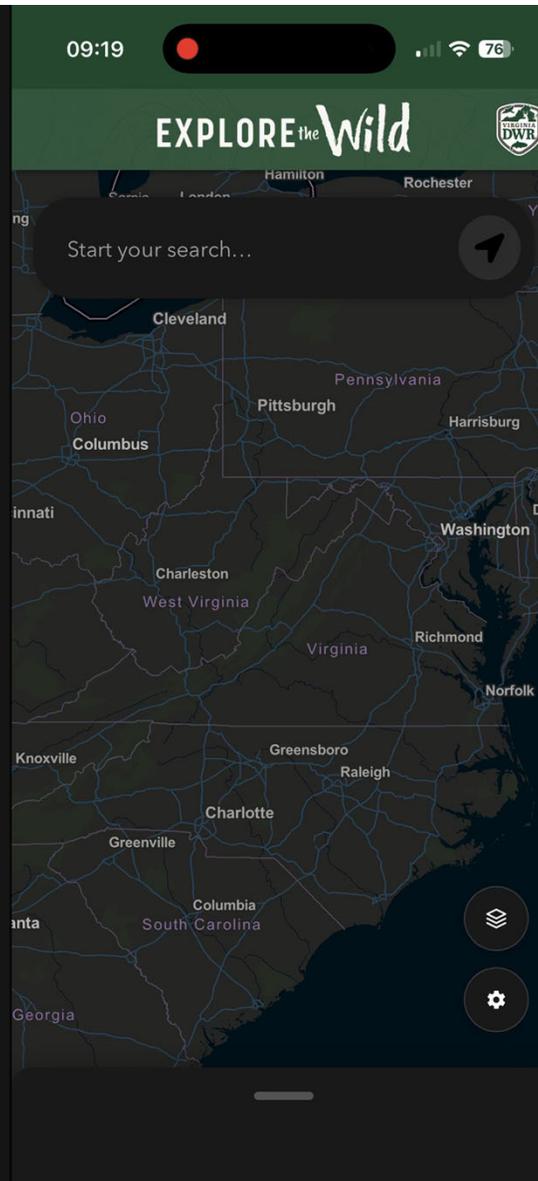
Let's search for:

- deer hunting opportunities
- within 50 miles of Roanoke

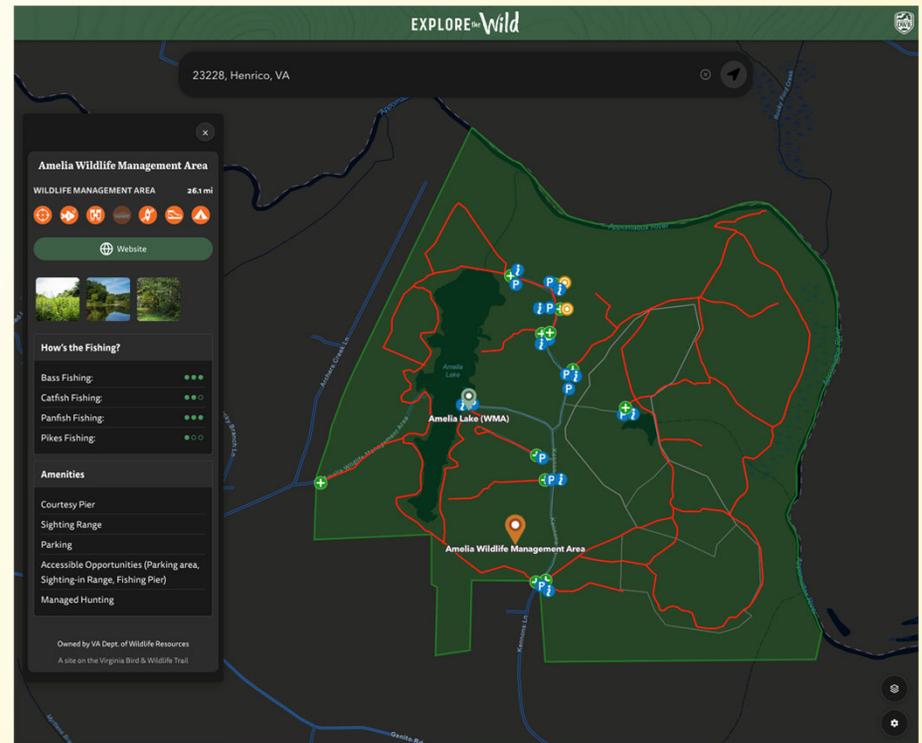
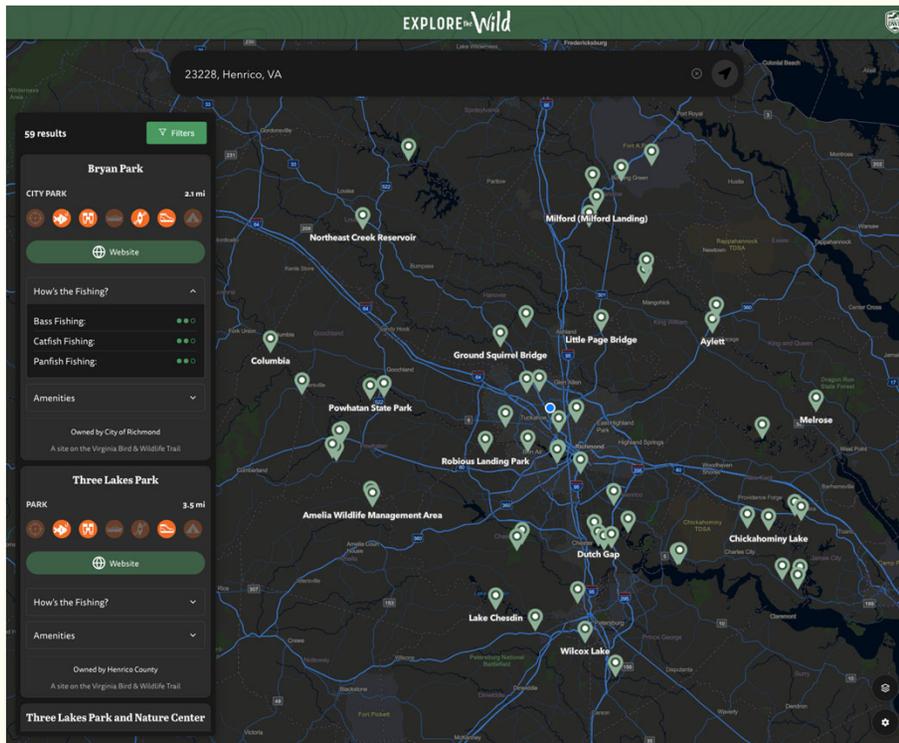


Let's search for:

- fishing opportunities
- within 30 miles of 23228 (Henrico)



EXPLORE^{the}Wild 2.0



EXPLORE^{the} Wild 2.0

Testing and Phased Rollout Timeline

- ✓ **Internal testing of development version** (complete)
 - **Internal beta test version** will be released to DWR staff in the coming weeks
 - “Stress test” to gather feedback and identify bugs or other issues, across a broader range of devices — e.g., different phones and browsers, older devices, etc.)
 - **Public beta**
 - EtW 2.0 will exist alongside EtW 1.0 during the public beta period. Anyone visiting the older version will see a banner promoting 2.0 and allowing them to opt-in to testing and providing feedback
 - ~8 weeks, depending on feedback received
 - **Full public release and promotion**
- This phased rollout—with progressively wider reach—mirrors our approach with Explore the Wild 1.0, which was helpful in allowing us to gather feedback and identify and fix issues before heavily promoting the tool to the wider public



COMING SOON to **EXPLORE^{the} Wild**

Virginia Outdoor Recreation Data Working Group

Developing a multiagency working group to expand and share outdoor recreation data among agencies and localities

Standalone Database and User Interface

Working with DWRs Information Management Team to develop the Explore the Wild Database Management System (EDMS) to facilitate simple and accessible data updates from within and outside of DWR.



Future plans for **EXPLORE^{the}Wild**

Native Mobile Application

At the suggestion of the Committee, we have scoped and have active grant applications pending to fund a stand-alone native mobile app that includes:

Offline Functionality

- Download maps and property information for use without cell service
- Critical for rural areas and field use

Persistent personalization

- Saved favorites and preferences stored locally on device
- Faster load times for repeat users
- Deeper personalization without repeated logins

Push notifications

- Real-time alerts for:
 - Emergency messaging, property closures, access changes
 - Regulation updates
 - Event reminders or seasonal opportunities

Foundation for more cool stuff

- Trip planning tools
- Permit/check-in/stand-by hunting
- In-field compliance and education tools



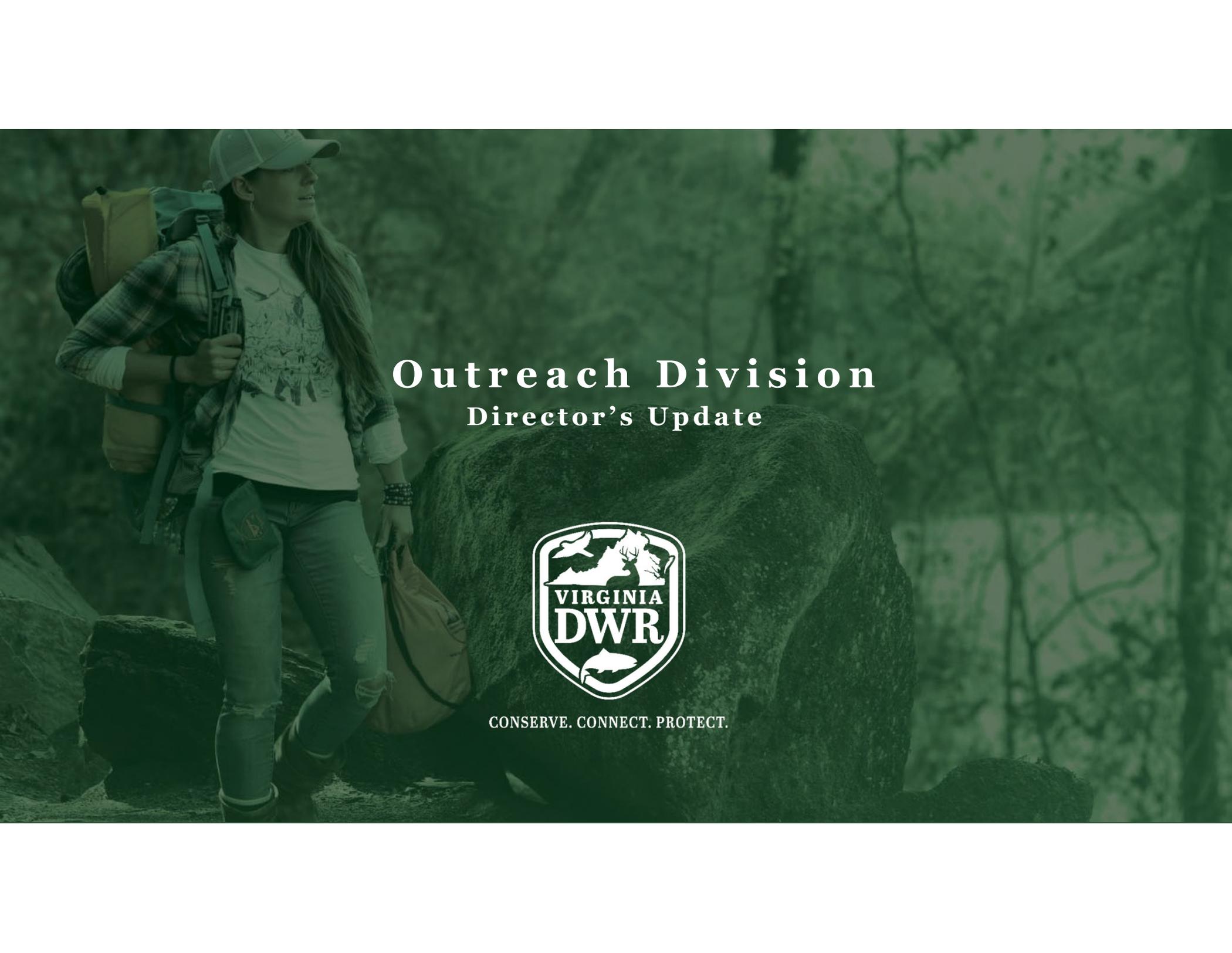


EXPLORE^{the} Wild

Over 1,000 public land opportunities for you to explore to your heart's content.

Explore the Wild is your online tool to find the best places in Virginia to hunt, fish, boat, paddle, view wildlife, hike, and go primitive camping! Scan this QR code with your smartphone or visit dwr.virginia.gov/explore today to discover new opportunities for adventure near you!



A hiker with a backpack is standing in a forest, looking to the right. The image is overlaid with a dark green tint.

Outreach Division

Director's Update



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VIRGINIA DWR
Archery Open
2026









RESTORE *the Wild*



March 6, 2026 Main Street
Station Richmond, VA

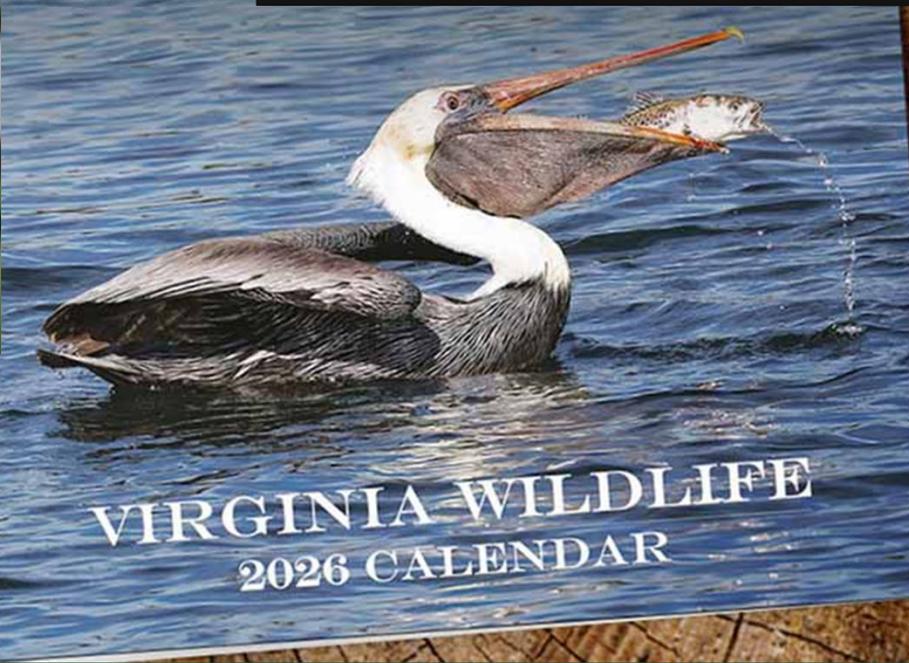




Virginia Elk Hunt Lottery



Enter for a chance to WIN!



VIRGINIA WILDLIFE
2026 CALENDAR



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES
Annual Report 2025
CONSERVE, CONNECT, PROTECT IN ACTION

