

VIRGINIA OUTDOORS FOUNDATION OWNED LANDS ACTIVITIES REPORT

Prepared for the March 2025 Board Meeting

BULL RUN MOUNTAINS NATURAL AREA PRESERVE 2,350 acres in Prince William and Fauquier Counties

Progress on South Section Parking Lot and Trail Improvements

VOF has planned for the development of a new parking lot and trailhead at the Bull Run Preserve for over 20 years since a 4-acre parcel that borders Beverley Mill Drive was set aside from preserve status for this purpose (dedicated as permanent open space but not designated as Natural Area Preserve). The planned improvements will move our visitor parking lot from its current position along a VDOT right-of-way onto VOF land. This will provide a safer, more welcoming, user experience while improving site security, by placing parking behind a lockable gate.

As reported last meeting, the parking lot construction project was granted its final approval by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). We are excited to announce that the limits of disturbance are demarcated, and our contractor has begun clearing the site.

In conjunction with the new parking lot and trailhead repositioning, the trail system is being updated to provide greater sustainability and public enjoyment. These renovations are led by our own staff with assistance from a consortium of volunteers from our VOF Stewardship Committee, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, Scouts of America, and VOF volunteers. Significant planning and logistics are in place to ensure that the trail system remains operational and open throughout this improvement process. A highlight from this effort is that an Eagle Scout candidate recently obtained his badge by completing several work-intensive trail installations with his troop. Their scout leader surprised us by contributing a generous monetary donation to VOF following the successful completion of the project.



Grant Funding: Federal and Local Grant News at BRMNAP

As previously reported, VOF was awarded two grants to further work at BRMNAP. We are pleased to announce that both grants are completed and funding secured. Federal funds through the NPS Chesapeake Gateways program provided \$71,711.90 towards our cultural history program as outlined in the application, "Living on the Edge: Uncovering and Sharing the Stories of Bull Run Mountain's Diversely Peopled Past". This enabled continued archaeological and genealogical work, along with a historical structural analysis, all of which provided greater insight into the understanding of the Robinson and Corum families. The grant also enabled VOF to hire a seasonal fellow, Amber Miller, to create educational programming regarding Bull Run cultural history for K-12 public schools within Prince William County and the public.

The Fauquier and Loudoun Garden club provided \$5,000.00 to install a biocultural garden and pollinator meadow at BRMNAP's North Section, improving the grounds around the stone house at our main trailhead and access point. The stone house is anticipated to be the future home for our growing archive of cultural artifacts and resources. This garden provides examples of native and culturally relevant plants to our visitors in one easily accessible location.



Research Partnerships at BRMNAP

Research at BRMNAP enhances VOF's understanding of its Natural Area Preserve, which improves our ability to steward the holding and connect our communities to its natural and cultural resources. Our research program is made possible by a network of partnerships with local universities and research organizations. We have a long-term, active project with the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) where VOF research associate, Jacob Saucier, is recording and compiling a natural sound library. While other researchers at the NMNH, Columbia University, and the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH) are conducting a paleontology project led by VOF Research Associate, Dr. Ben Kligman. They are utilizing BRMNAP's waterfall formation to reveal for the first time what life was like 200 million years ago during the Triassic-Jurassic boundary on the east coast of North America. The pictures below show Dr. Kligman presenting BRMNAP coelacanth fossils that are being prepared for study within the Smithsonian's public fossil lab to VOF and DCR-DNH staff.

New research projects include a small study into the table mountain pine population being led by staff from the World Wildlife Federation (WWF) and Oregon State University (OSU) and a five-year electromagnetic study being led by researchers at the United States Geological Service (USGS).



Utilizing Technology at BRMNAP

A short representative list below exemplifies the use of technology to assist in management practices at VOF's Preserve at Bull Run Mountains:

- BRMNAP Master Files Digitization Project: Over 10 ft of paper files that date back to the 1960s and 1970s were sorted this winter to identify all critical files and were digitized.
- VOF IT Director, David Morton, is a licensed drone pilot and visited BRMNAP to take video and still footage with VOF's drone. He captured beautiful photographs and video content useful for future outreach, land management, and research products.
- Annual trail counter data revealed that we had 13,968 visitors in 2024, which is within an acceptable range for a state-designated Natural Area Preserve located in the Northern Virginia region. Unsurprisingly, weekends remain our most popular days for visitation and October is our busiest month with 1,798 visitors. November is a close second with 1,628 in visitation.
- Camera traps are used at BRMNAP to monitor trespassing and collect wildlife presence and pattern data, contributing to projects with the Smithsonian Institution and iNaturalist. Highlights from this effort include, river otters being documented for the first time within BRMNAP and evidence that a family of bobcats set up a den site in our "Highpoint Conservation area", a species known for its sensitivity to human activity.



HOUSE MOUNTAIN RESERVE

884 acres in Rockbridge County



The Saddle (March 26, 2024)

VOF continues to steward this iconic property in a manner sensitive to its natural and cultural resources. VOF will coordinate the timing of the mowing of the saddle meadow to be mindful of the grassland bird nesting season and peak summer usage by visitors. VOF and area volunteers work to clear and maintain the trails during this particularly cold and snowy winter. The planned maintenance of the primary access from Trail Head Lane (private road) has been delayed by weather and contractor schedule, but VOF contributed funds for the maintenance of our secondary access route to the property along Denmark Way (also a private road). This spring VOF plans to update the signage at the parking area and saddle and continue its presence, activity, and improvements of the property.

ROCKFISH PROPERTY

86 acres in Nelson County

As authorized by the VOF Board of Trustees at the June 13, 2024 meeting the property is ready to be listed and sold with an open-space easement on it to protect its conservation values. The easement itself was approved at the March 27, 2024 meeting. The listing contract has been signed.

On January 15th, 2025, VOF closed on the sale of the Rockfish property in Nelson County. Following the VOF board authorization, it was conveyed subject to an approved open-space easement designed to protect its unique conservation values. The final offer accepted was \$350,000 with no contingencies and netted \$339,300 after closing costs. This transaction completes the journey of a property that was acquired as substitute land resulting from a 2017 agreement with the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC, to satisfy statutory requirements associated with the proposed development of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline going through nine open space easements held by VOF.

Although this property is no longer part of our Owned Lands portfolio it remains as a protected property in the VOF portfolio subject to an open space easement and contributes to the protection of the Rockfish River and its adjacent intact forestland.

UPDATE on VOF LANDS to be transferred to DCR

The adoption of the state's 2024-2026 budget bill included several items regarding the acquisition of land by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for planned additions to State Parks and Natural Area Preserves. This budget passage enables the transfers of several parcels held by VOF to proceed and conveyances to DCR should be able to be completed by the end of FY 2025. VOF staff is working diligently to be responsive as DCR staff works these projects through the required steps in their process:

- VOF and DCR continue working on the final due diligence items necessary to enable the transfer of the last parcel (40 acres) of land it owns at Hayfields Farm to DCR to establish a new State Park in Highland County totaling the entire 1,034 acres formerly owned by VOF.
- VOF is also poised to transfer the 56-acre parcel it acquired in December 2023 on behalf of DCR to be added to the Camp Branch Wetlands Natural Area Preserve in Floyd County.