

# Protect Virginia's Wetlands



## Why wetlands matter

Virginia's one million acres of wetlands are critical for filtering pollutants from our drinking water, protecting our communities from flooding, and providing habitat for fish and wildlife — all important benefits that improve our quality of life and support local economies. Wetlands are also critical to the health of the Chesapeake Bay, and a healthy Chesapeake Bay is essential to the state's economy.

## Protect drinking water

Three out of every four Virginians get their drinking water from surface waters like rivers and lakes. Wetlands across the Commonwealth help protect drinking water by filtering out pollution before it gets into these waters — and save money in the drinking water treatment process.



## The Economic Impact

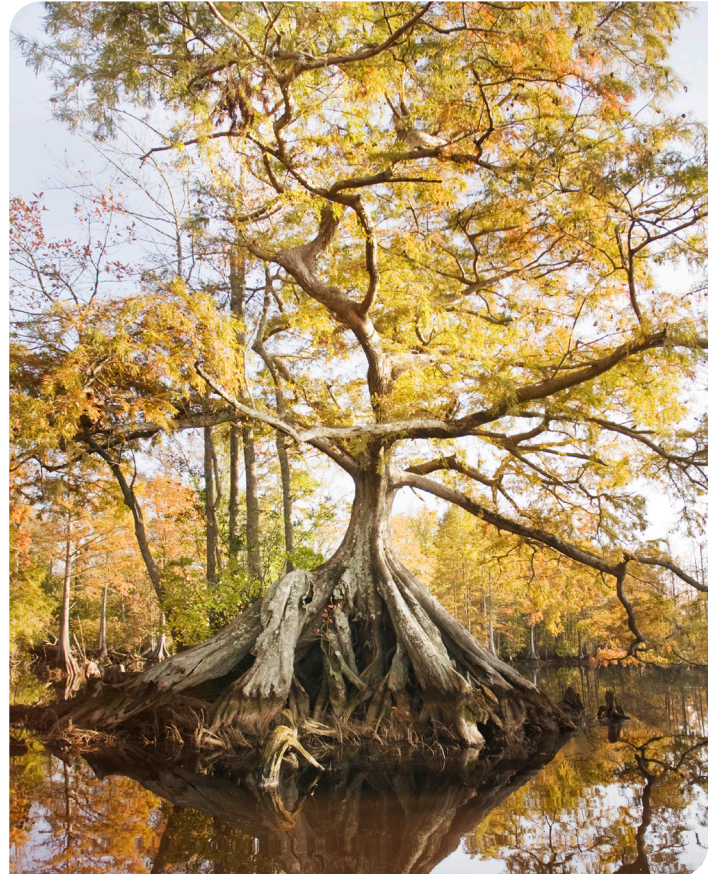
**\$6.3 billion**

estimated revenue generated from anglers, hunters, birdwatchers, and other wildlife watchers.

**\$1.1 billion**

in economic activity generated from Virginia's commercial seafood industry.

Wetlands **save money** in the drinking water treatment process by filtering out pollution.



Bald cypress swamp wetland, southeastern Virginia. Weakened protections under Virginia law would place wetlands like this one at risk of destruction.. (Photographer: Robert Llewellyn)

## Nature-based flood protection

With increased storm frequency and sunny-day flooding, our communities need wetlands more than ever to absorb rising waters and protect against floods. Wetlands serve as a critical nature-based solution to climate change and coastal flood risk.<sup>1</sup>

## Wetlands habitat generates value

In 2016, Virginia anglers and hunters spent an estimated \$3.1 billion on hunting and fishing, including \$1.4 billion on fishing alone, and Virginia birdwatchers and other wildlife watchers spent an estimated \$3.2 billion.<sup>2</sup> Virginia's commercial seafood industry generated \$1.1 billion in economic activity in 2019.<sup>3</sup>

## Maintain longstanding protections

The Commonwealth recognized the critical importance of our wetlands in 2000, when the Nontidal Wetlands Act was passed by a bipartisan majority in the General Assembly and signed into law by then-Governor Jim Gilmore. Additionally, Virginia's State Water Control Law, Tidal Wetlands Act, Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, and other longstanding laws work together to keep intact the valuable wetlands we depend on. These protections provide a consistent, predictable framework for businesses, residents, and economic development, but we cannot take wetlands or the state laws protecting them for granted.

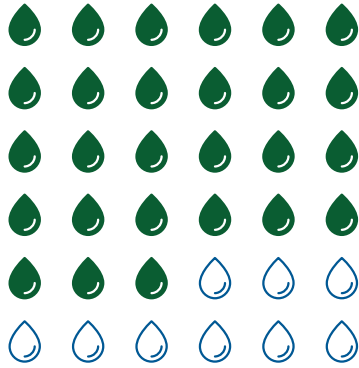


Kayakers exploring the Rappahannock River and associated wetlands in Virginia. (Photographer: Lynda Richardson)

## Safe Drinking Water

**3 in 4**

Virginians get their drinking water from surface waters like rivers and lakes, which wetlands naturally help protect.



Now that the U.S. Supreme Court has limited the scope of federal wetlands protections, our Virginia protections must remain in place to enable wetlands to do their job as a primary line of defense, as they have for decades — protecting communities from flooding, filtering our drinking water, serving as habitat for fish and wildlife, and supporting vibrant local economies.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Virginia Wetland Program Plan 2021-2025 at 5 (Dec. 2021), [https://www.vims.edu/cerm/advisory/wetlands\\_mgmt/va-wpp-2020-2025.pdf](https://www.vims.edu/cerm/advisory/wetlands_mgmt/va-wpp-2020-2025.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>Rockville Institute, Bridging the 50-State Surveys of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated recreation with Previous National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation Trends; Final Methodology Overview: Virginia at 10, 14 (Mar. 2020), <https://digitalmedia.fws.gov/digital/collection/document/id/2261/rec/9>.

<sup>3</sup>Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, "Virginia's Seafood Industry Provides \$1.1 Billion Boost to State's Economy" (Dec. 19, 2022), <https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/press-releases-221219-va-seafood.shtml>.



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