COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Executive Department

EXECUTIVE DIRECTIVE 4 (2026)

ESTABLISHING THE ROLE OF DIRECTOR OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor under Article V of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Virginia, I hereby establish the position of Director of Outdoor Recreation within the Secretariat of Natural and Historic Resources to lead a coordinated, statewide approach to growing Virginia's outdoor recreation economy, leveraging the Commonwealth's natural assets to drive economic development, strengthen tourism, support local communities, attract businesses and workers, and advance conservation and public health.

Importance of the Initiative

Virginia's natural, scenic, and historic resources are among the Commonwealth's greatest assets. From its mountains and rivers to its parks, trails, wildlife areas, coastal resources, and historic spaces, Virginia offers an extraordinary opportunity to experience the outdoors. These resources enrich the quality of life of Virginians, but they also represent an important economic asset with significant potential for continued growth.

Outdoor recreation is already a significant and growing sector of Virginia's economy. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation generated $14.4 billion in value added to the Commonwealth's economy in 2024, supporting jobs, small businesses, and local economies across urban, suburban, and rural communities. In addition to its economic impact, outdoor recreation plays a critical role in promoting and supporting conservation, improving physical and mental well-being, strengthening communities, and connecting Virginians to the natural and historic resources that make the Commonwealth a special place to live.

Few sectors offer the same opportunity to advance so many of Virginia's priorities at once. Outdoor recreation can create new opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs, strengthen tourism and hospitality, support rural economic development and small-town revitalization, enhance the vitality of urban communities, and help communities attract and retain workers and businesses. It creates unique benefits for Virginia families while also drawing visitors and their spending from across the country and around the world. It can also introduce young Virginians to new careers and industries while ensuring that the economic value of Virginia's natural resources reinforces the importance of conserving them for future generations.

Virginia is well positioned to build on this foundation. In 2025, visitor spending reached a record-high $36.2 billion, marking the fourth consecutive year of growth. Tourism directly supported nearly 232,000 jobs and generated $10.6 billion in wages and salaries, while tourism-

related revenues reduced the state and local tax burden on Virginia households by an average of more than $1,000.

Despite these strengths, Virginia's outdoor recreation efforts have often been carried out across multiple agencies, organizations, and levels of government without a unified statewide strategy. This fragmentation can make it harder for the Commonwealth to fully coordinate investments, connect communities with resources, and compete with other states that have established dedicated leadership and strategic plans for outdoor recreation as part of their economic development strategies.

Virginia now has an opportunity to better align outdoor recreation with broader statewide priorities and bring these efforts together around a shared vision for the Commonwealth's outdoor economy. A coordinated statewide strategy can help communities translate their natural and historic assets into sustainable economic development, tourism growth, workforce attraction, and the conservation of natural and historic resources. A coordinated approach will ensure that Virginia continues to expand access to outdoor opportunities for all while preserving the resources that make those opportunities possible.

To meet these challenges and opportunities, Virginia needs dedicated leadership to develop and implement a comprehensive outdoor recreation strategy, engage stakeholders across the Commonwealth, and position Virginia as a national leader in the outdoor economy.

Directive

Pursuant to the authority vested in me as the Governor of the Commonwealth, and pursuant to Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and the laws of the Commonwealth, I hereby establish the position of Director of Outdoor Recreation within the Secretariat of Natural and Historic Resources. The Director shall report to the Secretary and serve at the pleasure of the Governor. The Director shall include leverage the Commonwealth's natural assets to advance a coordinated statewide outdoor recreation strategy; strengthen tourism and workforce opportunities; promote and advance conservation, public health, and access; and engage stakeholders across the Commonwealth.

The Director of Outdoor Recreation shall:

1. Develop a comprehensive statewide outdoor recreation economy strategy that integrates conservation, economic development, tourism, public health, workforce attraction, and recreation planning. By April 1, 2027, the Director of Outdoor Recreation shall provide the Office of the Governor and the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources with the strategy workplan and stakeholder-engagement report.

2. Coordinate and consult with agencies within the Secretariat of Natural and Historic Resources—including the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Wildlife Resources, and the Marine Resources Commission—to align programs, policies, and investments that support outdoor recreation.

3. Engage and consult with all other Secretariats and executive branch agencies to ensure outdoor recreation is integrated into broader economic, tourism, public health and workforce strategies.
4. Serve as the Commonwealth's primary liaison to the outdoor recreation industry at the local, state, and national levels, and represent Virginia in regional and national partnerships, including engagement with organizations such as the Confluence of States.
5. Conduct a statewide stakeholder engagement process to ensure that Virginia's outdoor recreation strategy reflects the needs and perspectives of communities across the Commonwealth, which will include convening a stakeholder advisory group to be chaired by the Director and the First Gentleman. The advisory group shall include representatives from the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Wildlife Resources, Marine Resources Commission, relevant outdoor stakeholders, and other relevant executive branch agencies.
6. Leverage outdoor recreation as a driver of economic development by supporting business growth and entrepreneurship, increasing tourism and visitor spending, strengthening workforce recruitment and retention, and helping communities, particularly in rural and underserved communities, leverage outdoor assets to create jobs and attract investment.
7. Develop strategies and identify opportunities to grow and build long-term capacity for outdoor recreation in Virginia, including through public-private partnerships, state and federal funding opportunities, private investment, infrastructure and program development, and measurable goals.

Effective Date of the Executive Directive

This Executive Directive shall become effective upon its signing and shall remain in full force and effect until amended or rescinded by further executive directive.

Given under my hand and under the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia this 29th day of September, 2026.

Abigail D. Spanberger, Governor

Attest:

Candi Mundon King, Secretary of the Commonwealth