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2023 Annual Report

PREPARED BY

Kylie McLatchy, Conservation Support Coordinator

Calandra Waters Lake, Executive Director

Wild Virginia Board

MISSION

We work to protect and connect Virginia's wild places. Along with our partners, alliances, and citizens like you, we hold the state government and regulators accountable for improving habitat connectivity and protecting water quality.

We do this to counter climate change, prevent species extinction, and defend the health of our communities and ecosystems.

WHAT WE DO

- Strengthen habitat connectivity through increased wildlife crossings and corridors
- Protect water quality by preventing the release of forever chemicals, like PFAS
- Limit the environmental harms of the natural gas pipelines
- Train dedicated volunteers through our Clean Water Advocates Program
- Provide educational opportunities to connect people to the wild places they love

HOW WE DO IT

- Advocate to decision-makers for the connectivity and integrity of Virginia's wild places
- Empower diverse communities to participate in the regulatory process
- Convene stakeholder groups to amplify impact
- Connect people to a safer, more inclusive outdoors

WILD VIRGINIA STAFF



CALANDRA WATERS LAKE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Calandra Waters Lake is passionate about empowering others to create a flourishing people and planet. She has over 15 years of experience around environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Calandra served as the inaugural Director of Sustainability for the College of William & Mary where she was also adjunct faculty for the Environment & Sustainability Program. As director at W&M, she co-led a Climate Action Partnership with the University of Virginia, facilitated the university's first Sustainability Plan, and chartered their green revolving fund. Calandra co-chaired the Virginia Sustainability in Higher Education Network and is a board member of the Virginia Conservation Network. Calandra holds a Bachelor of Science in natural resources from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and a Master of Arts in education from William & Mary.



DAVID SLIGH, CONSERVATION DIRECTOR

David Sligh has worked for more than 40 years to make the promises of our environmental laws real. He has consistently and successfully pushed private parties and government agencies to base their actions on science, law, and the public interest. He has a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science from the University of Virginia, a law degree from Vermont Law School, and is a member of the District of Columbia Bar. Dave has worked as a Senior Environmental Engineer for the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Founder and Director of Virginia PEER – the state branch of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Southeast Regional Representative for American Rivers, Upper James Riverkeeper, adjunct instructor of Environmental Science at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and as a consultant and advisor to citizen groups around the country.

WILD VIRGINIA STAFF



DR. JESSICA ROBERTS, HABITAT CONNECTIVITY DIRECTOR

Jessica Roberts has over 10 years of experience in wildlife research and recovery, advocacy, and community-based conservation initiatives. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in environmental studies from American University, she began her career working with AmeriCorps as the Watershed Restoration Coordinator for a conservation nonprofit in California. There, she created and supervised watershed restoration and education programs in connection with California State Parks. Jessica was inspired to pursue a graduate degree after working in wildlife conservation at the Wildlife Center of Virginia and as the Red-Browed Amazon Recovery Program lead at ZooTampa. While reinforcing her skills in wildlife population management, captive-breeding, and species reintroduction, she noticed a gap in the research on captive management techniques for improved reintroduction success. Jessica helped fill that gap while earning her PhD at George Mason University in the Department of Environmental Science and Policy by providing more evidence-based information to conservationists for improving endangered species reintroduction programs. Jessica is passionate about wildlife recovery and excited to join the team at Wild Virginia advancing habitat connectivity programs and connecting with more communities in the state she calls home.



KYLIE MCLATCHY, CONSERVATION SUPPORT COORDINATOR

Kylie McLatchy received a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University. She has worked for the National Park Service, the Fairfax County Park Authority, and in the environmental non-profit sector. She was born and raised in Virginia and is proud to work for an organization that is committed to protecting the ecosystems that she cares deeply about. Kylie loves gardening, especially with native plants, spending time around animals, and being outside.

WILD VIRGINIA BOARD

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Board Member



IMPROVING HABITAT CONNECTIVITY



Photo by Lori A Cash

We continued to advance significant initiatives in 2023. Here's a look at our key leadership moments!

We welcomed our new **Habitat Connectivity Director**, Dr. Jessica Roberts, to the Wild Virginia team! Jessica has over 10 years of experience in wildlife research and recovery, advocacy, and community-based conservation initiatives.

Wild Virginia continued to co-lead the Virginia Safe Wildlife Corridors Collaborative, a group that is committed to protecting people and wildlife by reducing animal-vehicle conflicts and improving safe wildlife passage.

WILLIAM & MARY SOLAR & HABITAT CONNECTIVITY PROJECT

In 2023, Wild Virginia partnered with William & Mary to mentor students Marley Fishburn and Hannah Rovers on their solar siting and habitat connectivity research.

Their research addressed the rising rate of solar farms and the problems they can pose for the conservation of wild areas and key wildlife corridors.

Through our partnership, the students were able to create a tool that could be used to help plan solar sites that maximize production while minimizing damage to wildlife habitats.

PROTECTING WATER QUALITY

Preventing PFAS Pollution

Wild Virginia's newest campaign!

In September 2023, Wild Virginia announced its newest campaign to stop releases of the forever chemicals Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) to the environment! These toxic, synthetic chemicals are present throughout Virginia in the air, water, and soil and threaten our enjoyment of Virginia's wild places, the health of our communities, and the health of wildlife. Wild Virginia aims to prevent further PFAS contamination by stopping PFAS pollution at its source through:

- Holding state agencies accountable. PFAS are being dumped into our rivers and streams.
- Advocating for state legislation that will reduce PFAS pollution, lessen current contamination, notify the public of any future contamination, and compensate landowners for pollution damages.
- Mandating testing and removal of PFAS from sewage sludge biosolids before they can be spread on farmland.
- Educating Virginians, like you, about PFAS and what you can do to help – we even hosted our first virtual town hall meeting in October to educate the public on this important issue!

Wild Virginia got straight to work with the campaign and joined Southern Environmental Law Center, the James River Association, Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League and others in submitting public comments on state discharge permits throughout Virginia. We have also targeted several permits in Roanoke, Scottsville, and Hampton Roads for intensive attention and advocacy to involve more people and anticipate official public comment opportunities in 2024.

PFAS are being discovered in waters across Virginia and gaining public attention. In 2024, you can rely on Wild Virginia to continue to be a leading force in preventing further contamination.



PROTECTING WATER QUALITY

Clean Water Advocates

We graduated our **first class of Clean Water Advocates**, our statewide program that trains volunteers to work beside us and bolster our effectiveness in agency regulatory proceedings. Advocates were provided with knowledge of federal and state water protection laws, regulatory processes, and basic advocacy skills to influence environmental decisions and outcomes. Advocate graduate Carolyn Schuyler says that:

"THIS PROGRAM IS REALLY GREAT BECAUSE IT'S CASTING THE NET BROADER, AND ALLOWING PEOPLE THAT WANT TO HELP TO LEARN FROM THE EXPERTISE OF THE PEOPLE THAT HAVE BEEN DOING THIS SO EFFECTIVELY AT WILD VIRGINIA."

Advocates support Wild Virginia's efforts to protect Virginia's water quality! We look forward to training another cohort of Clean Water advocates in 2024.



PIPELINE OPPOSITION

In June 2023, the U.S. Congress passed the Fiscal Responsibility Act which forced all final federal agency approvals for completion of the Mountain Valley Pipeline. Wild Virginia quickly adjusted our approach to focus on preventing further environmental harms and reducing risks caused by construction of the pipeline. This was a major disappointment, but the passage of the Fiscal Responsibility Act shows how powerful pipeline opponents were in regulatory and court proceedings, because MVP supporters needed to take unprecedented action and change the rules to push the project forward.

We did not and **will not stop pushing for accountability** from the builders and especially from those state and federal officials who are supposed to protect you and your interests.

- Each week, we convene a broad-based strategy group to make sure that all allies have the most up-to-date information so that we can take effective action.
- We work with volunteer monitors who are in the field documenting violations and damage.
- We acquire and review a mass of information from state agencies that shows water quality threats and damages—information the agencies have only released when we demanded it under the law.

PUBLICITY & OUTREACH

OUTINGS & EDUCATION

Wild Virginia continued to inform and empower citizens through press coverage, blog posts, social media, our podcast, and countless events.

With over 35 news mentions this year, Wild Virginia was able to connect with citizens all across the state!



Habitat Connectivity Director, Jessica Roberts, was interviewed by WVTf, speaking about the importance of fencing for safe wildlife passage:

"THE VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH COUNCIL DID SOME RESEARCH ALONG I6 WEST OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, AND THEY PUT UP THIS FENCING TO DIRECT ANIMALS INTO TWO EXISTING UNDERPASSES. IT REDUCED VEHICLE CRASHES AROUND 90 PERCENT, AND IT ALSO INCREASED WILDLIFE USE OF THOSE CULVERTS BY FOUR HUNDRED PERCENT IN SOME AREAS."

10

PODCASTS RELEASED

10K +

PEOPLE CONNECTED
ON SOCIAL MEDIA

30

BLOG POSTS PUBLISHED

9K +

PEOPLE ON WILD
VIRGINIA'S EMAIL LIST

8

COMMENT LETTERS
AUTHORED

71

ORGANIZATIONS SIGNED
ONTO WILD VIRGINIA'S
LETTERS



2023 EVENTS

Monthly Book Club

Comment Writing Party:
Tell Forest Service to Reject the MVP

Salamanders!

Fourth Annual Open Mic:
Words and Images to Celebrate the Earth

Wild Virginia Film Experience:
Window to the Wild

An Introduction to Virginia's First Wildlife
Corridor Action Plan

The Beauty and Diversity of Moths

Holding MVP and Regulators Accountable

Raising Endangered Birds for Success

A Wild Virginia Town Hall to Discuss PFAS

Learn About Fish Conservation!



Photo by Lori A Cash



265+

PEOPLE REGISTERED FOR OUR SALAMANDERS WEBINAR WITH GUEST SPEAKER ANA SPARKS FROM THE VIRGINIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY



115+

PEOPLE REGISTERED FOR OUR COMMENT WRITING PARTY TO TELL THE FOREST SERVICE TO REJECT THE MOUNTAIN VALLEY PIPELINE



230+

PEOPLE REGISTERED FOR AN INTRODUCTION TO VIRGINIA'S FIRST WILDLIFE CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN WITH AMY GOLDEN OF VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



260+

PEOPLE REGISTERED FOR A WEBINAR ALL ABOUT MOTHS WITH GUEST SPEAKER CHRIS ALLGYER, VIRGINIA MASTER NATURALIST



HOW YOU CAN HELP WILD VIRGINIA

Tell another person about Wild Virginia!

Consider a financial gift or increasing the amount of your annual contribution.

Become a monthly donor.

Become a volunteer by signing up on our website.

Attend one of our comment writing parties.

Advocate for water quality and habitat connectivity in your area.

Join our newsletter and keep up with all our updates, activities, and opportunities!

STAY CONNECTED



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In 2024, you can rely on Wild Virginia to protect and connect the Commonwealth's wild places by advocating for environmental protections, convening stakeholder groups to amplify impact, and empowering diverse communities to become active in the decision-making process.

**[JOIN OR RENEW YOUR SUPPORT
BY VISITING WILDVIRGINIA.ORG.](https://www.wildvirginia.org)**