

# 2024

## ANNUAL REPORT



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WILD VIRGINIA

PROTECTING AND CONNECTING YOUR  
FAVORITE WILD PLACES

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## A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

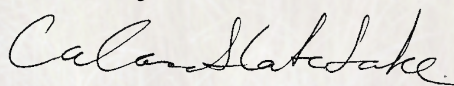
As we look back on 2024, we are deeply grateful for the support and dedication of our members, volunteers, partners, grantmakers, and community.

Last year, Wild Virginia made meaningful strides in our efforts to improve habitat connectivity, protect water quality, train clean water advocates, and provide educational programs that inspire stewardship of our natural world.

Thanks to you, we've seen real progress in advocating for wildlife crossings, advancing our mission of protecting clean water, and reaching more people through environmental education. Your support has been crucial in making this work possible, and we can't thank you enough for your commitment to protecting Virginia's wild places.

We are excited to share the highlights of our accomplishments and the impact we've made. In 2025, we will continue to work inclusively to protect and connect Virginia's wild places, so you and future generations can enjoy all that this beautiful state has to offer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Calandra Waters Lake". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Calandra" being more prominent than the last name "Waters Lake".

Calandra Waters Lake  
Executive Director



## 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 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 BOARD

**BETTE DZAMBA**

Board Member

**LEIGH KIRCHNER**

Treasurer

**GRETHE LINDEMANN**

Vice President

**KATE MALLEK**

Secretary

**TY MOSELEY**

Board Member

**SARAH NERETTE**

Board Member

**REBECCA R. RUBIN**

Board Member

**RYAN WAGENER**

President



Photo by Lori A Cash



# MEET THE TEAM

## WILD VIRGINIA STAFF



**CALANDRA  
WATERS LAKE**



**DAVID SLIGH**



**JESSICA  
ROBERTS, PHD**



**KYLIE  
MCLATCHY**

### **CALANDRA WATERS LAKE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Calandra Waters Lake has over 15 years of experience in sustainability, including serving as Director of Sustainability at the College of William & Mary, where she co-led a Climate Action Partnership and launched the university's first Sustainability Plan. She holds a Master of Arts in education from William & Mary and a Bachelor of Science in natural resources from Virginia Tech.

### **JESSICA ROBERTS, DIRECTOR OF HABITAT CONNECTIVITY**

Jessica Roberts has over 10 years of experience in wildlife research, recovery, and community-based conservation, including leading the Red-Browed Amazon Recovery Program at ZooTampa and working at the Wildlife Center of Virginia. She earned a PhD in Environmental Science and Policy from George Mason University, where she contributed research to improve endangered species reintroduction programs.

### **DAVID SLIGH, DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION**

David Sligh has over 40 years of experience advancing environmental laws, with roles including Senior Environmental Engineer for the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, founder of Virginia PEER, Upper James Riverkeeper, and consultant. 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.

### **KYLIE MCLATCHY, CONSERVATION SUPPORT COORDINATOR**

Kylie McLatchy has over 6 years of experience in the environmental field. She received a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University and did research in stream biology. She has worked for the National Park Service, where she protected an endangered butterfly. She has also worked for the Fairfax County Park Authority and in the environmental non-profit sector in Virginia.





# Improving Habitat Connectivity

Wild Virginia led the Commonwealth's advocacy efforts for wildlife crossings and continued to spearhead habitat connectivity work in Virginia! We chair the [Virginia Safe Wildlife Corridors Collaborative](#) (VSWCC), a group we co-founded that is committed to protecting people and wildlife by reducing animal-vehicle conflicts and improving safe wildlife passage.

**Here's a look at our key leadership moments.**

Photo by Lori A Cash





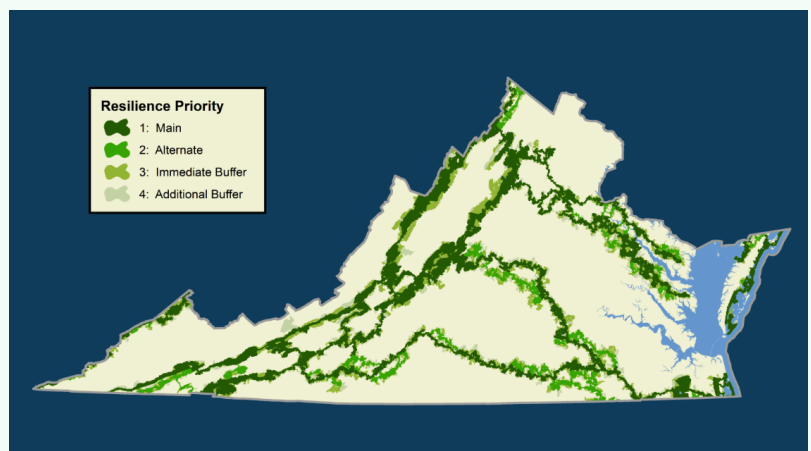
Photo by Lori A Cash

## HABITAT CONNECTIVITY HUB

Wild Virginia **launched Virginia's first ever Habitat Connectivity Hub**! This ArcGIS platform was created with help from VSWCC partners and support from Pew Charitable Trusts and Wildlands Network. The goal of the Hub is to make connectivity data more accessible and transparent, **so you can advocate for the connectivity needs in your area**. On the Hub, you can identify high-risk zones for wildlife-vehicle conflict across the state, delve into research on mitigating wildlife-vehicle conflict, explore tools illustrating the current status of infrastructure enhancements for improved connectivity, and find opportunities to actively participate in citizen science initiatives.

## A MAJOR LEAP FORWARD

The Hub was created with the involvement of 15 partnering organizations, ranging from state agencies to community-based nonprofits, and displays 18 projects and/or tools related to diverse habitat connectivity topics in Virginia. **This was a major leap forward for habitat connectivity work in the Commonwealth!** In 2024, Wild Virginia hosted a series of webinars to teach citizens how to use the Hub for education and advocacy.





# CELEBRATING VIRGINIA'S MODEL WILDLIFE CROSSING AT FORT BELVOIR!

In October, 2024, Wild Virginia hosted a tour of the Fort Belvoir Wildlife Crossing, Virginia's first comprehensive crossing designed to facilitate both aquatic and terrestrial passage while enhancing the area's flood resilience! This tour brought together Army personnel, conservationists, and legislative champions, including Congressman Don Beyer, Senator Marsden, and Delegate Shin. This was an opportunity to **highlight the success of this crossing, while also advocating for better wildlife-friendly infrastructure legislation across the state.**



## WILD VIRGINIA PAVES THE WAY

Wild Virginia is at the forefront of efforts to get more crossings like this implemented throughout Virginia!

▶ Watch our [recap video here!](#)



Photos by Andrew Johnson



# PROTECTING VIRGINIA'S WATER QUALITY



## REGULATORY REFORM

In our Campaign for Virginia's Water Future, we insisted that state officials fully enforce the Clean Water Act and state laws, advocating for use of existing protective water quality standards and adoption of necessary new standards, to stop pollution from development, wastewater discharges, and other damaging activities.

In our continuing work to prevent destruction from pipeline projects, we led twenty-eight allied groups in calling for a stop work order on the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP), to stop severe damage to our waters. We challenged the proposed MVP Southgate project in agency and court appeals and joined the new fight against the Southeast Supply Enhancement Project. To support these efforts, we accessed unreleased government records and reported on findings to the public and decision makers.



Photo by Lori A Cash

## PROTECTING OUR WATERS

Wild Virginia worked to improve state water control regulations and permits and help lead in setting policy goals and strategies for Virginia's broad conservation community. We were appointed to a Technical Advisory Committee convened by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to control pollution through a general permit that covers thousands of construction sites across the state each year. In that effort, we developed technical and legal rationales supporting stronger requirements and led a coalition of thirty-three organizations in making formal comments to insist on improvements to better protect water quality.

To help set statewide strategies, Wild Virginia authored the papers "[Preventing Polluted Stormwater Runoff](#)" and "[Enforcing Water Quality Standards](#)" for VCN's "Our Common Agenda."

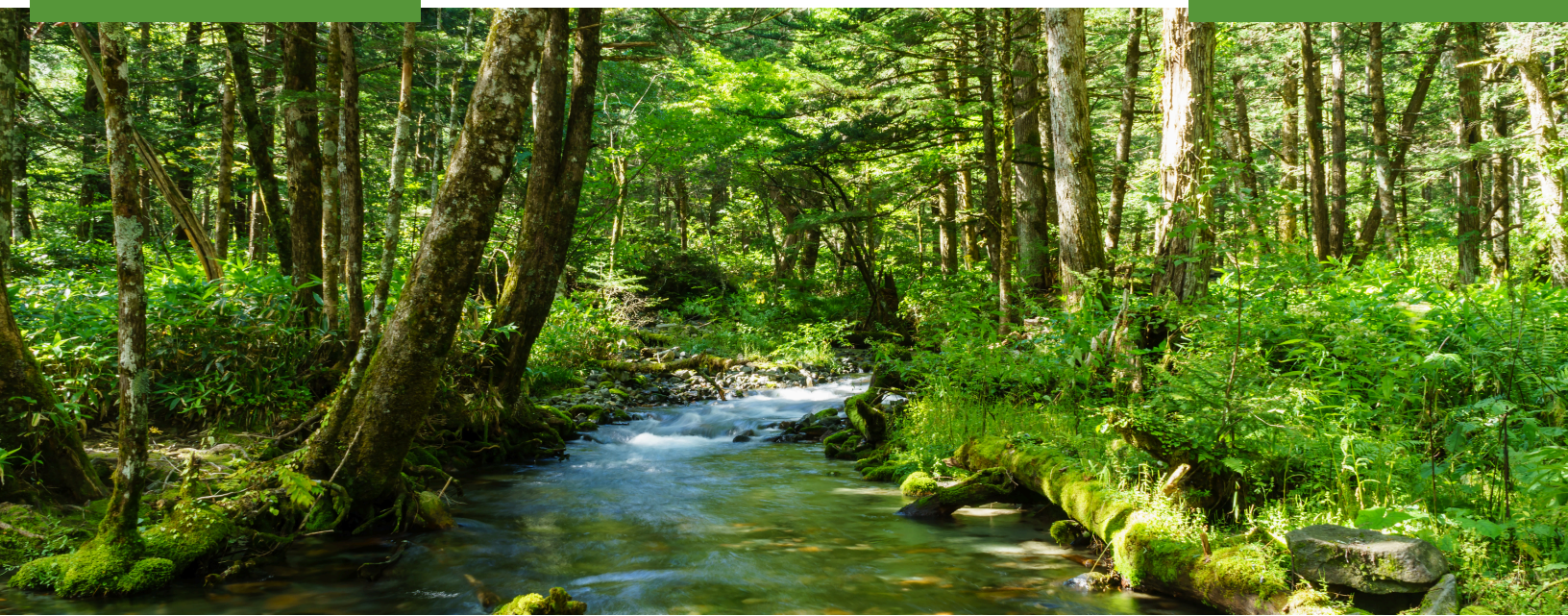
## PREVENTING PFAS POLLUTION

Wild Virginia paved the way in statewide advocacy efforts to keep PFAS from being released into our water. We compiled important data from state agencies about PFAS being discharged and made the public aware of this data through our webinar, "Threats of PFAS in Virginia Waters," and a report we issued.

Wild Virginia submitted comments on 26 discharge permits, insisting that DEQ properly address known PFAS threats. As a direct response to our Scottsville wastewater permit comments, DEQ imposed more stringent requirements on the discharge of certain pollutants. We also insisted that EPA play its proper oversight role to require PFAS requirements in the Danville WWTP permit.

We continued to lead statewide strategy discussions to form policy and regulatory approaches to prevent PFAS releases into the environment.





## EDUCATING CITIZENS ABOUT TOXIC FOREVER CHEMICALS

### JANUARY

#### COMMENT WRITING PARTY FOR ROANOKE WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT PERMIT

Wild Virginia informed citizens about the threat of PFAS discharges to the Roanoke River from this major wastewater plant. We taught participants how and where to send comments, what information is required, and suggested points to raise in the comments.

#### PFAS AND WILDLIFE WEBINAR

Last year, we hosted a panel of scientific experts to share information with the public about the impacts of PFAS on wildlife.

### APRIL

### AUGUST

#### PFAS DISCHARGE PERMIT WEBINAR

Wild Virginia informed citizens about data we acquired from DEQ that had not been released to the public. This data showed that large amounts PFAS are being discharged from industrial plants and sewage treatment plants to streams around the state.

#### WEBINAR ON PFAS IN LAND APPLIED SEWAGE SLUDGE

Wild Virginia, Potomac Riverkeeper Network and the Virginia Conservation Network hosted a webinar on threats from deposition of sewage sludge to Virginia lands. Farmers from Maine described harms they'd experienced and the state's response to protect its residents.

### NOVEMBER





## CLEAN WATER ADVOCATES PROGRAM

Wild Virginia graduated our second cohort of Clean Water Advocates. Clean Water Advocates is a free online program designed to equip individuals from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and locations across the state of Virginia with the knowledge and skills to protect Virginia's water quality. **This year's class of 24 participants was nearly triple the size of last year's pilot group!**

Program graduate Gabrielle Spennacchio-Parker said, "Through this program, I've gained the confidence to raise awareness and take action. Whether influencing policy, educating others, or advocating for stronger protections, I now feel empowered to create real change."

## CELEBRATING THE GRADUATES

Wild Virginia staff and board, partner groups, and our Clean Water Advocates gathered at the Lewis and Clark Exploratory Center to celebrate their accomplishments! Graduates received their certificates and got to hear from Delegate Katrina Callsen, who spoke about the important role that engaged citizens play in protecting our natural resources.

**In 2025, Wild Virginia will welcome our next cohort of Clean Water Advocates!**





# OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

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



**300+**

**REGISTRANTS**

At our wildlife crossings legislation webinar.

**450+**

**REGISTRANTS**

At our Vernal Pools webinar with guest speaker, wetlands ecologist, Mike Hayslett.

**195+**

**REGISTRANTS**

At our webinar on the effects of toxic chemicals on wildlife.

**230+**

**REGISTRANTS**

At our Wildlife Crossings webinar with Author Ben Goldfarb.

## 2024 EVENTS

Climate Change and Impacts on Freshwater Systems  
Virginia's Elk Restoration and Conservation Program  
Better Land Management for Migratory Birds  
Wildlife Crossings with Author Ben Goldfarb  
Vernal Pools from Ice Age to Space Age  
Wildlife Rehabilitation & Connectivity  
Effects of Toxic Chemicals on Wildlife  
Responsible Wildlife Photography



Virginia Wildlife Crossing Legislation  
Threats of PFAS in Virginia Waters  
Mountain Valley Pipeline Update  
Monarch Butterfly Tagging  
Comment Writing Parties  
Hub Highlights Series  
Learn About Mussels  
Monthly Book Clubs  
Post-Election Event





## **3,800+ Online Event Registrants**

Wild Virginia hosted over 25 virtual events, with topics including vernal pools, elk restoration, the Mountain Valley Pipeline, wildlife rehabilitation, and much more.

## **30+ Media Mentions**

News articles are an important way for Wild Virginia to highlight the work we are doing. In 2024, our Clean Water Advocates Program graduation ceremony was featured in a news segment!



## **40+ Partner Groups**

Wild Virginia coleads the Virginia Safe Wildlife Corridors Collaborative, which is made up of more than 40 groups working to protect people and wildlife by reducing animal-vehicle conflicts and improving safe wildlife passage.

## **15,000+ People Staying Connected**

Wild Virginia kept citizens informed about conservation issues through our social media pages and email list.



## **1,000+ Pages of Documents Acquired**

Last year, we submitted 18 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to federal, state, and local government. We acquired thousands of pages of documents with information not previously disclosed to the public.



# 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 webinars
- Advocate for water quality and habitat connectivity in your area
- Follow us on social media
- Join our newsletter and keep up with all our updates, activities, and opportunities

## STAY CONNECTED

Facebook: @wildvirginiainfo

Instagram: @wildvirginia

Linkedin: wild-virginia-nonprofit

Wild Virginia

434-971-1553

PO Box 1065

Charlottesville, VA 22902

In 2025, you can rely on Wild Virginia to continue providing the access, tools, knowledge and confidence for citizens to act effectively to protect our ecosystems and wild spaces.



Photos by Lori A Cash