



CHAPTER **10**  
*Scenic Resources*



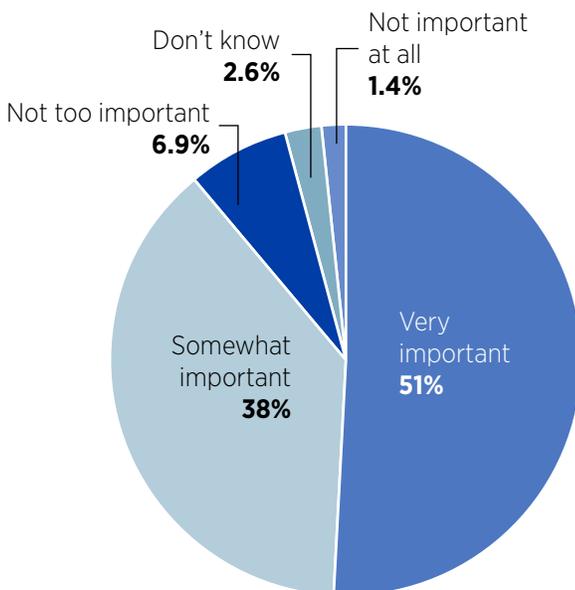
Blue Ridge Parkway | National Park Service

### Introduction

The word “scenic” is in over 85 sections of the Code of Virginia. Scenic resources are important to both quality of life and the economy. Much of the scenery in Virginia is associated with agrarian and forested landscapes. Recognition of scenic resources in rural and suburbanizing regions of the state is particularly important for tourism and recreation.

Virginia’s scenic programs provide opportunities to have a relaxing, inspirational and comfortable outdoor experience. According to the 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey (VODS), nearly 90 percent of respondents think scenery is very important or somewhat important when making travel plans.

**Figure 10.1 Importance of Scenery and Scenic Views**



### Community Influence Defining Scenic Resources

Scenic resource protection and management are the responsibilities of local governments. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) works with local governments and citizens to study potential scenic rivers and byways to encourage their participation in the evaluation process. Local land-use plans sometimes support the Commonwealth’s scenic resource recognition programs, the Virginia Scenic Rivers Program and Virginia Byways. Comprehensive plans, technical resource studies and local ordinances may establish parameters for protecting and enhancing the visual environment. Land conservation may also influence and protect community aesthetics and vistas.

Local and regional planning documents listed in Table 10.2 include some scenic resource protection techniques. State and local recognition programs will be strengthened if local governments incorporate scenic values into planning their process.

**Figure 10.2 Scenic Resource Planning Tools**

- Local comprehensive plans
- Local parks and recreation plans
- Visual and scenic resources inventories and assessments
- Open space and land conservation plans
- Natural and cultural resource inventories
- Greenways plans and studies
- Land-Use Tax Credits

Scenic Virginia is planning to develop a scenic resources toolbox as part of its 20th anniversary effort. The toolbox will include projects, codes, surveys and other references to help communities incorporate visual assets into their local plans.

Due to federal mandates, several federal agencies have developed their own visual resource programs. These programs are meant to meet the specific needs of each agency; however, various aspects of these programs can be useful to localities for identifying and documenting significant visual resources in their communities.

**Figure 10.3 Federal Visual Resource Program Summaries**

<b>Bureau of Land Management (BLM)</b>	The program provides mitigation for impacts on BLM lands, which might include or be dependent on views overlooking private land. It measures view quality. It is used to address alternative energy and facility placement. It includes public concern in its assessment.
<b>U.S. Forest Service (USFS)</b>	The program is a management tool for USFS lands or other federal lands. It includes inventory and management requirements. Its system defines scenic quality. It is used for forest management and utilization primarily to assess plan conformance and public concerns.
<b>National Park Service (NPS)</b>	The program is directed to conservation of views and management of a specific category of property on federal lands. It has a rating system that includes harmony and importance. It includes conservation, maintaining and interpretation without a specific management requirement. Public concerns are a big part of this process.
<b>Federal Highways Administration (FHWA)</b>	It includes an assessment of what the observer would see traveling through the landscape, including adjacent lands. The scoring system is limited to assessment needs as related to constructions impacts and mitigation.
<b>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)</b>	The program framework only looks at dam construction impacts for private and public lands. It is not a scenic conservation tool but a mitigation tool for construction impacts. The Corps can use this process in development plans, including parks, recreation facilities, visitor centers and other facilities.

### Virginia Scenic Rivers Program

The **Virginia Scenic Rivers Program** was established in 1970 as a way to celebrate outstanding examples of Virginia’s more than 49,000 miles of rivers and streams. The program is managed by the state in partnership with citizens and local government and focuses on enhancing the conservation of scenic rivers and their corridors. Recognized rivers and streams that gain this designation are honored by community groups, localities, DCR and Virginia’s General Assembly as being Virginia’s finest. Some of the characteristics for qualification are: scenic landscapes that include minimum development along the river corridor, historic features, unique flora and fauna, high water quality, strong fisheries, public access to the river and overall aesthetic appeal.

Communities like the Town of Buchanan are recognizing that scenic river designations are good for business. In 2010, Buchanan got the James River designation lengthened to take advantage of the recognition that the program provides.

The Code of Virginia provides that DCR may make recommendations to federal, state and local agencies regarding protected **scenic rivers resources**.

The **Virginia Scenic Rivers Act** gives DCR these duties:

- DCR administers the scenic river system to preserve and protect its natural beauty and to assure its use and enjoyment for its scenic, recreational, geologic, fish, wildlife, historic, cultural or other assets, and to encourage the continuance of existing agricultural, horticultural, forestry, and open space land and water uses.
- Surveying each scenic river periodically to monitor existing and proposed uses along the river.
- Assisting local governments with problem solving associated with Virginia scenic rivers.
- After designation of a scenic river, no dam or other structure that impedes natural flow thereof shall be constructed, operated or maintained in a designated scenic river unless authorized by the General Assembly.

The Virginia Scenic Rivers Program is celebrating its 50th Anniversary in 2020. Follow the progress on the Virginia Scenic Rivers website.



Upper James River | Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

### Virginia Scenic Rivers Recommendations

- Implement the 50th anniversary celebration strategic plan for the Virginia Scenic Rivers Program. (Scenic Virginia, DCR, Virginia American Society of Landscape Architecture [VASLA], other identified groups)
- Hold a workshop on Scenic Rivers and water trails. (DCR, Virginia Commonwealth University, River Management Society (RMS))
- Expand the number of designated Scenic Rivers, including representation of every watershed and/or planning district. (DCR, local communities)
- Establish a dedicated process for funding and installing “A State Scenic River” signs on all bridges crossing scenic rivers. (DCR, VDOT)
- Produce a “State of Virginia Scenic Rivers” brochure celebrating the accomplishments of the program. (Steering committee, DCR)
- Develop a manual on the scenic rivers program outlining the programs successes and preservation techniques. (DCR)
- Continue to coordinate with Virginia Department of Transportation and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to provide access to scenic rivers.

### Virginia Byways Program

The Virginia Byways recognition program began in 1966, with the Virginia General Assembly passing the legislation for the program. A scenic highway is a road designed and built within a protected corridor. The only roads that qualify for scenic highway designation are the four National Park Service parkways, which are also National Byways, with three of them being designated as All-American Roads. Virginia Byways are existing roads with relatively high aesthetic or cultural value, leading to or within areas of historical, natural or recreational significance.

Virginia Byways are roads that represent an exceptional example of a common regional landscape and have reasonable protection for aesthetic and cultural values. Byways are routes that bypass major roads for a leisurely motoring experience. Recommendations for Virginia Byway designation is initiated by localities.

According to the 2017 VODS, 67 percent of those who responded enjoy driving for pleasure as a way to connect with nature. This makes driving for pleasure equal with walking for pleasure as a top outdoor recreation activity. Additionally, on average, 30 percent of respondents stated that driving for pleasure is an outdoor recreational need.

Thanks to the partnership formed by the Prince William Conservation Alliance, Prince William County Board of Supervisors and the Commonwealth Transportation Board, several important roads in Prince William County have been designated as the first Scenic Byways in the county, adding nearly 40 miles to Virginia Byways network.

Source: <https://princewilliamliving.com/2017/07/virginia-approves-first-scenic-byways-in-prince-william-county/>

The following figure highlights that driving is still a top recreation activity and underscores the need for a vibrant byways program in Virginia.

**Figure 10.4 Top Three Recreation Activities**

	percent
Visiting natural areas	71*
Driving for pleasure	67**
Walking for pleasure	67***

\* Up from 50% in 2011

\*\* Up from 55% in the 2006 VODS, question was not in 2011 VODS

\*\*\* Down from 82% in 2011



Spring Ride on Route 42, Goshen | Jack Beilhart

### Virginia Byways Recommendations

- Update the byway designation process to make it more quantifiable and develop a process for benchmarking all byways to see if they still qualify for designation. (VDOT, DCR)
- Hold a workshop on scenic issues and assets as they relate to byways and develop a manual for continued management of byway corridors to promote byway designations. (VDOT, DCR, Scenic VA)
- Provide signage on bridges identifying where scenic rivers and byways intersect. (VDOT, DCR, Scenic Virginia)
- Dedicate funding for maintaining the safety, integrity and character of Virginia Byways. (General Assembly)

### Assets and Opportunities

The Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) Technical Advisory Committee met in 2016 and identified important reasons for protecting scenic resources.

- Community identity – Scenic assets create community context in a variety of settings.
- Resources and landscape character protection – Scenic resources enhance valued resources.
- Economic value of scenic beauty – Scenic resources frame authentic experiences for tourists, support ecotourism, increase land values and attract new businesses.

- Conservation and ecosystem service values – Scenic resources are a component of land conservation and preserving healthy ecosystems.
- Accessibility – Through visual experiences, scenic resources frame regional character by featuring the natural and cultural environment.
- Health benefits – Scenic resources support psychological and social well-being.
- Light pollution is a developing concern, potentially affecting nighttime scenic resources. The Virginia chapter of the International Dark-Sky Association has been active addressing these concerns. See Appendix 10.

### Challenges

The VOP Technical Advisory Committee identified three main challenges for the Commonwealth's scenic resources.

1. Identifying types of visual impacts to local, regional and state resources including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts.
2. Documenting scenic resources for protection and mitigation by:
  - a. Defining the value of scenic resources.
  - b. Implementing a protocol that identifies scenic resources.
  - c. Developing community-based scenic resource planning and protection strategies.
3. Identifying conservation tools appropriate on a parcel by parcel basis to protect scenic resources at a landscape scale.

### Recommendations

- Develop an education and advocacy program, including a workshop, to identify and promote scenic resources and support state scenic rivers and byways programs. (Scenic Virginia, DCR, VASLA)
- Implement a social media platform for the public to share scenic views. (Scenic Virginia)
- Develop lists of local scenic resources for inclusion in local comprehensive plans. (DCR, Scenic Virginia, local government)
- Develop and fund a statewide register of scenic areas and a layer of scenic areas for the VOP Mapper. (DCR, state agencies, local government, nonprofits)

- Develop an information repository for: (DCR, Scenic Virginia, Virginia Tech)
  - visual resource programs,
  - techniques for localities to use in identifying resources;
  - ordinances and land management options for protecting resources, and
  - scenic resources mapping.
- Develop an annual recognition program for noteworthy and qualifying views that are endangered or spectacular. (DCR, Scenic Virginia, VASLA)
- Establish a statewide Scenic Resources Advisory Board (Scenic Virginia)
- Recommendations for dark skies
  - Develop a state parks nightscapes program modeled on the National Park Service program and support local designations. (DCR, Virginia Chapter of International Dark-Sky Association [IDA])
  - Encourage citizen involvement and contribution to sky quality data through Globe at Night: citizen science campaign.

In June 2015, Staunton River State Park became the first IDA-certified Dark Sky Park in Virginia. This initiative began as a partnership between the Chapel Hill Astronomical and Observational Society (CHAOS) and park management. The park manager became a champion for IDA Dark Sky Park certification and forged an effective collaboration among the park, local officials and CHAOS to achieve and maintain the certification. The number of attendees at premier Star Parties has exceeded 200 visitors and in 2017 AstroCamp, a STEM-based summer camp for youth, purchased a nearby property because of its proximity to an IDA-certified Dark Sky Park. Other state parks are also working on certification.



*A dark-sky campsite in Clarksville | Sam Dean/Virginia Tourism Corp.*

## Resources

- Huang, Guoping “Protecting Urban River Views with Geodesign Approach” *Journal of Digital Landscape Architecture*, February 2017, Vol. 2: 85-93, DOI:10.14627/537629009. This study examines the viewshed using a series of geodesign techniques and methods.
- Preserving Monticello’s Viewshed: <https://www.monticello.org/site/about/preserving-monticellos-viewshed> – outlines voluntary guidelines for development within the Monticello viewshed.
- Saving Washington’s View: <http://www.mountvernon.org/donate/reasons-to-give/save-washingtons-view/history-saving-the-viewshed/>– discusses the history of efforts to maintain the original view from Mount Vernon across the Potomac.
- VirginiaViewFinders—a website that enables users to submit photos of scenic views and rate their favorites. <https://virginiaviewfinders.org/>