

# Virginia Forest Landowner Update

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### RC&D Councils Making Resource Conservation a Priority

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For 40 years, Resource Conservation and Development Councils across the country have partnered with agencies and organizations to improve the quality of life and protect natural resources. In Virginia, these partnerships have built a successful framework that produces a variety of land and energy conservation programs.

### Land Conservation in Virginia



In spring of 2006, Gov. Tim Kaine set a statewide goal of conserving an additional 400,000 acres of working farmland, forest land and natural area open space by the end of his administration. The RC&D councils of Virginia, which have a history of successful land conservation projects, responded to Governor Kaine's initiative with a commitment to increase conservation efforts across Virginia.

This winter, when Virginia Cooperative Extension rolls out the new Forest & Farmland Conservation Strategies Short-course, Virginia's RC&D Councils and the Virginia Department of Forestry will help sponsor five workshops in Eastern Virginia. These workshops will target planning professionals, natural resource managers, and landowners and will educate participants on the current land conservation strategies, including conservation easements and the purchase of development rights. These workshops are listed in the online VFLU calendar with contact information.

The Virginia Department of Forestry and RC&D forestry committees and advisory groups have developed presentations that underscore the economic and ecological impacts of the forest resource. These Value of Forestry presentations describe the status of resources, loss of forest land, and promote appropriate conservation strategies. To date, these presentations have been made in 16 localities in eastern Virginia. Other presentations are planned for the Shenandoah RC&D Council, the New River-Highlands RC&D Council, and the Black Diamond RC&D Council.

### Forestry and Renewable Energy in Virginia

Governor Kaine has also declared Virginia's support of the 25 X '25 vision (for more information, visit the Web site: <http://www.25x25.org/>). This national goal states that "by 2025, renewable energy from America's farms, forests, and ranches will provide 25 percent of the total

energy consumed in the United States, while continuing to produce safe, abundant and affordable food, feed and fiber.” Renewable energy has been, and will continue to be, a conservation priority for many of Virginia’s RC&D Councils.



In 2006, the South Hampton Roads RC&D, Shenandoah RC&D, and the South Centré Corridors RC&D Councils all participated in biodiesel forums. They targeted farmers, small scale producers, and local government to discuss the implications of conversion to renewable energy sources and generate interest in biofuels production. The emphasis was placed on biofuels production from agriculture and forestry residues --which could give rural landowners additional income sources. The workshops were well-supported by the local communities, indicating an increasing interest in biofuels in the coming years. In November 2006, the Tidewater RC&D Council forestry committee formed a renewable fuels committee—to explore energy production possibilities from agriculture and forestry.

### **Inspiring conservation**

In Virginia, we are losing an average of 67,000 acres of land to non-forest uses every year. Large blocks of land with a rural character are becoming fragmented to meet demands of a growing population. By exploring additional agriculture and forestry markets (i.e. biofuels), and pursuing innovative land conservation strategies, Virginia’s RC&D Councils will help initiate strategies to conserve natural resources while meeting the growing resource demands. Please join local and statewide efforts to wisely use our natural resources and conserve Virginia’s natural landscape for future generations.

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