

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 335

Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study long-term dedicated funding sources for land conservation. Report.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 2, 2011

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 22, 2011

WHEREAS, conservation of the Commonwealth's landscapes not only preserves our historic and cultural heritage but also protects our working lands and water quality; and

WHEREAS, conserving the Commonwealth's working lands and open spaces will help to ensure the long-term viability of our most significant economic drivers: agriculture, forestry, and tourism; and

WHEREAS, forests and fields provide ecosystem services with multiple benefits for local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay by filtering stormwater, recharging aquifers, sequestering carbon, consuming excess nutrients, and preventing siltation, while also protecting natural landmarks and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, recognizing the many fundamental values attributable to the preservation of our landscapes and natural beauty, upon taking office Governor McDonnell made a commitment to conserve 400,000 acres of open space in the Commonwealth by January 2014; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has developed well-designed programs and tools to incentivize land conservation by private landowners, but lacks a stable funding source to support such programs and to allow for comprehensive targeting of conservation dollars to attain the highest benefit; and

WHEREAS, a stable revenue source dedicated to land conservation in the Commonwealth will provide long-term planning and purchasing power to engage landowners across the state to preserve the Commonwealth's historically and ecologically significant landscapes and working lands; and

WHEREAS, a reliable funding stream will leverage local efforts by providing matching funds for local government land conservation efforts and complements the Virginia Land Preservation Tax Credit program for land conservation in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, Article XI, Section 1 of the Constitution of Virginia states: ". . . it shall be the Commonwealth's policy to protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to study long-term dedicated funding sources for land conservation.

In conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall examine and build upon prior legislative and administrative study efforts to establish a stable funding source dedicated to land conservation and report on the status of previous recommendations. The Commission shall also look to other states for innovative funding mechanisms and identify and develop viable options for potential long-term dedicated funding sources for land conservation in the Commonwealth.

Technical assistance shall be provided to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Department of Forestry, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and the Virginia Resources Authority. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission for this study, upon request.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings for the first year by November 30, 2011, and for the second year by November 30, 2012, and the chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the next Regular Session of the General Assembly for each year. Each executive summary shall state whether the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summaries and reports shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

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