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## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 214

Offered January 27, 2016

*Commending the Virginia Natural Heritage Program.*

Patron—Kilgore

WHEREAS, on August 27, 1986, the Commonwealth signed an agreement with The Nature Conservancy to launch the nation's 43rd State Natural Heritage Program, and the first Virginia Natural Area Preserve was dedicated on October 31, 1990; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Natural Heritage Program benefits all Virginians by finding, preserving, and protecting the Commonwealth's most significant natural resources and providing outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation; and

WHEREAS, Virginia is recognized as one of six biological diversity hot spots in the United States, and Virginia's Clinch and Powell Rivers represent the nation's leading hot spots of aquatic diversity, supporting a collection of freshwater mussels unmatched anywhere in the world; and

WHEREAS, the Natural Heritage Program has built a conservation information system of 8,820 natural community and rare species field locations, and a Natural Area Preserve System of 62 natural areas containing 55,600 acres supporting 760 exemplary natural community and rare species populations; and

WHEREAS, the Natural Heritage Program is the official aggregator and source for data and information on all of Virginia's conserved lands and managed areas, across 10,865 tracts, where these data are used internally, shared with partners, and provided to the public for conservation information and decision making; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Natural Heritage Program has been recognized twice by The Nature Conservancy and NatureServe as the Outstanding Natural Heritage Program in Canada, the United States, and Latin America for "outstanding and innovative efforts to apply natural heritage data to effect local and statewide conservation"; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Natural Heritage Program scientists have discovered 36 species new to science and 313 species not previously seen or documented in Virginia and have documented 110 globally rare species in Virginia's 4,100 caves, and the Virginia Natural Heritage Program staff have provided cost-effective, timely, scientific, and unbiased conservation information for 58,931 land conservation and land planning projects; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Natural Heritage Program has provided outstanding service to citizens and government agencies to protect drinking water and conserve significant natural resources; and

WHEREAS, the fourth most common outdoor recreation activity in Virginia is visiting natural areas; State Natural Area Preserves provide unique outdoor experiences and education opportunities for residents of and visitors to the Commonwealth, with 150,000 visitors to the preserves estimated in 2015; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, on the occasion of its 30th anniversary in 2016, for the invaluable service it provides to the citizens of the Commonwealth; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare copies of this resolution for presentation to the director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the director of the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, with reproductions to be displayed at Virginia Natural Area Preserve public access facilities, as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the program's achievements.

INTRODUCED

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