

Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fund

Greater Than the Parts

A handful of mitigation permits in Frederick County, VA adds up to one significant conservation project thanks to the Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fund's in-lieu fee mitigation program.

In the depths of the longest cave in Frederick County, Virginia five rare invertebrates — two amphipods, an isopod, a springsnail and a beetle — thrive amid the damp, dark conditions. They are members of a complex eco-system dependent on the clean, healthy flow of water in Buffalo Marsh Run. This biologically significant cave might not exist in this condition today if not for a well-timed, well-planned in-lieu fee mitigation effort.

Offering a Better Alternative

Between 2003 and 2006, 11 permit-seekers filed requests for stream mitigation in and around Frederick County. The pace and scale of the requests were too small to entice a private mitigation bank to provide the necessary credits. This presented a challenge to the permit-seekers: Avoid impacts altogether, or assume responsibility for mitigation, which would mean undertaking costly, piecemeal projects scattered across the region.

Fortunately, there was a better option available. The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) in-lieu fee mitigation program, the Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fund was in place, not only to provide the necessary credits, but also pool the funds and invest into a single more manageable, more critical conservation project.

Rare Conservation Opportunity

Around the same time, The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) approached TNC for help protecting Ogden's Cave: The biologically significant site in the Shenandoah River Basin was full of interesting formations, numerous drip pools, and a free-flowing stream. It was home to globally rare invertebrates, and at least two bat species. It was also within the watershed of the impacts in Frederick and surrounding Counties.

Greater Return on Investment

In little more than a year, TNC and the VARTF had purchased the Ogden's Cave property — saving it from potential development — and stabilized the bank along 1,700 feet of the Buffalo Marsh Run. TNC sold the property back to the state of Virginia, recouping all of the acquisition costs and reinvesting the funds in even more conservation work in the watershed. Thanks to the nimbleness of TNC's in-lieu fee mitigation program and its focus on conservation results, the watershed secured conservation benefits beyond the required mitigation; 11 development projects moved forward uninhibited by permitting delays and complicated mitigation requirements; and the tiny cave critters now have a permanent home.



Buffalo Marsh Run © TNC

Good for Business, People, and Nature

EXPERTISE AND EFFICIENCY

This project was completed in less than a year thanks to the expertise and efficiency of VARTF's full-time staff. The ability to use VARTF allowed the 11 permits to be processed in a much more efficient manner.

COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

By selling the protected area back to the State of Virginia, VARTF recouped the cost of acquisition, allowing them to reinvest the funds into additional conservation work in the watershed.

SIGNIFICANT CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

VARTF worked with the Virginia DCR to perform mitigation work in an area that not only compensated for the development of new housing, but also helped protect a biologically significant cave.