



GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA

Glenn Youngkin

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For Immediate Release: December 19, 2025

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Governor Glenn Youngkin Announces Advancement of Historic Southwest Virginia Open Space Public Access Easement

RICHMOND, VA – Governor Glenn Youngkin announced today the advancement of the largest open space public access easement in Virginia history. The Cumberland Outdoor Access Legacy (COAL) easement will include approximately 65,000 acres across four counties including Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, and Wise, that will provide recreational opportunities to Virginia's outdoor and wildlife enthusiasts.

"I am excited to announce that a letter of intent has been signed between The Nature Conservancy's Cumberland Forest, LP (TNC) and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) to bring record-breaking recreational access to Southwest Virginia," **said Governor Glenn Youngkin.** "Throughout my administration, we have been firmly guided by the principle that enhancing conservation and supporting local economies go hand-in-hand, and I cannot think of a better example than this historic accomplishment."

The easement will not only provide recreational opportunities to visitors but also will protect habitat for big game species including elk, deer, bear, and turkey, as well as species of greatest conservation need such as American woodcock and Big Sandy crayfish. The easement includes access to the Russell Fork and Pound rivers providing angling opportunities for trout and smallmouth bass, as well as access for canoers and kayakers.

"Throughout the Youngkin Administration, bolstering Southwest Virginia, improving access to outdoor recreation, and ensuring collaboration with partners have all been key priorities," **said Virginia Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Stefanie Taillon.** "This critical project embodies all of these individual goals, resulting in unprecedented access to public lands that will provide much-needed recreational opportunities, habitat expansion, and economic support to the region."

"This easement is a historic achievement for our conservation and recreation goals," **said DWR Executive Director Ryan Brown.** "In no other single transaction have we had the opportunity to preserve habitat at this scale, while securing permanent public access for our hunters, anglers, and all others who enjoy the outdoors."

"For Southwest Virginia, natural resources and outdoor recreation are deeply connected to building community, advancing economic development, and contributing to the overall quality of life," **said TNC's Virginia State Director Bettina Ring.** "At TNC, we strive to balance the needs of people and nature, and this collaboration reflects that commitment. It ensures the biodiversity of this land will be conserved and

restored, while providing Virginians and visitors alike the chance to enjoy these spectacular lands, waters, and wildlife."

The COAL easement is anticipated to be completed in late spring of 2026 with full public access available July 1, 2026.

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