

Public Land

By Delegate Albert C. Pollard, Jr.

June 14, 2010

The following is a letter I wrote to the City of Fredericksburg's Planning Commissioner Chairman in response to a draft management plan for 4,800 acres owned by the City that is currently under a deed of easement. A well-intentioned nonprofit drafted this management plan for the City, however, they failed to recognize a very important aspect of publicly owned land – that it is owned by the public and therefore requires access by the public.

Dear Mr. McAfee:

I am writing to comment on the proposed Draft Watershed Management Plan as submitted by the Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR) for the Watershed Management Property. The subject property is the 4,800 acres along the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers in the Deed of Easement dated June 5, 2006 by and between the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia Outdoors Foundation, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) Board of Directors, and The Nature Conservancy.

My concerns with the draft plan submitted by FOR echo those shared by VDGIF in their letter to FOR of March 2, 2010. Specifically, I am concerned about the issue of public land being held in trust for public enjoyment. The very idea that 4,800 acres of publicly owned land in the middle of a population center would have access greatly restricted is contrary to the very goals of public land. The present commercially managed access points are very well run and are great entry points for many users, but have obvious limitations. They are exactly that – commercial access to public land. Please also consider the future ramifications of easements and/or public land purchases when it is 'promised' that the land will continue to have traditional uses and public access.

I also believe it would be very unwise to restrict hunting on the property. Obviously, one of your easement holders (VDGIF) has in its mission upholding Virginian's constitutional right to hunt and fish. Beyond the obvious problems which would occur with an overabundance of wildlife so near a heavily populated urban center, restricting this habitat from sound management would further sour a public already distrustful of government land ownership.

In closing, the aforementioned land has been a great asset to the City and to all the citizens of Virginia. If help is needed with specific management issues, I and other members of the legislature would be happy to explore solutions rather than merely restricting the public's access to land it owns.

Sincerely,

Albert C. Pollard, Jr.

Delegate Albert Pollard, Jr., represents the 99th District, which consists of the counties of Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, Westmoreland, King George and a portion of Caroline, in Virginia's House of Delegates. You may contact his office in Lancaster Courthouse at (804) 462-5940 or visit his website at www.albertpollard.com.

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