



*Our mission is to conserve the gifts of nature, to restore and preserve historic landscapes of the Commonwealth, to cultivate the knowledge and love of gardening, and to lead future generations to build on this heritage.*

## **GCV Positions on 2024 Legislative Issues**

Conservation and Beautification Committee

**January 2024**

The Garden Club of Virginia (GCV) is an active association of 48 Clubs whose members form a group of more than 3,400 civic leaders from around the Commonwealth. Guided by its mission statement (above), and cognizant to strive for equitable community funding allocation, the GCV recommends attention to the following issues currently before the 2024 Session of the Virginia General Assembly:

### **Conservation and Protection of our Natural Resources**

The GCV supports protection of public and private lands from negatively impactful fossil fuel development. The strength of existing environmental protections must be maintained and enhanced as the Commonwealth's economic and energy needs progress.

### **Mining**

Virginia has no effective regulations controlling hard rock mining - the extraction of minerals (i.e., gold, pyrites). Many abandoned mines need reclamation, and without regulation pose a threat to public health, water quality and supply, and the general environment. Until the General Assembly creates an effective regulatory framework, the GCV opposes the issuance of new permits for large-scale mining, including Uranium mining.

### **State Parks and Regional Recreational Trails**

The GCV urges full budget funding to maintain and improve state parks, protect biodiversity, manage invasive and plant native plants, and encourage equitable use by all citizens.

The GCV also supports increasing biking and walking pathways throughout the Commonwealth, as well as ensuring that every Virginian has access to parks, trails and green spaces through dedicated funding.

### **Climate Change and Recurrent Flooding**

Climate change causes increased air and water temperatures and increased intensity of storms and rainfall. Resultant rising sea levels pose a significant threat to coastal Virginia. Increased levels of carbon dioxide cause all waterways in the Chesapeake Bay watershed to become more acidic and thus harmful to marine life. Given the US Supreme Court decision (Sackett v. EPA), States are now the primary protectors of wetlands. The GCV supports efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions and to invest in coastal resiliency and flood protection, and to expand regulation to protect wetlands.

GCV urges support of the Commonwealth's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) to limit carbon dioxide emissions and provide funds for mitigation efforts.

## **Protection and Improvement of Water Quality**

The GCV is concerned about toxic pollutants in our waterways and drinking water and supports the identification and disclosure of PFAS and other chemicals of concern to eliminate them at the source from our environment and drinking water. The GCV also encourages funding to manage polluted runoff and solutions to shift responsibility for clean-up from the community taxpayer to producer to protect Virginia's waterways. The GCV supports the need for study and effective planning and implementation methods that would ensure the protection and restoration of critical watersheds.

## **Single Use Plastics**

The GCV supports banning the use of single use plastics.

## **Land Conservation**

The GCV strives for preservation and beautification of open spaces, historic areas, and environmentally sensitive habitats by promoting responsible, sustainable land use. The GCV recommends that the General Assembly establish a source of ongoing annual dedicated funding of the Virginia Land Conservation Grant Programs for preservation of land, farmland and battlefields, and protection of the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC).

## **Viewshed Protection**

The GCV recommends continued vigilance over the placement/replacement/permitting of large roadside advertising, including LED advertising. This includes the placement and construction of large power lines.

## **Education, Community Engagement and Tree Planting**

The GCV promotes funding of programs for environmental education, so Virginia citizens know the importance of conservation stewardship. The GCV supports enacting state statutes and local ordinances that enable communities to create and care for green spaces and public landscapes. The GCV supports efforts to increase the urban tree canopy to cool our cities, handle storm water and sequester carbon to combat climate change.

## **Invasive Plants**

Invasive plants are a significant threat to the environment, impacting other species, habitat, and fragile ecosystems. GCV supports funding for control and removal of non-native invasive plants, discourages their sale and use, and supports funding for promotion of increased use of native plants.

## **Clean Energy**

The GCV supports legislation that encourages sensitively sited development of solar, wind and other forms of clean renewable energy in the Commonwealth, including small scale distributed solar and investments in energy efficiency as the most cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The General Assembly is urged to encourage regional efforts to allocate a higher percentage of regional transportation revenues to mass transit and rail.