

# **GOVERNOR KAINE ANNOUNCES CONSERVATION OF 4,188 ACRES WITHIN DRAGON RUN WATERSHED**

*~ Vital tributary to Chesapeake Bay to be permanently protected ~*

**RICHMOND**—Governor Timothy M. Kaine today announced that the Commonwealth and The Nature Conservancy have purchased 4,188 acres of environmentally extraordinary land within the Dragon Run watershed from the Hancock Timber Resource Group. This purchase brings the total land conservation under Governor Kaine to 335,000 acres, well on pace to meet his goal of preserving 400,000 acres during his term.

“The purchase of this property will add significantly to our protected state forest land,” Governor Kaine said. “It will also ensure that this ecologically important land will never be developed and will be enjoyed by Virginians for generations.”

The Commonwealth’s investment comes through a Virginia Public Building Authority bond for public land acquisition approved by the General Assembly in 2008. The Commonwealth will use these bond funds to protect large tracts of important conservation lands at several key sites across the state. All of the acreage acquired with bond funds will provide recreational opportunities to the public.

Dubbed the “second most ecologically important watershed in the Chesapeake Bay” by the Smithsonian Institution, Dragon Run includes the northern-most tidal cypress swamp community on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. Ninety bird species, such as bald eagles and prothonotary warblers, are found in the area, along with 55 species of fish. The waters provide vital nurseries for perch, rockfish, and alewives, which are important for Chesapeake commercial fishermen and sportsmen.

The Nature Conservancy originally purchased 4,188 acres from Hancock Timber Resource Group in November 2008. Of that, 2,411 acres are being acquired by the Virginia Department of Forestry with bond funds and added to Dragon Run State Forest. The State Forest is used to demonstrate forest management that promotes sustainable forestry, contributes to the local economy, and promotes healthy wildlife habitat.

Michael Lipford, director of The Nature Conservancy, said, “The Dragon Run watershed is one of the few watersheds in eastern Virginia that remains primarily undeveloped, rural forest land. This partnership between the Hancock Timber Resource Group, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and The Nature Conservancy represents our shared interest in conserving the ecology and traditional industries this special place supports.

“It is important to recognize that this project will produce benefits far from the site itself,” he added. “By protecting large forest tracts in the Dragon Run watershed, we are also helping to protect water quality in the Chesapeake Bay. Just downstream, the

Conservancy is restoring native oyster reefs in the Piankatank River, and the protection of this watershed enhances those efforts.”

Mike Wolf, director of North American Forest Operations at Hancock Timber Resource Group, said, “The Hancock Timber Resource Group, the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Nature Conservancy have a long history of working together to protect environmentally sensitive land. We are very pleased to be able to work with the Conservancy and the Department of Forestry once again to protect more land in the Dragon Run watershed.”

This is the most recent transaction between Hancock Timber Resource Group and The Nature Conservancy in the Dragon Run watershed. With this purchase, a total of 6,700 acres of Hancock land have been conserved in this area.

In April 2008, The Virginia Department of Forestry created the Dragon Run State Forest, an 1,811-acre property in King and Queen County on the Middle Peninsula that borders a major tributary to the Dragon Swamp, which feeds into the Piankatank River and, ultimately, the Chesapeake Bay.

Lowland areas of the State Forest contain forested swamps managed under an open-space easement with Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF). The Department of Forestry worked with TNC and VOF to limit certain activities on some particularly unique riparian areas of the property to further protect the water resource. In addition, DOF’s practice of establishing buffers along the waterways will protect the waters of the Dragon Swamp—one of the most significant forested areas in the coastal plain of the Chesapeake Bay. The upland areas of the property will continue Hancock Timber’s sustainable forestry regime for managing southern yellow pine, and providing raw material for local industry.

In Virginia, the Hancock Timber Resources Group has worked with conservation groups to permanently conserve nearly 10,000 acres. Hancock Timber in the late 1990s sold approximately 2,500 acres to The Nature Conservancy to help create the Piney Grove Preserve, providing habitat for the northernmost population of the red-cockaded woodpecker, which was listed as endangered in 1970.

Through its Sensitive Lands Program, the Hancock Timber Resource Group has helped preserve and protect nearly 400,000 acres of environmentally sensitive lands across the United States.

Today's announcement comes as Governor Kaine continues to move his "Renew Virginia" initiative, a series of legislative and administrative actions to promote renewable energy, create green jobs, and encourage preservation of the environment.

For more information on Renew Virginia, visit [www.governor.virginia.gov](http://www.governor.virginia.gov).