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### An Unwavering Commitment

It's often said that a crisis doesn't build character; it reveals it. This past year has presented nearly overwhelming challenges, yet I am greatly heartened by what it has revealed about the value and resilience of nature and our work to protect it here at The Nature Conservancy. I am gratified by the positivity and persistence with which our staff has adapted to new ways of working, as well as by the unwavering passion and commitment to conservation of supporters like you. I hope you will be as inspired as I am by the stories in this issue and the decades of leadership and service that people like the Volgenau family and TNC's own Bill Kittrell have devoted to protecting special places, from the Atlantic coast to the Appalachian Mountains. Thank you for joining us as we all work together, with purpose and determination, to create a brighter future for nature and people.

Locke Ogens, Virginia Director



Jill Bieri, director of the Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve, collects eelgrass seed shoots for restoration. © Jay Fleming

## Decades of Making a Difference Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve Honors Impact

The Nature Conservancy has renamed our conservation program on the Eastern Shore of Virginia in honor of The Volgenau Foundation's three decades of support. Dr. Ernst Volgenau and his family have supported some of TNC's largest success stories—from the Atlantic to the Appalachians in Virginia and the Pacific coast. But the family maintains a special connection and commitment to the Eastern Shore, where their partnership with TNC began. To mark the program's 50th anniversary, the foundation's most recent contribution is a leadership gift of \$5 million, which they hope will inspire others to support the next half-century of innovative science and conservation in one of Virginia's most iconic landscapes. Learn more at [nature.org/vcr](http://nature.org/vcr).

### Victory at Sea

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has adopted a new management approach for the Atlantic menhaden—the most important fish in the sea. The change culminates years of advocacy by TNC and partners all along the East Coast. Rather than setting catch limits based simply on menhaden numbers, the commission will use "ecological reference points" that take into account the needs of myriad ocean species that depend on menhaden. Learn more at [nature.org/menhaden](http://nature.org/menhaden).



Whale feeding on menhaden © Sutton Lynch



VCU Rice Rivers Center dam removal; monitoring hydrology; cleanup at Charlottesville's Meadow Creek © Daniel White/TNC

# In Water We Trust

## Restoring Wetlands and Streams for 25 Years

There was a time when buying swampland, like purchasing the Brooklyn Bridge, supplied a punchline for countless jokes. Over the last 25 years, though, the Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fund has proven the wisdom of investing in wetlands and streams and in restoring the natural services they provide to everyone, such as clean water, flood control and recreation. When the Trust Fund launched in 1995, the rationale behind it was simple: Developers whose projects impacted small, scattered wetlands (generally less than an acre) could—instead of attempting on-site measures of dubious quality and benefit—mitigate those damages by paying fees set by the

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Nature Conservancy would then use those pooled resources to undertake large-scale conservation projects in high-priority areas. The program has evolved regularly over its first quarter-century, expanding to include stream projects

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and adding the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality as a co-administrator. From a relatively small cumulative impact, the Trust Fund has conserved more than 20,000 acres (nearly half of which is public land, including areas managed by the cities of Charlottesville, Harrisonburg and Fredericksburg), prevented tons of sediment from polluting streams and served as a mitigation model being emulated in states such as Ohio and Utah. Learn more about the program's key accomplishments, including reflections from members of our Trust Fund team, at [nature.org/virginia](http://nature.org/virginia).

## Donation Protects Highlands



Fitz Gary © Daniel White/TNC

Landowner Fitz Gary recently donated a conservation easement on 1,839 acres in Highland County. Gary, who returned to Virginia after living in northern California, compares his first impression of the land he's owned since 1972 and adjacent Blue Grass Valley as "almost as overwhelming as driving into Yosemite." He is working with our Allegheny Highlands team to ensure permanent protection of the rich habitat, which includes diverse mountain forests, streams, caves and beaver meadows.

## Thirty Years of Leadership



Courtesy of Bill Kittrell

The Nature Conservancy salutes Bill Kittrell for 30 years of leadership—and counting! Kittrell began his TNC career guiding our fledgling Clinch Valley program. As associate state director overseeing all conservation programs, he tackles complex challenges with a unique combination of conservation expertise, business acumen and respect for others—all essential to successfully negotiate TNC's recent 250,000-acre acquisition launching the Cumberland Forest Project.