

NEWS

Virginia Outdoors Foundation Protects 408-acre Floodplain Forest -Enviva Forest Conservation Fund Helps with Donated Conservation Easement-

U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Greenville, SC

For IMMEDIATE RELEASE (**November 6, 2017**)

Greenville, S.C. – A donated conservation easement will protect from development a prime, 408-acre bottomland hardwood forest and help demonstrate the compatibility of wetland forest management and biodiversity conservation. Protecting this tract will also preserve scenic viewsheds along the Meherrin River in Southampton County, Virginia. The project was completed with a grant from the Enviva Forest Conservation Fund that helped cover administrative costs associated with the easement and also long-term stewardship monitoring expenses.

“Our family has had a footprint on that locality for nearly 200 years,” said landowner Dr. James Rawles. “We have raised four sons with much of our leisure time spent in hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities in the bottomlands along the Meherrin River. Watching the ducks fly in and out of the beaver-flooded timber at dawn and dusk, exploring the magnificent forests, hearing the turkeys gobble off the roost at daybreak, and paddling the logjammed Meherrin has been a profound testament to the majesty and complexity of creation to all of us.”

When Dr. Rawles learned from The Nature Conservancy about easements as a tool for protecting the family’s forests, he added, “It resonated deeply with all of us.”

“Most land owners care deeply about their forests and value the benefits they provide, such as clean water and wildlife habitat,” said Carlton Owen, President and CEO of the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, which administers the Enviva Forest Conservation Fund. “This easement permanently protects sensitive wetland forests, while also allowing sustainable timber management on other areas. This will help support local jobs associated with the forest industry while also maintaining broader, societal benefits.”

Conservation easements are a tool for limiting development rights on open space while allowing the land to remain in private ownership and used for farming, forestry, recreation, and other compatible uses. Easements are held by a qualifying governmental or nonprofit entity, in this case the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF). VOF was created by Virginia’s legislature in 1966 to protect the state’s scenic, natural, historic, recreational, and open-space lands for future generations. It is one of the largest easement holders in the nation, with more than 4,000

easements protecting 810,000 acres in Virginia. With the Rawles easement, VOF now protects more than 3,000 acres in Southampton County.

A key value of the Rawles easement is its location along the Meherrin River, which is a tributary to the Chowan River and the Albemarle/Pamlico estuary. The Nature Conservancy identified the Meherrin River as a priority watershed for land protection in its 1999 Mid-Atlantic Coastal Plain Ecoregional Plan. Mature wetlands in the Natural Area provide spring nursery habitat for migratory fish species including alewives and blueback herring, a group listed in 2006 as a species of concern by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service.

Wetlands found on the property are valuable stopover and breeding habitat for Neotropical migratory bird species, including Prothonotary Warbler, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bird of Conservation Concern for the Southeastern Coastal Plain. Protection of the wetlands will contribute to multi-state conservation plans such as the South Atlantic Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The property contains occurrences of reclining bulrush (*Scirpus flaccidifolius*), false rue-anenome (*Enemion biternatum*), and exemplary Coastal Plain Bottomland Hardwood Forest communities identified as Natural Heritage Resources by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Natural Heritage. The property is part of the Meherrin River Claesville Bottomlands conservation site, prioritized for protection by the Division of Natural Heritage.

The Enviva Forest Conservation Fund was launched in December of 2015 by Enviva, the world's largest producers of wood energy pellets. Through the first two years of this planned 10-year partnership, seven projects have been funded, committing \$1 million. When these projects are completed, an estimated 10,500 acres of sensitive wetland forest and other habitats will have been protected.

About the Enviva Forest Conservation Fund

The Enviva Forest Conservation Fund is a \$5 million, 10-year program established by Enviva Holdings, LP in December 2015 to permanently protect environmentally sensitive bottomland and wetland forests. Administered by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, the Fund awards grants annually to nonprofit organizations and government agencies for conservation projects in North Carolina and Virginia.

About the Virginia Outdoors Foundation

Created by the Virginia General Assembly in 1966, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation is Virginia's leader in land conservation, protecting more than 800,000 acres in 107 counties and cities. Since 1966 it has preserved open space at a rate of nearly two acres every hour. Roughly 95% of all Virginians live within 10 miles of VOF-protected land.

For more information on the Enviva Forest Conservation Fund visit www.envivaforestfund.org.

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The **U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities** (the Endowment) is a not-for-profit public charity working collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative, and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation's working forests and forest-reliant communities – www.usendowment.org

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