The Rappahannock-Rapidan Region of Virginia is known for its scenic beauty, agricultural and cultural resources, and recreational opportunities. Tourism and agricultural products are key components of the region’s economy. To preserve these resources for local citizens and tourists alike, valuable and/or vulnerable parcels have been protected via conservation easements or designated as parks. Land under conservation easement does not necessarily sit inactive, but in many cases may be used for agricultural, forestry or recreational purposes.

In 1999, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) was designated as the lead agency in developing the Commonwealth’s state-wide Conservation Lands Database. The database has since grown to include state, federal, private, and locally managed lands and conservation easements.

To develop the Regional Protected Lands Layer, the Commission reviewed easement and conserved lands data obtained from DCR. These data sets were then compared with local jurisdiction data, including parcel database, land use and zoning data, as available. Overall, there were minor changes to the existing protected lands layers, primarily consisting of publicly-owned lands identified as recreational or other open space land use being incorporated into the layer for Regional Commission use with this and other planning projects.

The Region’s Protected Lands Layer incorporates the following components:

- National Park holdings
- State Parks
- Local Parks
- National and State Forest lands
- State Wildlife Management Areas
- Publicly and Privately-held Conservation Easements
- Virginia Outdoors Foundation holdings
- The Nature Conservancy Preserved lands

This GIS layer has many applications for local governments, land trusts, regional and community organizations, and state partners. The data can be used in land-use planning, reviewing development projects, prioritizing land for conservation, targeting land for habitat restoration, making land management decisions, and public education. For example, by overlaying the other regional green infrastructure data layers onto the Regional Protected Lands layer, users can identify resources with a high vulnerability, which can be useful in developing local, regional or organizational priorities.

For additional information concerning the Rappahannock-Rapidan Region Protected Lands Layer, please visit RRRC’s website at www.rrregion.org/greeninfrastructure.html, or contact Michelle Edwards at medwards@rrregion.org or 540-829-7450. For information on the Virginia Conservation Lands Database visit DCR’s website at www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/clinfo.shtml.
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