

The Virginia state flag is shown in the upper portion of the image, featuring a central figure of a Native American holding a bow and arrow, surrounded by a decorative border of flowers. The word "VIRGINIA" is written in an arch above the figure.

2010

# Virginia Environmental Attitudes Survey

A photograph of the Virginia State Capitol building, a grand neoclassical structure with a prominent portico supported by tall white columns. The building is set against a clear blue sky.

THE ENVIRONMENT AND  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY'S  
 JUDY FORD WASON  
 CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Virginia  
Environmental  
Endowment

# INTRODUCTION

This is the second of three planned statewide surveys on the public's perception of the natural environment in Virginia. The first study in 2009 focused on climate change and examined what Virginians know about it, their personal environmental behavior, and their views on public policy related to climate change. This second study focuses on economic approaches to dealing with Virginia's environment and climate change as well as assessing the health of the state's natural environment and evaluating the most important natural resources in Virginia.

Overall, Virginians give the quality of the state's natural environment an average grade and don't think it will change

## THE HEALTH OF VIRGINIA'S ENVIRONMENT

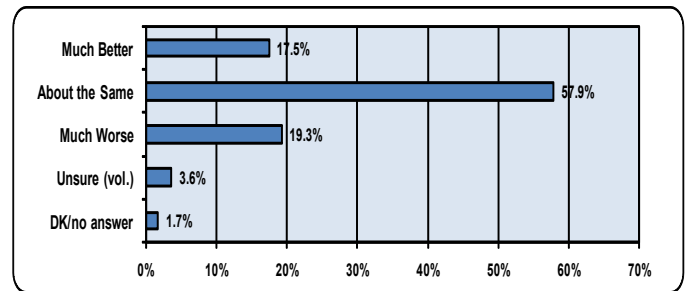
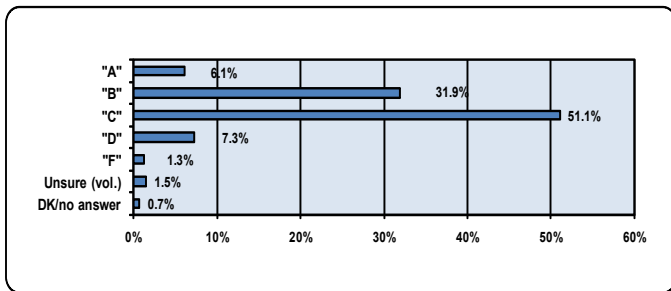
In 2009 Virginians gave the state's natural environment an average grade of 2.6, or "C". In 2010 the average grade dropped slightly to 2.4 (See Figure 1). Only six percent of Virginians give the natural environment a grade of "A", while just over three in ten give it a grade of "B." About one in ten give it a grade of "D"

much in the next ten years. Virginians think the Chesapeake Bay and the state's historic rivers are the most important natural resources, and they worry most about their health. They worry least about the health of the state's mountain ranges.

A strong majority of Virginians think state government has a role to play in improving the environment and are very supportive of approaches to dealing with the environment that are also good for the economy and create clean jobs. Virginians also support governmental actions that might lead to cleaner, more reliable, and safer energy in the future.

or "F." What will the state's natural environment look like in ten years? Nearly six in ten Virginians think it will be about the same as it is now (See Figure 2). Nearly two in ten say it will be much worse while just under two in ten say it will be much better than it is now.

FIGURES 1 & 2: ASSESSMENT OF VIRGINIA'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

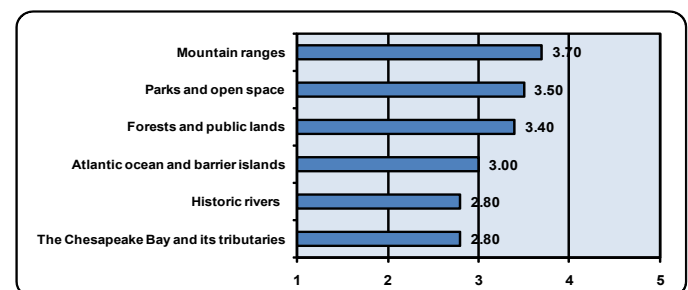
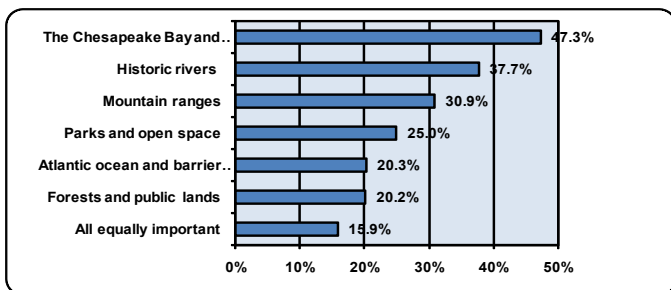


## VIRGINIA'S MOST IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES

Virginians have a strong affinity for the Chesapeake Bay and its coastal tributaries. Asked to indicate their first and second most important natural resource in the state from a list of six natural resources, a combined 47.3% chose the Chesapeake Bay (See Figure 3) while a combined 37.7% chose the state's historic rivers such as the James, York and Potomac. Forests and public lands received the lowest combined score at 20.2%.

Not surprisingly, Virginians are worried about the health of the Chesapeake Bay and the state's historic rivers more than they are other natural resources. Asked to rate the health of the same six natural resources using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing "very poor" health and 5 representing "very good" health, the Chesapeake Bay and historic rivers tied with the lowest average rating of 2.8 (See Figure 4).

FIGURES 3 & 4: MOST IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES AND THEIR HEALTH



# THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

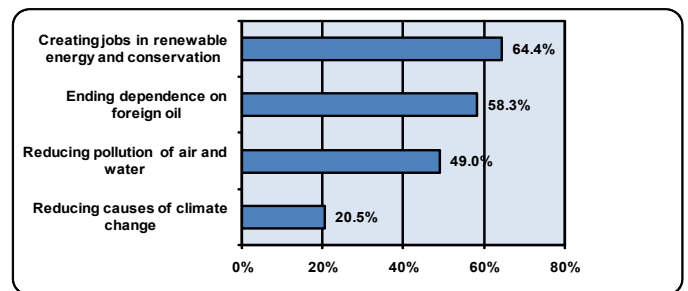
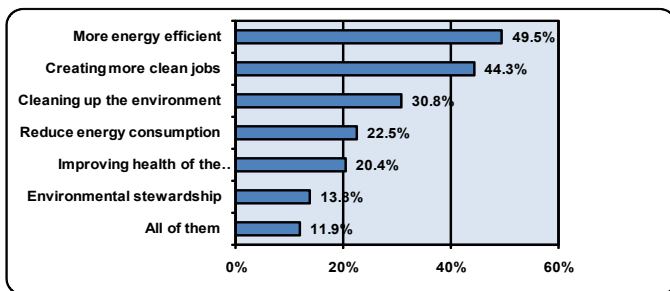
By strong majorities, Virginians think their state government has a great deal or some responsibility to create policies that might address climate change and improve the state's environment. About two in ten Virginians say the state has little or no responsibility to do this.

What kind of policies do Virginians support? Asked to indicate their first and second choices for policy approaches they would like to see the state pursue, Virginians put greater energy efficiency and creating more clean jobs at the top of the list (See Figure 5). At the bottom of the list is encouraging greater environmental stewardship. Clearly Virginians like the opportunity to be environmentally responsible in a way that is also economically beneficial. Further evidence of this is seen in Figure 6. When asked to indicate their first and second most

important environmental and economic goals for the future, new jobs and business opportunities in renewable energy and conservation topped the list, followed by reducing dependency on foreign oil.

Finally, Virginians favor working now to develop new energy sources, even paying more for energy today because they see it as in the state's long term interest. Strong majorities are willing to pay more for energy now as an investment in cleaner, more reliable, affordable, and safer energy down the road. Even stronger majorities think it is in Virginia's best interest to develop new sources of energy that are cleaner, reliable, affordable, and safer regardless of whether or not climate change is happening or not. Virginians clearly see the long-term benefit of investing in clean energy today.

FIGURES 5 & 6: THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## CONCLUSION

Virginians value the state's natural environment, think it could be better, but do not expect much improvement in it over the next decade. Virginians also express strong support for governmental action to improve the quality of the state's natural environment, especially if that action also leads to improved economic opportunity in renewable energy, conservation, and

clean energy jobs.

Taken as a whole, this study suggests public support for policies designed to both care for the state's environment and natural resources while at the same time taking advantage of economic opportunities around the development of a clean energy economy.

*QUESTION: How much responsibility do you think Virginia's government has to create policies that could address the issue of climate change and improve the state's environment? Would you say a great deal of responsibility, some responsibility, little responsibility, or no responsibility?*

37.2% Great Deal 40.5% Some 12.3% Little 8.3% None 1.6% Unsure/DK/no answer

*STATEMENT: Slightly higher energy costs today are worth the investment if they lead to energy that is cleaner, reliable, affordable, and safer down the road.*

25.4% Strongly agree 56.0% Agree 12.4% Disagree 4.6% Strongly Disagree 1.6% Unsure/DK/no answer

*STATEMENT: Taking smart, effective action now to develop new energy sources will result in energy that is cleaner, reliable, affordable, and safer in the long run.*

31.9% Strongly agree 56.9% Agree 7.6% Disagree 1.6% Strongly Disagree 2.0% Unsure/DK/no answer

*STATEMENT: Regardless of whether there is or isn't climate change, it is still in Virginia's best interest to develop new sources of energy that are cleaner, reliable, affordable, and safer.*

42.4% Strongly agree 48.8% Agree 5.7% Disagree 1.4% Strongly Disagree 1.8% Unsure/DK/no answer



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## METHODOLOGY

The 2010 Virginia Environmental Attitudes Survey is a public opinion survey of 719 randomly selected registered Virginia voters conducted by landline telephone between March 17-26, 2010. The data reported here are weighted on sex, age, and region of residence to reflect as closely as possible the demographic composition of Virginia adults 18 and older. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. Results for the full sample have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.6% at the 95% confidence level. This means for the full sample we can be 95% confident that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3.6%. In addition to sampling error, the other potential sources of error include non-response, question wording, and interviewer error. Where percentages for subgroups are reported, the margin of error would be higher. The poll was designed by Quentin Kidd of the Wason Center for Public Policy at CNU and conducted by the Institute of Public Opinion at Muhlenberg College. For information or requests call (757) 594-8033 or e-mail [qkidd@cnu.edu](mailto:qkidd@cnu.edu). Full topline and cross-tabs can be found at <http://cpp.cnu.edu>. Funding for the VEAS is provided in part by a grant from the Virginia Environmental Endowment.