

**SCENIC VIRGINIA
PUBLIC POLICY STATEMENT RE: UTILITY TRANSMISSION CORRIDORS
OCTOBER 21, 2014**

INTRODUCTION: Scenic Virginia is the premier statewide organization dedicated to the preservation, protection and enhancement of the scenic beauty of our Commonwealth. As such, we assert the following:

- Virginia is widely recognized as one of the most scenic states, with a great diversity of scenic resources.
- Aesthetically pleasing scenery plays a large role in the psychological well-being of our citizens.
- Scenic resources make a major contribution to the quality of life in Virginia.
- Scenic resources increase property value.
- Viewing scenery (sightseeing) is by far the most popular recreational activity in the United States.
- Virginia's scenic resources are arguably the major tourist attraction in the state, and thus make a significant contribution to our economy.
- Virginians place a high priority on the protection of visual resources in the state.
- Virginia's scenic beauty is often subtle, and therefore more vulnerable to incremental degradation.
- Surveys and studies show that utility corridors are among the most visually unattractive and visually detrimental land uses in the state.

POLICY STATEMENT: Scenic Virginia, therefore, supports the following measures in the development of utility transmission corridors in our Commonwealth:

- Aesthetics and the protection of visual resources should be given a very high priority in the planning, routing and design of utility corridors to make them as unobtrusive as possible.
- Landscape architects, planners and other design professionals with knowledge, expertise and experience in visual resource analysis, assessment, design and management should have a significant, responsible role in all utility transmission corridor planning, routing and design projects.
- Utility transmission corridors should not be located within view of areas of exceptional scenic quality or designated scenic or cultural resources. (Note: The Virginia Outdoors Plan is the Commonwealth's approved conservation plan, and should be used as the primary reference for identification of scenic, natural, historic, recreational, and cultural resources.)
- Utility transmission corridors typically result in negative visual impacts on their surroundings. When this occurs, the use of screening and other techniques -- including but not limited to the use of existing corridors and underground installation -- should be employed to mitigate the damage to scenic resources.

RATIONALE: We support these policies regarding utility transmission corridors for the following reasons:

- Scenic Virginia believes that although long-distance utility transmission corridors may be needed as components of the nation's energy infrastructure, their impact on the Commonwealth's natural and scenic resources must be weighed against that need.
- The Commonwealth of Virginia has abundant and diverse visual and scenic resources that entice visitors and that have a lasting appeal for residents. Virginia is a cornucopia of varied landscapes. These vistas lure people to explore and visit our cultural and historic sites.
- In Virginia, our economy depends on agriculture and tourism, and private property rights are taken seriously. Scenic Virginia supports individual and governmental efforts to protect the land from projects that destroy or significantly diminish scenic resources.
- Major utility corridors raise concerns in all those areas. Our organization cannot speak to the technical requirements for energy supplies, but we have spent years reminding Virginians that "beauty is good for business." As such, there is no excuse for introducing ugliness.

OTHER SUPPORTING INFORMATION & RESOURCES:

The Commonwealth holds its scenic resources in high esteem, as demonstrated in various sections of the Virginia Code and other documents.

Virginia Outdoors Plan – 2013 Edition:

The Virginia Outdoors Plan is the Commonwealth's Conservation and Recreation Plan. This document and the associated inventories list all the public lands and private lands with recorded easements protecting the site resources. It also identifies the Agricultural, Forest, and Historic Districts in the state. It should be a primary resource, along with the staff of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, related to the location and character of the state's important conservation and recreation areas.

DCR, in partnership with other groups including Scenic Virginia, helps protect the state's scenic resources. For more information on Virginia's Scenic Resources refer to the 2013 Edition of the Virginia Outdoors Plan. The Plan is available online at http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational_planning/vop.shtml.

ACIR Report: A 2000 General Assembly report called *The Impact of Aesthetics on the Economy and Quality of Life in Virginia and Its Localities* summarizes the many benefits of protecting and caring for the scenic resources and significant viewsheds of the state. The Executive Summary is as follows:

House Document No. 90 (1998)

The Impact of Aesthetics on the Economy and Quality of Life in Virginia and Its Localities

Author: Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

Enabling Authority: HJR 447 (Regular Session, 1997)

Executive Summary:

In 1996, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) heard testimony that the visual environment—all that is visible in the physical environment whether natural or manmade—was a fragile resource that was deteriorating rapidly in some areas due to a combination of forces such as chaotic unplanned growth, environmental degradation, and neglect.

As a consequence, the state and some of its communities confronted the possibility of the irreparable loss of valuable assets, including some of the very scenic, cultural, historic, and other visual resources that distinguish Virginia as one of the most beautiful states in the country and contribute to its communities' character and sense of place.

In addition, the ACIR heard evidence that many of these resources also strengthen the economic base of the Commonwealth and its communities. As a result, the ACIR undertook as one of its major projects for the year, a study of state and local efforts to preserve and protect these valuable resources. In 1997, the General Assembly formally requested in House Joint Resolution 447 that the ACIR present its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly in 1998. However, because of the breadth of this subject and its complexity, the ACIR recommended, and the 1998 General Assembly agreed, that the study should be continued for another year. This interim report serves to present some of the issues involved in this study for public consideration.

There is little question that a quality visual environment is a valuable resource. Scientific evidence has established that individuals experience significant physiological and psychological benefits from being able to view scenes of nature and other attractive sights. Moreover, when asked how much they value having access to such quality visual experiences, individuals consistently respond that it ranks as one of their highest priorities for quality of life. Visual quality, then, can be aptly characterized as a basic human need.

Furthermore, research shows that such experiences are not just a matter of personal taste. Contrary to popular belief, there is evidence to show a high level of agreement even among diverse groups of people about what constitutes visual quality.

Evidence also shows that by undertaking initiatives to improve the appearance of their communities, local officials can not only improve citizens' quality of life but also their communities' potential for economic development. For example, research indicates that many communities which have launched historic preservation and downtown revitalization programs have benefitted from, among other things, increased property values, the creation of new jobs, and growth in tourism. In the process, they have developed a wide range of strategies that can serve as models for others with the same goals.

In some cases, these endeavors have focused on removing negative features, such as visual clutter or obstructions that block the view of their communities' distinctive characteristics. Other efforts have concentrated on the addition of positive design elements, such as coordinated street furniture and visual amenities or tailor-made franchise architecture that respects community character and blends with the visual environment. Still other initiatives have focused on protecting historic landmarks or fragile scenic resources such as mountain ridges and rivers from various forms of degradation. Localities across the state have initiated such projects and many have reported positive results.

The state also benefits from such efforts. Tourism, for example, is the state's third largest industry and is growing, largely due to efforts to preserve and promote Virginia's historic character and beauty. This influx of new tourists increases the state's tax base through greater retail sales and the creation of new tourism-related jobs. In addition, the ACIR heard testimony that the visual appeal of communities and the quality of life they offer are among the most important factors executives weigh when deciding where to relocate a business.

Thus, community efforts to preserve and enhance visual quality can also draw other new businesses in addition to those related to tourism, thereby further increasing economic opportunities for the state as a whole. More fundamentally, efforts to protect and improve the visual environment contribute intangible benefits to the state's citizenry such as an improved quality of life and a rich legacy for future generations.

Because of this strong state interest in visual quality, the state's interest in helping localities preserve and enhance the appearance of their communities is equally great. The ACIR heard extensive testimony about various state programs that provide substantial assistance, including historic preservation grants, challenge grants for the arts, and scenic byways assistance, to name only three.

However, the ACIR also received testimony from local officials, citizens groups, and others who stressed that more can be done. Several testified that some state programs frustrate local efforts to preserve and enhance the visual environment. Others emphasized the need for greater authority to act in order to make needed improvements.

By means of this report, the ACIR hopes to increase the awareness of these issues, to recognize leading communities, to document some of the programs presented to the ACIR as successful models, and to point out areas of continuing need.

National Park Service:

Viewsheds have value, although only a few have been analyzed. The Blue Ridge Parkway's views are a rare example of quantifiable assets. With \$2.2 billion spent annually in the 29 counties in Virginia and North Carolina that surround the parkway, there is a lot of money to be lost if scenic vistas sprout raw utility corridors and scars.

"If Parkway views are changed dramatically, then visitors won't stop coming, but they might stop visiting that section of the Parkway," said Gary Johnson, chief of planning and professional services for the parkway. "Changing the vistas changes the way the visitors spend money."

Refer to http://www.nps.gov/lake/parkmgmt/upload/SCOP_AppendixH.pdf for the NPS standards concerning visual resources.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (taken from the BLM website)

Visual Resource Management (VRM)

http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/Recreation/recreation_national/RMS.html

By law, the BLM is responsible for managing public lands for multiple uses. BLM is also responsible for ensuring that the scenic values of these public lands are considered before allowing uses that may have negative visual impacts.

BLM accomplishes this through its Visual Resource Management (VRM) system, a system which involves inventorying scenic values and establishing management objectives for those values through the resource management planning process, and then evaluating proposed activities to determine whether they conform to the management objectives.

BLM has established VRM coordinators in each state and provides training in VRM so that this system is implemented effectively throughout the Bureau. The Bureau's VRM system helps to ensure that the actions taken on the public lands today will benefit the landscape and adjacent communities in the future.

What is VRM?

http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/Recreation/recreation_national/RMS/travel_mgt_outreach.html

The public lands administered by BLM contain many outstanding scenic landscapes.

While these lands provide a place to escape and enjoy the beauty of nature, they are also used for a multitude of other activities. Any activities that occur on these lands, such as recreation, mining, timber harvesting, grazing, or road development, for example, have the potential to disturb the surface of the landscape and impact scenic values. Visual resource management (VRM) is a system for minimizing the visual impacts of surface-disturbing activities and maintaining scenic values for the future.

When visual resources are not carefully managed and the visual impacts of poorly designed surface-disturbing activities are ignored, there can be dire consequences to the scenic values of American landscapes.

The benefits to be gained by carefully designing surface-disturbing activities to minimize visual impacts are readily apparent. BLM is committed to sound management of the scenic values on public lands in order to ensure that these benefits are realized and the scenic values are protected.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact us using the following information:

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