SMLA
Smith Mountain Lake Association
STEWARD OF THE LAKE

October 21, 2026

The Honorable David Bulova
Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Re: Modernizing the HB 38 funding cap for the Department of Wildlife Resources

Dear Secretary Bulova:

On behalf of the Smith Mountain Lake Association, I write to urge your support for raising the annual funding cap established by House Bill 38 from $13 million to $27 million.

Since its enactment in 1998, HB 38 has provided an important connection between spending on hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching equipment and the conservation, public-safety, and outdoor-recreation services provided by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. This mechanism recognizes that Virginians who participate in and benefit from outdoor recreation also help support the agency responsible for protecting those resources.

The $13 million cap, however, has not been updated since the legislation was enacted nearly three decades ago. More recent estimates of qualifying sales support a transfer of approximately $27 million—more than twice the existing statutory ceiling. Raising the cap would modernize the law to reflect today's level of outdoor activity and the greatly increased cost of providing DWR services.

DWR's financial position underscores the need for action. The Department is operating on approximately the same nominal level of recurring income that it had seven years ago—roughly $65 million today compared with approximately $64 million in fiscal year 2019. During that period, costs have increased by approximately 30 percent. As a result, DWR has suffered a substantial reduction in real operating capacity even as demands for boating safety, law enforcement, fisheries management, public access, wildlife conservation, and infrastructure maintenance have continued to grow.

At Smith Mountain Lake, DWR's responsibilities are visible and indispensable. The Department supports fisheries research and management, fish stocking, boating-safety education, conservation-police patrols, public access, wildlife habitat, and enforcement of Virginia's boating and fishing laws. These services protect residents and visitors, sustain one of Virginia's premier recreational fisheries, and support the regional economy.

Our colleagues at the Lake Anna Civic Association share these concerns. Together, our lake communities see firsthand the demands placed on DWR as boating activity, recreational use, public-safety needs, and resource-management challenges continue to increase.

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We recognize that increasing the statutory ceiling does not, by itself, guarantee that the full amount will be transferred during the annual budget process. Nevertheless, raising the cap is an essential first step. We therefore respectfully ask that you support:

1. Amending § 58.1-638(E) of the Code of Virginia to raise the annual HB 38 cap from $13 million to $27 million; and

2. Providing the full transfer supported by the statutory formula through the Commonwealth's budget.

This proposal would not impose a new tax. It would update an existing funding mechanism so that a more realistic share of the sales-tax revenue associated with outdoor recreation can support the agency charged with protecting Virginia's wildlife, waterways, boaters, anglers, and outdoor opportunities.

Thank you for your recent engagement with the Smith Mountain Lake community and for your continued leadership on Virginia's natural-resource priorities. We welcome the opportunity to work with you, DWR, the Administration, and members of the General Assembly to advance this important proposal.

Sincerely,

John Vidovich

John Vidovich
President
Smith Mountain Lake Association

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