



The 2013 Annual Virginia Green Progress Report



Virginia is a Green Travel Destination. This was the prevailing message in every presentation and workshop this year as we promoted the success of the Virginia Green program. Virginia Green certified partners are located in all regions of the Commonwealth of Virginia; and consumers truly can *Travel Green* wherever they travel in Virginia, simply by searching for Virginia Green partners at VirginiaGreenTravel.org.



Possibly the most significant program development overall in 2014 was that the Virginia Green program and its partners have noticeably matured in terms of their green program efforts. More than ever, it was clear that the individual Virginia Green partners and their staffs were fully dedicated to their green program commitments. Additionally, partners are increasingly aware of the significance of the program in terms of realized cost savings and additional business. As a result, Virginia Green is confident that its program partners are truly ready to be marketed to green-minded consumers.

Virginia Green also worked hard to brand the program locally and make it more meaningful to our regional tourism partners. We challenged our partners to “make Virginia Green their own” and to take credit for the abundance of green-certified partners in their regions. We have come to realize that regional buy-in is likely the key to the long-term success of our program.

2013 culminated in a wonderful celebration of our program’s achievements at the *1st Annual Virginia Green Conference and Green Travel Stars Awards Celebration* held in Virginia Beach at the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center on December 3rd and 4th. The success of the conference demonstrated our program’s significant accomplishments, and set the stage for our focus in 2014.



Virginia Green’s Tom Griffin and Virginia Department of Environmental Quality’s Rick Weeks present 2013 Virginia Green Travel Star Award to the Virginia Living Museum’s Rock Moeslein and Page Hayhurst.



2013 Virginia Green Program Highlights

Presentations, workshops, site visits, festivals and events, facebook posts, emails and phone calls – and so much progress. Below is a summary of the program areas where we excelled this past year.

❖ **Membership.** The program continued to grow both in terms of the number of participants and of those actively engaged. More than 115 new program partners joined in 2013. As staff turnover is high in the tourism industry, it is often a challenge to maintain program contacts. This year, our staff worked hard to update contact information and confirm that all program partners were fully engaged. As a result, we identified nearly 50 program partners who had either gone out of business or were no longer fully committed to the program's core requirements. Therefore our total number of recognized participants only increased from 1350 to 1415.

Lodging	535
Restaurants	204
Attractions	170
Conference Centers	59
Convention Centers	3
Wineries	20
Supporting Organizations	40
Visitor/Welcome Centers	33
Green Events	270
Green Suppliers	80
Total	1415

In terms of the total number of participants, Virginia Green is the #1 state-based green tourism certification program in the country!

❖ **Environmental Benefits and Cost Savings**

Virginia Green does not require its participants to file annual reports, but we have worked closely with many of our partners through technical assistance and the awards program to discern actual accomplishments and overall trends. As mentioned above, the green program efforts of our Virginia Green partners have matured significantly over the past few years. Many of our partners have made incredible achievements through their commitments to the program. We are increasingly confident that the majority of our program partners are fully implementing the required program commitments and are continuously improving every year.

This is our second year of reporting the program's estimated environmental benefits and cost savings. Last year, we made conservative estimates based upon the relative progress of the program using guidance from the American Hotel and Lodging Association interfaced with our own observations and experience. This year our staff also cross-referenced guidance from the Environmental Protection Agency and various other sources to establish a standardized approach that allows us to accurately estimate environmental impacts based on the number of rooms.

<u>Environmental Benefits</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost Savings for Participants</u>
• Wastes Recycled / Diverted from Landfill	5500 tons	\$975,000
• Electricity Use Reduced	146 million kwh	\$14.7 million
• Gas Use Reduced	421 tbtu	\$3.5 million
• Water Use Reduced	736,000 ccf	\$5.8 million
• Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduced	165 million lbs	
TOTAL COST SAVINGS by VA Green Partners → \$24,975,000		
Sources: EPA, AH&LA, & Virginia Green Travel Star Awards		

We documented the actual number of rooms represented by our 550 lodging partners, which was 54,126 bedrooms / cabin units. The data calculations included a conservative assumption that these partners have, on average, reduced wastes by 25% and reduced water and energy use by 20%. Furthermore, these calculations only address the lodging portion of our program (535 of 1415 total Virginia Green partners); therefore, the program's overall environmental and cost savings benefits are actually much greater. In 2014, we will work to gain additional data from these partners and begin to document the actual environmental benefits of the additional program partners. This type of data is critical to the success of our program as it clearly demonstrates the significant environmental and economic benefits of the program.

❖ **The Virginia Green Advisory Committee**

The Virginia Green Advisory Committee is our industry-based stakeholders group, and meetings are open to all Virginia Green participants. Two meetings of the Virginia Green Advisory Committee were held in 2013, and advisory / feedback sessions were held in conjunction with regional workshops in Harrisonburg and Abingdon. In 2014, advisory committee meetings will be included as a component of all regional workshops.

❖ **Regional Tourism Partnerships and Workshops**

In 2013, we made a concerted effort to engage each region of the state by offering to have Virginia Green advisory meetings in conjunction with planned presentations and site visits.

These meetings evolved into a successful blueprint that included:

- Sessions for 1-on-1 assistance (a “help-desk” prior to each workshop).
- A “green business expo” that featured Virginia Green Suppliers.
- An advisory / feedback meeting with a full program update.



Regional partnership presentations were held in Richmond, Norfolk, Hampton, Abingdon, Dulles, Williamsburg, and Harrisonburg. We have challenged each of these regions to make structured commitments to promote Virginia Green in their regions, such as:

- Creating a web presence
- Setting goals for increasing the number of Virginia Green partners
- Creating Virginia Green getaways and packages
- Hosting an educational / recruitment workshop
- Requiring that festivals, events, and meetings be green
- Engaging consumers



❖ **Marketing and Consumer Engagement**

- **Websites.** The Virginia Tourism Corporation continues to make improvements and updates to the consumer-focused website at VirginiaGreenTravel.org. The new format includes an emphasis on Virginia Green trip plans, getaways, and packages with a goal of creating more green business for our partners; and additional upgrades are planned for 2014. The [business partner website](#) is maintained by the Virginia DEQ and includes all of the environmental resources, applications, and guidance.



Additionally, the VirginiaSuppliersNetwork.org website provides direct access to our directory of green suppliers and products.

- **Social Media and Digital Marketing.** Virginia Green continued to expand its Facebook presence, making more than 150 posts in 2013. The page has 2288 “likes” and post reach is now being expanded dramatically through “ad boosting”. Virginia Tourism Corporation is also featuring Virginia Green in its regular blog posts and the program has a schedule of posts planned for 2014.
- **Green Festivals, Meetings, Conferences, and Events.** Forty-seven festivals, events, and conferences registered with Virginia Green this year. Reusable Virginia Green Event banners were sent to most of them, and we began sending partner-specific banners to many of our regional partners that were committing to make all of their festivals Virginia Green certified. We also exhibited and had tent-space at several of these festivals and engaged the public with our “Travel Green” challenge.



❖ Improved Green Practices Through Outreach and Technical Assistance

Virginia Green staff documented on-site technical assistance to more than 50 Virginia Green participants in 2013. Regional workshops afforded additional time to meet 1-on-1 with more participants and allowed for site visits during travel. The outreach project for wineries also provided additional opportunities to meet with partners on-site, and greening of festivals and conferences allowed for additional opportunities.

❖ Virginia Green Suppliers Network

The regional workshops also provided a great opportunity to more fully engage our suppliers network. Virginia Green Suppliers were offered free exhibit space at three of the regional workshops and the annual conference; and they were given the opportunity to make presentations about their company and products. Three issues of the supplier newsletter *Green Source* were distributed in 2013, and a new set of member benefits was developed and will be promoted in 2014.



❖ 1st Annual Virginia Green Conference and 3rd Annual Green Travel Star Awards

As mentioned above, the program’s first ever conference was held in Virginia Beach at the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center in December, and was attended by more than 125 participants. The first day featured technical workshops, the green business marketplace, a reception at the Aquarium, a volunteer clean-up, and dinner at a local Virginia Green Restaurant (Croc’s 19th

Street Bistro). The second day featured an array of great presentations including former Virginia Tourism President Alisa Bailey, a regional green tourism roundtable, and the “state of Virginia Green” program update. The conference culminated with a luncheon and presentation of the 3rd Annual Virginia Green Travel Star Awards. Fourteen partners received Green Travel Star awards in ten different categories; and eight additional partners also received Green Travel Leader awards for their efforts in 2013. The conference was beneficial to the program in many ways and will be held again in 2014.



Keynote Speaker Alisa Bailey, West Virginia Tourism

2013 Virginia Green Travel Star Award winners:

- Green Events of the Year (tie):
 - 2013 Kingsmill Championship (Williamsburg)
 - ASAE Foundation 2013 Springtime Golf and Tennis Invitational at Lansdowne Resort
- Green Restaurant of the Year: Maple Avenue Restaurant (Vienna)
- Green Hotels of the Year (tie):
 - Hilton Garden Inn Downtown Richmond
 - Westin Richmond
- Supporting Organization of the Year: Sandbridge Blue Realty Services
- Green Conference Center of the Year: Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Green Innovative Projects of the Year (tie):
 - Virginia Living Museum (Newport News)
 - Virginia Commonwealth University 810 Market (Richmond)
- Green Winery of the Year: North Gate Vineyard (Purcellville)
- Green Supplier of the Year: RD Fresh (Newport News)
- Green Campground of the Year: Williamsburg KOA
- Green Bed and Breakfast of the Year: Oak Grove Plantation Bed and Breakfast (Cluster Springs)
- Green Attraction of the Year: Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center (Virginia Beach)



Pickett Craddock, Oak Grove Plantation B&B w/Virginia Green's Tom Griffin & Rick Weeks, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality



Matt Folz, Xanterra/Kings Mill w/Virginia Green's Tom Griffin & Rick Weeks, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

Virginia Green Travel Leader Award Winners:

- Innovative Outreach Projects:
 - Adventure Kayak Tours (Chesapeake)
 - Roanoke Civic Center Adopt-A-Stream
- Green Bed and Breakfasts:
 - The Collins House Inn (Marion)
 - Inn at Riverbend (Pearisburg)
 - Clay Corner Inn (Blacksburg)
- Green Restaurant: Panache Catering Company (Middletown)
- Green Hotel: Holiday Inn Express and Suites (Warrenton)
- Green Supporting Organization: Sandbridge Realty



Keep Virginia Beautiful volunteer clean-up at Virginia Green conference.

Strategic Partnerships and Outreach Projects:

- **Keep Virginia Beautiful 60th Anniversary Gala and Give 60 Campaign.** Virginia Green partnered with KVB on many festivals and clean-ups throughout the year to help celebrate that organization's 60th anniversary. KVB's "Give 60" campaign challenged individuals and businesses to give 60 minutes of their time towards improving the environment, and many Virginia Green partners and their staffs used this as an opportunity to volunteer within their communities. Additionally, Virginia Green partners helped support the KVB 60th anniversary gala by donating "green getaway packages" for the gala auction.



- **Richmond 2015.** Virginia Green joined the green planning effort for the international cycling races that are occurring in the Richmond region. The goal is to make the race as green an event as possible, and Virginia Green will assist in that effort. The race will bring nearly 1 million international visitors to the region, and Virginia Green facilities will be featured as green partners for the two week-long event.



- **Sustainable Practices for Virginia Wineries Project.** Virginia Green facilitated an Environmental Protection Agency-funded project to provide free technical assistance to three Virginia Green wineries in order to document their green ongoing green practices and identify additional opportunities. Virginia Green partnered with Virginia Tech's Grape Chemistry program and the Manufacturing Technology Center in Wytheville on the project which provided assistance to DuCard Vineyard, Cooper Vineyards, and North Gate Vineyard. The summary findings will be published in 2014 and shared with the industry.



- **TripAdvisor's GreenLeaders Program.** Early in 2013, Trip Advisor informed us that it had used Virginia Green's voluntary structure when it was designing its own Green Leaders program. The *GreenLeaders* program was announced in the summer, and Virginia Green has been working reciprocally to promote participation in both programs.



71% of consumers registered with *TripAdvisor* made eco-based travel plans in 2012, and 50% said that they would be willing to pay more for a green overnight accommodations.

- **Supporting Recycling in Schools.** Virginia Green worked with the City of Richmond Public Schools to help address a need for improved internal recycling systems. Virginia Green's Hilton Garden Inn Downtown Richmond sponsored this community outreach project to help improve school recycling and they donated new recycling containers for all classrooms at Fox Elementary. The pilot project will hopefully be replicated by other schools in 2014.



Hilton Garden Inn's Barbara Overton and John Cario

- **Virginia Oyster Shell Recycling Project.** The program worked with Virginia Green Restaurant *Rappahannock* in Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University's Rice Rivers Center to create a pilot oyster shell recovery program. The project uses volunteers to pick up oyster shells from 3 Richmond restaurants (*LeMaire* and *Pearl*), and it works to recycle shell from all festivals that feature oysters. The project collected over 11,000 pounds oyster shells in its first four months that will all be impregnated with oyster spat and returned to the Chesapeake Bay.



VA Green's Melissa Tyler collects oyster shells at *Richmond on the Half Shell* event sponsored by EnRichmond.

❖ Sector Expansions

Virginia Green works to create guidance and resources that are applicable to all sectors of the tourism industry and has been systematically working to create applications for each. However, in 2013, it was decided that the program would simplify its approach to sector expansion by more closely mirroring the categories of the tourism database. Categorically, this has made the Virginia Green program more efficient and allows for easy program entry for all tourism "attractions".

❖ Program Sustainability

Program growth and expanded consumer engagements means additional work for the program staff and additional funding needs. The Virginia Green Advisory Committee has identified various funding strategies; however, the nature of this state-affiliated program has not been conducive to support these ideas. At the August meeting, the committee endorsed the development of a non-profit organization that would support and promote the program. Initial filings are now complete, and the Virginia Green Travel Alliance will begin pursuing opportunities in early 2014.



Virginia Green Program Goals for 2014

In 2014, we plan to build upon the many accomplishments of this past year and embrace new opportunities for strengthening and expanding the program. Here is an abbreviated summary of our goals for the coming year:

- ❖ **Participation.** Our goal is to increase the number of registered Virginia Green partners to more than **1550 participants**. Recruitment efforts will focus on various underrepresented sectors such as restaurants, attractions, and additional supporting organizations.
- ❖ **Measureable Environmental Impacts and Cost Savings.** Just as we challenge our participants to set goals to reduce their environmental impacts and continuously improve, so will the Virginia Green program set similar goals. Our overall goal for 2014 is to document a **15% increase in the environmental benefits and cost savings achieved for all reported categories for 2014**. To reach this goal, we will actively encourage our partners to report their actual reductions in environmental impacts; and we will develop methodologies to accurately document the efforts of our partners in every sector, not just lodging.
- ❖ **Increasing Business for our Virginia Green Partners.** Program partners are benefitting economically from cost savings associated with reduced utility expenditures. In 2014, we will also focus squarely on increasing and also beginning to measure green business that is being generated for our members. We will do this through:
 - Expanded **consumer engagement** that will increase program awareness through a wide array of grassroots efforts. These efforts will include cooperative messaging through strategic partners, advertising, digital marketing, and expanded partnerships with festivals and events.
 - Creating **green trip plans, getaways, and packages** that make it easy for consumers to choose green.
 - Engaging meeting planners and our partners to document current **green meetings** business and to actively drive new business to our partners because of their Virginia Green affiliations.
- ❖ **Regional Green Travel Partnerships and Workshops.** Making Virginia Green relevant regionally and locally will be a primary program goal for 2014. **Our goal is to co-host at least six regional partner workshops** that will feature 1-on-1 assistance, advisory updates and input, and a green business market that will include our Virginia Green suppliers.



- ❖ **Launch the New Virginia Green Travel Alliance and Actively Pursue Fundraising.** The new non-profit organization will support all aspects of the Virginia Green program, but also actively engage in fundraising and leveraged marketing opportunities. It will also create additional opportunities to connect directly with green-minded consumers and to sponsor regional and local projects that assist our partners in their greening efforts.
- ❖ **Program Recertification and Voluntary Reporting.** It is important for the integrity of the program that our members are actively engaged in the commitments that they made when they first joined. However, due to the nature of the program and the industry itself, it is difficult to maintain staff contacts with our partners. As a result, it will be announced in February of 2014 that Virginia Green program partners must update or at least confirm that they are still active participants in the program. In addition, we will announce an optional reporting function that will allow partners to report measureable reductions in environmental impacts.
- ❖ **Actively Support the Richmond 2015 Road Cycling World Championship.** Work to integrate Virginia Green participants with the planning for this international event; and use the race as an incentive for joining Virginia Green.
- ❖ **Hold the 2nd Annual Virginia Green Conference and Awards Celebration.** The 2nd annual event will expand upon the great success of the first conference. The site of the conference will be determined in the spring and planned for the fall of 2014.
- ❖ **Develop Additional Strategic Partnerships.** We will continue to establish and improve upon cooperative relationships with critical state agencies such as the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Department of Transportation, and the Virginia Department of Alcoholic and Beverage Control. Corporate partnerships will be promoted in conjunction with consumer outreach, and hotel brands and ownership groups will be engaged. Additionally, we will work to expand program activities with travel organizations such as AAA, Trip Advisor, and Expedia.

Special thanks to all of our program partners and supporting organizations!



VirginiaGreenTravel.org

Virginia Encourages Green Tourism Practices.

TRAVEL GREEN!

Virginia Green is run through a partnership between the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and the Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association.

