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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 31

Offered January 14, 2026

Requesting the Department of Conservation and Recreation to study the feasibility of establishing a state park in Washington County at the Mendota Trail and Abrams Falls located within the Holston River Watershed. Report.

Patron—Pillion

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the Department of Conservation and Recreation is charged with the mission to conserve, protect, enhance, and advocate the wise use of the Commonwealth's unique natural, recreational, scenic, and cultural resources; and

WHEREAS, tourism is vital to the economy of Virginia, and it has been the Commonwealth's policy to encourage tourism and travel in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, in 2016, more than 10 million people visited state parks located within the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, in 2018, visitors to Virginia's state parks spent an estimated $249 million within the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Mendota Trail and Abrams Falls was designated by the Nature Conservancy as one of the 39 "Last Great Places," comprising one of the world's most important intact remaining ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, the Mendota Trail was a rails-to-trails project that spans the former Southern Railroad corridor between Bristol, Virginia, and Mendota, Virginia, with a total of 12.5 miles of rail bed; and

WHEREAS, Washington County, the surrounding counties, and the citizens thereof have benefited economically from the former railroad established around 1900; and

WHEREAS, the trails have been fully restored and are now available to the general public for hiking and biking; and

WHEREAS, the new economy for the Mendota Trail is based on recreation and tourism that provide for sustainable and inexhaustible resources that are anchored in the natural beauty of Southwest Virginia, consisting of breathtaking mountains, tranquil countryside and forest, and pastoral views in Washington County; and

WHEREAS, the Washington County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved acquisition by donated conveyance from the Mendota Trail Conservancy, the 12.5-mile rails to trails greenway from Mendota to Bristol, along with all related amenities; and

WHEREAS, since 2017 a portion of the Mendota Trail has been open to the public for hiking and biking and officially opened on September 15, 2023, to commemorate the inspiring success of the Mendota Trail Conservancy Board; and

WHEREAS, the nearest state park from Bristol, Virginia, and Mendota, Virginia, is nearly one hour of drive time away from such communities, and research indicates that such communities are more socially vulnerable and disadvantaged than communities where recreational opportunities are available; and

WHEREAS, the Mendota Trail and her supporting cast of unique features and lands all complement and add value that will greatly open the possibility to becoming a premier destination state park in Washington County, Virginia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Department of Conservation and Recreation be requested to study the feasibility of establishing a state park in Washington County at the Mendota Trail and Abrams Falls located within the Holston River Watershed.

In conducting its study, the Department of Conservation and Recreation shall seek and consider the views of local citizens, local governments, and regional organizations before making its final recommendations.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department of Conservation and Recreation for this study, upon request.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2026, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2027 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

INTRODUCED

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