



Press release

The Flora of Virginia Project

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

'FLORA OF VIRGINIA' PUBLISHED, THE FIRST VIRGINIA-WIDE PLANT MANUAL SINCE 1762

December 12, 2012 — Richmond, Va. — The 3,164 plant species native to or naturalized in Virginia are the focus of the much-awaited "Flora of Virginia," a 1,600-page manual of the plants of the state published last week by the Botanical Research Institute of Texas Press in Fort Worth.

The flora, conceived as a tool for botanical and ecological research, education and conservation, was produced by the Flora of Virginia Project with important partnership support from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage. The manual was written by J. Christopher Ludwig, chief biologist with the Division of Natural Heritage, John F. Townsend, staff botanist with Natural Heritage, and Alan S. Weakley, curator of the herbarium and an adjunct professor of biology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"Virginia has a richer plant life than most other states," Ludwig said. "There are many reasons for this — the diversity of topography from the coast to the Appalachian Plateau, the patchwork of soil and rock types that are the basis of plant habitats, and the fact that many

northern plants reach their southern limits in Virginia, and many southern ones reach their northern limits here.”

The term flora can refer to the plant life of a region or to a book that describes that region’s plant life. Virginia’s most recent flora was “Flora Virginica,” published in Holland in 1762, written entirely in Latin, and with a single illustration — a map of Virginia. It was based in large part on plant specimens collected and descriptions written by John Clayton, a naturalist who was clerk of Gloucester County, Va.

“The essential purpose of the ‘Flora of Virginia’ is to enable identification of plants in the commonwealth,” Ludwig said. “Each species is described in fine detail, and other information is presented, such as flowering and fruiting times, the plant’s status in the state, and the characteristics of its habitat.” Of the plants described, 1,400 are illustrated with pen-and-ink drawings commissioned for the book. Plants are organized by family (such as the grasses, the orchids, the pines, the mints, the asters), of which 189 are represented in Virginia. Users are guided through the task of identifying a plant by the flora’s keys, which help them winnow down the possibilities through a stepwise process.

Special chapters present the history of botanical exploration in Virginia; the processes by which the state’s plant communities have developed over geological time; and 50 botanizing hotspots featuring the best areas to explore and learn about Virginia’s plant life.

Production of the flora took 11 years and was made possible by the support of five official partners, individual donors, and grants. The Flora Project’s partners are the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Virginia Native Plant Society, the Virginia Botanical Associates, the Virginia Academy of Science, and Richmond’s Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.

“We are proud to see this product come to fruition and to have been able to realize it with an eye to conservation,” said Tom Smith, director of the Division of Natural Heritage and a member of the Flora Project’s board. “The flora is going to be important to botanists,

ecologists, planners, and environmental consultants in finding, managing, conserving, and restoring our native plant communities for generations to come." It already has been designated the official textbook for this spring's plant taxonomy course at James Madison University.

To order your copy of the "Flora of Virginia," visit the home page of the Flora Project's website, floraofvirginia.org, and click the red button. The price is \$79.99, plus \$6.50 shipping.

About The Foundation of the Flora of Virginia Project

The Foundation of the Flora of Virginia Project is a nonprofit organization that inspires conservation of Virginia's native flora through education, outreach, and production of the Flora of Virginia, in print and electronic formats. To learn more and to donate, please visit our website floraofvirginia.org.

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