

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Legislative Agenda for 2021 General Assembly – Approved by Full Membership on December 7, 2020

1. **Maintain Operating Funds for the 47 districts recognizing a need for Increased Support.** Soil and Water Conservation Districts are the local program delivery mechanism for nonpoint source pollution control throughout the Commonwealth. Currently, the district appropriation is \$12,141,091. This includes funding for:

- District Central Operations
- Administrative Assistance
- Technical Assistance to implement agricultural and urban best management practices (BMPs)
- Technical Assistance to operate and maintain 104 flood control dams
- Technical Assistance to implement Resource Management Plans including review & verification
- Support for environmental education programs

Operational funding needs should align with the based upon the annual “budget template” requests. Without adequate funding, conservation districts continue to find it especially difficult to meet the critical need to retain highly trained, experienced and skilled employees who are the primary delivery mechanism for programs to meet the Commonwealth’s water quality goals established by the Governor and General Assembly. Strong local conservation districts are needed to play a key role as Virginia intensifies its efforts to reduce nonpoint sources of pollution throughout the Commonwealth and to meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL. As efforts to reduce nonpoint sources of pollution intensify, district funding needs to increase.

2. **Establish a dedicated and adequate, secure and stable source of funding for the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund (VNRCF)** commensurate with the most recent Agriculture Needs Assessment Report and the most recent Chesapeake Bay and Virginia Waters Clean Up Plan Report. Currently the VNRCF is funded on a year to year basis, often times relying entirely on unpredictable, year-end, state budget surplus.

We support the creation of a dedicated revenue source for those on-the-ground practices (BMPs) and the retention of the certified professional employees which represent front line efforts to meet Virginia’s challenges outlined by the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP). Twenty years after the creation of the Water Quality Improvement Act and more than eleven years after the creation of the VNRCF, Virginia’s commitments to the WIP and TMDL Virginia are highly reliant on high performing SWCDs. To carry out district responsibilities, the retention and adequate compensation, commensurate with workload, of seasoned, highly valued and highly competent employees are not only the top priority for conservation districts but an essential ingredient to Virginia’s success. **We support a minimum of \$35 million annually for a stable, reliable cost share program, while realizing the full cost according to the Agriculture Needs Assessment and VirginiaForever Five Year Plan has been identified as greater than \$100 million.**

3. **Continue support for urban best management practices as a means to addressing WIP and TMDL needs: Request restoration of \$1,000,000 for the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) recognizing that demand is in excess of \$2,000,000.** The program complements the Agricultural BMP Cost Share Program. SWCDs, with appropriately qualified, trained, and experienced staff, are well-positioned and capable of implementing a voluntary urban BMP cost share program for private commercial and residential landowners. Virginia’s Phase III WIP recognizes the program as a key means to meeting urban water quality improvement needs. As a minimum we request funding be restored to the previous level of \$1M per year as the true need is in excess of \$2M per year.

4. **Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Representation** – A Bill to amend Code of Virginia § 10.1-502. Soil and Water Conservation Board; composition. The bill shall clarify the appointments process for the Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board ensuring all areas of the Commonwealth’s SWCDs are represented and that stakeholders continue to play a role in the nominations process.



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