

**Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
Legislative Agenda for 2023 General Assembly**

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1. **Establish a dedicated, adequate, secure, and stable source of funding for the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund (VNRCF) commensurate with the most recent Chesapeake Bay & Virginia Waters Clean Up Plan Report. Likewise, provide increased funding for Best Management Practices (BMPs) and related Technical Assistance in the amount of \$73.8 million as documented in the 2022 Agriculture Needs Assessment 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 certified professional employees which represent front line efforts to meet Virginia's challenges outlined by the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP). More than twenty years after the creation of the Water Quality Improvement Act and more than thirteen 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.

2. **Allow per budget amendment the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board to allocate unused Chesapeake Bay Agriculture BMP and Technical Assistance (TA) funds to support SWCD projects statewide.** Many Chesapeake Bay districts have more funds than capacity to implement BMPs on the ground. This would not require a budget increase but would provide authority to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board to allocate unobligated Chesapeake Bay funds (both cost-share and technical assistance funds) to support SWCD efforts statewide.
3. **Increase Operating Funds for the 47 districts by \$1.9 million to support education and outreach programming.** Soil and Water Conservation Districts are the local program delivery mechanism for nonpoint source pollution control programs throughout the Commonwealth. Thanks to an increase of \$3.6 million during the 2022 General Assembly Session, additional financial support was provided for district central operations, administrative assistance, technical assistance for implementation of agricultural and urban BMPs, technical assistance to operate and maintain 104 flood control dams, and technical assistance to implement Resource Management Plans and address tax credit applications. **Additional funding aligned with "budget template" requests submitted by SWCDs to the Department of Conservation & Recreation must be provided to support critical SWCD education and outreach programs and staff.** Strong local conservation districts are necessary as Virginia intensifies its efforts to reduce nonpoint sources of pollution throughout the Commonwealth and to meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL.
4. **Provide \$350,000 for the addition of two experienced Senior Conservation Specialists at DCR to provide in-the-field training for new district employees to accelerate the certifications in agronomic, livestock, and engineering practices.** These positions will support increased training needs and reduce the two-year training period currently needed to become effective conservation specialists.
5. **Increase funding for District Dam Repair Needs.** Twelve SWCDs in Virginia own and operate 104 small watershed flood control dams. As local sponsors of these federally funded watershed projects, without the means to levy funding, districts need adequate state support to meet state requirements and provide for public safety and flood control. Annual flood control dam maintenance responsibilities continue to increase. Increases in high magnitude storms are creating additional needs for maintenance and repair. **Request \$1,000,000 in the second year of the biennium for the District Dam Maintenance, Repair and Rehabilitation Fund for necessary repairs to 104 aging dams owned and operated by SWCDs.**
6. **Support a system upgrade in the amount of \$1,000,000 at DCR for the Agriculture BMP tracking program, nutrient management, and precision agriculture needs.** The tracking program is critically important to data collection for the VACS program and with increased program funding there remains a need for program updates and system upgrades.



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