

**Virginia Wetlands Enhancement and Restoration Coordinating
Committee Meeting
9/25/03
DEQ-Piedmont Regional Office**

Minutes by Hadley Milliken (ACB)

Coordinating Committee representatives attending:

Stacey Moulds- Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay (ACB)
Hadley Milliken- Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay (ACB)
Bob Hume- Army Corps of Engineers
Ann Jennings- Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF)
Libby Norris- Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF)
Lee Hill- Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
Brenda Winn- Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Ellen Gilinsky- Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
David Norris- Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF)
Ben Alder- Ducks Unlimited
Carrie Hagin- James River Association (JRA)
David Phemister- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
David O'Brien- Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS)
Tony Watkinson- Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC)

Please see attached complete list of Coordinating Committee invitees.

The first Virginia Wetlands Enhancement and Restoration Coordinating Committee met on September 25th, 2003 from 1:00-3:00pm at the DEQ-Piedmont Regional Office training room in Glen Allen, VA. Ellen Gilinsky, Virginia Water Protection Permit Program Manager, DEQ, led the meeting.

1) Introductions: Meeting attendees were briefly introduced.

2) History of Draft Executive Order, Past Committee Endeavors, and Goals and Objectives of the current committee (Ellen Gilinsky, DEQ):

- It was summarized that through the support of a grant from the US EPA to the DEQ and the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay (ACB), a Virginia Citizen Wetland Education, Outreach, and Monitoring Program will be initiated. This program will include a series of public informational workshops on financial and technical resources for wetland restoration success.
- Ellen Gilinsky summarized that in October 2000, Governor James Gilmore issued Executive Order Number Seventy-Two, establishing the Virginia Wetland Restoration Coordinating Committee. As a part of this executive order, Virginia committed to the restoration or creation of 10,000 acres of wetlands by 2010, 60% of which are to be restored within Virginia's portion of the Chesapeake Bay.
- This Coordinating Committee was the entity responsible for meeting both the Chesapeake Bay 2000 (C2K) goals and Executive Order commitments concerning

wetland restoration. Originally, this Coordinating Committee was co-chaired by DGIF and DCR.

- One of the principal tasks of the Coordinating Committee was to promote the voluntary establishment or restoration of wetlands (tidal and non-tidal) by private landowners throughout the Commonwealth.
- As the Committee progressed in 2001, it recognized the importance to develop a public outreach program to bolster and enhance restoration efforts on private and local government lands.
- During the administration change to Governor Warner, the Coordinating Committee temporarily dis-banded.
- This Coordinating Committee, in a reconstituted form, will assist DEQ in providing overall project oversight and leadership for the Virginia Citizen Wetland Education, Outreach, and Monitoring Program, ensuring a close working relationship between state and federal agencies and private organizations in the development and overall program implementation.

Current Draft Executive Order: *Protection and enhancement of the Commonwealth's Wetland Resources*

- Ellen Gilinsky briefly summarized the current Draft Executive Order: *Protection and Enhancement of the Commonwealth's Wetland Resources*, which at the time of the meeting was on the desk of Governor Warner to be signed.
- This current Executive Order designated the Virginia's Wetlands Enhancement and Restoration Coordinating Committee (the Coordinating Committee) as responsible for encouraging voluntary establishment or restoration of wetlands by private or public landowners throughout the Commonwealth and advising the Secretary of Natural Resources on any actions needed to forward this goal.
- The Director of DEQ, or his designee, will serve as chair of the Coordinating Committee and will set meetings and make member assignments.
- One major change between the former committee and the reconstituted committee is that the membership will not only involve State and Federal Agencies, but will also include non-profit organizations as well.
- The specific duties of this Coordinating Committee are to
 - Promote the voluntary establishment, restoration, and enhancement of wetlands (tidal and non-tidal) by public and private landowners throughout the Commonwealth.
 - Provide the Secretary of Natural Resources with a listing of opportunities to enhance, restore, or establish wetlands on public lands.
 - **Report by December 1st of each year**, through the Secretary of Natural Resources, on the Commonwealth's commitment to restore or establish wetland acreage statewide and within Virginia's portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- The current Draft Executive Order includes a call for all land-holding State agencies, including institutes of higher learning, to participate in the restoration and enhancement of wetlands by taking the following steps with land suitable for wetland restoration, enhancement, establishment, or preservation:
 - Notify the Coordinating Committee of any available lands that may be suitable and appropriate for the voluntary restoration, enhancement, establishment, or preservation of wetlands;

- Develop partnerships with volunteers and private organizations to cooperatively restore or construct wetlands on appropriate state owned lands; and
 - Report on its efforts to restore wetlands to the DEQ in accordance with instructions from that agency to ensure inclusion in the Virginia Wetlands Database.
- It was discussed that a cursory list of state-owned lands exists but that the current committee needs to do some additional research and add federal and other public lands. (**Action Item**)
 - The agencies participating in the Coordinating Committee shall provide technical assistance and guidance, within the extent of resources available, to the various land-holding state agencies and institutions that have identified land available for the restoration or establishment of wetlands.
 - The current Executive Order also includes a component that directs the DEQ to partner with the VIMS to develop and maintain the Virginia Wetlands Database for the purpose of tracking permitted impacts to tidal and non-tidal wetlands in the Commonwealth, compensatory mitigation provided for those impacts, and voluntary efforts to restore and enhance wetlands acreage and function on public and private lands. The member of the Coordinating Committee and state agencies that hold land will assist in these efforts. Specifically:
 - DEQ will establish the Virginia Wetlands Database in partnership with VIMS
 - The member of the Coordinating Committee shall encourage private landowners, local governments, and organizations to report wetland restoration and enhancement efforts for inclusion in the Virginia Wetlands Database.
 - DCR, the Department of Forestry, VDGIF, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and other state agencies will work with private landowners to restore wetlands, enhance habitat or otherwise preserve land, shall establish mechanisms to assure the recipients of state funds provide information on wetlands restoration and enhancement activities for inclusion in the database.
 - The Executive Order establishes the *Virginia Citizen Wetland Education, Outreach, and Monitoring Program*. Specifically, the Governor directs the DEQ and the Coordinating Committee to work with appropriate public and private organizations to educate citizens and local governments on how to identify potential restoration sites, on how to monitor the performance of wetland mitigation sites, and other actions that will enhance wetlands restoration and monitoring by the citizens of the Commonwealth.
 - It was the consensus of the attending Committee members that there is a great need for a central tracking mechanism for wetlands—the creation, enhancement, restoration, type, location, and loss of wetlands within the Commonwealth and that this will be beneficial in tracking the progress towards the C2K wetland goals.
 - Ellen stressed that the purpose of this Coordinating Committee is to serve as an advisory committee and that the intent is not to overburden the Committee with extra work, but to utilize the expertise and knowledge of the group for project oversight, suggestions, brainstorming, suggestions for Wetland Workshop speakers etc. in working towards common C2K goals.

One member raised a question as to whether or not these Coordinating Committee meetings were the appropriate venues to suggest ways to streamline the permitting process if they saw it as a hindrance to wetland restoration. Ellen replied that it is not the purpose of this Committee. Certainly issues may come up, suggestions can be raised, but that is not the role of this committee.

3) Discussion of Data Coordination for Voluntary Restoration Projects- (Brenda Winn, DEQ)

- Brenda summarized the fact that currently, a comprehensive wetland-tracking database does not exist which captures voluntary wetland restoration/creation efforts and this will greatly assist in Chesapeake Bay Program reporting. She went over the draft version of the data form. (Included with minutes)
- It is important to note that this tracking database will remain separate from the regulatory DEQ database and the data will not be scrutinized like permits.
- The activity number column would serve as a unique identifier for the particular project site in order to help resolve the amount of duplication in reporting efforts.
- All member of the Coordinating Committee (and others involved in wetland restoration, creation, or enhancement projects) would keep a project-tracking sheet, tally their projects, and send it into the DEQ at designated intervals (**December 1st of each year**).
- There would be an opportunity to spot-check the information to cut down on the duplication of reporting the same wetland projects (perhaps by two different agencies involved in the same project). Once spot-checking has been preformed, VIMS will enter the information from the reporting sheets into the database.
- A suggestion was made to add some other columns to the draft reporting sheet to assist in further identifying the location of the project—perhaps columns for Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUC), latitude/longitude coordinates, county, etc.
- There was a major concern raised by Committee members when reporting wetland projects on **private lands**- many of these private landowners do not want to be identified by something as specific as lat/long coordinates. After some discussion, a possible solution was offered to solve this “privacy problem”. Coordinating Committee members could list both the county and the 8-digit HUC code. This would provide more detail as to the site location (watershed location) without disclosing latitude and longitude. Latitude and longitude could be used on public lands.
- Another question was raised regarding when to report projects, at the time of initiation or the completion of construction. **It was decided that the most practical time to report would be at the completion of construction and then continue to monitor it.** If the project was unsuccessful, you can amend the reporting at a later time depending on the ultimate gain or loss of wetlands for the project.
- It was emphasized that this database is trying to capture the EFFORT and success of voluntary wetland restoration, creation and enhancement- on both, public, private lands.
- A question was raised regarding the use of the database in tracking “preserved” wetland. It was decided to add another column on the tracking form for “preserved acres.”

- For the purpose of the database, wetlands restored under the CREP program will be considered voluntary wetland restoration and will be included in the wetland database tracking efforts.
- An “Organization” field needs to be added on the data tracking form so that organizations are recognized for their efforts in wetland restoration, enhancement, or creation. All partnering organizations should be listed. The consensus of the Committee was to add another field for “Lead Organization” for facilitating wetland projects when one or more organizations are partnering on the same project or piece of property. There was a question of how to break out the “lead organization” and one suggestion was to do a financial break down- who ever received the most money for the project is considered the “lead”.
- The consensus of the Committee was that wetland conversions were NOT going to be captured in the database.
- It was decided that required BMP wetland projects will not be included in this database.
- It was suggested that the Elizabeth River project needs to be added to the list of participating non-profit organizations on the Committee.

4) Grant Activities, including Public Workshops and Educational Materials (Stacey Moulds, ACB)

- Stacey briefly summarized the overview of the EPA grant- there are two main components of the Virginia Citizen Wetland Education, Outreach, and Monitoring Program for the Chesapeake Bay Region: 1) Public education and outreach concerning wetland restoration in Virginia, and 2) Wetland assessment monitoring developed for use within all of Virginia.
- The public education and outreach component includes the development of training materials to educate citizens and local governments how to identify potential restoration sites within their own watersheds and how to obtain technical and financial assistance to implement wetland restoration or creation projects within Virginia. Four training workshops will be held during 2003 and 2004 within Virginia. The 2003 workshop will be held in Richmond, and in 2004 there will be workshops in Northern Virginia, Tidewater, and the Roanoke areas of Virginia.
- The first training workshop will be held in Richmond on November 19th from 10am-5pm at the Piedmont Regional DEQ office in Glen Allen, VA.
- The assessment –monitoring component includes the development of a Draft Wetland Monitoring Manual geared for use by citizens and modified to be specific to Virginia, as well as holding one training workshop for wetlands assessment monitoring. The protocols developed will be field tested at several restoration sites. A final draft manual will be prepared and submitted as a final deliverable under this grant for EPA review.
- The role of the Coordinating Committee will be to review and assist with the development of workshop training materials; review and comment on draft wetland assessment monitoring; provide agency/organization staff at some or all of the public workshops for further technical assistance to the public; and participate in evaluating workshops, training materials, and assessment monitoring manual.
- The question arose as to how complex the Monitoring Manual needs to be, and who is the audience we are catering to?

- Stacey is to send out the list of funding sources to be used in the upcoming Wetland Workshop to the Committee to review and see if anything can be added.
- We discussed advertising strategies for the upcoming workshops- possibly getting announcements out into the local papers.
- Any suggestions for speakers, case studies, etc. from the Committee should be passed on to Stacey.

Role of Citizens in Monitoring Wetlands:

- The issue of citizen monitoring on private lands was raised- again issues of privacy were discussed.
- When training citizens, we need to be careful not to label the training as the “delineation” wetlands.
- It was agreed that with proper training, citizens CAN be trained to monitor wetlands on public lands, or on private lands through the appropriate watershed organizations or agencies involved in the private projects. Also, having a monitoring manual with consistent protocols will be a useful resource.
- The training of landowners to perform their own monitoring was discussed to be very helpful in the situation where the property owner can assess their own wetland project.
- Ben Alder from Ducks Unlimited will contact Stacey regarding their on-going wetland monitoring program.
- One additional benefit of the manual is the raising of awareness regarding wetland information and that a wetland does not need to be “sopping wet” to be a wetland, there are seasonal variations of water levels.
- The QA/QC component of the citizen monitoring can be two-tiered, depending on desired outcomes of the monitoring- one for educational purposes for school groups etc. and one that is more technical for assessment purposes for watershed groups and the like.

5) Questions, Comments, Set the next meeting dates:

- There needs to be a conference call after the first Wetlands Workshop on November 19th with the Coordinating Committee- to discuss possible changes, suggestions, improvements for the next workshops.
- The date of the conference call is TBA but will occur in late November/early December.
- The next Wetland Workshop needs to be in January or February at the latest to reach the 2004 wetland project cycle.
- The idea of creating a certificate accompanied by a letter from the Governor, much like the Elizabeth River Project’s *River Stars*, to honor on-the-ground wetland restoration, creation, or enhancement projects was discussed. It could be something people could hang on their walls commemorating their efforts.
- No date has been set to re-convene the Coordinating Committee but it was thought the Committee would meet quarterly and the next meeting will be after the General Assembly in late April, early May.