

**Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Norfolk Waterside Marriott
December 6, 2023**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, December 6, 2023, at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott in Norfolk, Virginia.

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charles Newton, Chair	Jay C. Ford
Adam D. Wilson, Vice Chair	Pamela Mason
Charles A. Arnason	John Schick
Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director, Ex Officio	
Dr. Edwin M. Martinez, NRCS, Ex Officio	

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Jason R. De La Cruz

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director
Sara Bottenfeld, Agricultural Incentives Program Manager
Debbie Cross, Conservation District Coordinator
Tracy Culbertson, Agricultural BMP Engineering Specialist
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Blair Gordon, SWCD Liaison
Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety and Floodplain Management
Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager
Olivia Leatherwood, Conservation District Coordinator
James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
David Neudeck, Public Communications & Marketing Director
Marissa Roland, Conservation District Coordinator
Marie Schirmacher, Nutrient Management Specialist
Amy Walker, Eastern Area Manager

OTHERS PRESENT

Darrell Kuntz, Office of the Attorney General
Freeda Cathcart, Blue Ridge SWCD
Wayne Davis, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Bill Fleming, Virginia Dare SWCD
Kimberly Gleeson, Loudoun SWCD
Dr. Dan Goerlich, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Julie Head, Eastern Shore SWCD
Frank A. Johnson, Jr. Northern Neck SWCD

Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Darrell Marshall, VDACS
Carmie Ross, Eastern Shore SWCD
Dr. Kendall Tyree, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Lynn Graves, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
John Womack, NRCS

ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM

With six (6) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Newton called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and called for introductions. He thanked members and guests for attending.

APPROVAL MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

Mr. Arnason moved that the minutes of the September 25, 2023, meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board be approved as submitted. Mr. Ford seconded, and the motion carried.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT – *Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director*

Director Wells gave the report for DCR. He noted that much of the information had been shared at the Association Meeting.

Director Wells advised that the Governor's proposed budget will be released on December 20th and noted the following:

- For FY2024, the Board allocated \$124.6 million for VACS, and an additional \$20 million for Whole Farm Approach – a total of \$144.6 million.
- As of Friday (12/01), \$96 million of that funding had been requested by districts. That's \$20 million more than this time last year.
- New producers continue to become involved in the Virginia Agricultural Cost-share Program into the program, this is critical to Virginia's future success. This program year to date, there are 324 new participants. That's in addition to the 700 new participants last year.

Director Wells thanked Dr. Tyree and the Association staff for an excellent conference. He commented that it was good to be able to gather and celebrate successes.

DAM SAFETY DIVISION

Division Report

Mr. Glover gave the following Division report for the Dam Safety Division.

Critical Statistics of the Dam Safety Program as of November 30th, 2023

Count of Dams Regulated by DCR by Hazard Classification				
Calendar Year	2020	2021	2022	2023 (changes since 8-31)
Total Number of Dams Regulated by DCR	2056	2663	2645 *	2553 (-7)
High	326	348	371	406 (21)
Significant	170	173	171	175 (9)
Low	261	266	269	284 (11)
Regulatory Size with Undetermined Hazard Classification	1299	1876	1828	1688 (-48)
*Note: Fully breached and decommissioned dams excluded in 2022				

Dams of Regulatory Size without Hazard Classification:

As of this report, there are 1,688 dams of regulatory size without a hazard classification in the dam safety inventory. This is down from 1,736 since our report in September.

DCR has continued a screening-level dam breach inundation study initiative to assess the hazard potential of dams with undetermined hazard class. These studies include inundation maps with potential downstream impacts data for emergency planning, and locality hazard mitigation plans. However, the studies are preliminary in nature, are no longer sealed by our engineers, and do not contain sufficient detail for real property changes such as spillway alterations. To date, 61 screening-level maps resulting in hazard classification updates have been completed and are being documented in the Dam Safety Inventory System (DSIS). An additional 20 screening-level studies have been completed and are pending internal staff review.

The Department has also reinstated the Simplified Mapping Program, as outlined in 4VAC50-20-54 for dam break inundation zone mapping. Mapping staff have received and processed requests for seven simplified inundation studies for dam owners who have submitted their payments to DCR.

Dams of Regulatory Size without Ownership Information:

Enforcement staff have virtually completed conducting property research to identify owners of dams. The number of dams of regulatory size with unknown ownership has been reduced from 812 initially to only 23 remaining. These 23 dams have a lack of available data with which to identify their owners.

Status of Periodic Review of the Impounding Structure Regulations:

The Board approved the initiation of a periodic review of the Impounding Structure Regulations at your April 27, 2023, meeting. That periodic review was filed on November 27. Notification of the periodic review will be published in the Virginia Register on December 18, which will begin the public comment period. Once the comment period starts, the Department will send notice of this periodic review to dam owners and engineers through the Dam Safety Information System (DSIS). The public comment period will close on January 8, 2024. The results of the periodic review and any recommendations for a regulatory action will be brought to the Board for your approval in the spring.

Staffing:

Two additional Dam Safety Regional Engineers have been hired, bringing the total back up to 5 Regional Engineers, and 1 Lead Engineer. Once we receive notification from FEMA of an expected increase in our National Dam Safety Program State Assistance Grant, we shall recruit both 2 more Regional Dam Engineers, to a new total of 7, as well as a newly created Chief Engineer. The new Chief will oversee the Lead Engineer, the Regional Engineer team, as well as the Data Management, Enforcement, and Dam Modeling (mapping) teams. In preparation for this transition, staff has prepared a realignment of the current 5 regional service areas, into 7. This was based on balancing priority dams between regions while also accounting for drive distances, routes, office locations and, to the extent possible, alignment with the 8 Virginia Department of Emergency Management regions.

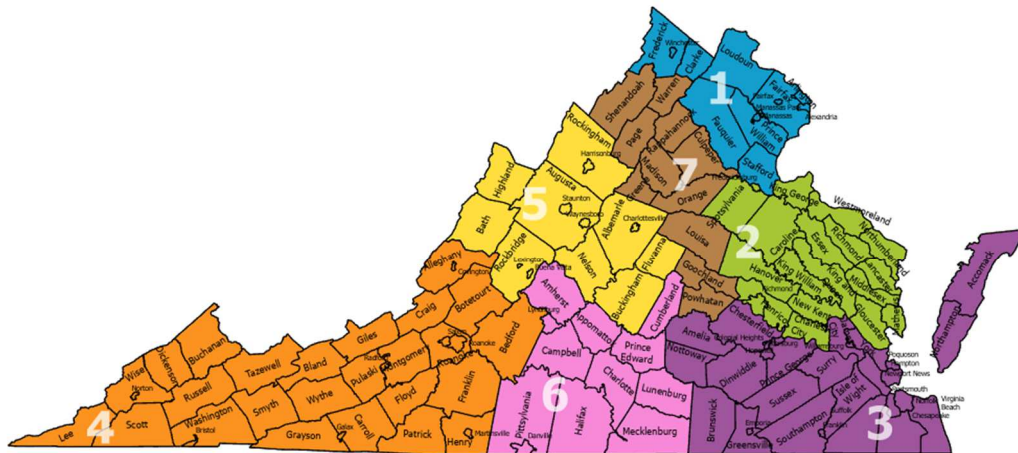


Figure 1. Map Depicting New Dam Safety Regions

Screening-Level Risk Assessments and High Hazard Potential Dam (HHPD) Grant Program:

Virginia was granted early access to FEMA's Risk Screening Tool in preparation for the Federal FY2024 HHPD Grant. DCR finalized and initiated a contract with Schnabel Engineering to provide professional services by performing screening-level risk assessments (SLRAs) on 57 High Hazard Dams that meet the eligibility criteria for the HHPD Grant. The primary requirements are for the dam to be high hazard, in poor or unsatisfactory condition, or in fair condition with a population at risk (PAR) greater than 1,000. 24 of these eligible dams have already returned letters of interest in the HHPD grant program to DCR.

Schnabel Engineering has begun reviewing all records in DSIS for these dams and identifying any gap in documentation that will strengthen the SLRA process. In coordination with Schnabel, DCR will be distributing a dam owner outreach and data call survey to all HHPD eligible dams. The objectives of the survey are to both gain valuable information for the SLRAs and begin developing DCR's grant application to FEMA as the State Administrative Agency. In phase 2 of the grant, dams that propose projects with the greatest risk reduction benefit, based on the screening-level risk assessments, will be awarded as subgrantees.

Enforcement

At present, 18 dams are under enforcement; six of these are classified as high hazard, one as significant, two as low, and three as unknown.

There have been no additional dam failures since August 2023. We remain at four failures in calendar 2023.

The Department remains focused on reenlisting dam owners with expired O&M Certificates. A total of 401 dams of various hazard classifications, with expired certificates were identified in all five regions. To date, the Department has been working on this in regions 2,4, and 5. These regions contain 274 dams of the 401 statewide total. As of November 30, 2023, 64 of those have either renewed their O&M certificate or have either qualified for either an agricultural or size exemption. Another 25 are cooperating with DCR to renew their certificates. Now that two Regional Engineer positions have been filled, the Department will begin sending certificate renewal reminders for the applicable dams in both Regions 1 and 3.

Additional Activities:

The following activities are currently underway in the division and directly impact the results above:

- **DSS-WISE Lite:** DSS-WISE Lite continues to be utilized for conducting Screening-Level Inundation Studies.
- **Enhanced Aerial Photography:** DCR Dam Safety is coordinating with Civil Air Patrol (CAP), a civilian extension of the US Air Force. As a volunteer

service, they have provided photographs of high hazard dams taken during their training flights. To date CAP has photographed approximately 50 high hazard dams in Virginia and shared high-quality photos with the Department. Data Management Staff are working on organizing the imagery, entering these photos into DSIS, and integrating them with the Dam Safety Web Mapping application. Additionally, EagleView, a vendor of premium high quality oblique imagery, has provided demonstrations of their data and shared their coverage maps with DCR which cover approximately 40% of the state's dams. These aerial photography datasets can be utilized by staff to better evaluate the general condition of these dams.

Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund – Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager

Approval of 2024 Grant Manual

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the following recommended changes to the 2024 Grant Manual.

- The grant manual is a guidance document as defined by §2.2-4002.1 of the Code of Virginia.
- As a guidance document, there must be a 30-day public comment opportunity.
- The draft grant manual was published in the Virginia Register of Regulations on September 11, 2023.
- The public comment period ended on October 11, 2023. Four comments were received. DCR provided notice of the public comment period to all dam owners in addition to the notifications provided through the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall.
- DCR recommended the following revisions to the manual in response to the comments received.
 - Unfortunately, the agency is unable to make the revisions requested related to expanding the funding opportunity to significant dams for projects in categories 2 and 3.
 - The majority of the funds available in those categories is specifically set out for high hazard dams.
 - Incentivizing the use of instrumentation that shares data with the National Weather Service by providing an additional 5 points on the scoring criteria for those systems.
 - Allowing projects that have started after July 1, 2023, to be eligible to apply for funding. This allows for more consistent application of the grant criteria, reduces confusion, and expands the opportunities for dam owners to seek financial assistance for eligible projects.
 - Correcting a typo found in one of the Virginia Administrative Code references.
 - Including the definition of “cost” in the grant manual. This definition mirrors the language in the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance statute.
- Highlights of the proposed 2024 manual include:
 1. Revisions were made to the changes in the amounts and funding sources available for this grant round. Funding varies each year. These pages also broadly cover which projects will be funded from which funding source. (Pages 4-5)

2. Many of the general application requirements and criteria remain the same as last year. (Pages 7-10)
3. The project categories and the eligible activities under each category are discussed in greater detail this year. Most of the revisions to the manual occurred in this section. The revisions more accurately reflect the priorities and activities undertaken by the Department and the Board to increase compliance with the Dam Safety Act and regulations. (Pages 15-18)
4. Revision to the scoring criteria form in the manual reflect the revisions made earlier in the project categories.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the 2024 Dam Safety, Flood Prevention, and Protection Assistance Fund Grant Manual as presented by the Department. Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of rescission of certain grant awards

Ms. Watlington Jones presented a recommendation to rescind certain grant awards. She advised that there were six grant projects funded in 2020 that the agency was recommending be rescinded. She noted:

- The grant period has lapsed, and no activity was reported; no financial reimbursements have been requested.
- The grant applicants were contacted in September and no responses were received.
- The Department's recommendation was that the Board rescind previous approvals of these projects and unobligate the funding associated with those projects.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board rescind six (6) projects approved on June 3, 2020, and unobligate the funding associated (\$23,719) with these projects. Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

Division Report – James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation

Mr. Martin gave the report for the Division of Soil and Water Conservation.

Mr. Martin noted that, with thanks to partners, the Department received an additional \$1 million for the upgrade of the Conservation Application Suite. While the upgrade will be a multi-year effort, the first Phase is underway.

Approval of small dam repair projects for Districts (Soil and Water Conservation District Dam Maintenance, Repair and Rehabilitation Fund)

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the small dam repair projects for approval.

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that these projects fall between routine maintenance and rehabilitation. She also noted the following recommendations.

- Budget provides \$500,000 a year to this fund for these projects
- Contingency fund recommendation - \$166,674.33
- Emergency fund recommendations - \$50,000
- Recommendations for this year:
 - 12 projects
 - \$650,120 in total funding
 - Projects are:
 - Culpeper (2)
 - Piedmont (4)
 - Robert E. Lee (1)
 - Shenandoah Valley (4)
 - Southside (1)

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approve funding for twelve (12) projects in the amount of \$650,120 as presented and recommended by the Department. For FY2024, the Board also approves allocating \$166,674.33 for contingency funds and \$50,000 for emergency project funds.

Additionally, the Board directs the Department to reimburse Soil and Water Conservation Districts for all eligible costs associated with the installation of the remote monitoring equipment as provided for in Chapter 2 of the 2022 Special Session 1 Acts of Assembly. The funding for the reimbursements shall be provided from the Soil and Water Conservation District Dam Maintenance, Repair, and Rehabilitation Fund.

Mr. Ford seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of findings from the Resources Management Plan regulations (4VAC50-70) periodic review

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that in accordance with § 2.2-4007.1 of the Code of Virginia, the Resource Management Plan regulations must be reviewed at least once every four years. She further noted:

- The public comment period must be at least 21 days.
- Notice of the public comment period was announced through the Association's all district list, email to RMP developers, and notification through the Regulatory Town Hall.
- Public comment period began on September 25, 2023, and ended on October 16, 2023.
- There were no comments received during the public comment period.
- Department recommended retaining the regulation as it currently is.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the report of findings on the periodic review conducted for the Resource Management Plan regulations (4VAC50-70) and direct the Department to post the report on the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall for publication in the Virginia Register. The Board authorizes the Department to coordinate, as necessary, with the Office of Regulatory Management to develop any additional documents, including the economic review form, needed to file the results of this periodic review.

Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of District Director appointments and resignations

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the following list of District Director appointments and resignations.

Chowan Basin

Appointment of Ms. Elizabeth Cooper, of Surry County, effective 12/6/2023, to fill the vacant Extension Agent appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Hanover-Caroline

Resignation of Mr. Leigh Pemberton, of Hanover County, effective 12/31/2023, at-large appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2026).

Appointment of Mr. Grayson Kirby, of Hanover County, effective 1/1/2024, to fill the at-large appointed director position of Mr. Leigh Pemberton (term of office expires 12/31/2026).

Peanut

Appointment of Ms. Afton "Livvy" Preisser, of Isle of Wight County, effective 12/6/2023, to fill the vacant Extension Agent appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Piedmont

Resignation of Ms. Erin Small, of Prince Edward County, effective 9/27/2023, Extension Agent appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Appointment of Ms. Mackenzie Gunn, of Amelia County, effective 12/6/2023, to fill the vacant Extension Agent appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the appointments of the individuals being recommended. Mr. Ford seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

*Acceptance of individuals nominated to serve on the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board –
Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that Dr. Hill had resigned from the Board earlier in the year. She advised that the recommendations were provided by Area 2 and moved forward by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Board after consulting with the Virginia Agribusiness Council and the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation.

While timing is short, hopefully an individual will be in place in time for the Area 2 spring meetings.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board accept the nominations of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts of the following two individuals and direct staff to forward these nominations to the Secretary of the Commonwealth for consideration for appointment.

Stephanie Cornell
Nokesville, Virginia

Jim Gehlsen
Nokesville, Virginia

Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of trustee to Lake Barcroft Watershed Improvement District

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that section 10.1-623 of the Code of Virginia requires this Board to approve the trustees for Watershed Improvement Districts. Northern Virginia District approved Mr. James Simonson to replace Mr. George McLennan as a trustee on the Lake Barcroft WID.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the appointment of Mr. James Simonson as Trustee for the Lake Barcroft Watershed Improvement District to replace Mr. George McLennan. This approval reflects actions taken by the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District.

Mr. Ford seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of initial actions to evaluate extent of deficiencies in VACS Program implementation at the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District.

Ms. Watlington Jones reported that on November 20, 2023, the Department determined that the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District (District) had provided payment to a producer for a structural

practice that did not have an approved engineering plan, did not have as-built designs, and did not have a final practice inspection after construction was completed. She further noted:

- In January 2023, an Engineering Job Approval Authority (EJAA) review was conducted for the District's primary conservation specialist, Jonathan Wooldridge. In response to the issues found during that review, Mr. Wooldridge's EJAA was limited to investigation and evaluation (I&E); his EJAA for design and construction was removed. No other employee at the District has EJAA; therefore, all engineering plans, as-builts, and final practice inspections must be approved by the department.
- On October 16, 2023, the Department's Agricultural BMP Engineering Services Program received a request to review a livestock watering system design. After additional correspondence between Mr. Wooldridge and Department employee, Mr. Wooldridge was informed that the engineering review would take approximately two weeks. On November 20, 2023, as review of the engineering documents was nearly completed, it was determined that payment for the practice was provided to the producer on October 17, 2023.
- Additionally, the District falsely listed a Department employee as having approved a component of the practice. To date, the practice design has not been approved and several concerns have been identified with the design.
- The failure to have practices appropriately designed and documented by individuals with the appropriate levels of EJAA is a violation of the District's cost-share and technical assistance grant agreement. Such failures increase the risks that a practice will not function as intended; enhance the likelihood for larger maintenance costs to be borne by the producer; reduce options to assist a producer with any future practice failures; and may cause harm to the reputation of the District and the VACS Program.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) direct the following actions to be taken in response to the severe deficiencies found in the administration of the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Cost-Share (VACS) Program at Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District (District):

1. The District is prohibited from issuing payment for any structural practices without the Department of Conservation and Recreation's written approval. The District's Conservation District Coordinator will coordinate with the Department's Agricultural BMP Engineering Services Program and the Agricultural Incentives Program Manager to provide notice of practices that are eligible for payment by the District Board on a monthly basis.
2. The Department will conduct a review of all structural practices that have been issued payment in FY2024, are in carryover status (approximately 20 practices), or have been approved by the District Board in FY2024 to determine if all the applicable VACS Program guidelines have been adhered to including requirements related to the design and approval of engineering plans, completion of as-built designs, and the final inspection of the practice by an authorized individual prior to payment being issued to the producer.
3. Any practices not yet under construction that are determined to have engineering plans designed and approved in accordance with the VACS Program guidelines will be eligible to proceed to construction.
4. For those practices not yet under construction that are determined to have either (i) no engineering plans or (ii) engineering plans that have not been designed and approved in accordance with the VACS

Program guidelines, the Department's Agricultural BMP Engineering Services Program will work closely with District staff to ensure proper designs are developed, reviewed, and approved in accordance with the Program guidelines prior to initiation of construction.

5. Any practices that have been paid but failed to meet the VACS Program guidelines shall solely be the financial responsibility of the District. Additionally, the District bears the sole liability for any failure or issue(s) that arises from these practices. The District shall reimburse the Department for any payments made for practices that were not implemented in accordance with the VACS Program guidelines.

6. For those practices that are currently under construction and do not have engineering plans designed and approved in accordance with the VACS Program guidelines, the producer will be encouraged to halt construction until the practice's engineering design is approved by the Department. These practices will receive priority for review by the Department's Agricultural BMP Engineering Services Program. Should the producer decide to continue with practice construction, they do so at their own risk. Any practices that continue with construction will solely be the financial and legal responsibility of the District and will be ineligible for payment from any cost-share allocations.

7. Department Manager(s) will attend a District Board meeting at their earliest opportunity to discuss the concerns of the Board and the Department regarding the administration of the VACS Program and any other relevant concerns.

8. At the March 2024 Board meeting, the Department will provide an update on the status of VACS Program administration at the District as well as any additional actions that may be warranted in response to the deficiencies found.

Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

PARTNER REPORTS

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Dr. Martinez gave the report for NRCS. A copy of the report is included as Attachment A.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Mr. Marshall gave no formal report but expressed appreciation to the Board and the Association for a productive conference.

Virginia Cooperative Extension

Dr. Goerlich gave the report for Virginia Cooperative Extension. A copy of the report is included as Attachment B.

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Dr. Tyree thanked the Board and agency staff for their participation in the Annual Meeting. She introduced Wayne Davis as the new Association President.

Mr. Davis commented that he looked forward to working with the Board and gave best wishes for the holiday season.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Cathcart commented that she would like to encourage stakeholders to consider bringing a program to Virginia called an Urban Conservation Corps. The intent is to strengthen and develop the tree canopy in urban areas.

NEXT MEETINGS

- March 2024*
- April 2024*
- May 2024*

*Location to be announced

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 10:03 a.m.

Attachment A

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting
December 6, 2023

STC Highlights

- **NRCS 10-year Commitment to Conservation:** More than 7,900 conservation contracts obligated since 2013 to provide \$324 million in financial assistance for implementing conservation practices on 1.5 million acres. \$177 million in total active funding for natural resource protection on more than a 577,603 acres of Virginia land.
- **Local Work Groups (LWG):** The LWG exercise for FY23 has been successfully completed. The key issues identified for Virginia are loss of Ag Land, conversion of land to solar farms, and the increasing cost of installation of conservation practices. In FY23 34/41 NRCS service centers completed the LWG exercise. We encourage all SWCDs in VA to continue to support this effort.
- **State Technical Committee meeting:** The most recent meeting was hosted in person and virtual. We received great feedback from partners and had a good visit to our VSU farm! We would like to ask the SWCDs to continue to support our technical committee as we target increasing participation.
- **Virginia NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG):** NRCS is currently looking for potential CIG priorities for FY 2024. In 2023 our priorities were soil health and forestry. We funded a new CIG project to investigate soil health indicators in differently managed parts of commercial vineyards and to develop standards and best practices for soil health testing.
- **FY23 NRCS Funded New Agreements:** To increase our state staffing capacity and technical expertise, NRCS VA supported several new cooperative agreements funded via Farm Bill and IRA authorities.
 - o **Virginia Department of Forestry:** \$555,000. To deliver the technical forestry portion of Farm Bill programs. This agreement deals with the cost of technical assistance associated with the Farm Bill programs, including the EQIP, CSP and any other future programs that include forestry components.
 - o **Virginia Tech – Integrated Conservation Agronomy:** \$1,130,866. To improve economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture across VA through enhanced soil health, climate smart agriculture, and conservation agronomy outreach, technical assistance, and implementation.
 - o **Virginia Tech/Soil Health Coalition:** \$295,805. To work closely with the 2020 Farmers Cooperative (the Co-op) to increase outreach and conservation delivery to their 200+ members in Virginia. Through an innovative partnership between the coalition, the Co-op, and USDA/NRCS, the proposed project will substantially expand NRCS's ability to get conservation on the ground effectively while improving equity in program design and delivery.
 - o **American Bird Conservancy:** \$58,072. To work with Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture (AMJV) to build capacity to deliver Farm Bill and IRA conservation programs and provide conservation technical assistance in forestry.
 - o **Virginia State University:** \$300,000. To increase the number of participants implementing soil and water conservation practices and provide educational workshops to increase awareness in climate smart practices.
 - o **Ducks Unlimited:** \$297,895. To increase technical assistance to producers interested in addressing wildlife and/or water quality resource concerns through the delivery of Climate SMART practices within the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay.
 - o **American Farmland Trust:** \$300,000. To increase technical assistance to agricultural producers to promote land stewardship and climate-smart agricultural.

State Conservationist November and December Events: Rappahannock River Symposium, Va. Chapter of the Soil & Water Conservation Board, VASWCD Annual Meeting, Chesapeake Bay Climate Smart & Regenerative Ag, Virginia Farm to Table Conference, Farm Bureau Annual Meeting.

ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

EQIP, CSP, RCPP, VPA-HIP, CIG, TSP and Easement Programs

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**

Received and ranked 1,302 EQIP applications. Obligated \$26.4 million in EQIP funds via 391 contracts. Obligated \$2.68 million in EQIP-IRA funds via 48 contracts.

- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)—Classic, Renewals & GCI**

Obligated \$7.6 million for 122 CSP renewals on 46,617 acres. Obligated \$11.1 million in CSP Classic funds via 157 contracts. Funded 14 CSP-GCI contracts for \$39,280. Obligated \$5.1 million in CSP-IRA funds via 54 contracts.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

Currently managing 16 active contracts with total funding of \$2 million covering 6,687.6 acres. Four RCPP proposals awarded as renewals. VA was just recently awarded two new RCPP projects and is a partner state on another project.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**

Obligated over \$3.2 million in ALE funding via 9 contracts, on 2,179 acres; 11 ACEP-ALE acquisitions underway. 2 ACEP-WRE restorations in progress. 146 existing recorded easements totaling 17,112 acres of land protected and monitored. Two new ALE Program Agreements signed with land trusts (totaling 8 statewide).

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**

2023 Virginia CIG Notice of Funding Opportunity closed May 29, 2023. The recommended proposals topics were Soil Health and Forestry. A \$200k grant was awarded for one project. Currently managing 12 CIG's totaling \$1.1 million with various partners like: Virginia Tech, Sustainable Chesapeake, Virginia State University, Virginia Department of Forestry, Water Science Institute and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources.

Engineering (SCE)

Staffing Updates

- Chris Hamilton is currently the acting SCE.
- Kelly Ramsey started as the State Hydraulic Engineer, effective 9/11/23.
- Two other state office positions (Environmental Engineer & Dam Safety Engineer) are scheduled to be advertised soon.

Dam Rehabilitation

- **Cherrystone Creek 1 and Cherrystone Creek 2A**

Pittsylvania County is leading the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structures. Pittsylvania County has retained Schnabel Engineering as its consultant. The design process is ongoing. The designs

are estimated to take 18 to 24 months. The preliminary design for 2A has been submitted and is currently under review.

- **Beaver Creek 1**

The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) is leading the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structure. RWSA has retained Schnabel Engineering as its consultant. The design process is just getting started. The design is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.

- **John's Creek 1**

Mountain Castles SWCD is leading the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structure. DCR is currently assisting Mountain Castles SWCD in obtaining a consultant. The design is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP)

NRCS is providing disaster assistance to Buchanan County through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) for a rain event in the Hurley area on August 30 (estimated 6-8 inches). NRCS and Buchanan County completed damage survey reports (DSRs) for 4 county-identified sites. Funding for 3 eligible sites was received in mid-January 2022 and the EWP agreement was finalized on March 15, 2022. The County obtained all the necessary permits and started construction in June 2023.

Construction has halted due to a time of year restriction (July 1 – October 31) from performing work in the stream (per their permit). Construction resumed the week of November 6. Buchanan County has requested an extension to June 30, 2024, due to delays in getting construction completed due to the time of year restriction.

State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

- Clarimer Hernandez Vargas, new State Resource Conservationist started her new role on 11/6/2023.

Technical Tools (Field Office Technical Guide)

Continue to maintain the Virginia Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) as a repository of technical resources and references to include conservation practice standards, technical notes, planning criteria, resource concerns, conservation practice physical effects, cost lists and the Virginia Plant Establishment Guide.

Notices released:

- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-23-520 regarding Farmed Wetland Hydrology Indicators
- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-24-521 regarding Virginia Conservation Practice Standards and supporting documentation.
- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-24-522 regarding Grassland Information General References
- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-24-523 regarding Guidance Documents for NRCS-CPA-52
- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-24-524 regarding Plant Establishment Guide – Planting Recommendations

Bulletins released:

- Virginia Bulletin 180-24-1: Conservation Planning – Primary and Facilitating Practices
- Virginia Bulletin 180-24-2: NRCS-CPA-052 guidance with the usage of CD/Cart, permitting, and the Virginia Ecological Sciences Practice Sheet

- Virginia Bulletin 180-24-3: Conservation Planning Policy and Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority (ESJAA) Reminders.

State Emergency Board (SEB) Meeting for drought declarations in 11 counties (10/31). There will be another SEB meeting in November as the drought and needs unfold.

Training to Field Staff

• Webinars

- o Training Webinar: Virginia Conservation Practice Standards (Notice 450-24-521) Information (10/25/23)
- o Training Webinar (Program): FY24 Program Rollout Webinar (9/26/23)
- o UPCOMING Webinars: November 15th: NWSG CIG Final Presentation, with JB Daniels and Gabe Pent

Staffing Updates

November 29th: TSP Training, with Stacy Bradshaw

December 13th: Engineering topics followed by Ethics Training, with Chris Hamilton and Markee Connors, respectively.

• Staff/Partnership Trainings

- o Grazing School for Ag Professionals Training (10/3-4/2023)
- o Erosion/RUSLE2 Field Training (10/03,10, 12, 17, 19, 24, 26 & Nov 9, 28/ 2023)
- o Farm Visits for Field Staff (10/31/2023)

• Staff Training/Outreach Events

- o Late Summer Pasture Walk at Tufton Farm (10/6/2023)
- o Grazing School for Forum Ag Students (10/18/2023)

Customer Service and Outreach

- Partnership meeting with FSA to keep communication on CRP cost list and new data.
- Partnership meeting with VA NRCS Soil Outreach team (SHOUT)
- Partnered with VFGC and VSU to conduct a 2-day intensive Grazing School for Agricultural Professionals at the Randolph Farm Pavilion in Petersburg.
- Partnered with local VCE and SWCD staff to present at a pasture walk with 35 attendees to lead the discussion on grazing management, desirable forage species, forage utilization and planning Climate Smart Practices to meet future needs of grazing livestock.

State Soil Scientist (SSS)

Virginia NRCS is partnering with USGS and FPAC GEO to acquire new LiDAR data for the area shown on the map below. This will be tide coordinated data and will be flown starting in December 2023. Virginia NRCS provided \$40,000 in funding for this project.

Soil Survey Update

Soils is working with Virginia Tech on a Soil Plant Sciences Division grant for the "Carbon and color: Linking soil carbon properties, ecosystem functions, and color requirements for soil classification and taxonomy" project. The project will study the validity of using soil color to correlate to the amount of carbon for field estimation.

The Richmond MLRA office is working to update some taxonomically named soil map units to soil series names in Hanover County.

Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) continues for the local data segments for the state. The NRI grazing data collection was completed for FY 23 at the end of September.

Two new soil tunnels were provided to the Harrisonburg and Christiansburg offices. Contact those offices for reserving for events.

Collaboration with HB 895 and 206 regarding solar panel farms and prime farmland continues. A new website to assist localities with planning for potential locations is located here: [VALEN - Virginia Land and Energy Navigator \(vt.edu\)](https://www.vt.edu/VALEN)

Partnerships & Initiatives (P&I)

People Garden Initiative (PGI)

The Virginia team continued to promote the PGI by establishing four additional agreements with the City of Richmond - Richmond Grows Gardens, Groundwork RVA – Hillside Micro Farm, Greater Richmond Fit4Kids and Kinfolk Community RVA. These agreements support 36 garden sites across the city, with a combined total of \$150k in grant funding. Our flagship garden at Fairfield Middle School received an additional \$40k to expand their educational program. Now with more collaborative garden sites in Richmond than ever, NRCS is working to promote Urban Agriculture and resilient local food systems.

New Public Affairs Specialist

Jeff Blakley has joined VA NRCS as the new Public Affairs Specialist in Richmond. Jeff Blakley has over 20 years of experience in the visual arts, media, and communications. He began his career in the U.S. Navy, where he served for nearly a decade as a photographer, videographer, and public affairs specialist. Following his departure from military service in 2008, Jeff transitioned to the civil service, as Chief of Photography for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, where he also completed a Bachelor of Communications and Master of Business Administration. In 2016, Jeff took his skill sets to Capitol Hill, as the Director of House Creative Services for the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served until 2022. Jeff's technical, creative, and business expertise served an integral role in consolidating previously separate offices of photography, graphics, communication, and videography into a unified media department that was better able to meet the needs of representative members of the House. Most recently, Jeff worked as a Social Media Analyst for the Defense Commissary Agency, where he restructured the entirety of the DeCA social media program before joining the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2023 as a Public Affairs Specialist.

Administration/Management & Strategy (ASTC- M&S)

Virginia NRCS Personnel Changes

Retirements: No retirements known at this time.

Positions Vacated:

- Stacey Bradshaw, Soil Conservationist, State Office
- Matthew Carroll, Soil Conservationist, Louisa Service Center
- Aneka Jones, Administrative Coordinator, Farmville Area Office

Positions Moved:

- Wesley Hedrick (formerly Soil Conservationist in Verona Service Center): **moved to** become the Area Resource Conservationist, Harrisonburg Area Office
- Dana Bayless (formerly District Conservationist in Louisa Service Center): **moved to** become the CSP Coordinator, State Office
- Emily Aleshire (formerly District Conservationist in the Courtland Service Center): **moved to** become the DC in the Emporia Service Center.

Personnel Added:

- Sarah (Katherine) Sullivan, Civil Engineer, Christiansburg Area Office
- Kelly Ramsey, Hydraulic Engineer, State Office
- Jeffrey Blakley, Public Affairs Specialist, State Office
- Clarimer Hernandez Vargas, State Resource Conservationist, State Office

Detailed/Acting:

- Greg Meade, District Conservationist in the North Tazewell Service Center, is acting DC in the Abingdon Service Center.
- Rex Rexrode, District Conservationist in the Culpeper Service Center, is acting DC in the Verona Service Center.
- Andrew Faison, District Conservationist in the Dinwiddie Service Center, is acting DC in the Courtland Service Center.
- Benjamin Young, Soil conservationist in the Accomac Service Center, is now acting District Conservationist in the same office.
- Trenton Howell, District Conservationist in the Chesapeake Service Center, has **completed** his detail as acting DC in the Courtland Service Center.
- Rachel Loveday, Area Resource Conservationist in Farmville Area Office, has **completed** her detail as acting State Resource Conservationist in the State Office.

Attachment B

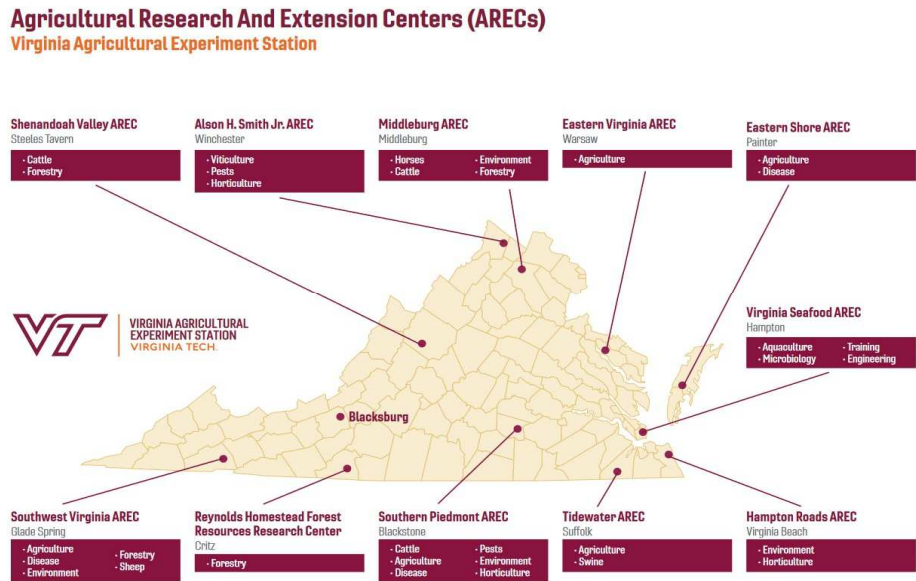
Virginia Cooperative Extension Report

December 2023

Virginia Agricultural Experiment Stations

The Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station conducts research on food and fiber systems, their impact on the environment, and their relation to the future needs of Virginia, the nation, and the world. There are 11 Agricultural Research and Extension Centers in the Commonwealth of Virginia affiliated with the Virginia Tech Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Natural Resources and Environment, and the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine. In addition, Virginia State University owns and operates Randolph Farm, the site of important research and Extension activities.

AREC faculty and staff, along with faculty based at the main campus, deliver research and Extension programs at these sites, which represent the commonwealth's diversity and take advantage of the unique characteristics and challenges found in each location. The ARECs serve not only as field-research sites and field laboratories for undergraduate and graduate students, but also as program sites for producers, school groups, and the state's citizens.



As part of this report, I will share two videos that provide an overview and introduction to AREC's in the Virginia's Tidewater region, host site for the 2023 VASWCD and Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board meetings.

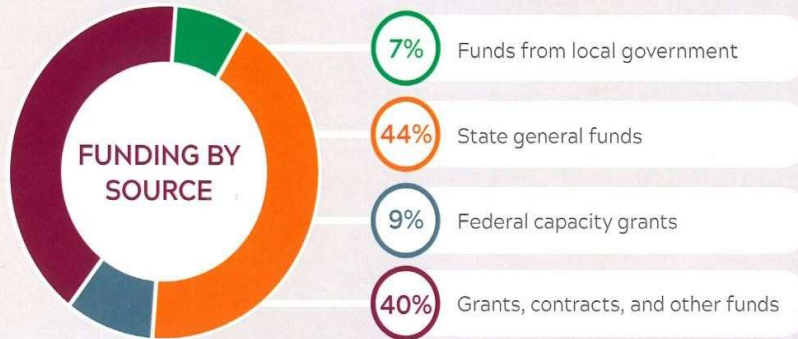
Agency 229

Together, VAES and Virginia Cooperative Extension are known as Agency 229 for budget purposes. The partnership between VAES and VCE creates a highly effective means for communicating and teaching new techniques with instant and lasting impact in local communities.

EXTENSION AND RESEARCH FUNDING

(FUNDING SOURCES FOR FY2020)

Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station received \$171,985,370 from federal, state, and local government, as well as from grants, contracts, and other sources.



LOCATION OF RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PERSONNEL



20% Amount of Virginia's agricultural productivity that comes from investment in research and Extension



\$1.29

ADDITIONAL AMOUNT OF FUNDING

Agency 229 generates for every \$1 the state invests

VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS



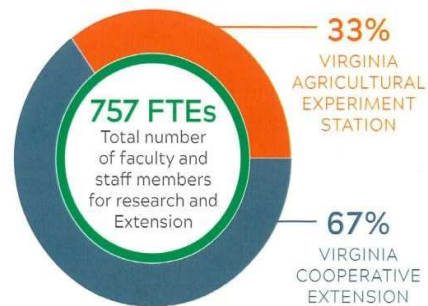
In 2019, Virginia Cooperative Extension volunteers assisted in delivering education programs. These volunteers contributed

1,164,939 hours of service valued at

\$33,154,164*

* Based on Independent Sector 2019 Value of Volunteer Hours by State.

EXTENSION AND RESEARCH EFFORT



HAMPTON ROADS

Agricultural Research and Extension Center



The Hampton Roads AREC addresses water management, pest control, and production practices for horticultural crops and landscapes.

Faculty members work closely with the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association, the Virginia Turfgrass Council, AmericanHort, and the Virginia Strawberry Growers Association, among others. Master Gardener volunteers help maintain the arboretum, butterfly garden, tree trail, and 10 other demonstration gardens that are open to the public.

A plant pathologist addresses nursery diseases and tactics to reduce disease inoculum in recycled irrigation water. A horticulturist utilizes rain gardens and other sustainable techniques to demonstrate water management in landscape settings. Modeling and managing urban stormwater for cities and watersheds in Virginia is a top priority for the AREC's water engineer. An entomologist addresses new insect pests that target nursery crops, while a weed scientist conducts research to control troublesome weed species in ornamentals, turfgrass, and fruit production. The evaluation of new strawberry and blackberry varieties for the region, along with alternatives to methyl bromide fumigation, are under the purview of the AREC's small fruit specialist.

Jeffrey Derr and Adam Nichols conduct turfgrass research at the station in conjunction with their turf team colleagues in Blacksburg. Weed management and cultivar evaluation experiments are conducted each year and are shown at an annual field day in June. Trials are conducted primarily on tall fescue, bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, and St. Augustine.

PARTNER WITH US

1444 Diamond Springs Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23455
(757) 363-3900
www.arec.vaes.vt.edu/arec/hampton-roads

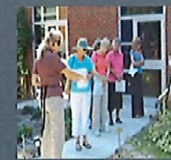


"The environmental horticulture industry acknowledges and appreciates Chuanxue Hong and his research team's dedication to helping nursery and landscape managers better manage boxwood blight. Their work - from using mulch to finding biological controls and developing educational materials - helps ensure that boxwood, the most important evergreen shrub, production and use will continue."



JILL CALABRO, PH.D.
SCIENCE & RESEARCH PROGRAMS DIRECTOR
AMERICANHORT AND HRI

"Laurie Fox and Master Gardener volunteers maintain a wide range of demonstration gardens at the station, including a butterfly garden, tree trail, vegetable garden, annual flower evaluations, and a woody plant arboretum, among other gardens. These gardens are open to the general public and receive thousands of visitors each year."



HAMPTON ROADS AREC AT A GLANCE



DISCIPLINES

- Nursery crops
- Pest management
- Small fruit production
- Stormwater management
- Turfgrass maintenance

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

- Anaerobic soil disinfestation
- Digital image analysis
- Solar-heated greenhouse
- Stormwater modeling
- Use of drones

FACILITIES

- 7 laboratories
- 7 greenhouses
- 3 classrooms
- Container and field research areas

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

- Nursery industry
- Lawn care
- Landscape industry
- Strawberry producers
- City governments

ABOUT THE HAMPTON ROADS AREC

The Hampton Roads AREC conducts research and extension programs that benefit container and field nursery producers, turfgrass managers, landscape maintenance firms, small fruit producers, and local government officials addressing urban stormwater management. The station has a focus on water use, including irrigation efficiency, diseases in recycled water, and offsite movement of nutrients. Faculty members also work with horticultural crops, addressing disease, invasive insects, and weed pests.



A COLLABORATIVE NETWORK

The ARECs are a network of 11 centers strategically located throughout the state that emphasize close working relationships between Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the industries they work with. The mission of the system is to engage in innovative, leading-edge research to discover new scientific knowledge and create and disseminate science-based applications that ensure the wise use of agricultural, natural, and community resources while enhancing quality of life.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg



VT/0121/AREC-252

VIRGINIA SEAFOOD

Agricultural Research and Extension Center



Naser Bayoumy works to improve hatchery live feeds production in support of a growing aquaculture industry. (Photo courtesy of Virginia Sea Grant).

The VSAREC is actively engaged with industry and research partners to address a variety of stakeholder needs. A major pillar of our program is ensuring seafood safety and product quality. We engage in product testing, sanitation, technical assistance, validation of processes, value-added product development, and employee training in an effort to help our stakeholders ensure the quality and safety of their products.

In addition to food and seafood safety, the VSAREC is also involved in aquaculture research and development. Recognized as a center of excellence for live feeds and hatchery production technologies, the VSAREC is venturing further into the microbiology of aquaculture production systems. The aquaculture program is highly adjustable and responsive to stakeholder needs, with the capacity to operate freshwater, brackish, and saltwater systems.

VSAREC programming also covers the areas of economics, business development, and marketing. Current research activities include assessing the regulatory challenges faced by U.S. aquaculture producers at the farm level.

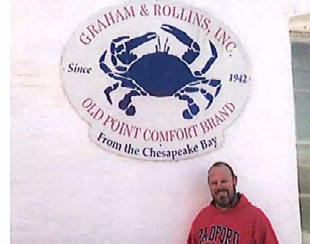
PARTNER WITH US

102 S King Street Hampton, VA 23669
(757) 727-4861
www.ares.vaes.vt.edu/ares/virginia-seafood



“VSAREC Extension and research activities assist our seafood industry at the local, national, and international levels. Our program is focused on using cutting-edge technologies for rapid detection of bacteria and mitigating foodborne illnesses.”

REZA OVISSIPOUR
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
EXTENSION SPECIALIST
FOOD AND SEAFOOD SAFETY



“Virginia Tech is vital to our business. From sanitation practices to validation tests and employee training, they do it all. We are so fortunate to have them as next door neighbors.”

CASEY GRAHAM
VICE-PRESIDENT OF
GRAHAM AND ROLLINS, INC.

VIRGINIA SEAFOOD AREC AT A GLANCE



DISCIPLINES

- Food and seafood safety
- Microbiology
- Process validation
- Engineering
- Green energy
- Aquaculture
- Economics
- Business and marketing

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

- Process validation
- Vibrational spectroscopy
- Nano-bubble and electrolyzed water

FACILITIES

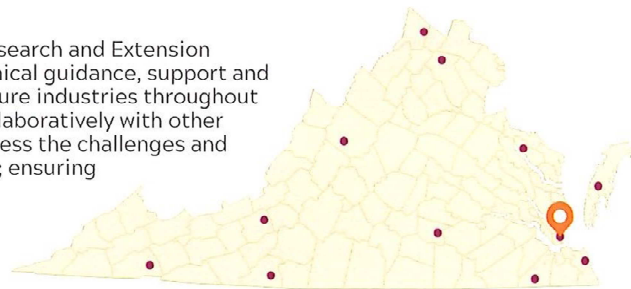
- Microbiology lab
- Recirculating aquaculture systems
- Aquatic habitat systems
- Classroom for teaching and training

INDUSTRY PARTNERS

- Aquaculture
- Seafood processors
- Seafood distributors
- Seafood retailers
- Seafood end-users and consumers

ABOUT THE VIRGINIA SEAFOOD AREC

The mission of the Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center is to provide education, scientific, and technical guidance, support and leadership to the commercial seafood and aquaculture industries throughout Virginia and the United States. Our faculty work collaboratively with other researchers, Extension agents, and industry to address the challenges and needs of our seafood and aquaculture stakeholders; ensuring safe and wholesome seafood for all of us to enjoy.



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