

**Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Wednesday, June 17, 2026
Virginia Transportation Research Council – Research Council Auditorium
Charlottesville, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, June 17, 2026, at the Virginia Transportation Research Council, Research Council Auditorium in Charlottesville, Virginia.

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charles Newton, Chair	John Schick, Vice Chair
Adam Wilson	Jason De La Cruz
Robert Mills	Leigh Pemberton
Kevin Dunn	Stephanie Cornnell
Nick Thomas	Matt Lail, on behalf of Dr. Dan Gorelich
John Womack on behalf of Dr. Edwin Martinez	

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION STAFF PRESENT

Nikki Rovner, DCR Director
Sarah Spota, DCR Deputy Director
Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety, and Floodplain Management
James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager
Breanne Lindsey, Board and Constituent Liaison
Paul Saunders, Senior Policy Analyst
Blair Gordon, District Operations Coordinator
Andrea Henry, Chief Engineer
Nico Robichaud, Policy and Program Assistant
Debbie Cross, DCR
Crystal Lavin, DCR
Olivia Leatherwood, DCR

OTHERS PRESENT

Darrell Kuntz, Office of the Attorney General
Kendall Tyree, VASWCD
Meghan Jones, VASWCD Intern
Anne Coates, TJSWCD
Luke Longanecker, TJSWCD
Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Melissa Allen, JMSWCD

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With nine (9) members of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board present a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Newton called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. and asked for introductions.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM APRIL 15, 2026

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Pemberton moved to approve the April 17, 2026, Board meeting minutes as amended. Ms. Cornell seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornell, De La Cruz, Dunn, Mills, Newton, Pemberton, Schick, Thomas, and Wilson.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT – *Nikki Rovner, DCR Director*

Director Rovner briefed the Board on the status of the state budget, noting that although it had not yet been finalized, there is optimism that a completed budget would be adopted in the coming weeks.

She reflected on her tenure with the agency to date, highlighting what she has learned about its many programs and divisions, including Natural Heritage, Virginia State Parks, planning and recreation, administration, finance, procurement, and other units that provide both internal and external services. Director Rovner also acknowledged the important work of the divisions responsible for soil and water conservation, dam safety, and floodplain management.

She announced that Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, will retire on August 1, 2026, and expressed appreciation for his years of dedicated service and significant contributions to the agency and the Commonwealth. Mr. Glover thanked Director Rovner and shared that during his 43 years of service, it has been a pleasure to work with the Board and its predecessors.

DAM SAFETY DIVISION REPORT – *Andrea Henry, Chief Engineer*

Ms. Henry provided the division report on dam safety.

- Schnabel has created a new Emergency Action Plan (EAP) template, incorporating review checklists, tabletop exercise guidelines, and owner instructions, with input from DCR Dam Safety and Soil and Water staff, VDEM, local emergency managers, and consulting engineers. They are using the template to update six EAPs, emphasizing reorganized content for emergency managers and new action sheets outlining short-term measures to prevent dam failure during Stage I or II activations. The project is expected to be completed by July 2026 and the updated format will be considered during the upcoming regulatory revisions.
- DCR Dam Safety staff conducted an impact analysis of the proposed incremental damage assessment methodology on 16 dams. Staff found similar but slightly more conservative results for hazard reductions, which would allow greater spillway design flood reductions; these findings will also inform regulatory updates.

- FEMA's 2024 HHPD grant is supporting nine high-hazard dam owners, with eight projects moving through FEMA review and one deemed ineligible. Funding is anticipated to return in 2027.
- For this year's grant round, the Dam Safety Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund received 111 applications requesting over \$19 million, with proposed awards for 10 Type I and 7 Type II grants.
- Additionally, Justin Deel has been appointed Lead Dam Safety Engineer and will oversee daily regional engineering operations as the program expands to six regions in July.
- Finally, 25 dams remain on DCR's pre-enforcement list, with one recently removed after receiving an agricultural exemption.

APPROVAL OF PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE DAM SAFETY, FLOOD PREVENTION AND PROTECTION ASSISTANCE FUND AND PROVIDE EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN PRACTICES FROM REAPPLYING FOR THE NEXT GRANT PERIOD – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the projects funded by the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention, and Protection Assistance Fund along with an exception for the Board to consider.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Mills made the following motion:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approves the 17 grant applications, with an approval amount of \$4,964,092.69, as recommended by the Department.

Approval of these grants is conditioned on the following:

1. All grants are made on a reimbursement basis and will be governed by a Grant Agreement developed in consultation with the Virginia Resources Authority. All applicants will be given a period of 90 days to enter into a Grant Agreement following the Agreement being sent. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (Department) is authorized to further extend this date in its discretion and following consultation with VRA.
2. All grant agreements will require that projects be completed within 24 months of the date of execution of the Agreement. Upon receipt of a written request for a project extension with a specified completion date by the Grantee to the Department with a copy to VRA, the Department is authorized to consider such request and may amend the terms of the Agreement and allow a specified extension upon the Department's and the Authority's written approval. Extension requests must be received by the Department not later than 90 days prior to the expiration of the original agreement or grant funds are subject to rescission at the Department's discretion. No extensions shall exceed an additional year without specific Board approval.
3. In the event that any of the above applicants fail to execute a Grant Agreement with VRA within 90 days of such an Agreement being sent to the applicant, the Department, in consultation with VRA, is authorized to rescind those grant funds and allocate in subsequent grant rounds.

The Department is authorized to communicate this approval to the Virginia Resources Authority (VRA) so that VRA's review of applications may proceed. The Department is also authorized to take any action necessary to proceed with the closing and administration of grants subsequent to VRA's approval of the application.

Additionally, for the 85 applications that have been deemed eligible to receive funding, but were not recommended due to insufficient funds in this grant round, the Board waives the requirement to reapply for funding in the 2027 grant round. These applications are not guaranteed funding and will be scored against any other applications that are received in the future grant round.

Mr. Pemberton seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornnell, De La Cruz, Dunn, Mills, Newton, Pemberton, Schick, Thomas, and Wilson.

APPROVAL OF NOTICE OF INTENDED REGULATORY ACTION (NOIRA) FOR IMPOUNDING STRUCTURE REGULATIONS (4VAC50-20) – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided the Board with an overview of the regulatory sections that will be reviewed.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Pemberton made the following motion:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board authorizes the Department to convene a regulatory advisory panel to make recommendations on potential regulatory changes, to hold other stakeholder group meetings as it deems necessary, and to prepare a draft proposed regulation and any associated documents for the Board's review and consideration. The Board directs the Department to conduct these activities in accordance with the Administrative Process Act, Executive Order 19 (2022), and all other applicable laws, policies, and procedures. Additionally, the Board authorizes the Department to coordinate, as necessary, with the Office of Regulatory Management and other reviewing agencies to develop any additional documents needed to file this Notice of Intended Regulatory Action.

Mr. Mills seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornnell, De La Cruz, Dunn, Mills, Newton, Pemberton, Schick, Thomas, and Wilson.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DIVISION REPORT – *James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation*

Mr. Martin provided the report for the soil and water conservation division.

Mr. Martin informed the Board that agency staff continue to collaborate with and support the Joint Legislative Audit and Legislative Review Commission (JLARC) in its review of the VACS program. JLARC is currently interviewing district staff, district directors, and other stakeholders, and a producer survey will be released once finalized. The survey results will be incorporated into the JLARC report.

He reported that development of the Conservation Application Suite (CAS) is progressing, with enhancements made to the nutrient management module at the end of April. To support planners

working in areas with limited internet access, an import/export tool was added, enabling offline work that can later be uploaded into the system. An infrastructure project supporting CAS has also been completed. CAS has now entered phase three, which focuses on improvements to mapping, general assistance, certification tracking, and the financial module.

Mr. Martin noted that the Nutrient Management Training and Certification Regulations Regulatory Advisory Panel (RAP) held its third meeting on May 20. Recommended changes from the RAP (Regulatory Advisory Panel) are being incorporated into the regulations and the Standards and Criteria document, with proposed amendments scheduled for presentation to the Board in September.

Finally, he reported that the Alliance to Advance Climate Smart Agriculture Project, conducted in partnership with the agency, several districts, and Virginia Tech, has completed its third application cycle in Virginia. A fourth cycle will be opened to allocate the remaining grant funds; it will be focused on cover crop practices for fall implementation.

APPROVAL OF FUNDING FOR DISTRICT DAM REHABILITATION PROJECT– *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the funding from the Water Quality Improvement Fund for a rehabilitation project at Leatherwood Creek #5 for the Board to consider.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Pemberton made the following motion:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approves \$22,996,000 in funding for the rehabilitation project at Leatherwood Creek Dam #5. The Board authorizes additional funding of up to 5% of the total project cost for any project contingencies.

Mr. Wilson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornnell, De La Cruz, Dunn, Mills, Newton, Pemberton, Schick, Thomas, and Wilson.

APPROVAL OF CORRECTION TO FISCAL YEAR 2027 VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL COST-SHARE MANUAL – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided background information and prior action taken by the Board regarding the FY 2027 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Manual.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Cornnell made the following motion:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approves these corrections to the 2027 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share BMP Manual.

Mr. Wilson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornnell, De La Cruz, Dunn, Mills, Newton, Pemberton, Schick, Thomas, and Wilson.

APPROVAL OF DESKTOP PROCEDURES FOR DISTRICT OPERATIONS – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the desktop procedures.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Mills made the following motion:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approves the 2026 Desktop Procedures for District Operations as presented by the Department. The Department is authorized to make nonsubstantive changes to include formatting and stylistic changes as necessary to the document.

Ms. Cornnell seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornnell, De La Cruz, Dunn, Mills, Newton, Pemberton, Schick, Thomas, and Wilson.

APPROVAL OF DISTRICT APPOINTMENTS AND RESIGNATIONS – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

The Board reviewed the following Soil and Water Conservation District Director resignation:

Appomattox River

Resignation of Mr. Michael Storrs, of Petersburg, effective 5/27/2026, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

Colonial

Resignation of Mr. Tim Beale, of York County, effective 5/31/2026, at-large appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2026).

Evergreen

Appointment of Mr. Clegg Williams, of Smyth County, effective 6/17/2026, to fill the vacant at large director position (term of office expires 12/31/2026).

Mr. Williams is a local farmer. He also serves as the Assistance County Administrator, working closely with the erosion and sediment and stormwater management programs.

Lord Fairfax

Resignation of Mr. Jack Owens, of Frederick County, effective 5/29/2026, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

Resignation of Mr. Robert “Bobby” Clark, of Shenandoah County, effective 6/30/2026, extension agent director (term of office expires 12/31/2028).

Appointment of Ms. Cynthia Fairbanks, of Warren County, effective 7/1/2026, to fill the vacant unexpired extension agent director (term of office expires 12/31/2028).

Piedmont

Recognition of the passing of Mr. Juan Whittington, of Amelia County, 5/21/2026, at-large appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2026).

New River

Recognition of the passing of Mr. Pete Farmer, of Galax, 2/7/2026, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

Robert E. Lee

Resignation of Ms. Joetricia Humbles, of Appomattox County, effective 4/23/2026, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

Appointment of Mr. Glenn Dye, of Appomattox County, effective 6/17/2026, to fill the vacant elected director position (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

Mr. Dye has been serving as an Associate Director since November 2025. He is a certified crop advisor and Virginia nutrient management plan writer. He is the winner of the Clean Water Farm Award from both Tri-County/City SWCD and Robert E. Lee SWCD, and was the 2020 runner up for the American Farm Bureau Federation National Achievement Award. He is the current President of the Appomattox County Farm Bureau and is a member of the VANTAGE board. He's a past president of the Soybean Growers Association.

Appointment of Mr. Kahlial Smith, of Amherst County, effective 6/17/2026, to fill the vacant elected director position (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

Mr. Smith is the Executive Assistant and Youth Pastor at Providence Transformation International Church and is an Instructional Assistant at Sandusky Middle School. He is very involved in the Virginia Young Democrats Black Caucus and serves as the Co-Vice President for the Central Virginia Young Democrats. He graduated from Amherst High School in 2025 and is currently enrolled at New Hampshire University. He is looking forward to being a leader in his community.

BOARD ACTION

After review, Mr. Wilson made the following motion: The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approves the appointments of the individuals being recommended.

Ms. Cornnell seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornnell, Dunn, Mills, Pemberton, Schick, and Wilson.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business for the Board to consider.

NEW BUSINESS – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

The Board received a letter from the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (TJSWCD) requesting improvements to the Virginia Agricultural Cost Share Program to ensure more consistent implementation and verification of cover crops across all Districts. The District noted that differences in interpretation and administration among Districts have created inconsistencies for both producers and staff. They asked the Board, in coordination with DCR, to consider developing clearer statewide guidance, standardized verification protocols, staff training opportunities, enhanced oversight measures, and engagement of experienced District staff in this process.

The District emphasized that greater consistency would help ensure equitable treatment of producers, strengthen confidence in reported conservation outcomes, and support the effective use of public funds. They expressed appreciation for the Board's leadership and offered to assist further as improvements for program year 2027 are considered.

The Board held an in-depth discussion regarding the letter from the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District, with several members sharing their experiences with the cover crop program. The discussion highlighted the need for additional training and further clarification of program requirements to ensure consistent implementation across all Districts. The Board agreed to establish a smaller working group to review the recommendations outlined in the letter, along with suggestions raised by Board members. This group will consist of Mr. Dunn, Mr. Pemberton, and Ms. Cornnell.

BOARD ACTION

The Board discussed the agricultural BMP standards. After discussion, Mr. Mills made a motion to implement the following language:

"A good stand and good growth of vegetative winter cover must be obtained by January 1 to protect the area from nutrient leaching and runoff in the fall and winter. All cover crop plantings must maintain a minimum of 60% cover crop plant material on the enrolled acres from January 1 through the lifespan of the practice. District staff will conduct field visits no later than January 31 to verify required cover has been established."

Ms. Cornnell seconded the motion, which was approved by: Cornnell, De La Cruz, Dunn, Mills, Newton Schick, Thomas and Wilson.

Mr. Pemberton opposed the motion.

PARTNER REPORTS

Natural Resources Conservation Service – John Womack

Mr. Womack gave the report for the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Virginia Cooperative Extension – Matt Lail, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Mr. Lail gave the report for the Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts – Dr. Kendall Tryree, VASWCD Executive Director

Dr. Tyree gave the report for the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETINGS

The Board discussed scheduling its next meeting, which will be held in July. Ms. Watlington Jones requested that Board members complete the scheduling survey that Ms. Lindsey distributed following the meeting.

Mr. Mills also provided additional information regarding the Board's planned field visit to his farm in September.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 1:34 p.m.