

**Agricultural Needs Assessment Workgroup
Thursday, August 6, 2026
Virginia Farm Bureau Federation – Auditorium
Richmond, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 10:35 a.m. on Thursday, August 6, 2026, at the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation Auditorium in Richmond, Virginia.

AGRICULTURAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Jim Ridell, Virginia Cattlemen's Association
Trey Davis, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Norah Carlos, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Tom Dunlap, James River Association
David Reynolds, House Appropriations Committee
Eric Messick, Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations
Jay Ford, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Kendall Tyree, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Nikki Rover, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Sarah Spota, Deputy Director, DCR
James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager
Nico Robichaud, Policy and Program Assistant

OTHERS PRESENT

Lauren Axselle, Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

James Martin called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m. and asked for introductions.

REVIEW OF CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN PROGRESS

Mr. Martin reviewed agricultural best management practice (BMP) implementation levels for calendar years 2021 through 2025, based on the most recently finalized Chesapeake Bay Program progress run (2025). The group discussed year-over-year changes in implementation for several practice categories, including cover crops, conservation tillage, buffers and livestock exclusion, poultry litter transport, and tree planting. Several notable year-to-year swings in the data were discussed, with staff noting that some may reflect reporting or data-entry inconsistencies (for example, units reported in feet versus acres) that

will be reviewed further. The group also discussed practice lifespans and the assumed 3 percent annual loss rate used in the model, agreeing that the current assumption remains reasonable.

UPDATED COST ESTIMATES

Mr. Martin presented updated per-unit implementation cost estimates. These costs were calculated using a three-year rolling average of Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) program data (Program Years 2023 through 2025) and were supplemented by Conservation Application Suite (CAS) cost estimates for practices with limited VACS enrollment history. Costs were adjusted for inflation. The group discussed year-to-year cost variability for certain practices.

DISCUSSION OF IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

The group discussed extending the agricultural implementation horizon used in the assessment from 2027 to 2030. Mr. Martin noted that this shift would need to be reviewed by the Secretaries of Natural and Historic Resources and of Agriculture and Forestry to ensure consistency with § 62.1-44.119:1. The group discussed several alternative approaches, including addressing the 2027 shortfall directly, allowing implementation to extend into 2028, or extending the full implementation horizon to 2030. Mr. Martin was asked to prepare an alternatives analysis for further consideration.

SOUTHERN RIVERS TMDL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Mr. Martin presented a new cost estimate for agricultural BMP implementation needed to meet local Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements outside the Chesapeake Bay watershed (the Southern Rivers), using a methodology consistent with the Bay analysis. The preliminary estimate for the Southern River needs was approximately \$862 million. Staff noted that most local TMDLs in this area address bacteria (E. coli) rather than nitrogen and phosphorus. These TMDLs call for a different mix of practices, primarily runoff reduction, storage, and livestock exclusion practices.

STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING SPLIT

The group discussed the assumed state and federal cost-share split used in the assessment. Staff proposed adjusting the longstanding 40 percent state / 35 percent federal assumption to better reflect recent actual federal (NRCS) funding levels. A revised split in the range of 57 percent state / 18 percent federal was suggested. The group also discussed whether additional federal and partner funding sources, such as the Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) program and other multi-state or Virginia Tech-led initiatives should be included into the federal funding baseline, and asked staff to gather further data on these programs.

FY2028 FUNDING NEED ESTIMATE

Based on the assumptions discussed, staff presented a preliminary estimate of approximately \$147 million in additional funding needed for FY2028, beyond unobligated funds rolled forward from prior years. The total estimated need for FY2028 cost-share and technical assistance program is \$271.3 million. The group discussed District obligation trends and capacity constraints, and the importance of continued advocacy for increased federal Bay funding.

NEXT STEPS

Staff agreed to continue refining the assessment, including gathering additional data on federal and partner-funded implementation, updating the spreadsheet with revised percentages, and circulating the updated materials to the group for review and comment.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.