

**Invasive Species Working Group
Friday, July 17, 2026
Patrick Henry Building - Richmond, Virginia**

Working Group Members Present

The Honorable David L. Bulova, Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Chair
Ben Rowe, Deputy Secretary, on behalf of the Honorable Katie K. Frazier, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Vice Chair
Ryan Brown, Director, Department of Wildlife Resources
Jason Ericson, Director of Environmental Services, Dominion Energy
Terry Lasher, State Forester, Department of Forestry
Charles Green, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Joseph Grist, Commissioner, Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Brad Copenhaver, Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association
David L. Davis, on behalf of Dr. Mike Rolband, Director, Department of Environmental Quality
Nikki Rovner, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Tracy Woodall, on behalf of Dr. B. Cameron Webb, Commissioner, Department of Health
Dr. Carrie Fearer, on behalf of Dr. Jacob Barney, Virginia Tech, Department of Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science

Working Group Members Absent

Steven C. Brich, Commissioner, Department of Transportation
Dr. Derek Aday, Director, Virginia Institute of Marine Science

Others Present

Frank Stovall, DCR
Lesley Starke, DCR
Kevin Heffernan, DCR
Joshua Ellington, DCR
Lisa McGee, DCR
Breanne Lindsey, DCR
Emi Endo, DCR
AG Sweany, DCR
Lindsay Caplan, DCR
Laura Taylor, PRISM
Rod Walker, PRISM
Katlin Dewitt, DOF
Lori Chamberlin, DOF
David Rudders, VIMS
David Gianino, VDACS
Joel Maddux, VDACS
Nijel Christie, VDACS
Hannah Schul, DWR

WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Secretary Bulova called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM and called for introductions.

PRESENTATION OF FY26 STATE AGENCY ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPORT

Ms. Dewitt (DOF), Mr. Heffernan (DCR), Ms. Schul (DWR), and Mr. Gianino (VDACS) provided an overview of their respective agencies' FY26 activities related to invasive species management. Their updates included efforts to engage and assist landowners, conduct outreach and education, support provided to Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM), and strengthen interagency coordination and collaboration.

The Working Group discussed the agencies' accomplishments and opportunities to enhance future reporting. Secretary Bulova inquired about the number of state-owned properties that are free of invasive species and recommended tracking this metric in future reports to measure progress.

The Working Group also discussed the role of Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISMs) in supporting invasive species management, particularly on private lands. Members noted the importance of PRISMs in providing landowner assistance and regional coordination and discussed the funding needed to expand PRISM capacity and support homeowner assistance programs. Agency staff provided updates on the progress of existing PRISMs and the development of additional PRISMs throughout the Commonwealth.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 2025

WORKGROUP ACTION

DWR Director Brown moved to approve the September 17, 2026, meeting minutes. VMRC Commissioner Grist seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Brown, Bulova, Copenhaver, Davis, Ericson, Fearer, Green, Grist, Lasher, Rowe, Rovner, and Woodall.

REPORTS ON 2026 CHANGES IN INVASIVE SPECIES LAWS

VDACS – Changes to Noxious Weed Law – Commissioner Charles Green

Commissioner Green informed the Working Group that HB 109 requires the Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services to evaluate DCR's invasive plant list for potential designation as noxious weeds under the amended statute and to submit a progress report and recommendations to the General Assembly by November 1, 2026.

DCR – Volunteer Herbicide Applicators – Joshua Ellington, State Parks Chief of Resource Management

Mr. Ellington provided an overview of invasive species management at Virginia State Parks, highlighting the use of drones and a new invasive species tracking system to improve monitoring and treatment efforts. The tracking system records invasive species occurrences and treatment data, including the extent of affected acreage, treatment methods, chemicals used, and management outcomes.

Mr. Ellington reported that four drones are currently being used to monitor invasive species and collect data to evaluate treatment costs per acre for aerial, aquatic, ground-applied, and mechanical control methods. These efforts have been implemented in coordination with the DOF and VDACS.

Mr. Ellington also highlighted the significant contribution of volunteers, who provided a total of 196,043 service hours at Virginia State Parks in 2025. Volunteer activities included trail maintenance and natural resource stewardship. The work addressing invasive species included surveys, hand-pulling, and hand-cutting invasive species projects. He noted that staff are evaluating opportunities to further optimize volunteer engagement and ensure their efforts are used effectively to support invasive species management.

DCR – Powers of Service Districts and Invasive Plant Control – Kevin Heffernan, Invasive Species Coordinator

Mr. Heffernan provided an overview of service districts as a mechanism for supporting invasive species management at the local level. He explained that localities may establish individual service districts or collaborate to create regional districts encompassing multiple localities. These districts provide a means for local governments to generate funding dedicated to invasive species prevention and control efforts.

Mr. Heffernan also noted that Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISMs) can assist localities in establishing service districts by providing technical information on invasive species management and guidance on developing and implementing regional PRISM partnerships.

VDOT – Highway Rights-of-Way and Invasive Plants – Kevin Heffernan, Invasive Species Coordinator, DCR

Mr. Heffernan provided an update on recent legislation affecting invasive species management, including implementation of HB 88, enacted by the 2026 General Assembly. The legislation prohibits VDOT from planting species included on DCR's invasive species list, requires the development of a plan to manage invasive species along state highways, and directs VDOT to consult with the Working Group in developing that plan, which is due to be reported to the General Assembly by December 1, 2026.

REPORT ON THE INVASIVE SPECIES RETAIL SIGNAGE LAW

Commissioner Green provided an update on the invasive species retail signage law, noting that approval of the associated guidance document was delayed. The guidance document is currently under review by the Governor's Office and will provide direction for implementing the required invasive species signage in retail establishments.

COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON NEEDS AND NEXT STEPS, OR LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

Secretary Bulova invited Working Group members to share feedback on next steps, legislative initiatives, and future agenda items.

- Mr. Davis (DEQ), speaking on behalf of Director Rolband, stated that he does not have recommendations for future Working Group activities, but DEQ is interested in collaborating with DCR staff on invasive species training for DEQ staff.
- Director Brown (DWR) emphasized that additional funding will be essential to support the agency's efforts to address invasive species.

- Commissioner Grist (VMRC) shared that VMRC is working to address invasive species on waterfront properties by educating landowners.
- Mr. Lasher (DOF), State Forester, reiterated the importance of stable state funding, noting that while DOF has received federal funding, those funding levels may fluctuate.
- Mr. Copenhagen (VNLA) announced that the 2026 VNLA Field Day will be held on July 30, 2026. He expressed appreciation for VNLA's partnerships with PRISM groups and for the opportunity to participate in discussions related to the invasive species retail signage law.
- Commissioner Green (VDACS) stated that he will report back to the Working Group on the noxious weeds law in relation to the report due to the General Assembly on November 1, 2026.
- Director Rovner (DCR) deferred to DCR staff for comments. Mr. Stovall emphasized the importance of funding and public education regarding invasive species, and Mr. Heffernan echoed those remarks. Ms. Starke reminded the Working Group that the Invasive Species Management Plan, developed by the Working Group and advisory members, provides a clear framework of recommended actions. Secretary Bulova encouraged members to review the plan and consider discussing priorities for the next several years at a future meeting.
- Mr. Ericson (Dominion Energy) expressed Dominion Energy's continued support for the Working Group and offered the company's assistance with future efforts.
- Dr. Fearer (VT), speaking on behalf of Dr. Barney, reported that the Invasive Species Collaborative (ISC) is adding a sixth staff member dedicated to invasive species work, focusing on economics, further expanding its capacity. She also noted that VT is entering its fifth year of funding to identify invasive species threats and support research through grants for faculty and students. Additionally, she highlighted the Spring Symposium was an opportunity to educate the public on invasive species efforts led by VT and its state agency partners.
- Ms. Woodall (VDH), speaking on behalf of Dr. Webb, encouraged agency staff to contact VDH if they encounter public health concerns while conducting invasive species work.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Two representatives from Blue Ridge PRISM provided public comment regarding ongoing efforts to assist VDOT with invasive species research. They also encouraged the Working Group to discuss approaches used by other states to address invasive species and explore opportunities to recruit additional volunteers to support education, outreach, and management efforts.

Mr. Dave Ruthers (VIMS) shared information on blue catfish management and discussed factors that may help inform future invasive species efforts. He informed the Working Group that VIMS has a great team of people to assist with resources related to fisheries science studies by the Commonwealth.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:47 AM.