

VASWCD 2026 Legislative Agenda

*Providing and promoting leadership in the
conservation of natural resources*



1. SWCD Operations

- Increase operating funding by \$3 million annually to maintain staffing and training needs of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

2. Agriculture BMPs

- Establish a dedicated funding source for Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund (VNRCF) to support agricultural cost-share programs in alignment with needs assessment.



3. Urban Conservation



- Provide \$8 million over the biennium to support and expand the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)



4. Environmental Education

- Fund \$4 million annually to support SWCD-led conservation and environmental education programs statewide



5. Septic System Support

- Create a statewide annual cost-share program for septic repairs, replacements, and maintenance to reduce nutrient and bacteria loads in waterways

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- 1. Increase Operating Funding to Soil and Water Conservation Districts by \$3 million annually, consistent with full funding of the aggregated, peer-reviewed Attachment D Budget Template requests.** Soil and Water Conservation Districts are the local program delivery mechanism for nonpoint source pollution control throughout the Commonwealth. The minimum funding level necessary is shown on the Attachment D Budget Template submitted by SWCDs to DCR every two years. Without this basic level of sustained funding, Conservation Districts will find it especially difficult to retain highly trained, experienced, and skilled employees who are the primary delivery mechanism for programs to meet the Commonwealth's water quality goals established by the Governor and General Assembly. Conservation Districts are needed and play a key role as Virginia intensifies its efforts to reduce nonpoint sources of pollution throughout the Commonwealth and to meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL. In the efforts to reduce nonpoint sources of pollution intensity, District funding needs to be adequate to address the needs not only for projects but also for the administrative and staffing needs to ensure accountability needs can be fully met according to the required Desktop Procedures Manual.
- 2. Establish a dedicated, adequate, secure, and stable source of funding for the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund (VNRCF) commensurate with the most recent Agricultural Needs Assessment Report and the Chesapeake Bay & Virginia Waters Clean Up Plan Report that provides funding at 60/40 split between Chesapeake Bay and Southern Rivers (Outside the Chesapeake Bay).** Historically, the VNRCF has been funded on a year-to-year basis, often times relying entirely on unpredictable, year-end, state budget surplus. We support the creation of a dedicated revenue source for those on-the-ground practices (BMPs) and the retention of certified professional employees representing front-line efforts to meet Virginia's challenges outlined by the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP). More than twenty years after the creation of the Water Quality Improvement Act and more than fifteen years after the creation of the VNRCF, Virginia's commitments to the WIP and TMDL are highly reliant on high-performing SWCDs. To carry out district responsibilities, the retention and adequate compensation, commensurate with the workload, of seasoned, highly valued, and highly competent technical assistance employees are not only the top priority for conservation districts but an essential ingredient to Virginia's success.
- 3. Enhance support to the (VCAP) Urban Cost Share Programs to address WIP and TMDL needs. Support funding at \$8 million over the biennium.** Urban programs complement the Agricultural BMP Cost Share Program. SWCDs currently have qualified, trained, and experienced staff and are well-positioned and capable of implementing a wide range of voluntary urban BMP cost share and tax credit programs for private commercial and residential landowners. Virginia's Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan recognizes a need for urban/residential BMPs in its "Local Implementation Strategies for Urban/Suburban Source Sector," including a cost-share program strategy. We support increased/sustained funding of this valuable program.
- 4. Support Funding for Environmental Education. Provide \$4 million annually in funding so that all Districts statewide can effectively foster and/or sustain conservation and environmental education programs.** Educating communities on the need for soil and water conservation and natural resource management is a critical component in the successful implementation of NPS pollution reduction programs. We support \$4 million, the aggregated total amount in the most recent Attachment D Budget Template, to support SWCDs environmental education efforts.
- 5. Establish and Maintain Annual Cost Share Funding Program on a Statewide Level for Septic Repairs, Replacements, and Maintenance needs, (including pump-outs), to address CB WIP needs.** Funds are needed in TMDL areas as well as non-TMDL areas, and in the Coastal Zone as well as in the inland areas of the State. Failing septic systems result in an increased loading of bacteria, viruses, nitrogen, and possibly phosphorus to adjacent waterways. They may contribute as much as 6% of the total nitrogen load in the Chesapeake Bay (Bay Watershed Model 2009 Scenario, Chesapeake Bay TMDL).