

**Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Wednesday, April 15, 2026
Pocahontas State Park – Swift Creek Banquet Hall
Chesterfield, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, April 15, 2026, at Pocahontas State Park, Swift Creek Banquet Hall in Chesterfield, Virginia.

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

John Schick, Vice Chair

Robert Mills

Kevin Dunn

Dr. Dan Goerlich, VCE, Invitee

Adam Wilson

Leigh Pemberton

Stephanie Cornell

Dr. Edwin Martinez, NRCS, Ex Officio

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Charles Newton, Chair

Jason De La Cruz

Nick Thomas

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

Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager

Dave Neudeck, Public Communications & Marketing Director

Breanne Lindsey, Board and Constituent Liaison

Paul Saunders, Senior Policy Analyst

Blair Gordon, District Operations Coordinator

Nico Robichaud, Policy and Program Assistant

Matt Sabas, Senior Public Relations & Marketing Specialist

Sara Bottenfield, DCR Ag Incentives Program Manager

OTHERS PRESENT

Amy Walker, Colonial SWCD

Kendall Tyree, VASWCD

Jake Tabor, Farm Bureau

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With six (6) members of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board present a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Vice Chairman Schick called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and asked for introductions.

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

Director Rovner provided the Board with an update on the state budget, noting that a budget has not yet been finalized but expressing optimism that one will be in place soon. She advised that, if the budget is adopted in a timely manner, the next Board meeting is scheduled for June 17, at which time the Board will be able to complete funding allocations for the Soil and Water Districts.

Director Rovner also informed the Board that this year marks the 100th anniversary of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), whose predecessor agency was established in 1926. As part of the anniversary celebration, Governor Spanberger recently visited DCR's Richmond office. The agency plans to continue commemorating this milestone throughout the year with events across the Commonwealth, including recognition of DCR staff for their contributions. In addition, this year marks the 90th anniversary of State Parks and the 40th anniversary of the Natural Heritage Program. Director Rovner noted that these milestones will be celebrated in coordination with the boards, including the Soil and Water Conservation Board, and encouraged members to share any ideas for commemorating these occasions.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM MARCH 20, 2026

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Pemberton moved to approve the March 20, 2026, Board meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Mills seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornell, Dunn, Mills, Pemberton, Schick, and Wilson.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DIVISION REPORT – *Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety, and Floodplain Management*

Mr. Glover provided the division report on behalf of James Martin, Director of the Division of Soil and Water Conservation.

Grant Update

The enrollment period for the Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture grant is currently underway, with the applications being accepted between April 1 and April 30. Two program options are available. The general program provides \$100 per acre for the implementation of a single eligible practice on up to 120 acres per producer; eligible practices include pasture and hay planting, nutrient management, and grazing management. The pasture renovation option offers a more comprehensive approach, allowing producers to implement all three practices on up to 50 acres, with a payment rate of \$300 per acre.

Draft Conservation Planning Curriculum

The Department is continuing to accept comments on the draft Conservation Planning Curriculum, which was developed in response to comments and concerns raised by individual Districts and the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Employees Association. This opportunity for input has been announced at area meetings held throughout the state.

Dam Safety Information

Mr. Glover informed the Board that, if the June 17 meeting proceeds as anticipated, Department staff will present the results of the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention, and Protection Assistance Fund grant cycle. He noted that a record number of 111 applications were received, requesting a total of \$19 million, while \$5 million is available for awards this year.

APPROVAL OF THE BOARD’S FISCAL YEAR 2027 VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL COST-SHARE (VACS) BMP MANUAL – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided the Board with an overview of a revision needed in response to changes by the IRS related to the issuance of 1099-G forms and outlined two decisions required of the Board concerning the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMP) Manual in relation to the TAC recommendations.

BMP Manual TAC Recommendations Discussion & Board Decision

There were 2 recommendations from the AgBMP TAC that the Department did not support.

1. Bundle Variance

5P	Any combination of BMPs that exceeds the participant cap should be eligible for a variance	<p>Update existing Bundle Variance process in the VACS Guidelines to allow a combination of BMPs, except a combination of only agronomic BMPs, that exceeds the participant cap to be eligible for a variance.</p> <p><i>If the <u>an</u> applicant qualifies for a Variance request and wishes to apply for additional non-Variance-eligible multiple practice(s) in the same Program Year (e.g., a Variance is being requested for a WP-4 that exceeds the participant cap and the participant also wants to apply for cover-crop practices) which in combination exceed the participant cap, the District may request a “Bundle Variance”. A Bundle Variance requests <u>consisting entirely of agronomic practices are not eligible</u> includes one or more Variance-eligible practices as well as non-Variance-eligible practice(s). All practices for consideration under a Bundle Variance must be included in a single request, with all required Variance documentation provided for each</i></p>
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		<i>practice as applicable. The Variance Committee may consider each practice separately for approval of the Variance request.</i>
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Department concern: This changes the variance process to simply be a means to avoid the participant cap, rather than a way for the program to accommodate very costly structural practices.

2. Timber Harvesting

14S	<p>Specify in the program manual the limits on timber harvesting in riparian forest buffers. With some buffers now exceeding the 15 acre payment cap by 20 acres or more and 15-year lifespans in place, it needs to be specific whether tree cutting is prohibited, can only be done for maintenance, select cutting is allowed, or if clear cutting is allowed as long as the forest is replanted, etc., and if part of the buffer can be left out of the practice if it is planned to be harvested during the lifespan. This needs to be clear so staff can inform participants what they are enrolling in and there are no misunderstandings between participants, staff, directors, or DCR.</p>	<p>Update language in SL-6N/W/F, WP-2N/W to restrict timber harvesting within the minimum setback buffer area of the practice:</p> <p>The buffer must be maintained as perennial species for the practice lifespan. <u>Regardless of the actual installed exclusion fence location, timber harvesting is not allowed within the minimum fence setback as approved for the practice, unless otherwise approved by DCR, DOF, and the District.</u> Grazing (including flash grazing) and haying are not allowed in the protected riparian area during the lifespan of this practice.</p>
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Department revised recommendation:

The buffer must be maintained as perennial species for the practice lifespan. Grazing (including flash grazing) and haying are not allowed in the protected riparian area during the lifespan of this practice. If at any time during the practice lifespan the participant is found to be grazing (including flash grazing) their livestock in the buffer, as documented by photographic evidence, the District shall require the repayment of the entire buffer payment (i.e. non-prorated).

i. When both sides of the stream are under the same ownership livestock must be excluded from both sides of the stream.

ii. Regardless of the actual installed exclusion fence location, timber harvesting is not allowed within the minimum fence setback as approved for the practice or within the area receiving a buffer payment, unless otherwise approved by DCR, DOF, and the District. The buffer payment area must be clearly marked with signs, posts, or some other identifiable method if timber harvest is planned in non-payment areas. Harvesting timber within the minimum setback or buffer payment areas will result in required repayment of the buffer payment.

Additional revisions:

The IRS has revised the threshold for issuing 1099 forms. In both the Guidelines section (Page II-36) and the CREP section (VI-9), language need to be revised to reflect the changing threshold. The IRS also anticipates adjusting the threshold each year for inflation.

Districts must provide an Internal Revenue Service Form 1099-G to any individual installing an agricultural practice who receives ~~\$600 or more in~~ payment(s) from cost-share or other funding sources (such as settlement funds) equal to or above the threshold established by the IRS per their federal taxpayer identification number or social security number during the calendar year.

BOARD ACTION

After discussion of the recommendations regarding timber harvesting, Mr. Mills moved to accept the Department's recommended language. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornell, Dunn, Mills, Pemberton, Schick, and Wilson.

After discussion of the recommendations regarding bundle variance, Mr. Pemberton moved to accept the AgBMP TAC's recommendation. Mr. Wilson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornell, Dunn, Mills, Pemberton, Schick, and Wilson.

Mr. Pemberton made the following motion: The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approves the 2027 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share BMP Manual as discussed. The Department is authorized to make non-substantive changes to include formatting and stylistic changes as necessary to all approved sections of the Manual. Mr. Mills seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by: Cornell, Dunn, Mills, Pemberton, Schick, and Wilson.

REVIEW OF BOARD POLICY ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS FUNDING ALLOCATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027 – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Administration and Operations funding allocations for Fiscal Year 2027. She noted that references to the budget will be updated once a final budget is adopted and that revisions have been made to reflect FY2027 rather than FY2026. The budget template includes a request for \$12.8 million in funding which reflects basic administrative costs required to manage a minimal VACS program. No additional funding has been proposed for administration and operations.

Ms. Watlington Jones further explained that in the scenario presented, funding increases for districts were capped at 27.5 percent. While some districts projected a need exceeding that cap, others indicated they could operate with less funding. She advised that the Board will need to take action at its next meeting to approve the funding allocation and determine whether to maintain the current distribution to each district or modify the allocations.

The Board held discussion regarding funding requests and considered their options, with the understanding that a decision will be necessary at the next meeting.

REVIEW OF ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS SUPPORT GRANT AGREEMENT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027 – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the Administration and Operations Support Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2027. She noted that the agreement has been updated to reflect FY2027 rather than FY2026, including corresponding date revisions. The budget template has been reinstated as a required component, with a submission deadline of July 15, 2027, in accordance with every two-year grant deliverable requirement.

Ms. Watlington Jones also highlighted a revision to one of the deliverables, which now requires the full district board to review the Desktop Guide, rather than limiting the review to the Finance Committee. Additionally, Attachment E has been updated.

REVIEW OF BOARD POLICY ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COST-SHARE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FUNDING ALLOCATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027 – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the updates to the Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Cost-Share and Technical Assistance funding allocations for Fiscal Year 2027. She noted that references to the budget will be updated once a final budget is adopted and that the policy has been revised to reflect FY2027 rather than FY2026, including corresponding date changes.

She also explained that clarifying language has been added regarding non-industrial private forest lands. The revision allows an exemption from the \$1,000 requirement when such lands are managed for commercial production in accordance with a plan prepared by a professional forester. This language was discussed with the Department of Forestry.

With respect to funding allocations, Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the draft policy is based on budget language as amended by the House, which reflects a reduction of \$36.2 million in funding for VACS and technical assistance from the introduced budget. These figures will be updated once a final budget is in place. Based on the current draft, the allocations are as follows:

- Total VACS funding: \$304,217,459
- Total funding allocated to individual districts: \$203,465,049
 - Chesapeake Bay (Bay) allocation: \$212,465,049
 - Southern Rivers allocation: \$91,056,450
 - Whole Farm Approach (WFA): \$113,000,000
 - Cost-share implementation: \$100,000,000
 - Technical assistance: \$13,000,000

Ms. Watlington Jones further noted that a nonpoint source assessment was updated for 2026, resulting in changes to the high, medium, and low priority ratings for hydrologic units (HUCs) used to inform funding allocations. She stated that total technical assistance funding, in addition to the technical assistance included within WFA, is \$30,528,225. The Department is recommending that \$1,300,000 in recordation revenue for technical assistance be incorporated into the base technical assistance amount, bringing the total base technical assistance funding available to \$5,850,000.

REVIEW OF COST-SHARE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT AGREEMENT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027 – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2027, noting that the agreement has been updated to reflect FY2027 rather than FY2026, including corresponding date revisions.

She highlighted a clarification to a grant deliverable related to financial data reporting, explaining that one data entry requirement has been separated to ensure that financial data aligns with information in the Conservation Application Suite. Ms. Watlington Jones emphasized that payments should be made promptly and noted that a question had been raised regarding how to handle multiple payment

instances within a single contract. While a producer may prefer to receive a single combined payment, doing so could extend or conflict with the required 30-day payment timeframe.

She also stated that complete and accurate End of Year Cash Balance Reports and Carry Over Reports must be submitted by the established end-of-year reporting deadline.

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

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the Desktop Procedures for District Operations. For the initial comment period, a draft was sent to Districts on February 24, 2026. The comments were requested by March 16, 2026. A call with the Districts was held on April 13, 2026, to discuss the changes and for Department staff to receive additional feedback.

Key Changes Include:

- **Title (Cover Page and Throughout):** Removed the word “Fiscal” to better reflect the document’s broader procedural guidance provided by the Department.
- **Page 2 – Directors:**
 - Added a citation from the Code of Virginia regarding Director compensation.
 - Included language on Associate Director policies and job descriptions, as recommended by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG).
- **Pages 3–4 – Conflict of Interest:**
 - Added a recommendation that all appointed and Associate Directors complete COIA training.
 - Clarified that a quorum remains intact if a Director leaves the room during a discussion or vote due to a COIA conflict (e.g., approval of their own cost-share contract).
- **Page 5 – Board of Directors Meetings:** Added language addressing FOIA requirements, including the posting of final meeting minutes.
- **Page 5 – Committees:** Clarified that the full Board may approve committee meeting minutes if the committee will not meet again in the near future.
- **Page 6 – Delegated Authority:** Defined delegated authority, including parameters for granting such authority and for ratifying actions taken by an individual or committee.
- **Page 8 – Best Practices for Operations:** Added recommended best business practices, including development of a long-term strategic plan, annual plan of work, annual reports, and continuity of operations (COOP). Included a reference to the VASWCD District Best Business Practices checklist and resource document.
- **Page 10 – Audits:** Clarified the process for Districts to submit additional information related to audit findings prior to meetings of the state board’s audit subcommittee.
- **Page 11 – Records Management:** Updated guidance to allow backups to cloud storage, network servers, or external hard drives.
- **Page 12 – Insured Accounts:** Updated SPDA language to reflect Department of the Treasury deadlines and recommended printing verification confirmations for audit purposes.
- **Page 18 – Sales:**
 - Added language permitting use of QuickBooks invoicing, credit card payments, and payment platforms such as Venmo and PayPal.

- Specified that districts should not use software that retains credit card information.
- **Page 19 – Sales:** Added language allowing the use of bank-issued check scanners for deposits.
- **Page 20 – Expenditure Processing:** Clarified that an attached check stub is acceptable documentation to indicate an invoice has been paid.
- **Page 21 – Online Bill Paying:** Authorized the use of online bill pay via direct withdrawal, while limiting automatic drafts to employee payroll, benefits, and payroll taxes.
- **Page 21 – Direct Deposit:** Added a new section permitting direct deposit for cost-share payments (participants, TSPs, VRA) and for staff and Director reimbursements. Included required safeguards to reduce fraud risk.
- **Page 23 – IRS 1099 Forms:** Updated thresholds to align with current IRS requirements.
- **Page 27 – Use of Personal Credit Cards:**
 - Extended the receipt submission deadline to 60 days to align with the travel reimbursement policy.
 - Allowed reimbursements via direct deposit.
 - Clarified that Directors may not reconcile or approve their own expense reports or reimbursements.
- **Pages 28–29 – Non-Travel and Travel:**
 - Added language allowing reimbursement via direct deposit.
 - Clarified that Directors may not reconcile or approve their own expense reports or reimbursements.

REALLOCATION OF FUNDS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF BMPS IN THE SOUTHERN RIVERS – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the proposed reallocation of funds for the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the Southern Rivers region. She presented funding recommendations for the Daniel Boone, Holston River, New River, Peaks of Otter, Robert E. Lee, Skyline, and Southside Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The Board was also provided with estimated cost-share payment amounts for each district, including revisions to the Robert E. Lee District's requests based on discussions between the Department and the District.

BOARD ACTION

After discussion, Mr. Wilson made the following motion: The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) directs the Department to redistribute a portion of the cost-share funds that were recovered by the Department via the reallocation procedures established for FY2025. There was \$15,255,382 in cost-share funds returned from the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts) at the close of FY2025.

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board directs the Department to redistribute up to \$5,405,593.70 of cost-share funding returned from the Districts for the implementation of best management practices in the Southern Rivers (Outside the Chesapeake Bay watershed). Additionally, the Board authorizes the use of up to \$810,839.06 of returned and unobligated cost share funds to be utilized as technical assistance (15%) for the Districts receiving additional cost-share funding.

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

Tidewater

Resignation of Mr. T Jacob Kirby, of Middlesex County, effective 3/6/2026, elected director position (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

BOARD ACTION

After review, Mr. Mills made the following motion: The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board acknowledges the resignation being submitted.

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

ACCEPTANCE OF INDIVIDUALS NOMINATED TO SERVE ON THE VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the names and backgrounds of those being nominated by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Dunn made the following motion: The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board accepts the nominations of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and directs staff to forward these nominations to the Secretary of the Commonwealth for consideration for appointment.

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

PARTNER REPORTS

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Dr. Edwin Martinez

Dr. Martinez gave the report for the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Virginia Cooperative Extension – Dr. Daniel Goerlich, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Mr. Goerlich 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.

Virginia Farm Bureau Federation – Jake Tabor

Mr. Tabor gave the report for the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Amy Walker, Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District Operations Manager, gave a public comment regarding allocations within the Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Administration and Operations Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2027. Ms. Walker encouraged the Board to ensure that the administration and operations allocations reflected the information provided in the template to at least some degree.

NEXT MEETINGS

The next Board meeting is scheduled for June 17, 2026, and the location is to be determined.

The September 2026 meeting will include a field trip to Mr. Mills' farm to observe his farm operations, similar to the Board's field visit to Mr. Wilson's farm in September 2025. Ms. Watlington Jones asked the Board to respond to the survey sent by Ms. Lindsey.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 11:37 a.m.