

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

380 Fenwick Road, Fort Monroe, VA

Habitat Policy Oversight Committee

Initial Meeting: July 22, 2026, 3:30pm-5:30pm

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Committee Members in Attendance:

William Bransom, Assoc. Commissioner and
Chairperson
David Rudders (VIMS)
Prof. Carol Considine (ICAR)
Richard Calvert (City of Portsmouth Wetlands
Board)
Neville Reynolds (VHB)
Mary-Carson Stiff (Wetlands Watch)

Lexy McCarty (Cherrystone Aquaculture)
Justin Shafer (City of Norfolk)
Ryan Green (CZM)
Kelsey Gray (VERA)
Ben McFarlane (HRPDC)
Joseph Grist, Commissioner (ex-officio)
Randy Owen (ex-officio)

Public in Attendance:

Caitlin Verdu
Ian Blair

Alexander Sabo
Robert Crockett

MRC Staff in Attendance:

Justin Worrell
Brad Reams
Hannah Kieler
Kirsten Travis
Kylie Harris

Olivia Upton
Mike Johnson
Adam Kenyon
Claire Gorman

1. Introduction of Panel Members

The initial meeting of the Habitat Policy Oversight Committee (HPOC) was convened at 3:31pm by Commissioner Grist, who provided greetings and had each member of the oversight committee introduce themselves, followed by members of staff and the public in attendance. Commissioner Grist, working with the Committee Chair, Associate Commissioner William Bransom, would serve at the initial meeting facilitator, and that he would serve in an ex-officio capacity until a Deputy Commissioner is hired and able to assume the role.

2. Purpose of HPOC

Commissioner Grist provided the committee members a copy of HB390 and §28.2-104.2 of the Code of Virginia and a brief overview of the powers and duties of the committee as provided with the enabling documents. Commissioner Grist also provided a general overview of additional workgroup roles HPOC will fill on related topics such as beneficial-use of dredged materials (HB52) and no net loss of wetlands (HB521), and that some additional members would be appointed to the committee

to assist in fulfilling those responsibilities. Commissioner Grist asked the committee to consider, after the meeting, what are their top 3 -5 topics of priority interest for this committee, and to email those to Commissioner Grist so they can be compiled, ranked, and presented at the next committee meeting.

3. Panel Topic Overview

a. Coastal Resilience Projects

Commissioner Grist, Caitlin Verdu, Resilience Coordinator with the Virginia Office of Resilience, and Randy Owen provided a brief overview and comments about the bottomlands conveyance process (and limitations). It was noted this has been an infrequent issue in the past, where the actual ownership of state bottom was required to fulfill a project, but with ever increasing resilience projects being initiated by the Army Corp of Engineers across the Commonwealth (e.g. City of Norfolk seawall; areas impacted by Hurricane Helene in southwest Virginia), this was an issue that HPOC guidance would be sought this summer. Although the agency's legislative submission process has started, the agency would bring forth an example of proposed legislation to the committee by the next meeting for comment before proceeding further.

b. Beneficial Use of Dredged Materials

The committee discussed beneficial use of dredged materials (BUDM) and HB52, the need to come up with guidance for the JPA process before December 1, 2027, and the lack of dedicated staff support until FY28, so this would need to be done with any assets currently available. Multiple committee members, such as Dr. Considine (ICAR) and Dr. Rudders (VIMS), offered up helpful suggestions for materials and speakers for future meetings about BUDM. Commissioner Grist briefly discussed Bay Enhancement Working Group (BEWG) with the committee, along with providing the 2022 Interim Report on the Dredged Material Management Process Implementation Study to each committee member. Commissioner Grist offered to reach out to Maryland Environmental Services and the Maryland Port Administration, who he had previously met with, to discuss having them provide a presentation and be available to answer questions of the committee. It was also suggested that staff should look towards what New Jersey is doing and get insight from their program.

c. Mitigation requirements for tidal non-vegetated wetlands

The committee received a brief overview of HB521 pertaining to the no-net loss of wetlands, followed by a brief presentation by Randy Owen, Chief of the Habitat Management Division on no-net loss of wetlands and the overall annual regulatory permitting workload the division processes each year. Committee members noted that the Habitat Management Division is understaffed considering the increased workload and lack of new staffing since 2005 to assist in permit processing.

4. Establishing Bylaws of Committee for In-Person/Virtual Meetings

Commissioner Grist reported to the committee that at a future meeting by-laws for the committee will be presented to establish rules for having a variety of meetings, some in-person, some all-virtual, in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Virginia. The draft by-laws were not completed in time before the committee met to present at this meeting.

5. Planning for Future Meetings

The committee discussed future meetings and needs. It was recognized for the first few months that monthly meeting were needed into the fall of 2026 to have the opportunity to discuss the multiple topics in detail. For 2027, the committee would hopefully move to quarterly meetings.

The committee agreed that meetings would be held on the fourth Wednesday of each month, starting at 10am and ending by 12pm (noon). The next meeting would be August 26, 2026, at 10am, to be located at MRC Headquarters.

6. Public Comment

Ian Blair, Wetlands Watch, provided brief comments to the committee on topics discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 4:51pm.