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# **COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**

## **ANNUAL REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF JOINT LETTER OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SECRETARIES OF NATURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES, AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY, AND EDUCATION AND THE VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS FOR CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN INITIATIVE #14**

**MAY 2023**

Department of Conservation and Recreation

Division of Soil and Water Conservation

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Richmond, VA 23219



Virginia's final Chesapeake Bay Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on August 23, 2019 includes the following commitment number 14:

Enhance Coordination among State Agencies assisting farmers:

Multiple state and local agencies provide technical assistance to farmers employing management practices to improve farm operations and reduce runoff of excess nutrients and sediment. These state agencies include the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Department of Forestry (VDOP), the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). Farmers also receive assistance from their local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). These agencies work collaboratively, but also recognize the opportunity to enhance that collaboration. Through a joint letter of agreement signed November 2020 between the Secretaries of Natural and Historic Resources, Agriculture and Forestry, and Education and the Virginia Association of SWCDs (VASWCD), Virginia committed to identify and implement avenues for cross-collaboration that address technical assistance, education and training, research needs, and agriculture incentives.

Each of the actions described in the joint letter of agreement and detailed with timelines, deadlines and benchmarks below will advance the goals of the Chesapeake Bay WIP and the ability of agricultural producers to achieve production needs with assistance through better coordination and delivery of agricultural programs. In addition, a steering committee of agency and partner (DCR, VDOP, VDACS, VCE, DEQ, and VASWCD) staff will meet no less than two times each calendar year to assess progress and propose modifications to the signatories.

## **Action Item 1- Training and Programs**

Continue and expand cross training of SWCD staff by state environmental agencies through the DCR Conservation Planning Certification curriculum including updates and information on WIP implementation.

### **Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD):**

Agency Lead Contact: Dr. Kendall Tyree, VASWCD Executive Director

VASWCD staff and leadership team members will attend the annual DCR Virginia Agricultural Cost Share (VACS) Program training each spring, as well as other VACS Program trainings provided throughout the year. We will promote these opportunities to our 47 SWCDs as an opportunity for cross collaboration with and learning from key partner agencies in attendance.

VASWCD staff and leadership continues to actively participate on the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program's Technical Advisory Committee (and assigned TAC subcommittees). In previous years, we have served on the Programmatic and Cover Crop and Nutrient Management subcommittees. The VASWCD Executive Board meets regularly and receives updates on TAC work.

*Invite and encourage collaborative engagement and cross training at VASWCD events including the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (VASWCD) Annual Meeting.*

VASWCD has traditionally requested participation from many of our partners at our VASWCD Annual Meeting held in December. The VASWCD has an established Annual Meeting Planning committee, which includes partners, stakeholders, Districts, and other interested individuals. This committee has also been heavily engaged in planning annual training efforts and meets regularly.

Recognizing the critical importance of partnerships, we actively encourage participation by partners at other training events throughout the year

*Build upon virtual trainings and partner opportunities to continue expanding communication, coordination, and collaboration with partner agencies.*

Our need to balance in person and virtual trainings to enhance communication, coordination and collaboration will continue moving forward.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Ongoing

### **Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)**

Agency Lead Contact: Darrell Marshall, Agriculture Stewardship Act (ASA) Program Manager

VDACS ASA Program staff continue to attend training courses in the DCR Conservation Planning Certification curriculum. Currently,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the ASA staff are DCR Certified Conservation Planners.

VDACS ASA Program staff continue to actively participate on the DCR Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program's Technical Advisory Committee, as well as the Stream Protection and Animal Waste subcommittees.

VDACS ASA Program staff attended the annual VACS trainings and update sessions.

VDACS ASA Program staff attend and participate in the VASWCD Annual Meeting each year.

In order to meet the needs of new Soil and Water Conservation District employees and recently elected directors, VDACS ASA Program staff continued to provide individual trainings to SWCDs upon request.

VDACS ASA Program staff continued to attend local SWCD meetings as needed.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Ongoing

### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)**

Agency Lead Contact: Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator

The DCR Conservation Planning Certification Training program will continue to include agency partners in the courses provided through this program. Providing partners an opportunity to discuss their purpose, efforts, and their work with the agricultural community and SWCDs is critical to further developing existing partnerships. Current platforms for agency cross training include in-person events, webinars, and recorded program highlights on the Commonwealth of Virginia Learning Center (COVLC). DCR currently partners with DEQ, DWR, DHR, and VDACS to provide trainings and will expand invitations to include the other signatories.

These trainings are annual events in support of planner certification and recertification efforts by SWCD staff and others.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Ongoing

### **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: Todd Groh, Forest Management Program Coordinator

VDOF field staff will continue to make technical assistance field visits with SWCD staff, as able, and will assist in other efforts as requested.

The VDOF Forest Management Division staff will continue to actively participate on the DCR Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the its subcommittees.

Potential opportunities to participate with SWCDs include participation at the VASWCD Annual Meeting.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Ongoing

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contacts: Dan Goerlich, Associate Director, Economy, Community, and Food; Extension agent Appointed Directors to local SWCD boards.

Specific examples of partnerships and actions taken are included in the appropriate sections labeled 1(a), 1(b), and 1(c) below.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These collaborative efforts are ongoing.

### **Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)**

Agency Lead Contact: Justin Williams, Director, Office of Watershed and Local Government Assistance Programs

DEQ Water Programs and regional staff will continue to attend training courses in the DCR Conservation Planning Certification curriculum and update online training sessions as appropriate.

DEQ Water Programs and regional staff will continue to participate in the VASWCD Annual Meeting.

Provide training and materials on the DEQ water programs at annual SWCD Employee Trainings and other events.

Continue to attend monthly local SWCD meetings as needed and provide status updates as appropriate.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These collaborative efforts are ongoing and cover items 1 (a), (b) and (c)

DEQ staff continue to engage with SWCDs including meeting attendance and information sharing.

### **Action Item 1(a)**

#### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)**

Agency Lead Contacts: Sara Bottonfield, Agriculture Incentives Manager; Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator

Ensure invitations are sent to partner agency contacts for the Annual DCR Virginia Agricultural Cost Share (VACS) Program training and update events. Partners will be provided time on the agenda, when appropriate, for any updates and information sharing.

These trainings are annual events in support of the VACS program and planner certification and recertification efforts by SWCD staff and other staff from federal and state partners.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Ongoing

All partner agencies were invited to the series of VACS update webinars held summer 2022.

### **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: Regional Foresters, Bryant Bays – Eastern Region, Robbie Talbert – Central Region, Brad Carico – Western Region

VDOF staff will continue to attend these annual meetings as available.

Attendance at the VASWCD Annual meeting in December is planned.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These collaborative efforts are ongoing

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contacts: Dan Goerlich, Associate Director, Economy, Community, and Food; Extension agent Appointed Directors to local SWCD boards.

VCE is a historical sponsor of the VASWCD annual meeting and the VCE Associate Director and multiple Extension agents attend this meeting on an annual basis. The new Associate Dean and Director of Virginia Cooperative Extension started employment on November 1, 2022 and attended the 2022 VASWCD annual meeting as part of networking and relationship building efforts. VCE delivers content presentations at the VASWCD annual meeting as requested by VASWCD. Two VCE Extension agents participate in the DCR Ag BMP Technical Advisory Committee (and subcommittees) as voting members, and the Associate Director attends as a non-voting member as scheduling allows.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These collaborative efforts are ongoing.

### **Action 1(b)**

#### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)**

Agency Lead Contacts: Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator

DCR will coordinate with agency contacts to share invitations to water quality programs offered by DCR that will include SWCD staff and will share partner agencies programs with SWCD staff to encourage attendance. Where available, contact hours for trainings offered by DCR and partners will be offered for DCR Certified Conservation Planners to also encourage participation.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks:

Many trainings are annual events in support of the VACS Program and planner certification and recertification efforts DCR staff will participate with other trainings provided by partners as requested. DCR continues to be a primary resource for the VASWCD Annual Meeting by participating on the planning committee and being heavily involved in the trainings and opportunities provided at the Annual Meeting.

### **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: Todd Groh, Forest Management Program Coordinator

DOF staff will continue to partner and attend SWCD meetings as available. Currently, many staff attend local SWCD monthly meetings to collaborate, share resources, and ensure landowner needs are met. DOF will continue to provide training in areas of deficiency and in new sciences and techniques as they are developed.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These collaborative efforts are ongoing.

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contact: Dan Goerlich, Associate Director, Economy, Community, and Food.

VCE currently engages in collaborations and cross training with SWCD and other partner agency staff in multiple ways. For example, VCE is a sponsor of the VASWCD annual meeting and the VCE Associate Director and multiple Extension agents attend this meeting on an annual basis. VCE delivers content presentations at the VASWCD annual meeting as requested by VASWCD. In previous years VCE has also shared internal procedural documents such as the Emergency Action Plan and COVID organizational procedures with the VASWCD Executive Director, demonstrating that this partnership extends beyond conservation programming. VCE agents and administrators attend and deliver updates at annual area VASWCD meetings; they also deliver an Introduction to VCE presentation at the SWCD new director and board member orientation, among many other collaborations. Extension agents and SWCD typically work closely together on numerous projects at the local level. VCE public-facing programs are open to all and are frequently attended by SWCD and other partner agency employees. VCE extension specialists deliver research-based information in nutrient management, integrated pest management, crop management, and soil health at events throughout the year that are attended by personnel from multiple state and federal conservation agencies as well as private companies and citizens.

Representatives from VCE plan to attend the 2023 VASWCD Annual Meeting.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These engagement efforts have been—and continue to be—ongoing.

### **Action 1(c)**

#### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)**

Agency Lead Contacts: Blair Gordon, Soil and Water Conservation District Liaison

Coordinate with agency contacts to identify representatives for appointment to each district that should be contacted and invited to local district meetings. Use established procedures to ensure membership and attendance to meetings is consistent with requirements and agreements.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Ongoing

These commitments will follow the established multi-year appointment system already in place.

Coordination between agencies and DCR have continued to ensure partners are represented on each district board as needed based on staffing or other changes.

#### **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: District Foresters (DF).

DOF staff will continue to partner and attend these meetings as available. Currently, many DOF staff attend local SWCD monthly meetings to ensure landowner needs are met and practices are implemented.

Requirements to ensure DOF representation at the SWCD meetings exist within DOF Employee Work Profiles.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These collaborative efforts are ongoing.

#### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contacts: Dan Goerlich, Associate Director of Economy, Community, and Food; District Directors, and; Extension agents serving as Appointed Directors on local SWCD boards.

Virginia Cooperative Extension agents serve as Appointed Directors on local SWCD boards. VCE, and SWCD, and DCR completed the Extension Appointed Directors appointment/reappointment process in fall of 2020 via an established multi-year appointment procedure already in place. The four-year appointments were approved at the December 16, 2020 Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board Meeting and are in effect through January



2025. Vacancies that result from turnover in Extension agent positions are filled in a timely manner.

In 2022 VCE worked with Mountain SWCD, Mountain Castles SWCD, Tri-County/City SWCD, and Patrick SWCD to appoint Extension agents to fill Board openings created by the resignations of the previous agents.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Extension Appointed Director terms expire on January 1, 2025. Vacancies that arise in the interim are addressed as they occur.

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## **Action Item 2 – Employee Responsibilities**

Adjust relevant agency staff Employee Work Profiles (EWP) and position descriptions to include responsibilities related to cross-agency training, coordination, and farmer and landowner outreach.

### **Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)**

Agency Lead Contact: Darrell Marshall, ASA Program Manager

The Employee Work Profiles (EWPs) of the four ASA Program staff include language to reflect cross-agency trainings, coordination, and farmer and landowner outreach responsibilities. These actions are currently underway.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: New EWP responsibilities are currently in place.

### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)**

Agency Lead Contact: Darryl M. Glover, DCR Deputy Director.

Relevant DCR-DSWC employees have their Employee Work Profiles and positions descriptions updated to reflect new responsibilities related to accomplishing WIP goals. This includes working with Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program (VSU-SFOP) and other outreach efforts to enhance awareness of DCR managed programs to underserved landowners and operators.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: The initial updates occurred in fall 2020 and further updates will take place every year and be reflected in the new EWPs issued annually.

### **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: Regional Foresters, Bryant Bays – Eastern Region, Robbie Talbert – Central Region, Brad Carico – Western Region

Employee Work Profiles (EWPs) will be adjusted to place emphasis on cross-agency training and capitalize on outreach opportunities within DOF Work Districts.

- District field staff are encouraged through their Employee Work Profiles (EWPs) to accomplish the following:
- Work with private landowners and partner agencies to increase riparian buffer establishment in the district.
- Work with private landowners and partner agencies to accomplish forest management practices, including prescribed burning, wildlife habitat improvement, desirable regeneration, site preparation, invasive species control, and others.
- Actively promote agency mission and programs to community leaders by engaging Planning Commissions, Boards of Supervisors, SWCDs and other appropriate entities.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These updates occurred in the fall 2021 EWP cycle.

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contacts: Lonnie Johnson, Associate Director for Field Operations and Administration; District Directors, and; VT CALS Human Resources.

Actions Taken: Virginia Cooperative Extension agent position descriptions currently include language and expectations regarding collaborations with partner organizations and educational outreach. No further action needed.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: This is an ongoing effort.

### **Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)**

Agency Lead Contact: Justin Williams, Director, Office of Watershed and Local Government Assistance Programs

The Employee Work Profiles (EWPs) of the relevant water program staff will be amended to include participation in DCR's conservation planning certification curriculum and other stakeholder activities. Other DEQ staff will be engaged as necessary.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Changes to the EWPs occurred in October 2021.

Action will be taken during the development cycle of Employee Work Profiles to address any further refinements that may be needed.

### **Action 2(a)**

## **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation**

Agency Lead Contact: James E. Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation

Future grants and contracts between DCR and SWCDs and VASWCD will contain language to enhance cross-training responsibilities. Language will include expected outcomes from the grants and contracts.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Updates to annual grants and contracts occurred in FY2022 and revisions continue to be reflected in the new grant awards and contracts going forward.

The FY2023 grants were updated to provide more emphasis on training and partnership. Efforts to refine and enhance those documents will continue.

## **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: Todd Groh, Forest Management Program Coordinator

Inclusion of language within the VDOF Policy and Procedures 7-2 “Rural Financial Assistance Programs” that emphasizes the importance and benefits of cross training and identify opportunities to share implementation goals.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: This language inclusion effort will be completed in 2023.

## **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contacts: Extension specialists and Extension agents.

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership organization. It is common practice to include agency partners on grant applications as co-Principal Investigators, manage grants together, hire jointly funded positions, and so forth. For example, DCR and VCE currently enjoy one such significant partnership on nutrient management, and the VCE-Buckingham County Office and Peter Francisco Soil and Water Conservation District share a jointly funded program assistant. On multiple occasions, grants obtained by Extension agents have been routed through the local SWCD office as fiscal agent. In 2022, the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences received an \$80 million USDA grant entitled Rural Investment to Protect our Environment (RIPE). This is the largest grant in the history of Virginia Tech and the partnerships between DCR, SWCDs, and VCE feature prominently in this effort.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: This is an ongoing effort.

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## **Action Item 3 – Agency Training and Workshop**

Establish cross training among state agencies who interact directly with farmers and landowners to better prepare all staff, regardless of agency, to make referrals in the field to programs housed within another agency. Hold an inter-agency workshop for each agency to present on their agricultural related programs, which may occur through an existing event. Ensure state agencies are well versed in programs offered by local SWCDs.

### **Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

Agency Lead Contact: Darrell Marshall, ASA Program Manager

ASA Program staff will continue to participate in inter-agency workshops and trainings to present information to educate partner agencies on the roles of the ASA Program and its partnership with local SWCDs in addressing complaints of water pollution from agricultural activities.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Annually

### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation**

Agency Lead Contact: Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator

DCR will work with partner agencies to schedule an annual inter-agency staff training. These interagency trainings will be conducted through a series of webinars, in person meetings, or recorded training residing in COVLC. Each DCR program that works with agricultural clients will provide an introductory presentation to enable partner staff to understand the basics of each program and be able to identify contacts to their clients for additional support through DCR and SWCDs.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Inter-agency training will be enhanced in 2023 with additional opportunities. DCR will work with partners to establish annual timelines for training.

### **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: Todd Groh, Forest Management Program Coordinator

Seek opportunities to engage/cross-train with partnering agencies within existing meeting and training sessions that focus specifically on forestry practices.

Engage local Extension agents and SWCD staff to ensure a comprehensive approach to training occurs annually on a local work area approach.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These collaborative efforts are ongoing.

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contact: Dan Goerlich, Associate Director, Economy, Community, and Food; Extension specialists, and; Extension agents.

VCE currently engages in collaborations and cross training with SWCD and other partner agency staff in multiple ways. For example, VCE delivers content presentations at the VASWCD annual meeting, annual area meetings, and new director and board member orientation. In past years VCE has also shared internal procedural documents such as the Emergency Action Plan and COVID organizational procedures with the VASWCD Executive Director, demonstrating that this partnership extends beyond conservation programming. VCE extension specialists deliver research-based information in nutrient management, integrated pest management, crop management, and soil health at events throughout the year that are attended by personnel from multiple state and federal conservation agencies as well as private companies and citizens.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These partnership efforts are ongoing.

### **Virginia Department of Environmental Quality**

Agency Lead Contact: Justin Williams, Director, Office of Watershed and Local Government Assistance Programs

DEQ will invite partner agencies to present information about their programs during division meetings, as part of periodic DEQ talks or as stand-alone webinars. These events will be conducted through a series of webinars, in person meetings, or recorded training residing in COVLC. Each DEQ program that works with agricultural clients will provide an introductory presentation upon request to enable partner staff to understand the basics of each program and be able to identify contacts to their clients for additional support.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Inter-agency continue to identify additional opportunities. DEQ will work with partner agencies to establish annual timelines for informational events.

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### **Action Item 4 – Conservation Cabinet**

The Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources should continue to host meetings with the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Secretary of Education, DCR, VDACS, VCE, DEQ, VDOF through the Conservation Cabinet, or if the Conservation Cabinet ceases to exist, then shall host meetings as often as deemed necessary with relevant agency heads to ensure senior management awareness and involvement in assisting farmers and achieving our WIP goals.

### **Office of the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources**

Agency Lead Contact: Deputy Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources for the Chesapeake Bay

The Office will schedule an annual meeting of the three Cabinet Secretaries, the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and state agencies engaged in this initiative to discuss progress and review challenges to enhanced collaboration. This meeting may coincide with a meeting of the Conservation Cabinet.

Timeline, deadline, or benchmark: Annually.

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### **Action Item 5 – VCE Programs**

Virginia Cooperative Extension will incorporate information regarding state and federal agency agriculture and forestry conservation programs and training opportunities, including new employee training programs with a focus on equipping VCE agents to be able to inform farmers of where they can get help for specific environmental or other challenges they observe on farms they visit.

#### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contacts: Dan Goerlich, Associate Director, Economy, Community, and Food; Extension agents, and; new agent mentors.

VCE utilizes a multi-faceted employee onboarding process that includes introducing new Extension agents to agency partners in the localities. Through this process, new agents are able to make connections and become conversant in partner agency programmatic offerings that facilitates client referrals. Extension agents are encouraged by administrators and agent mentors to collaborate with partner agencies on the development and delivery of educational programs. In addition, VCE is currently implementing a new onboarding process for Extension agents. This training continues to include emphasis on partnerships, relationships, and collaborations. Subject matter focused aspects of this training will include information and resources from partner agencies.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These engagement efforts have been—and continue to be—ongoing.

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### **Action Item 6 – Cost-Share Program Feedback**

Continue to utilize work groups already in place to facilitate appropriate conversations regarding increased collaboration, cost-share and program delivery including the Chesapeake Bay WIP Interagency Team. Based on this ongoing discussion, solicit views of the members of the Chesapeake Bay Stakeholder Advisory Group to bring together a feedback loop about successes, failures and adaptations needed. Add Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) to the Chesapeake Bay Interagency Team.

## **Office of the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources**

Agency Lead Contact: Deputy Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources for the Chesapeake Bay

The Office has added VCE to the Chesapeake Bay WIP Interagency team that continues to meet monthly. The team will at least annually and include an update on this WIP #14 initiative as well as the VACS and ASA programs.

Timeline, deadline, or benchmark: Annually.

DCR – DSWC conducted the annual Stakeholder TAC process for input and edits to the VACS program of which final edits will be taken to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board in 2023.

## **Virginia Department of Forestry**

The VDOF has participated in monthly Chesapeake Bay Interagency Team meetings. The VDOF has provided updates to the Chesapeake Bay Clean Up Plan, the Numeric Milestones update, and the Programmatic Updates to the WIP.

These updates provide relevant information to progress, shortfalls and anticipated needs going forward to achieve WIP III goals.

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## **Action Item 7 – Enhanced Outreach**

Conduct an interagency review of outreach materials to ensure consistency between agencies and creation of new materials to help landowners compare and contrast various programs. Ensure materials highlight the benefits to farmers implementing VACS Program best management practices. Build a “one stop shop” on the web that links to all relevant state and federal programs and is connected to training opportunities.

## **Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts**

Agency Lead Contact: Dr. Kendall Tyree, VASWCD Executive Director

VASWCD will review Association materials previously developed to assist SWCDs. Updates will be made where necessary to focus on enhanced outreach and partnership opportunities as well as reference to a “one stop shop” on the web.

Progress Report: Ongoing Efforts

- i. The VASWCD Marketing Committee is comprised of staff, directors, and partners, specifically active is a representative from the DCR Public Communications and Marketing Office.

- ii. The VASWCD Marketing Committee has reviewed materials developed by the VASWCD and SWCDs and created a Marketing Toolkit as a resource to help SWCDs enhance marketing efforts. This toolkit is available at <https://vaswcd.org/marketing-toolkit>.
- iii. The Marketing Committee identified an additional need for SWCD training on outreach and “one stop shop” website efforts and has engaged in an aggressive training effort.

*Coordinate with other implementing agencies to review outreach materials, create new outreach opportunities and materials for landowners to help them compare and contrast various programs. Provide the space for this material to be shared with SWCDs thru the newly established marketing committee toolkit and other training opportunities.*

Progress Report:

- i. Provided numerous online and in-person trainings to SWCD staff to better understand the programs available to producers. Many local SWCDs have now connected with their Virginia State University – Small Farm Outreach specialist to coordinate materials and increase outreach efforts.
- ii. New materials are also now available for staff that reflect new partner efforts; these new initiatives have been articulated in trainings as well.

*Provide input to developing the web-based “one stop shop” for state and federal conservation programs and training opportunities.*

Progress Report: Ongoing effort. VASWCD will continue to offer input and insights into a “one stop shop” sharing experiences from SWCDs and VASWCD training efforts, material review, etc.

Provide a web presence on [www.vaswcd.org](http://www.vaswcd.org) that shares and, where appropriate, links to the agreed upon website or other enhanced outreach materials.

Progress Report: Ongoing effort.

- i. The VASWCD is in discussion with a contractor on revamping our website to be mobile friendly and provide a more user-friendly experience.
- ii. A section on partners has been added to our leadership course so that new directors and new employees taking this training have a better understanding of partner efforts. This portion of our online training can be found at <https://vaswcd.org/roles-and-responsibilities1>.



Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: VASWCD Marketing Committee will continue to provide input and discussion regarding any outreach material needs at the SWCD level. Ongoing insights and advice will be offered to implementing agencies regarding web presence needs.

### **Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

Agency Lead Contact: Darrell Marshall, ASA Program Manager

ASA Program staff will coordinate with other implementing agencies to review outreach materials, create new outreach opportunities and materials for landowners to help them compare and contrast various programs, and provide input to developing the web-based “one stop shop” for state and federal conservation programs and training opportunities.

Internal discussions with ASA Program and Communications staff continue regarding information on the website.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Information on the agency website regarding the ASA Program are frequently updated frequently.

### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation**

Agency Lead Contacts: Darryl Glover, DCR Deputy Director and Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator (DCR-DSWC)

DCR revised the division website, including a new webpage for Farmers of Color in 2021; revisions continue to ensure materials and links are relevant and timely. Updated media materials, including some in Spanish, allows both DCR and partners to provide information to landowners and farmers that highlight each of available programs as well as training opportunities. Continuing discussions with partners will include the best way to provide and share information in a clear and assessable manner for the benefit of all potential clients.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: The outreach project began in summer of 2021 and will continue.

DCR has made several updates to the division website and has continued to make updates as initiatives and programs evolve. The Farmers of Color page is available for use and continues to receive updates. DCR and the Virginia State University - Small Farm Outreach Program has worked on language translations for several promotional documents.

### **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: Caitlin Verdu, Watershed Program Manager

Create and distribute a digital riparian buffer cost-share cheat sheet and a cost-share flow-chart to support landowners and partner agencies looking for their best fit funding programs.

Assess the need for additional internal documents to address frequently asked questions about programs and funding opportunities. Create these resources as necessary.

Conduct an internal audit regarding outreach materials that focus on various programs to include the DCR VACS Program and VDOF cost share programs as well as grant programs annually.

Coordinate with responsible agency partners on the results of findings of internal audit and make edits as necessary.

Create link to the “one stop shop” on the VDOF website.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These audits and revisions will be conducted annually.

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contacts: Natural Resources Program Team co-chairs Adam Downing and Scott Barrett.

VCE will complete a review of current educational outreach materials, identify gaps, and seek opportunities to partner with collaborating agencies to address identified gaps. VCE will assist with the “one stop shop” concept by providing links to applicable publications currently available through the VCE public website.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: Ongoing.

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### **Action Item 8 – Update DEQ Information**

Update the information included on the “Our Rivers, Our Bay: Virginia’s Path to Clean Water” webpage housed currently on DEQ’s website and notify relevant agencies and SWCDs.

Currently, DCR, VDOF and VDACS have a link to the DEQ page. Offer links and associated logos and artwork to VCE and the VASWCD for inclusion on their websites.

### **Virginia Department of Environmental Quality**

Agency Lead Contacts: DEQ Chesapeake Bay Coordinator and Megan Sommers Bascone, Chesapeake Bay Planning Coordinator

DEQ completed a website revision in FY 2021. Information related to the Chesapeake Bay Phase III WIP is now located at the following link: <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/water/chesapeake-bay/phase-iii-wip>.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: DEQ Chesapeake Bay TMDL web pages will be updated when relevant new information is available.

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## **Action Item 9 – VCE Capacity**

Work to increase the capacity of VCE. Currently, VCE has numerous Extension agent vacancies. Identify the regions that VCE is unable to reach and work to ensure VCE has the capacity to fill these vacancies and others that might occur, thus providing support in those regions.

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contacts: VCE Administration; VT CALS HR.

Virginia Cooperative Extension received consideration in the 2020/21 Virginia General Assembly budget that enabled the agency to fill 13 agent positions across all program areas. Positions were identified through an internal prioritization process. Extension agent positions are supported by both state and local dollars. Strong local government support enabled VCE to hire more agents than projected in last year's report.

Seven of these agent positions were Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Extension agent positions in the Chesapeake Bay watershed region, enhancing Extension's capacity to carry out educational programming in concert with partner agencies that positively impacts water quality. Sustained support will enable Extension to continue to address core capacity needs and in turn impact Virginia citizen's environmental, economic, and social well-being. Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension agent positions filled include the following localities: Amherst, Amelia, Caroline, Nelson, Fluvanna, Montgomery, and Craig Counties. Vacant ANR Extension agent positions currently in 2023 include Botetourt, Giles, Stafford, and Orange Counties, and Norfolk City ANR. Current ANR vacancies on hold due to budget constraints include King William/King and Queen Counties, Norfolk City, and King George County. Additionally, Page County ANR is 100% locally funded and VCE would like to reinstate the state portion of funding for that position.

Please note that position-related information included in this report reflects a snapshot in time and thus does not always capture changes in circumstances over time.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: On-going.

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## **Action Item 10 – Underserved Farming and Forestry Communities**

Evaluate the reach of the VACS Program and other support for farmers and forest landowners to determine underserved farming communities. Develop methods to reach underserved communities that may benefit from the information and assistance agencies provide.

### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation**

Action 10: Underserved Farming and Forestry Communities

Agency Lead Contacts: Darryl M. Glover, DCR Deputy Director, and Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator, Division of Soil and Water Conservation

DCR has begun the process of reaching out to underserved farmers. The FY2022 state budget included \$250,000 for DCR to partner with Virginia State University's Small Farm Outreach Program to provide direct outreach to farmers of color and small farm operations in order to better inform them of the availability of state and federal financial and technical assistance. The VACS Program has implemented a "small herd initiative" to incentivize small animal operations (20-49 bovines) to implement livestock stream exclusion.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: The outreach project began in summer 2021.

### **Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Agency Lead Contact: Virginia State University Extension specialists and VSU Small Farm Outreach Program.

A critical partner in the Virginia Cooperative Extension system, Virginia State University has strong relationships with—and significant experience reaching—limited resource, small, and minority farmers. Through their existing relationships and collaborative partnerships, VSU Extension specialists and Small Farm Outreach Program administrators and technicians are well-positioned to assist DCR with growing connections among these important and underserved audiences. VCE will also support DCR in this initiative through our extensive network of unit offices.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: VCE efforts to reach limited resource, small, and minority farmers are ongoing. Support to enhance DCR capacity in this area will follow the timeline established by DCR.

### **Virginia Department of Forestry**

Agency Lead Contact: Dean Cumbia, Forest Management Director, and Todd Groh, Forest Management Program Coordinator, Bryant Bays – Eastern Regional Forester and Robbie Talbert – Central Regional Forester

The DOF is currently working closely with and holds quarterly conference calls with the Black Family Land Trust (BFLT) to provide outreach and assistance to underserved forestry communities with planning and implementation of forest management practices. The DOF will use these existing efforts to promote other agency's programs and services.

During the summer of 2022, DOF provided direct assistance to several landowners with the development of Forest Stewardship Plans and encouragement of forest management projects.

The DOF and BFLT continue to work with SVCC (Southside Virginia Community College) to determine the feasibility of starting a 2-year forestry technical program on their campus.

The DOF is working with the BFLT to develop and conduct a series of podcasts to be held seasonally throughout the year to make farmers aware of tree activities to consider implementing during different time of the year.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: These outreach efforts are ongoing.

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### **Action Item 11 – Agricultural Assessments**

Explore how agricultural assessments developed under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act can be better incorporated into broader conservation plans developed under the auspices of DCR. Develop a plan to ensure collaboration and update the plan annually.

#### **Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)**

Agency Lead Contact: Justin Williams, Director, Office of Watersheds and Local Government Assistance Programs

DEQ will explore how agricultural assessments developed under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act can be better incorporated into broader conservation plans developed under the DCR VACS Program. Develop a plan to ensure collaboration between the agencies.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: DEQ and DCR have finalized coordination efforts and localities have been notified that conservation plans and Resource Management Plans are equivalent to CBPA conservation assessments. This item is complete.

#### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation**

Lead Agency Contact: Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator

DEQ and DCR have finalized coordination efforts and localities have been notified that conservation plans and Resource Management Plans are equivalent to CBPA conservation assessments. This item is complete.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: DCR will provide reports related to conservation plans and resource management plans to DEQ in a timeframe that is acceptable to both agencies.

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### **Action Item 12 – Recognition and Reporting**

#### **Action 12(a)**

Establish a recognition program for agency, VCE, and SWCD staff that show excellence or innovation to promoting the goal contained in commitment 14 of the WIP.

### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation**

DCR utilized its existing agency and division recognition programs to develop a WIP Task #14 award. These include categories for awards, a nomination process, a review process, determination of what awards will be (e.g. certificates, etc.), and the timing and manor of announcing awards. The focus will be to highlight significant efforts to advance WIP 14 action items by employees of the partners to this agreement.

Lead Agency Contacts: James E. Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation and Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: DCR worked with partners to this agreement to develop a process for annual recognition.

Initial awards were given at the 2022 VASWCD Annual Meeting. DCR and partners will continue to promote and refine this award for 2023.

### **Action 12(b)**

Provide annual reports on the implementation of these actions to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Virginia Association of Conservation District Employees, Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, the Secretary of Education, Conservation Cabinet, and other entities.

### **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation**

Lead Agency Contacts: James E. Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation and Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator

DCR will work with partners to compile and develop annual reports on all twelve actions related to the WIP 14 initiative. Discussions with partners will focus on needed information, timelines, and report layout to show the efforts and progress towards WIP 14 initiative. The reports will then be presented to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, the Virginia Association of Conservation Districts, the Virginia Association of Conservation District Employees, Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Secretary of Education and provided to the full Conservation Cabinet and others entities identified through the work of meeting the goal.

Timelines, deadlines, or benchmarks: DCR will work with partners in 2023 to meet this annual requirement.