



How Wetlands & Living Shorelines Support Virginia Programs & Policies



There are approximately 1 million acres of wetlands in Virginia, impacting everything from wildlife and recreation to climate resilience and tourism. Wetlands come in various forms and are found on government land, residential property, farms and other areas along the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. **The following programs and initiatives all benefit from wetland protection, restoration and enhancement in Virginia.**



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Wetlands protect and enhance outdoor recreation venues and agricultural properties while spurring green jobs.

Virginia Outdoors Plan 2018: Outdoor recreationists spend more than \$8 billion within the state annually, and most of the popular forms of outdoor recreation are dependent on the health, vitality and productivity of resource lands and waters, including wetlands.

Virginia Scenic River Program: The goal of Virginia's scenic river system is to identify, designate and help protect rivers and streams that possess outstanding scenic, recreational, historic and natural characteristics. The plan prioritizes rivers that meet several criteria, including presence of stream corridor vegetation (e.g., wetlands), water quality (improved by wetlands), and the quality of its fishery (for which wetlands provide habitat).

Fisheries Management: By providing habitat for fish and improving the health of marine ecosystems, wetlands help Virginia Marine Resource Commission and Virginia Department of Wildlife resources meet inland and saltwater fishery management plan goals.



PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

Wetlands play a critical role in reducing the impact of extreme weather such as coastal storms and flooding.

Virginia Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program: Wetlands reduce the impacts of coastal storms and flooding on natural and built infrastructure. The Virginia CZM Program supports the use of natural features, such as wetlands, through a range of initiatives, including the promotion of living shorelines, protection of beaches and dunes, and the use of dredged material as a resource for building coastal resilience.

Safety and Floodplains: Floodplains, many of which are considered wetlands, have a proven capacity for reducing the impacts of coastal storms and community flooding. Communities can reduce the cost of floodplain insurance premiums by preserving green spaces including floodplains, living shorelines and other wetlands.

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INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTAINANCE

As wetlands reduce the impact of extreme weather events, infrastructure and maintenance needs decrease.

Virginia Living Shorelines Act: Through the Living Shorelines Act, Virginia is committed to a net resource gain of wetlands, the enhancement of wetland ecosystem services, and improved communication of these needs to the public and decision makers.

Executive Order (EO) 24 - Coastal Resilience Master Plan: Virginia experiences one of highest rates of relative sea level rise in the U.S. EO 24 is Virginia's roadmap to making our built environment more resilient to floods, hurricanes, fires, and other extreme weather events. It calls the state to "incorporate nature and nature-based infrastructure and flood control whenever possible."

NATURAL BENEFITS

Wetlands provide critical habitats for wildlife and are a fundamental part of the Virginia's ecosystem.

Virginia Marine Resource Commission Tidal Wetland: Chapter 13 of Title 28.2, Code of VA: The intent of the law is to balance preservation and use of wetlands in order to protect the ecosystem services they provide.

Virginia Wildlife Action Plan: The plan recommends conservation strategies that maintain and restore wetland habitats, promote living shoreline erosion protection, control invasive species, and are resilient to climate change.

Virginia Natural Heritage Program: The Program's mission is "conserving Virginia's biodiversity through inventory, protection, and stewardship," including through a registry of natural areas to encourage voluntary preservation of private and public lands.

Virginia's Strategy for Safeguarding Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) from the Effects of Climate Change (2009): According to the strategy, over 60 percent of Virginia's SGCN are aquatic and another 15 to 20 percent rely upon riparian and wetland habitats, making them critical to survival of these species.

Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP): The WIP recognizes the value of living shoreline restoration for water quality improvement, shoreline erosion control and the support of living resources.

Virginia Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act: The Act aims to protect and improve the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, including and through the protection of tidal and non-tidal wetlands and shorelines.

Virginia State Wetlands Program Plan (WPP): The state plan aims to achieve no net loss of existing wetland acreage, achieve net wetland resource gain through restoration, and assist local governments and community groups with development of wetland preservation plants.

Constitution of Virginia: "...Further, it shall be the Commonwealth's policy to protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth."

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