

# Building Momentum for Wetlands: Policy and Technical Teams



CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.

**Becky Gwynn, Deputy Director**

2026 Wetlands Workshop  
Center for Coastal Resource Management  
Virginia Institute of Marine Science  
September 10, 2026



# Presentation Overview

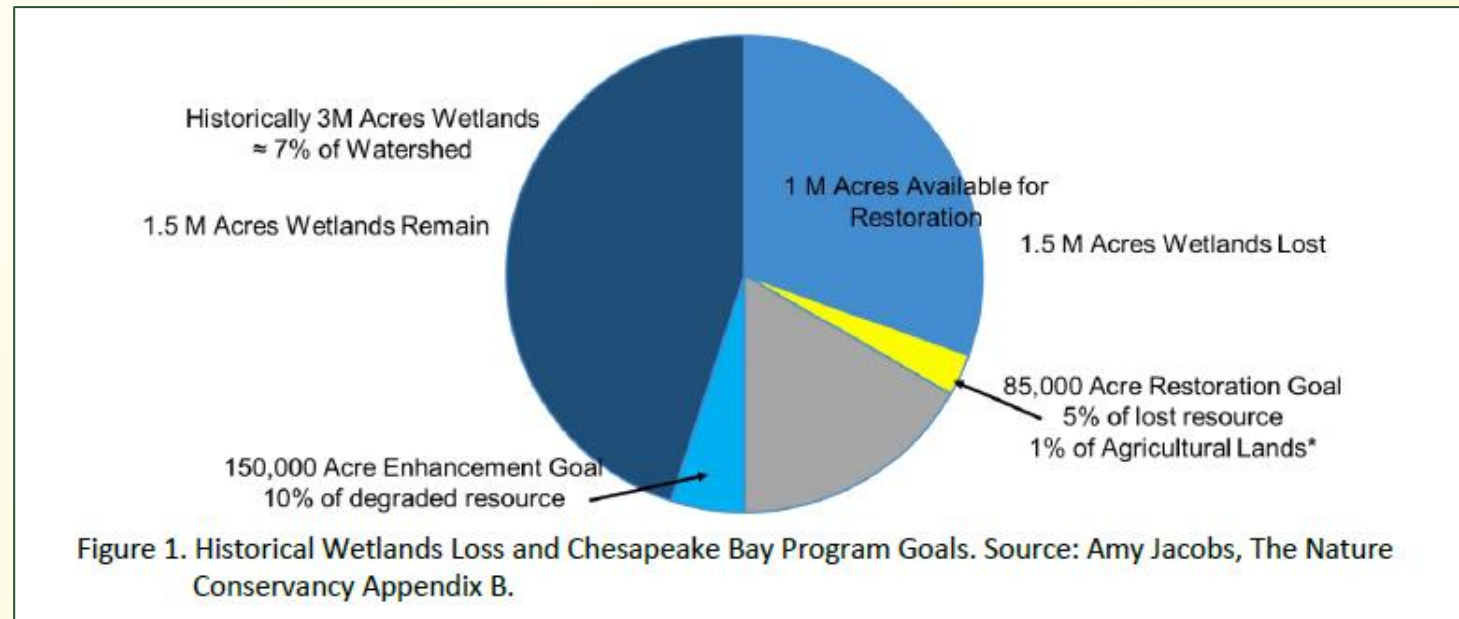
- Background
- Statewide Wetlands Technical Team
- Wetlands Policy Task Force
- Next Steps

# Chesapeake Bay Wetlands Outcome

- 2010 Clean Water Blueprint – had some wetland goals
- 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement Wetlands Outcome: *Continually increase the capacity of wetlands to provide water quality and habitat benefits throughout the watershed. Create or reestablish 85,000 acres of wetlands and enhance function of an additional 150,000 acres of degraded wetlands by 2025.*

## 2025 Watershed Agreement:

- Restore/create **3,000 acres**; *enhance 15,000 acres*, both *tidal and non-tidal*
- Focus on habitats that support populations of *waterbirds*



# Virginia Wetlands Action Plan

## Wetlands Tracking

- Effective reporting and accounting system
- Define activities that count towards outcome
- Jurisdiction-specific targets for tidal and non-tidal wetlands

## Strategic Planning

- DWR to lead diverse partnership focused on wetlands outcome
- Guided by existing plans and tools
- Acknowledge climate change and focus on at-risk areas
- Seek to restore/enhance habitat for SCGN species
- Implement on both private and public lands with emphasis on private lands

## Capacity Building

- Build on existing diverse regional partnerships
- Increase staff focused on wetland restoration
- Low barrier applications for voluntary efforts
- Expand native nursery / other restoration capacity

## Outreach

- Landowner interest is critical
- Identify and promote demonstration sites
- Target grant funding focal areas
- Coordinate with PDCs and SWCDs

## Sustainable Funding

- Current funding increases for private and public
- Match is limiting factor
- Need to establish dedicated funding source



# Voluntary Wetland Restoration and Enhancement in Virginia



Atlantic Coast  
Joint Venture



# Statewide Wetlands Technical Team

- Governor Youngkin's Executive Directive 10 (*Positioning the Commonwealth for Continued Success in Chesapeake Bay Restoration*)
- Goals:
  - Wetland tracking
  - Strategic planning
  - Capacity building
  - Outreach (to landowners and cooperators)
  - Sustainable Funding
- Practitioners from 13 state/local agencies, organizations, academia
- Two Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellows (Virginia SeaGrant)





- [illegible]

# Accomplishments

- *Capacity building*
  - EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant – 3 positions
  - Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellows – 2 positions
- *Outreach*
  - 3 workshops/engagement events – 130 landowners, practitioners, policymakers...
- *Strategic Planning*
  - Advancing beneficial use of dredged material
- *Sustainable Funding*
  - Developing recommendations for Wetland Policy Task Force – capacity needs
- *Wetland Tracking*
  - Contact list; work with CBP



# Establishment of Wetlands Policy Task Force

## **VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY - 2025 RECONVENED SESSION**

### **CHAPTER 647**

*An Act to direct the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources to establish a policy task force to evaluate existing policies regarding wetlands protection, restoration, creation, and mitigation in the Commonwealth and other states; recommend policy changes necessary to accelerate tidal and nontidal wetland identification, restoration, creation, and protection; and explore emerging science and innovation to ensure wetland health and survival; report.*



# Task Force Charges

1. Evaluate existing policies regarding wetlands protection, restoration, creation, and mitigation in the Commonwealth and other states.
2. Recommend policy changes necessary to accelerate tidal and nontidal wetland identification, restoration, creation, and protection.
3. Explore emerging science and innovation to ensure wetland health and survival.
4. Meet not less than twice per year, once with the Statewide Wetlands Technical Team.
5. Report findings and recommendations biennially, initially due Dec 31, 2025.

Photos: Dave Seibel, Bryan Watts





# Task Force Members

- Chaired by Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources
- Staffed by the Dept. of Wildlife Resources
- 26 representatives, including:
  - Governmental agencies (local, regional, state, federal)
  - Non-governmental conservation organizations
  - Tribal entities
  - Non-governmental business organizations
  - Academic/research institutions

# Accomplishments

- *Three meetings*
- *Information sharing*
  - State of the state in Virginia
  - Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement
  - Survey of members
    - Organizational connections
    - Impacts of existing policies
    - Barriers to implementation
    - What's working well
    - Policies in other states to consider
    - Emerging science to explore
- *Emerging Science*
  - Marsh migration
  - Living shoreline economic benefits
  - Ribbed mussel living shoreline enhancement
  - Barriers to landowner engagement in voluntary wetland restoration
- *Report to General Assembly*  
<https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2026/RD272>

