

How Wetlands & Living Shorelines Support Programs & Policies: Virginia



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



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Wetlands are an asset that protect agricultural and private properties and enhance outdoor recreation venues while spurring green jobs.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program: A state-federal partnership that provides financial incentives for the restoration or creation of wetlands on agricultural lands to improve water quality, protect environmentally sensitive lands, restore habitat and decrease erosion.

Virginia Outdoors Plan 2018: Outdoor recreationists spend more than \$10 billion within the state annually, and most of the popular forms of outdoor recreation are dependent on the health, vitality and productivity of natural resource lands and waters, including wetlands.

Virginia Scenic Rivers Program: The Scenic Rivers Program enhances tourism and recreation in the state by promoting rivers and streams with outstanding scenic, recreational, historic, and natural characteristics. The program prioritizes rivers that meet several criteria, including presence of stream corridor vegetation (e.g., wetlands), healthy water quality (which benefits 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. The American Sportfishing Association estimates that in Virginia, \$998 million is spent on fishing annually, with 9,785 jobs supported and \$72 million in state and local tax revenue raised.



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, which include wetlands, are vital for mitigating the impacts of coastal storms and flooding. Communities participating in the Community Rating System program can reduce the cost of flood insurance premiums by preserving green spaces including floodplains, living shorelines and wetlands.



An urban tidal wetland project in Norfolk, Virginia uses coconut fiber logs to control erosion.

Photo by Kevin Du Bois, DoD Chesapeake Bay Program Coordinator

INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTAINANCE

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

Virginia Living Shorelines Act: Healthy and robust wetlands protect against community infrastructure flooding and erosion. Through the Living Shorelines Act, Virginia is committed to a net resource gain of tidal wetlands, the enhancement of wetland ecosystem services, and improved communication of these needs to the public and decision makers.

State Water Control Law: Virginia law to establish and implement policies and programs to protect and enhance the Commonwealth's waters and wetland resources. Includes voluntary and incentive-based programs to achieve a net resource gain in acreage and functions of wetlands to maintain provision of wetland services for water quality, habitat, consumption, recreation and other uses.

Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Planning Framework: Virginia experiences one of highest rates of relative sea level rise in the U.S. The Framework is Virginia's roadmap to making our built environment more resilient to floods, hurricanes, fires, and other extreme weather events. It recognizes the resilience, water quality and habitat benefits of wetlands and calls to "incorporate nature and nature-based infrastructure and flood control whenever possible."

NATURAL BENEFITS

Wetlands provide critical wildlife habitat and are a fundamental part of Virginia's integrated ecosystems.

Virginia Tidal Wetlands Act: The intent of the law, enforced by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, is to balance preservation and use of wetlands in order to protect ecosystem services including the production of wildlife; the protection against floods, tidal storms, and erosion; and provisions for recreational and aesthetic opportunities.

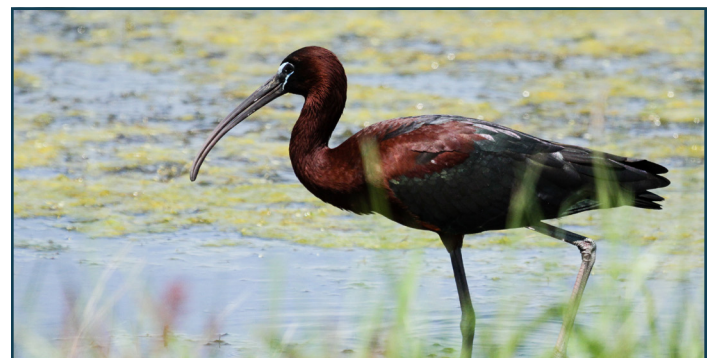
Virginia Wildlife Action Plan: The plan recommends conservation strategies that maintain and restore wetland habitats, promote living shoreline erosion protection, control invasive species, and are resilient to climate change.

ConserveVirginia: ConserveVirginia is a data-driven guide for land conservation. It has identified almost 7 million acres of lands with the highest conservation value, across seven prioritized categories, so that limited resources can be focused for maximum benefit. Wetlands of highest ecological value are featured in the Natural Habitat and Ecosystem Diversity Category but are also represented in categories pertaining to water quality, floodplains, resilience, and scenic preservation.

Virginia Natural Heritage Program: The program focuses on conservation of Virginia's biodiversity through science-based inventory, protection, and stewardship of rare plants and animals, exemplary natural communities, including wetlands, and the ecosystems upon which life depends.

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.



Found in Virginia wetlands, the Glossy ibis is a tier-one Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Photo by Steve Droter/Chesapeake Bay Program

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 plans.

Constitution of Virginia: Protection and restoration of wetlands support the intent of the Constitution: "...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."