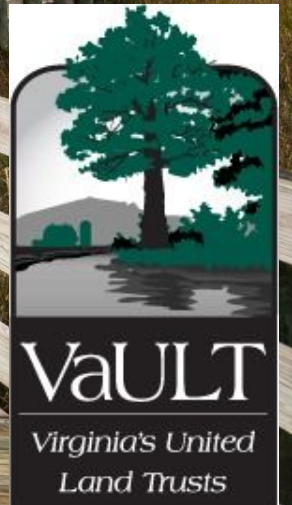


Welcome to the VaULT Business Meeting

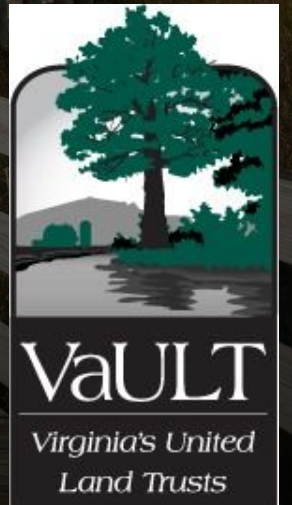
Newport News, April 28, 2026



VaULT Board Members

- Hali Plourde-Rogers, VaULT Chair, Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust
- Heather Barrar, VaULT Vice-Chair, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River
- Jen Perkins, VaULT Treasurer, American Farmland Trust
- Alan Rowsome, VaULT Secretary, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust
- Ebonie Alexander, VaULT At-Large Executive Committee, Black Family Land Trust
- Lisa Biever, Northern Neck Land Conservancy
- Nathan Burrell, Groundwork RVA
- Becky Gwynn, Department of Wildlife Resources
- Kerry Hutcherson, Johnson & Johnson, Attorneys at Law
- Mike Kane, Piedmont Environmental Council
- Martha Little, Virginia Outdoors Foundation
- David Perry, Land Savers United

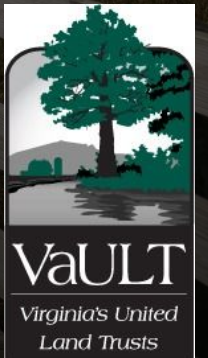
Newport News, April 28, 2026

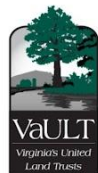


VaULT Member Organizations

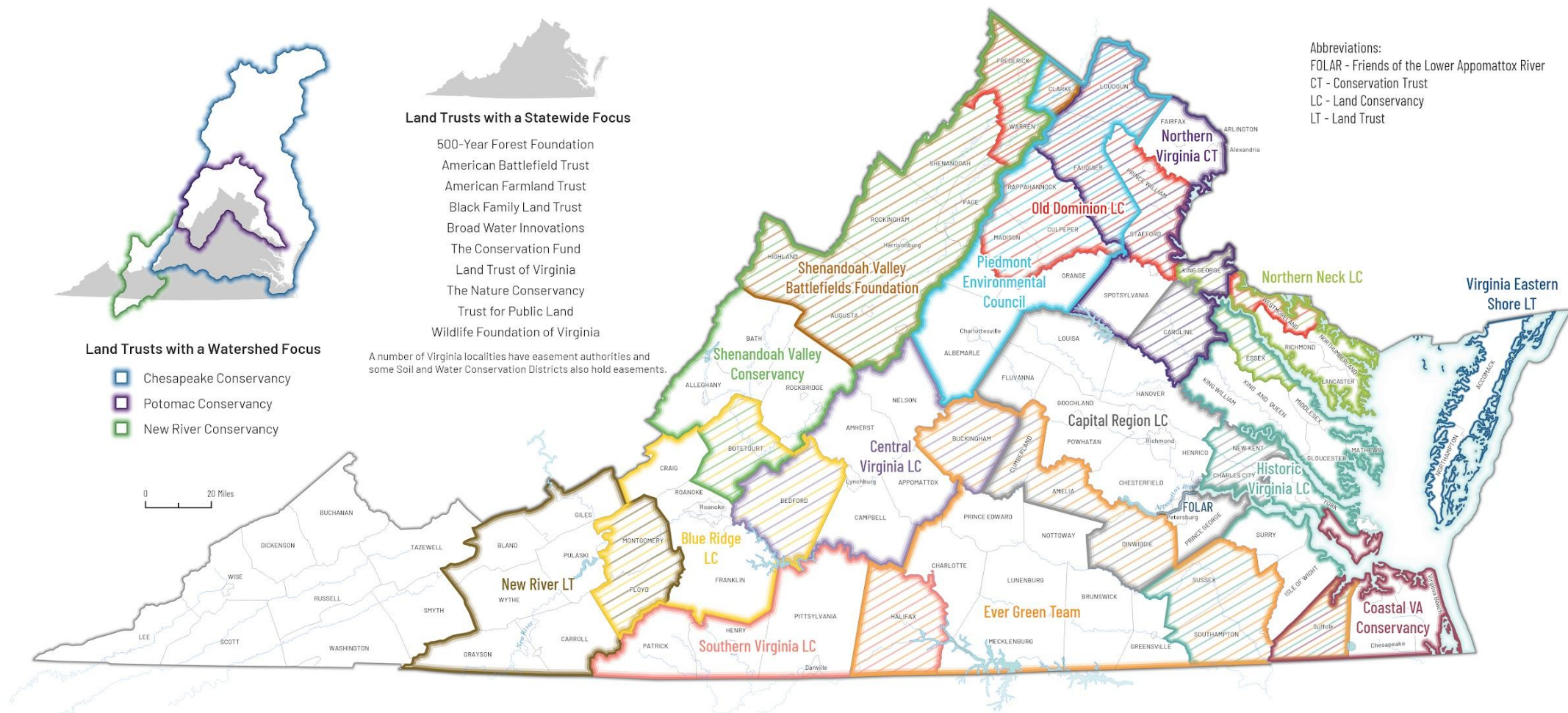
- 500-Year Forest Foundation
- American Battlefield Trust
- American Farmland Trust
- Black Family Land Trust
- Broadwater Innovations
- Capital Region Land Conservancy
- Chesapeake Conservancy
- Coastal Virginia Conservancy
- The Conservation Fund
- EverGreen Team
- Friends of the Lower Appomattox River
- Historic Virginia Land Conservancy
- Land Savers United
- Land Trust of Virginia
- The Nature Conservancy
- New River Conservancy
- New River Land Trust
- Northern Neck Land Conservancy
- Northern Virginia Conservation Trust
- Old Dominion Land Conservancy
- Piedmont Environmental Council
- Potomac Conservancy
- Shenandoah Valley Conservancy
- Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation
- Trust for Public Land
- Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust
- The Wildlife Foundation of Virginia

Newport News, April 28, 2026





Virginia's United Land Trusts Membership



Agency
Partners

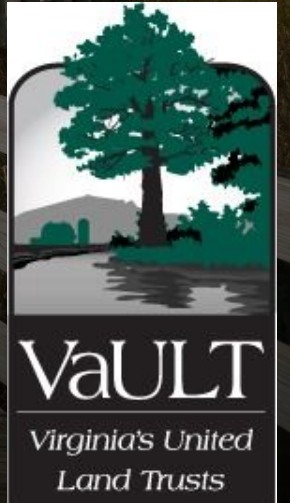


Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

VOF-VaULT Capacity Grant

- In recognition of the critical importance of accelerating land conservation in Virginia, VOF has provided funding for a fifth year to increase capacity in the nonprofit land trust community. This will bring the total funding for VaULT members to \$880,000!
- Grants can be used for accreditation, technology, strategic planning, and other projects that build the capacity of an organization. Ten organizations received \$3,500. Please thank the VOF staff and board! Ten VaULT members received funding.

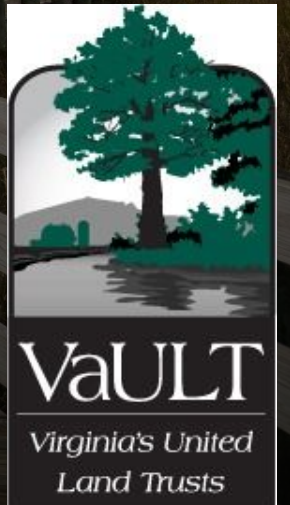
Newport News, April 28, 2026



VaULT Stewardship Workgroup (Year 2)

- Establish a peer network focused on stewardship challenges and opportunities in Virginia.
- Share successes and seek solutions to challenges.
- Increase knowledge and capacity of stewardship professionals.
- 19 land trusts, five state agencies, and six local governments.
- Two in-person site visits in 2025 to Carvin's Cove and Mount Fair, two in the works for 2026 to Sweet Run State Park and VarinaLandLab.
- Monthly calls with topics including resolving violations, forest stewardship management plans, ROW easements, and more.
- Coordinated by Valerie Peterson, PEC

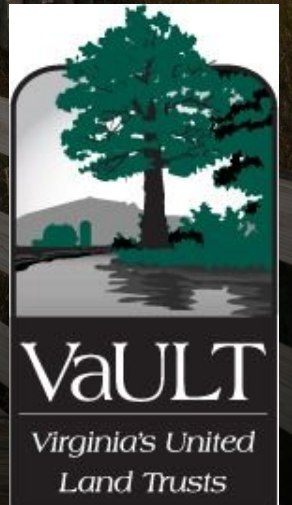
Newport News, April 28, 2026



Localities in Conservation (LINC)

- A joint effort between American Farmland Trust, Department of Forestry Office of Working Lands, and VaULT.
- For now focused on the 12-15 localities who have an easement authority, Purchase of Development Rights Program, or other established land conservation program.
- Topics of discussion: Easement 101, Land Preservation Tax Credit, Generation Next, DOF

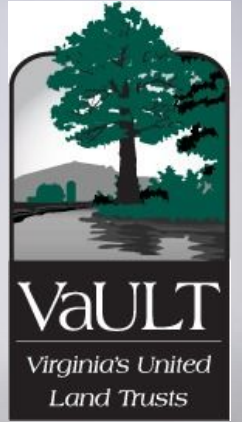
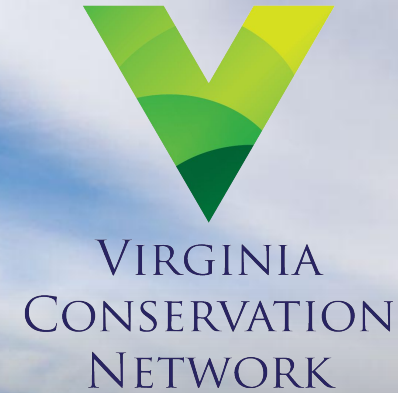
Newport News, April 28, 2026



Joint VaULT-VCN Land & Wildlife Workgroup

- Nonprofit organizations who are members of VaULT or VCN
- Weekly calls during the General Assembly Session
- Monthly calls outside of session
- First in-person meeting on May 13
- Briefing book papers

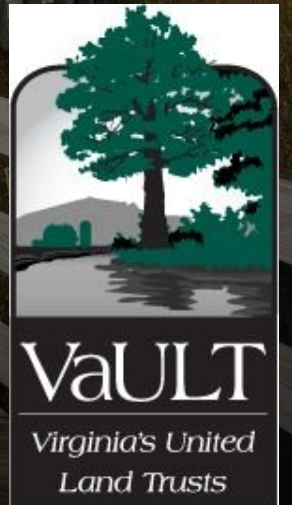
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Exploring Potential New Workgroups

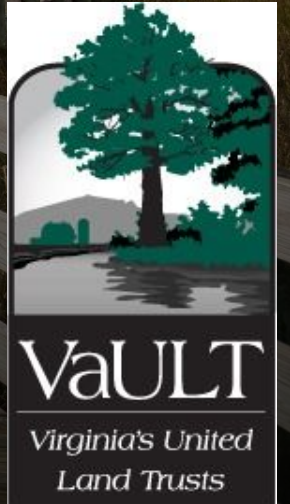
- Acquisition Workgroup
- Land Conservation Leadership Workgroup
- Professional Partners Workgroup

Newport News, April 28, 2026



VaULT Partner & Member Announcements

Newport News, April 28, 2026



THANK YOU TO OUR 2026 CONFERENCE SPONSORS & EXHIBITORS!

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500-Year Forest Foundation • Broad Water Innovations • Conservation Partners, LLC •
MLA Valuation & Advisory • Shenandoah National Park Trust • Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust

FOUNDATION SUPPORT





The Role of Conservation Easements in Environmental Regulation

Opportunities for Partnering between Land Trusts and DEQ

Jonathan Rak, Deputy Director

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

April 28, 2026

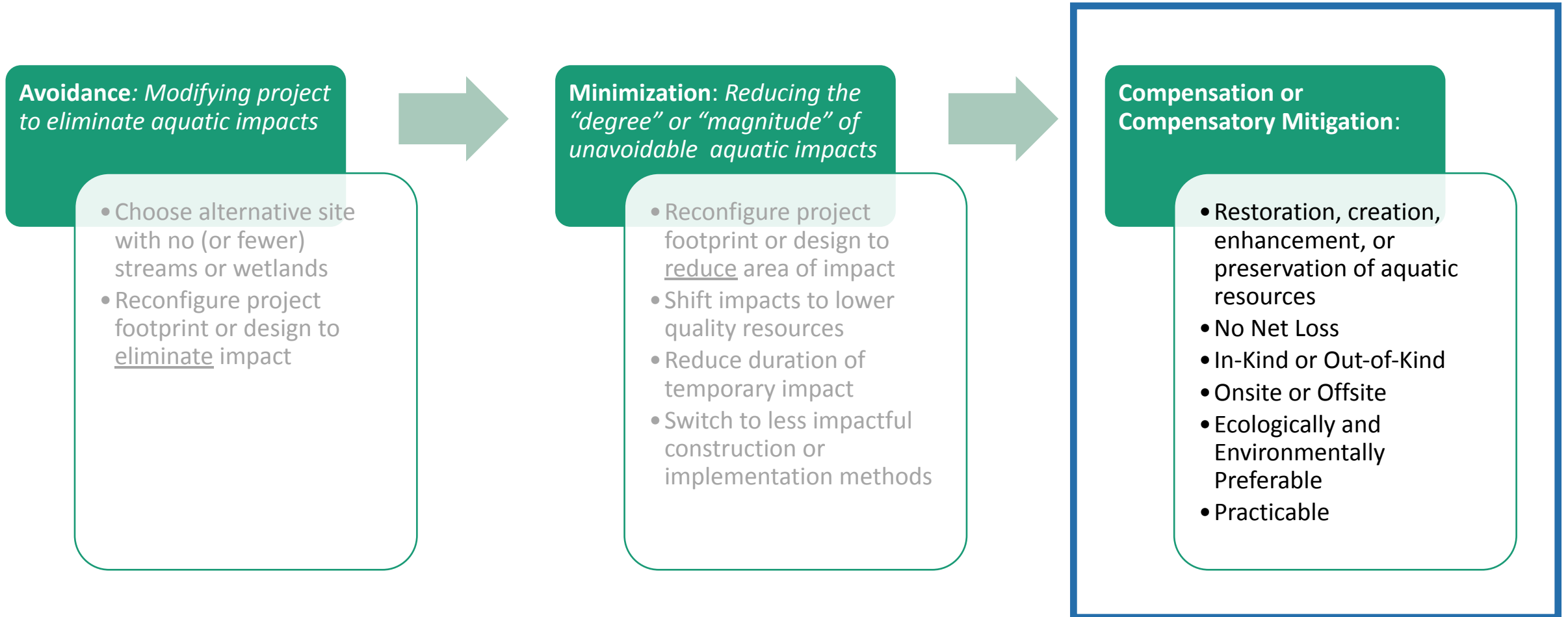
1. DEQ Mitigation Trading Programs – Wetlands and Streams

- Wetlands and streams– Clean Water Act Section 404 and Va. Water Protection Permit

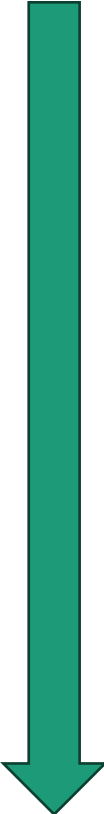


Mitigation – Three Step Process

"Mitigation" means sequentially avoiding and minimizing impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and then compensating for remaining unavoidable impacts of a proposed action.



Compensation Options (aka Mitigation Hierarchy)

- 
1. Third-Party Mitigation Bank credits
 2. Third-Party In-Lieu Fee Program credits
 3. Permittee Responsible Mitigation (PRM) - Watershed
 4. PRM - Onsite and In-Kind
 5. PRM - Offsite or Out-of-Kind
 6. Upland Buffer on Wetlands, paired with 1-5
 7. Preservation of Wetlands, paired with 1-5



In Lieu Fee Programs – Investment in Created Wetlands



2. DEQ Mitigation Trading Programs – Nutrient Credit Banking

- Nutrient credits to offset nonpoint source pollution from construction activities, industrial activities, and municipal separate storm sewers



Trading Nutrient Reductions from Nonpoint Source Best Management Practices in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed: Guidance for Agricultural Landowners and Your Potential Trading Partners



Generating Credits: Land Conversion



←→
Phosphorus credits =
P from farm field – P from forest



More nutrients

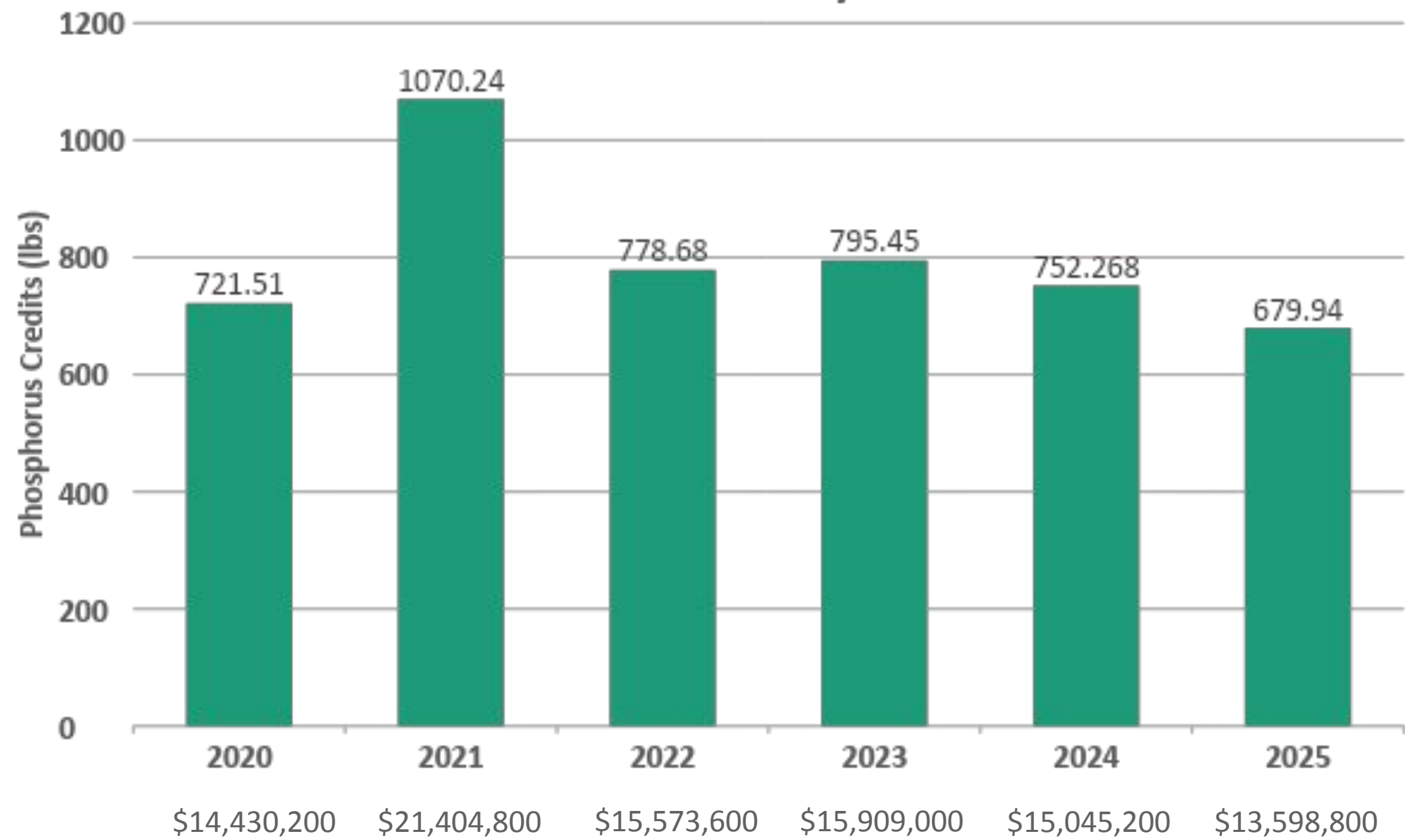
Crop to forest:
0.41 lbs of P/acre

Pasture to forest:
0.30 lbs P/acre



Less nutrients

NPS Credit Sales by Year

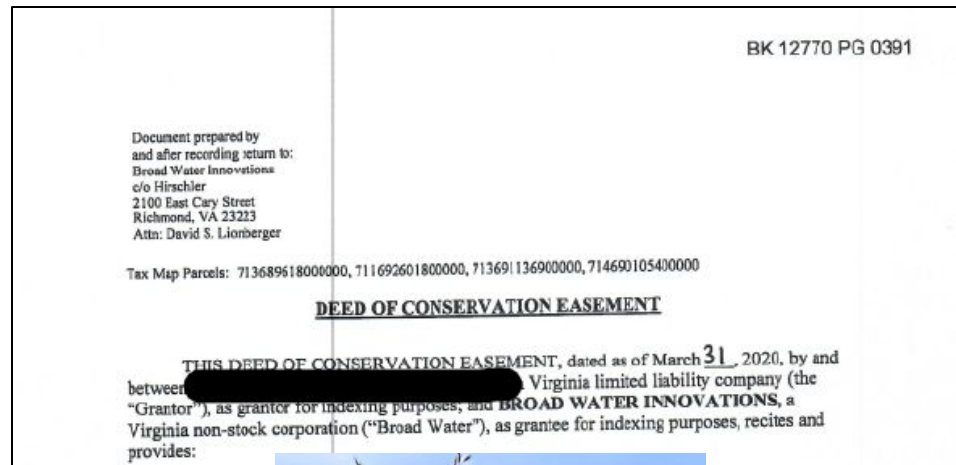


3. DEQ Mitigation Trading Programs – Solar Site Mitigation

- Conservation easements for utility-scale solar impacts to forests and prime agricultural soils



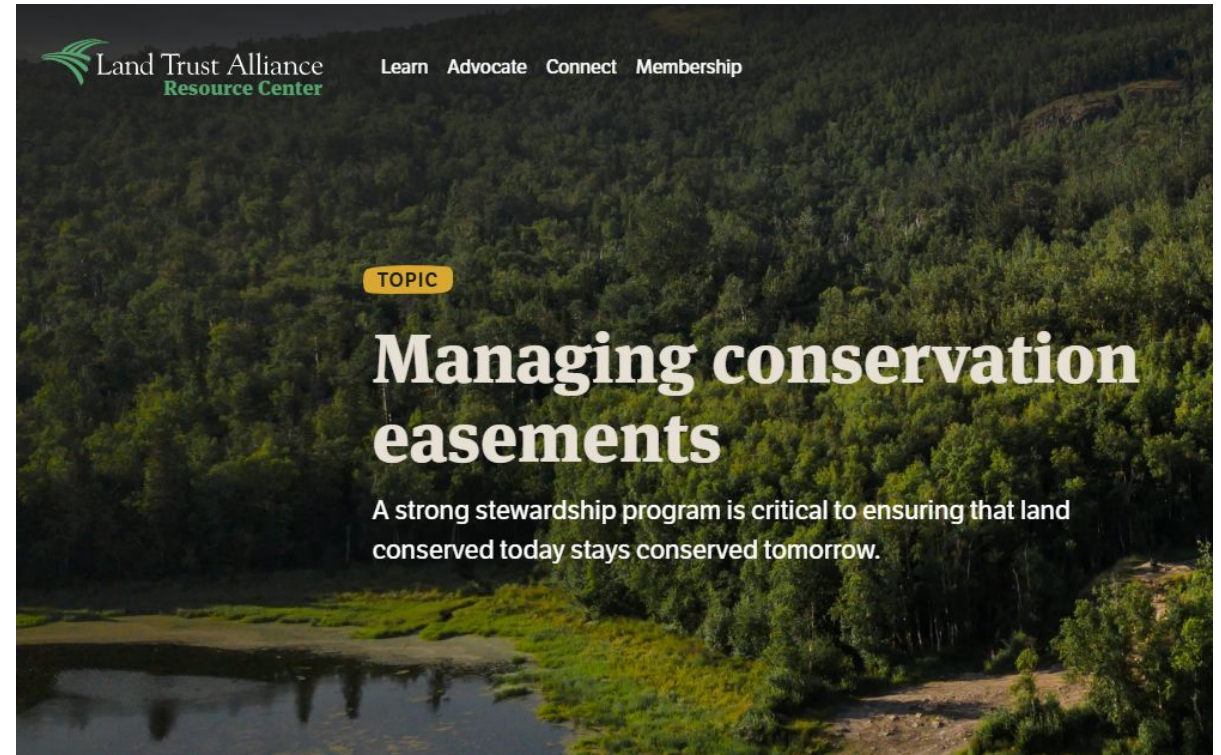
Mitigation Site Protection



- Declaration of Restrictions*
- Conservation or Open Space Easement
- Alternative protection
- Site protection must contain:
 - Agency site access
 - Minimum restrictions: No ditching, clearing, discharge of dredge or fill material, or other activity (exception of mitigation plan activities)

Need for Partnering with Land Trusts

- Lack of DEQ resources for long-term monitoring and enforcement
- Lack of DEQ expertise
- Ability to manage stewardship funds



Issues to Consider

- Easements are a liability not an asset
- Need for adequate stewardship funds
- Alignment with organizational mission
- Organizational Capacity



Site Protection Instrument- Easement Holders



THE WILDLANDS
— CONSERVANCY —

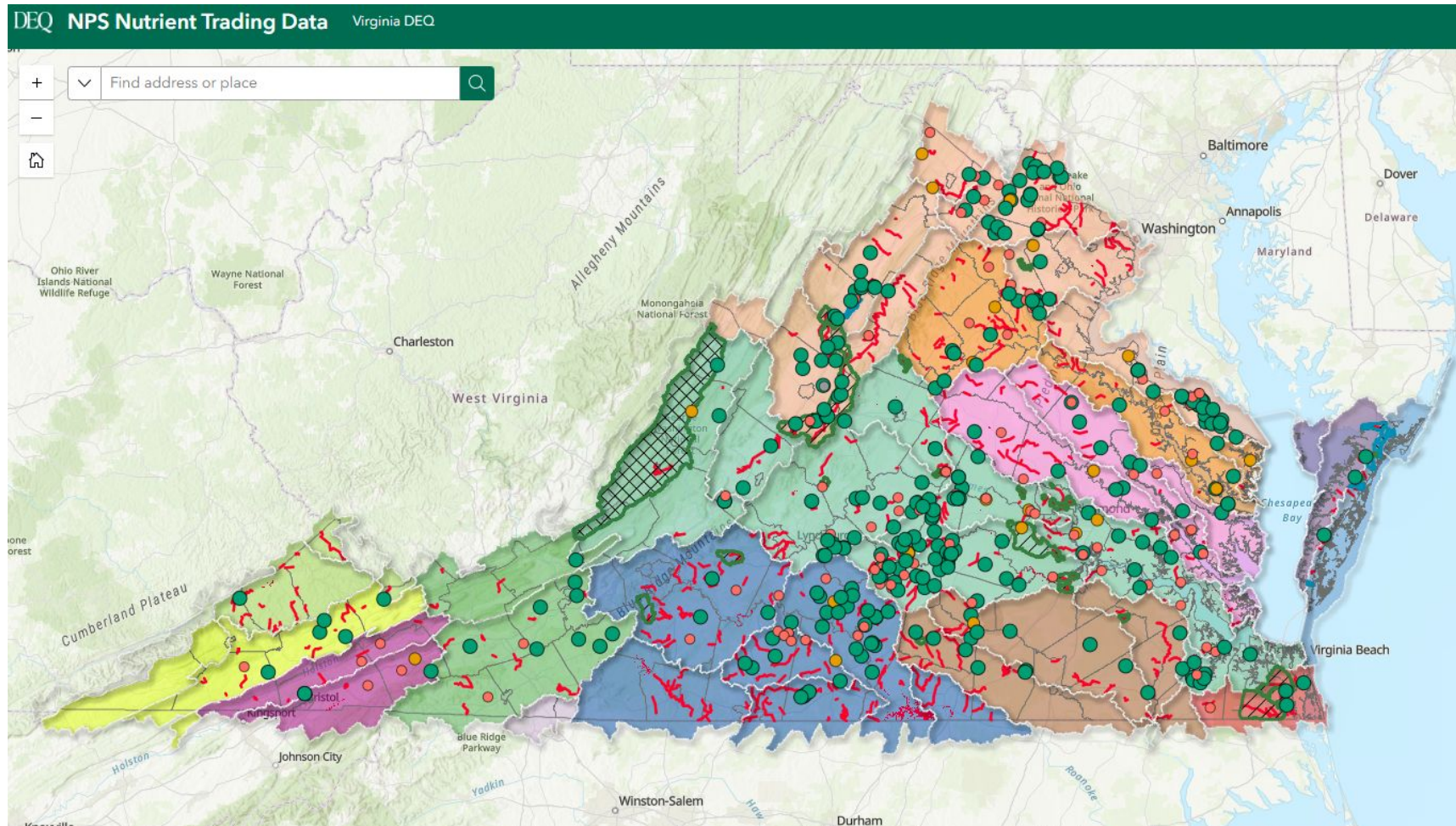
The Nature
Conservancy 



- Others!



Questions?

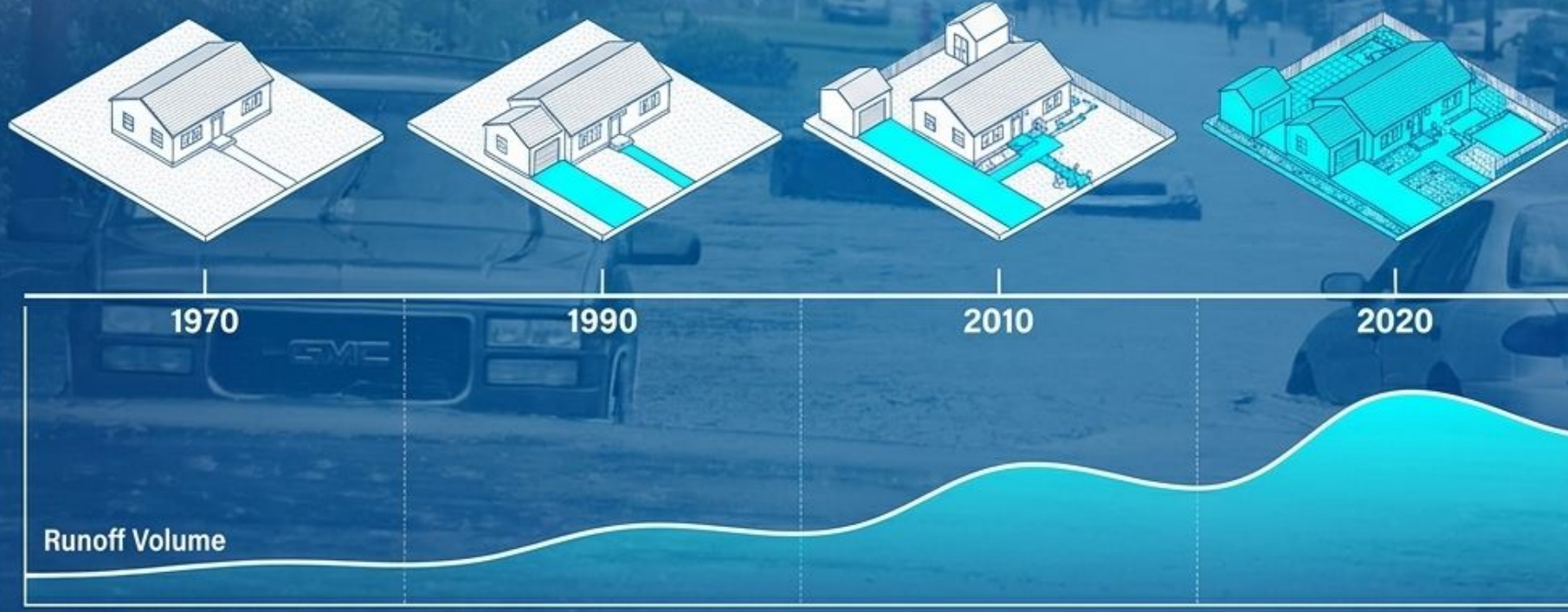




Land Use as Infrastructure

Integrating Stormwater, Conservation,
and Resilience in Newport News

The Cumulative Cost of Impervious Cover



Development patterns dictate municipal flood risk. Accessory structures compound over decades.

Legacy infrastructure (designed 50+ years ago) cannot handle modern runoff volumes.

Projected reality: 40% increase in Virginia precipitation by end of 21st Century.

Rethinking the Municipal Stormwater Strategy

	Traditional Stormwater (Grey)	Land Use as Infrastructure (Green)
Primary Function	Reactive (Managing generated runoff)	Proactive (Preventing runoff generation)
Lifecycle Cost	Depreciating (Pipes degrade)	Appreciating (Trees grow, wetlands expand)
Systemic Value	Single-benefit (Conveyance)	Multi-benefit (Recreation, Habitat, Heat reduction)
FEMA CRS Value	Low (Maintenance only)	High (Open Space Preservation credits)

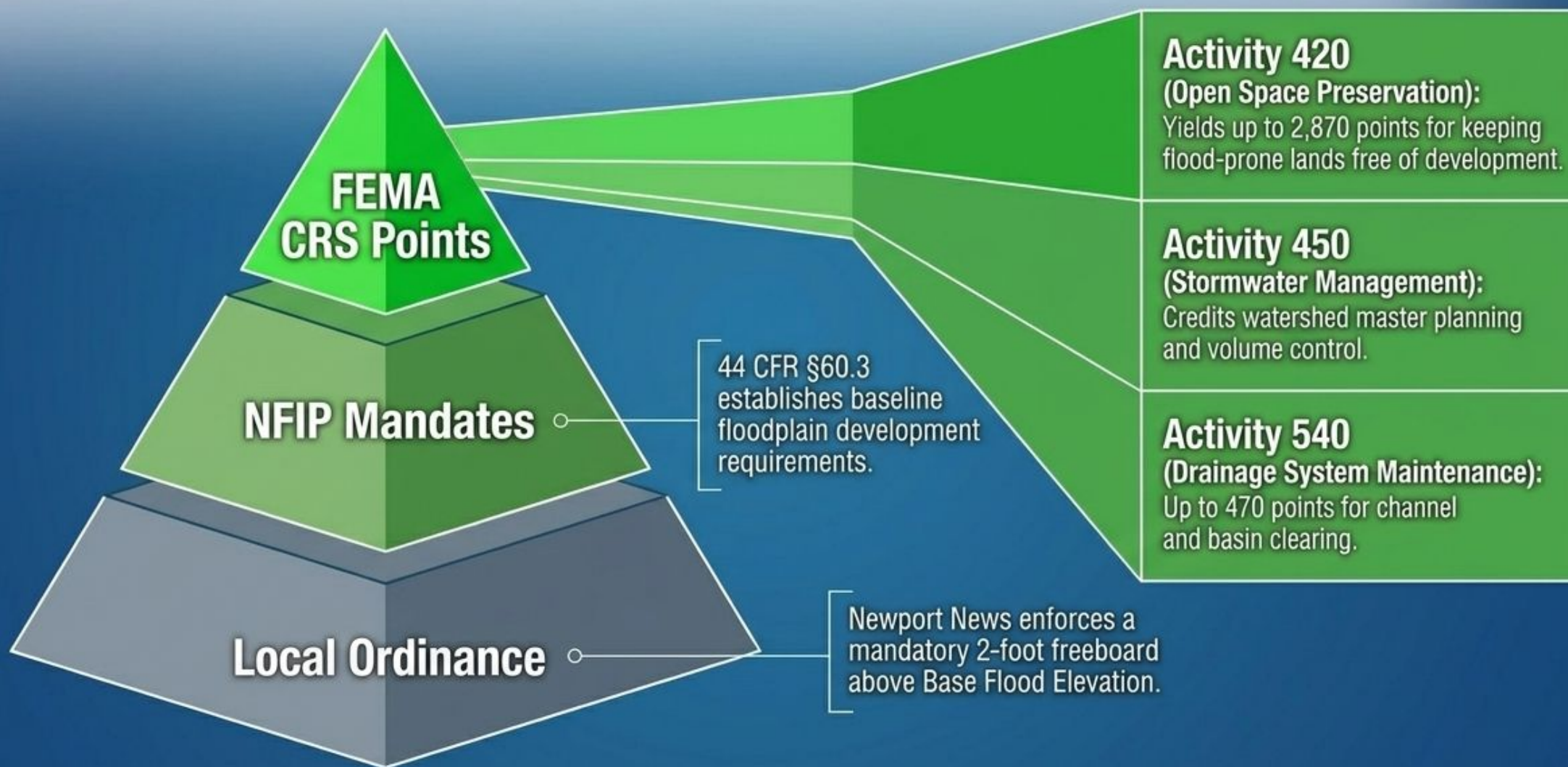
Sea level in Hampton Roads is projected to rise 1 to 3 feet over the next 30-80 years, severely reducing the transmission capacity of existing gravity-fed pipe systems.

Land Use is the Primary Flood Mitigation Tool

Lower Lifecycle Costs &
Downstream Mitigation



The Regulatory Engine for Conservation



The Newport News Testing Ground

Supported by a **\$4.9M** Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF) grant.

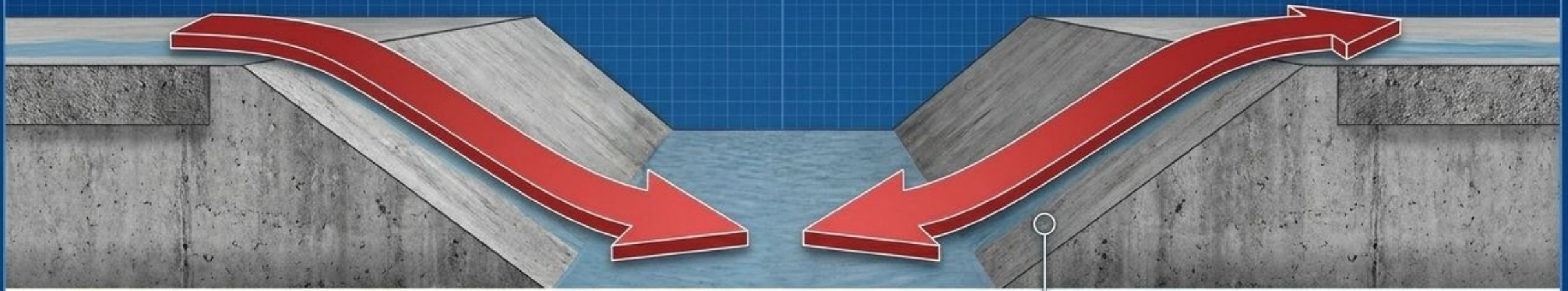
Simultaneous integration of stormwater, floodplain management, and resilience strategies.

Comprehensive **24-watershed** master planning approach.

Clear correlation between legacy development patterns and highly concentrated flood-prone zones.



Open Space Functions as Active Infrastructure



1

Storage Volume: Floodplains act as high-capacity volumetric storage systems during peak storm events.

2

Infiltration Rate: Newport News contains nearly 3,000 acres of tidal wetlands operating as natural buffers.

3

Peak Flow Reduction: Parks and undeveloped land actively reduce downstream peak flow velocities.



Cost Comparison: Exponentially cheaper to preserve natural topography than to excavate new municipal retention ponds.

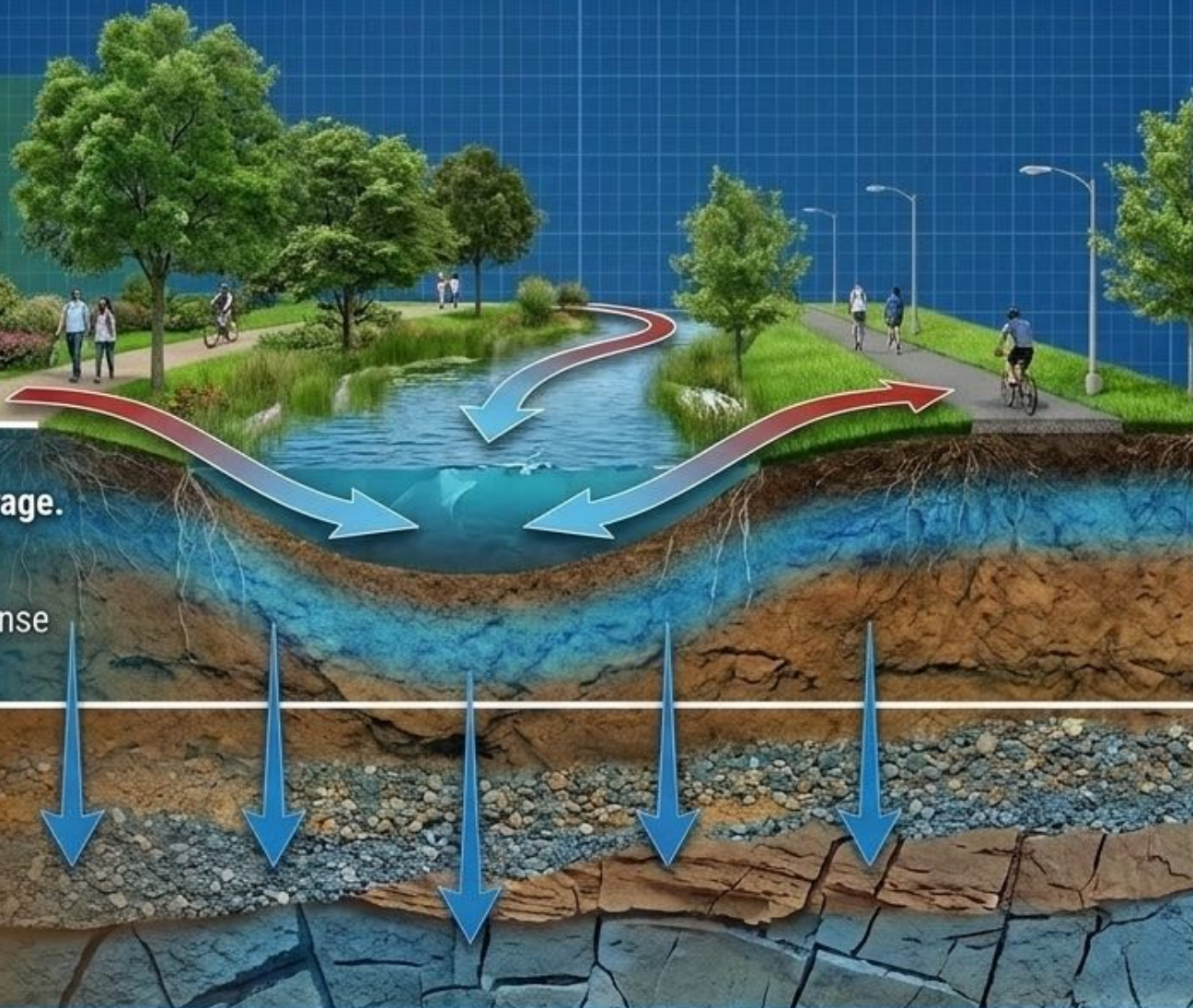


Greenways: Multi-Benefit Conveyance Systems

Top Layer: Recreation & Trails.
Links isolated green spaces to restore continuous ecological flow.

Middle Layer: Conveyance & Storage.
Absorbs overflow and seamlessly transports water across complex watershed boundaries during intense precipitation events.

Bottom Layer: Infiltration.
Active groundwater recharge.



Key Applications



Linear Parks



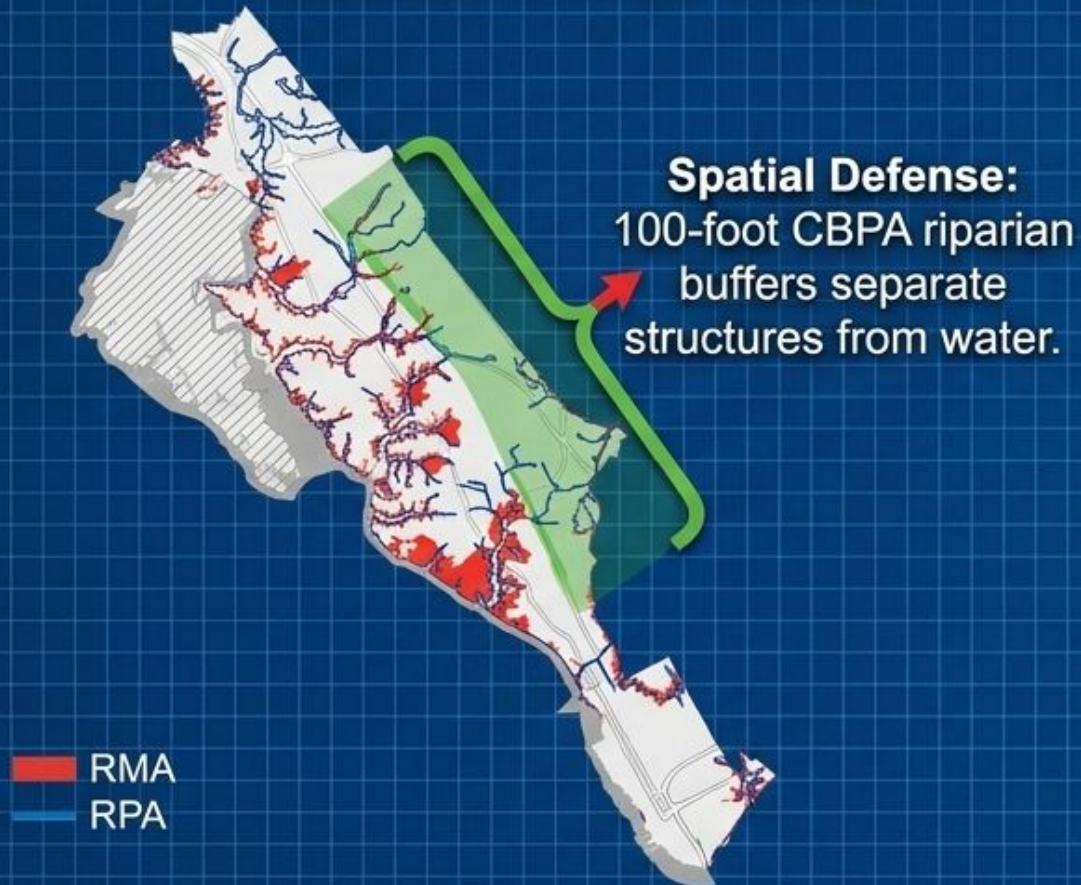
Protected Stream Buffers



Elevated Trail Corridors

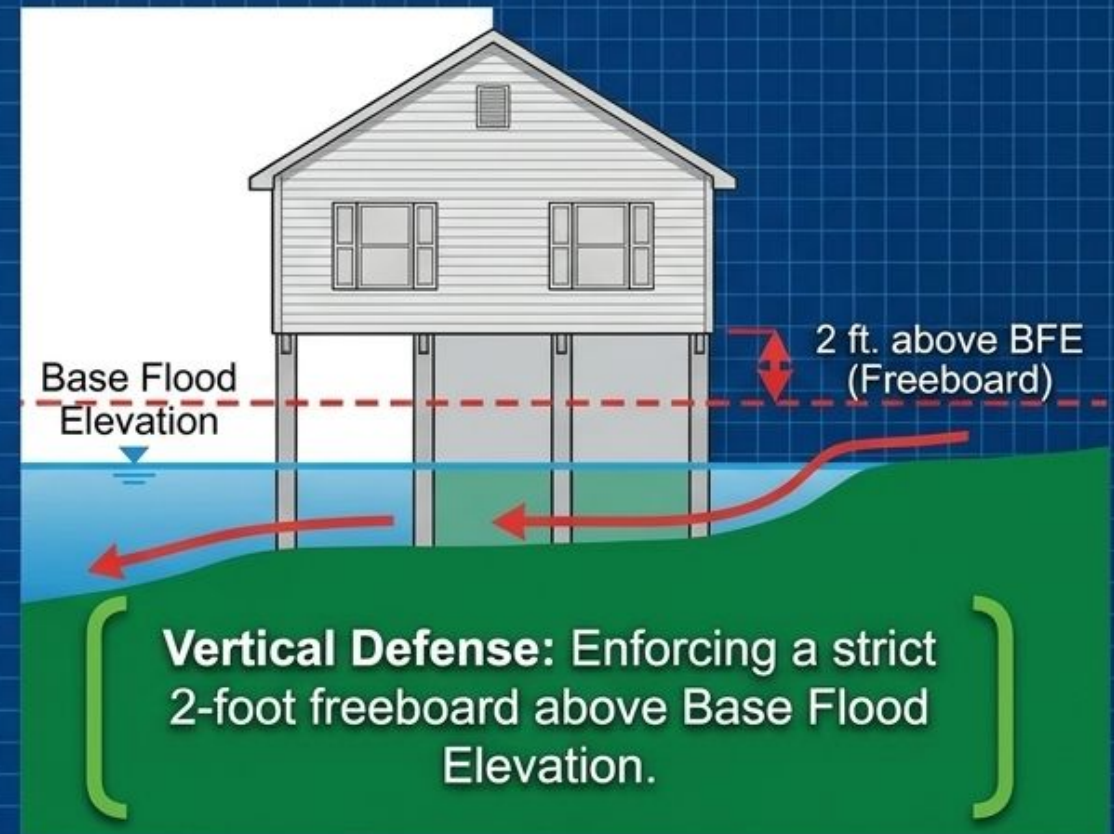
Conservation Strategies that Eliminate Risk

HORIZONTAL DEFENSE



Voluntary Acquisition: Acquiring repetitive loss properties voluntarily to restore the floodplain to its natural functions

VERTICAL DEFENSE

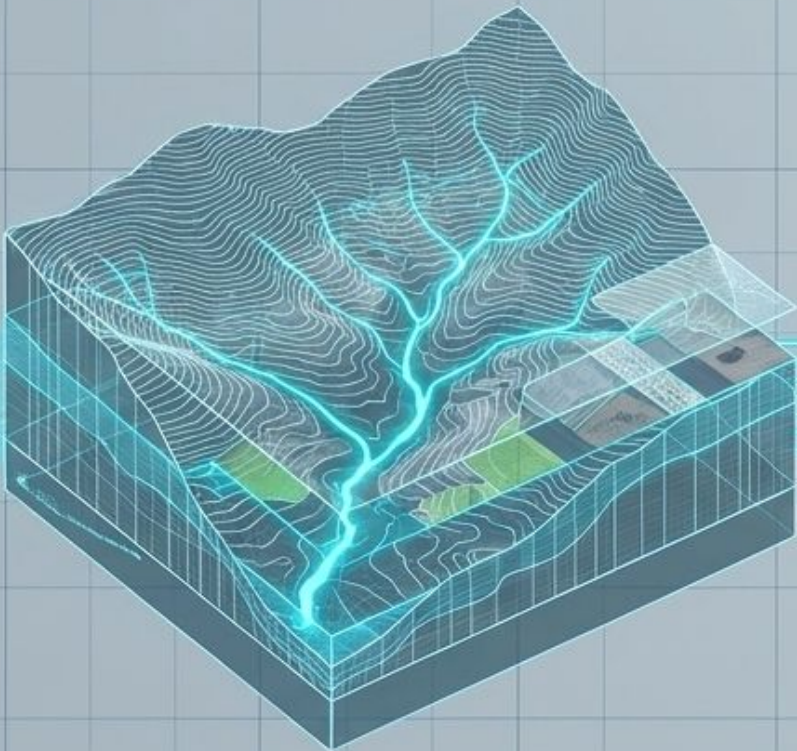


Easement Deployment: Locking flood-prone parcels out of future development pipelines.

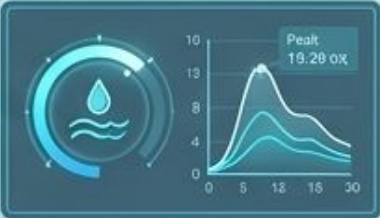
Quantifying the Impact: PCSWMM Modeling

Input A:
Strict Existing Land
Use Mapping

Input B:
Future Land Use
Scenarios



PCSWMM
Computational
Engine



Data translates ecological value directly into peak flow and infrastructure volume metrics, replacing assumptions with engineering proof.

Case Study: The Cost of Development

Fully Developed Scenario

Maximized impervious cover forces massive CIP spending on oversized pipe networks.

Conserved Open Space Scenario

Natural topography handles baseline volume; requires minimal structural intervention.



Peak Flow Velocity



Community Flood Depth



Infrastructure Cost



Key Example: Article X.-R5 Low Density Zoning. Limits density to 11 units/acre while mandating 2,000 sq ft of open space per unit. Result: Strategic preservation drastically reduces required pipe sizing.

Capital Planning Through an Equity Lens



61%

Of 74 site-specific flood reduction projects serve high social vulnerability census tracts.

2

Targeted Hotspots

Prioritizing repetitive loss neighborhoods like Salters Creek and Newmarket Creek.

3

CIP Integration

Capital Improvement Plan prioritization is tightly coupled to historical land use patterns.

Acquiring vulnerable land avoids exponential future infrastructure costs and addresses environmental justice imperatives.

Nature-Based Solutions in Urban Systems



Policy Levers for Better Land Use



Dictating permitted uses within vulnerable floodplain fringes.

Zoning Overlays



Mandating 80% of a lot's required area must be above flood level.

Development Restrictions



Credit offered for green area retention and viable tree canopies.

Conservation Incentives



Requiring developers to dedicate parkland and drainage easements.

Subdivision Regulations

The Synergy: Conservation = Credit + Resilience



The Tangible Community Impact



Reduced Physical Risk

Measurably reduced flood risk in repetitive-loss neighborhoods.



Lower Financial Burden

Lowered individual costs through discounted NFIP insurance premiums.



Property Stability

Increased property value stability by removing homes from extreme hazard zones.



Improved Quality of Life

Vastly improved daily living via accessible greenways and public open space.

Voluntary Acquisition: Healing the Floodplain, Protecting the Community

Voluntary Acquisition: Acquiring repetitive loss properties voluntarily to restore the floodplain to its natural functions.

The Challenge of Repetitive Loss

Identifying Repetitive Loss Properties: Structures with two or more insurance claims of \$1,000+ within any 10-year period.

The Burden of the "Flood Cycle": Frequent losses drain public disaster funds and threaten the National Flood Insurance Program's solvency.

High-Risk Vulnerability: Many repetitive loss areas overlap with socially vulnerable neighborhoods, increasing the socio-economic impact.

Restoration Through Voluntary Acquisition

Voluntary Buyouts and Clearing: Owners voluntarily sell flood-prone homes, which are demolished to create permanent green space.

Restoring Natural Functions: Restored land acts as a buffer, absorbing runoff, recharging aquifers, and providing wildlife habitat.



Community-Wide Benefits: Converting lots to open space can lower community insurance premiums through CRS credits.

Real-World Impact: Newport News Flood Assistance Program (FAP)

84 
Properties Mitigated:
high-risk homes removed.

16+ 
Green Space Created:
acres returned to nature.



Long-term Status:
Permanent Open Space
(Deed Restricted)

Building the Implementation Alliance



The Playbook for Land Trusts



1. Reframe your mission:

Pitch floodplain acquisition to the city as essential risk mitigation infrastructure.



2. Leverage municipal funding:

Conservation grants can double as civic infrastructure funding.



3. Identify vulnerabilities in SFHA : **Voluntary** acquisitions on high-value storage areas identified in engineering models.



4. Provide regulatory value: Ensure conservation easements are structured to qualify for FEMA CRS Activity 420 credits.



Key Takeaways

Land Use is Destiny.

Zoning and development patterns strictly determine municipal flood risk outcomes.

Nature is Engineering.

Conservation is the most cost-effective stormwater infrastructure available.

Greenways Connect Systems.

Open spaces provide simultaneous recreational, ecological, and hydrologic benefits.

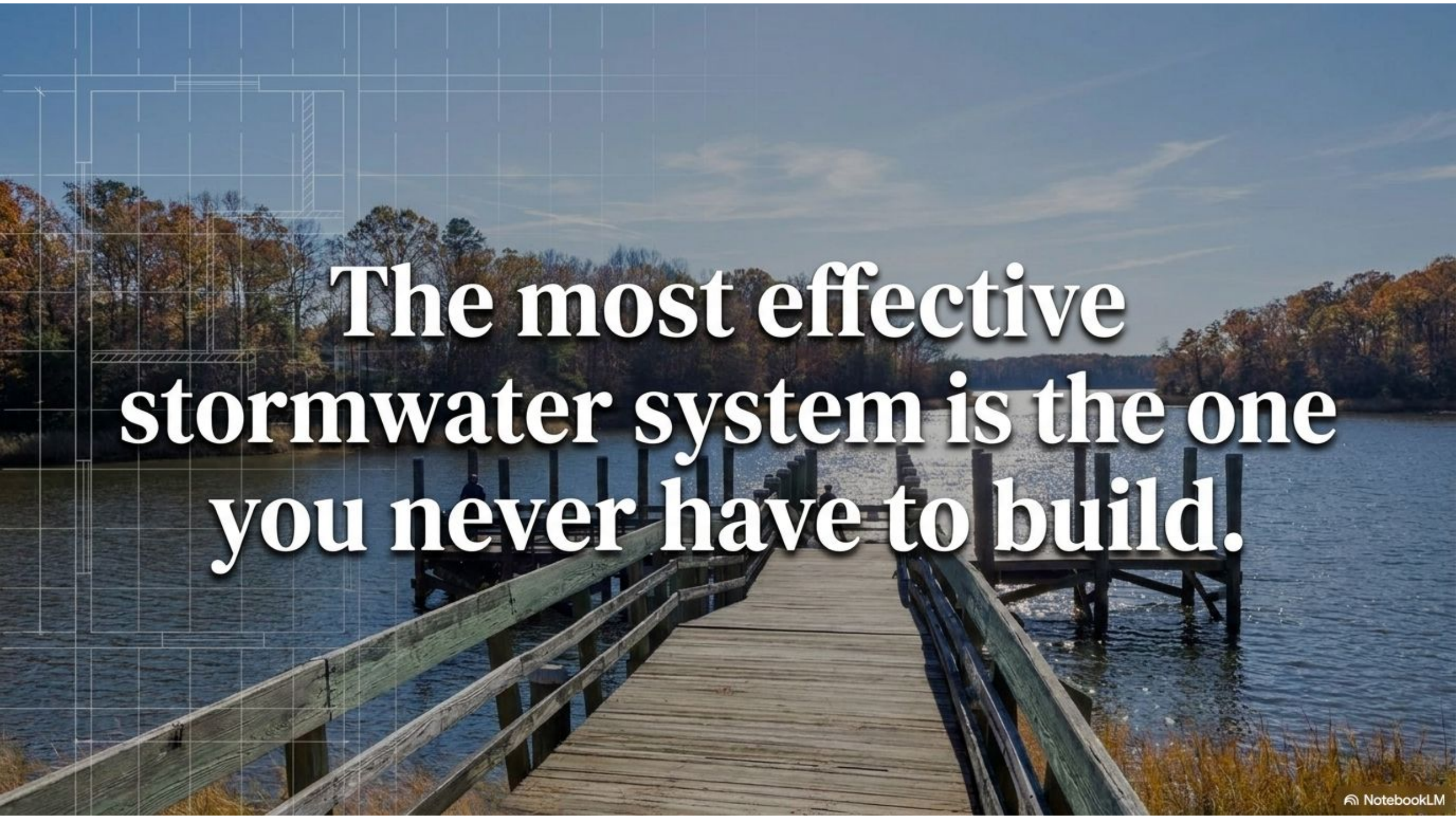
Proactive Planning Pays.

Preserving open space upstream prevents massive capital engineering costs downstream.

Buffer
Municipal

and

Sponge
Conservation

A scenic photograph of a wooden pier or dock extending from a grassy shore into a calm body of water. The pier is made of weathered wooden planks and has a simple railing. In the background, there are trees with autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. The sky is a clear, pale blue with a few wispy clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

**The most effective
stormwater system is the one
you never have to build.**



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FORWARD. TOGETHER.

Virginia State Conservationist Highlights



Dr. Edwin Martínez Martínez, Virginia State Conservationist
Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways Conference
April 28, 2026

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

Virginia NRCS Profile

\$55M - \$120M State budget trend FY 2012-2026

Virginia NRCS has 4 Areas, 41 Field Offices, and a State Office

~ 132 employees

Staff includes:

District Conservationists
Soil Conservationists
Soil Conservation Technicians
Civil Engineer Technicians
Engineers
Soil Scientist
Agronomists
Foresters

Conservation Authorities/Programs

- **Farm Bill Programs**
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program
 - Inflation Reduction Act
 - Conservation Stewardship Program
 - **Agricultural Land Easements**
 - Regional Conservation Partnership Program
 - Regenerative Agriculture Pilot Program (New)
- **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)**
 - Watershed Rehabilitation
- **Emergency Watershed Protection Program**
 - Emergency work (hurricanes, floods, fires, etc.)
- **Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program**
 - Water quality



USDA NRCS Chief's Priorities, 2026

1. Preserve and Protect Agricultural Land:

Goal: Reduce the loss of productive farmland and safeguard the long-term viability of America's agricultural landscapes.

2. Modernize NRCS Infrastructure and Technology

Goal: Transform NRCS into a digitally agile agency that empowers staff and farmers through modern tools and systems.

3. Recenter Field Engagement and Technical Assistance

Goal: Re-establish NRCS's presence in the field to deliver hands-on, personalized support to farmers.

4. Strengthen Partnerships by Streamlining Processes and Accountability

Goal: Leverage partnerships as force multipliers while reducing internal friction to accelerate conservation outcomes.

5. Shift to Outcome-Based Conservation and Farmer Empowerment

Goal: Measure success through outcomes and empower farmers with data, recognition, and market access.



NRCS manages several Easements programs including:

- **Agricultural Land Easements (ALE):** Protect croplands and grasslands on working farms and ranches by limiting non-agricultural land uses.
- **Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE):** Protect, restore, and enhance wetlands that have been degraded by past agricultural activity.
- **Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE):** Provide flood mitigation, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection in flood-prone areas.
- **Legacy Programs:** Wetlands Reserve Program (**WRP**), Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (**FRPP**), and Grasslands Reserve Program (**GRP**) continue to provide benefits in Virginia alongside Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).





Virginia NRCS Preservation and Protection of Agricultural Land

- Virginia NRCS has **157 recorded easements** covering over **21,172 acres**.
- This represents more than **\$17 million dollars in Farm Bill conservation** funds invested directly into Virginia's working lands and landscapes.
- In **FY25** alone, over **\$3.5 million was obligated** for easement conservation projects. We received 16 applications totaling \$15 million dollars .
- In **FY26** we have so far **15 applications** for ALE program for approximately **15.5 million** in Farm Bill funds. Our **FY26 allocation is \$3.9 million for ALE and \$1 million for WRE**.
- Our state easement distribution is as follows: **73 easements targeting agricultural lands, 63 in wetlands, 20 in grasslands, and 1 floodplain easement**.

USDA NRCS Easement Locations

As of January 2026

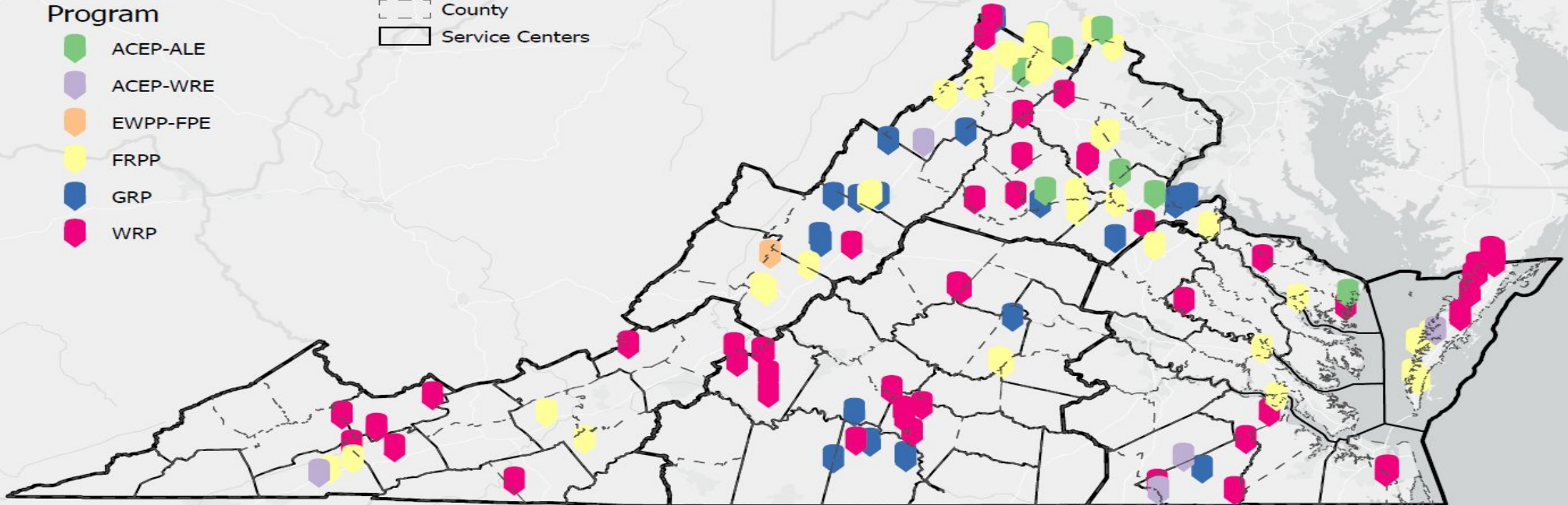
- 73 Agricultural Lands
- 63 Wetlands
- 20 Grasslands
- 1 Floodplain Easement

Legend

Program

- ACEP-ALE
- ACEP-WRE
- EWPP-FPE
- FRPP
- GRP
- WRP

- County
- Service Centers



Map ID: m15012_RIAD

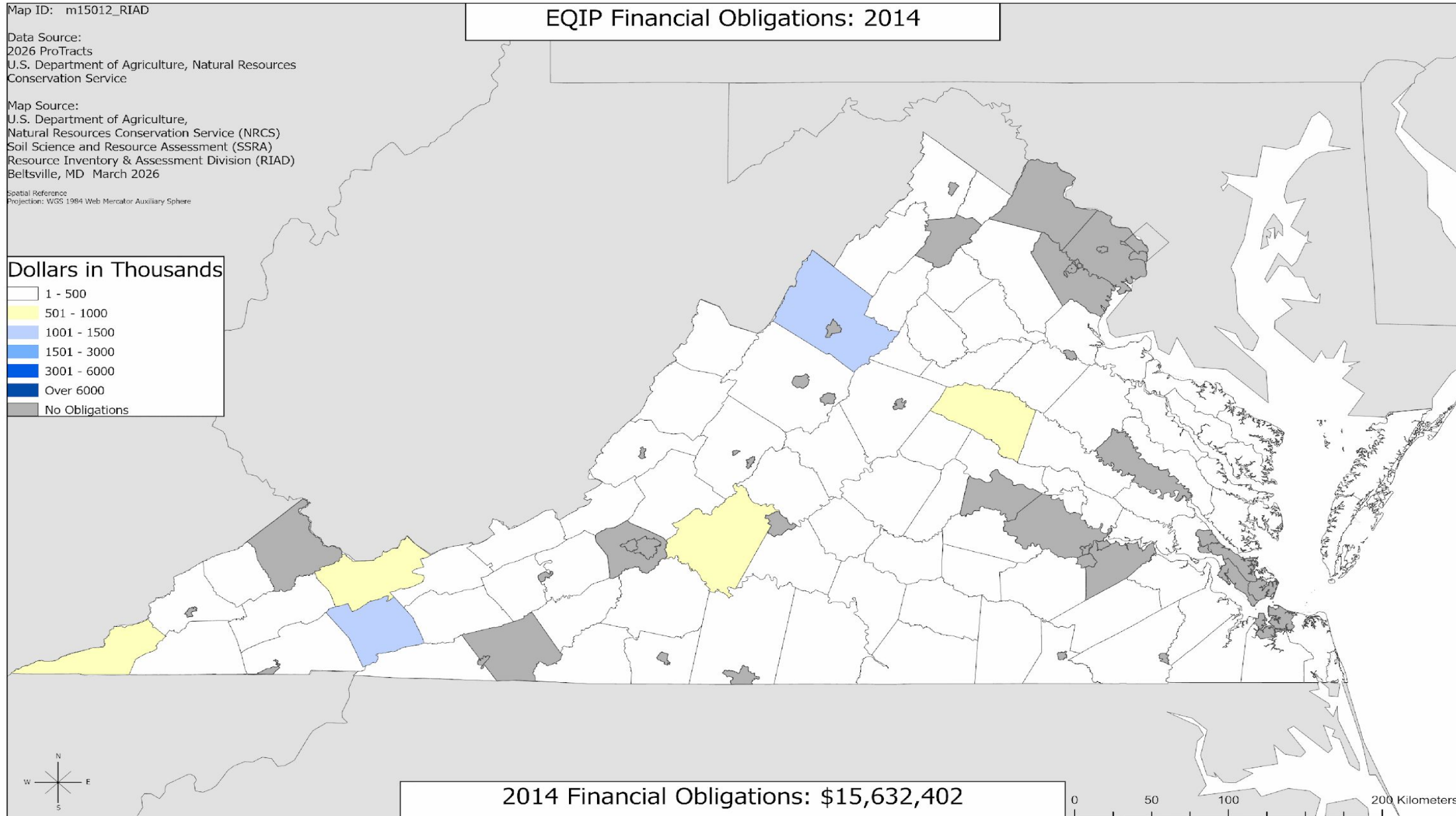
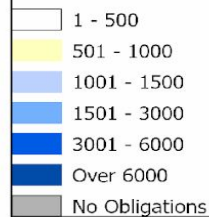
Data Source:
2026 ProTracts
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Map Source:
U.S. Department of Agriculture,
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Soil Science and Resource Assessment (SSRA)
Resource Inventory & Assessment Division (RIAD)
Beltsville, MD March 2026

Spatial Reference
Projection: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere

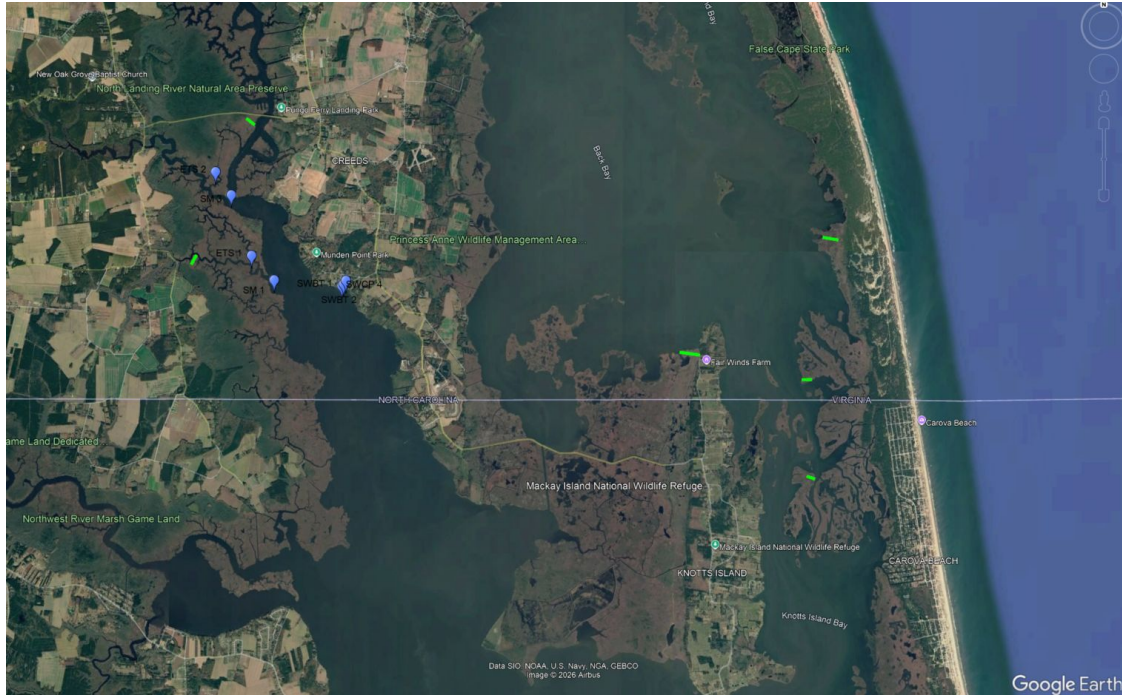
EQIP Financial Obligations: 2014

Dollars in Thousands





Virginia Coastal Zone Soil Survey



Staff worked in the **North Landing River and Back Bay, VA**, which are directly connected to Currituck Sound in the Outer Banks of NC.



The **coastal zone soil survey** can be used for providing data and interpretations that will be useful for marine **spatial planning, aquaculture, and coastal and near-shore restoration projects.**



NRCS Conservation Practice Standards Producer Roundtables:

Conservation Practice Standards are going to be reviewed nationwide via landowner roundtables.

Virginia's first batch of reviews took place on April 23rd in Southwest Virginia where we met with 15 producers to discuss the following standards:

- 512 – Pasture and Hay Planting
- 642 – Water Well
- 511 – Forage Harvest Management
- 574 – Spring Development
- 351 – Well Decommissioning





Questions?





Contact Information

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Virginia State Conservationist
Edwin.Martinez@usda.gov



Edwin Martinez Martinez, Ph.D.
Virginia State Conservationist at Usda-
Natural Resources Conservation Service



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agency and review
our open positions.



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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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