

**MOTION to authorize the Department of Conservation and Recreation to develop the Conservation Plan Program**

WHEREAS, §10.1-505 of the *Code of Virginia* (Code) authorizes the Board "to provide for the conservation of soil and water resources, control and prevention of soil erosion, flood water and sediment damages thereby preserving the natural resources of the Commonwealth";

WHEREAS, the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (Program) supports and encourages conservation planning on all agricultural land in Virginia;

WHEREAS, certain agricultural best management practices have been exempted from the Program's requirement to have an approved conservation plan prior to receiving cost-share funding approval in an effort to reduce the amount of administrative time and effort required to implement practices;

WHEREAS, §10.1-104.8 of the Code establishes the criteria included in a resource management plan;

WHEREAS, a resource management plan for cropland, specialty crops, or hayland must contain a soil conservation plan that achieves a maximum soil loss rate of "T";

WHEREAS, a pasture management plan or a soil conservation plan must be included for all pasture land included in a resource management plan;

WHEREAS, §58.1-339.3 of the Code states that "any individual who is engaged in agricultural production for market, or has equines that create needs for agricultural best management practices to reduce nonpoint source pollutants, and has in place a soil conservation plan approved by the local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), shall be allowed a credit against the tax imposed by § [58.1-320](#)...";

WHEREAS, Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) BMP Manual (Manual), as approved by the Board, states that "individuals wanting to participate in the Tax Credit Program must have a soil conservation plan approved by the local District Board of Directors prior to BMP installation";

WHEREAS, the Manual further requires that "at a minimum, a conservation plan must contain the BMP and an implementation schedule for the specific field or site";

WHEREAS, the Department has historically allowed various types of plans to be considered a soil conservation plan including soil erosion plans, nutrient management plans, pest management plans, Department of Forestry cost-share plans, Agricultural Stewardship Plans, Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act Plans, and Natural Resources Conservation Service conservation plans for agricultural lands;

WHEREAS, the Department recognizes that the varied types of plans considered to be conservation plans has led to duplication of efforts by state and federal agencies and potential confusion within the farming community;

WHEREAS, the development of a formal and streamlined Conservation Plan Program for Virginia has value for the farming community and increases the conservation of the natural resources of the Commonwealth;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board authorizes the Department to develop a Conservation Plan Program including provisions for the training and certification of individuals developing conservation plans;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Department shall establish a working group of stakeholders to offer recommendations and insight into the resources to be considered, components of a plan, training and certification requirements, and other policy and Program considerations;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Department is authorized to coordinate and consult with federal and state agencies and other stakeholders as needed to develop the Program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Department will bring additional guidance and program details for approval by the Board at the Board's May 2017 meeting.