

SUPPORT HB357

Topic: Establishing a work group to develop strategies to protect tidal and nontidal wetlands and develop plans for wetland restoration and creation to address adverse impacts from human activities and climate change.

Bill Patron: Delegate Shelly Simonds

OVERVIEW:

The work group would consist of the Department of Environmental Quality, the natural resources secretariat and agencies, and relevant stakeholders. Findings and recommendations will be reported to the chairs of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources by December 1, 2024.

The work group will be tasked with evaluating existing approaches to wetland conservation strategies, identifying wetlands adaptation areas where tidal wetlands can persist in the landscape, and exploring circumstances in which climate can impact the wetlands' health and survival.

REASONS TO SUPPORT

- Wetlands are disappearing quickly. Virginia has already lost to development approximately half of the wetlands that existed in the 1780s, and according to a 2021 report by Climate Central, Virginia could lose 42% of its tidal wetlands by 2100.
- Wetlands are among the most productive, diverse, and important ecosystems in Virginia. Both tidal and nontidal wetlands improve water quality, reduce storm damage and flooding, control erosion, provide vital wildlife habitat, and help fight climate change.
- Because of the Supreme Court's 2023 decision in *Sackett v. EPA*, which removed federal protections from large swaths of the nation's wetlands, Virginia's existing state tidal and nontidal wetlands laws and regulations are more important than ever. It now falls on our state and local decision-makers to enforce existing wetlands laws.
- Virginia currently lacks a comprehensive strategy to protect tidal and nontidal wetlands from impacts due to human activities and climate change – as well as to restore or create additional wetlands to achieve our Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Watershed Implementation Plan goals. These goals commit Virginia to restore more than 3,500 acres of tidal and nontidal wetlands.



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This position was taken by Virginia Conservation Network (VCN)'s Legislative Committee and Board of Directors and is supported by Virginia's conservation community. For a complete list of VCN positions, visit www.vcnva.org/bill-tracker. VCN is committed to building a powerful, diverse, and highly-coordinated conservation movement focused on protecting our Commonwealth's natural resources today and for tomorrow.