

ENSURING LONG-TERM FLOOD RESILIENCE

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WHY IT MATTERS

Virginians across the Commonwealth are experiencing climate change firsthand, from rising seas along our coastlines, flash floods in our mountains, and more powerful storms statewide. By 2080, nearly one million Virginians will be at risk of major coastal flooding and face flood damages costing up to \$5.7B annually.¹ The challenges extend far inland as well, with localities such as Buchanan and Tazewell Counties in the far southwestern reaches of Virginia facing some of the highest risk of flooding in the entire Commonwealth. Under-resourced communities who are least prepared to adapt, plan, and invest in flood resilience are often those who face the greatest climate risks. Flood resilience is a cross-sector issue, impacting health and public safety as well as economic, cultural, social, and natural resources.

Virginia's **Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF)** has deployed \$150M to help communities across Virginia identify and address flood risk, with over 60% of awards going to low-income areas. However, this funding pales in comparison to the climate risk in Virginia, and the Commonwealth currently has no dedicated, reliable stream of funding for this urgent work. Further, there is currently no overarching mechanism or process for prioritizing the limited state funds and resources that are available to ensure the projects being advanced are in line with state flood resilience plans and focused on the most urgent threats – protecting under-resourced communities from flooding and reducing high-risk development in flood-vulnerable areas.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Virginia has made noteworthy progress in identifying flood risks and is beginning to address community needs. The **Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)** created Virginia's first Coastal Resilience Master Plan to assess coastal flood risk in 2021, and rainfall-based flood risk will be added by the end of 2024. A statewide Flood Protection Master Plan will be completed by the end of 2025.

The CFPF is a statewide program that awards funding to local and regional governments to develop resilience plans and build capacity, collect data, conduct studies, and implement flood resilience projects. With an emphasis on community-scale and **nature-based solutions**, and a requirement to distribute at least 25% of funding to low-income communities, over \$150M has been awarded since 2021 with more than 60% going to low-income areas.² In addition, the General Assembly allocated \$100M for the CFPF in FY25, the first time that general funds have been appropriated for statewide flood resilience.

However, the CFPF has simply not kept pace with the number of applications received. And with Virginia no longer – at least for now – receiving roughly \$130M annually from the **Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)**, a dedicated, long-term revenue source must be identified to address the tens of billions of dollars needed to address the Commonwealth's flood risk.

Virginia also lacks an overarching prioritization process for using the CFPF, **Resilient Virginia Revolving Fund (RVRF)**, or other sources to fund the flood resilience projects and efforts identified or aligned with state flood plans. Although CFPF grants are awarded using a scoring rubric, other resilience funds such as the RVRF do not have the same priorities. Additionally, there is no requirement to award the funds to projects that are included in state flood plans or incentive for localities to submit their priority projects to the state's database to enter a funding queue. As communities embark on Coastal Storm Risk Management (CSRM) studies with the **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)**, project costs – and funding requests to the state to help cover the billions of dollars needed – will grow exponentially and a prioritization process will be essential.

In another big advancement in 2024, the General Assembly created a standalone **Chief Resilience Officer (CRO)** position with funding for two additional staff. The CRO is tasked with providing technical assistance and capacity-building support to local governments, acquiring federal funds for resilience efforts, and assisting DCR with coastal and statewide flood planning efforts. This position is also tasked with coordinating and communicating resilience programs, initiatives, and funding opportunities across state agencies through an Interagency Resilience Management Team.

OPPORTUNITIES

A resourced, coordinated, and comprehensive approach to flood resilience is needed to protect Virginia's people, places, economy, and natural resources.

If Virginia does not re-join RGGI, the CFPF lacks a dedicated revenue stream to implement flood resilience plans and projects. The General Assembly must find dedicated, long-term funding to ensure a safe and prosperous future as climate risk grows and does not face higher costs down the road.

To ensure resources are being invested effectively, DCR should ensure that each flood resilience funding program incorporates a project selection process that prioritizes projects that align with the Commonwealth's Resilience Guiding Principles³ and are included in Virginia's flood resilience plans. Until a clear link is required between Virginia's flood resilience plans and its funding programs, there will be significant pressure to siphon resources to projects that may not be consistent with statewide priorities.

The CRO will submit a funding and staffing needs assessment to the General Assembly by the end of 2025. Given the scope of this issue, it is likely this work will require at least six additional staffing capacities⁴ to execute effectively, as well as a dedicated revenue stream.

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TOP TAKEAWAYS

Virginians are experiencing climate change firsthand, from rising seas along our coastlines, flash floods in our mountains, and more powerful storms statewide.

Virginia has made noteworthy progress in identifying flood risks and beginning to address community needs through Virginia's first Coastal Resilience Master Plan; deploying \$150M through Virginia's Community Flood Preparedness Fund; and creating a standalone Chief Resilience Officer position.

To successfully address increased statewide resilience needs in line with state priorities, flood resilience plans will need a clear link to funding programs along with dedicated and sufficient funding, particularly if Virginia does not rejoin RGGI.



ENDNOTES

1. Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan," *Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation*, (2021), <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/crmp/plan>.
2. "Community Flood Preparedness Fund," *Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation*, <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/dam-safety-and-floodplains/dsfpm-cfpf>.
3. Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Planning Framework: Principles and Strategies for Coastal Flood Protection and Adaptation" *Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation*, page 6, (October 22, 2020). <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/crmp/document/Virginia-Coastal-Resilience-Master-Planning-Framework-October-2020.pdf>.
4. "Hampton Roads Planning Development Commission, Legislative & Regulatory Activity" *2024 Regional Legislative Agenda*, Pg. 6, (2024), <https://www.hrpdcva.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8813/2024-Regional-Legislative-Agenda-PDF>.