



United States Department of Agriculture



VIRGINIA TRIBAL  
SUMMIT  
RESOURCE  
GUIDE





# OUR COMMITMENT



*“We began this journey with a shared commitment to stewardship and a strong desire to preserve Virginia’s rich history and heritage for the next generation. This common ground provides a good foundation for closer collaboration, but it is only a first step. I believe this gathering of tribal nations and federal and state agencies has opened a door and it is now up to us to step through it. We shared a lot of information on programs and services but couldn’t possibly cover all the available options in two short days. I hope this resource guide will be a helpful reference that will lead to more conversations, stronger government-to-government relationships and a greater sense of community.”*

**Dr. Edwin Martinez Martinez**  
**NRCS Virginia State Conservationist**

*“Our office was established to help provide education, tools and resources to address the many challenges rural and underserved communities face every day. We do that by serving as a bridge between these groups and USDA programs and initiatives that can help meet specific needs. Partnership events like this one are a wonderful way to begin making those vital connections. I’m happy you chose to join us and eager to speak with your leaders about ways we can work together. I’m sure we’ll have much to discuss and can’t wait to begin.”*

**Lisa Ramirez, Director**  
**USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement**



# PARTNERS AND PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

## **Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)**

USDA agency that can work with tribal communities to ensure that livestock and produce are free from diseases, parasites and predation from wildlife.

## **Farm Service Agency (FSA)**

USDA agency that implements agricultural policy, administers credit and loan programs and manages conservation, commodity, disaster and farm marketing programs through a national network of offices.

## **Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)**

USDA agency that works in partnership with public, private and nonprofit organizations to increase food security and reduce hunger by providing children and low-income adults access to healthy food that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

## **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

USDA agency that provides financial and technical assistance to landowners and agricultural producers and collaborates with communities to protect natural resources on private properties.

## **Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE)**

USDA staff office that facilitates collaboration to address challenges facing rural and underserved communities and offers tools and resources to foster hope and opportunity, wealth creation and asset building.

## **Risk Management Agency (RMA)**

USDA agency created in 1996 to serve America's agricultural producers through effective, market-based risk management tools to strengthen the economic stability of individual producers and rural communities.

## **Rural Development (RD)**

USDA agency focused on helping rural communities grow and prosper with capital and technical assistance available to assist tribes and individual tribal members in starting and expanding businesses.

## **Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD)**

A private, nonprofit association of 47 state Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) that promotes leadership in natural resource conservation through stewardship and education programs and coordinates statewide efforts to focus effectively on issues identified

by local member districts.

## **Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)**

A state agency established in 1877 to promote the economic growth and development of Virginia agriculture, provide consumer protection and encourage environmental stewardship.

## **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)**

The state's lead natural resource conservation agency that offers a variety of environmental programs to support clean water, natural habitats, parks, dams, open space and outdoor access.

## **Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VHCD)**

A state agency that partners with communities to develop their economic potential, regulates Virginia's building and fire codes, provides training and certification for building officials and invests more than \$100 million each year into housing and community development projects that are primarily designed to help low- to moderate-income citizens.

## **Virginia Soil Health Coalition (VSHC)**

An alliance of governmental and partner agencies across Virginia that have pledged support for NRCS core soil health principles and are committed to fostering a greater understanding of the practical benefits of these practices. Coalition members include NRCS, DCR, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Virginia State University and VASWCD.

## **U.S. Forest Service**

USDA agency that manages 155 national forests and an additional 222 research and experimental forests. In Virginia, the USFS manages the 1.8-million acre George Washington and Jefferson National Forests for multiple uses including recreation, timber, minerals and sustenance of fish and wildlife.

## **Special thanks to faculty and staff at these colleges and universities for serving on the event planning committee:**

Sweet Briar College  
Virginia State University  
Virginia Tech

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# CONSERVATION AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING



## Conservation Planning (DCR and NRCS)

Conservation plans are a great roadmap to address landowner needs and goals for protecting natural resources and supporting agricultural operations. Certified planners can provide personalized plans that address these concerns while also identifying on-site state cultural, historic and wildlife resources.

NRCS conservationists use a nine-step process to help landowners lay out customized plans that, when implemented, will likely achieve their conservation objectives. They begin by walking the land to conduct a field inventory of each operation and then work with the landowner to develop a targeted strategy to ensure that the right suite of practices is installed to work as a system to produce desired outcomes.

DCR planners also interview the property owner/producer and visit all areas to be included in the plan. Identified concerns can be addressed through recommended best management practices (BMPs). Conservation plans are “living documents,” so they’re likely to be updated as improvements are made and goals are met.

### Web Links:

- [www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/conservation-planning](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/conservation-planning)
- [www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vaconvision](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/vaconvision) (Virginia ConservationVision, a suite of statewide conservation planning maps)
- [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=nrcs144p2\\_015695](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=nrcs144p2_015695) (Nine-Step Planning Process)

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## Habitat Restoration and Management (DCR, VDACS, VCE, NRCS)

DCR's **Natural Heritage Program** focuses on science-based conservation to protect and conserve habitat for Virginia's native plant and animal species, and the significant natural communities and ecosystems upon which they depend.





DCR biologists collect data on natural communities and rare plants and animals, develop land conservation data and online mapping tools and provide up-to-date information to enable timely conservation decisions.

Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System provides permanent long-term protection and management for these natural heritage resources, as well as outdoor recreation access to some of the state's and the planet's most ecologically important lands.



NRCS supports statewide habitat creation and management activities through its Private Lands Biologist (PLB) program offered in partnership with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and Virginia Tech's Conservation Management Institute. A team of five PLBs is available to support habitat management for pollinating insects, songbirds, rabbits and big game animals in the commonwealth's open lands and forests.

The team helps administer state and federal financial assistance programs, reviews conservation plans for impacts on threatened and endangered species and assists Virginia Department of Forestry staff in developing forest stewardship plans for private timberland owners.

**Publications:** [www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/publications](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/publications).

#### Web Links:

- Natural Heritage Program: [www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/about](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/about)
- Information Services: [www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/infoservices](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/infoservices)
- Rare Species/Natural Communities: [www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/rare-species-com](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/rare-species-com)
- Natural Heritage Data Explorer, an interactive mapping website: <https://vanhde.org/>

- Private Lands Biologists: [dwr.virginia.gov/quail/get-involved/private-land-biologist/#:~:text=The%20Private%20Lands%20Biologist%20\(PLB,FREE%20technical%20assistance](http://dwr.virginia.gov/quail/get-involved/private-land-biologist/#:~:text=The%20Private%20Lands%20Biologist%20(PLB,FREE%20technical%20assistance)

### Natural Heritage Resources/Consultation (DCR)

The locality liaison at DCR's Division of Natural Heritage (DCR-DNH) assists tribes and other local conservation partners in more fully utilizing natural heritage resource information (rare, threatened and endangered species, significant natural communities, caves and karst features) and provides consultative services to ensure ongoing protection of natural heritage resources. These services can include training on DCR-DNH data tools, access to DCR-DNH data and the Natural Heritage Data Explorer (NHDE) and presentations about potential natural heritage resources on tribal lands. Each presentation can be tailored to the specific tribe with a discussion of the tribe's needs to follow.

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### Land Conservation (DCR and NRCS)

The Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) was created to help fund the permanent protection of specific categories of land: farmlands, forestlands, lands of historic or cultural significance, natural areas and open spaces and parklands.

State agencies, local governments, other public bodies and nonprofit land trusts are eligible to receive matching grants from the foundation for the permanent conservation of land through purchase and dedication under the Open Space Land Act or conservation easements. Funding is reliant upon the state's annual budget.

An interagency taskforce reviews and recommends grant applications to the VLCF and DCR provides staff and administrative support. Grant awards are based on applications for 50 percent or less of total project costs pursuant to specific criteria defined in each category. Grant rounds usually open in the spring after the state budget is finalized with awards typically made in the fall and a two-year period for project completion. More information can be found on the VLCF webpage: [www.dcr.virginia.gov/land-conservation/vlcf](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land-conservation/vlcf).



NRCS offers funding and technical assistance through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to help landowners, land trusts, American Indian tribes and other entities protect farms and wetlands through land conservation easements. The Agricultural Land Easements component protects the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to nonagricultural uses. Wetland Reserve Easements help preserve delicate ecosystems by providing habitat for fish and wildlife to include threatened and endangered species.

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### Invasive Species Management (VDACS, NRCS)

Harmful species that are accidentally or intentionally introduced into environments in which they did not evolve can quickly spread to disrupt plant communities or ecosystems. State and federal agencies offer a number of resources to help landowners detect and possibly remove these invasives.

DCR's Division of Natural Heritage offers downloadable lists of native plants and 90 invasive species, which are ranked in terms of the dangers they present to forests and other native species.

#### Web Links:

- Native Plants: [dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/nativeplants](http://dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/nativeplants)
- Invasive Plants: [dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspinfo](http://dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspinfo)

#### DCR Contact:

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Additional resources are available on this state government website: [www.invasivespeciesva.org/](http://www.invasivespeciesva.org/).

USDA can also support tribal efforts to control invasive species on their lands. The National Invasive Species Information Center offers a host of online resources at [www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/](http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/) (click here for state-specific threats). A full guide to NRCS policies and services to help in identifying invasive species can be

found at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/ecoscience/invasive/?cid=stel-prdb1043179](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/ecoscience/invasive/?cid=stel-prdb1043179).

NRCS conservationists and private lands biologists based in field offices can also consult with landowners on invasive species issues. Reach out to your local service center to learn more.

The **Blue Ridge Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM)** is another resource for information on Virginia invasive species identification and management. Download fact sheets and view schedules for upcoming workshops at <https://blueridgeprism.org/>.



### Shoreline Stabilization (DCR/SEAS)

Shorelines are in constant states of change due to storm waves and rising sea levels. Agriculture and development activities, soil type and composition can drastically accelerate the natural rate of erosion.

The Shoreline Erosion Advisory Service (SEAS) offers services free of charge in non-tidal areas to assist Virginia's private landowners and localities with erosion problems. On-site meetings can be scheduled to discuss current shoreline conditions and grant funding opportunities. Learn more: [www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/seas](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/seas).

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## Soil Health (DCR, NRCS, Virginia Soil Health Coalition)

Virginia NRCS has championed soil quality improvement for decades and many of our staff members serve as speakers, teachers, organizers or advisors for statewide soil health education efforts that include internal training and conferences for farmers and industry.

In 2013, the agency launched a soil health initiative focused on regenerating soil life on croplands and grasslands through soil health management systems. The Virginia Soil Health Coalition was a key part of that strategy and is working closely with NRCS to engage more partners in promoting sustainable practices that support mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

VSHC has also launched a 4theSoil education and awareness campaign to extend its reach to the general public. Learn more: [www.virginiasoilhealth.org](http://www.virginiasoilhealth.org).



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## Best Management Practices (DCR, NRCS)

The DCR Division of Soil and Water administers the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) program that is implemented by SWCDs statewide. The districts receive funding to provide assistance to producers with questions related to agricultural best management practices (BMPs).

Here are a few options with proven positive impacts on water quality, agricultural sustainability and productivity:

- Cover crops
- Cattle exclusion from waterways and karst features
- Forestation of agricultural land.
- Protecting waterways from streambank erosion using forested buffers
- Converting current marginal croplands to pastures or hayfields
- Manure injection
- Roof runoff management

Local SWCD staff can answer your questions on cost-share rates, practice lifespan and which cost-share

practices may be most applicable to your land. Learn more at [www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/costshare2](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/costshare2).



The NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers technical and financial assistance to help producers address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water quality, enhanced soil health and reduced erosion and improved or created wildlife habitat. The following practices are available through EQIP to address resource concerns common to Virginia tribes:

- Invasive species control
- Wildlife habitat planting
- Tree/shrub planting
- High tunnels

**Contacts:** Local SWCDs and field offices



## Water Quality and Quantity (DCR and NRCS)

**Nonpoint Source (NPS) Pollution.** DCR coordinates programs and services to prevent water quality degradation caused by runoff that is not from a single point such as a wastewater treatment plant or industrial discharge pipe. Soil and water conservation staff members collaborate with numerous state, local and federal agencies and the private sector to administer NPS pollution control programs required by state law.



Some BMPs may qualify for Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program funds, tax credits or other funding. Visit [www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/) to get more information or find the nearest office.

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**Nutrient Management.** Nutrients found in fertilizers, manure, biosolids and other sources can have a significant impact on ground and surface water. DCR offers services through its nutrient management program to help landowners develop nutrient management plans that incorporate best management practices such as timing, rate and placement of fertilizer, manure and biosolids to protect and improve water quality.

NRCS conservationists can also work with agricultural producers to develop Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) for animal-feeding operations. These plans document the practices and management activities adopted by the landowner or operator to address the natural resource concerns related to soil erosion, water quality, utilization of manure and waste water and disposal of organic byproducts.

Learn more: [www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/nutmgt](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/nutmgt) and [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/nra/?cid=nrcs143\\_014041](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/nra/?cid=nrcs143_014041).



**Poultry Litter Transport Incentives.** DCR and the Virginia Poultry Federation have teamed up to help address water quality issues related to the overapplication of poultry litter by transporting it out of the state’s main poultry-producing counties for use

as a crop nutrient source in other areas. The initiative is designed to encourage the development of self-sustaining poultry litter markets beyond the Bay and in designated areas within the watershed. Payments of \$7.50, \$15 or \$20 per ton of litter moved help cover additional costs associated with longer transport distances. Get more information on eligibility, applications and program requirements at [www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/nmlitter](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/nmlitter).

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*Spotted Lanternfly, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture*

**Animal and Plant Health Inspection (APHIS)**

APHIS offers testing for diseases that impact animals and those that can also be communicated to people (Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, brucellosis and others). Staff share information with livestock owners and prepare tribal communities to respond to outbreaks of disease and pest emergencies. Services are also available to protect livestock and crops from predators such as wolves, coyotes, feral swine and bears.

Early detection of damaging/invasive weeds and insects is critical to containing outbreaks. APHIS provides plant protection and quarantine services to help suppress the spread of pests such as range caterpillars and Mormon crickets. Biotech Regulatory Services are also available to address issues related to genetically engineered crops. Learn more: [www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/tribalrelations/SA\\_Program\\_and\\_Activities](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/tribalrelations/SA_Program_and_Activities).

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# COMMUNITY GROWTH AND EXPANSION



## Farm Loan Programs (FSA)

Tribal members interested in agriculture can get financial assistance from FSA through the following loan programs:

- **Farm Operating Loans** of up to \$400,000 for normal operating expenses, including machinery and equipment, seed, livestock, feed, fuel, insurance and more
- **Farm Ownership Loans** of up to \$600,000 for purchasing farms, improving and expanding operations and refinancing debt
- **Farm Storage Facility Loans** offered at low interest to build, buy or upgrade buildings and equipment used to store, handle or transport eligible commodities
- **Marketing Assistance Loans** that provide interim financing around harvest season to enable producers to meet cash flow needs without selling their commodities when prices are often at their lowest levels of the year
- **Microloans** for farm operations and to assist in farm ownership
- **Youth Loans** of up to \$5,000 to help individuals aged 10-20 finance income-producing ag projects developed in conjunction with Future Farmers of America (FFA), tribal youth organizations or similar groups

Learn more: [www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/index](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/index).

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## Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FNS)

The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) provides USDA-inspected vegetables, fruits, frozen meats, whole grains and other traditional foods to low-income households living on reservations and in designated areas near reservations. Learn more at [www.fns.usda.gov/fdpi/food-distribution-program-in-dian-reservations](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdpi/food-distribution-program-in-dian-reservations).

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## Business Development Services (RD)

RD offers a number of programs to increase economic development and improve the quality of life in rural places and small towns. Offerings include:

- **Guarantees** for business loans offered by local lenders to tribal member-owned businesses in rural areas
- **Re-lending** loans to local intermediaries including Native Community development financial institutions that re-lend to businesses and community development projects.





## Rural Broadband (VDHCD and RD)

VDHCD's Office of Broadband serves as the go-to resource for tribal communities to access state broadband programs, and technical assistance when applying for federal funds. Tribal governments are eligible for the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative, the commonwealth's primary grant program to expand access to broadband.

The Office of Broadband also facilitated tribal government applications for federal funds, including the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program and Affordable Connectivity Program. This assistance included sharing best practices for application development and vetting proposals from consultants to tribal communities.

For more information and to access these resources, please contact [broadband@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:broadband@dhcd.virginia.gov).

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RD offers more than 20 programs to fund planning, construction and research for rural broadband activities. More information can be found at [usda.gov/broadband](https://usda.gov/broadband) or by downloading a copy of this *Broadband Resource for Rural America* guide: [www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/508\\_rd\\_broadband\\_usda\\_guide\\_2021\\_102621.pdf](https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/508_rd_broadband_usda_guide_2021_102621.pdf).

- **Rural Business Development Grants** to support business and job creation in tribal communities through capitalizing loan funds, technical assistance and training (also support small and emerging business planning and feasibility studies)
- **Rural Energy for America** grants and loan guarantees to agricultural producers and small businesses in rural areas for installation of renewable energy systems/improvements in energy efficiency
- **Value-Added Grants** to help farmers and ranchers invest in new processing methods or tap into new or emerging markets to grow their businesses
- **Electricity Loans** for generation, transmission and distribution facilities in tribal areas (grants available to address rising energy costs)
- **Water and Waste Disposal** funding pool dedicated to finance drinking water systems, sewer and solid waste disposal systems and storm water drainage
- Guaranteed loans for essential **Community Facilities** facilities such as hospitals, libraries, schools and emergency response (limited grants also offered to smaller, low-income tribal communities based on need)
- Flexible financing for water, electric and telecommunications projects aimed at **Historically Underserved Trust Areas**

Learn more at [www.rd.usda.gov/va](https://www.rd.usda.gov/va).

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## Dam Safety (DCR and NRCS)

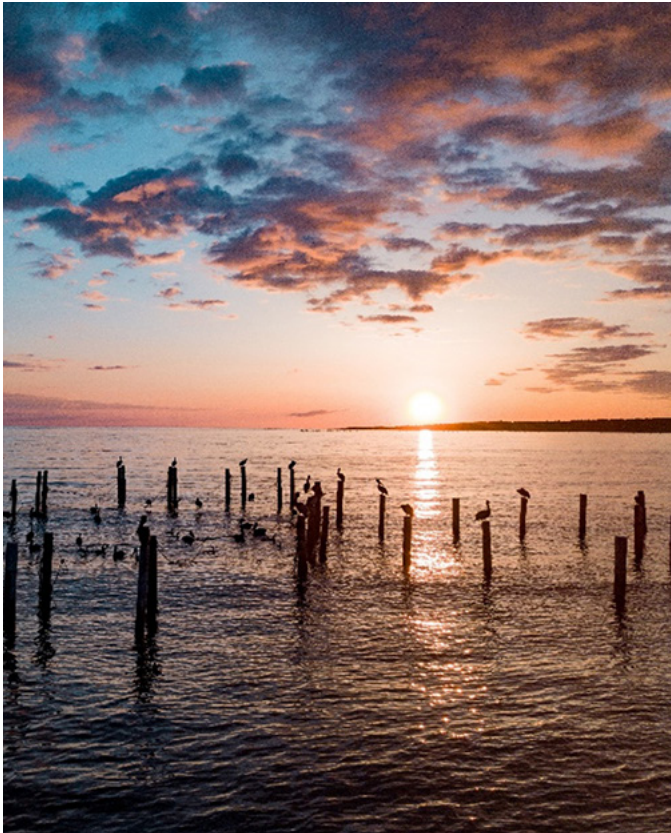
Virginia dams are classified by hazard potential (high, significant or low), which is based of identified impacts to life and property downstream should the dam fail. DCR's dam safety staff members promote the proper and safe design, construction, operation and maintenance of these structures. Unless specifically excluded, all 2,600 dams in Virginia are regulated.





NRCS also provides planning assistance for large river basin studies, water quality issues, flooding, recreation and water supply reservoirs and resource inventories. Since 1950, NRCS has helped local sponsors construct 150 dams in 35 watersheds and 27 counties. Between 2005 and 2019, the agency helped communities rehabilitate 13 of those dams.

Learn more: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/va/programs/planning/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/va/programs/planning/).



### Floodplain Management (DCR)

Floods are the most common natural disaster, causing about 200 American deaths each year and nationwide damages exceeding \$3 billion. The Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Fund was established in 2020 to help Virginia regions and localities reduce the impacts of flooding, including events driven by climate change.

The fund empowers communities to complete vulnerability assessments and develop and implement action-oriented approaches to bolster flood preparedness and resilience. The program also has a component to assist communities with capacity building, planning and studies. Applications are currently being accepted from through April 8, 2022, for more than \$40 million in flood preparation funds.

**Web Link:** [www.dcr.virginia.gov/dam-safety-and-flood-plains/dsfpm-cfpf](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/dam-safety-and-flood-plains/dsfpm-cfpf).

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### Federal Crop Insurance (RMA)

RMA administers Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) programs and promotes national welfare by improving the economic stability of agriculture through a secure system of crop insurance and other risk management tools. Using a network of public- and private-sector partners, RMA creates crop insurance products and provides risk management education and outreach while ensuring program accessibility and integrity.

Virginia farmers can contact [local crop insurance agents](#) or RMA's Raleigh, N.C., regional office to access programs and services. Learn more at [www.rma.usda.gov](http://www.rma.usda.gov).

**Contact:** Raleigh Regional Office

**Phone:** (919) 875-4880

**Email:** [rsonc@usda.gov](mailto:rsonc@usda.gov)



### Recreation Planning (DCR)

DCR coordinates funding and technical assistance for local parks and recreation departments through the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant programs. Since 1967, DCR has administered LWCF grant funding for more than 450 projects where recipients have matched grant funding by 50 percent or more.

Since the 1990s, DCR has administered the RTP grant funding for more than 300 trails projects where grant recipients have matched grant funding by 20 percent or more. To learn more, contact the DCR Recreation Grants Team via email at [recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov).



# Special thanks to

Virginia's federally recognized tribes for their invaluable guidance in crafting this program to focus on their unique needs and interests.



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