

CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRESS REPORT VIRGINIA

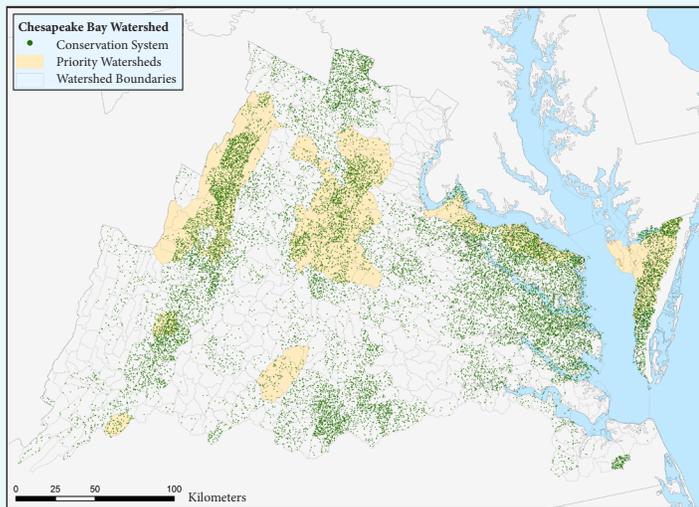
Agricultural Lands in Virginia Key to Healthy Bay

The Chesapeake Bay is a tremendous economic and recreational engine for Virginia. The bay has long served as a vehicle for commerce, tourism and transportation, and many Virginians' livelihoods depend on sustainable populations of shellfish and finfish. The Bay's wetlands filter pollutants and provide critical wildlife habitat and flood protection.

Farmers and forest landowners are using conservation systems that are reducing nutrient and sediment runoff by keeping soil in place and making agricultural lands more efficient and productive.



NRCS works closely with farmers to implement soil health management systems to decrease nutrient and sediment runoff from crop fields.



Each dot represents a farm where "Avoid-Control-Trap" conservation systems were implemented. Dots are randomly placed within priority watersheds to protect landowner privacy.

Targeted Approach in Virginia

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed a systems approach for designing and installing conservation activities on farms and forests to protect and improve water quality. The core parts of this approach are conservation activities that avoid, control and trap nutrients and sediment that could run off from farm fields.

Most of the conservation work in Virginia focuses on controlling nutrients on livestock operations and on croplands where farmers use manure as fertilizer. NRCS targets investments in high-priority watersheds where nutrient and sediment pollution is highest. Common practices include conservation buffers, nutrient management, waste storage facilities and heavy-use area protection. Since 2009, NRCS and conservation partners have worked with Virginia farmers and forest landowners to install conservation systems on more than 1.2 million acres in the Chesapeake Bay

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Through CIG projects, NRCS is partnering with managers of grazing lands to explore new approaches to improving soil health and water quality.

INVESTMENTS IN VIRGINIA

| YEAR | INVESTMENT | ACRES |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 2009 | \$18.5 million | 176,000 |
| 2010 | \$28 million | 238,000 |
| 2011 | \$31.1 million | 212,000 |
| 2012 | \$26 million | 205,000 |
| 2013 | \$25.1 million | 187,000 |
| 2014 | \$20.8 million | 75,000 |
| 2015 | \$20.9 million | 124,000 |
| TOTAL | \$170.4 million | 1,217,000 |

Source: NRCS Resources Economics, Analysis and Policy Division.

Leveraging the Help of Partners

Investments by NRCS are often matched two- and three-fold by conservation partners in Virginia. Through the Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), NRCS is building the next generation of conservation science and innovation and bringing together partners at the grassroots level to address priority natural resource concerns.

Through CIG, NRCS has invested more than \$1 million since 2009 in innovative projects of universities, conservation districts, nonprofits and other groups in Virginia. These CIG projects are accelerating adoption of

multi-species cover crops, precision agriculture, nutrient management, managed grazing and practices that promote soil health.

Through RCPP, NRCS is bringing conservation partners together across the state and bay watershed, investing \$4.3 million to get conservation practices on the ground. USDA designated the Chesapeake Bay as one of the eight critical conservation areas for RCPP funding. Currently, three projects are underway in the basin, bringing together an array of partners like Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Trout Unlimited and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Positive Outcomes in Virginia

Independent reports show positive trends for water quality, habitat and key aquatic species, and modeled results and monitoring stations show declines in nutrient and sediment loads to the Bay.

The abundance of underwater grasses grew by 21 percent between 2014 and 2015. Aerial imagery collected between May and November of 2015 revealed a total of 91,621 acres of underwater grasses across the region, the highest amount ever recorded by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science's aerial survey. Experts attribute this rise in underwater grass abundance to the recovery of wild celery and other species in fresh waters of the upper Bay, the continued expansion of



widgeon grass in the moderately salty waters of the mid-Bay and a modest recovery of eelgrass in the very salty waters of the lower Bay.

Meanwhile, the Chesapeake Bay Health Index scores the bay on overall health. The lower bay in Virginia has the highest score, which earned a B for health while the middle and upper bay areas earned C's.

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