2026 Special Session I

Budget Bill - HB30 (Introduced)

Bill Order » Natural and Historic Resources » Item 362

Department of Conservation and Recreation

Item 362	First Year - FY2027	Second Year - FY2028
Land and Resource Management (50300)	**$434,875,166**	**$146,870,581**
Soil and Water Conservation (50301)	$305,380,275	$18,625,690
Dam Inventory, Evaluation and Classification and Flood Plain Management (50314)	$91,733,864	$90,483,864
Natural Heritage Preservation and Management (50317)	$8,066,936	$8,066,936
Financial Assistance to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (50320)	$15,144,091	$15,144,091
Technical Assistance to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (50322)	$5,850,000	$5,850,000
Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost Share Assistance (50323)	$8,700,000	$8,700,000
Fund Sources:		
General	$183,673,568	$37,802,426
Special	$1,676,791	$1,426,791
Dedicated Special Revenue	$243,562,579	$101,679,136
Federal Trust	$5,962,228	$5,962,228

Authority: Title 10.1, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 21.1; Title 62.1, Chapter 3.1, Code of Virginia.

A.1. Out of the amounts appropriated for Financial Assistance to Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts, $15,044,091 the first year and $15,044,091 the second year from the general fund shall be provided to soil and water conservation districts for administrative and operational support. These funds shall be distributed upon approval by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board to the districts in accordance with the Board's established financial allocation policy. Of this amount, $12,809,091 the first year and $12,809,091 the second year from the general fund shall be distributed to the districts for core administrative and operational expenses (personnel, training, travel, rent, utilities, office support, and equipment) based on identified budget projections and in accordance with the Board's financial allocation policy; $468,000 the first year and $468,000 the second year from the general fund shall be distributed at a rate of $4,500 per dam for maintenance; $1,500,000 the first year and $1,500,000 the second year from the general fund for small dam repairs of known or suspected deficiencies; and $267,000 the first year and $267,000 the second year to the department to provide district support in accordance with Board policy, including, but not limited to, services related to auditing, bonding, contracts, and training. The amount appropriated for small dam repairs of known or suspected deficiencies and the purchase and installation of remote monitoring equipment is authorized for transfer to the Soil and Water Conservation District Dam Maintenance, Repair, and Rehabilitation Fund. Notwithstanding the provisions of § 10.1-611.1, Code of Virginia, the department is authorized to use interest earnings from the Soil and Water Conservation District Dam Maintenance, Repair, and Rehabilitation Fund to support two positions to oversee maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation projects necessary for District-owned dams to be in compliance with the Dam Safety Act (§ 10.1-604

et seq.) and attendant regulations.

2. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $4,550,000 the first year and $4,550,000 the second year shall be provided for base technical assistance support for the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts. These funds shall be distributed upon approval by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board to the districts in accordance with the Board's established financial allocation policy. These amounts shall be in addition to any other funding provided to the districts for technical assistance for appropriations in excess of $35,000,000. The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board is authorized to utilize previous years' unobligated cost-share funds to provide technical assistance funding to Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts at a rate no higher than the technical assistance rate percentage funded in the current Appropriation Act.

3. The department shall provide a report on or before August 15 of each year to the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate and Appropriations Finance Committees on each Virginia soil and water conservation district's budget, revised budget, previous year's balance budget, and expenditure for the following: (i) the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, (ii) the use of Agricultural Best Management Cost-Share Program funds within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, (iii) the use of Agricultural Best Management Cost-Share Program funds within the Southern Rivers area, and (iv) the amount of Technical Assistance funding.

4. The reporting requirements of A.3 shall be included as part of the reporting requirements in § 62.1-44.118.

C. It is the intent of the General Assembly, that notwithstanding the provisions of § 10.1-2132, Code of Virginia, the department is authorized to make Water Quality Improvement Grants to state agencies.

D.1 Out of the appropriation in this Item, $10,000,000 the first year and $10,000,000 the second year from the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund, a subfund of the Virginia Water Quality Improvement Fund, is hereby appropriated. The funds shall be dispersed by the department pursuant to § 10.1-2128.1, Code of Virginia.

2. The source of an amount estimated at $10,000,000 the first year and $10,000,000 the second year to support the nongeneral fund appropriation to the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund shall be the recordation tax fee established in Part 3 of this act.

3. Out of this amount, a total of thirteen percent, or $1,300,000, whichever is greater, shall be appropriated to Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts for technical assistance to farmers implementing agricultural best management practices, and $8,700,000 for Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Assistance. Of the amount deposited for Cost-Share Assistance, seventy percent shall be used for matching grants for agricultural best management practices on lands in the Commonwealth exclusively or partly within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and thirty percent shall be used for matching grants for agricultural best management practices on lands in the Commonwealth exclusively outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

E.1. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $2,583,531 in the first year and $2,583,531 in the second year from the funds designated in Item 3-1.01 C. of this act are hereby appropriated to the Virginia Water Quality Improvement Fund and designated for deposit to the reserve fund established pursuant to paragraph B of Item 361. It is the intent of the General Assembly that all interest earnings of the Water Quality Improvement Fund shall be spent only upon appropriation by the General Assembly, after the recommendation of the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, pursuant to § 10.1-2129, Code of Virginia.

2. Notwithstanding the provisions of §§ 10.1-2128, 10.1-2128.1 and 10.1-2129, Code of Virginia, or any other provision of law, it is the intent of the General Assembly that the department use interest earnings from the Water Quality Improvement Fund and the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund to support five positions to administer the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program and provide support to Soil and Water Conservation Districts. At the end of each fiscal year, interest accrued in the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund that exceeds the amount for these five positions shall be transferred to the reserve fund of the

Water Quality Improvement Fund established pursuant to paragraph B of Item 361, unless the cash balance in the reserve at the end of the prior fiscal year is at or greater than $70,000,000.

F. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $15,000 the first year and $15,000 the second year from the general fund is provided to support the Rappahannock River Basin Commission. The funds shall be matched by the participating localities and planning district commissions.

G. Notwithstanding § 10.1-552, Code of Virginia, Soil and Water Conservation Districts are hereby authorized to recover a portion of the direct costs of services rendered to landowners within the district and to recover a portion of the cost for use of district-owned conservation equipment. Such recoveries shall not exceed the amounts expended by a district on these services and equipment.

H. Unless specified otherwise in this Item, it is the intent of the General Assembly that balances in Soil and Water Conservation be used first, and then balances from Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost Share Assistance be used for the Commonwealth's statewide match for participation in the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

I. The Water Quality Agreement Program shall be continued in order to protect the waters of the Commonwealth through voluntary cooperation with lawn care operators across the state. The department shall encourage lawn care operators to voluntarily establish nutrient management plans and annual reporting of fertilizer application. If appropriate, then the program may be transferred to another state agency.

J.1. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $250,000 the first year and $250,000 the second year from the general fund is provided to the department to make available competitive grants to provide Chesapeake Bay meaningful watershed educational experiences. The department may enter into two-year contracts contingent on funding being available in the second year of the biennium.

2. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $350,000 the first year and $350,000 the second year from the general fund is provided to the Department to support two positions in the Office of Environmental Education to provide increased opportunities for education programs on environmental issues across the Commonwealth, pursuant to § 10.1-104, Code of Virginia. The Office of Environmental Education shall develop and implement environmental education programs and the Virginia Strategic Plan for environmental literacy in collaboration with the Department of Education, the Science Museum of Virginia STEM program, and other relevant stakeholders.

K. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $200,000 the first year and $200,000 the second year from the general fund is provided to the department for technical assistance to support Shoreline Erosion Advisory Services as established in § 10.1-702, Code of Virginia.

L. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $1,093,352 the first year and $1,093,352 the second year from the general fund shall be provided to the Natural Heritage Program in support of active preserve management activities across Virginia's Natural Area Preserves as identified by the Board of Conservation and Recreation.

M. Notwithstanding § 54.1, Chapter 4, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and Department of Conservation and Recreation Central Office staff may provide engineering services to the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts for design and construction of agriculture best management practices.

N.1. Out of the amounts appropriated for Dam Inventory, Evaluation, and Classification and Flood Plain Management, $1,732,147 the first year and $732,147 the second year from the general fund shall be deposited to the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund, established pursuant § 10.1-603.17, Code of Virginia.

2. Unobligated balances in the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund may be utilized in an amount not to exceed $60,000 to perform activities necessary to update the flood protection plan for the Commonwealth and to make the plan accessible online. Once these activities are complete, the department will maintain and update the plan as needed within existing resources.

O. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $400,000 the first year and $400,000 the second year from the general fund is provided to support lyngbya remediation efforts at Lake Gaston.

P. Notwithstanding the provisions of § 10.1-2132, Code of Virginia, the department shall allow grant funds allocated for the Virginia Cost Share Assistance Program to be committed and disbursed as cost-share funding in conjunction with the planning and construction of livestock and poultry waste facilities and prior to animals being on-site, provided that the project is otherwise eligible for funding and the applicant has a contract for animals to be placed on-site within six months of the project's completion. The department shall provide guidelines for implementation of this provision.

Q. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $350,000 the first year and $350,000 the second year from the general fund is provided for the department to establish (i) a position to expedite the training and certification of Soil and Water Conservation District employees to enable them to provide engineering, agronomic, and technical assistance for the preparation of all conservation practices in the Virginia Agricultural Cost share program; and, (ii) a position to expedite the provision of assistance to Soil and Water Conservation Districts with engineering designs for structural practices.

R.1. In any fiscal year, 50 percent of any funds previously distributed for Agricultural Best Management Practices for the purpose of grants for agriculture best management practices on lands in the Commonwealth that cannot be obligated by June 15 by a soil and water conservation district during such fiscal year, regardless of whether such lands are within or outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, may be reallocated by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board to any soil and water conservation district for conservation practices. The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board may reallocate the remaining previously distributed funds that cannot be obligated by June 15 to the soil and water conservation districts within the same watershed.

2. Nothing in this section shall prevent any funds distributed to the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program for the purpose of matching grants for agricultural best management practices on lands in the Commonwealth that cannot be obligated by a soil and water conservation district during a fiscal year to transfer such funds to another soil and water conservation district within the same watershed within the same fiscal year.

S. Out of the appropriation in this Item, $750,000 the first year from the general fund is provided for harmful algal bloom mitigation and remediation efforts at Lake Anna.

T. Notwithstanding § 10.1-2129 A., Code of Virginia, $144,121,142 the first year from the general fund shall be deposited to the Virginia Water Quality Improvement Fund established under the Water Quality Improvement Act of 1997. Of this amount in the first year, $6,950,000 shall be appropriated to the Department for the following specified statewide uses: $6,000,000 for nonpoint source projects including direct pay initiatives for nutrient management and resource management plans as well as poultry litter transport; $700,000 for maintenance of the Conservation Application Suite; and $250,000 for the Commonwealth's match for participation in the Federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Notwithstanding Item 361 B., no deposit is designated to the reserve within the Virginia Water Quality Improvement Fund.

2. Of the remaining amount in the first year, $137,171,142 is authorized for transfer to the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund, a sub fund of the Water Quality Improvement Fund. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the funds transferred to the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund shall be distributed by the Department upon approval of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board in accordance with the board's

developed policies, as follows: $83,537,226 shall be used for matching grants for Agricultural Best Management Practices on lands in the Commonwealth exclusively or partly within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, $35,801,668 shall be used for matching grants for Agricultural Best Management Practices on lands in the Commonwealth exclusively outside the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and an additional $17,832,248 in addition to the base funding provided in A.1. shall be appropriated for Technical Assistance for Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

3. The appropriation in this paragraph of this act meets the mandatory deposit requirements associated with the fiscal year 2025 excess general fund revenue collections and discretionary year-end general fund balances.

U. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, $58,000,000 the first year from interest accrued in the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund is hereby appropriated to be distributed by the Department upon approval of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board in accordance with the board's developed policies, as follows: $35,322,000 shall be used for matching grants for Agricultural Best Management Practices on lands in the Commonwealth exclusively or partly within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, $15,138,000 shall be used for matching grants for Agricultural Best Management Practices on lands in the Commonwealth exclusively outside the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and an additional $7,540,000 in addition to the base funding provided in A.1. shall be appropriated for Technical Assistance for Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

V. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, $83,883,443 the first year from the Water Quality Improvement Reserve Fund is hereby appropriated to be distributed by the Department upon approval of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board in accordance with the board's developed policies, as follows: $51,085,016 shall be used for matching grants for Agricultural Best Management Practices on lands in the Commonwealth exclusively or partly within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, $21,893,579 shall be used for matching grants for Agricultural Best Management Practices on lands in the Commonwealth exclusively outside the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and an additional $10,904,848 in addition to the base funding provided in A.1. shall be appropriated for Technical Assistance for Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts.