



# **Eastern Shore Soil & Water Conservation District**

**Four Year Strategic Plan  
July 1, 2022- June 30, 2026**

**Operations Committee Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

**District Board Approval Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Signature of District Board Chair: \_\_\_\_\_**

# **EASTERN SHORE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT 2022 - 2026 STRATEGIC PLAN**

## **DISTRICT BOARD DIRECTORS:**

**Nick Thomas... District Chair (Appointed)**  
**Jim Evans.....Vice Chair (Elected)**  
**Ursula Deitch.....Director (Appointed)**  
**Kyle Strurgis.... Director (Elected)**  
**Sands Gayle... Director (Appointed to fill unexpired term)**  
**Sandy Williams.... Director (Appointed to fill unexpired term)**

## **DISTRICT BOARD ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS:**

**Robbie Lewis... Associate Director**  
**Edwin R. Long... Associate Director**  
**Richard F. Hall, III... Associate Director**  
**Chip Turlington... Associate Director**  
**William E. Shockley... Associate Director**  
**Hunter Blake... Associate Director**

## **DISTRICT STAFF:**

**Carmie M. Savage... District Manager**  
**Bill Savage... Conservation Specialist**  
**Julie Head... Education Director**  
**Norman Pitt- VCAP Coordinator/ Cons Tech**

The Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District (ESSWCD) is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth as defined and established by the § Code of Virginia, Title 10.1, Chapter 5, et seq. The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the VA Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

## **Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District**

### **2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan**

**Mission** – To obtain sustainable use of our soil and water resources through conservation between the Bay and the Ocean.

**Our Vision** – To provide and develop leadership in natural resource conservation, meeting the needs of a diverse clientele through education, technical assistance and the promotion of cooperative programs.

### **Natural Resources Goals and Objectives Goal**

1. Lessen the impact of non-point source pollution on water quality.
  - Deliver the State’s Agricultural BMP Cost-Share Assistance Program.
  - Identify sensitive sites and problem areas, and prioritize focus on these areas.
  - Provide technical assistance to help create solutions for non-point source runoff.
  
2. Define “coastal” and “natural” resources as they refer to the District’s mission
  - Provide technical assistance and support for projects that fall in line with these Definitions
  
3. Provide assistance for the conservation of the natural resource base including wetlands, groundwater, wildlife habitat and prime farm lands through land use policy and project implementation.
  - Provide staff and input for TMDL planning and implementation.
  - Review draft policies and provide information before public hearings and attendance at public hearings discussing legislative changes when requested.
  - Implement programs as necessary to promote conservation and protect water resources.
  
4. Support of Resource Management Planning
  - Technical Review Committee will review Resource Management Plans as assigned, recommending additions, corrections or Board approval
  - Using DCR’s tracking program, files will be maintained and verified by Staff
  - Verification spot-checks will be conducted once Certainty has been met.
  
5. Goals of Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan Phase III (WIP III)
  - District will have a lead contact person to share information with the District
  - Using a draft BMP Input Desk provided by DEQ, DCR will work with SWCDs and partners to update each Input Desk based on SWCDs’ projections of achievable progress by Year 2025, for implementation of each specific agricultural BMP

type. The revised Input Decks are submitted to DEQ who will calculate their pollution reduction effectiveness and advise DCR whether 2025 goals are likely to be achieved.

- Spot checks as assigned.

### **Educational Goals and Objectives Goal**

1. Continue to provide educational opportunities
  - Provide opportunities to discuss the goals and mission of the District.
  - Continue to provide educational programs and opportunities to support our mission and goals.
  - Identify target groups that have educational needs or may be underserved.
2. Continue to develop educational programs
  - Contact schools and develop field trip alternatives
  - Educational programs shall continue to be focused on the District mission and educate the community generally on issues of agriculture, coastal resources, natural resources and water quality issues
3. Educate land owners on best management practices for land use and conservation.
  - Continue to promote VA Agricultural Best Management Programs

## **Outreach and Public Relations Goals and Objectives Goal**

1. Increase the District's visibility.
  - Use the District's website to create awareness and to provide a schedule of educational opportunities
    - Use Social media, newspapers, radio stations and other media outlets to advertise events and create agency awareness
2. Perform an internal review of environmental issues affecting the District and its consumers.
  - Continue programs to inform the community
  - Continue networking opportunities to involve the public
3. Continue to work with non-traditional groups

## **Intra- Agency Goals and Objectives Goals**

1. Review the Strategic Plan annually.
  - Adjust priorities and responsibilities as necessary
2. Create the Annual Plan of Work
  - Base objectives from review of Strategic Plan goals and priorities
3. Evaluate past year's Annual Plan of Work
  - Reprioritize objectives that were not completed
  - Create a report to acknowledge work being performed in District
4. Annually review internal protocol
  - Review annual budget, grant procedures and employee review procedure
  - Continue to discuss budget and grant opportunities for the District

## **Analysis of Stakeholder Interviews and Survey**

### General Information of Survey Respondents:

The Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District survey had 44 respondents who provided information used in developing the strategic plan. The respondents identified social media (70.5%), radio and newspaper tied for second at (43.2%) and direct mailing/ postcards (40.9%) as the top three preferred means of advertising Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District programs to the public. Over 43.2% of respondents have lived in the District boundaries for over 30 years and 37.2% of respondents were over the age of 60 years. The respondents were also asked to identify themselves as an agricultural producer, aquacultural producer, educator, government representative, conservation partner, or homeowner.

### Agricultural Response:

Respondents of the survey who identified themselves as agricultural producers were primarily grain crop farmers.

### Aquacultural Response:

Respondents of the survey who identified themselves as aquacultural producers were equally split between oyster and clam growers.

### Education Response:

Respondents of the survey who identified themselves as educators were predominantly college, high school and elementary school educators.

### Government Representative/ Conservation Partner Response:

This sector of respondents were asked several questions regarding their interactions and experiences with District staff from working together on specific projects, attending monthly Board meetings, and whether our partnership has been beneficial to the respondent's mission. Of the respondents participating, 27.9% answered yes to working with the District on specific projects, 2.3% had not worked with the District on specific projects and 69.8% answered n/a. When asked if the respondents attended monthly board meetings, 10% answered yes, 22.5% answered no, and 67.5% answered n/a. When asked if the partnership had been beneficial to their organization's mission, 30% answered yes, 0% answered no and 70% answered n/a.

### General Response:

Respondents of the survey were asked several general questions specific to interactions with the District.

- When asked if respondents had heard of specific programs the District offers, the highest response was VA Ag Best Management Practices Cost Share Program at 58.1% and the lowest response was Camps hosted by the District at 11.6%. Overall the respondents were aware of programs the District offers.
- When asked which programs the respondents had been involved in, the highest response was the VA Ag Best Management Practices Cost Share Programs at 45.2% and the lowest was the District Committees collectively at 0%.

- When asked how the respondents had learned of the District's programs, the highest response was Staff at 69.8% and the lowest was radio/ newspapers at 4.7%.
- When asked the best way the District can reach the public about environmental education programs, cost-share programs, or other services, the highest response was social media at 70.5% and the lowest was flyers at 25%.
- When asked if respondents found the website easily accessible and kept up-to-date with programs and services the District offers, 95% answered yes and 5% answered no.
- When asked to give priority to the respondent's top five concerns, the highest priority was given to development's impact on water quality at 38.5% with the second highest priority given to ag's impact on water quality at 34.5%. The third highest concern was clean-up polluted streams and creeks at 30.4%, fourth being litter and recycling at 21.9% and the fifth highest concern being wildlife habitat protection at 22.22%
- When asked of interactions with staff and the impression of staff, 92.8% of respondents viewed initial contact with District staff as excellent, 92.9 % of respondents viewed staff courtesy as excellent, 90.5% viewed interaction with staff during business hours as excellent, 83.3% viewed staff responsiveness as excellent, 83.3% viewed staff knowledge as excellent, and 90.2% viewed overall experience with staff as excellent.

When asked to consider the key natural resource the District should consider in the next 4 years, the following comments were collected:

- Address human needs related to natural resources
- Water
- Seal level rise and increased rain inundation
- Water Quality
- Land erosion
- We have to plant more cover crops to lessen soil erosion and restart cleaning ditches to ensure the bay doesn't fill with sediment from the Commonwealth's directive of let the ditches fill in to lessen run-off. IT'S COUNTERINTUITIVE
- Watershed
- Keeping farm land in production
- Groundwater sustainability and quality, ag land subsidence
- The decreasing available farm land
- Climate change impacts and preparation
- Clean, safe water
- Wildlife management
- Commercial development on Rt 13 corridor
- Have a working relationship with farmers and developers so they will be open about their concerns
- Runoff from development
- Nutrient management / positive impact of chicken manure and availability to all farmers
- Soil
- Protection from rising sea level

- Future farm preservation. Worry that farmers are being locked into farming practices that may have to change. ei Conservation easements vs the industrial nature of farming
- Excess poultry litter
- Extending planting dates for cover crops
- Cover Crops
- Ag best management practices implementation and tracking to access WIP III goals progress
- Development/ Sprawl
- Assistance/ incentives for grassed ditches/ waterways
- Soil health
- Building organic matter in soils while also reducing soil erosion

The following comments were collected regarding interactions with District Staff:

- Carmie does an excellent job
- Very nice to my student's questions
- Great people to work with
- Great to work with. Carmie was always available and very helpful
- The ESSWCD staff has always been prompt, knowledgeable and helpful

The following additional comments, suggestions, or ideas were collected:

- Be open to doing more to help people, not just the earth. When you help people it benefits the earth.
- It would be great to see more with the VCAP program. I also wonder if there is more that can be done to protect water quality by planting or buffering ditches in a way that doesn't impact the ag producers significantly but reduces the impact of any runoff on streams, creeks, and bays.
- More public input
- Keep the programs in place. Go back to independent farm numbers for each piece of land.
- Allow no till farmers to sell wheat straw
- Thank you for all you are doing for us on the Shore!
- We have been overly impressed with all programs/ opportunities provided and plan to continue to work with ESSWCD.
- Be more proactive with county officials concerning Ag Forest district protection
- Very well organized survey- easy to use
- Additional educational programs for grades K-2
- Elimination of barriers that prevent efficient and common sense solution to BMP implementation would be a huge benefit across the land.

The results from the stakeholder survey help to develop a set of goals for the Board and Staff to consider.