



Shore Conservor

Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District

22545 Center Parkway Accomac, VA 23301 (757)302-4431 www.esswcd.org

Annual Report

July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

Locally-Led Conservation

District Staff

Carmie S. Ross, *District Manager*
Julie Head, *Education Director*
Ben Young, *Conservation Specialist*
Lucy Earl, *Conservation Specialist*

District Directors

Nick Thomas, *Chair*
James A. Evans, *Vice-Chair*
Helene Doughty
Sands Gayle
Kyle Sturgis
Sally Williams

Accomack County
Northampton County
Federal and State Agencies
Stakeholder Organizations
Local Citizens
Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Virginia Department of Conservation and
Recreation

Associate Directors

Hunter Blake, Brian Broadwater, Ursula Deitch,
Richard F. Hall III, Matt Hickman,
Robbie Lewis, Edwin R. Long, Norman Pitt, Chip
Turlington

The Eastern Shore Soil & Water Conservation District's FY26 Annual Report is a summary of our work over the past year. As a local entity, we strive to increase public awareness and participation in natural resources conservation

Formed in 1945, the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia defined and established by the Code of Virginia, Title 10.1, Chapter 5. The work of the District is determined by directors, elected by the people of the Districts at general elections or appointed by the VA Soil and Water Conservation Board. Directors serve four-year terms and designate non-voting associate directors to help guide District efforts. Directors and Associate Directors are volunteers. The District serves as a valued partner and

service provider to various agencies and organizations working together towards resource conservation on the Shore. The District's service area covers the Eastern Shore of Virginia - a region on the Delmarva Peninsula comprised of Accomack and Northampton Counties, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the Chesapeake Bay, and Maryland.

The Commonwealth of VA supports the District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the VA Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Accomack and Northampton Counties also provide financial assistance and support to the District. Two of the District's major roles are to administer Virginia's incentive program for agricultural best management practices and provide environmental education. Since conservation involves everyone, the District provides various programs to students and adults promoting awareness, action, and support for the area's natural resources.

2026 Agricultural Best Management Practices Incentive Program

WFA - CC Whole Farm Approach - Cover Crops

Chesapeake Bay \$2,822,224.31	Seaside \$2,070,836.10
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WFA - NM Whole Farm Approach - Nutrient Management Practices

Chesapeake Bay \$339,482.10	Seaside \$268,770.95
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NM - 1A Nutrient Management Planning

Chesapeake Bay 70,662.18	Seaside \$52,668.04
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CCI - CNT Long Term Continuous No-till Planting

Seaside \$6,559.00

Total Amount Distributed to Eastern Shore Producers
\$5,631.190.67

In FY26, the District provided \$5,631,190.67 in cost-share assistance to landowners and producers on the Eastern Shore. The VA Agricultural Best Management Practice Cost-share Program is administered by local soil and water districts through the Commonwealth of Virginia with financial and administrative assistance provided by the VA Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. The program encourages voluntary installation of agricultural best management practices (BMP's) by offering cost-share assistance for implementation and aims to improve water quality in the state's streams, rivers, Chesapeake Bay, and the ocean.

Virginia Conservation Assistance Program

Land Development and Storm Water Runoff Assistance For Property Owners

Roads, parking lots, sidewalks, homes, and offices replace natural landscapes. Rainfall that once soaked into vegetated ground now becomes storm water runoff carrying pollution such as sediment and nutrients. This runoff flows into the Chesapeake Bay and has a detrimental effect on water quality.

The Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) is a cost-share program for homeowners and landowners that provides financial reimbursement to property owners installing eligible Best Management Practices (BMP's) in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Watershed. These practices can be installed in areas of your yard where problems like erosion, poor drainage, or poor vegetation occur.

Through VCAP, you can:

- maintain or improve property values
- receive technical assistance
- receive cost-share assistance
- help protect our natural resources



Conservation Landscaping



Permeable Pavement Installation

VCAP can help:

- restore problem areas
- control and minimize erosion
- conserve water within the landscape
- restore riparian buffer areas
- promote wildlife habitat
- re-vegetate bare slopes
- stabilize draining ways

treat storm water runoff

For more information or questions, call Ben Young, Conservation Specialist, at 757-302-4437 or

benjamin.young@esswcd.org



Living Shorelines



Dry Wells



Impervious Surface Removal



Rainwater Harvesting



Rain Gardens

These two photos are of a current VCAP shoreline erosion remediation project being done here on the Eastern Shore. A living shoreline is a nature-based method for stabilizing coastal areas and protecting them from erosion. It uses natural materials like native plants, sand, rock, and oyster reefs instead of hard structures like concrete seawalls or bulkheads.



Environmental Impact Programs

In FY 2026, ESSWC staff provided programming to over 7,600 participants of all ages.

Classroom and Community Programming

It was a very busy year for classroom programming and outreach. The ESSWCD provides programming that pertains to agriculture, natural resources, plastic pollution, scientific investigation, and a number of others in addition to soil and water conservation. Staff is trained in specialty curriculums including Ag In The Classroom, Project Learning Tree, Project Wild, and Project Wet.



Nandua Middle School students during a classroom program.

Envirothon

the Eastern Shore Envirothon was held on March 17, 2026, at the Virginia Tech AREC station in Painter. The Envirothon is a worldwide natural sciences competition where students learn about soil science, aquatics, wildlife, and forestry. This year's special topic was non-point source pollution. In the high school division Broadwater Academy took first place. Arcadia High School had two teams competing and they came in second and third. Both Broadwater Academy and Arcadia High School went on to represent the Eastern Shore at the Area VI Envirothon. Broadwater Academy placed 3rd at the Area VI Envirothon and went on state competition



Broadwater Academy team

Envirothon (continued)



Arcadia High School team

In the middle school division Broadwater Academy placed first and Cape Charles Christian School placed second and third.

Eastern Shore Regional Science Fair

In collaboration with Northampton 4-H and VIMS, the District coordinated the ES Regional Science Fair. The event was held at VIMS - Eastern Shore in Wachapreague. Students competed in three divisions: 3rd - 5th grade, 6th-8th grade, and 9th - 12th grades.

The science fair has seen significant improvements in student experiments since it was reinstated three years ago. This year a variety of STEM activities were added for the community to participate in including forestry activities, boat rides, touch tanks, and more.



Congratulations to the 2026 Eastern Shore Regional Science Fair winners!

Community members enjoy the touch tank among other STEM activities.



Environmental Impact Programs (continued)

Summer Camps

Five years ago, the ESSWCD experimented with a summer camp designed to introduce children of the Eastern Shore to Agriculture. Since that time, summer camp offerings have expanded to include an Adventures in Nature Camp, Junior Ag Camp, Ag Camp, and two Seaside Explorer camps. These camps introduce children to the agriculture, ecosystems, and natural resources of the Eastern Shore.

Adventures in Nature

A collaboration of ESSWCD, 4-H, and the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge, this camp helps to get youth outside and learning about the Eastern Shore ecosystem. Campers learned about pollinators, ticks, insects, local ecosystems, and more. Campers learned about ticks, tick-borne diseases, and how to protect themselves. One of the highlights of camp was making a black-legged tick out of Legos.



Jr. Ag Camp and Ag Camp

This year, campers learned about many different products that are related to agriculture. They made bread, ice cream, butter, lip balm, and soap from all natural ingredients. In addition they did farm themed crafts, and played agriculture themed games. These two camps are a collaboration between ESSWCD, Northampton 4-H, and Barrier Islands Center.



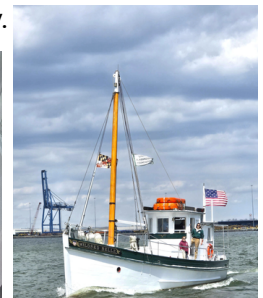
Seaside Explorers:

Sponsored by ESSWCD and VIMS, with financial support from the Elks Lodge, campers spent three days learning about aquatic biology and ecosystems. They explored the marsh, dissected fish, learned about ecosystems, and had a good time getting dirty.



The Mildred Belle Experience

In June of 2026, the ESSWCD had the unique opportunity to partner with the Living Classrooms Foundation to host two days of hands-on experiences aboard an authentic Chesapeake Bay Boat. Attendees had the chance to learn about a variety of topics that pertain to the Chesapeake Bay.



Environmental Impact Programs (continued)

Farm Tire Recycling

In February 2026, Accomack County producers had the chance to participate in a highly productive Farm Tire Recycling Event. The initiative, sponsored by the Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District and Accomack County Farm Bureau, provided local farmers with the opportunity to recycle up to 3 tons of tractor, large truck, and implement tires at no cost.

The community's enthusiastic participation resulted in the collection of just under 66 tons of tires, underscoring the commitment of Accomack County's agricultural community to sustainability and responsible waste management. With Accomack County Public Works providing the space for collection, the event made a significant positive impact on the local environment by removing bulky and potentially hazardous waste from farms and fields.



Arbor Day

The District partnered with the ESVA Master Gardeners to hand out over 700 native plant plugs and tree seedlings at the ANEC Arbor Day Celebration event in Tasley. Look for us next year at the ANEC Arbor Day Celebration where we will again be handing out native plant plugs.



2026 Fletcher/Beasley Scholarships

These scholarships are awarded to students in the ESSWCD service area. They are available to those majoring in natural resources, agriculture, or an associated major. Two scholarships were awarded this year in the amount of \$1,000 each.

Layla Jones currently attends Virginia Tech with a major in Wildlife Conservation and a minor in GIS and Wetland Science. She is working at the VIMS Eastern Shore Lab this summer as a Bonnie Sue intern.



Ariyah Brisco graduated from Northampton High School in June and will be attending Norfolk State University this fall. She plans to major in Marine biology.

Billie Fitzgerald Memorial Spring Grants

Each year the ESSWCD Endowment Committee awards mini-grants to local groups for conservation related projects. This year two grants of \$500 each were awarded

No Limits Eastern Shore was awarded \$500 to restore and refurbish an existing pollinator garden and purchase water conservation supplies. NLES serves brain injury survivors. This project will serve as a hands-on conservation education activity and outdoor learning space.



Pictures from NLES pollinator garden.

(continued)

Environmental Impact Programs (continued)

Billie Fitzgerald Memorial Spring Grants

The second grant was awarded to the Museum of Chincoteague Island. The funds will be used to create an outdoor classroom for students visiting the Beebe Ranch during the 2026 season. Native plants will be used in garden. Students will learn about the importance of native species and receive seeds and plants that support local species to take home.



Farmland Easements

Sixty percent of Chesapeake forests have been divided into disconnected fragments by roads, homes, and other gaps that are too wide or dangerous for wildlife to cross. The District is proud to do its part and serves as a co-holder of conservation easements in an effort to help conserve open spaces. The District currently co-holds 28 easements totaling nearly 5,000 acres with Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust and co-holds one with the Virginia Outdoor Foundation for the benefit of future generations.



The Commonwealth of VA supports the Eastern Shore SWCD through financial and administrative assistance provided by the VA Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Eastern Shore SWCD programs, activities, and employment opportunities are available to all people regardless of disability, race, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, color, age, religion/religious creed, veteran status, or genetics. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.