

Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship

2021 Host Office Descriptions

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Virginia Sea Grant (VASG) and the Virginia Environmental Endowment (VEE) are now soliciting applications for the 2021 Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship. This twelve-month paid fellowship is intended to provide educational and professional development opportunities for post-graduates interested in Virginia's coastal and marine resources. In addition to learning about state-level policy and management processes, fellows receive on-the-job training with a Virginia state agency or non-governmental organization (NGO), working to address important coastal and marine resource issues. Selected finalists for the fellowship will interview with prospective host offices to find the best match. VASG, VEE, and their partners anticipate supporting a minimum of two post-graduate fellows starting on October 1, 2021. This announcement and guidance on how to submit your application can be found at: <https://vaseagrant.org/>

PARTICIPATING HOST OFFICES

Each office listed below has expressed interest in hosting a fellow during the 2021 fellowship year. Additional host offices and projects may be added before the fellowship application deadline. Please visit <https://vaseagrant.org/fellowship-research-funding/commonwealth-fellowship-home/> for the current list.

Department of Conservation and Recreation

- *Project: Verification of Shoreline Management BMPs for Chesapeake Bay TMDL Pollutant Reduction Credits*

Department of Environmental Quality

- *Project: Watersheds & Local Government Assistance Program Technical Methods and Policy Improvement for Specific Water Quality Impairments: Dissolved Oxygen and pH*

Department of Wildlife Resources

- *Project: Climate Change Preparedness and Planning*

Office of the Secretary of Natural Resources

- *Project: Commonwealth of Virginia Coastal Master Plan Initiative*

The Nature Conservancy

- *Project: Advancing Responsible Offshore Wind Development in Virginia*

Applicants are strongly encouraged to visit host office websites for more details on their missions and activities. Each host office has shared descriptions of potential projects available to finalists during their fellowship. While final projects may vary based upon the requirements of the host office and the skillsets of the selected fellow, these examples do provide a representation of the host office's current needs.

In Collaboration With



DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE RESOURCES
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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Project Title: Climate Change Preparedness and Planning

Location: Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources Headquarters Office, Henrico County, VA

Description of Host Office

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) is responsible for managing inland fisheries, all terrestrial wildlife, and recreational boating for the Commonwealth. The agency has statutory responsibility for threatened and endangered wildlife in Virginia and exercises conservation, management, regulatory, and enforcement jurisdiction over all state and federally listed wildlife, including protected marine species. The DWR manages public access and wildlife habitats on 44 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) totaling more than 225,000 acres and provides access to Virginia's waters at approximately 250 boating access sites. The mission of the DWR is to conserve and manage wildlife populations and habitats for the benefit of present and future generations; connecting people to Virginia's outdoors through boating, education, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing and other wildlife-related activities; and protecting people and property by promoting safe outdoor experiences and managing human-wildlife conflict. The agency is organized into six major work units (Wildlife, Fisheries, Planning & Finance, Law Enforcement, Outreach, and Executive Director's Office) to support its mission.

Project Background

Climate change poses an unprecedented threat to human communities, fish and wildlife, habitats, and the natural communities we depend on for food and water, wildlife-related recreational opportunities, the strength of local economies, and quality of life. The implications of climate change on our rich natural resources present challenges and opportunities that must be met by the DWR. The "North American Model of Wildlife Conservation," which is distinct from other forms of wildlife conservation worldwide, includes, as one of its tenants, that wildlife are held as public trust resources by the states for the benefit of all people, making climate-related challenges an even more compelling issue for the DWR. While we have made some investments in assessing impacts of climate change and developing adaptive management strategies, competing priorities have precluded meaningful progress.

The DWR owns the most land of any state government agency in the Commonwealth, representing a considerable investment in lands and waters recognized for their biological, recreational, and natural significance. Climate change threatens every one of these assets and will have profound impacts on how we manage our lands, waters, infrastructure, and fish and wildlife populations.

Potential Fellowship Project

The proposed project is intended to advance the DWR's climate change planning efforts, including alignment with the Commonwealth's overarching climate resilience and adaptation plan. Strategic focus will be placed on climate-related issues, needs and opportunities in coastal Virginia associated with at-risk species and habitats, the DWR's land acquisition and conservation efforts, and wildlife-related outdoor recreation. The Commonwealth Fellow will lead efforts across the organization to accomplish a number of supporting initiatives:

- Compile laws, regulations, policies and guidance from mid-Atlantic state fish and wildlife agencies that have relevancy to "climate readiness." Evaluate DWR laws, regulations, policies and guidance documents and identify barriers and needed modifications to integrate climate adaptation, resulting in a report of recommendations for delivery and presentation to the DWR's Executive Director;
- Develop a survey using Qualtrics and deploy to DWR employees to assess and evaluate the organization's overall understanding of and readiness to respond to the impacts of climate change, providing a report of survey findings and recommendations to enhance awareness and integration;
- Use the DWR's "Virginia's Strategy for Safeguarding Species of Greatest Conservation Need from the Effects of Climate Change" and "Virginia's Climate Modeling and Species Vulnerability Assessment," identify specific actions that the DWR should take in the next 24 months to integrate and link climate adaptation strategies into its activities, facilitating a meeting with key DWR staff members to present findings and receive feedback;
- Use existing sea level rise models, perform a GIS-based vulnerability assessment of the DWR's lands and facilities in coastal Virginia, summarize findings, and develop recommended policies or guidance to ensure that the agency invests its capital funds strategically; and
- Synthesize existing information regarding impacts of climate change on wildlife-related recreation, develop recommended policies and strategies, facilitate a meeting of key DWR employees to share findings and collaborate on ways to communicate with constituents and adapt existing recreation programs.