



DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE RESOURCES
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Virginia Coastal Zone
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

2025 Commonwealth Fellowship Host Office Descriptions

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Virginia Sea Grant (VASG), Virginia Environmental Endowment (VEE), and the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (VA CZM) are soliciting applications for the 2025 Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship. This twelve-month paid fellowship provides 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, 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, VA CZM, and their partners anticipate supporting two to three post-graduate fellows starting on October 1, 2025. This announcement and guidance on how to submit your application can be found at: <https://vaseagrant.org/commonwealth-fellowship-applicants/>

PARTICIPATING HOST OFFICES

Each office listed below has expressed interest in hosting a fellow during the 2025 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.

- **Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission**
- **Department of Wildlife Resources**
- **Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program**

Applicants are strongly encouraged to visit host office websites for more details on their missions and activities. Descriptions of projects are included below.

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT PARTNER UNIVERSITIES



MIDDLE PENINSULA PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION

LOCATION: MATTAPONI, VIRGINIA

DESCRIPTION OF HOST OFFICE:

The Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission (MPPDC) supports regional planning and project implementation across six counties and three towns, with a focus area on community resilience, coastal zone management, and sustainable land use. As a political subdivision of the Commonwealth, MPPDC facilitates regional cooperation to address environmental challenges such as flooding, shoreline erosion, and sediment management. Key initiatives include the Municipal Dredging Program and the Fight the Flood Program, which connects homeowners with resilience solutions and certified contractors. MPPDC also leads coastal zone management efforts, advancing policies that balance economic development with environmental sustainability. Through strategic planning, grant assistance, and intergovernmental coordination, MPPDC helps localities implement climate adaptation strategies, enhance public lands management, and build resilient communities within our region.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROPOSED PROJECT TITLE: Municipal Dredging & Coastal Resilience Internship

PROPOSED PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

This Fellowship will assist in the management of multiple dredging projects and grants, supporting the development of a comprehensive municipal dredging program in the Middle Peninsula. This includes coordinating sediment management planning, assisting with dredge project design, and supporting natural resource mitigation efforts. The intern will also engage in community outreach with stakeholders including state and federal agencies and contribute to community development initiatives that enhance coastal resilience. This role provides hands-on experience in environmental planning, grant management, and local government coordination, offering valuable insight into coastal resource management and regional sustainability efforts.

To address the most immediate needs identified in these plans, the Fellow will work directly under MPPDC's Executive Director and staff to accomplish three main initiatives, otherwise not possible due to lack of MPPDC staff capacity and funding for this comprehensive effort:

Task 1: Digitization and Analysis of Creek Data

Collect and digitize approximately 10 years of VIMS data on physical analysis and surveys of major creeks in the Middle Peninsula. Conduct an existing conditions analysis for each creek and compile the findings into a digital format to support sediment management and dredging planning.

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Task 2: Coordination with USACE on Dredging Designs and Holding Areas

Engage with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to review previous dredging designs, designated holding areas, and associated requirements. Ensure that historical data and regulatory considerations are incorporated into current dredging and sediment management strategies.

Task 3: Stakeholder Engagement on Lessons Learned

Organize and facilitate stakeholder work meetings, particularly with Deltaville constituents, to discuss key lessons learned from the Broad Creek dredging project. Gather feedback, document best practices, and identify areas for improvement in future municipal dredging initiatives.

Task 4: Integration of Fight the Flood Program Data

Coordinate and analyze data from the Fight the Flood program to align with dredging and sediment management efforts. Identify opportunities for beneficial sediment reuse, assess resilience project locations, and ensure strategic alignment between flood mitigation and municipal dredging programs.

PROJECT CONTACT:

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PRINCIPAL MENTORS:

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Rachael Peabody, Director of Daily Operations

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ADDITIONAL MENTORS:

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

LOCATION: THE NATURE CONSERVANCY RICHMOND OFFICE

DESCRIPTION OF HOST OFFICE:

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) is responsible for managing inland fisheries, terrestrial wildlife, and recreational boating for the Commonwealth. DWR's mission is to conserve and manage wildlife populations and habitats for the benefit of present and future generations; connect people to Virginia's outdoors through boating, education, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing and other wildlife-related activities; and protect people and property by promoting safe outdoor experiences and managing human-wildlife conflict. DWR manages public access and wildlife habitats on Wildlife Management Areas and Wildlife Conservation Sites totaling nearly 250,000 acres and provides access to Virginia's waters across 230 boating access sites. DWR also provides technical assistance to public and private landowners regarding the restoration, enhancement, and protection of a variety of priority habitats, including wetlands. DWR will be working in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Virginia, whose mission is to protect land and water across the commonwealth and produce lasting benefits for people and nature. TNC's Wetlands Program is working to build voluntary wetland project capacity in Virginia through partnerships, landowner outreach, and landowner technical assistance for project implementation to improve water quality and habitat within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROPOSED PROJECT TITLE: Building Virginia's Voluntary Wetland Restoration Workforce

PROPOSED PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Over 40% of Virginia's wetlands were actively drained or filled to support agriculture and development until the 1970s when several federal and state policies were enacted to protect them. Recently, as part of a larger ongoing effort to address lagging Chesapeake Bay restoration goals, DWR and TNC led the development of **Wetlands Action Plans** which highlight strategies needed to advance wetland project implementation. To address the most immediate needs identified in these plans, the Fellow will work directly under TNC's Wetlands Program Manager, in close partnership with DWR, to accomplish three main initiatives, otherwise not possible due to lack of DWR/TNC staff capacity and funding for this comprehensive effort:

Task 1. Landowner Outreach & Technical Assistance: The Fellow will support the development of private and public landowner outreach materials which will summarize available funding opportunities and technical assistance providers. To ensure targeted outreach is achieved, a geospatial desktop analysis using TNC- and DWR-provided GIS data will be completed to identify landowners with wetland restoration/enhancement potential. When interested

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landowners are identified, the Fellow will participate in site visits and technical assistance activities to gain on-the-ground experience in wetland project site identification, design, and implementation. Landowner outreach materials will be developed, and geospatial analysis will be conducted in fall 2025. Outreach materials will be distributed beginning in winter 2025-2026.

Task 2. Wetland Education: The Fellow will work closely with TNC, DWR, and Natural Resources Conservation Service wetland experts to develop and deliver at least two regionally-specific Wetland Restoration Site Identification Workshops covering the history/types of wetland impacts, strategies for identifying impacted wetlands, and available funding/incentive programs and technical assistance providers. The target audience includes federal/state/local governments and non-profits who frequently work with private landowners and managers of large tracts of public/conservation land. The Fellow will be encouraged to attend a wetland restoration construction techniques course and other applicable workshops, conferences, and trainings to gain practical knowledge and learn through shared experiences. Educational materials will be developed in the winter and spring, with workshops being hosted during summer and fall 2026.

Task 3. Wetland Partnership Building and Participation: The Fellow will provide coordination support for the Rappahannock Wetlands Team and the Wetlands Core Team planning partnerships. This includes planning and coordinating meetings, taking notes, and following up with group members on action items. Additionally, the Fellow will participate in several existing regional partnerships working to advance wetland restoration efforts, including the Chesapeake Bay Program Tidal and Non-Tidal Wetland Workgroups, York River Roundtable, and the Virginia Eastern Shore Conservation Alliance. Active participation in diverse partnerships often stimulates project identification and can ease project implementation by taking advantage of the synergistic capabilities of several organizations. Through this unique partnership, there will be opportunities to meet with key elected officials and senior leaders across Virginia government and other sectors to gain experience in public policy. Additionally, the Fellow will learn a wide range of techniques used to monitor and manage wetland habitats and associated species, including hydrologic analysis, waterfowl banding, moist-soil management, and prescribed burning.

PROJECT CONTACT:

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PRINCIPAL MENTORS:

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PRINCIPAL MENTORS:

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ADDITIONAL MENTORS:

- **Ryan Brown**, Executive Director, DWR, ryan.brown@dwr.virginia.gov
- **Becky Gwynn**, Deputy Executive Director, DWR, becky.gwynn@dwr.virginia.gov
- **David Norris**, Regional Wildlife Manager, DWR, david.norris@dwr.virginia.gov
- **Steve Living**, Habitat Education Coordinator, DWR, Stephen.living@dwr.virginia.gov
- **Sam Lindblom**, Director of Landscape Conservation, TNC, slindblom@tnc.org
- **Amy Jacobs**, Chesapeake Bay Agriculture Director, ajacobs@tnc.org

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT PARTNER UNIVERSITIES



VIRGINIA COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

LOCATION: THE SELECTED FELLOW WILL BE PHYSICALLY LOCATED AT VIRGINIA SEA GRANT (VASG)'S OFFICES ON THE VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF MARINE SCIENCE (VIMS)'S GLOUCESTER, VIRGINIA CAMPUS, BUT WILL BE EXPECTED TO TRAVEL TO VIRGINIA CZM'S OFFICES IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA AS NEEDED.

DESCRIPTION OF HOST OFFICE:

Virginia boasts more than 5,000 miles of shorelines and the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (Virginia CZM) works every day to protect coastal resources and the industries and livelihoods that depend upon them. The Program's goals are outlined below. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) serves as the lead agency for the **Virginia CZM network** of state agencies and coastal localities, and houses the Virginia CZM office in Richmond. Virginia CZM helps develop coordinated policies and the network implements the **enforceable laws, regulations and policies that protect our coastal resources** and foster sustainable development across **Virginia's coastal zone**. A **Coastal Policy Team** consists of representatives from each of the agencies and coastal planning district commissions (PDCs) to discuss and resolve crosscutting coastal resource management issues. To accomplish its goals, the Virginia CZM office administers an **annual grant award** of approximately \$3 million from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Ocean Service, Office for Coastal Management, through the federal Coastal Zone Management Act.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROPOSED PROJECT TITLE: Building Capacity to Implement the Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan

PROPOSED PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

For the last decade-plus CZM has provided leadership and funding to strategically address marine debris through prevention, interception, innovation, and removal for ecological, social and economic benefits. Working closely with federal and state level governments as well as NGO partners (including **Clean Virginia Waterways**), CZM authored the **Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan (VMDRP)** in 2014, the first state on the East Coast to have such a plan. The VMDRP was updated in 2021 to coincide with the development of NOAA's **Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Action Plan** and will again be updated in 2025 with the help of a network of diverse partners working to address 1) Abandoned & Derelict Vessels (ADV); 2) Derelict Fishing Gear (DFG); 3) Microplastics & Microfibers; and 4) Consumer Debris. To address the most immediate needs identified in the VMDRP, the Fellow will work directly under CZM staff and in close partnership with other marine debris partners to accomplish three (3) main objectives, otherwise not possible due to lack of CZM's capacity and funding for this comprehensive effort:

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Task 1. Public Education & Outreach: The Fellow will learn about CZM's history of public outreach and education associated with marine debris prevention and removal, assist in the continuation of these efforts using existing/ updated campaign materials, strategize new efforts to expand the reach of the campaigns (including implementation of the **Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)**'s community-based social marketing (CBSM) marine debris prevention campaign into Virginia), and develop, distribute, and analyze surveys to the public and practitioners. The Fellow will also support updates to VASG's marine debris webpage.

Task 2. ADV & DFG Strategy Implementation: CZM and CVW have played an active role in crafting policy recommendations and implementing strategies related to the removal and prevention of ADVs and DFG (specifically lost nets from clam aquaculture operations). VIMS also has developed a **TRAP program** to address DFG. The Fellow will work with related partners to provide capacity for additional policy research, stakeholder facilitation, and crafting of technical resources/tools to be used for further implementation. Tasks may include: ADV inventory maintenance and public survey updates, streamlining ADV and DFG removal regulatory processes, development of new policies from previous work group recommendations, creating a framework for aligning funding availability to priority needs, and providing GIS-based mapping of marine debris hotspots.

Task 3. Regional Coordination: CZM has a long history of collaborating with other state marine debris programs to not only exchange lessons learned, but also to coordinate similar outreach efforts. The Fellow will support Virginia partners in maintaining these interstate partnerships by attending meetings and providing analysis of successes and challenges faced by other states.

Across all Tasks, the Fellow will be provided with numerous opportunities to grow their professional network in the marine debris, coastal management, and marine science fields. CZM staff (primarily Jeff Flood) will also provide direct professional mentorship to the Fellow on topics such as effective networking, public speaking, translating science to policy, and grants management.

PROJECT CONTACT:

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PRINCIPAL MENTORS:

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