

# Northern Neck Planning District Commission Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program Technical Assistance Grant FY 20, Task 45 Final Report



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## I. Coastal Management Support

NNPDC staff provided continuing coastal management support to the four counties and six towns of the Northern Neck as well as the Northern Neck Land Conservancy, Friends of the Rappahannock, the Northern Neck Master Gardeners Shoreline Evaluation Program, the Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority, Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District, and myriad other regional, state and federal entities dedicated to environmental stewardship, conservation and resiliency. Support provided includes, but is not limited to, regional coordination, technical assistance, planning, grant writing, project management, GIS analysis, and mapping products. Support through regional coordination included collaboration with the Special Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Adaptation and Protection in support of the development of the Virginia Resilience Master Planning Framework for the purposes of maximizing consideration of rural coastal management issues and alignment with local priorities. Additional support through regional coordination included collaboration with Wetlands Watch to further discussions for local participation in the CRS program by all four counties of the Northern Neck through NNPDC staff participation in the CRS Workgroup and by disseminating that information to local staff. Other support through regional coordination included collaboration with the Virginia Coastal Policy Center through participation in forums and contributions to reports and collaborative documents to maximize policy considerations for coastal management issues facing rural coastal localities.

Technical assistance and GIS mapping support were provided to localities for zoning updates, business district development, and other community development projects. Comprehensive plan analysis and GIS mapping support were provided to Colonial Beach for a comprehensive plan update. Additionally, GIS analysis and mapping products were supplied to the Northern Neck Master Gardeners Shoreline Evaluation Program, Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority, Friends of the Rappahannock, and the Northern Neck Septic Pump-out Program. Additional support included planning, grant writing, and technical assistance for proposed stormwater and shoreline management projects in the towns of Colonial Beach and White Stone. Additional support was provided through collaboration in projects pertaining to the furtherance of eco-tourism and the support of coastal resource dependent industries. Examples of these products are attached, and additional products of this coastal management support are available upon request.

The benefits of this continuing support range in their effects and include the identification and mitigation of environmental impacts of those projects reviewed where construction is being undertaken, such as the White Stone Business District Revitalization. Other benefits include ensuring the accuracy and completeness of local zoning and comprehensive plans. Technical assistance and planning support were provided to Colonial Beach for an update to its Comprehensive Plan to incorporate State-mandated inclusion of language and to incorporate resilience throughout the plan. Additionally, benefits to erosion and sediment control and nutrient management of the Northern Neck's waterways through regional efforts to increase consideration of natural and nature-based best management practices, such as continued support of the Northern Neck Master Gardeners Shoreline Evaluation Program and Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District Programs; and more specifically, through local projects such as proposed stormwater projects in Colonial Beach and White Stone. Other benefits include education and outreach through a myriad of environmental stewardship, conservation, and resiliency efforts and educational initiatives in partnership with Friends of the Rappahannock and the Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District. Countless other unquantifiable benefits result from the regional coastal management support provided to Northern Neck localities and environmental organizations.

## II. Local Planning Coordination and Training

NNPDC staff continued to provide coordination of coastal planning efforts and training opportunities to its member localities. Local planning coordination included collaboration with VDOF, NNSWCD, FOR, and

the NNLC to gather local input and support for a regional blue and green infrastructure assessment to prioritize and promote conservation and to compliment water quality planning efforts. NNPDC staff, in collaboration with stakeholders, met with locality administrators and staff to identify priority conservation areas, opportunities to align conservation efforts with local ordinances, and to prioritize implementation opportunities. Additionally, NNPDC staff conducted quarterly Land Use Administrators and Coastal Managers meetings to coordinate planning efforts and to provide training to local Administrators and staff. Trainings and meetings topics aimed to adhere to a continuing theme of concern to coastal communities, resiliency, and the protection of coastal resources.

The first local coordination and training meeting was held on November 13, 2020 and was conducted with the RAFT core team, consisting of representatives from Old Dominion University, the Institute for Engagement and Negotiation at the University of Virginia, and the Coastal Policy Center at William and Mary. The purpose of the meeting was to coordinate individual locality outcomes on issues of greater than local significance. During the meeting, local stakeholders identified areas of collaboration around hazard mitigation, emergency planning, and resilience. Outcomes of the meeting included, but were not limited to, local commitments to regional hazard mitigation, emergency response, and resilience planning strategies. Local stakeholders agreed to incorporate regional planning outcomes into local plans with an emphasis on implementation to achieve goals and objectives. Local stakeholders agreed to meet on an annual basis to review progress towards achieving those goals and objectives and make any necessary changes.

The second local coordination and training meeting was held on March 19, 2021 and was conducted with representatives from Dominion Energy, the Virginia Association of Counties, and the Berkley Group. The purpose of the meeting was to educate local stakeholders on policy changes regarding utility-scale solar projects and to discuss local utility-scale solar projects. Representatives from VaCO and the Berkley Group updated locality staff on changes to Virginia's utility-scale solar policies. Dominion Energy representatives updated locality staff on its projects in the region and provided an industry perspective on state policy changes. Local stakeholders discussed local policy changes regarding utility-scale solar and updated each other on proposed and on-going projects. Outcomes of the meeting included agreement on local approaches to manage the pace and size of utility-scale solar projects and a need for increased regional planning and mapping efforts designed to provide the tools local stakeholders need to manage development.

The third local coordination and training meeting was held on August 18, 2021 and was conducted with the RAFT core team, consisting of representatives from Old Dominion University, the Institute for Engagement and Negotiation at the University of Virginia, and the Coastal Policy Center at William and Mary. The purpose of the meeting was a regional RAFT workshop to showcase the outcomes of the year-long RAFT process. During the workshop, local stakeholders were presented tools developed by the RAFT team to assist them with their resilience planning and implementation. Local stakeholders were updated on the progress of each locality's resilience action checklist, the core document outlining a locality's next steps toward achieving community resilience.

The fourth local coordination and training meeting was held on September 15, 2021 and was conducted with staff from DCR's outdoor recreation and planning team. The purpose of the meeting was to convene local stakeholders to learn about the Virginia Outdoors Plan planning process and to provide input on the plan's development for the Northern Neck Recreation Region. Local stakeholders provided updates on outdoor recreation planning activities, including new public access, trails, and parks. DCR staff provide an update on the development of the Virginia Outdoors Plan and reviewed statewide priorities for outdoor recreation. Outcomes of the meeting included the development of local and regional outdoor recreation priorities that included increased public access, a regional connector trail, and increased local park facilities.

### III. Northern Neck Green

NNPDC staff, in collaboration with the newly established Northern Neck Environmental Stewardship Consortium (NNESC), created the [NNKgreen.org](http://NNKgreen.org) website in 2015 with funds from the VACZM program, grant #NA15NOS4190164. The website acts as a regional clearinghouse and events calendar for environmental topics relevant to the Northern Neck of Virginia. The website is maintained by NNPDC staff, who act as administrator, and members of the NNESC, which consists of organizations dedicated to making the most out of the region's air, land, and water.

This grant year, NNPDC staff maintained and directed content across the site related to environmental news, projects, meetings, and events in the Northern Neck. Topics posted included: Agricultural and Farming; Climate Change & Sea-Level Rise; Environmental Guidelines and Regulations; Environmental equity; Land Conservation; NNK Environmental Organizations; Plants, Trees, Gardening, and Lawn Care; Recreation in Nature; Shoreline Erosion Control; Solar Energy; Stormwater Management and Water Quality; Transportation; Volunteer Opportunities; Waste Disposal and Composting; Wetland Protection and Preservation; and Wildlife, Fisheries, Birds, Insects and Bugs. Additionally, NNPDC staff engaged with environmental education and outreach leaders, such as the Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District, Friends of the Rappahannock, Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Northumberland Association for Progressive Stewardship, and the Northern Neck Land Conservancy to increase the site's utilization as the premiere platform to educate residents of the Northern Neck and inform them regarding events and educational opportunities throughout the year.

The website has been an increasingly useful tool for environmental outreach in the region since it was established and considering the challenges faced by the Coronavirus pandemic in this grant year the website served as a way for residents to plan for and engage in environmental activities throughout the region in a safe manner. In 2020-2021, the number of visitors to [www.NNKgreen.org](http://www.NNKgreen.org) steadily increased.

### IV. Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant House Elevation Program

The Northern Neck Planning District Commission administers a program to assist localities and residents mitigate the impacts of recurrent flooding through the elevation of structures prone to repetitive loss. NNPDC staff assisted localities in the Northern Neck through the administration of several home elevations funded by FEMA, with additional funding, when required, by VDEM and/or the property owners.

In this grant year, NNPDC staff have assisted Essex County with the elevation of two homes, awarded in 2019, in the Lowry Point area that are prone to recurrent flooding and vulnerable to flooding due to severe weather. NNPDC staff provided grant writing assistance and technical support to Essex County and property owners to apply for funds and received FEMA funding to cover part of the cost to elevate the homes. To date three homes have been elevated with the remaining home slated to be complete. NNPDC staff conducted project management and oversaw the completion of construction activities and project closeout.

The Program also received funding for the elevation of six homes, awarded in 2020, three in the Lewisetta area of Northumberland County, where the program has elevated five homes since 2013, one in the Little Florida area of Richmond County, where there is severe recurrent flooding, and two in the Morattico area of Lancaster County. In all cases, the homeowners have been affected by repetitive loss and are seeking mitigation assistance. The total FEMA funding to elevate those homes is \$1,233,400. NNPDC staff assisted the counties and property owners with grant writing assistance and technical support in the application process and will oversee project management activities.

The Program has pending applications, with anticipated award in 2022, for Hazard Mitigation Grants to elevate five additional homes in the Northern Neck. NNPDC staff have provided grant writing assistance and technical support to Northern Neck localities and residents to fund the elevations. Pending applications include two additional projects in the Little Florida area of Richmond County, one additional project in the Lewisetta area of Northumberland County, one project each in the Windmill Point area of Lancaster County, and one project in Northumberland County.

## V. Northern Neck RAFT

NNPDC staff facilitated local participation in the Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool (RAFT) by four counties and four towns in the Northern Neck. NNPDC staff, in collaboration with RAFT core team, met regularly over the course of the year with locality administrators, staff, and other stakeholders to discuss the implications and benefits of resilience planning and to strategize complementary planning actions to maximize benefits and align state and local priorities. The RAFT is a multi-year resilience planning and implementation effort designed to ascertain a locality's level of resilience and to assist individual localities with resilience planning and capacity building with the intent of fostering local and interregional engagement with an emphasis on implementation. NNPDC staff participation was critical to the adoption of the RAFT by all ten Northern Neck localities and has helped create continuity between local implementation activities such as the creation of a local and regional emergency communications strategy and the initiation of annual hazard mitigation planning activities.

NNPDC staff, in coordination with the RAFT Core Team, held multiple virtual local and regional workshops for the Resiliency Adaptation Feasibility Tool (RAFT) in each of the four Counties and the towns of Kilmarnock, Colonial Beach, Warsaw, and White Stone. During each workshop NNPDC and RAFT Core Team members engaged with a diverse set of stakeholders including local land use and emergency management staff, Social Services and Health Departments, NNSWCD, environmental organizations, and other community organizations to ascertain current local programs and policies that build resiliency and develop action checklists with implementable actions that build community resilience. Particular attention was paid to capacity building at the local level to foster engagement and create a self-sustaining and perpetual vehicle for resilience planning and implementation. Over the following months, NNPDC staff, in coordination with the RAFT Core Team, participated in virtual monthly meetings for each of the eight participating localities. Each monthly meeting built off the outcomes of the local workshops and continued with the implementation the local action checklists. The RAFT meetings also served to address regional resilience through the advancement of priorities identified in the regional Hazard Mitigation Plan generated an incremental approach to the Hazard Mitigation Planning process. The RAFT meetings resulted in regional coordination on an emergency and preparedness communication strategy and the identification of hazard mitigation planning deficiencies.

Outcomes of the RAFT included, but were not limited to, the development of and progress on local priority resilience action items, the development of regional strategies and actions to improve hazard mitigation, emergency response, and resilience planning, the development of tools for use by participating localities to assist in resilience planning and implementation, and the development of local resilience committees to continue the momentum of local implementation teams and to continue to review progress and implement new priority actions. The actions chosen by localities varied, but each locality identified the need to develop emergency communications strategies, institute a committee of local stakeholders to monitor and advance progress toward achieving local resilience, and strengthen local and regional planning processes. Regional outcomes included the identification of gaps in data useful for resilience planning and improvements to the regional hazard mitigation planning process.

## VI. Special Project: Land Conservation Workshop

Forests and farmland in the Northern Neck are valued for multiple reasons such as wildlife, privacy, recreation, timber, hunting, and scenery. The region consists of large tracts of land that are owned and maintained by a single person or family. Many landowners or their heirs are ill-prepared to pass the environmental and heirloom values rooted in that land to the next generation. Passing land from one generation the next with its environmental and conservation legacy intact takes work, planning and dedication. Legacy planning is the broader effort that not only encompasses the typical estate plan, but also articulates a family's goals and ways to involve the next generation. Engaging the next generation in the care and enjoyment of the land helps ensure a smooth and successful transition to keep the land in the family and those legacy land uses intact.

NNPDC staff, in collaboration with the Virginia Cooperative Extension, VA Department of Forestry, Northern Neck Land Conservancy, and local business sponsors, conducted a series workshops educating landowners on the benefits of land conservation and legacy planning. Two workshop series were held virtually, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, over the course of the spring and fall of 2021. The spring workshop series was held during the weeks of April 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, respectively, and the fall workshop series was held during the weeks of September 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, respectively. The workshops were conducted by the Virginia Cooperative Extension and the VA Department of Forestry and the NNPDC conducted outreach to local businesses to sponsor the events and landowners to promote the events and make them accessible. NNPDC staff worked with local foresters, like Potomac Supply, and the Farm Bureau to provide sponsorship for a local viewing of the events and promoted the events through those sponsors, the Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District, the Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Department of Forestry. In all, some dozen landowners and a few conservation groups attended one or the other workshop series.

Workshop topics included land conservation, natural resources planning, land transfer, and legacy planning. Each workshop series consisted of an introduction to the Generation Next program, an overview of forest resources, and family stories about their experiences with land transfer. Participants were guided to develop long-term goals for their land and to determine their family assets. Participants were then provided conservation, legal, and financial tools to execute a legacy plan for their land. Most importantly, participants had access to experts in legacy planning to answer questions and guide them in the development of a plan. In all, participants were provided the background information, tools, advice, and motivation to act on behalf of preserving the environmental and conservation legacy of their cherished land and ensuring subsequent generations could enjoy and care for our region's natural resources.

## VII. Benefits Accrued from Previous VACZM Grants

NNPDC staff tracked measurable benefits accrued from previous grant products that have served as a foundation for additional projects. The initial funding of projects which developed the region's first water trails has resulted in the expansion of the Northern Neck Water Trail Network and a plan to update the network for greater inclusion of the region's indigenous cultural landscape in the interpretive narrative of the trails. Additionally, a plan has been developed to update and market the Northern Neck Water Trail Network to increase public access to the trail network and to create uniformity with water trails on the Eastern Shore and Middle Peninsula for inclusion in [virginiawatertrails.org](http://virginiawatertrails.org). This ecotourism collaboration effort will incorporate the tenets of resiliency through continued VZCMP funding, further ensuring its lasting benefit to tourism activities in the region.

Additional benefits include NNPDC staff contributions to the development of the Virginia Resilience Master Planning Framework. VCZMP activities have culminated in the development of the statewide plan

and have led to the funding of resilience capacity building in Virginia's Coastal Zone. Continued VCZMP funding of technical assistance and resilience capacity building will see additional benefits accrue in subsequent years.

Additional benefits include the initiation of a blue and green infrastructure assessment and watershed management plan. This work utilizes the assessments of green infrastructure and facilitated meetings funded with past VCZMP grants. Other benefits include the initiation of an assessment of dredging and beneficial use projects in the region. Building off the outcomes of previous VCZMP grants, the NNCBPAA will conduct the assessment of waterways identified in the Shallow Draft Navigation and Sediment Management Plan in order to prioritize critical dredging needs.

Other benefits include the continuation of the Northern Neck Assign-A-Highway program which saw over ten tons of litter collected along Northern Neck roadways and another successful Virginia Clean Waterways event. The Northern Neck program ensures litter and debris are removed and mitigates local waterway contamination. Other benefits include NNPDC staff participation in and contributions to several environmental technical advisory groups that indirectly resulted from work funded by the VCZMP. NNPDC staff, in collaboration with academic institutions and environmental groups, have participated in efforts to study the impacts of sea level rise and flooding on critical transportation infrastructure and the economic well-being of the Coastal Region.

## VIII. Regional Resiliency Coordination

For the VCZMP resilience focal area, the NNPDC received funding to help build regional resiliency coordination among its member localities, local, state, and federal stakeholders, and residents. NNPDC staff provided technical assistance and coordination to local governments on resiliency while serving as a liaison to state and federal agencies in charge of developing new policies and regulations. This work continued progress from previous VCZMP funding and built on existing relationships and stakeholder engagement at the regional scale. NNPDC staff utilized the RAFT to help localities establish local resiliency stakeholder groups that will focus local efforts to expand existing priorities around resilience and act as liaison for resilience issues to local administrations and elected bodies. These stakeholder groups monitor state and regional resilience efforts, trends, and priorities to champion local priorities to achieve greater local understanding of the challenges, greater local buy-in for solutions to those challenges, and hopefully drive community resilience forward. Local representatives then participated in regional workshops and meetings where they showcase local progress and participate in a more meaningful way to regional planning processes for emergency management, hazard mitigation, and resilience.

## IX. Regional Resiliency Priorities

For the VCZMP resilience focal area, the NNPDC received funding to help develop local and regional resiliency priorities. NNPDC staff utilized the RAFT and the regional resilience coordination process to engage with local governments and stakeholders to identify local and regional resilience priorities and needs. These priorities and needs were varied and locally focused but take advantage of regional planning processes; they included data and funding needs, technical capacity, policy and plan development, and implementation projects. With assistance from the RAFT core team and NNPDC staff, localities developed local resilience action checklists consisting of local priorities that once achieved will contribute to incremental resilience capacity. Over the course of the year, with help from the RAFT core team and NNPDC staff, local stakeholders worked through planning and implementation of their respective resilience action checklists.



An example of local resilience action priorities includes the incorporation of resilience into comprehensive plans and the alignment of local plans with the regional hazard mitigation plan for greater continuity in planning with a focus on local implementation. Another example is the development of emergency communications strategies, to streamline and coordinate emergency risk and response across local governments, intragovernmental communications, and outreach to the public. Another example of local resilience action priorities is the development of local stakeholder groups to champion local resilience priorities and coordinate regional efforts at the locality scale. Other examples include building business and economic resilience, studying the economic impacts of high-risk hazards, and conducting comprehensive stormwater and shoreline management assessments to develop strategies for sea level rise and to prioritize projects.

## X. CZM Resilience Database Support

For the VCZMP resilience focal area, the NNPDC received funding to help VCZMP develop a resilience database and populate it with local planning and project priorities. NNPDC staff continues to support the ongoing VCZMP resilience database effort and coordinate with the organizing team by providing feedback on the structure, usability, access procedures, and other components of the effort. NNPDC staff utilized the RAFT, local stakeholder groups, and local resilience action priorities to identify and share with VCZMP for the purposes of populating the resilience database.

## XI. Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan

For the VCZMP resilience focal area, the NNPDC supported the development and implementation of the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan. NNPDC staff acted as members of the Technical Advisory Committee to the VCRMP, was a contributing member of the Outreach Subcommittee, and acted as Co-chair to the Economic Development Subcommittee. NNPDC staff attended all TAC meetings, provided input and responded to data calls in support of the development of the VCRMP. The NNPDC facilitated regional outreach for the plan development process by holding a planning design charette and a public meeting to educate the public on the plan's development. In all, NNPDC staff contributed significant hours to the development of the VCRMP to ensure that local interests were fully represented and to garner local buy in of the plan's benefit to local interests.