

**SUMMARY OF THE MEETING OF THE  
HRPDC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE  
April 1, 2021**

Pursuant to the declared state of emergency in the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to protect the public health and safety of the committee members, staff, and the general public, the Regional Environmental Committee meeting was held electronically via WebEx. These electronic meetings are required to complete essential business on behalf of the region. A recording of the meeting is available on the website.

**Attendance**

A complete attendance list is available. In addition to several non-voting committee members and other interested parties, the following members participated electronically:

**Regional Environmental Committee Voting Members:**

Barbara Brumbaugh, CH	Meg Pittenger, PO
Kevin Landry, GL	Beth Lewis, SH
Greta Hawkins, HA	Erin Roundtree, SK
Michael Woolson, JC	Diana St. John, VB
Toni Small, JC	Heather Markle, WG
Kim Moshier, NN (proxy for Allison Watts)	Kent Henkel, YK
Justin Shafer, NO	

**1. Summary of the March 4, 2021 Meeting of the Regional Environmental Committee**

There were no comments on the March meeting summary and they were approved.

**2. Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**3. VIMS/Penn State University Community Climate Outlook**

Dr. Molly Mitchell, VIMS-CCRM, briefed the Committee on the Mid-Atlantic Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments (MARISA) program. MARISA, the VIMS Center for Coastal Resources Management, and Penn State University's Center for Climate Risk Management recently collaborated on an effort to develop Community Climate Outlooks for selected coastal counties and cities in Virginia. The outlooks seek to educate the general public on the effects of climate change on sea level rise, temperature, and precipitation and include descriptions of how climate change will impact each community. Outlooks are available for all HRPDC localities except for Franklin, Smithfield, and Southampton County. The Community Climate Outlooks are available online at <https://www.marisa.psu.edu/outlooks/>. Dr. Mitchell also shared other tools

and products from the MARISA program and available to the public, including a Mid-Atlantic Regional Climate Summary, historic climate and weather data such as hurricane tracks, and a portal to download climate modeling and projections. Committee members asked about how the climate change effects were derived for each locality, specifically precipitation changes, and how the outlooks would be rolled out to the public. Dr. Mitchell said that existing global climate models were down sampled to provide greater detail, but in doing so significant uncertainty is introduced into the projections. The outlooks are available electronically for now, but eventually will be distributed in hard-copy with the assistance of the new Coastal Climate Extension Specialist for the Chesapeake Bay Region at VIMS.

#### **4. Environment Virginia Symposium 2021 Highlights**

HRPDC staff provided their takeaways from the all-virtual 2021 Environment Virginia Symposium. The virtual format offered fewer presentations and panels and fewer opportunities to meaningfully engage with other conference attendees and presenters compared to previous events. Nevertheless, the conference addressed several important subjects including energy, the Chesapeake Bay, resilience, environmental justice, energy, and the regulatory environment. Environmental justice and equitable community engagement were overarching themes of the conference. There was also a moderated discussion with Secretary Ring and Secretary Strickler. The Executive Director of Wetlands Watch, Skip Stiles, was awarded the Erchul Environmental Leadership Award. Presentations from the conference will be available for viewing for 90 days.

#### **5. Great Dismal Swamp Stakeholder Collaborative**

Dr. Alexandra Sutton Lawrence, part of the Leadership Team of the Great Dismal Swamp Stakeholder Collaborative, presented an overview of the Collaborative, including its purpose, accomplishments to date, and future plans, programs, and initiatives. The Collaborative consists of tribal, federal, state, municipal, and community leaders and other representatives in the larger Dismal Swamp region who are working on a series of linked conservation and cultural preservation projects that reflect the complex ecological history of the Swamp and the rich history of its local communities. One of these projects is the designation of the Great Dismal Swamp as a National Heritage Area (NHA), which would allow for both the ecological and cultural identity of the Swamp to be better protected and communicated. The Collaborative is also developing K-12 education materials and public signage and conducting cultural mapping of the Swamp. Committee members asked about funding for and boundaries of the NHA and if any forest restoration projects were being considered. Dr. Lawrence said that designation of the NHA provides limited funding, but more importantly makes available other federal funding opportunities for investments in the community towards historic preservation, interpretation, and resource conservation. The proposed boundaries for the feasibility study include all immediately adjacent and neighboring cities and counties to the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The Collaborative has not completed any forest restoration projects yet, but supports such efforts by partner organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy.

#### **6. Virginia Marine Resource Commission (VMRC) draft Wetlands Guidelines**

HRPDC staff provided an update on the public comment period and an outline of potential comments to VMRC's draft Wetland Guidelines. The Guidelines were developed in response to SB 776, the living shorelines legislation passed in 2020. The public comment period was extended to April 16, 2021 and as a result, there will be more opportunity to discuss the impacts of the of the Guidelines with locality staff and develop more robust comments. Comments will center around the Guidelines' alignment with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, tidal wetland types, best available science, the repair and replacement of existing structures, climate change considerations, and resources that were removed from the existing Guidelines. Additional opportunities for local staff input are forthcoming.

#### **7. Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area (CBPA) Designation and Management Regulation – Proposed Amendments**

Whitney Katchmark provided an update on the regional comment letter on the proposed amendments to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Designation and Management Regulations. The HRPDC staff distributed a draft regional comment letter for locality review on March 9, 2021, requesting any comments or suggestions by March 22, 2021. Numerous comments were received from local staff, and HRPDC staff tried to address each comment in the revised letter. Ms. Katchmark explained that the next step in the process is for the Committee to make a formal recommendation to the HRPDC board to submit the draft letter to DEQ and the State Water Control Board. Committee members expressed support for the letter, and Hampton and Newport News noted that they would also be submitting comments, separate from HRPDC. Barbara Brumbaugh (CH) made a motion to recommend the letter to the HRPDC board. The motion was seconded by Mike Woolson (JC). The motion passed unanimously by all voting Committee members present, except for Kevin Landry (GL) who did not vote.

#### **8. Other Matters**

No other matters were discussed.

The next meeting of the Regional Environmental Committee will be held on Thursday, May 6, 2021 virtually via WebEx.