

Virginia's Coastal Resilience Master Plan

Toward a Resilient and Thriving Coastal Region

If you live in the Coastal Plain of Virginia, then you already understand the positives and negatives of living with water. One of the negatives – flooding – makes everything worse. It blocks roads, damages homes and businesses, and can harm beaches, marshes, and the Chesapeake Bay.

You probably have also noticed more frequent and more severe flooding in recent years. Science shows us that with climate change, flooding will get worse before it gets better because of rising sea level, increased rainfall, and stronger coastal storms.

Unless we take action to reduce flooding where we can, adapt to it where we can't, and increase the resilience of our neighborhoods and infrastructure, living with water in Virginia coastal and coastal region communities will grow more and more difficult.

That's why Governor Northam has directed Virginia state government to work with residents and localities in coastal regions of Virginia to create a comprehensive Coastal Resilience Master Plan.

The Need for a State Plan

Some coastal Virginia localities have already started making their own plans for flood adaptation and resilience. Those important efforts will help residents of those localities, and will provide important pieces of the Master Plan.

However, most localities cannot afford to create individual plans, and no localities can afford to pay for all of the projects and actions the plans identify to fight flooding. Further, local plans often do not consider impacts to nearby communities, or impacts to assets of regional, state, or national significance like transportation networks or migratory fish and wildlife.

That's where the Commonwealth of Virginia comes in. By taking a broader view along our entire coastal region, we can identify and address both the shared challenges all coastal residents face, and the challenges that are unique to certain areas.

State government can also coordinate local, regional, state, and federal adaptation and resilience efforts and related programs to maximize their impact, encourage equitable treatment of traditionally underserved populations, align coastal resilience with environmental protection, and ensure that we leave no community behind.

By creating the Master Plan, the Commonwealth has stepped up to play a critical role, and will make coastal flood resilience and adaptation in Virginia more cost effective, more comprehensive, and more likely to benefit all coastal region residents.

About the Plan

The Coastal Resilience Master Plan will achieve four Primary Goals by following five Guiding Principles.

The four Master Planning Framework Primary Goals are:

1. Identify priority projects to increase the resilience of coastal communities, including both built and natural assets at risk due to sea level rise and flooding
2. Establish a financing strategy, informed by regional differences and equity considerations, to support execution of the plan
3. Effectively incorporate climate change projections into all of the Commonwealth's programs addressing coastal region built and natural infrastructure at risk due to sea level rise and flooding
4. Coordinate all state, federal, regional, and local coastal region adaptation and protection efforts in accordance with the guiding principles of this Framework

The five Master Planning Framework Guiding Principles are:

1. Acknowledge climate change and its consequences, and base decision-making on the best available science.
2. Identify and address socioeconomic inequities and work to enhance equity through coastal region adaptation and protection efforts.
3. Recognize the importance of protecting and enhancing green infrastructure like natural coastal barriers and fish and wildlife habitat by prioritizing nature-based solutions.
4. Utilize community and regional scale planning to the maximum extent possible, seeking region-specific approaches tailored to the needs of individual communities.
5. Understand fiscal realities and focus on the most cost-effective solutions for protection and adaptation of our communities, businesses and critical infrastructure.

Pursuing these goals in a manner consistent with these principles will help all regions of coastal Virginia adapt to climate-driven flooding and build resilience while also enhancing coastal natural resources, economic opportunity, and equity.

The Commonwealth will complete the Master Plan by the end of 2021, but our work will not end there. We will continue working with coastal residents, local governments, and other stakeholders to update the Master Plan periodically as we learn more about regional coastal adaptation and resilience best practices.

Planning Approach

To complete the first Master Plan, and to lay the groundwork for future improvements, we need your help. The Commonwealth is leading a coordinated planning effort that leverages the creativity and ingenuity of our state's many diverse coastal region communities to chart a comprehensive and inclusive path forward.



Virginia cannot achieve this vision of coastal resilience without the cooperation and invaluable insight of coastal plain residents, localities, and stakeholders. Our participatory planning process will involve collaboration with communities, regional planning organizations, academic institutions, military installations, businesses and industry, non-governmental organizations, and other key partners. Through a robust outreach and engagement process—including advisory committees, public meetings, surveys, and social media—the community and stakeholder perspective will heavily inform the technical study process and the development of the Master Plan. A transparent, objective, and repeatable framework will factor in the diverse characteristics and challenges of all coastal plain communities to determine which projects we prioritize, including through grants and loans from the Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund.

<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorviriniagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/Virginia-Coastal-Resilience-Master-Planning-Framework-October-2020.pdf>

How can you get involved?

The Coastal Master Plan will involve an ongoing stakeholder engagement process. Now is the time to get involved. Together, we can build a resilient future for Virginia's coastal regions. For more information, please visit <https://www.naturalresources.virginia.gov/initiatives/technical-advisory-committee-for-coastal-resilience/>. If you have any questions, please send a message to ResilientCoastVA@governor.virginia.gov.