

Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program

Final Draft Section 309 Needs Assessment *October 20, 2005*

Part I. Introduction

The Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program was established in 1986 as the state's response to the federal Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) serves as the lead agency of a network of state agencies that administer state regulations and policies to protect and enhance coastal resources. Agencies in the network include the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Department of Forestry (DOF), the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), the Department of Health (VDH), the Department of Historic Resources (DHR), the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), Tidewater localities, and Coastal Planning District Commissions (PDCs).

Section 309 of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) is known as the Coastal Zone Enhancement Program. Created in 1990, Section 309 is a voluntary grant program in which federal funds are available to coastal states with federally approved coastal management programs. To receive funds, the programs must assess nine specified areas of coastal zone management as they relate to the state and identify which are the highest priorities. The nine areas are: public access, coastal hazards, ocean resources, wetlands, marine debris, cumulative and secondary impacts of growth and development, special area management planning (SAMP), energy and government facility siting, and aquaculture.

In 1997, Virginia developed a three-year Assessment and Strategy that addressed each enhancement area of Section 309 and identified five high priority areas (public access, hazards, cumulative and secondary impacts, SAMPs, and aquaculture). These areas were selected based on the recognized need for regulatory or program changes. Based on the highest priority of need and likelihood for success, three strategies were developed for the FY'97-FY'99 period: SAMPs for Northampton and Southern Watershed Areas, and Aquaculture.

In 2000, Virginia developed a five-year Assessment and Strategy that identified five high priority areas with seven proposed strategies: 1. Wetlands: Wetlands Regulatory Programs Strategy; 2. Coastal Hazards: Dune Management Strategy; 3. Cumulative and Secondary Impacts: Shorelands Management Strategy and Clean Marina Program Strategy; 4. SAMP: Southern Watershed Area Strategy and Dragon Run Area Strategy; and 5. Aquaculture: Aquaculture Management Strategy.

This report presents the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program's 2005 Assessment of the nine enhancement areas. The analysis was completed using the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) final Section 309 Guidance (March 28, 2005). Assessment questions were developed by NOAA in consultation with states and territories to help determine and update the status of each enhancement area.

The Coastal Policy Team, comprised of the agencies noted above, met on September 26th, 2005 to review and prioritize the nine enhancement areas. The Coastal Policy Team used the criteria listed below for determining the priority for each area. Team members individually ranked each area on scoring sheets, considering each area on its own merits. Individual scores were combined and the overall ranking of the areas posted for reflection and discussion by Coastal Policy Team members. The Coastal Policy Team discussed whether any enhancement area should be re-ranked, and then used group consensus to assign a final priority for each enhancement area.

List of Criteria:

1. Feasibility:
 - a. Could progress be made within the time and financial constraints?
 - b. Is successful development of enforceable policies likely?
 - c. Is adoption of enforceable policies likely?
2. Importance:
 - a. Is there a significant threat in this enhancement area?
 - b. How valuable (economically or ecologically) is the coastal resource?
3. Appropriateness for the Coastal Program:
 - a. Is this an issue that other agencies are not addressing?
 - b. Is there a need for coordination of efforts within Virginia?

The prioritization effort resulted in the assignment of six high and three medium priorities for the nine enhancement areas. No area was assigned a low priority in this assessment, reflecting the increasing pressures from growth, urbanization, and the resultant declining water quality and habitat loss. The Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program plans to focus its attention and efforts during the next five years on the following six enhancement areas receiving a high priority ranking during the Coastal Policy Team meeting on September 26th, 2005 : *Wetlands, Public Access, SAMPs, Aquaculture, Coastal Hazards and Cumulative and Secondary Impacts of Growth and Development.*

Once this Assessment is finalized, the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program will be soliciting input from its partners and constituencies to develop strategies to address specific issues in each of these six high priority areas that are deemed appropriate for Virginia CZM action. Focus groups will be convened on each topic and potential strategies developed. Based on feasibility and available Section 309 funding over the next 5 years, several strategies may be pursued.