

## **AGENDA**

Board of Wildlife Resources  
Law Enforcement Committee  
7870 Villa Park Drive, Board Room  
Henrico, Virginia 23228

May 24, 2023  
2:00 pm

Committee Members: Brian Vincent, Chair, Mr. Tom Sadler, and Mr. G. K. Washington

DWR Staff Liaison: Colonel John Cobb

1. Call to Order and Welcome  
Mr. Brian Vincent
2. Approval of March 15, 2023 Meeting Minutes **Final Action**  
Mr. Brian Vincent
3. Public Comment – Non-Agenda Item  
Mr. Brian Vincent
4. Virginia Conservation Police Relevancy Plan  
Colonel John Cobb
5. Law Enforcement Chief Update  
Colonel John Cobb
6. Director's Report  
Mr. Ryan Brown
7. Chair's Report  
Mr. Brian Vincent
8. Additional Business/Comments  
Mr. Brian Vincent

9. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, August 16, 2023  
Mr. Brian Vincent

10. Adjournment  
Mr. Brian Vincent

Draft Meeting Minutes  
Law Enforcement Committee  
Board of Wildlife Resources  
7870 Villa Park Drive, Board Room  
Richmond, Virginia 23228

March 15, 2023  
2:00 pm

**Present:** Mr. Brian Vincent, **Chair**, Mr. G. K. Washington, Mr. Tom Sadler; **Board Members in attendance:** Mr. Leon Boyd, Mr. Jon Cooper, Dr. Mamie Parker, Mr. George Terwilliger and Ms. Tammy Franklin; **Executive Director:** Mr. Ryan J. Brown; **Deputy Director:** Ms. Becky Gwynn; **Director's Working Group:** Mr. Darin Moore, Ms. Paige Pearson, Mr. Bob Smet, Dr. Mike Bednarski, Mr. Tom Guess, Mr. Paul Kugelman, Mr. George Braxton, (virtual) and Dr. Gray Anderson.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm and welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Chair noted for the record that there was a quorum present for the meeting.

**Meeting Minutes:** The Chair called for a motion to approve the minutes of the January 18, 2023, committee meeting. Mr. Washington made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 18, 2023, meeting minutes. It was seconded by Mr. Sadler. Ayes: Vincent, Washington & Sadler

**Public Comment – Non-Agenda Item:** The Chair called for Public Comment – Non-Agenda Item. Hearing none, the Chair continued with the meeting.

**CPO Recruitment:** The Chair called on Major Milt Robinson for a presentation.

Major Milt Robinson introduced the 2023 Recruitment Class, who came through and introduced themselves to the Board and gave their assignment location.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Major Robinson for his presentation.

**Law Enforcement Chief Update:** The Chair called on Colonel John Cobb for an Update.

Colonel John Cobb gave a Law Enforcement Update:

- House Bill 38 Money
- Retaining Officers is a challenge
- The hiring climate is a challenge

**Director's Report:** The Chair called on Executive Director Ryan Brown for his Director's Report.

The Director reported:

- Commended all of Colonel Cobb's efforts on behalf of Law Enforcement to always work and get the best for his officers.
- Thanked the Recruits for their Introduction.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

**Chair's Report:**

The Chair enjoyed seeing the 2023 Law Enforcement Recruit class and thanked the Law Division for their reports and updates.

The Chair announced the next Law Enforcement committee meeting will be Wednesday, May 24, 2023, and asked if there were any additional comments, hearing none, he adjourned the meeting at 2:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Frances Boswell



# VCP RELEVANCY PLAN

## Public Safety Investment



### Purpose of VCP Relevancy Plan:

As we connect more people with the outdoors, the need for our specialized public safety services will only continue to grow statewide. Our situational report (other side) already shows some of the multiple challenges we are facing in both staffing and meeting the needs of the public. This issue has been previously identified in the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Fish and Wildlife Relevancy Roadmap (2019) under “Agency Capacity” and the associated barriers of lacking capacity (*expertise, staffing, and resources*) to serve the needs of broader constituencies. To be successful in having others value the outdoors, we will need to enhance our training and educational services.

### ❖ Expertise = North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA)

- VCP Quality Public Service: Professional Standards (**Governor’s BEST IN CLASS**)
- Best practices, networking, collaboration, accountability, credibility, and public trust
- For the insight to better forecast trends and find viable efficient solutions
- Adopt programs and methods that are already working for other agencies

### ❖ Staffing = Natural Resource Public Safety Response Services

- VCP Pursuit of Excellence: As Protectors of Wildlife and Natural Resources and to respond effectively to those in the woods and on the water during their greatest time of need
- **SNHR Objective 3**: *Increase the outdoor experiences for all Virginians*
- Meet high increased demands for waterway usage, especially by paddle craft users
- Manage conflict among different outdoor user’s groups to include private landowners
- Build upon our highly specialized skills and utilize these capabilities as first responders
- Continue to offer training and partner with other first responders as a force multiplier
- Expand upon our initiatives as **Ambassadors to Wildlife and Natural Resources**

### ❖ Resources = Leadership Development Continuum (LDC)

- VCP Employer of Choice: Addressing “quality of life” police retention concerns
- **SNHR Objective 4**: *Recruitment/Retention of key state personnel capabilities*
- Developing Officers and Staff (Best Resource) to meet Challenges of Tomorrow
- Utilize “Game Warden Experiences” to increase subject matter expertise
- Explore unique **Woods\*Wildlife\*Water** “W3” Training and Educational Center

### ❖ VCP Relevancy Plan Activation (New General Funding Consistent Stream)

- Need public safety general funding to directly address low officer staffing levels back toward their traditional numbers (request funding support for additional officers; up to 40 CPOs)
- Allocate Officer Salary (\$51,000) and Benefits (49.1%) \$76,041 (total) + Emergency Patrol Vehicle (\$60,000) and issued personal equipment (\$11,500); total of **\$147,541 per officer**

## Woods and Water Public Safety Situational Report

### ❖ VCP Scope of Work

- The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) has a Law Enforcement Division that is known as Virginia Conservation Police (VCP) with top primary objectives of Public Safety and Natural Resource Protection
  - Known for their ability to provide Public Safety Response Services in difficult terrain and harsh weather conditions using specialized equipment, including off-road vehicles and various watercraft
  - VCP K-9 program and tracking team, often train other agencies (i.e., WV Natural Resource Police)
  - In last five years, officers have received 20 lifesaving and 3 meritorious lifesaving service medals
- Teach Hunter Education and Boating Safety Classes to the general public and offer specialized training to local jurisdictions and state law enforcement on watercraft operations and officer water survival
- Since 1960, DWR responsible as the Boating Enforcement Agency / Port of Virginia - Security Member
- Second only to Virginia State Police in the number of sworn officers with statewide jurisdiction and full police powers, allows them to serve as a force multiplier for federal, state, and local law enforcement
  - 33% of VCP enforcement actions during the last three years is related directly to public safety
- Primarily charged with enforcement of laws and regulations in the woods and waters - Accredited by Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission & National Association of State Boating Law Administrators

### ❖ Officer Staffing Challenges / Public Safety Needs

- Twenty-five years ago, nearly 220 officers across the state (**current funding for only 182 officers**)
- Patrol public and private lands to protect our wildlife and natural resources and promote public safety
  - At current staffing levels, each field officer is responsible for 455 square miles (~300,000 acres)
- In 2021, only 113 field officers were able to remove 236 boaters/drivers operating under the influence of alcohol from our waterways and highways. In addition, they made 415 arrests for firearm violations
- DWR is the largest state landowner, second only to VDOT (46 WMAs - over 215,000 acres)
- Responsible for recreational boating safety across the state
  - 53,225 miles of rivers and 116,364 acres of lakes
  - Increasing waterway usage - especially by canoes, kayaks, and standup paddle boards
- In 2021, 32% of boating fatalities occurred from paddle craft, due to failure to wear life jackets
- On a scale of 0 to 10 (extremely important), how important is conservation law enforcement work in your state, the national mean rating was 8.49 with the highest performance ratings for conducting search and rescue efforts followed by creating a safe and enjoyable recreational environment \*

### ❖ Appropriations for Public Safety

- HB38 Transfer Funds to DWR have not kept pace with our growing personnel costs. Funding shortfalls over 25 years (cap was set at 13 million in 1998) have caused this to be an undependable, non-stable funding source to meet officer staffing needs (**20% decrease / resulting in a loss of nearly 40 officers**)
- VCP officers within DWR are the only state law enforcement (besides ABC) without a general fund line item for public safety within the state budget (see sister agency MRC with their Marine Police)
- Most Americans (60%) would like to see more conservation law enforcement officers in their state \*
- Agencies may wish to consider expanding the role of conservation law enforcement when it comes to collaborating with local communities and educating the public on conservation and protection issues \*

\* Planning for the Future of Conservation Law Enforcement in the United States (National Report 2021)



# Request for Support in Locating Suitable Property for Woods\*Wildlife\*Water (W3) Training and Educational Center

## Executive Summary

**Purpose:** This public safety initiative is to acquire a large tract of state property suitable for this unique outdoor training center with all of the elements of woods, wildlife, and water to be used for training law enforcement recruits, officers/staff, and other emergency first responders from state and local jurisdictions. In addition, this will provide an appropriate site for providing hands-on training and educational opportunities to those interested in a career in the outdoors, as well as those who want to learn more about wildlife and natural resource outdoor experiences in a safe manner. Unfortunately, these training opportunities have been lacking in the state of Virginia, largely due to the unavailability of this type of outdoor resource, which is often found within other state wildlife agencies. Additionally, the facility will provide a commercial outdoor recreational firearms range and an ATV/UTV safety training course for public use.

**Rationale:** The DWR is the second largest state landowner in Virginia, with 46 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs); however, these areas were obtained and are maintained with federal grant funds that preclude law enforcement use for training. The DWR currently does not have property that can be used for this type of training due to these grant requirement and limitations. In 2024, we will mark 20 years since our first in-house law enforcement academy session kicked off without having a dedicated outdoor training facility. Consequentially, we have had to rely on other local, state, and federal partners, which often times comes with conditions and last minute changes that impact the delivery of the training. Recently, we have been fortunate to network with other state wildlife agencies to better understand how they use their training facilities and outdoor spaces to create opportunities, so that we can serve all Virginians and not just law enforcement trainees. Pursuant to the DWR Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan, we will explore opportunities to expand access to Virginia's wild spaces for underrepresented populations. Many of those living in Virginia's urban centers neither own, nor have access to, areas that would allow outdoor recreational shooting or ATV/UTV riding. Studies reveal that recreational shooting sports are growing with greater participation from women and people of color.<sup>1</sup> The DWR sees this capital acquisition and development project as an opportunity to showcase how a dedicated wild space for training and educational purposes can recruit, retain, and reactivate broader constituent groups.

**Action Needed:** Support for this concept and in locating a suitable piece of property to be known as the *Woods\*Wildlife\*Water (W3) Training & Educational Center*. To meet our educational goals for this piece of property, the primary characteristics for this training ground would include:

- 200 Acre Minimum with a Wooded Area (60% or greater)
- Various Elevation Changes (i.e., hills and valleys) for off-road driving courses
- Preferably with Body of Water (Pond) for fishing opportunities
- Suitable for building an Outdoor Recreational Shooting Range
- Central Virginia w/in two hours of the DWR HQ (Henrico)

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<sup>1</sup> Firearm Ownership and Sport Shooting Participation in the United States 2009-2022, National Shooting Sports Foundation



# Public Safety General Fund Budget Line Item Request

## Executive Summary

**Purpose:** To establish a general fund line-item appropriation, specifically for public safety in the woods and on the waterways. These funds will be used to hire and equip officers for creating a safer and more enjoyable recreational environment by providing programs and services to broader constituencies. Currently, the Law Enforcement Division of DWR, known as Virginia Conservation Police (VCP), lacks staffing capacity due to stagnant revenue sources, which has resulted in a 20% decrease (*40 less officers*) over the last 25 years. This approach would provide the needed resources to address current inadequate staffing and public safety service requirements.

**Rationale:** The VCP Officers patrol public and private lands to protect wildlife and promote public safety. At current staffing levels, each field officer is responsible for over 455 square miles (equates to nearly 300,000 acres). More importantly, they are first responders often responding to public safety calls for service on the waters and in remote areas, usually without the luxury of back-up. Public safety does not stop in the woods and on the waterways; they have been sworn in with full police powers and in the past three years, 37% of their enforcement actions were responses to public safety incidents and property crimes (including actions incident to traditional duties). The VCP Officers also routinely serve as a force multiplier to local, state, and federal agencies, especially in the more rural areas of the Commonwealth. Due to their training and expertise, they are called upon as an integral assisting partner agency and engage in large-scale high-profile incidents and criminal investigations.

In addition, the DWR as the recreational boating agency, is facing increasing pressures and calls for emergency assistance from the usage by paddlecraft that do not require registration (*thus no revenue*), such as canoes, kayaks, and the significant increase in the use of the standup paddle board. Of solemn note, paddlecraft have been involved in 32% of the fatal boating incidents in Virginia, due to the failure to wear life jackets.

**Action Needed:** DWR's Law Enforcement Division has the lowest budget appropriation (*agency budget per officer*) despite being the second largest state law enforcement agency, and like the rest of DWR is funded only by restricted fund revenues and sales tax (watercraft and outdoor equipment) transfers. Unlike the rest of DWR, our law enforcement efforts are not eligible to receive support from federal Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration funds (the two largest federal grant sources for a state fish and wildlife agency) and are therefore further constrained. As of fiscal year 2023, agency spending, as measured as a ratio per law enforcement officer is \$134,000. In contrast, Maryland DNR has a per officer spending ratio of \$247,909.

Due to the ever-growing significant cost for LE personnel and emergency vehicles/watercraft, law enforcement today requires a consistent and reliable revenue stream of public safety funding. VCP Officers are the only state law enforcement (*besides ABC*) without a specific general fund line-item for public safety within the state budget. Request funding for additional officers (up to 40)

- For DWR, total of \$147,541 per officer cost (Officer Salary (\$51,000) and Benefits (49.1%) \$76,041 + Emergency Patrol Vehicle (\$60,000) and issued personal equipment (\$11,500))