



Virginia Conservation Police

CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.



Annual Report

2023

*120 Years of Service To The Commonwealth
of Virginia as "Virginia's Wildlife Protectors"*

Our History



ON May 14, 1903, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation, during a special session, to establish a statewide system of wildlife law enforcement officers to deal specifically with wildlife crime. From that point through 2007, these officers were called game wardens, now known as Conservation Police Officers. (Visit: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/conservation-police/history/> to read about our full history protecting Virginia's wildlife)



TODAY'S Conservation Police Officers are highly motivated, independent, and well-trained members of the law enforcement community. We are often called upon by federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to assist with various enforcement endeavors, due in part to their ability to deal with a complex array of issues in an expedient and professional manner. Whether working a youth fishing day, tracking a violent offender over rough terrain or providing law enforcement services in the wake of a natural disaster, Conservation Police Officers are always ready and willing to serve.

Conservation Police Officers are fully certified law enforcement officers through the Department of Criminal Justice Services, with the authority to enforce all of the laws of Virginia. As Deputy US Fish and Wildlife Special Agents, they may also conduct investigations and cross state lines when violations of federal wildlife laws have been committed.

The CPO Badge

The badge of the Virginia Conservation Police Officer represents those who have dedicated their lives to the protection of Virginia's wildlife and natural resources, as well as promoting a safe environment for anglers, hunters, boaters and other outdoor enthusiasts. To earn it requires comprehensive training and highly specialized skills, along with a passion for the outdoors and its wildlife.

Conservation Police Officers are fully certified sworn officers through the Department of Criminal Justice Services, with the authority to enforce all of the laws of Virginia. However, due to the unique nature of this law enforcement profession, those who wear it are unlike any other police officer.

Conservation Police Officers (CPO) perform their public service duties while taking on many different roles. These range from educator and ambassador to outdoor enthusiast; from evidence technician to boat collision reconstructionist; and from crime analyst to wildlife crime detective responsible for managing informants. CPOs also provide public safety and emergency response, sometimes during severe weather conditions, requiring that they put their lives on the line to rescue others.

Their workplace is geographically vast and diverse with modes of transportation that range from four-wheel drive vehicles to various types of boats. When comparing the duties of a CPO to those of a general police officer, one must keep in mind that the difference between these positions becomes the most evident where the pavement ends and fields and forests begin. CPOs frequently conduct foot patrols in remote areas, usually without back up and often under the cover of darkness. In these types of stressful situations, CPOs have an ability to use little more than their communication skills to shield them from wrongdoers as the "Protectors of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources".

As per a portion of the Conservation Police Officer's Code of Ethics, we must:

"...maintain calm in the face of danger, scorn or ridicule; demonstrate self-restraint; and be constantly mindful of the welfare of others..."

Message from the Colonel



This year 2023, marks our 120th anniversary in this noble profession of being "Virginia's Wildlife Protectors" since 1903. Our success has been nothing less than incredible. I remember, nearly 50 years ago, hunting with my father and being just thankful to see a deer hoof print or to catch a glimpse of a turkey in the distance. While many game species have greatly expanded, other species still need our focus and protection, often due to personal greed and commercialization.

Our public safety services have significantly increased over the years to include protecting our waterways. As we now connect more people to the outdoors, we are seen for our emergency response expertise by those in the woods and on the water. In just the last five years, our officers have been awarded 20 lifesaving medals and 3 meritorious service medals (risking the officer's life to save another). Our K9 Program is so well-respected that we trained West Virginia Natural Resources Police's Inaugural K9 Program. Our specialized tracking team is exceptional and is often called upon by local jurisdictions to assist with search and rescue operations.

I generally do not spend much time looking back on initiatives successfully implemented and past accomplishments as I am more focused on the future (currently working on the implementation of the VCP Relevancy Plan). However, the purpose of the VCP 2023 Annual Report is to look at that specific year in retrospect, so here is a list gathered from our monthly Rollcall Newsletters:

- 1) Welcomed 28 recruits, our largest Basic Academy (12th), and in terms of diversity, this class had the greatest variety of work experiences that we have ever seen in one group.
- 2) Our K9 Team trained West Virginia Natural Resources Police's Inaugural K9 Program.
- 3) Implement the new Outstanding Accomplishment Spot Recognition Program along

with the 27 recipients for each one of those months since I have been promoted to Colonel.

4) Fifth Annual VCP Awards Ceremony combined with the Leadership Development Program Cohort 1 Graduation. An opportunity to formally recognize 40 officers and staff members.

5) Held Game Warden Experiences for trapping and waterfowl, focusing on traditional boots-on-the-ground techniques using hands-on approach on multiple days in the field.

6) Presented multiple sessions of the NASBLA Pursuit and Stop Course. These courses were held in partnership with the Port of Virginia and the US Coast Guard. We received the necessary funding for these courses through a Port Security Grant.

7) VCP had a prominent role in the Governor's Staff Event at Pocahontas State Park with a Conservation Police booth attended by the Governor and First Lady, including the Secretaries of Natural & Historic Resources and Public Safety & Homeland Security

8) With the 12th Basic Class Graduation, 22 new officers headed to the field to assist with staffing concerns and we also completed the recruitment for the 13th class of 25 recruits.

9) Due to the outstanding work of the Special Operation Unit, specifically the covert agents, a Board Resolution was passed that directs the Agency to take specific steps to combat the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians. One of the main deliverables of this resolution is the establishment of four New Regional Special Agent Investigator Positions.

10) Research and development was completed on the VCP Career Progression Program (CPP) which led to the full launch to include all sworn officers (Supervisors and Managers).

11) Transitioned from the establishment of the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA) Program to the operational stage of this vital national initiative, leading us to improved quality public service, networking, collaboration, and credibility.

12) Researched, developed, and implemented the VCP Relevancy Plan (see Overview)

As a vital part of this Public Safety Investment, with the support of our Executive Director and DWR Board, we are moving forward with the W3 (Woods*Wildlife*Water) DWR Training & Educational Center. This initiative began with selecting a W3 Project Manager who is committed to this complex ideal, which includes research, planning and development, marketing, fundraising (i.e., establishing public / private partnerships), etc.

You will certainly see some pictures and stories in this report that highlight those efforts of many officers and staff to continually move us forward in our "Pursuit of Excellence". We can not be successful without their significant contributions and sacrifices in family/work life balances due to increased demands for our public safety services combined with historically low staffing levels.



We continue to offer "Quality Public Service" at very high standards thanks to our VCP Officers and LE Staff. As an organization that desires to be an "Employer of Choice", we spent this year wisely implementing new proactive initiatives and advocating for our dedicated and passionate employees.

Within these pages of this annual report, you will see many of our accomplishments where it is evident that we are the "Protectors of Wildlife and Natural Resources" as well as those who want to enjoy the great outdoors and all that it has to offer. It is absolutely my honor and privilege to be the Chief of our Law Enforcement Division. I am confident we will develop ourselves to be even more successful as public servants and will be looked on as an example of excellence.

I will end my message and let this significant accomplishment of organizational team excellence, recognized on the national-level, that started in 2018 at the Virginia State Capitol, speak for itself.

The Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) Advisory Council had been established in 2018; our professional standards vision of Quality Public Service / Employer of Choice / Pursuit of Excellence along with an associated CREED, which is the benchmark of this council's work.

In the first five years, this council had seen 24 officers and staff at all levels within our statewide organization serve within this team. They have contributed directly to the research, development, and implementation of many comprehensive long-term team projects, including the Citizen Feedback System; Employee Suggestion Program with its 33 implemented group projects; VCP Recognition and Engagement Handbook; and Leadership Development Continuum.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) in 2023 at their 113th Annual Meeting held in Calgary, Alberta (Canada) recognized the O.P.S. Advisory Council, with the AFWA Conservation Law Enforcement Award for "outstanding national-level achievement in conservation law enforcement", which is their highest teamwork recognition award.

Per the AFWA Press Release (dated October 3, 2023):

"The O.P.S. Advisory Council showcases remarkable dedication and significant contributions in enhancing the professionalism and advancement of conservation law enforcement in the Commonwealth of Virginia over the past five years. Through unwavering commitment and outstanding accomplishments of its membership and collaboration with officers and staff, the O.P.S. Advisory Council



has exemplified the highest standards of excellence, making a lasting impact on the conservation and protection of our natural resources. The Virginia O.P.S. Advisory Council stands as a shining example of excellence in conservation law enforcement and embodies the very essence of this national-level recognition”.



These proactive dedicated efforts of 24 team members over this five-year period, ultimately resulted in our first ever UNIT CITATION in 2024 for the Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) Advisory Council (This significant team honor will be featured in next year’s annual report).

Colonel John J. Cobb, Chief of Law Enforcement



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 = Woods*Wildlife*Water “W3” Training and Educational Center

- 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
- Build upon Leadership Development Continuum (LDC) for succession planning

❖ 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**

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1.0 Mission Summary

Virginia Conservation Police Officers operate within the Law Enforcement Division of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR). The central objective of the Law Enforcement Division is to uphold law and order, ensuring the enforcement of both criminal and regulatory statutes in an unbiased and just manner. This involves not only enforcing laws but also conducting educational outreach to foster voluntary adherence and bolster public awareness and support for the state's wildlife, fisheries, and boating regulations. Collaborating seamlessly with other divisions within the agency, the Law Enforcement Division contributes to fulfilling the broader mission of the organization while delivering prompt and efficient services to Virginia's citizens in a highly professional manner.



Comprising a team of 150 dedicated Conservation Police Officers, the focus of their patrols revolves around upholding Virginia’s wildlife, fishing, and boating laws. These officers deploy specialized law enforcement methodologies and equipment to encourage compliance, combat criminal activities, and safeguard public safety. Their expertise and professionalism often lead them to assist federal, state, and local agencies in various enforcement undertakings. From conducting Hunter Education classes to navigating challenging terrains while pursuing violent offenders, these officers exhibit unwavering commitment to serving the Commonwealth’s residents. The colossal task of preserving Virginia’s extensive natural resources demands dedication.



The state encompasses 95 counties, 38 independent cities, and a vast land area spanning 39,490 square miles. In 2023, Virginia’s population was estimated at 8,715,698



The state’s topography, ranging from coastal shores to rolling Piedmont hills and the towering Blue Ridge Mountains, mirrors the diversity of its populace. Explorers can venture along 371 rivers and creeks, as well as 27 major lakes, while accessing 230 boat ramps provided by the DWR for public water access. With over 3,500 miles of trout streams, including 2,900 miles of untamed trout waters, Virginia beckons trout anglers. Those drawn to hunting and outdoor pursuits can immerse themselves in over 1.6 million acres

of National Forest land within the state. Furthermore, Virginia hosts 24 State Forests encompassing over 68,626 acres, overseen by the Virginia Department of Forestry, and 46 Wildlife Management Areas spanning more than 203,000 acres, managed by the DWR.



2.0 Administrative

2.1 Staffing

As of the conclusion of 2023, the Law Enforcement Division comprised a team of 150 Conservation Police Officers. This inclusive roster consisted of 108 field officers operating in non-supervisory roles, 19 Sergeants, 7 First Sergeants, 4 Lieutenants, 5 Captains, 3 Majors, and 1 Colonel. These individuals were duly certified by the Department of Criminal Justice Services, granting them the legal authority to enforce the entirety of Virginia’s laws.

Table 1: Law Enforcement Staffing from 2019 to 2023

DESCRIPTION	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
CPO (Recruit and non-supervisory)	121	113	117	108	106
SERGEANT	22	21	26	19	24
FIRST SERGEANT	-	-	-	7	8
LIEUTENANT	6	6	6	4	4
CAPTAIN	6	3	3	5	4
MAJOR/COLONEL	2	3	3	4	4
SWORN SUBTOTAL	157	146	155	147	150
DISPATCH	9	12	11	14	13
ADMIN/OFFICE - FULL-TIME	7	8	9	9	8
PART-TIME	4	6	-	3	3
IT SUPPORT	1	1	1	1	1
SUPPORT SUBTOTAL	21	27	27	27	25
TOTAL SWORN/SUPPORT (FULL-TIME)	178	173	173	174	175

In addition to their state-level responsibilities, these officers held the designation of Deputy US Fish and Wildlife Special Agents. This allowed them to carry out investigative actions, even across state borders, in cases involving violations of federal wildlife regulations. To enhance their operational efficiency, the Law Enforcement Division benefited from the contributions of 24 full-time and 3 part-time civilian personnel. This support team encompassed roles such as dispatchers, administrative assistants, asset managers, records custodians, and IT personnel. For a comprehensive view of staffing trends, please refer to Table 1, which illustrates the headcount of both full-time sworn officers and support staff over the course of the last five years.

2.2 Years of Service (2023)

At the end of 2023, the Law Enforcement Division had 174 full-time and three part-time employees. Figure 1 shows a five-year incremental breakdown of how long our sworn employees have been with DWR.

Table 2 lists the names of the Law Enforcement personnel that have reached years of service milestones in 2023.

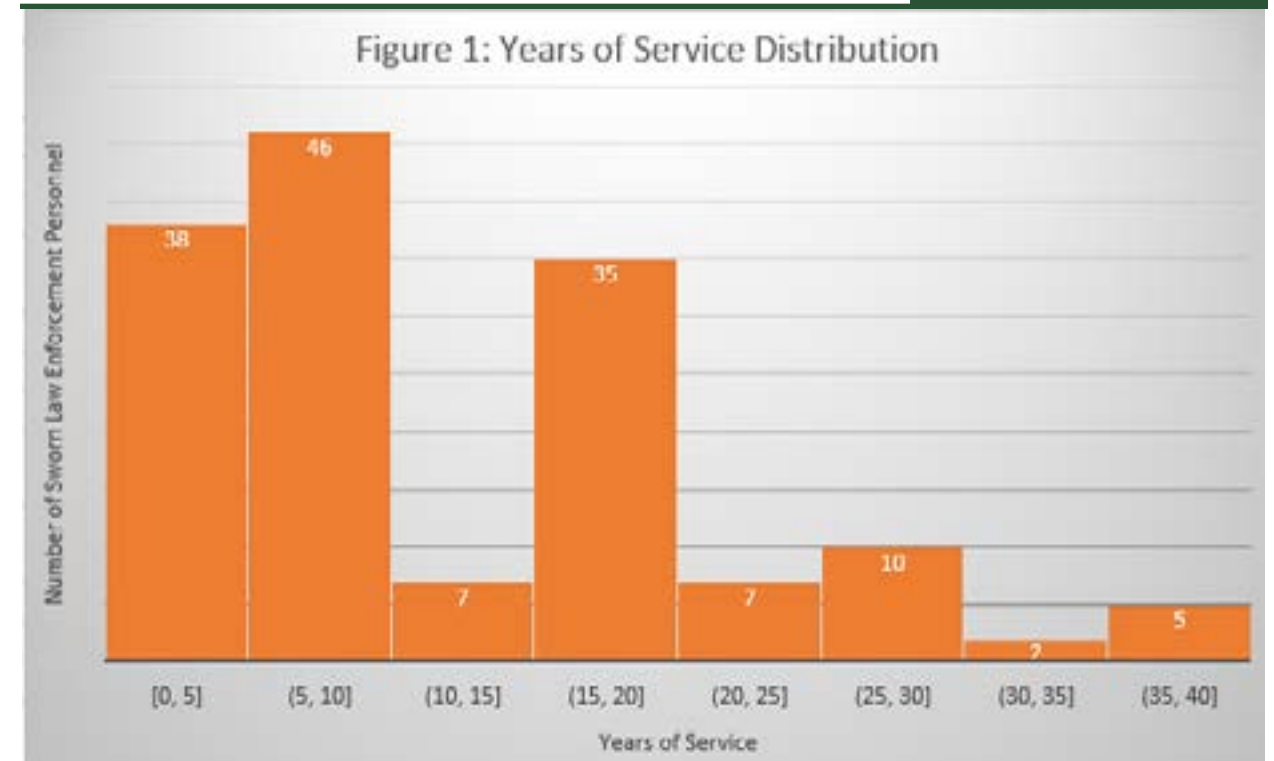
Table 2: Law Enforcement Personnel Years of Service Milestones (2023)

5 YEARS	15 YEARS	25 YEARS
Ofc. 1st Class Nicholas Belotte	Captain Ivan Kopelove	Major Milt Robinson
Ofc. 1st Class Michael Chittum	Sergeant Mark Brewer	Lieutenant Frank Spuchesi
Ofc. 1st Class Gregory Goff	Sergeant Carl Dobbs	
Ofc. 1st Class Joshua Guizar	Sergeant Christopher Heberling	
Ofc. 1st Class James A. Hale	Master CPO Daniel Corley	
Ofc. 1st Class Kyle Jones	Master CPO David Peake	
Ofc. 1st Class Mark Machen	Master CPO Matthew Sandy	
Ofc. 1st Class Roger Palmisano	Master CPO Austin Wakefield	
Ofc. 1st Class Anthony Pennio		
Ofc. 1st Class Philip Pritt		
Ofc. 1st Class Adam Roberts		
Ofc. 1st Class Tyler Routon		
Ofc. 1st Class Nicholas Sumner		
Ofc. 1st Class Shane Wilson		
Ofc. 1st Class Leslie Wright		

Did you know that the funding for Virginia’s Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) primarily originates from sources other than Virginia’s general tax revenue?

A significant portion of the financial support that aids our efforts in conserving wildlife and preserving habitats is derived from the public’s investment in activities such as purchasing fishing and hunting licenses, tags, or stamps, registering boats, and contributing through a federal excise tax applied to firearms and ammunition.

Thanks to these sources of financial backing, we’ve successfully safeguarded numerous species and their habitats for over a century. However, the scope of our potential impact on Virginia’s wildlife remains extensive and Virginia’s Conservation officers play a critical role in the agencies mission. This is where your involvement becomes crucial. Regardless of whether you engage in hunting, fishing, boating, or simply cherish outdoor experiences, you have the opportunity to become an advocate for our cause. By supporting our initiatives or collaborating with us directly, you can play a pivotal role in becoming a steward of the outdoors.



2.3 Budget

While the majority of this annual report predominantly delves into discussions centered around calendar year reporting, it’s vital to recognize the discrepancy with regard to budgetary considerations. The budget cycles of state entities, particularly the Law Enforcement Division, adhere to a fiscal year framework spanning from July 1st to June 30th. In light of this, we present an overview of the Law Enforcement Division’s budget over the past four fiscal years: FY24 (July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024), FY23 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023), FY22 (July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022), and FY21 (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021).

Table 3: Budget

Law Enforcement Budget	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Personnel Costs	\$16,574,540	\$16,050,771	\$18,423,614	\$20,098,828
Non-personnel Costs	\$3,659,611	\$4,588,549	\$5,180,614	\$5,008,256
Total	\$20,234,151	\$20,639,230	\$23,604,108	\$25,107,084

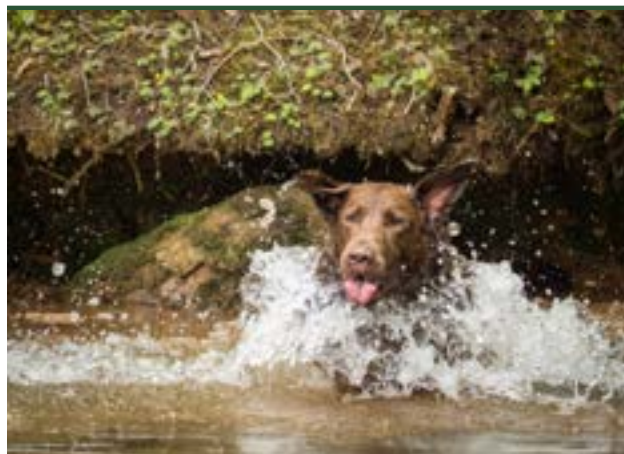
Unleashing Unity

In the heart of 2022, the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources (WVDNR) embarked on a mission to implement a natural resources K9 team. They reached out to Colonel John Cobb and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) with a special request: to train a new K9 Unit for their state. This marked the beginning of an extraordinary collaboration, leading to the creation of a formidable team of canine officers for WVDNR.



Presented to the Virginia Wildlife Resources Conservation Police.
From the men and women of the West Virginia Natural Resources Police, We thank you for your unwavering commitment in successfully training our six K-9 teams! Your dedication to our agency will ensure our continued success in Protecting the Wild and Wonderful!





Sgt. Richard Howald of the Virginia DWR Canine Unit took the reins in guiding this ambitious endeavor. He worked closely with the new WVDNR K9 handlers, addressing myriad details essential to the unit's establishment. From policies to dog selection, training schedules, locations, and even lodging arrangements, every aspect was meticulously planned under Howald's expert supervision.

Spring 2023 marked the commencement of the VADWR Canine Academy, spearheaded by the Sgt. Howald. Over nine intensive weeks, the academy molded six WVDNR officers into proficient K9 handlers. The training began at Bear Creek State Park in Virginia and continued through Pipestem State Park in West Virginia. Each week, trainers and trainees clocked over twenty-five miles on foot, honing their skills in tracking, article searches, and wildlife detection.

In a heartfelt tribute to Sgt. Howald and his first K9 partner, the newly formed academy was named in honor of K9 Scout. This gesture underscored the deep respect and admiration the trainees had for their mentor.



The culmination of their efforts was marked by a graduation ceremony attended by West Virginia Governor Jim Justice. In a moving recognition of the program's significance, Governor Justice presented each graduate with a governor's recognition. Additionally, a plaque symbolizing the unity between West Virginia and Virginia was unveiled, celebrating the collaboration between the two states and their wildlife agencies.

The impact of the new K9 unit was immediate and witnessed. By May 2023, the newly minted officers and their canine partners were already making a difference. They swiftly demonstrated their prowess by locating evidence, finding lost individuals, and tracking trespassing hunters. Their success stories are a testament to the rigorous training and the unbreakable bond between handler and dog.

As we look to the future, the achievements of the West Virginia Canine Unit stand as a symbol of collaboration between wildlife agencies to protect the woods and water of North America. The journey from an idea to a fully operational K9 unit is a testament to what can be accomplished when states come together to enhance natural resources law enforcement. The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources wish WVDNR K9 great success in the future of their K9 Program.



3.0 Office of Professional Standards

The Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of law enforcement practice, employing risk management principles to deliver exceptional quality service and foster public trust. To further this mission, we have established the O.P.S. Advisory Council, which plays a pivotal role in promoting and exemplifying our Professional Standards CREED within the Law Enforcement Division of the Department of Wildlife Resources.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS CREED

Our Virginia Conservation Police (VCP) adhere to a comprehensive two-part creed that underscores professional standards. This creed expects Conservation Police Officers (CPOs) and all law enforcement personnel within our agency to conduct their public service with unwavering ethical values. Additionally, our management and supervision commit to benchmarking against best practices in their professional conduct.

CORE VALUES = Ethical Behavior and Code of Conduct:

- I. Act with integrity
- II. Render a high standard of public service
- III. Perform in a way that promotes trust in our profession
- IV. Treat others impartially with dignity and respect
- V. Take responsibility for one's actions

PROFESSIONAL CRITERIA = Best Practices Management Model:

- I. Create an inclusive, diverse and cohesive team environment to fulfill our agency mission
- II. Provide both the strategic direction and the necessary tools to be successful
- III. Follow accepted standards to measure our public service delivery system
- IV. Employ proactive and collaborative efforts to enhance effectiveness and reduce risk
- V. Communicate and implement change in a positive and constructive manner

The O.P.S. Advisory Council is composed of a fifteen-member team, tasked with providing guidance and insight across recruitment/retention, training, and administrative investigations. This council's role is to present recommendations to senior leadership, drawing from the best practices of successful police operations. Furthermore, the council will consistently measure our public service delivery system against accepted standards, while spearheading a collaborative endeavor to address effectiveness challenges and liability issues. These efforts will be fueled by agency staff and resources.

“There are obligations to treat staff fairly and to be seen as an employer of choice, thus the highest standards must be applied to internal processes as well.”

Directorate of Professional Standards, London's Metropolitan Police Service

O.P.S. ADVISORY COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

- Serve as advisors and advocates for professional standards initiatives, including quality public service enhancements, to senior law enforcement leadership
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of public service and the effectiveness of strategies implemented to raise professional standards within the Law Enforcement Division
- Establish working relationships with other well-respected law enforcement agencies
- Research and stay up-to-date on new law enforcement trends and case law
- Market and showcase the uniqueness of our law enforcement profession to include maintaining a Professional Standards Website for our constituents and the public
- Seek-out constructive citizen and staff feedback in order to identify deficiencies and discover new methods to reduce liability and enhance law enforcement operations
- Accept nominations from the field and review their recommendations to formally honor Constituent Supporters with a numbered O.P.S. Protector Challenge Coin
- Facilitate and ensure the continuous and effective implementation of the Law Enforcement Employee Suggestion Program as well as maintaining those databases
- Accept nominations and make selections for the Professionalism Decree (CPO / Law Enforcement Staff Annual Recognitions) to include the award presentation



3.1 Citizen Feedback System

On May 25, 2018, a centralized Citizen Feedback System and associated workflow were implemented, coinciding with the official launch of the Office of Professional Standards (O.P.S.) website: dwr.virginia.gov/ops. This system was strategically established within the Law Enforcement Division to effectively gather, monitor, and address diverse forms of citizen feedback, all geared towards enhancing the quality of public service. Ensuring that feedback was handled appropriately, specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were introduced to guide different positions in the process.

For the past six years, the feedback system has played a pivotal role in significantly amplifying the collection of positive interactions as well as concerns shared by the public regarding our officers and staff. These records are now archived and maintained by the Office of Professional Standards, ensuring their accessibility and preservation.

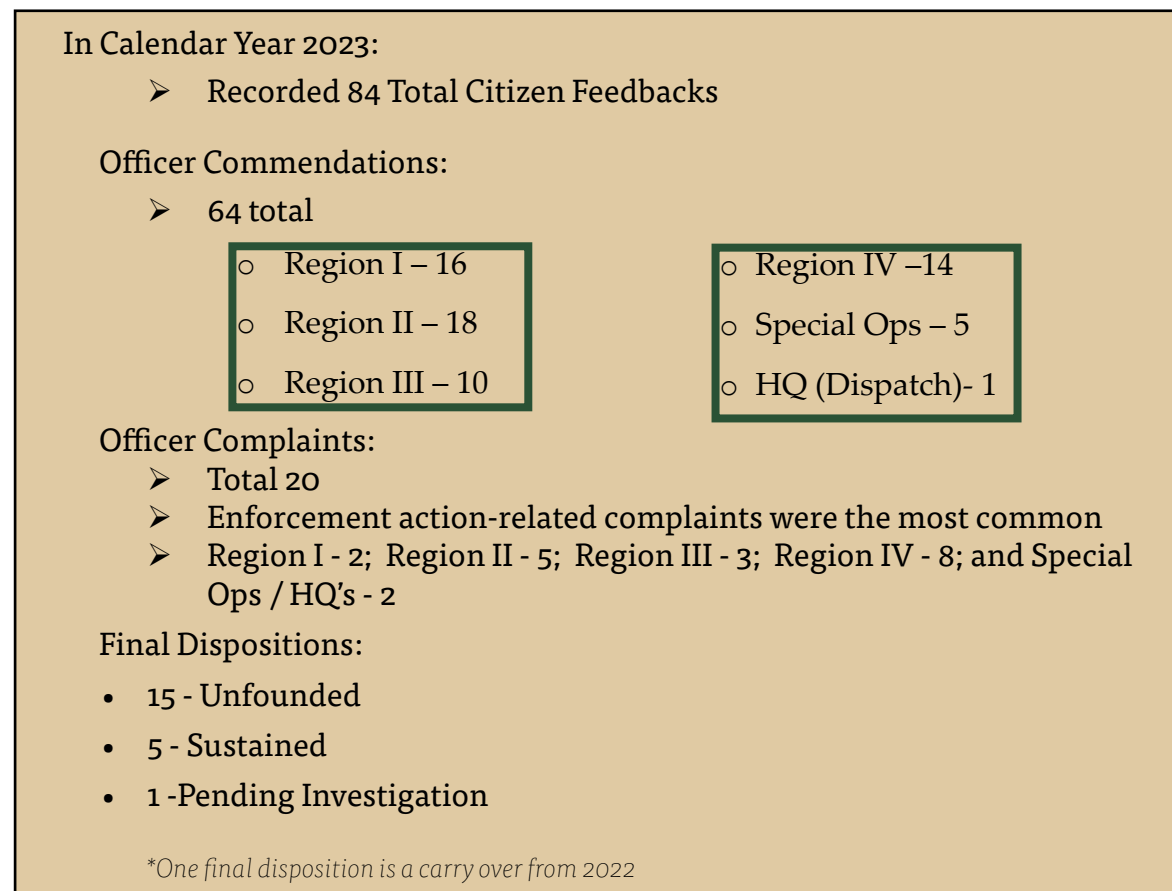


Figure 2: Citizen Feedback

3.2 Employee Suggestion Program (E.S.P.)

The Employee Suggestion Program aims to transform a specific segment of the Professional Standards Creed related to "management best practices" into practical initiatives. The primary goal is to create an "inclusive, diverse, and cohesive team environment" by promoting "proactive and collaborative efforts to enhance effectiveness and reduce risk." This is accomplished by focusing on and forming functional work groups that address issues to improve field operations. More importantly, this approach leverages the expertise, creativity, and innovation of field-level CPOs and Law Enforcement Staff to drive improvements across the entire division.

Every employee within the DWR Law Enforcement Division has the opportunity to contribute constructive suggestions through the Employee Suggestion Program. The O.P.S. Advisory Council plays a key role in facilitating this feedback process. Employees can either submit their feedback to a designated project leader provided by the council or submit an Employee Suggestion Form directly to the council for consideration as a potential new project.

In 2023, two programs were added through the Employee Suggestion Program. The first is the Regional Recruitment Ambassadors Program, which aims to have staff trained throughout the state to assist with recruitment efforts. The second is a feasibility study for a Maritime Search and Recovery Unit.

When a proposed project gains the interest of senior leadership and the necessary resources are available, the initiative progresses from the conceptual phase to active status. In such cases, those who made the suggestion will be contacted, and a collaborative team will be formed to work on the project. This team will work together to achieve the implementation target date set by the O.P.S. Advisory Council.

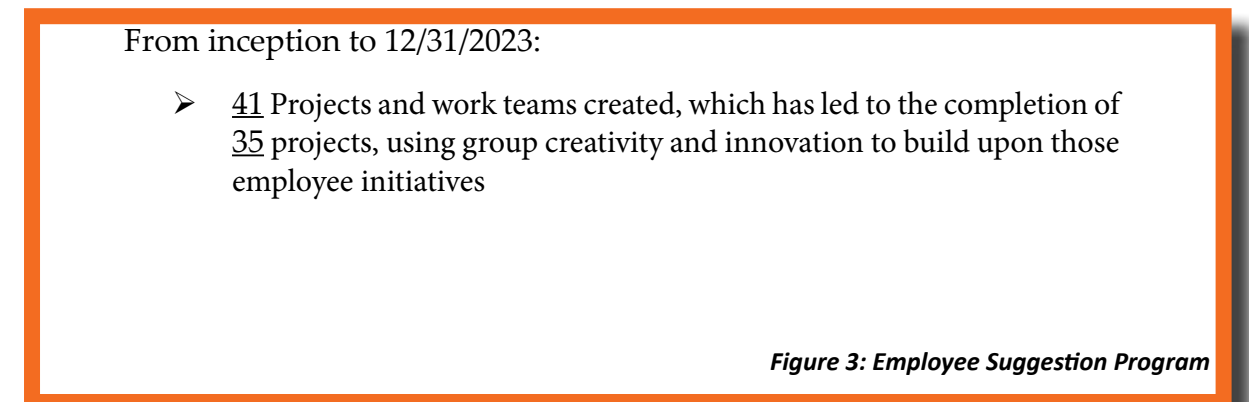


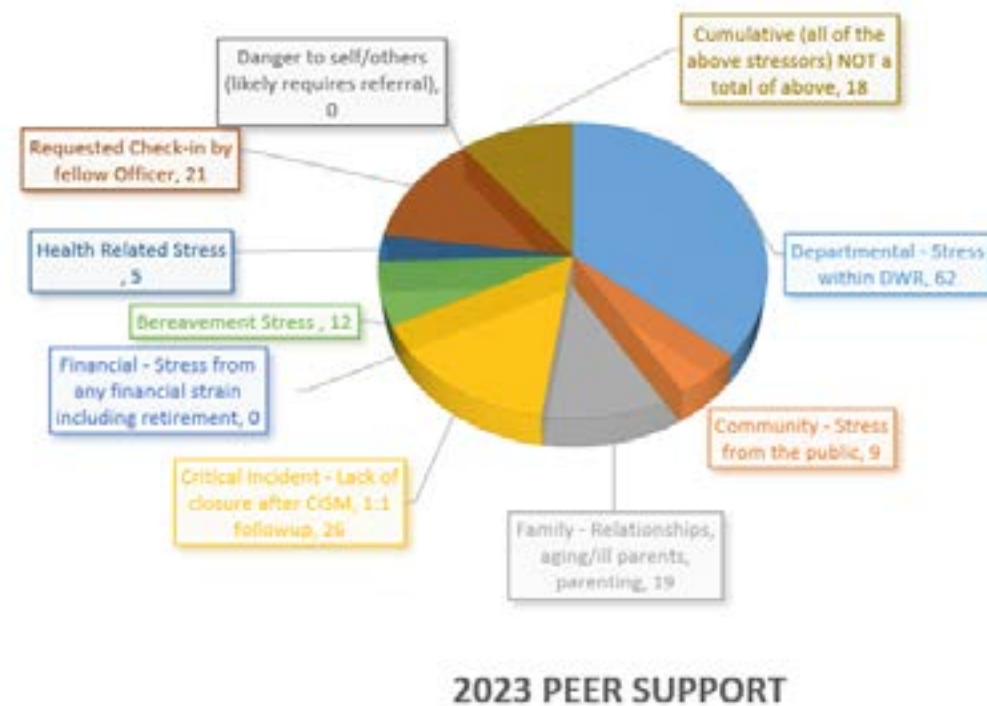
Figure 3: Employee Suggestion Program

3.3 Peer Support Team

Throughout 2023, the Peer Support Team was active in providing support in several capacities. They were available to respond to critical incidents that required immediate attention and assistance. Additionally, they were available for one to one support whether it was a stressful situation on the job or personal struggles, team members were there to offer guidance and support. Their dedication to their peers was instrumental in maintaining the well-being and morale of the Virginia Conservation Police.

The impact of the Peer Support Team's efforts is evident in the number of contacts made throughout the year, as illustrated in Figure 2. These contacts are broken down into general categories, showcasing the various ways in which team members provided assistance. From critical incident responses to offering emotional support, the data highlights the broad scope of the team's work and their commitment to their colleagues' mental health and well-being.

To ensure they were well-prepared to provide the best possible support, the Peer Support Team met twice for training sessions in 2023. These training sessions were crucial for refreshing their skills and knowledge, particularly their training from the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF). The ICISF training is a recognized standard in critical incident stress management and equips team members with the tools they need to effectively support their peers.



3.4 Accreditation

Enhancing Law Enforcement Standards: The Department of Wildlife Resources' Commitment to Accreditation

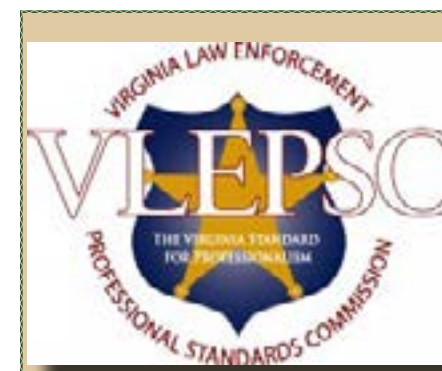
Accreditation involves a voluntary, systematic internal review of an organization's policies, procedures, training, and operations. These are measured against the standards set by an accrediting body to ensure compliance. The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) demonstrates a strong commitment to this process by actively participating in the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC) program.



Captain Rob Ham plays a crucial role in this commitment as the Vice-President of the Virginia Law Enforcement Accreditation Coalition. Alongside him, Retired Chief Bobby Mawyer contributes significantly as a part-time accreditation specialist. Retired Chief Mawyer's previous position as the president of the organization further highlights the depth of experience and dedication within the team.

Captain Ham's role extends to representing state-accredited agencies on the VLEPSC standards review committee. In this pivotal position, he ensures a consistent and ongoing evaluation of Virginia's standards, making sure they stay relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of agencies across the Commonwealth.

Both Captain Ham and Retired Chief Mawyer serve as esteemed VLEPSC assessors, using their expertise to assist in accrediting agencies. Their active involvement underscores DWR's unwavering commitment to enhancing the success of VLEPSC law enforcement agencies throughout the Commonwealth. By promoting the adoption of best practices within their communities, DWR continues to advance law enforcement standards, contributing to the overall betterment of the field.



The Commission's goals include the following: To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth through the delivery of services; To promote cooperation among all components in the criminal justice system; To ensure the appropriate level of training for law enforcement personnel; To promote public confidence in law enforcement; and To promote the professionalism of law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth of Virginia.



North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA)

The North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA) program stands as a testament to the commitment of natural resource law enforcement agencies to uphold the highest standards of professionalism, effectiveness, and public trust. NAWLEA's goals are multifaceted, each aiming to fortify the structure and function of wildlife law enforcement across the continent. This article explores the key objectives of NAWLEA and their significance

in enhancing the conservation efforts of natural resource law enforcement agencies.

One of NAWLEA's primary goals is to increase the effectiveness of natural resource law enforcement agencies. By focusing on the efficient delivery of services, NAWLEA ensures that agencies can respond promptly and effectively to wildlife crimes and natural resource violations. This goal encompasses streamlining processes, utilizing advanced technologies, and implementing best practices in wildlife law enforcement. Efficient service delivery not only enhances the agency's ability to protect wildlife and natural resources but also optimizes the use of available resources, ensuring that every effort is impactful.

NAWLEA emphasizes the importance of cooperation among all components of the criminal justice system. Effective wildlife law enforcement often requires collaboration with various entities, including federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, judicial systems, and community organizations. By fostering a spirit of cooperation, NAWLEA helps to create a cohesive network of support that enhances the overall effectiveness of the criminal justice system. This cooperative approach ensures that wildlife crimes are prosecuted effectively and that offenders are held accountable, thereby deterring future violations.

The success of wildlife law enforcement agencies hinges on the knowledge, skills, and preparedness of their personnel. NAWLEA aims to ensure that natural resource law enforcement personnel receive appropriate and continuous training. This training covers a wide range of topics, including wildlife identification, investigative techniques, legal procedures, and the use of technology in enforcement activities. By maintaining high training standards, NAWLEA helps to equip officers with the necessary tools to perform their duties competently and confidently, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of the agencies.

Public trust is essential for the effectiveness of any law enforcement agency. NAWLEA strives to promote public confidence in wildlife law enforcement by upholding transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. Agencies accredited by NAWLEA are committed to

operating with integrity and in accordance with the law. By demonstrating their dedication to these principles, accredited agencies can foster positive relationships with the communities they serve, encouraging public support and cooperation in conservation efforts.

NAWLEA's commitment to promoting the professionalism of law enforcement agencies is a cornerstone of its mission. Professionalism encompasses a range of attributes, including adherence to ethical standards, excellence in service delivery, and continuous improvement. By setting and maintaining high standards, NAWLEA encourages agencies to strive for excellence in all aspects of their operations. This dedication to professionalism not only enhances the credibility of the agencies but also contributes to the overall success of wildlife conservation efforts.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources is a notable participant in the NAWLEA program. Colonel John J. Cobb from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources serves as the chair of the NAWLEA board, highlighting the department's commitment to the program's goals. Additionally, Captain Rob Ham has been designated as the assistant program director of NAWLEA, and retired Chief Bobby Mawyer, also from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, was chosen as one of two training coordinators for the program. Their involvement underscores the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources' dedication to advancing the standards and effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement.



The North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation program plays a vital role in enhancing the effectiveness, cooperation, training, public trust, and professionalism of natural resource law enforcement agencies. By achieving these goals, NAWLEA supports the broader mission of conserving North America's natural resources and wildlife for future generations. The program's emphasis on high standards and continuous improvement ensures that accredited agencies are well-equipped to tackle the challenges of wildlife law enforcement and contribute meaningfully to conservation efforts across the continent.



NASBLA Accreditation

A Continuous Pursuit of Excellence on the Waterways of Virginia

Virginia DWR continues to be active participants NASBLA accreditation program in 2023 by meeting or exceeded the program requirements as well as implementing training standards and performance task based upon NASBLA guidelines. This accreditation ensures readiness of the Virginia Conservation Police Officer boat crews and their ability to conduct missions on our Virginia waterways safely and effectively. Having Virginia’s Conservation Police Officers trained to a United States Coast Guard and FEMA recognized standard creates seamless inter-agency operations within our maritime homeland security framework.



The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) through its Boat Operations and Training (BOAT) Program will provide its Consultation, Assessment, and Accreditation Process (CAAP) to an agency, department or unit, of their maritime training policies, procedures, curricula, qualification process and documentation to ensure alignment with the BOAT Program National Standard, and interoperability with marine units across the country in the following applicable capabilities: Boat Crew

Member, Boat Operator for Search and Rescue, Enhanced Vessel Operator, Tactical Operator, Pursuit Operator, Fire Boat Small, BUI, Accident Investigation, Small Vessel Radiological-Nuclear Detection Operator and any other discipline the National Director authorizes an agency to teach.

3.5 Recruitment

In 2023, the Recruitment section of the Virginia Conservation Police was actively involved in sourcing and selecting candidates for the next class of Conservation Police Officers. The recruitment efforts began early in the year with the search for successful candidates for the 13th Basic Law Enforcement Academy. The team dedicated significant time to engaging with potential applicants through various channels, including university visits, college outreach programs, and participation in outdoor expos and shows.



These initiatives aimed to identify individuals with the qualities and commitment needed to become protectors of Virginia's natural resources. The recruitment process sought candidates with the necessary law enforcement skills and a genuine passion for conservation law enforcement. By engaging with potential recruits in diverse settings, the Recruitment section demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring that the ranks of the Conservation Police are filled with individuals who share the mission of safeguarding the state's wildlife and protecting the citizens of Virginia.

3.6 Training

12th Basic Law Enforcement Academy

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Law Enforcement Academy graduated a new class of conservation police officers. On July 19th, 2023 The Honorable Heidi S. Barshinger, Clerk of the Henrico County Circuit Court, officially swore-in the new officers of the 12th Basic Conservation Police Officer



Academy at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens. The Basic Academy graduates completed an intensive training program that ran for 26 weeks. They took up their assignments across the Commonwealth and proceeded with field training under the direct supervision of field training officers. Congratulations to the 12th Basic "Woodducks"!



2023 Training Highlights:

- The LDP Cohort 1 and Honor Guard under Captain Comer participated in the 2023 Police Week in Washington DC. CPOs remembered and honored fallen officers all across the United States in 2023 at the candlelight vigil. Honor Guard stood watch over each of the agency's fallen Game Wardens in Washington DC. CPOs took time to stencil each warden's name on paper, which was turned into a display at HQ by Captain Comer.



- Law Enforcement Leadership Development Program (LDP) Cohort 2 began their two-year program. Training included leadership trips to Bedford WWII monument, high ropes course, and other hands on leadership courses and classes.
- Waterfowl Workshop Game Warden Experience on the Eastern Shore
- Field Training Officer Program was updated to Power FTO to create a real time tracking for new officers in the field.

Navigating Excellence: The Marine Law Enforcement Training Program (MLETP)



In the realm of marine regulation, protection, and law enforcement, the critical role played by Officers and Agents cannot be understated. These dedicated individuals are tasked with safeguarding our aquatic ecosystems, ensuring compliance with maritime laws, and maintaining safety on the water. The Marine Law Enforcement Training Program (MLETP) stands as a cornerstone of their preparation, providing comprehensive and specialized training that equips them for the unique challenges of their field.

The MLETP is a program designed to empower Officers and Agents from various agencies and organizations with the knowledge and skills essential for effective marine law enforcement. While their roles may vary, a common thread binds these professionals: a commitment to preserving the integrity of our marine environments and ensuring the safety of those who navigate them.

The core of the MLETP lies in its carefully crafted curriculum, meticulously designed to cover all facets of marine law enforcement. The central focus is on nurturing proficiency in the operation of marine patrol vessels—a vital skill for Officers and Agents engaged in protecting and enforcing maritime regulations. The curriculum goes beyond vessel operation, encompassing a myriad of critical subjects.



The MLETP curriculum paints a vivid picture of the multifaceted training provided to participants. Key subjects include:

- Aids to Navigation: Understanding the markers and beacons that guide vessels safely through waterways.
- Chart Interpretation: Navigational charts are the backbone of marine navigation, and Officers are equipped to decipher them accurately.

- Marine Navigation: The art and science of navigating through varying water conditions and environments.
- Vessel Intercepts: Techniques for safely and effectively stopping vessels for inspection and law enforcement purposes.
- Safety and Emergency Equipment: Mastery of essential safety equipment and protocols ensures preparedness in crisis situations.
- Law Enforcement Operations: Participants delve into the specifics of law enforcement activities in the maritime domain.
- Electronic Navigation: Harnessing modern technology for accurate navigation.
- Emergency Procedures: Comprehensive training in handling emergency situations efficiently and effectively.



This is merely a glimpse into the extensive curriculum that arms Officers and Agents with the tools they need to excel in their roles.

The MLETP is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about cultivating a mindset of responsibility and stewardship toward our marine ecosystems. As participants delve into nautical terminology, maritime search and rescue strategies, and law enforcement water safety, they are instilled with the values that underpin their noble profession.

2023 Virginia Boating Incident Summary

- Number of Incidents = 59
- Number of Vessels Involved = 85
- Number of Injured Persons = 39
- Number of Fatalities = 8
- Alcohol was a known factor in 0% of fatal incidents.
- Canoes and kayaks were involved in 38% of fatal incidents.
- In 63% of fatal incidents no life jacket was worn
- Property Damage = \$278,734

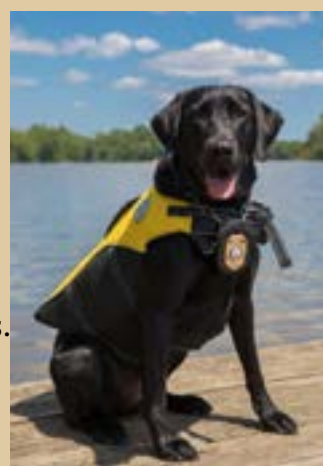


Figure 4: 2023 Virginia Boating Incident Summary

4.0 Law Support Services

4.1 Communication Center: 2023

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) continues to operate a 24 hour, 7 days a week Law Enforcement Communications Center. Our staffing is currently 11 communication officers, 2 supervisors and a communications manager.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources Communications Center provides support throughout the entire Commonwealth, not only for all DWR personnel, but also for the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) State Park Rangers. In addition, the Communications Center is used by the Virginia Department of Forestry as an emergency contact for high-risk situations.



The Communications Center also maintains direct working contact with multiple State agencies and localities in the performance of their duties.

For 2023 calls for service increased by 16% from 2022. From 53,235 calls created in 2022 to 61,767 calls in 2023, this trend continues to grow every year and can be most likely be attributed to the recovery of the pandemic, weather, and other factors. For the entire year each communications officer averaged 4,412 calls per person with Saturdays (219), Fridays (174) and Sundays (163) being the busiest days during the week. The top three busiest months were November (6,638), December (5,938) and October (5,240). The top three call for service types were Posted Rules (1903), Injured Wildlife (1583) and Kill Permits (1267).



Lastly, the Communications Center, in coordination with the Office of Professional Standards, recognized the 2023 Dispatcher of the Year, Andrea Frisby. Communications Officer Frisby is a highly motivated, proactive, reliable, and professional dispatcher who is invaluable to the agency. This past year, Andrea attended the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials Winter Summit where she discussed and brought back information to the dispatch center concerning CAD software,

translation services, VCU Life Evac, Next Gen 911, and Mental Health. She strives to continually gain knowledge and expertise that is then used to better the agency. CO Frisby is an expert at handling officer complaints and resolving caller hostility while still obtaining all necessary and vital information. Andi completed training to become a Communications Training Officer and excels in that role while also filling in as a backup training officer when staffing levels are low. On many occasions supervision has tasked her with assuming the role of a Senior Communications Officer, which she has handled with responsibility and tact. Her attitude towards the additional roles and responsibilities she has assumed has been exemplary. CO Frisby's consistent work ethic and passion for her career is obvious in her diligence and attention to detail. She deeply cares about the CPOs she so selflessly helps keep safe through her outstanding work as a communications officer.

Table 4: Dispatch Summary 2019 to 2023

DESCRIPTION	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total CAD Calls for Service	58,734	57,409	50,134	53,235	61,767
Crimeline Reports	5,090	5,836	6,065	5,734	5,725
Environmental Issues/Fish Kills	206	185	225	243	280
Wildlife Nuisance/Permits/Injured related calls	6,748	5,185	4,734	4,493	4,911
CPO/Ranger Patrols	25,133	24,864	19,643	20,445	23,012
Hunt/Boat/Fish/Trapping Violation Type Calls	5,226	6,460	5,650	5,531	5,891
General / Traffic Violations	1,828	1,003	788	843	4,434
Service-Related Type Calls	3,994	3,287	3,098	4,241	5,156
Hunt Incident Reports	34	32	36	35	27
Boat Accident/Sinking/Drowning Reports	98	78	128	121	93
Distress/Overdue Hunters, Fishermen or Boaters	223	331	204	226	210
Accidents Involving DWR Persons/ Equipment	27	32	1	27	30
Criminal Investigations/Complaints	358	924	78	806	950
Stolen Property Reports/Investigations (Boat, other, etc.)	109	73	58	133	136
Abandoned or Recovered Boats	177	279	170	179	163

4.2 Law IT & Records Program

Throughout 2023, the Law Enforcement Division continues to be supported by dedicated Information Technology (IT) and Records Programs. The primary focus of both is the system development, maintenance, and data accuracy of the Central Square Technologies' Zuercher Pro Suite which is a comprehensive data system. This product operates on a case-centric reporting model, providing the division with a powerful toolset that includes various functions and database groups: Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD), case management, Master Name database, and GEO validation capabilities. It offers the flexibility to develop custom modules and case forms offering the potential of creating tools targeting unique aspects of all database groups.



Our Pro Suite system is now supporting 450+ officers support staff. In 2023, Virginia Marine Resource Commission (MRC) joined the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) in operating within a shared system. IT spent exhaustive efforts in resolving VITA Firewall issues to enable MRC to complete the process of joining the Pro Suite system.

This year IT was instrumental in the development and issuance of new Law division specific ID cards with several security features. This provides a very professional looking ID card for both our Sworn and civilian employees. The new component of Field Ops – CAD and Limited RMS for the phone has completed testing and firewall issues resolved allowing rollout in spring and summer 2024. In preparation for the issuance of new officer laptops in the fall of 2024, 5 computers were rolled out testing of the new system.

The Law Records Program retained its pivotal role in managing the Records Management System (RMS) aspects, with a keen focus on system development, maintenance, and data accuracy. Serving as a vital source for data edits, Law Records played a significant role in ensuring the integrity of the information within the system.

The Pro Suite system allows for the creation of individual case types allowing delineation of a wide variety of functions and programs within the agency.

Table 5: Records Management System (RMS) Summary from 2019- 2023

RMS Summary	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
All Case Types*	10,933.00	9,538.00	7,937.00	8,574.00	8,901.00
Investigative Cases	8,412.00	6,602.00	5,345.00	6,027.00	6,404.00
Arrests (Individuals Charged)	6,676.00	6,374.00	3,180.00	3,176.00	3,921.00

Non-offense case types were developed and designed to support multiple agency functions of which officers are directly involved. These provide a critical aspect of communication between our field officers and personnel associated the corresponding programs. The chart below reflects the usage of some of the non-offense case types within the last three years.

Table 6: Non-Offense Case types in 2023

Case Types (non-offense)	2021	2022	2023
Animal Rehabilitation	42	36	32
Boat Section	127	108	81
Foxhound Training Preserve	30	31	29
Licensed Shooting Preserve	14	22	2
Shoot from Vehicle Permit	26	28	35
Waterway Marker	16	11	148
Wildlife Kill Permit/DCAP	2,015	2,029	2,039
Total Records	2,321	2,265	2,366



In 2023, there were 6404 Officer Investigative Cases representing 3921 arrests. Although our officers have full state policing authority, their primary focus is on wildlife and boating regulation enforcement. Freshwater fishing license has historically been our highest volume of offenses.



Below are the top 10 arrest charges/offenses for 2023.

Table 7: Top 10 Arrest Charges Issued in 2023 by Conservation Police

RANK	CODE DESCRIPTION	CODE	2023
1	LICENSE: FISH W/O FRESHWATER LICENSE	29.1-335(FRESH)	936
2	WATERCRAFT: PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES REQUIRED	4VAC15-430-30	385
3	TO HUNT OVER A BAITED AREA	29.1-521(4)	214
4	TRESPASS: TRESPASS BY HUNTERS AND FISHERS	18.2-132	214
5	LICENSE: HUNT W/O LICENSE	29.1-335(HUNT)	148
6	LICENSE: HUNT W/O DEER/TURKEY LICENSE	29.1-335(DEER/TURKEY)	131
7	FISHING W/O SALTWATER LICENSE	28.2-302.1	129
8	GAME/FISH: TAKE OR ATTEMPT TO TAKE DURING CLOSED SEASON	29.1-550(i)	119
9	REGULATORY MARKERS AND AIDS TO NAVIGATION	4VAC15-370-50	112
10	UNREGISTERED MOTORBOAT	29.1-702(A)	95

Along with querying individual charges, Pro Suite enables us to review major arrest charge categories which reflect a broader view of officer investigative efforts. Our arrest charges/offenses typically revolve around six major types of incidents: Boat, Fish, Hunt, General, Lands, and Non-Game. The chart below displays the resulting efforts for the most recent 5 years in reference to these incidents.

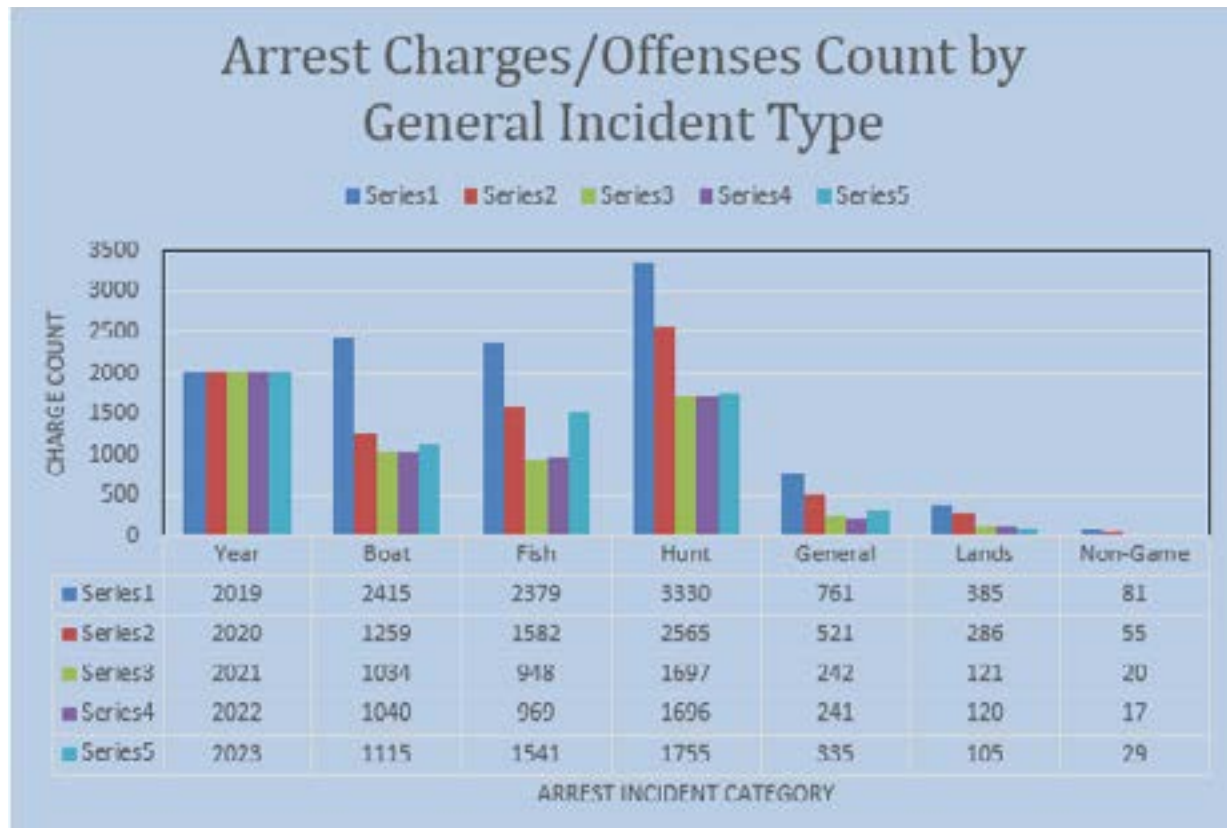


Figure 5: Arrest Charge Count by Major Category

Further utilizing Pro Suites Custom Reports, arrest charges/offenses categories can be broken down into minor incident types which narrows the scope to identifying specific type of offenses occurring during a time frame. The variation of yearly totals correlate to multiple variables not necessarily captured in the RMS system. For example, the 2020 era of Covid 19 there is an unusually high increase in Season – Fish offenses which is a direct reflection increase of individuals were seeking outside recreation while adhering to restrictive public mandates.

The data within the Pro Suite program ultimately represents the encompassing efforts of our Conservation Officers reflecting their dedication to uphold wildlife conservation and public safety. The information collected is essential in adhering to mandated agency responsibilities which include reporting to National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS), Virginia State Police Use Of Force, Interstate Wildlife Violators Compact, and Community Policing Data. Via their submitted records, we continue contributions to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service’s (NCIS) Law Enforcement Information Exchange (LInX) system, enhancing collaboration in the law enforcement community. Law Records strives to support them utilizing the system from end user assistance to data accuracy to creating requested customized operational tools.

Table 8: RMS Arrest Charges/Offenses Breakdown of specified Minor Incident types from 2019-2023

Charge/ Offense Category	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
License - Fish	1,810	1,126	812	1,114	1,153
License - Hunt *			422	639	455
Safety - Boat	1,619	907	793	674	778
Season - Hunt	1,257	1,017	654	650	772
Safety - Hunt *			252	179	163
Trespass	614	506	304	181	322
License - Boat	579	256	355	418	293
Traffic	414	271	159	206	251
Safety - Other	379	402	251	16	4
Season - Fish	288	2,207	131	173	282
Drug - Marijuana	155	53	36	4	3
Drug - Other *			96	9	15
Littering	153	0	17	52	59
Firearm	142	105	415	69	74
Other	130	128	331	38	74
Alcohol Other	94	60	115	63	43
Fraud	73	53	144	36	28
Alcohol - BUI	53	28	139	16	22
Alcohol - DUI	42	19	97	16	20
Damage	33	29	14	20	11
Elude/Impede	25	18	5	6	7
Larceny	14	17	78	15	19
Alcohol - HUI	12	4	0	1	6
Assult	6	5	3	9	1
Totals	7,892	5,211	5,653	4,604	4,855
* New Category 2021					

4.2.1 Wildlife and Boat Revocations



Law Records is responsible for submitting wildlife revocations to the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact (IWVC) database, which is also state mandated. On December 1, 2011, the Board of IWVC administrators accepted DWR's application to become a member. DWR has been contributing Virginia wildlife revocations into the IWVC database since 2014. Law Records staff regularly download IWVC data containing revocations associated

with wildlife violations submitted by the 48 U.S. member states.

Boating revocations records are also the responsibility of Law Records. This type of revocation is managed via a customized divisional dedicated IT process. As with the wildlife revocations, Zuercher is the starting point to document a revocation. Officers initially update the associated case with relevant revocation information. Auto generated notifications are issued to Law Records personnel to continue processing the revocation data. Ultimately, an "alert" associated with each revocation is created within Zuercher. The alerts display a visual indicator, automatically deactivated on the expiration date of the restriction. This information can be instrumental in a CPO's first contact with an offender/suspect and potentially used to support charge presentations in the judicial system.



Table 9: Revocations entered into the Revocation Database from 2019 to 2023

Revocation Entered	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
VA Hunt	94	64	91	82	51
VA Fish	5	12	1	4	
VA Boat	13	7	3	4	1
DWR Property					1
Other State Revocations Ratified	5,591	5,470	4,693	4,626	6,007
TOTAL REVOCATIONS	5,703	5,553	4,788	4,716	6,060

4.2.2 Community Policing Data Collection

Effective July 1, 2020, the Virginia Department of State Police, Uniform Crime Reporting Unit began the collection of investigatory stop data based on the creation of the Community Policing Act. Updates to the original legislation were made per Chapter 37 of the 2020 Special Session I. Data from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021 include only those persons stopped while driving. Data from July 1, 2021 and on will contain all persons subject to an investigatory (nonconsensual) stop.



Table 10: Community Policing Data 2023

Reason	Arrest	Summons	No Action	Warning	Total
CFS	7	97	54	617	7775
Check Point	1	2	1	37	41
Equipment Violation	0	2	148	113	116
Other	13	278	48	1229	1568
Terry Stop	10	18	3	35	68
Traffic Violation	7	123	9	249	388
Warrant Service	0	0	0	0	0
Total					2957

§ 52-30.2. Prohibited practices; collection of data.

- A. No State Police officer shall engage in bias-based profiling in the performance of his official duties.
- B. State Police officers shall collect data pertaining to (i) all investigatory motor vehicle stops, (ii) all stop-and-frisks of a person based on reasonable suspicion, and (iii) all other investigatory detentions that do not result in an arrest or the issuance of a summons to be reported into the Community Policing Reporting Database. State Police officers shall submit the data to their commanding officers, who shall forward it to the Superintendent of State Police.
- C. Each time a law-enforcement officer or State Police officer stops a driver of a motor vehicle, stops and frisks a person based on reasonable suspicion, or temporarily detains a person during any other investigatory stop, such officer shall collect the following data based on the officer's observation or information provided to the officer by the driver: (i) the race, ethnicity, age, gender of the person stopped, and whether the person stopped spoke English; (ii) the reason for the stop; (iii) the location of the stop; (iv) whether a warning, written citation, or summons was issued or whether any person was arrested; (v) if a warning, written citation, or summons was issued or an arrest was made, the warning provided, violation charged, or crime charged; (vi) whether the vehicle or any person was searched; and (vii) whether the law-enforcement officer or State Police officer used physical force against any person and whether any person used physical force against any officers.

5.0 Special Operations

The Special Operations Unit within the DWR boasts an amalgamation of specialized divisions, forming a formidable team at the forefront of the division's operations. This unit encompasses the division's K9 Units, the Marine Fraud and Theft Unit, and the Covert Unit. The Special Operations Unit extends its purview to oversee various additional teams, each contributing distinct skills to the division's capabilities.

Beyond the full-time assignments within the unit, the Special Operations Unit assumes responsibility for guiding the division's Man Tracking Team, which employs finely honed skills to track individuals in diverse terrains to enhance the divisions Search

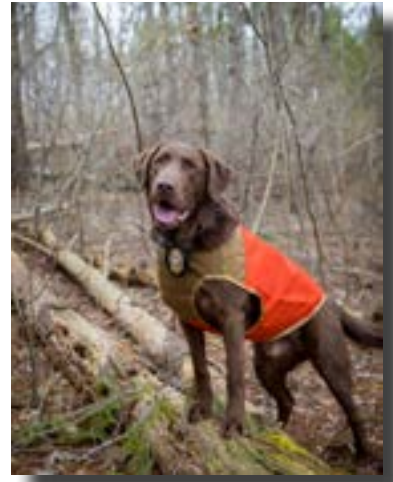
and Rescue abilities. A newly formed Drone Team, leveraging cutting-edge technology, enhances the unit's aerial capabilities, adding a layer of modern sophistication to their operations. Moreover, the Hunting and Boating Incident Teams are available to assist Conservation Officers throughout the state in complex investigations. Finally, to culminate this impressive array of responsibilities, the Special Operations Unit assumes the revered duty of overseeing the esteemed Honor Guard Unit.

This unified assemblage within the Special Operations Unit serves as a testament to the division's commitment to excellence and adaptability. Each segment contributes its unique proficiencies, resulting in a synergistic force that remains prepared to navigate the complex and dynamic challenges within the realm of conservation law enforcement.



5.1 K9 Team

In recent times, the K9 unit has experienced a surge in requests for public appearances. Officers and their K9 partners have been actively involved in providing K9 demonstrations and manning event booths across the state. This renewed interaction and attention at public events have been a welcome relief for the K9s, who have greatly missed these engagements.



Operational Achievements

The K9 unit has demonstrated exceptional performance in various critical operations. Their notable achievements include:

Tracking and Search Operations: The unit successfully ran multiple tracks, locating runaway juveniles, missing persons, and trespassing hunters. These operations have been pivotal in ensuring public safety and resolving critical incidents.

Article Searches: The K9s conducted numerous searches, locating firearms and other evidence. These searches were instrumental in solving crimes related to hunting violations, felons in possession of firearms, shootings, and murders.

Large Ground Searches: The unit played a crucial role in extensive ground searches for missing and endangered individuals. These efforts resulted in the resolution of multiple cases and the safe return of missing persons.

Table 11: Summary for K-9 Activity from 2019 to 2023 (*separation of uses and patrols starting in 2019)

DESCRIPTION	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
TOTAL USES	286	292	295	319	267
CALLS FOR SERVICE	-	1870	576	1871	1446
PUBLIC APPEARANCE	89	14	91	111	71
TRACKS	71	74	82	92	44
WILDLIFE DETECTION	18	17	15	14	-
AREA SEARCH	63	177	118	116	152
NONSPECIFIC USE	45	10	2	9	8
HUMAN REMAINS DETECTION	-	1	4	3	-

Expansion of the K9 Unit

In 2023, the decision was made to expand the K9 unit by adding two new canine teams. The selection process identified Senior Officer Cameron Dobyns with K9 partner Atlas, and Senior Officer Bruce Young with K9 Blaze, to join the unit. These new teams will attend the VADWR K9 academy, led by Sgt. Howald, in the spring of 2024.

Summary of 2023 Activities

The table below provides a summary of the K9 unit's activities and accomplishments since 2020, highlighting the contributions of individual officers and their K9 partners during the calendar year 2023.

Officer Name	K9 Partner	Notable Activities 2023
Officer First Class Chaffin	K9 Molly	Participated in numerous public demonstrations and event booths; assisted in search operations
Senior Officer Tyler Blanks	K9 Bruno	Conducted article searches locating critical evidence; participated in tracking runaway juveniles
Officer First Class Bonnie Braziel	K9 Grace	Assisted in large ground searches; involved in locating missing persons and solving cases
Master Officer Mark DiLuigi	K9 Lily	Engaged in article searches; key role in resolving hunting violations and firearm-related crimes
Sergeant Richard Howald	K9 Sky	Led the K9 academy; instrumental in large ground searches and public engagement activities
Senior Officer Ian Ostlund	K9 Reese	Conducted successful tracks for runaway juveniles and missing persons; involved in evidence searches
Master Officer Mark VanDyke	K9 Coal	Participated in high-profile search operations; contributed to solving multiple criminal cases

The K9 unit's ongoing dedication to public safety, community engagement, and successful operational outcomes continues to highlight their importance and effectiveness within the department.

5.2 Marine Theft and Fraud

During the 2023 calendar year the boat theft and fraud unit consisted of two Special Agents Paul Inge and Jim Croft. Agents concentrated on working marine theft and identifying person involved in larcenies of watercraft and marine equipment such as motors and trailers.

Agents also investigated consumer complaints on persons involved in unscrupulous transactions with boat dealers and persons selling vessels without a Watercraft Dealers License.

In 2023, individuals who committed tax fraud by misrepresenting the purchase price of vessels on their title applications were identified and appropriate measures taken. According to tax codes, it is permissible to asses and impose an additional 50% penalties where purchasers misrepresent the amount of money they spent on a boat to evade taxes. Imposing these penalties on tax cheats is a valuable lesson for them and serves as a deterrent to others, as well as providing needed additional revenue for DWR.

Agents were also busy assisting other law enforcement agencies with investigations on stolen vessels, break-ins of businesses and other criminal activities.

Agents focused on more serious felony-level cases and boat purchasers who maliciously misrepresenting purchases prices to evade paying taxes.

Agents also continued to provide awareness training both within the Agency and outside the Agency to bring awareness to boat theft trends and strategies to identify stolen boats. Some of the presentations were on a local level with regional theft task force groups and national training was giving to the National Odometer & Fraud Investigators Annual Training Conference on boat fraud. On an international level, the Boat Theft and Fraud Unit

Table 12: Case Types from Boat Fraud Team

DESCRIPTION	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
CASES DEVELOPED	105	74	84	51	79
FELONY CHARGES	51	10	342	341	45
MISDEMEANOR CHARGES	24	28	22	45	14
WARNINGS	31	0	9	14	-
SEARCH WARRANTS	60	13	15	26	32
RECOVERED BOATS	21	6	13	14	14
RECOVERED TRAILERS	12	5	11	6	6
OTHER RECOVERED STOLEN ITEMS	1	0	1	4	0
IMPACT ON TAXATION	\$90,000	-	\$194,600	\$401,737	\$437,000
TOTAL VALUE OF RECOVERED PROPERTY	\$334,000	-	\$214,275	\$117,512	

with the Department of Wildlife Resources hosted the 34th annual training seminar of The International Association of Marine Investigators. Agents with the unit as well other Virginia Conservation Police Officers gave numerous presentations of boating related crime investigations as well as on boat accident investigations at this conference in which drone technology was utilized.

A few noteworthy cases handled by the Marine Theft & Fraud Unit during 2023 and are described below:

The Marine Theft & Fraud Unit assisted Conservation Police Officers in Stafford County in solving a larceny of a yacht taken from marina slip. After being stolen, the yacht was driven at a high rate of speed across Aquia Creek. The suspect in the larceny was operating under the influence and later ran into the shoreline at high speed. The impact from the crash injured the suspect. The owner of the property where the boat crashed ran out of his house and shone a light on the suspect. The suspect had a cut over his left eye and blood on his nose. The suspect then fled on foot from the area.

Evidence was collected including blood in the yacht that was left from the injured suspect. Investigators soon learned that a Mack truck with an attached demolition dumpster had been stolen about 2 miles from the boat crash site. Investigators suspected that the truck was likely stolen by the suspect to flee the area. The truck was later found abandoned in a neighborhood near a Wa-Wa store about 20 miles away. Surveillance video was obtained of the man entering the Wa-Wa and it showed that he matched the description of the suspect as reported by the witness. A crescent-shaped laceration was visible over his left eye and he had blood on his face.

An agent with the marine theft unit showed an informant he knew a picture of the suspect and learned the suspect's identity. It was quickly determined that the suspect had recently been jailed on an unrelated matter following the yacht larceny. The jail was



contacted and the suspect's mug shot was requested to be e-mailed to investigators. This mug shot showed a fresh laceration over the suspect's eye.

The agent obtained a search warrant for the suspect's DNA to compare it to the blood splatter left in the stolen boat. DNA swabs were taken and the suspect was interviewed and confessed to the larcenies of the yacht and the Mack truck. Appropriate charges were placed





by the District's Conservation Police Officers.

A stolen 2023 Yamaha 275 SE worth approximately \$140,000.00 was recovered in Spotsylvania County after a mechanic thought the Hull Identification Numbers (HIN) were not correct. Confidential numbers were located and it was determined that the boat was stolen from an individual from Indianapolis. The larceny occurred when the owner sold it to a suspect using a fraudulent check and identity. The boat was later purchased by a Virginia man. The boat was transported to Connecticut and laundered by replacing the original HIN plate with a counterfeit HIN plate. This HIN plate was an expert counterfeit and looked exactly like a factory HIN. An agent from the Boat Theft and Fraud Unit determined that the information for the counterfeit HIN came from an advertisement from Copart, a business that sells salvaged boats. The boat advertised by Copart was located in Florida. Florida boat theft investigators determined that the actual HIN plate was still attached to the salvaged boat so that the counterfeit plate was manufactured by the those involved in the theft and not removed from a salvaged vessel. The agent was able to obtain documents used in laundering and titling this stolen boat and obtained a fingerprint that identified the thief. This suspect was currently under federal investigation into numerous financial frauds involving identity theft and obtaining money by false pretense. He was later arrested on the appropriate charges.

On November 19, 2023, DWR's Region 4 Office in Verona was burglarized, and the suspect was able to get away with a large quantity of law enforcement and wildlife equipment and supplies. For those that work out of this office, this burglary was a very personal invasion of their workplace and caused expected uneasiness and concerns for their safety. This burglary immediately became the top priority for the Law Enforcement Division, and Special Agent Paul Inge was assigned to work with the Virginia State Police on this investigation. Over a period of three months, Special Agent Inge and many fellow Conservation Police Officers spent countless hours running down leads in an attempt to locate the suspect. In late January, they received a break in the case and was able to finally identify the individual responsible. After close coordination with the Virginia State Police, Harrisonburg PD and the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office, SA Inge, fellow CPOs, and other LE officers conducted an operation on February 1 to target the suspect and his property where they believed that DWR's stolen equipment and supplies were being held. The operation was successful in recovering the majority of DWR's equipment and supplies, as well as arresting the suspect who was currently on federal probation for drug distribution and firearms theft. The outcome of this operation not only resulted in closing the Verona DWR officer burglary and arresting the suspect, but it also closed approximately 12 other commercial burglary cases in the Shenandoah Valley and recovered over \$100,000 in stolen goods.

5.3 Covert Unit

In 2023, the Special Operations Unit of DWR's Law Enforcement Division concluded a nearly three-year comprehensive investigation of the illicit reptile trade in Virginia. The unit focused on high activity sites, both physical and virtual, for those engaged in the sale of reptiles. After three years, the investigation had grown to include several cooperating private individuals, cooperation with federal and state partners, and has spanned outside the Commonwealth, with DWR special agents conducting investigations in North Carolina, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and California. These efforts culminated in the purchase, seizure, surrender of over 750 individual native animals, comprised of 26 different species. While the domestic estimated value of the recovered wildlife is around \$35,000, the terminal market estimate exceeds \$150,000. Members of the Special Operations Unit were asked to provide these findings to the Law Enforcement Committee of the DWR's Board. The Committee's response to the report initially showed the shock and anger of its members that these types of activities were persistent and ongoing. They further acknowledged the difficulties that investigations of this variety entail. To this end they directed members of the unit to create an additional presentation that would outline a path forward for the protection of the Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

In October of 2023, as a result of the information provided to the board, a resolution was passed that, in part, help provide for the creation of four regional investigator positions. With the additional investigative efforts of these agents, along with their additional duties of serious hunting and boating incidents, it is hoped that the illicit poaching and sale of species of greatest conservation need can be further curtailed. A copy of the passed resolution is provided below. These accomplishments were not performed in a vacuum and the Special Operations Unit would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Wildlife Division, specifically that of Becky Gwenn and John Kleopfer, The Wildlife Center of Virginia, and the continued support of the Law Enforcement Command Staff.



RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Whereas, Virginia is home to 20 species of native turtles, 12 of which are identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Virginia's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan; and

Whereas, turtles are one of the most vulnerable groups of vertebrates worldwide, and unsustainable take (poaching) is a significant threat to turtle species; and

Whereas, delayed maturation, small clutch sizes, low egg and juvenile survival rates, and increased vulnerability of nesting females can result in turtle populations experiencing rapid declines following losses of adults; and

Whereas, the Department of Wildlife Resources has taken efforts to reverse turtle population declines by assessing population statuses and limiting factors, protecting important habitats, developing confiscation plans, participating in the development of species genetic libraries to support repatriation of turtles to the wild, and taking law enforcement actions; and

Whereas, the DWR is a member of the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles, which seeks to coordinate state regulations to help address current conservation risks, providing additional resources for wildlife law enforcement to prevent illegal collection and trafficking, enhancing public outreach that communicates the severity and scale of the crisis, increasing resources for emergency housing and care of confiscated turtles to relieve strain on agency operations, and implementing science-based planning to guide temporary and final disposition of confiscated specimens;

Whereas, these efforts are sustained by leadership support and coordination across the biological, law enforcement, and legal and policy staffs, including through directed training, skills development, and information sharing; and

Whereas, the results of recent activities by the DWR's special operations unit investigating the illegal commercialization of reptiles and amphibians uncovered violations involving approximately 750 animals (including 650 turtles), equating to \$35,000 U.S. market potential value or \$155,000 overseas market potential value; and

Now therefore be it resolved that the Board of Wildlife Resources recognizes that the illegal trade in reptiles and amphibians is a significant threat to native species that the Board and the DWR are entrusted to manage and conserve, and

Be it further resolved, the Board directs the Executive Director to take the following actions to continue addressing the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians in Virginia:

1. Establish replacement costs for native reptiles and amphibians of Virginia, beginning with native turtle species;
2. Establish four (4) full-time Regional Special Agent positions in the

DWR's Special Operations Unit. A primary focus of these positions will be working collaboratively with the covert special agents to target the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians;

3. Explore participation in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Task Force Officer Program;
4. Obtain specialized technology and equipment to aid in investigations;
5. Explore other authorities established within the Code of Virginia to better leverage penalties for those convicted of illegal trafficking;
6. Develop and provide training on the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians to:
 - a. Commonwealth's Attorneys and the judiciary;
 - b. Other state and local law enforcement entities, including animal control officers; and
 - c. DWR uniformed Conservation Police Officers and recruits;
7. Develop and deliver a communications campaign to increase public awareness about the impacts of the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians as a public trust resource;
8. Explore new sources of funding to support the training and communications efforts;
9. Explore establishing a permanent facility or a partnership with another organization for the holding of reptiles and amphibians prior to adjudication of legal cases and subsequent repatriation; and
10. Develop a repatriation plan for the return of reptiles and amphibians illegally removed from the wild, beginning with turtles.

Be it also resolved that the Board of Wildlife Resources requests the Executive Director to provide periodic updates on these actions at the meetings of its Law Enforcement Committee.

Adopted this 26th day of October 2023.

5.3 Tracking Team

The Virginia Conservation Police (VCP) tracking training program was a popular course during the 12th Basic CPO Academy. The 12th Basic received four days of tracking and rural operations training, led by SCPO Ian Ostlund. The VCP tracking training cadre were able to proceed with some of the requests that it receives annually from local law enforcement agencies. Tracking instructors worked with regional K9 units in Southwest Virginia and trained the Spotsylvania Search and Rescue unit in 2023.

In May of 2023 VCP tracking teams were offered an opportunity to train with one of the most well-known tracking instructors around. The VCP training division helped the teams set up training with Mike Hull, a retired Virginia Game Warden and current world-renowned tracking expert. Mike was able to challenge the attendees in several areas of tracking that went well beyond their initial training level.

The Region 3 tracking team, led by Sgt. Arnold, planned and coordinated a successful mock training incident including multiple local agencies and emergency response services. The planning and logistics of a training exercise like this are extensive, often taking months of preparation.

The VCP tracking teams utilized the skills of 41 dedicated Officers who have taken on this extra responsibility in addition to their normal duties. During 2023, VCP tracking team members from Regions 3 & 4 responded to assist the Department of Emergency Management on multiple occasions with missing persons. The Region 3 tracking team assisted local law enforcement in a prison escape. Their efforts to track the escapee were a direct impact on the suspects apprehension. The suspect later stated they were trying to elude the tracking team and only left their hiding place once they saw the team.



Current Regional tracking team leaders are:

Region 1: SCPO Chris Gilmore

Region 2: Sgt. Cory Harbour

Region 3: SGT Matt Arnold

Region 4: Sgt. Chris Heberling

5.4 Honor Guard

VCP Honor Guard inspires and builds on tradition as it progressed through 2023. Each member accepts the commitment to excellence ensuring to promote esprit-de-corps and instill pride through celebrating the accomplishments of CPO's. Committed to excellence, with one goal in mind; Honor. The HG is here to provide officers, new and old, the dignity and respect earned for their hard work and dedication throughout the year.

Forever remembered as protectors of the woods and waters the Honor Guard stands proud in memoriam for retirees and fallen officers across the Commonwealth. Each member is dedicated to showing appreciation to families for the service their loved one provided the Commonwealth as Game Wardens and/or Conservation Police Officers. The Honor Guard considers this the most sacred and revered duty to pay tribute and provide long-lasting member of a beloved officer. A staple of the law enforcement division's representation and a beacon of professionalism the VCP Honor Guard is dedicated to their significant and important role in paying tribute.



5.5 Unmanned Aerial System (UAS)

The division's Unmanned Aerial Systems continues to be a successful exploration for the division, a snapshot of our roadmap for implementing the Virginia Conservation Police (VCP) Unmanned Aerial System Program (Drone). Briefly highlighted our activities as we initially launched our Drone Program in calendar year 2022 and then recap our activities for calendar year 2023.

OVERVIEW AND GOAL: Our initial goal was to create a deployable UAS capability to meet the agency's mission requirements. We researched and developed a plan to accomplish this by gaining an understanding that building a UAS capability requires planning, organizing, equipping, training, and exercising. We quickly realized that buying equipment does not enable an agency to deploy a drone. Finally, we knew that we must also consider and address numerous policy and training issues.

STEPS FOR SUCCESS: Prior to launching our UAS Program, we identified ten steps that would be necessary for VCP to be successful in the airspace. The ten step process that we used was as follows: We defined our Objectives and Outcomes; we created Policy, Plans and Procedures that would comply with all legal requirements; We identified Risks and Mitigation Strategies; we developed a Realistic Budget which highlighted building out our program and UAS capability in phases; we ensured all the right people, disciplines, and agencies are involved and purchased the right equipment that was appropriate for the agencies mission; we recruited and developed our operating pilots with the right training; and finally, we developed a plan to exercise this capability.

OUR INTENTION: Early on we recognized that Virginia law was very restrictive but that it did allow certain uses. Our intent was to utilize our drones as a force multiplier in these permitted activities. Thus, we adapted the following situations for which we can employ our drone: To enhance Situational Awareness, to be a Supervisory aid in planning for events; during Search and Rescue operations, to assist with Amber, Silver and Blue alerts, missing persons alerts; as a Visual Perspective, to provide direction in complex environments; to assist with Scene Documentation, as a tool to document accident and crime scenes; to assist with Natural Resource Management, specifically to aid in resource decisions; to maintain Training, and thus to be proficient; and finally to Maintain and Test our equipment so that we would be fully operational.

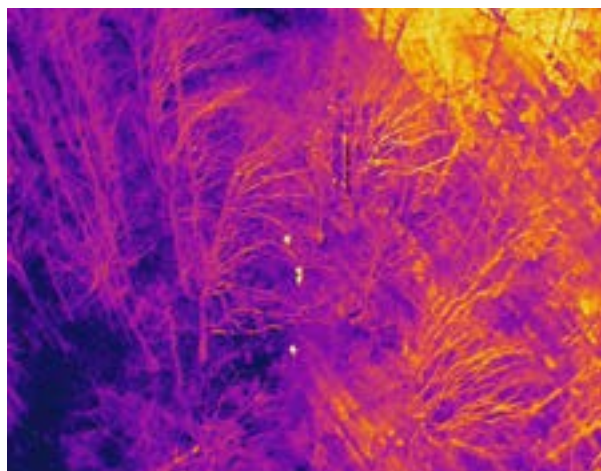
HISTORY: A few years ago, we began discussions about developing an LE Drone Program. A small workgroup (4 officers, 1 from each region), was assembled to begin discussions on developing a program. One of the driving motivators was when an officer attended some training and saw firsthand how we were missing an opportunity. Discussion at a Command Staff meeting gave us an understanding that this



could be a tremendous opportunity for us to add a significant force multiplier in our law enforcement operations. Thus, our journey began, and we formed a Drone Committee Team. Our team started out with 5 members, 1 manager to keep the group focused and moving, 1 officer who was already a certified pilot and 3 officers who already flew personal drones. Very soon all 4 officers became certified pilots. We developed goals, conducted research, attended professional meetings. We learned and gathered as much information and literature as possible. We reached out to other agencies, other states, for assistance. We researched Virginia law. We researched many different Drone manufacturers to find the best fit for our agency and developed our General Orders, Standard Operating Procedures and Reporting Forms. Finally, we created a purchase order requisition to purchase two drone systems.



In April 2022, we received the first two drone systems and began our transition from concept to reality. From April to August, we attended meetings, conducted training, trained, and swapped the drones among the pilots so that each could become familiar with them, learn how they operated, and fly training flights. While this was occurring, we developed training for Visual Observers, and all sworn officers completed this training. Fast forward to early-December when we received two additional drone systems and fielded them. Now, each pilot had their own drone system, and each operations patrol region had a drone pilot.



CURRENT / FUTURE: Our vision for success was developed around different phases of our program. In Phase I, we established and launched the VCP Law Enforcement Division Drone Program / Team. Our plan is to maintain this until we begin to expand into Phase II. In Phase II, we want to develop additional training standards, recruit, and train new members, and expand the program to 8 drone pilots, with 2 in each region of operations. Our long-term goal, Phase III, is to

expand this capability to include underwater drones to aid in all underwater search and rescue and boating accident investigations.

With 2023 now behind us, it is important to capitalize on our journey, our successes and how far we have come in a little over a year. Perhaps one of the best ways to do so is to highlight our UAS activity for calendar year 2023.

Here are our overall activity efforts:

Figure 6: Drone Program Data 2023

2023 UAS - ACTIVITY RECAP	
Activity	TOTALS
# of Calls	41
# of Uses	78
107 Flight Hours	44.25
Training Hours	12
COA Flight Hours	0
# Citations	4
# of Public Relations Events	3
Activities	41

LIVE PERIOD BREAKDOWN (January - December)					
Activity	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	TOTALS
# of Calls	22	2	14	3	41
# of Uses	20	2	50	6	78
107 Flight Hours	23.75	1	16.5	3	44.25
Training Hours	8.5	0	2.5	1	12
COA Flight Hours	0	0	0	0	0
# Citations	4	0	0	0	4
# of Public Relations Events	1	1	0	1	3
Activities	21	1	13	6	41

6.0 Officer Outreach

The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Law Enforcement Division continues to make significant strides in community engagement through a variety of outreach initiatives. These efforts aim to educate the public, especially the younger generation, on wildlife conservation, safety, and responsible outdoor activities.

Sgt. Mike Hill, along with Conservation Wildlife Foundation (CWF) volunteers Joe Koch and Catharine Tucker, conducted an engaging presentation at Laburnum Elementary School in Henrico, Virginia. The event saw active participation from 242 students in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, as well as 12 staff members. This hands-on event provided students with an interactive learning experience about local wildlife and conservation efforts.

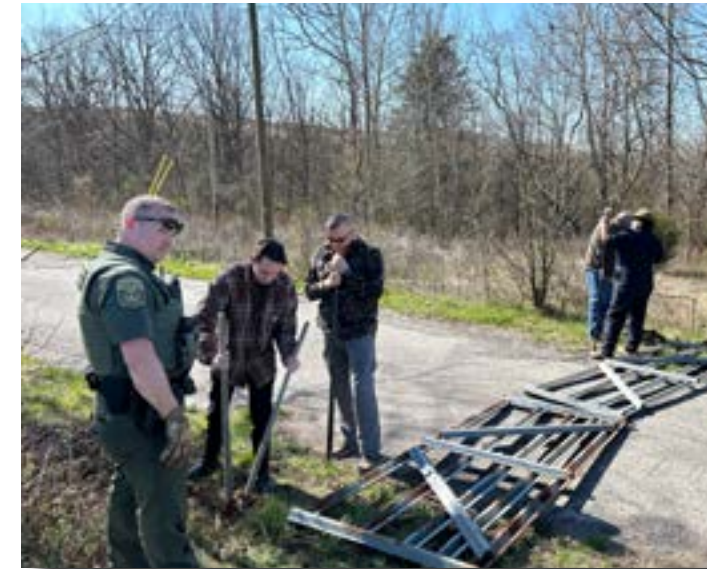


On May 7, the DWR Law Enforcement Division hosted an event for the Governor's staff at Pocahontas State Park. This gathering was part of the department's ongoing efforts to foster strong relationships with state officials and demonstrate the importance of wildlife conservation and outdoor recreational activities.

On September 9, Virginia Conservation Police Lieutenant Frank Spuchesi and DWR volunteer hunter education instructor Mark Fike organized a youth dove hunt for members of the King George Outdoor Club. The young hunters had been preparing for this event for several months. They first completed a hunter education class at King George Middle School, led by Mr. Fike, followed by live fire shooting events to practice safe firearm handling and marksmanship. The hunt was successful, with all participants harvesting their first doves. Post-hunt, they received instructions on properly cleaning their game and cooking recommendations.



In September 2023, a new Public Safety Announcement (PSA) began airing around Smith Mountain Lake. Virginia Conservation Police Master Officer Eric Dotterer participated in this initiative to promote the importance of wearing life jackets while enjoying lake activities. The PSA featured contributions from the Bedford County Sheriff's Office,

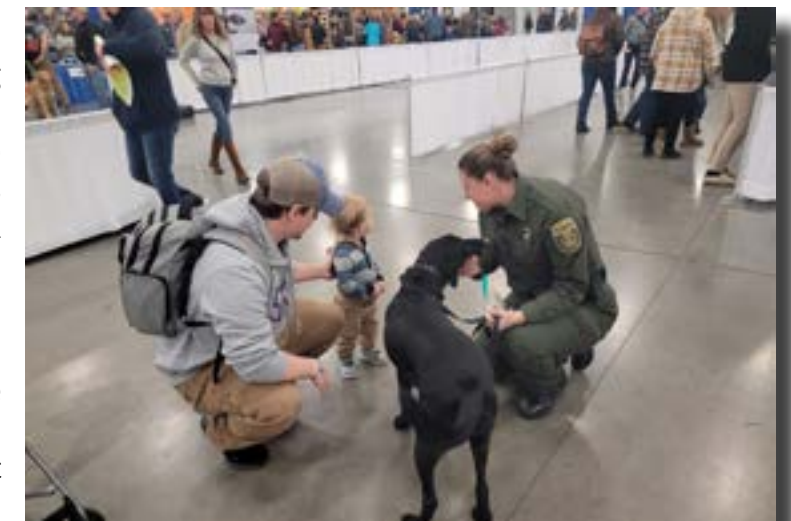


Master Officer Owen Heine led the Shenandoah County 7th Annual River Cleanup, a significant event aimed at preserving the natural beauty and health of the Shenandoah River. This initiative brings together community members to remove trash and debris from the river, fostering a sense of stewardship and environmental responsibility.

The DWR Law Enforcement Division actively participates in National Night Out events, fostering community-police partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie to make communities safer and more caring places to live.

Kids Fishing Days are organized to introduce young children to the joys of fishing. These events are designed to teach basic fishing techniques and promote conservation awareness among the youth.

Through these diverse outreach initiatives, the Department of Wildlife Resources Law Enforcement Division continues to engage with the community, promoting wildlife conservation, safety, and responsible outdoor recreation.



Smith Mountain Lake Marine Fire & Rescue, Smith Mountain Lake Water Safety Council, and other local organizations. It has been widely distributed across social media, boat rental agencies, short-term rental companies, and is even shown at Westlake Cinema and various special events. This effort underscores the Virginia Conservation Police's commitment to boating safety education throughout the Commonwealth.

7.0 Recognition and Award

7.1 Officer of the Year

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) announces that Conservation Police Master Officer William J. Harris is the department's 2023 Conservation Police Officer (CPO) of the Year.

Harris began his career with DWR in 2000 and during his 24-year tenure he's been proactive in seeking out and addressing illegal activities. This past year, he played a crucial role in locating homicide victims, spearheaded specialized training on side-scan sonar, initiated and led various projects to improve boating safety, and enhanced environmental protection in his area.



Master Officer Harris exemplifies excellence and dedication in his role within the agency, particularly in promoting teamwork and innovation, as well as displaying a positive attitude," said Colonel John J. Cobb. "He is a mentor and leader within the agency, providing expert guidance and assistance to his colleagues. He is also a huge proponent of outreach, organizing numerous programs and events to benefit the public."

In addition to receiving the CPO of the Year Award, Master Office Harris, who's assigned area includes Grayson County, has been selected as the recipient of the 2024 North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association "Officer of the Year" Award. This award is given annually to the top Natural Resource Enforcement Officer and is evaluated based on law enforcement achievements, teamwork and public outreach, excellence and innovation, attitude, and leadership.

7.2 Boating Officer of the Year (NASBLA)

Conservation Police Officer First Class Adam Roberts has earned the Boating Officer of the Year award, reflecting his invaluable contributions, unwavering commitment to public service, and exceptional professionalism. Known for his positive attitude and dedication to teamwork, CPO Roberts epitomizes the ideal conservation police officer.

CPO Roberts's dedication was highlighted when he responded promptly to a fatal boating incident on Smith Mountain Lake, despite being off duty. His swift action in securing evidence and locating the victim's next of kin showcased his reliability and sense of duty.

His support of the agency's mission is evident through his work with the Special Operations Unit. He assisted in executing a search warrant on an unauthorized boat dealership, leading to charges against the owner, and played a key role in recovering a stolen jet ski, resulting in multiple felony charges against the suspect. As a Field Training Officer, he dedicated significant time during the busy boating season to prepare a new officer for success.

CPO Roberts is deeply involved in public outreach, actively promoting boating safety. He participated in 15 boating-related events, including the Smith Mountain Lake Association Water Safety Day, where he coordinated the Conservation Police Officer display. He also led a three-part kayaking exposition, training elementary children to safely operate paddle craft and accompanying them on a field trip to utilize their new skills. Additionally, he coordinated the boating safety component at National Night Out, giving children the opportunity to board a patrol boat, and transformed a patrol boat into a float for a local parade.

During Operation Dry Water (ODY) weekend, CPO Roberts worked a total of 26 hours, inspected 30 vessels, contacted 114 boaters, and detected 12 violations, including one OUI arrest. His extraordinary efforts earned him the 2023 Operation Dry Water Officer of the Year award.

CPO Roberts's extraordinary efforts, dedication to public service, and commitment to boating safety have rightfully earned him the Boating Officer of the Year award. His contributions have not only enhanced the safety of Virginia's waterways but have also fostered a greater sense of community and public trust in the Department of Wildlife Resources.



7.3 Other Awards

Colonel's Leadership Award (2023)



The purpose of the Colonel's Leadership Award is to formally recognize those officers and staff members that set the standard in regard to being a leader within the Law Enforcement Division. Furthermore, the Colonel has an opportunity each year to highlight an employee within the division who is demonstrating a best practices management model through their outstanding actions and deeds per the criteria identified below in our Professional Standards CREED. The recipient of the 2023 Colonel's Leadership Award is First Sgt. Steve Ferguson



O.P.S. Professionalism Decree (Class of 2023)



The purpose of the O.P.S. Professionalism Decree (Innovation Award) is to establish a tradition to formally recognize those Sworn Officers and DWR Law Enforcement Staff who have gone above and beyond to promote the professionalism of Virginia Conservation Police through their commitment and dedication to this public service profession.



Master Officer Owen Heine



Master Officer Ray Solomon

Behind The Lens

The Creative Contributions of Meghan Marchetti

Meghan Marchetti, is one of the key persons behind the visual storytelling of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), she has consistently demonstrated her exceptional talent and dedication to DWR and specifically to the law enforcement division. Meghan through her creative content helps tell the story of Virginia's Conservation Police Officers.



One of Meghan's standout contributions was producing the video for the Flippo-Gentry Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Dedication. Her work not only captured the essence of the event but also created a lasting memento for the family members of those honored. Additionally, Meghan designed the sign board placed at the WMA and expertly photographed the dedication ceremony, ensuring that every moment was preserved with precision and artistry.

Meghan's creative touch is evident in the very environment of the DWR. She designed the sign boards and background for the Forrest Hanks Rifle Display in the lobby, adding a professional and aesthetically pleasing element to the display. Her designs not only enhance the visual appeal but also contribute to the educational value of the exhibit.

In recognition and appreciation of Meghan Marchetti's significant contributions to the Law Enforcement Division and the Agency as a whole, it was our honor to recognize Meghan at our annual awards banquet. Meghan's creative talents and unwavering dedication have made a lasting impact, enriching the DWR's mission and enhancing its visual storytelling capabilities. Her work not only documents the present but also preserves the history and legacy of Virginia's wildlife conservation efforts for future generations.

Behind the lens, Meghan Marchetti has proven to be more than just a photographer; she is a storyteller, historian, and designer. Her contributions have gone above and beyond, making her an invaluable asset to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. From all of the Law Enforcement Officers and staff thank you Meghan for your exceptional work and dedication in telling the story of Virginia's Conservation Police.

7.4 Promotions

Lieutenant Frank Spuchesi -Region 1

Lieutenant Jessica Fariss -Region 2

First Sergeant Joshua Thomas -Region 1 – Area (A)

First Sergeant Sonny Nipper- Region 2 – Area (B)

First Sergeant John Koloda- Region 3 – Area (A)

Sgt. Amanda Nevel -Acadmey Training Sergeant

Sergeant Joe Rollings- District 14

Sergeant Roy Morris- District 16

Sergeant Michael Morris- District 22

Sergeant Cory Harbour- District 23

Sergeant Brandon Harris- District 25

Sergeant Dan Rabago- District 31

Sergeant Matthew Meade- District 33

Sergeant Matthew Arnold- District 34

Sergeant Chris Heberling- District 43

Sergeant Eric Plaster- District 44

8.0 Retirees (2023)



*Randy Francis
37 Years*



*Master CPO Gene Wirt
28 Years*



*Sgt. Rich Gozska
26 Years*



*Master CPO Jon Hart
23 Years*



*Master CPO Mark Shaw
13 Years*



*K9 Bailey
5 Years*

In Memoriam - Recently Fallen RETIREES

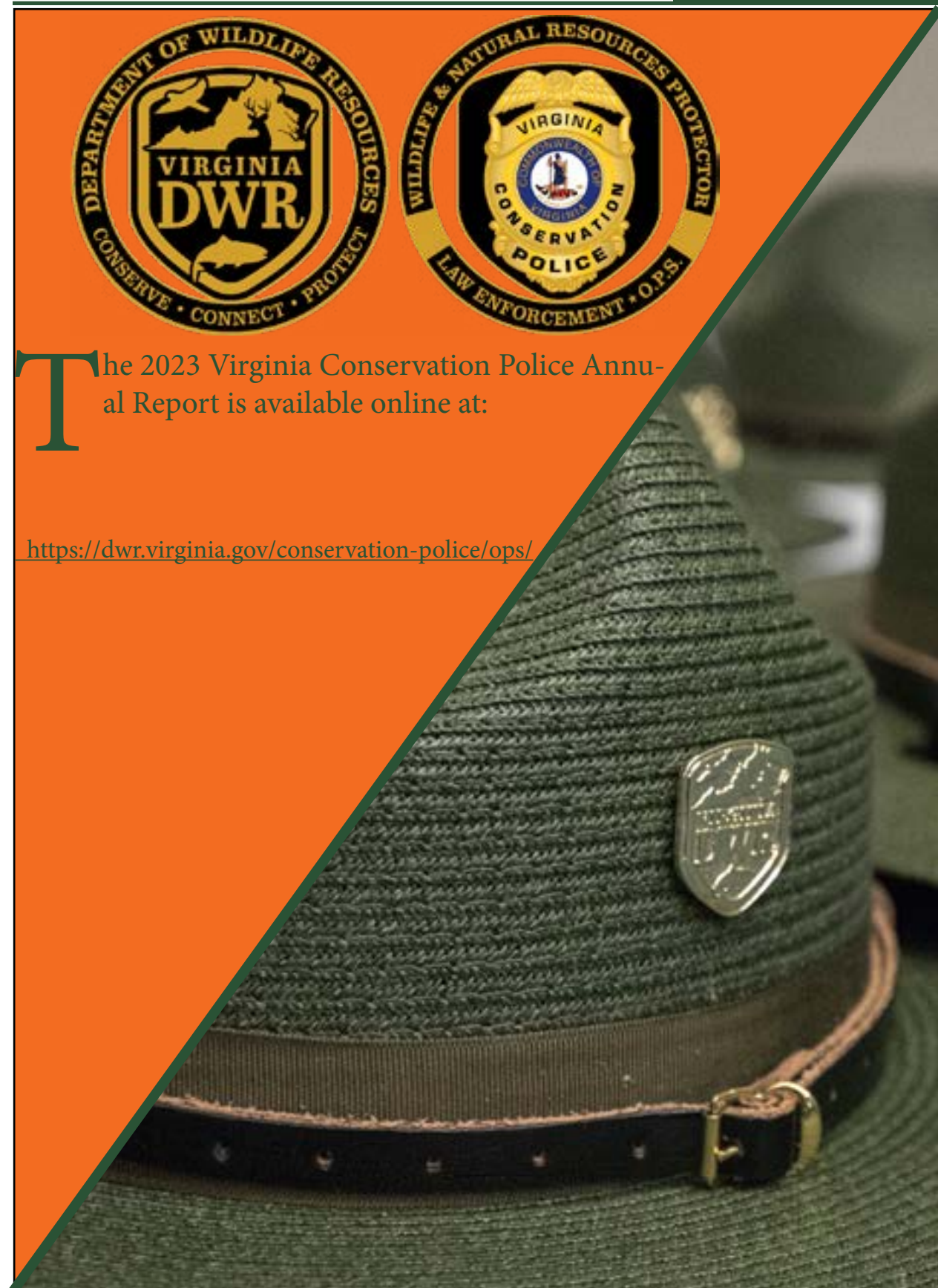


Timmy Worrel 09/22/2023

Timothy James Worrell, 57, of Gloucester, VA passed away Friday, September 22, 2023. At the age of 57. Timothy Worrell was the 2002 Game Warden of the Year.

Timothy Worrell joined the VDWR in 1998. Prior to that, he worked as a deputy sheriff with the Isle of Wight County Sheriff's Office where he served as a road deputy for three years and as an undercover narcotics officer for four years. He was the recipient of the 2000 Commonwealth Valor Award presented by The Virginia Public Safety Foundation.

During his assignment to Gloucester County, Officer Worrell set up many contacts in the community. He was also active in education, working cooperatively with the Community Education Coordinators and helped to develop a one-hour program to meet the Standards of Learning requirements for wildlife education in all Gloucester County elementary schools. Sgt. Worrell retired in 2018 after 20 years of service with DWR.



The 2023 Virginia Conservation Police Annual Report is available online at:

<https://dwr.virginia.gov/conservation-police/ops/>

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Henrico, VA 23228
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Region 1 Office (Charles City)

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Charles City, VA 23030
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Phone: 804-829-6580



Region 2 Office (Forest)

1132 Thomas Jefferson Rd
Forest, VA 24551
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Phone: 434-525-7522



Region 3 Office (Marion)

1796 Highway Sixteen
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Hours: Mon–Fri, 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM
Phone: 276-783-4860



Region 4 Office (Verona)

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All photos in this report were contributed by DWR staff
unless otherwise noted

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Law Enforcement Division

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