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HOUSE BILL NO. 1757

Offered January 9, 2013

Prefiled January 8, 2013

A *BILL to amend and reenact § 62.1-44.15:21 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Article 2.2 of Chapter 3.1 of Title 62.1 a section numbered 62.1-44.15:24, relating to establishment of the Aquatic Resources Improvements Fund.*

Patron—Scott, E.T.

Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 62.1-44.15:21 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Article 2.2 of Chapter 3.1 of Title 62.1 a section numbered 62.1-44.15:24 as follows:

§ 62.1-44.15:21. Impacts to wetlands.

A. Permits shall address avoidance and minimization of wetland impacts to the maximum extent practicable. A permit shall be issued only if the Board finds that the effect of the impact, together with other existing or proposed impacts to wetlands, will not cause or contribute to a significant impairment of state waters or fish and wildlife resources.

B. Permits shall contain requirements for compensating impacts on wetlands. Such compensation requirements shall be sufficient to achieve no net loss of existing wetland acreage and functions and may be met through (i) wetland creation or restoration, (ii) purchase or use of mitigation bank credits pursuant to § 62.1-44.15:23, (iii) *contribution to the Aquatic Resources Improvements Fund established pursuant to § 62.1-44.15:24 to provide compensation for impacts to wetlands, streams, or other state waters that occur in areas where mitigation bank credits are not available at the time of permit application*, or (iv) contribution to a Board-approved fund dedicated to achieving no net loss of wetland acreage and functions. When utilized in conjunction with creation, restoration, or mitigation bank credits, compensation may incorporate (i) (a) preservation or restoration of upland buffers adjacent to wetlands or other state waters or (ii) (b) preservation of wetlands.

C. The Board shall utilize the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' "Wetlands Delineation Manual, Technical Report Y-87-1, January 1987, Final Report" as the approved method for delineating wetlands. The Board shall adopt appropriate guidance and regulations to ensure consistency with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' implementation of delineation practices. The Board shall also adopt guidance and regulations for review and approval of the geographic area of a delineated wetland. Any such approval of a delineation shall remain effective for a period of five years; however, if the Board issues a permit pursuant to this article for an activity in the delineated wetland within the five-year period, the approval shall remain effective for the term of the permit. Any delineation accepted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as sufficient for its exercise of jurisdiction pursuant to § 404 of the Clean Water Act shall be determinative of the geographic area of that delineated wetland.

D. The Board shall develop general permits for such activities in wetlands as it deems appropriate. General permits shall include such terms and conditions as the Board deems necessary to protect state waters and fish and wildlife resources from significant impairment. The Board is authorized to waive the requirement for a general permit or deem an activity in compliance with a general permit when it determines that an isolated wetland is of minimal ecological value. The Board shall develop general permits for:

1. Activities causing wetland impacts of less than one-half of an acre;
2. Facilities and activities of utilities and public service companies regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission or State Corporation Commission. No Board action on an individual or general permit for such facilities shall alter the siting determination made through Federal Energy Regulatory Commission or State Corporation Commission approval. The Board and the State Corporation Commission shall develop a memorandum of agreement pursuant to §§ 56-46.1, 56-265.2, 56-265.2:1, and 56-580 to ensure that consultation on wetland impacts occurs prior to siting determinations;
3. Coal, natural gas, and coalbed methane gas mining activities authorized by the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, and sand mining;
4. Virginia Department of Transportation or other linear transportation projects; and
5. Activities governed by nationwide or regional permits approved by the Board and issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Conditions contained in the general permits shall include, but not be limited to, filing with the Board any copies of preconstruction notification, postconstruction report, and

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59 certificate of compliance required by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

60 E. Within 15 days of receipt of an individual permit application, the Board shall review the
61 application for completeness and either accept the application or request additional specific information
62 from the applicant. Within 120 days of receipt of a complete application, the Board shall issue the
63 permit, issue the permit with conditions, deny the permit, or decide to conduct a public meeting or
64 hearing. If a public meeting or hearing is held, it shall be held within 60 days of the decision to conduct
65 such a proceeding, and a final decision as to the permit shall be made within 90 days of completion of
66 the public meeting or hearing.

67 F. Within 15 days of receipt of a general permit application, the Board shall review the application
68 for completeness and either accept the application or request additional specific information from the
69 applicant. A determination that an application is complete shall not mean the Board will issue the permit
70 but means only that the applicant has submitted sufficient information to process the application. The
71 Board shall deny, approve, or approve with conditions any application for coverage under a general
72 permit within 45 days of receipt of a complete preconstruction application. The application shall be
73 deemed approved if the Board fails to act within 45 days.

74 G. No Virginia Water Protection Permit shall be required for impacts to wetlands caused by activities
75 governed under Chapter 13 (§ 28.2-100 et seq.) of Title 28.2 or normal agricultural activities or normal
76 silvicultural activities. This section shall also not apply to normal residential gardening, lawn and
77 landscape maintenance, or other similar activities that are incidental to an occupant's ongoing residential
78 use of property and of minimal ecological impact. The Board shall develop criteria governing this
79 exemption and shall specifically identify the activities meeting these criteria in its regulations.

80 H. No Virginia Water Protection Permit shall be required for impacts caused by the construction or
81 maintenance of farm or stock ponds, but other permits may be required pursuant to state and federal
82 law. For purposes of this exclusion, farm or stock ponds shall include all ponds and impoundments that
83 do not fall under the authority of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board pursuant to Article 2
84 (§ 10.1-604 et seq.) of Chapter 6 pursuant to normal agricultural or silvicultural activities.

85 **§ 62.1-44.15:24. Aquatic Resources Improvements Fund established.**

86 *There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the Aquatic*
87 *Resources Improvements Fund, hereafter referred to as "the Fund." The Fund shall be established on*
88 *the books of the Comptroller. All contributions to the Board pursuant to clause (iii) of subsection B of*
89 *§ 62.1-44.15:21 shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Fund. Interest earned on*
90 *moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund,*
91 *including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall*
92 *remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used for the purpose of purchasing mitigation bank*
93 *credits pursuant to the conditions established in § 62.1-44.15:23 as soon as practicable if qualifying*
94 *credits are available. If such credits are not available within five years of the collection of moneys for a*
95 *specific impact, then the funds shall be utilized either (i) to purchase credits in the closest fourth order*
96 *subbasin regardless of river watershed, as defined by the hydrologic unit boundaries of the National*
97 *Watershed Boundary Dataset, as the impacted site, or (ii) for the planning, construction, monitoring,*
98 *and preservation of wetland and stream mitigation projects that shall be developed in accordance with*
99 *guidelines, responsibilities, and standards established by the Department of Environmental Quality for*
100 *use, operation and maintenance consistent with federal regulation 33CFR Part 332, governing*
101 *compensatory mitigation for activities authorized by U.S Army Corps of Engineers permits. Any projects*
102 *sponsored by the Board shall comply with the provisions of subsection A of § 62.1-44.15:23.*
103 *Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued*
104 *by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the Director of the Department of Environmental*
105 *Quality. The Department may charge a reasonable fee to administer the Fund.*