

977801376

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 549

House Amendments in [] — January 31, 1997

Requesting the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to undertake and coordinate [a study of utilizing utilization of] certain programs to seek federal funds in support of efforts to protect riparian forest buffers, wetlands, and other voluntary conservation measures on agricultural land.

Patron—Murphy

Referred to Committee on Conservation and Natural Resources

WHEREAS, in the 1996 Farm Bill (Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act, P.L. 104-127), the United States Congress instructed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to expand efforts to target the Conservation Reserve Program to watersheds with significant agricultural pollution problems and to achieve this targeting by working closely with state and local governments; and

WHEREAS, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program allows the USDA to use the Conservation Reserve Program to directly support state and local governments that have already begun conservation projects addressing water quality and wildlife issues for resources of high local concern; and

WHEREAS, the Governor of Virginia and the regional partners on the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council have committed to reduce nutrient loadings to the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries from, among other sources, agricultural lands, in order to achieve a 40 percent loadings reduction of nitrogen and phosphorus by the year 2000, and have also committed to establish and protect 2,010 miles of riparian forest buffers by the year 2010; and

WHEREAS, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program permits the USDA to make Conservation Reserve Program payments directly to states where those payments will be dedicated to a specific conservation program that enhances the conservation benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's participation in the Conservation Reserve Program will provide farmers with an expanded and readily available set of tools to reduce nutrient loadings, including increased financial assistance programs and augmented technical resources; and

WHEREAS, participation in such programs can produce significant funding, as can be seen in Maryland where that state has applied to the USDA for support of the Maryland Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and may receive over \$197 million in federal funds, with a \$61 million match from the state, to restore and protect 100,000 acres of sensitive lands; and

WHEREAS, the 1996 Farm Bill establishes a number of new or enhanced programs providing for additional federal assistance to states for meeting conservation needs, such as the Environmental Conservation Acreage Reserve Program and the Fund for Rural America; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Conservation and Recreation, in consultation with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance Department, be requested to undertake and coordinate [a study of utilizing utilization of] certain programs to seek federal funds in support of efforts to protect riparian forest buffers, wetlands, and other voluntary conservation measures on agricultural land. The [study agencies] shall examine: (i) the establishment of a Virginia Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program; (ii) the development of a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Plan to be submitted to the USDA targeting buffer zones, sensitive lands, and riparian forest restoration to reduce loadings of nutrients to the Chesapeake Bay; and (iii) the means for utilizing additional federal assistance identified in the 1996 Farm Bill for conservation work on agricultural land.

The Director of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation shall report by November 15, 1997, to the chairmen of the House Committees on Appropriations and Agriculture, and the Senate Committees on Finance, Agriculture, and Conservation and Natural Resources, on any decision related to seeking [the these] federal funds [that are the subject of this study] .

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department of Conservation and Recreation [for this study] , upon request.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1998 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

ENGROSSED

HJ549E