

The Commonwealth of Virginia Draft Chesapeake Bay TMLD Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan has been released. In it are items that can potentially impact the equine industry.

Earlier this year, DCR organized an Equine Task Force Group as a subcommittee of the Agricultural BMP (Best Management Practices) Technical Advisory Committee. The group was charged with making recommendations as to how BMPs could be implemented on equine operations. There was interest implementing a pilot program which would offer financial incentives to equine operations for the implementation of BMPs. There is particular interest in including non-commercial horse operations in a pilot program. The subcommittee recommended a number of general specifications to consider developing when considering horse operations as part of a pilot. It was during this discussion the issue of stocking rates (carrying capacity) arose. It was the opinion of the subcommittee that stocking rates should apply in certain instances, in a case by case situation, but should not be a requirement for participation in the program. However, when the WIP III draft came out Section 7.2, item #25 stated that the workgroup had recommended a maximum stocking rate in order to qualify for financial assistance. A blanket stocking rate will serve as a barrier to program participation in the pilot program and thereby ensure non participation by the equine industry and erect a barrier to the implementation of BMPs on agricultural land.

Additionally, in Section 7.2, item #26 – Authority for local governments to set adequate land area requirements for horses. The equine industry opposes giving broad regulatory powers to localities through the zoning process. Especially regulations that are based on a generic stocking rate. All the factors that have to be taken into consideration when attempting to establish a generic stocking rate are next to impossible. Should a generic rate be implemented and no thought given by the localities as to the variables that comprise a stocking rate it could severely impact equine operations and ultimately the industry. Equine operations and activities in Virginia represent a \$2 billion industry. We want to see our industry continue to grow not restrict its growth.

Also included in Section 7.2, item 24 is the call for the exclusion of livestock from all perennial streams in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Fencing for stream exclusion can be a costly expenditure and without cost share incentives can be prohibitive for many equine operations. Plus, some operations use streams as their sole water sources so stream exclusion calls for the establishment of alternative water sources. In addition, there are equine operations who rent pasture land – restricting their ability to comply with such a mandate. The original mandate for fulfilment of this exclusion was 2025. The equine industry sees no reason for the date to be moved ahead of that deadline.

The Technical Advisory Committee will be meeting on July 9th at the Department of Forestry Building, 900 Natural Resource Drive, Charlottesville at 10:00 am. We urge members from the equine community to come out and make your voices heard on these important issues.

More information on the WIP III draft can be obtained by googling WIP III and downloading a copy of the entire draft document. Attached is an infographic prepared by the Virginia Agribusiness Council that outlines some of the additional items included in the WIP III and its potential impact on the agricultural industry.