

DEQ AWARDS \$82,000 TO THE ACCOMACK-NORTHAMPTON PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION; Funds will reduce septic tank pollution

NEWS RELEASE

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RICHMOND, Va. - The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has awarded the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission \$82,500 to address pollution from septic tanks on the Eastern Shore. The Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project is contributing an additional \$13,400 to the project.

This new initiative will help reduce pollution from septic fields in watersheds on the Bay side of Northampton County, between the towns of Eastville and Birdsnest, where levels of bacteria exceed state water quality standards. If not properly maintained, septic tanks can leak bacteria and nutrients into groundwater and leach into surrounding creeks and tributaries.

Water quality standards protect public health - swimming, fishing and drinking water - and also safeguard the production of edible and marketable seafood in the area. Each year, DEQ monitors rivers, lakes and tidal waters to check that pollutants do not exceed these standards.

"We are continually working with our local communities to identify best management practices that will reduce bacteria pollution in the area," said DEQ Director of the Tidewater Regional Office Craig Nicol. "Fixing and restoring septic tanks is an important step towards achieving clean water and protecting shellfish along the Eastern Shore."

Funding for the project was provided by DEQ through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Program. Through the Clean Water Act the EPA requires that states develop a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), or "pollution diet," to identify pollution sources and contaminant levels that need to be reduced. DEQ completed the TMDL study for this project area between 2007 and 2010, and identified excess amounts of fecal bacteria (mostly from humans, livestock and pets).

Target reductions are outlined in a Water Quality Implementation Plan for the Gulf, Barlow, Mattawoman, Jacobus and Hungars creeks, which also identifies best management practices that reduce bacteria pollution. The plan was approved by the EPA in 2015 and focused primarily on septic tank repairs, pet waste removal stations and agriculture practices. The project is expected to begin later this year with completion anticipated for the end of 2020.

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