LRNow's 2026 VA General Assembly Legislative Agenda

Plastics: Bags, Bottles, and Producer Responsibility

- Plastic Bag Ban - Virginia lawmakers have introduced bills (e.g. HB 1662 in 2025) to ban single-use carryout bags at grocery stores starting in 2027. This mirrors at least 12 states that have enacted plastic bag bans or fees.
- Bottle Bill (Container Deposit Law) - Deposit-return systems are proven to boost recycling and cut litter. In the 11 U.S. deposit states (e.g. Oregon, Michigan, Maine, Connecticut), recycling rates per capita are more than double those of non-deposit states. For example, studies show beverage containers make up 5% of the waste stream but 40–60% of roadside litter, and adding a 5–10¢ deposit dramatically increases returns.
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) - EPR policies require producers to finance recycling and waste management, shifting costs off taxpayers. As of late 2025, seven states (Maine, Oregon, Colorado, California, Minnesota, Maryland, Washington) have passed broad EPR laws for packaging. These laws typically target plastic, paper, glass, and other consumer packaging and set up producer-run recycling programs.

Menhaden

- Funding Menhaden Research - Atlantic menhaden are a keystone forage fish for Chesapeake Bay ecosystems (critical prey for striped bass, ospreys, etc.), yet in-Bay menhaden science is inadequate. The City of Virginia Beach has formally requested that the General Assembly fund studies on Bay menhaden and direct the Marine Resources Commission to adjust management. Virginia could appropriate funds (e.g. to VIMS or VMRC) to study menhaden life history and population trends in the Bay.
- Reducing Menhaden Harvests & Area Closures - Currently Virginia holds ~75% of the Atlantic menhaden quota (~350 million lbs coastwide), with most catch taken in or near the Bay. Legislation could direct VMRC to impose stricter quotas or seasonal limits on the reduction fishery. For example, the City's proposal includes measures like prohibiting industrial harvesting until adequate science is in place and implementing seasonal quota periods to spread effort. Additionally, Virginia could amend laws or regulations to restrict menhaden trawling in the Bay and require observers on Bay trips (both measures suggested by Virginia Beach).

Enhancing the Offshore Wind (OSW) Industry

- Workforce Development - As Virginia builds its offshore wind industry (5.2 GW by 2034 under the Virginia Clean Economy Act), investment in training local workers must be prioritized. A bill (e.g. 2025's HB 1616) could allocate state funds or grants for OSW education and apprenticeships. Maryland provides a model: its FY2025 Offshore Wind Workforce Training Program committed **$3 million** in grants to colleges and nonprofits to expand OSW training programs. Similarly, New Jersey projects ~20,000 new offshore wind jobs by 2030 and is creating a "Wind Institute" to train those workers. Virginia can emulate this by offering competitive grants or tax incentives to community colleges, unions, and training centers to launch OSW curricula (e.g., turbine tech, marine trades, electrical). Promoting such a bill will involve engaging industry and labor partners, and showcasing how other East Coast states are preparing their workforce.

Resilience Funding (RVRF, CFPF, SLAF, VCAP)

- Increasing Program Funding – Virginia's key flood mitigation, adaptation, and stormwater management funds must be strengthened. Key programs include the Resilient Virginia Revolving Fund (RVRF), the Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF), the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF), and the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP). These provide grants/loans for local flood mitigation, stormwater projects, and conservation landscaping. For example, the 2023 budget dedicated **$125 million** to RVRF (initially $25M from CFPF plus $100M general funds), but sustained funding is needed. LRNow's 2025 agenda specifically urges support for CFPF and restoring SLAF funding. (CFPF is the sole consistent state source for flood planning and projects.) To implement this, advocates can push for larger appropriations in the biennial budget and insist RGGI (if rejoined) resume its role funding CFPF and RVRF.

RGGI Re-Entry

- Rejoin the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) - LRNow supports Virginia re-entering RGGI, a multi-state cap-and-invest program for power plants. Virginia left RGGI in 2021, but state law (Va. Code §10.1-1330) originally directed auction proceeds to flood resiliency and efficiency programs. Legislative proposals in 2025 aimed to reverse that withdrawal. For example, a budget amendment would require immediate re-entry (re-publishing the RGGI regulation) and then auctioning emissions allowances, with proceeds split as originally intended. Another amendment allocates **$100 million** in FY2026 assuming re-entry proceeds. If Virginia rejoins, the auction revenues would resume funding programs like the CFPF (and housing/weatherization programs) according to law. This mirrors other RGGI states (Maryland, Connecticut, etc.) that use auction funds for clean energy and resilience.

Support DOF's General Fund Request

- Lynnhaven River NOW **strongly supports** DOF's request to sustain two community forestry positions and a modest vehicle allocation with **state General Funds**. These roles are **essential** to meeting Chesapeake Bay tree-planting and canopy goals, distributing **WQIF** efficiently, and delivering measurable benefits in **stormwater reduction, heat mitigation, air quality**, and **habitat restoration**. Stable funding keeps Virginia at the forefront of practical, science-based urban forestry that directly advances clean, healthy waterways.