

**TANGIER ISLAND  
REPORT OF THE  
VIRGINIA ADVISORY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
TO  
THE GOVERNOR  
AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



**SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 26**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PURCHASES AND SUPPLY  
RICHMOND**

**1978**



**MEMBERS OF THE**  
**VIRGINIA ADVISORY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

EDWARD E. LANE, CHAIRMAN  
LAWRENCE DOUGLAS WILDER, VICE-CHAIRMAN  
GEORGE E. ALLEN, JR.  
PETER K. BABALAS  
VINCENT F. CALLAHAN, JR.  
JOSEPH V. GARTLAN, JR.  
JERRY H. GEISLER  
ROBERT R. GWATHMEY, III  
C. HARDAWAY MARKS  
LEWIS A. MCMURRAN, JR.  
WILLARD J. MOODY  
JAMES M. THOMSON  
J. WARREN WHITE  
EDWARD E. WILLEY

**STAFF**

JOHN A. BANKS, JR., DIRECTOR  
COURTNEY R. FRAZIER, STAFF ATTORNEY

**Tangier Island**

**Report of the**

**Virginia Advisory Legislative Council**

**To**

**The Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia**

**Richmond, Virginia**

**December, 1977**

To: Honorable Mills E. Godwin, Jr., Governor of Virginia

and

The General Assembly of Virginia

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

This Council was directed by Senate Joint Resolution No. 90 to make a study of the problems facing the populace of Tangier Island and recommend any possible solutions to these problems. A copy of the above resolution is set out as follows:

**SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 90**

Requesting the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council to study certain matters relating to Tangier Island.

WHEREAS, recognizing the uniqueness of Tangier Island in the Chesapeake Bay which has been occupied since sixteen hundred sixty-eight and the threat of destruction due to an erosion rate of approximately twenty feet per year; and

WHEREAS, further recognizing that the urgency of improving the present sewerage disposal and solid waste management systems; electrical utilities systems and drinking water supply will require the expenditure of large sums of money which the inhabitants of the Island cannot presently afford; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate of Virginia, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council is requested to study the social, economic and environmental needs of Tangier Island, giving consideration to the Island's historic importance, isolation, the peculiarities of its soil and limited land area, the dynamics of the water surrounding the Island upon the stability of the Island, the significance of the Island and activities thereon to the Chesapeake Bay estuary.

The Council shall further consider the need for special exemptions to certain State environmental rules and regulations affecting the Island and for the Commonwealth to request special exemptions to federal environmental, water, sewerage, and other control rules and regulations insofar as they are detrimental to the livelihood of the residents of this unique Island.

The Council is further requested to appoint a member of the Board of Supervisors of Accomack County and the Mayor of Tangier Island to serve on the committee which will conduct this study.

Such study should be completed by the Council and its report submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly by October one, nineteen hundred seventy-eight.

The Council appointed Senator Edward E. Willey, of Richmond, to act as Chairman of the Committee, Senator Willey appointed the following persons to serve on the Committee: Senator William E. Fears of Onancock, Senator Joseph T. Fitzpatrick of Norfolk; Delegate Robert B. Ball, Jr., of Henrico County; Delegate S. Cleaves Manning of Portsmouth; Delegate George N. McMath of Accomac; Delegate Owen B. Pickett of Virginia Beach; Mr. Robert S. Bloxom of Mappedville; Commissioner James E. Douglas, Jr., of Newport News; Mr. J. S. Kirkpatrick of Parksley; Mr. Warren F. Nock, Sr., of Parksley; Mr. William A. Pruitt of Warsaw; Honorable Robert J. Thorne, Mayor of Tangier Island; and Millard B. Rice, of Phenix.

The Committee visited Tangier Island to observe the problems which face its citizens on a first-hand basis. It was briefed by the Honorable Earl J. Shifflet, Secretary of Commerce and Resources, with reference to the work of two task forces dealing with the problems of Tangier Island. The Committee was further briefed by the various members of the two task forces with reference to their respective areas of expertise. The Committee had the benefit of the reports prepared by the task forces.

The Committee wishes to express its appreciation to Secretary Shifflet and the various members of the task forces for their assistance to the Committee in its' deliberations.

## II. FINDINGS.

### A. Tangier Island is a unique, historical area.

Tangier Island, in Accomack County, is the southernmost of a series of Chesapeake Bay from Tangier and Pocomake Sounds. The Island is approximately three miles long and one mile long. It has three principal ridges on which all of the inhabitants live. These are the West Ridge, the Main Ridge, and the Canton Ridge. There are one thousand inhabitants of Tangier Island.

Tangier Island was discovered on June 4, 1608, by Captain John Smith and a party of ten men while exploring the Chesapeake Bay. In 1686, Mr. John Crockett purchased a part of Tangier Island and brought his wife and one child to establish the first permanent white settlement on the Island. The Island has been inhabited by the descedents of John Crockett to the present.

For centuries, Tangiermen have fished, crabbed and oystered in the Chesapeake Bay. This remains today the main source of income for the Island.

During each war of this century, Tangiermen have fought and died for this country. In World War II, Tangier Island had a greater number of men and women per capita in the Armed Forces than any other town in this Commonwealth and possibly the nation. One hundred thirty-three men and women served from a population of nine hundred men, women and children.

B. The western shore of Tangier Island has an erosion rate of approximately twenty feet per year and, at that rate, forty per centum of the West Ridge now inhabited will be eroded away within thirty years.

The magnitude of the erosion on the western side of Tangier indicates the severity of the problems. From the years 1850 to 1942, the average rate of erosion was about 18 feet per year. Between the years 1942 and 1967, the average rate was about 20 feet per year. Since 1967, the rate of erosion has been about 25 feet per year.

The area experiencing the most severe erosion is the southern half of the island. This makes the homes at the southern end of the "West Ridge", which are presently about three hundred feet from the shoreline, vulnerable to destruction within a decade. The area affected by this erosion is approximately 8,200 feet long.

While the Committee does not have the expertise to determine the best method of preventing this shoreline erosion and saving Tangier from destruction, it recognizes the fact that, without some means of controlling the shoreline erosion, it will not be necessary to address the problems which are discussed in the remainder of this report.

C. Tangier Island faces complex problems with reference to water supply, waste water and solid waste disposal.

The citizens of Tangier Island are currently faced with an unacceptable sanitary waste treatment. The present mode of sewage treatment is

dangerously close to failing to meet State and federal standards for water quality. It is more than apparent that additional or alternative treatment methods are imperative.

The Island presently faces a severe problem of collecting and disposing of solid waste. Solid waste is presently being disposed of in an open dump. Presently, it is estimated that 900 tons of solid waste are being produced each year. The island has very little high ground and that ground is in use presently. Under these conditions, the island needs a complete system for the storage, collection and disposal of solid wastes.

At present, the Island is served by seven separate water systems which consist of artisan wells in depths from 8900 to 1,000 feet. While there have been no complaints with reference to these systems, they do not meet present construction requirements of Virginia's Waterworks regulations. The supply of pure water may be affected by the other problems discussed in this report. The seven different systems present a problem of fire protection at low tide as the Island has no water storage capability.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS.**

A. That the General Assembly memorialize Congress to appropriate the necessary funds to construct a seawall to prevent the erosion of the western shoreline.

The Committee, with the assistance of the Secretary's task force, determined that the island had many immediate needs. The most pressing need, however, is the construction of a seawall to prevent the erosion of the Island into the Chesapeake Bay. If this erosion is not prevented, the other problems will not need to be addressed. Since the Commonwealth will have to expend its limited resources on the other problems and the federal government has indicated its policy to preserve the coastal zone plains, every effort should be made to secure the funds necessary to construct the seawall.

B. That the General Assembly designate Tangier Island a unique, historic area. Due to Tangier's place in Virginia history and the uniqueness of the island as it has been inhabited for over three hundred years by many of the same families who have kept alive the tradition of making a livelihood from the Chesapeake Bay, the General Assembly should designate the area as a unique, historic area.

Resolution to accomplish the above purpose is attached to this Report.

### **IV. CONCLUSION.**

An emergency situation exists on Tangier Island which must be remedied immediately. The erosion of the Island is so severe that it will wash into the Chesapeake bay within the very near future.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward E. Lane, Chairman

Lawrence Douglas Wilder, Vice Chairman

George E. Allen, Jr.

Peter K. Babalas

Vincent F. Callahan Jr.

Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr.

Jerry H. Geisler

Robert R. Gwathmey, III

C. Hardaway Marks

Lewis A. McMurrin, Jr.

Willard J. Moody

James M. Thomson

J. Warren White

Edward E. Willey



## APPENDIX I

### SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Memorializing Congress to appropriate funds for the building of a seawall at Tangier Island.

WHEREAS, the General Assembly of Virginia has designated Tangier Island a historic, unique area because of its place in Virginia history and its contribution to the Commonwealth and the Nation in time of war; and

WHEREAS, Tangier Island is in danger of eroding into the Chesapeake Bay as the rate of erosion is presently twenty-five feet per year; and

WHEREAS, the Island faces many other problems as waste water treatment, solid waste disposal, water supply problems, and other problems which the Commonwealth must address and which will require the Commonwealth to appropriate sums from its limited revenues; and

WHEREAS, the Congress has indicated its purpose to preserve coastal zone areas from destruction; now, therefore, be it,

RESOLVED by the Senate of Virginia, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Congress of the United States is hereby memorialized to appropriate sufficient funds to construct a seawall to protect the western shore of Tangier Island from further erosion.

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate of Virginia is directed to send a copy of this Resolution to the President of the Senate of the United States, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States, and each member of the delegation from Virginia to the Congress of the United States in order that they may be apprised of the sense of this body.

## APPENDIX II

### SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO.

Designating Tangier Island as a unique, historic area.

WHEREAS, on June 4, 1608, Captain John Smith and a party of ten men discovered Tangier Island while exploring the Chesapeake Bay; and

WHEREAS, in 1686, Mr. John Crockett purchased a part of Tangier Island and brought his wife and one child to establish the first white permanent settlement on the Island; and

WHEREAS, the Island has been inhabited by the descendants of John Crockett to the present; and

WHEREAS, Tangiermen have played a part of this Nation's history, fighting and dying in World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict and the Vietnam Conflict; and

WHEREAS, during World War II, Tangier Island had a greater number of men and women per capita in the Armed Forces of the United States than any other town in this Commonwealth, possibly this Nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate of Virginia, the House of Delegates concurring, That, in recognition of its historic significance and its contribution to this Commonwealth and to this Nation, Tangier Island is hereby designated by the General Assembly of Virginia as a unique, historic area.

