



Council of Virginia Archaeologists

September 9, 2019

US Army Corps of Engineers
Norfolk District
9100 Arboretum Parkway
Suite 235
Richmond, VA 23236

Dear Steven VanderPloeg,

On behalf of the Council of Virginia Archaeologists (COVA), I am writing to respectfully submit initial comments on the James River Water Authority (JRWA) project requiring a federal permit and thereby triggering Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

COVA is the Commonwealth's professional archaeology organization dedicated to the preservation and study of Virginia's archaeological resources. Since 1975, our mission has been to: 1) promote the preservation and study of Virginia's prehistoric and historic archaeological resources; 2) foster public awareness, knowledge, and support for the preservation of Virginia's archaeological resources; 3) facilitate interaction between the communities of professional and avocational archaeologists; and 4) act as an independent professional advisory group for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Under this mission, COVA requested consulting party status for the JRWA project in July 2019.

We would like to submit for review the following comments.

- 1) We would like to express great concern from Virginia's professional archaeological community over the proposed JRWA project and its impact to sites of immense significance. These sites, which are part of the sprawling Village of Rassawek, the pre-Colonial Monacan political capital, are exceedingly important due to their exceptional level of preservation, high potential for the presence of burials, and the fact that they are included in the earliest European documentation of the region. We support the Monacan Nation and recognize how valued these places are for the tribe whose ancestral community was centered on this powerful chiefly village. These sites should be avoided at all cost. It is clear that the Adverse Effects of the Pumping Station project go far beyond minimal impacts and, therefore, the project should be processed as an individual permit instead of a nationwide permit. All possible alternatives must be evaluated publicly. We strongly urge the Corps to make this change.

- 2) Should the permit be issued and the project allowed to proceed, we advocate for additional oversight and guidance with regard to data recovery efforts. We know that the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation has suggested that in complex cases special oversight by “peer review” can be an appropriate strategy for moving forward with a project such as this one. We recommend that the treatment plan be revised/redeveloped and that research strategies be overseen by a panel composed of professional archaeologists with expertise in the region and representatives from the Monacan Nation. The panel must have the authority to guide methodology as the project progresses. This is essentially how the Werowocomoco project was developed with the Werowocomoco Research Group (professional Anthropologists) working closely with and guided by an all Native Advisory Board. Modern archaeological methods (and ethically sound research) recognize the valuable role that descendant communities play in planning, undertaking, and interpreting field research projects and we believe that the Monacan must be involved in this project at every stage.

- 3) We believe that the Treatment Plan currently underestimates the complexity of data recovery on deeply stratified floodplain sites. Our understanding is that these sites have the high potential to be incredibly methodologically difficult to properly mitigate, given their depth, complex stratigraphy, and close proximity to the edge of the river and the water table. An archaeological project like this will require an extended timeframe for completion and an appropriate budget to ensure that the sites are properly mitigated. If pushed forward, this project will require that archaeologists work closely with engineers to build, service, and maintain dewatering systems. Stepbacks, trenching, and shoring will have to be planned well in advance in order to protect the archaeologists and allow for the excavation of sensitive archaeological deposits including will add considerably to project costs. If conducting a data recovery becomes absolutely necessary, the work will require experience excavating sites of similar depth and stratigraphic complexity, experience working closely with construction engineers to maintain conditions of site safety, and experience with tribes during complicated and controversial projects.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to comment on this important project.

Sincerely,

The Executive Board of the Council of Virginia Archaeologists