

Letter to Virginia Marine Resources Commissioner Pruitt, concerning hydraulic dredge scars in Virginia coastal bay SAV beds:

November 27, 2000

Mr. William Pruitt
Commissioner
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Newport News, VA 23601

Dear Commissioner Pruitt:

As you are aware, VIMS scientists use aerial photography to monitor the distribution and abundance of SAV in Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries and the Delmarva Coastal Bays on an annual basis. The photographs taken by this survey, in particular, were instrumental in highlighting the impacts of clam dredging on SAV beds in both Virginia and Maryland. VMRC responded to the damage by passing the regulation that prohibits clam and crab dredging in the SAV beds in the Virginia portion of the coastal bays, including a buffer zone of 200 m adjacent to the SAV beds. The sanctuary was immediately effective as only thirteen scars were noted in 1998 and nine in 1999. The nine did represent a clear violation of the regulation but were certainly significantly less than the 218 scars noted in 1997.

We have acquired the photography for 2000 and will be making our assessment to VMRC in mid-winter on whether violations of the regulation by watermen in Virginia are continuing. However, the photography reveals damage to the SAV beds in the Virginia portion of Chincoteague Bay that we must bring to your attention. The photograph reproduced in part as [Figure 1](#) reveals a scarring pattern within the northern section of the large bed north of Coards Marshes that is linear rather than circular as seen in the adjoining area. This linear pattern matches the scarring pattern caused by the hydraulic dredging of clams in SAV beds in Maryland waters, which are also now protected by legislation. This new scarring is alarming for two reasons: 1. Hydraulic dredges for clamming are not permitted in Virginia waters, and 2. The scarring is well within the sanctuary established by your agency.

Given this clear violation of Virginia's regulation, we would be happy to work with you to provide any information necessary for your enforcement branch to deal with this issue. We have documented widespread damage by hydraulic dredges in Maryland. This new illegal activity could seriously impact the very SAV beds that you have worked so hard to protect. Since the SAV beds do not respect state borders, perhaps the best results can be achieved through coordination with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Sec. Taylor Rogers.

Again, please do not hesitate to call me if you need any additional information. We look forward to hearing if VMRC and MD officials are able to cooperate to solve this issue on a baywide basis.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Orth, Ph.D.
Professor

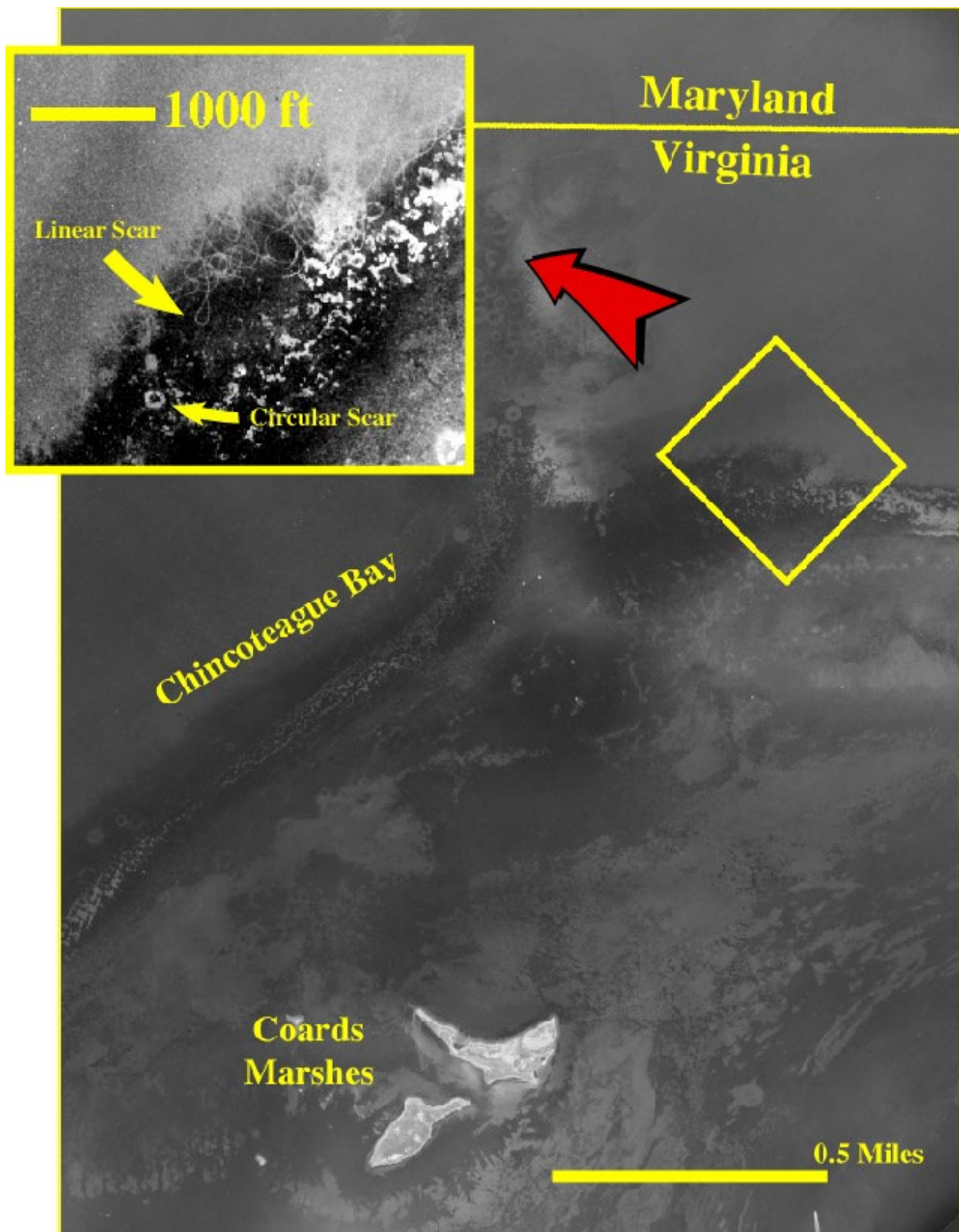


Figure 1. Linear scars caused by hydraulic dredging in Chincoteague Bay, Virginia