

**Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Thursday, April 21, 2022, 10:00 a.m.
Department of Forestry, Charlottesville, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 21, 2022 at the Virginia Department of Forestry in Charlottesville, Virginia.

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Adam D. Wilson, Vice-Chair

Charles Newton

Jay C. Ford

Dr. Stephen R. Hill

Anna Killius

Kat Maybury

Matthew S. Wells, DCR, Ex Officio

Dr. Edwin M. Martinez, NRCS, Ex Officio

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Charles A. Arnason, Chair

Dr. Dahlia O'Brien

Pamela Mason

Daniel Goerlich, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Invitee

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Darryl Glover, Deputy Director for Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety and Floodplain Management

Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager

Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy

Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison

Blair Gordon, SWCD Liaison

James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation

Amy Walker, Eastern Area Manager

Dan Ingersoll, Office of the Attorney General

OTHERS PRESENT

Suzanne Brown, Loudoun, SWCD

Sharon Connor, Hanover Caroline SWCD

Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission

Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau

Amy Moyer, Thomas Jefferson SWCD

Beck Stanley, Virginia Agribusiness Council

Dr. Kendall Tyree, VASWCD

Greg Wichelns, Culpeper SWCD

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With six (6) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Wilson called the meeting to order at 10:03 and asked for introductions.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 23, 2022

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Newton moved that the minutes of the March 23, 2022 meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board be approved as submitted by staff. Ms. Killius seconded and the motion carried.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT – *Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director*

Director Wells noted that he had been in the position for a little over a month. He advised that his report would mainly deal with legislation.

The General Assembly Session ended on March 11, 2022. The Veto Session is scheduled for April 27, 2022.

Director Wells advised that none of the bills mentioned below had been signed by the Governor.

Bills with direct impact on the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board

SB508 (Lewis)

As passed by the House and Senate, this bill shifted the oversight and decision making authority for the Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund from the Department to the Board.

The Governor amended the bill to state that the Department would maintain the responsibility for the Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund, but that two new non-legislative members would be added to the board as follows:

- Both new members must be from flood-prone communities.
- The Speaker of the House appoints one new member from the community outside the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- The Senate Rules Committee appoints one new member from the community in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

HB1309 (Bulova) and SP756 (Lewis)

As passed by the House and Senate, this bill(s) establishes the Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund.

- Monies in the Fund are used primarily to make loans and grants to local governments to finance or refinance the cost of any project.
- Project means: (i) home upgrades or home buyouts related to mitigation projects or resilience projects; (ii) gap funding related to home buyouts in floodplain hazard areas or during projects undertaken to increase the efficiency of floodplains; (iii) assistance to low-income or moderate-income homeowners to help lower flood risk; (iv) loans and grants to persons for hazard mitigation and infrastructure improvement projects; and (v) projects included in the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan or the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan.

The Governor made the following amendments:

- Shifts the responsibility for the administration of the Fund from the Board to the Department.
- Department would be responsible for directing the distribution of loans and grants from the Fund to particular local governments, following consultation with the Virginia Resources Authority.

Bills of interest to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board – approved by the Governor on April 11, 2022

HB516 (Bulova) and SB551 (Marsden)

- Codifies requirements under Executive Order 24 (2018).
- Requires additional actions by the Department related to statewide flooding and resilience efforts; Department must:
 - Develop a statewide Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan no later than December 31, 2026;
 - Update the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan by December 31, 2024;
 - Develop an outreach and engagement plan for updates to the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan and for development and updates to the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan no later than December 31, 2022;
 - Must be developed jointly with the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and in coordination with the Chief Resilience Officer and the Special Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Adaptation and Protection.

- Implement both the Flood Protection Master Plan and the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan; and
- Ensure both plans are integrated and updated at least once every 5 years.
- Formally establishes the Virginia Coastal Resilience Technical Advisory Committee to assist with the development, updating, and implementation of the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan.

HB206 (Webert)

- Strives to address concerns about the impacts of small energy projects (solar farms) on prime agricultural land and forest lands
- If proposed project would disturb more than 10 acres of prime agricultural soils or 50 acres of contiguous forest lands or if it would disturb forest lands enrolled in certain programs for forestry perseveration, a significant adverse impact is assumed.
- Prime agricultural soils means soils recognized by USDA as “prime farmland”
- DEQ must convene an advisory panel to assist in developing regulations to further develop criteria for determining significant adverse impact on natural resources and guidelines for plans to mitigate such adverse impacts.

Director Wells gave an update regarding the General Assembly and the Budget.

The Special Session began on April 4 to discuss the budget. As of the date of this meeting there was no agreement on the budget. The conferees are still working toward agreement.

If there is no signed budget, the May 18 Board meeting will need to be canceled. Mr. Fletcher will poll Board members regarding a June meeting date.

Director Wells advised that meeting the Chesapeake Bay goal is of paramount importance to this Administration. He noted that the Administration is very aware of the role the Board plays in attaining those goals.

DAM SAFETY AND FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT

Division Report – Darryl Glover, Deputy Director for Soil and Water Conservation and Dam Safety and Floodplain Management

Mr. Glover noted that Ms. Howard Cooper was unable to attend the meeting.

Last month, we made the Board aware of a possible dam failure in Fluvanna County that was occurring during the meeting. Since that time, the emergency has been addressed. The dam has been breached and the water level lowered. The cost estimate of these actions will be provided at a future date.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

Division Report – James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation.

Mr. Martin gave the update for the Division of Soil and Water Conservation. He noted that a through report was given at the March meeting.

Mr. Martin noted that he was able to attend all six area meetings, virtually or in person. He advised the all of the areas of the actions taken by the Board at the March meeting with actions concerning signatures and actions regarding audits. The point of information the areas was to convey the importance that all of the District's financial processes are in order.

Mr. Martin advised that he also encouraged Districts to begin looking at staff recruitment and staffing needs to make sure that they are able to meet demands from anticipated increased budgets.

Regarding the tillage survey, the agreements with Districts have now been executed. There were five districts that opted not to participate in the tillage survey. Data collection in these Districts will be completed by VCU graduate students in a process similar to the cover crop survey process that was utilized last month.

Staff has been working diligently to provide the allocation information that the Board will review. He noted that more resources can solve problems but also bring other challenges.

Approval of the Board's Fiscal Year 2023 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) BMP Manual – Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that most of this information was previously presented to the Board. However, there were additional revisions:

New practice (SL-6F) was inadvertently left off of two tables in the Manual:

- i. Page 21: added practice to the list of practices that have components that require digitization
- ii. Page 43: added SL-6F to the list of practices that are authorizes for a two-year program completion date

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that as previously mentioned, the Department is working to expand the WFA project. One of the Districts that has been offered this opportunity requested that NM-6 (Manure Injection) be added to the WFA-NM. There is no objection to including this practice and the Department recommends including it. The WFA has been utilized in primarily

agronomic areas of the state and this may be a way to encourage its use by producers with animal operations.

Regarding cover crop prices, correspondence received by the agency was provided to Board members. That correspondence included:

- A letter from Hanover-Caroline SWCD
- Emails from Pam Mason, Three Rivers SWCD, and Northern Neck SWCD

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that both Three Rivers and Northern Neck provided estimated increased costs in their District areas.

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Board had several options to consider:

- Follow the timeline set out in the motion that was provided earlier (work through the TAC and provide recommendation in September);
- Allow the Department to gain additional information and provide a recommendation at the May/June meeting; or
- Adopt a revised payment rate today.

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that the Board did need to adopt the Manual at this meeting. She advised that the Board could adopt the Manual with the caveat that the payment rate for cover crops be adjusted if the Board would prefer to gather additional information before adjusting the payment rate. She noted that for many practices, especially structural practices, District costs lists should take inflation into account when determining the upcoming year's costs lists; Districts are allowed to amend their costs lists during a fiscal year currently.

Dr. Hill commented that it was important to be as flexible as possible with the pricing.

Ms. Watlington Jones recommended that the Board allow the Department to request additional information from the Districts and other partners on the anticipated costs of cover crop prices and provide a recommendation to the Board at the next meeting. Additionally, the Board could make a recommendation to the AgBMP Technical Advisory Committee to examine the feasibility of utilizing a regional payment rate structure for cover crops.

Mr. Ford asked, if a rate was adopted in May, when it could be revisited.

Mr. Glover advised that he would not recommend changing payment rates during the program year; it would be more beneficial to revise the payment rates before the program year began..

BOARD ACTION

After considerable discussion, Dr. Hill moved the following revised motion:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approves the 2023 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share BMP Manual as presented and the revisions recommended at the April 21, 2022 meeting. The Department is authorized to make nonsubstantive changes to include formatting and stylistic changes as necessary to all approved sections of the Manual.

Further, the Board directs the Department, ~~in conjunction with the Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-share Program Technical Advisory Committee Cover Crop and Nutrient Management Subcommittee~~, to develop a recommendation for an increase in the payment rates associated with the cover crop practices included in the 2023 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share BMP Manual. The recommendation will be presented to the Board for approval at ~~their September, 2022~~ either the May or June Board meeting (whenever the last Spring meeting occurs).

Additionally, the Board directs the Department to request the Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-share Program Technical Advisory Committee Cover Crop and Nutrient Management Subcommittee examine and discuss whether a range of cost-share payment rates would be more appropriate than a flat payment rate for the cover crop practices.

Additionally, the Board directs the Department to examine the participant caps and to determine if an increase is warranted. The Department shall research whether a formula that considers the amount of acreage one producer manages should be considered as a component of the cap. The Department shall solicit written comments from stakeholders, including members of the Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-share Program Technical Advisory Committee Programmatic Subcommittee. The recommendation shall be presented to the Board at either the May or June Board meeting (whenever the last Spring meeting occurs).

Ms. Maybury seconded and the motion carried.

Review of Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Administration and Operations Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2023 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that there were very few recommended changes from the previous fiscal year. The dates have been changed. She noted that the numbers were not final because the budget had not yet been adopted. She provided three options for consideration:

Option # 1

- Reflects the information provided on budget template submitted by Districts in July
- Fully funds all needs shown for Districts that maintain dams
- Fully funds Districts that indicated increased needs on budget template
- For districts indicating decreased needs, the needs were multiplied by 114%

- The 114% was just math; it was the percentage that achieved the total allocation amount of \$9,809,091

Option #2

- Similar to Option #1 in many ways
- Fully funds all needs shown for Districts that maintain dams
- Fully funds Districts that indicated increased needs on budget template
- For districts indicating decreased needs, held funding constant with FY2022 levels
 - In order to hold those Districts' funding levels constant, Districts with the largest increases in funding had their funding amounts reduced

Option #3

- Reflects the information provided on budget template submitted by Districts in July
- Fully funds all needs shown for Districts that maintain dams
- Fully funds Districts that indicated increased needs on budget template
- Districts highlighted in yellow indicated issues with their submittals; have tried to correct their information to more accurately reflect needs.
- Held District funding at least constant with FY2022 levels
 - In order to hold those Districts' funding levels constant, Districts with the largest increases in funding had their funding amounts reduced
-

Mr. Wilson noted that no actions would be taken at this meeting. He advised members to communicate questions and concerns to DCR staff.

Review of Administration and Operations Support Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2023 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Grant Agreement would be revised when the budget numbers were final.

Additional changes included:

- Changes of dates from FY2022- FY2023 and reporting due dates
- Requirement to complete a budget template and submit as part of end-of-year reports (Grant deliverable #9)
 - This follows the every-other-year submittal process established several years ago
- Grant deliverable #3 – more accurately reflects language earlier in the grant agreement

- Grant deliverable #6 – requires a mid-year review of annual plan of work to ensure progress is made on plan of work
- Grant deliverable #7 – clarifies what needs to be submitted to the CDCs to meet deliverable requirements (adds the long-term 4-year plan to the list of documents that must be submitted)
- Grant deliverable #12 – clarification on training requirements (no anticipated requirements, just clarifies the naming of the trainings)
- Grant deliverable #13 – adds district personnel policy to the list of policies that must be annually reviewed and provided to the CDCs, as well as position descriptions. Requires pay actions to be documented.
- Grant deliverable #14 – clarifications related to director orientation
- Grant deliverables #15-16 – requires certificate of completion be provided to CDCs for completed FOIA and records retention trainings
- Grant deliverables #18-19 – Outreach deliverables
 - The survey conducted by Virginia State University (Small Farm Outreach Program) showed that only 15% of producers of color had heard about VACS.
 - Have heard from a District with recommended edits:
 - Added a new #4 and recommended striking #18 completely

#17. The District hosted at least one agricultural community outreach event during the year that met the following:

1. The outreach event was marketed through at least three venues such as a radio spot, local news print media, local news broadcast media, social media, flyers, District or partner newsletters, flyers at local farm stores or local cooperatives, or mailers. One of the three marketing venues used must be directed towards producers with small farms or producers considered socially disadvantaged.
2. The outreach event included an introduction to the District for the community. The introduction should include the history of the District, mission statement, Directors, staff, program offered (including agricultural programs, educational programs, and urban programs if offered).
3. The outreach event included a discussion featuring local agricultural producers who have utilized the VACS Program to install BMPs on their operations.
4. The District notified all partners including the Virginia State University – Small Farm Outreach Program (Program) of the event and a representative from each organization was invited to participate on the agenda.

#18. The District notified the Virginia State University – Small Farm Outreach Program (Program) of every outreach event conducted by the District focusing on agricultural producers. At least two weeks prior to an outreach event, both the Program’s state representative and the regional representative, if known, were notified by email; the state representative (Frederick Custis) should be emailed at fcustis@vsu.edu. A Program representative was invited to participate on the agenda for the event if they chose to do so.

Mr. Wilson noted that no action was needed on this item. The Board will take action at the next meeting.

At this time the Board recessed for lunch.

Following lunch, the agenda resumed.

Review of Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2023 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the language and tables will be updated when the budget is final. She also noted that the dates and reporting due dates were changed.

In addition:

- The total allocation for FY2023 is \$123,000,000; however, the Department is holding \$6,705,415 in cost-share funding (and the associated technical assistance funds) in reserve for the Districts that are participating in the Whole Farm Approach during FY2023.
- The Department recommends that no District receive more than \$9,000,000 in cost-share funds for FY2023.
- There is an additional \$1,000,000 available in cost-share funding to split between Eastern Shore and Northern Neck. These are federal grant funds but will be treated in all aspects as VACS funds. These funds will be added to the Districts' allocations; additional technical assistance funding is also provided.
- Based on preliminary budget information, it is anticipated that there will be between \$107,000,000 and \$133,500,000 available for FY2024.
- The Department anticipates approximately \$8.5 million being received in recordation revenue. However, the Department is not recommending the allocation of all of those funds at this time. The Department does recommend allocating \$1 million of these available funds for BMP verification; it is anticipated that this amount will ensure verification activities are funded through FY2025. Additionally, the Department recommends utilizing \$2 million of these funds for the poultry litter transport program; it is anticipated this will meet the demand for the biennium.

Review of Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2023 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that, as with previous items, this would be updated when the budget is final. The dates have been revised accordingly.

There were very few substantial changes.

- Includes language clarifying the process to relinquish funds back to the Department.
- Includes language requiring all VACS contract parts to be fully completed and signed.
- Both of these items will be included in the policy as well.

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that there were clarifications, but no substantive changes to the deliverables.

Review of Desktop Procedures for District Fiscal Operations – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the suggested changes to the Desktop Procedures had been provided to Districts for comments.

The updates to this version came from a collection of suggestions and edits identified through the audit process, Districts' annual review of the handbook, and Department staff reviews. The changes this year are largely organizational, attempting to put the information in a more logical order, and include some minor formatting changes and updates to all of the website links. Additionally, the following edits and additions have been made:

- Pg 3, **FOIA** – Added language to match the Code of Virginia that clarifies all elected, re-elected, appointed and re-appointed directors should receive a copy of the current FOIA law within two weeks following their election, re-election, appointment or reappointment. Also inserted the word “biennial” to more accurately reflect the required training for elected directors.
- Pg 3, **COIA** – Added language to match the Code of Virginia that clarifies all elected, re-elected, appointed and reappointed directors should receive a copy of the current COIA law within two weeks following their election, re-election, appointment or reappointment. Additionally, language was updated to reflect that the required online or in-person training must be provided by the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council.
- Pg 4, **Records Retention** – Added a section about records retention and provided link to the Library of Virginia Records Retention Schedules and includes language about the required records retention officer.
- Pg. 9, **Records Management** – Added reference to the Record Retention Officer.
- Pg 10, **Insured Accounts** – Updated language to reflect the change from Insured Cash Sweep program to the IntraFi Network Deposits program.

- Pg 18, **Online Bill Paying** – Add language stating that if online bill paying is to be used, it is preferred that the online payment be made with the district credit card.
- Pg 19, **VACS Payments** – Add language that before a VACS payment is made to a participant, all required documents have been received by the SWCD (i.e. receipts, invoices, nutrient management plans, etc.) and that the Part II of the contract has been signed by all required parties.
- Pg 20, **IRS 1099 Forms** – Added language to reflect the 1099-NEC and to remind SWCDs that the 1099-NEC may have an earlier filing date than other forms.
- Pg 20, **Sale and Use Tax Exemption for SWCD Purchases** – Corrected language to reflect that the Form ST-12 is filed with the vendor/dealer, not the Va. Department of Taxation.
- Pg 21, **District Credit Cards** – Add language that district staff with check signing ability can reconcile the credit card bill before payment. However, language was also added that if staff is completing the reconciliation, the Treasurer or Director with check signing authority must also complete a reconciliation to ensure all expenditures are appropriate. This reconciliation can be done before or after the payment is made. If completed after payment, it should be completed within 30 days of the payment.
- Pg 24, **Travel** – Added language requiring all employees and directors to submit travel reimbursement documentation to the SWCD office no later than 60 days after incurring the expense.
- Pg 25, **Fixed Assets Inventory** – Changed the language to suggest that items valued great than \$100 should be inventoried. Added language to remind districts that an assets inventory list is helpful for obtaining insurance policies for loss, theft, or damage to the assets and that property insurance is not provided by the Commonwealth.
- Pg 29, **DCR Attachment D – Budget Template Exercise** – Added a new informational section about the Attachment D process and a reminder that the submitted Attachment D must be Board approved.
- Pg 34, **Personnel Management** – Added introductory paragraph that links to the VASWCD Personnel Management Handbook.
- Pg 34, **Hiring a New Employee** – Added reminder that the FLSA exempt or non-exempt status should be included in the job offer letter.
- Pg 35, **FLSA Exempt/Non-exempt** – Updated language to reflect that employees are compensated for over-time hours worked based on their assigned primary duties, not their employee agreement.
- Pg 35, **Payroll and Taxes** – Included language that a paystub documenting pay and deduction must be given to the employee.
- Pg 54-60 – Added Sample Telework Policy, Sample Telework Agreement, and Sample Telework Log
- Pg 62 – Updated FLSA Questionnaire

Review of revised Small Herd Initiative Program – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Board adopted the Small Herd Initiative at the May 2021 meeting. The program is currently only available in seven districts.

She noted that, based on current budget discussions, either \$7 million or \$8 million will be available

- *Of the \$7.0 million provided, \$6,090,000 shall be for practice implementation funding and \$910,000 will be held for the associated technical assistance funding at a rate of 13%*
OR
- *Of the \$8.0 million provided, \$6,960,000 shall be for practice implementation funding and \$1,040,000 will be held for the associated technical assistance funding at a rate of 13%.*

These revisions:

- Would expand the program statewide;
- Increase the number of bovines allowed from 20-35 to 20-49;
- Increases the cap from \$25,000 - \$35,000;
- Does not impact VACS participant caps, but practice can't be piggybacked with other funding sources; and
- Will be included as part of the Manual, rather than establishing 47 different MOUs for Districts.

Review of Soil Health Pilot Specification – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that this practice was developed in cooperation with the Soil Health Coalition and incorporates initiatives from partners (Virginia Cooperative Extension and Natural Resources Conservation Services). As developed, the implementation of this practice will be a venture between the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Virginia Soil Health Coalition.

This pilot practice is anticipated to be implemented in two Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts). Each District will be able to utilize up to \$500,000 of FY2023 Virginia Agricultural Best Management Cost-Share (VACS) Program funds to incentivize the implementation of the practice.

This practice builds on the existing SL-10 practice (Grazing land management) to improve both water quality and soil health. This practice focuses on management techniques that a producer implements, rather than a structural technique. Enhanced management techniques include

rotational bale grazing, soil sampling, improved hay feeding, improved nutrient cycling and placement, and reducing the impact of winter-feeding areas. Utilizing the Graze 300 program, sponsored by Virginia Cooperative Extension, will help increase number of days grazed and further reduce impacts of winter hay feeding. Well-managed pastures have improved soil health and may lead to a reduced need for nitrogen applications for stockpiled forages.

Additionally, field days will be conducted to share information, including the benefits of the practice, with neighboring agricultural producers.

Approval of District Appointments and Resignations – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that there was only one recommended action in Tri-County/Cities SWCD:

Appointment of Ms. Kayleigh Mize, effective 4/21/2022, to fill the un-expired Extension Agent appointed director position of Mr. Mike Broaddus (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Newton moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the individual being recommended. Mr. Ford seconded and the motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no additional old business.

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Killius suggested that the Department convene the Agricultural Needs Stakeholder Advisory Committee members prior to the development of the next Agricultural Needs Assessment to ensure that stakeholders understand how inflation and other financial impacts are considered in the analysis.

Mr. Ford asked about the possibility of livestreaming the meetings for the public. Mr. Glover advised that staff would research this possibility and report back to the Board.

PARTNER REPORTS

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Dr. Martinez gave the report for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. A copy of this report is included as Attachment #1.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Not represented.

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Dr. Tyree commended DCR staff, particularly Ms. Watlington Jones, for the work on the grant agreements and for listening to Association concerns. She noted that the grant agreement with the Association allows for the offering of multiple trainings and appreciates the flexibility in the current agreement.

In addition:

- Since the last meeting the Association Admin and Ops committee met.
- She noted that Brim and Associates is on retainer for District use related to financial and budgeting questions and concerns.
- Terry Higgins has joined the Association to address many of the questions and needs related to human resources.
- The salary survey has been sent to Districts. Responses are due May 1.
- The Envirothon will be held at Eastern Mennonite University on May 15-16, 2022.

Chesapeake Bay Commission

Ms. Kotula noted that the Commission has been actively working during the legislative session. She noted that the CBC looks forward to working with Director Wells in his new role.

The CBC policy focus for Virginia during the upcoming year will be on carbon sequestration. They will also continue to work with the Chesapeake Bay Initiative.

Virginia Agribusiness Council

Mr. Stanley departed the meeting prior to partner reports.

Virginia Farm Bureau Federation

Ms. Moore expressed appreciation for being able to be in the audience, to provide comments, and to ask questions. She noted that farmers are struggling with increased costs. She advised that Districts have conversations with their producers regarding stress levels. She noted that there has been an increase in farmer suicide across the nation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Wichelns commented that last year the Board adopted a motion authorizing Districts to fund practices that were carried from one year to another to be funded at the new year's average cost list rate. He asked if that would be the intention for this year.

Staff advised that these discussions will continue.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for May 18, 2022 at Bear Creek Lake State Park. This meeting may be cancelled depending upon the passage of a state budget.

ADJOURN

There was no additional business and the meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Attachment #1

NRCS REPORT**Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting****April 21, 2022 ♦ In-person, Dept. of Forestry, Charlottesville, Virginia**

ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)**EQIP, CSP, RCPP, VPA-HIP, CIG, TSP and Easement Programs**

Field staff are currently managing 2,100 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent \$131 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 468,175 acres.

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**
Received and ranked 923 EQIP applications. Preapproved 417 applications for \$21.2 million. Obligated 81 contracts for \$4.7 million. Applications at the approved status are 101 for \$4.5 million. Secured \$2,983,965 of funding for 3 years for Bland, Botetourt, and Wythe counties through the Joint Chiefs Eastern Divide Restoration Project. Received a total EQIP allocation of \$25.6 million.
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)–Classic, Renewals & GCI**
Obligated \$5.9 million for 82 CSP renewals on 45,686 acres, a 57% increase in contracts obligated and a 53% increase in acres enrolled over FY21. Funded 13 CSP-GCI contracts for \$26,560 (all applications submitted). Mailed 156 FY23 CSP Renewal applications to eligible participants. Received 360 FY22 CSP Classic applications.
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
Currently managing 24 active contracts with total funding of \$2.6 million covering 8,230 acres. Met with partners who were interested in submitting RCPP proposals by April 13, 2022, deadline.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
Received 3 ALE applications on 1,632 acres and 1 WRE application. Currently 10 ALE acquisitions are in progress.
- **Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP)**
Virginia NRCS continues to assist DWR with VPA-HIP. The program now has 4 contracts obligated and 16 applications being processed covering 24,161 acres in the Coalfields region of Southwest Virginia.
- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**
Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) announcement has been posted to grants.gov. Priority topics are soil health on grazing lands and pollinator habitat restoration. The maximum award for each topic is \$200,000. Deadline to apply is May 16, 2022.

Engineering (SCE)**Dam Rehabilitation**• **Beaver Creek 1**

The planning effort is being locally led by the Sponsor, Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA). RWSA has retained Schnabel Engineering as their consultant. The draft environmental assessment is being reviewed by the NRCS National Water Management Center for technical adequacy. It is anticipated that a final environmental assessment will be completed by Fall 2022.

• **Cherrystone Creek 1**

Pittsylvania County will be the Sponsor for the locally led design process for the design for the rehabilitation of the structure. NRCS and the County have signed a cooperative agreement to obligate the funding. The design process is estimated to take between 18 and 24 months.

NRCS REPORT

Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting April 21, 2022 ♦ In-person, Dept. of Forestry, Charlottesville, Virginia

- **Cherrystone Creek 2A**

Pittsylvania County will be the Sponsor for the locally led design process for the design for the rehabilitation of the structure. NRCS has requested funding. After funding is secured, NRCS and the County will enter into a cooperative agreement to obligate the funding. The design process is estimated to take between 18 and 24 months.

EWP

NRCS is providing disaster assistance to Buchanan County, Virginia, through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP). The Hurley area of Buchanan County received 6-8 inches of rain (estimated) on Monday, August 30. NRCS and Buchanan County completed damage survey reports (DSRs) for 4 county-identified sites. Funding for 3 eligible sites was received in mid-January 2022. The EWP agreement was finalized on March 15, 2022. Buchanan County is currently working through the engineering design, permitting and scheduling for the approved sites.

State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

Technical Tools (Field Office Technical Guide)

Continue to maintain the Virginia Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) as a repository of technical resources and references including conservation practice standards, technical notes, planning criteria and resource concerns, conservation practice physical effects, cost lists and the Virginia Plant Establishment Guide (PEG).

- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-22-497 Conservation Practice Physical Effect
- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-22-498 Virginia's Plant Identification Guide
- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-22-499 regarding Virginia Wetland Job Approval Authority Roster

Training to Field Staff

- Continue the use of SRC webinars in place of tradition in-person meetings allowing us to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to field staff:
 - March 2 – Farmer-to-Farmer mentoring opportunities in VA – 99 participants
 - March 9 – Compliance Review Training – 79 participants
 - March 16 – Biosecurity – 103 participants
 - RUSLE@2 office hours help sessions
- For the first time in over two years due to COVID training and travel restrictions, we have scheduled in-the-field trainings, keeping under 50 staff and all outdoor events:
 - March 14 and 21 - FSA Compliance Review field training for staff
 - March/April JEDs delivered in all four areas basic erosion processes training and coordinated with DCR and SWCD's to approve conservation planning and nutrient management CEU's
 - Conducting Soil Health & Agronomy Farm visits for field staff
- March 31 conducted a joint agency call on grasslands CRP, general CRP and reminders on status reviews and re-enrollments. Issued VA Bulletin 180-22-7 on grasslands CRP.

Customer Service and Outreach

- Developed and presented a presentation on "Pasture Soils and Factors that Influence Forage Production" delivered virtually through Zoom to 17 farmer participants enrolled in the Graze300 series titled, Optimizing Profitability in Grazing, in partnership with Virginia Cooperative Extension.

NRCS REPORT

Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting

April 21, 2022 ♦ In-person, Dept. of Forestry, Charlottesville, Virginia

- Developed and presented “Building Soil Health through Grazing Management” to 32 farmers and professionals at the Appalachian Grazing Conference via Zoom by request from WV NRCS partner and the Appalachian Grazing Conference planning committee.
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State Soil Scientist (SSS)

National Resources Inventory Update

The NRI grazing land field data collection locations have been release and are in the process of being analyzed for data needed to complete. The annual protocol training has been scheduled for May 11.

Soil Survey Update

Ecological Site Descriptions for Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 153 A and B, located on the eastern side of the coastal plain, has begun. The goal for Virginia NRCS is to have consistent vegetative communities for offsite wetland determinations or manipulated wetlands are completed. This project may take up to two years for completion.

48,212 unique Areas of Interest (AOI) were created in Virginia this fiscal year so far by internal and external clients that use NRCS’s soils database in Web Soil Survey for free.

Public Affairs (PAS)

Communications/Outreach

Tribal Engagement. Posted **Virginia Tribal Summit** resource page on the state website to broaden the audience for this unique partnership event held as a virtual meeting on March 16-17 (visit www.va.nrcs.usda.gov and click on the Virginia Tribal Summit link under **Highlights**). Content includes speaker presentations, a resource guide and links to edited recordings of the two-day program.

Landmark Achievements. Publicized the release of three new Virginia-focused “Conservation at Work” videos via March service center newsletters and a series of tweets. Clarke County producer Tupper Dorsey shares his experience using the Field Border practice while Forrest Pritchard offers insights into how the Riparian Forest Buffer and Access Control practices help make his operation more sustainable and productive. Pritchard will also be featured in a “Fridays on the Farm” blog slated for April 22.

Social Media Engagement. Leveraged state Twitter account to publicize programs, tie ag to current events and implement campaigns like 4theSoil. Posted 10 tweets between March 11 and April 15 that yielded 665 profile visits. Top tweet: National Ag Day (221 impressions).

Spring Meetings. Networked with attendees at the 2022 Virginia Agriculture and Natural Resources Summit on April 12-13 to enhance partnerships with Virginia Tech and the private agricultural, forestry and natural resources industries, producers and commodity groups.

Earth Team Program

Showcasing state award winners Hannah Clifford and the Prince William SWCD Water Quality Program as part of the Virginia NRCS celebration of National Volunteer Week, April 17-23. District partners will also receive state conservationist letters and tokens of appreciation to recognize their vital role in helping protect and improve Virginia soil health and water quality