

**Conservation Planning Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group
Thursday, February 23, 2017
DEQ Piedmont Regional Office
Glen Allen, Virginia**

Stakeholder Advisory Group Members Present

Sara Bottenfield, Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Glenn Chappell, III, James River SWCD
Al Dews, Mattaponi Resources
David Dowling, DCR
Darryl Glover, DCR
Todd Groh, VDOF
Alston Horn, CBF
Frank Johnson, Northern Neck SWCD
Lonnie Johnson VCE
David Kindig, DCR
Adrienne Kotula, James River Association
Darryl Marshall, VDACS
Kevin McLean, VASWCD
Marian Moody, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Joan Salvati, DEQ
Nicole Sandberg, DEQ
Kelly Snoddy, Peter Francisco SWCD
Richard Street, Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Brian Walton, Thomas Jefferson SWCD
Ashley Wendt, DEQ
Chad Wentz, NRCS
Brittany Wood, Headwaters SWCD
Charlie Wootton, Piedmont SWCD

DCR Staff Present

Scott Ambler
Michael Fletcher
Barbara McGarry
Roland Owens
Carl Thiel-Goin
Amy Walker
Christine Watlington

Others Present

Weedon Cloe, Chesterfield County

INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. McGarry called the meeting to order and called for introductions. She noted that the SAG is a representative group designed to provide input into DCR's conservation planning process.

Minutes from the last meeting were distributed to the SAG via email and posted to the Town Hall as a draft version. The SAG had no changes to the minutes as distributed.

To more clearly state and clarify the purpose and responsibilities of the SAG, DCR prepared the following purpose statement that was shared with the SAG.

Conservation Planning Stakeholder Advisory Group Purpose Statement

On December 7, 2016, the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board adopted a Conservation Plan Program resolution and called on the Department of Conservation and Recreation to establish a working group of stakeholders to offer recommendations and insight into the resources to be considered, components of a conservation plan, training and certification requirements, and other policy and Program considerations.

Accordingly, the purpose of this committee is to develop recommendations for creating a Virginia-focused conservation planning process that consolidates the requirements of related state code and regulations associated with applicable state programs.

Based on conversations with Soil and Water Conservation Districts and an understanding of the Commonwealth's unique needs, the Department recognizes the necessity for comprehensive and adaptive planning tools.

TRACKING MODULE OVERVIEW

The January meeting focused on the larger view of what a conservation plan is; therefore, the current conservation plan module in DCR's Agricultural BMP Database was not presented to the SAG. However, it was determined that a more detailed presentation of the current conservation planning module might be helpful to the SAG in its continuing discussions.

Mr. Owens gave a demonstration of how the current module works when used to develop a conservation plan, how the module is linked to the BMP tracking program, and how the module can incorporate the assessment required under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. It was noted that the conservation plan module was completed at the same time as the resource management plan module. The conservation plan module is designed to be web-based and will run on most browsers. Data incorporated into the module is able to show certain BMPs that have been installed on the property since 1988. Mr. Dowling emphasized that this was the current module and that the discussions and decisions of this SAG would lead to an improved module and a better conservation plan.

CONSERVATION PLAN COMPONENTS

Ms. McGarry reviewed both a long and short version of the conservation plan report currently produced by the module. These reports had been edited in response to comments from the SAG at the January meeting.

The following comments were made by the SAG:

- The Plan report needs to be a document that the producer can use.
- A brief summary on the assessment is fine.
- The summary should answer the question of “why did I (the producer) need this plan?”
- A member asked if bullet points could be provided in the summary rather than a narrative; Mr. Owens responded that narrative items are more easily programmed into an automatically generated report. .

Mr. Dowling reminded everyone that this process was ongoing and the documents would continue to be refined based on recommendations from the SAG.

A significant discussion was held regarding draft assessment documents that were shared with the SAG. Several concerns related to the assessment documents were voiced including the ability to customize the documents to meet the producer's objective, the need to identify all recommended practices instead of only the practices the producer agrees to implement, and the relationship with a forestry plan.

Mr. Dowling remarked that including all the recommended practices in a conservation plan allowed DCR to share with the General Assembly a more complete picture of the true funding needs for agriculture. This information could help with future funding requests. Additional comments were heard regarding the necessity for plan approval by the local soil and water conservation board and whether maps should be included in the plan reports. It was also noted that, while participation in the conservation plan program was voluntary, there could be practices that are needed to meet local water quality requirements including TMDLs.

RESOURCE ASSESSMENTS

Sample assessment documents were presented to the SAG. The assessment included:

- A. Farm Summary;
- B. Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act assessment; and
- C. Resource Considerations

The SAG had the following comments and suggestions on the sample assessment:

- Sometimes it is difficult to locate the producer; would it be helpful to include farm locations, headquarters locations, and contact information?
- Should one plan cover an entire operation? The appropriate scale of the plan likely depends on the operation itself. If a producer rented multiple properties or worked on non-contiguous properties, multiple plans might be more useful. From a plan review and approval perspective, revisions for small changes in operations could be completed more easily if the plans represent a smaller portion of the large operation.
- There are concerns about sharing information between plans and between federal and state agencies.
- It was suggested that the summary document be called a plan summary and not a farm summary.

The SAG commented that the following information should be included in the plan summary:

- Person's name (producer/owner);
- Headquarters location;
- Mailing address and farm address (note if separate);
- How many total acres in the plan unit, not in the entire operation;
- Farm identifier (as described by the producer); and
- Pasture lands, improved and unimproved.

The SAG decided that the wildlife and headquarters building categories did not need to be included in the plan summary.

A question was asked whether livestock should be counted as animal units or as the number of actual animals. Additionally, a comment was made that the forestland and wildlife management section should include the list of acres first and then how many forested acres are in the plan; acreages for ponds as well as other features should also be included.

The SAG recognized that the plan summary should be a snapshot of the day the farm was visited and that district staff would likely complete the plan summary at the office, rather than while visiting the farm.

Ms. McGarry presented the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act portion of the sample assessment. The assessment form presented to the SAG has been previously vetted by DEQ and includes all the necessary information needed to be considered a CBPA assessment. It was noted that a Chesapeake Bay Plan should include the whole farm.

The SAG discussed whether the sample assessment forms provided would be useful in completing the assessments for the conservation plan. A member of the SAG asked if the Natural Resource Conservation Service's form (CPA-52) could be used as the assessment form, rather than developing a new form. Many District staff are already completing the CPA-52 Environmental Evaluation worksheet.

Ms. McGarry noted that these sample assessment forms were provided to begin discussions on assessments and revised versions would be provided at the next meeting of the SAG. The Department would examine whether the CPA-52 form could be utilized as well.

The next meeting of the SAG will be Friday, March 24 in the Albemarle County Offices in Charlottesville. Members of the SAG were asked to submit any comments on the meeting or the materials provided to staff. All materials provided at the SAG meeting are available on the conservation planning page of the Department's website.