

Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Friday, June 24, 2022
Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
Richmond, VA

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place on Friday, June 24, 2022 at the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation offices in Richmond, Virginia.

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charles A. Arnason, Chair	Anna Killius
Adam D. Wilson, Vice-Chair	Pamela Mason
Jay C. Ford	Kat Maybury
Dr. Stephen R. Hill	Charles Newton
Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director, <i>ex officio</i>	
Dr. Edwin M. Martinez, NRCS, <i>ex officio</i>	

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Dr. Dahlia O'Brien

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety and Floodplain Management
James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager
Lisa McGee, Director of Policy
Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Amy Walker, Eastern Area Manager
Carl Thiel-Goin, Conservation Planning and Training Coordinator
Amanda Pennington, District Engineering Services Manager
Hunter Landis, Nutrient Management Program Manager
Sara Bottenfield, Agricultural Incentives Program Manager

OTHERS PRESENT

Suzanne Brown, Loudoun SWCD
Kevin C. Craun, Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Megan Dalton, Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Elizabeth Dellinger Shenandoah Valley SWCD
Wayne Davis, VASWCD
Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau
Leigh Pemberton, Hanover-Caroline SWCD

Kyle Shreve, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Jenny Toomey, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Dr. Kendall Tyree, VASWCD
Don Wells, VASWCD
Greg Wichelns, Culpeper SWCD

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With eight (8) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Arnason called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. He asked for member and guest introductions.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM APRIL 21, 2022

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the minutes from the April 21, 2022 meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board be approved as submitted. Mr. Newton seconded.

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

Director Wells gave the following report. He noted action on two pieces of legislation discussed at the April Board meeting.

SB508, as passed by the House and the Senate, shifted the oversight and decision making authority for the Virginia Community Flood Preparedness Fund (Fund) from the Department to the Board. It also increased the membership of the Board by 2 new non-legislative members.

The Governor amended the legislation to maintain the responsibility for the Fund with the Department but maintained the addition of the new non-legislative members. The Governor and the Administration believe there should be a single entity to coordinate the Fund.

The legislature did not agree to the amendments and the Governor vetoed the bill.

HB1309 and SB756, as passed by the House and Senate, establishes the Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund (Fund). Monies in the Fund will be used primarily to make loans and grants to local governments to finance or refinance the cost of any project.

For the purpose of this legislation, 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's amendments shifted the responsibility for the administration of the Fund from this Board to the Department. The 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.

The Governor's amendments were agreed to by the General Assembly and the legislation passed as amended.

Regarding the budget, Director Wells noted that the General Assembly reconvened on June 17 to address the Governor's amendments. Governor Youngkin signed the budget on June 21st.

Director Wells noted that the budget contains unprecedented levels of funding for the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF). He noted that the funding levels do not include the recordation revenue. The funding is as follows:

- \$10 million in recordation revenue (\$8.7 for BMP implementation; \$1.3 for technical assistance) provided each year
- Total deposit for FY2023 = \$313,013,000
 - Amount provided for the WQIF Reserve:
 - \$15,895,679
 - Amount of funding for agricultural BMPs and additional technical assistance:
 - House = \$256.5 million

Key line items (carve-outs) were:

Carve-outs	Amount provided
Small Herd Initiative	\$7,000,000
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Project (CREP)	\$6,000,000
Special nonpoint source reduction projects (RMPs, poultry litter transport, nutrient management plans)	\$4,560,000
Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)	\$4,000,000
Incentive for Riparian Buffer Maintenance for Ag Producers	\$2,000,000

Development & maintenance of Conservation Suite Application (DCR)	\$1,500,000
Small Farm Outreach Program (DCR & VSU)	\$250,000

Other key funding items included:

- Soil and Water Conservation District administration and operations funding:
 - Provided an additional \$3.6 million
- District dam funding:
 - Increase in District dam maintenance funding from \$3,000 to \$4,500
 - Funding for District dam rehabilitation
 - \$45.5 million
- Environmental Education (2 fulltime employees)
 - \$350,000

DAM SAFETY AND FLOOD PLAIN MANAGEMENT DIVISION

There was no Division report.

Approval of Use of Additional Funds for Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund Projects – Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that all projects approved for funding through the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund have conditions approved by this Board. One condition addresses rescinding funds from projects:

3. In the event that any of the above applicants fail to execute a Grant Agreement with VRA within 90 days of such an Agreement being sent to the applicant, the Department, in consultation with VRA, is authorized to rescind those grant funds and allocate in subsequent grant rounds.

Additionally, projects may not be completed in a timely manner or are completed at a lesser cost than anticipated. Those funds are also considered unobligated and are available to be reallocated.

The Department received 218 applications requesting more than \$1,893,000. More than 50 percent of the projects applied for are from newly engaged dam owners who received letters from the Department; these owners are working towards achieving compliance with Dam Safety regulations.

The current unobligated and deobligated grant balance in the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund is \$786,505.61. The Department requests authorization to

utilize \$350,001 of this unobligated and deobligated grant funding to provide additional funding for the 2022 grant round. Providing these additional funds will ensure the projects applied for by newly engaged dam owners are funded and will bring the total funding available for the 2022 grant round to \$1,600,001.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Newton moved the following.

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approves the use of \$350,001 of unobligated and deobligated funds in the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund (Fund) for use in the 2022 Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund grant round.

The Department is authorized to communicate this approval to the Virginia Resources Authority (VRA) so that VRA's review of applications may proceed.

Mr. Ford seconded and the motion carried.

Approval of Projects Funded by the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund projects recommended for approval. A full list of the projects is available from DCR.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved the following.

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approves the 202 grant applications, with an approval amount of \$1,600,001, as recommended by the Department. Approval of these grants is conditioned on the following:

1. All grants are made on a reimbursement basis and will be governed by a Grant Agreement developed in consultation with the Virginia Resources Authority. All applicants will be given a period of 90 days to enter into a Grant Agreement following the Agreement being sent. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (Department) is authorized to further extend this date in its discretion and following consultation with VRA.
2. All grant agreements will require that projects be completed within 12 months of the date of execution of the Agreement. Upon receipt of a written request for a project extension with a specified completion date by the Grantee to the Department with a copy to VRA, the Department is authorized to consider such request and may amend the terms of the

Agreement and allow a specified extension upon the Department's and the Authority's written approval. Extension requests must be received by the Department not later than 90 days prior to the expiration of the original agreement or grant funds are subject to rescission at the Departments discretion. No extensions shall exceed an additional year without specific Board approval.

3. In the event that any of the above applicants fail to execute a Grant Agreement with VRA within 90 days of such an Agreement being sent to the applicant, the Department, in consultation with VRA, is authorized to rescind those grant funds and allocate in subsequent grant rounds.

The Department is authorized to communicate this approval to the Virginia Resources Authority (VRA) so that VRA's review of applications may proceed. The Department is also authorized to take any action necessary to proceed with the closing and administration of grants subsequent to VRA's approval of the application.

Dr. Hill seconded and the motion carried.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DIVISION

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

Mr. Martin provided a written report for the Board. That report is included as Attachment #1.

Approval of recommendations for FY2023 VACS Program - Christine Watlington Jones

- The Department requested suggestions related to the participant cap from members of the AgBMP Technical Advisory Committee as well as partners and stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth.
- Seventeen suggestions were received.
- The suggestions ranged from removing the cap entirely to maintaining the cap at its current level.
- Based on the suggestions received, the existing mechanisms in place allowing producers to exceed the cap for certain practices, and the lack of time to implement more complex approaches in our database, the Department is recommending the participant cap be increased to \$200,000 in FY23.
- There was consistent opposition to utilizing acreage as a mechanism to provide additional cost-share funding to producers; therefore, the Department did not include that as part of the recommendation.

The Department is aware that there have been conversations among stakeholders about raising the cap to \$300,000; the Department is not opposed to this amount of increase.

Mr. Ford noted that the Department not being opposed to the increase to \$300,000 was not the same as supporting. He asked if staff believed there was a more appropriate level between the two choices.

Ms. Watlington Jones replied that the Department was not taking a position but was leaving the decision to the discretion of the Board.

Ms. Mason asked if it was known how many and what type of producers were reaching the cap.

Ms. Watlington Jones indicated that the Department had reviewed the participants during FY2021 and found that seven producers were currently above the cap.

Ms. Maybury noted that the information provided indicated that there were ways for producers to bypass the cap if necessary. She asked if there was a way for the Board to raise the cap for this year and ensure that the cap is reduced or reviewed in the next fiscal year.

Ms. Watlington Jones indicated that the provision for future review could be included in the motion.

Mr. Wells from Hanover-Caroline SWCD commented that his District requested that the caps be removed as they are a hindrance to meeting the water quality goals of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL. He noted that the General Assembly provided significant funding. He also noted that there are three more years remaining to achieve the TMDL goals and advised that it is important to get as many BMPs on the ground as possible.

Ms. Killius noted a concern with doubling the cap when future budgets may not see a similar increase. She cautioned against moving too quickly.

Mr. Ford suggested that the Board consider revisiting the cap on an annual basis. He suggested a sunset clause to address reviewing the cap annually.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approves an increase in the VACS Program participant cap for FY2023; the participant cap will be increased to \$300,000 per participant.

The Board directs the AgBMP Technical Advisory Committee to review the methodology associated with the participant cap to determine if there should be additional considerations taken into account such as a sliding scale for acreage under production, the number of counties or Districts a producer is operating in, and any other considerations that the TAC may

determine are worthwhile to examine. The increase in the participant cap to \$300,000 shall be reduced to \$200,000 for FY2024 if the AgBMP TAC does not provide a new recommendation and the Board takes no further action extending the increase in the participant cap through FY2024.

Mr. Newton seconded. The motion carried with the following vote:

AYE: Arnason, Newton, Ford, Mason, Killius, Maybury

NAY: Wilson, Hill

Cover crop payment rates – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Department requested suggestions related to the cover crop payment rates from members of the AgBMP Technical Advisory Committee as well as other partners and stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth. She noted:

- Twenty suggestions were received.
- There was no consensus in the suggestions regarding the appropriate level of increase to the payment rates.
- The cover crop payment rate recommendations are based on comments received from stakeholders and partners, as well as the need to incentive certain practices that receive the highest levels of credit in the Chesapeake Bay Model.

Ms. Watlington Jones reviewed the following comments submitted by the Culpeper SWCD:

- Agenda Item H.2. Cover crop payment increases being proposed. The Committee would like to see SL8H (harvestable cover crop) receive \$35 per acer if the producer is taking only the grain off the field and leaving all the straw. The \$20 per acre proposed is fine if they are taking the entire plant.
- Also the Committee felt the WQ-4 practice (legume cover crop) ought to receive \$60 per acre rather than the proposed \$45 per acre. Limited seed availability is currently, and has been for some time now, driving costs up and planting costs are rising with fuel process and inflationary pressures. Some legumes are costing \$35 per acre just to buy the inoculated seed and planting costs seem to be \$25 per acre at a minimum.

Chairman Arnason asked the Board to address the comments from Culpeper prior to moving forward.

Mr. Wichelns advised that the comments came from the District technical committee. Due to current costs, the recommendation was to bring the rate for the WQ-4 to \$60.

Mr. Arnason commented that the TAC needs to address the recommendation related to allowing a producer to remove only the grain, but leaving the straw, and come back to the Board with a formal recommendation.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approves the recommended increases in the cover crop payment rates for FY2023.

The Board directs the Cover Crop and Nutrient Management Subcommittee of the AgBMP Technical Advisory Committee to examine revising the cover crop practice payments from a flat per-acre rate to a percentage-of-cost payment. The Subcommittee shall also examine the viability of developing a specification that provides cost-share payment for producers that only harvest the grain off the field, leaving all of the remaining residue.

Ms. Mason seconded and the motion carried.

At this point in the meeting, Chairman Arnason amended the agenda to call on Dr. Edwin Martinez to give the report for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The full NRCS report is included as Attachment #2.

Chairman Arnason thanked Dr. Martinez and returned to the original agenda.

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

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that no changes were made to this document since the April meeting with the exception of the final budget numbers. She noted:

- Admin and ops allocation options – utilized Option #3 for the allocations
 - The Board seemed most comfortable with that Option at the April meeting
 - 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
- Provides the increase in dam maintenance funding to impacted Districts (\$3,000 to \$4,500 per dam)
- Once there is a Chapter number for the budget, it will be referenced.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Administration and Operations Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2023.

Mr. Newton seconded and the motion carried.

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

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that there were no changes to the grant agreement presented at the April meeting.

BOARD ACTION

Dr. Hill moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the Department of Conservation and Recreation and Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Administration and Operational Support Grant Agreement (Fiscal Year 2023).

Mr. Newton seconded and the motion carried.

*Approval of Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2023 –
Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones noted there were few changes to the document as presented at the April meeting. The current budget numbers were included. She noted:

- Changes in reference to new budget
 - Once there is a Chapter number for the budget, it will be referenced.
- Changes of dates from FY2022- FY2023 and reporting due dates
- Other changes to note:
 - There is a new nonpoint source assessment this year; references have been changed to the 2022 nonpoint source assessment
 - Page 9 – added “and is at least 18 years of age” to mimic language in the approved VACS Manual
 - Page 25 – removed requirement that secondary considerations be submitted to the Department prior to the beginning of the fiscal year
 - Secondary considerations must be submitted and approved by the Department prior to any cost-share applications being approved
 - Mirrors the grant deliverable language
 - Page 28 – participant cap information will be revised to reflect the increased participant cap

- Page 28 – allows producers that are applying for a variance to receive additional cost-share funding in certain instances:

However, if producer is approved for such a variance, he is not eligible for any additional cost-share funds for any other cost-share practices, unless such other practice authorizes the exceedance of a participant cap (ex. WFA-NM and WFA-CC standards and specifications) or is implemented under an initiative that does not contribute to the VACS participant cap (ex. Small Herd Initiative).

- Page 32 - Includes language clarifying the process to relinquish funds back to the Department
- Page 33 - Includes language requiring all VACS contract parts to be fully completed and signed
- Cost-share allocations are the same as what was presented in April
 - The total allocation for FY2023 is \$123,000,000; however, the Department is holding \$6,639,483 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 (the Chesapeake Bay watershed portion) and Northern Neck. These are federal grant funds but will be treated in all aspects as VACS funds. These funds are included as separate table on page 32.
 - Based on the budget, it is anticipated that there will be \$133,507,321 available for agricultural best management practice implementation in FY2024.
- Option #2 was utilized for base technical assistance amounts.
- 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.

BOARD ACTION

Dr. Hill moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the Policy and Procedures on Soil and Water Conservation District Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Funding Allocations (Fiscal Year 2023).

Mr. Newton seconded and the motion carried.

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

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that edits to the document include:

- language clarifying the process to relinquish funds back to the Department
- language requiring all VACS contract parts to be fully completed and signed
- language has been added that will be included in the grant agreements for those districts that are implementing the WFA specifications;
- clarifications in deliverables, but there are no changes to deliverables.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the Department of Conservation and Recreation and Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Grant Agreement (Fiscal Year 2023).

Dr. Hill seconded and the motion carried.

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

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the only change to this document since April was on page 14.

- Revised 6 months to 12 months
- It is unadvisable for any District to accumulate more than ~~six~~ twelve months of undedicated reserve funds.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Newton moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the Desktop Procedures for District Fiscal Operations as presented by the Department. The Department is authorized to make non-substantive changes to include formatting and stylistic changes as necessary to the Guide.

Mr. Wilson seconded and the motion carried.

Approval of Small Herd Initiative – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the document was amended to reflect the approved budget:

- During the 2022 Special Session 1, an additional \$7.0 million was 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%.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the revisions to the Small Herd Initiative as presented by the Department. The Department is authorized to develop or revise any forms or documents needed to facilitate the implementation of this *Initiative*.

Any Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and a Soil and Water Conservation District that were executed under a previous Board action are superseded by this action.

Ms. Maybury seconded and the motion carried.

At this time the Board recessed for lunch.

Chairman Arnason called the meeting back to order at 12:25 p.m.

Approval of Soil Health Pilot and specification (SL-10E) – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that no changes were made to the document since April.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson move that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the Soil Health Pilot (Pilot) and the specification (SL-10E). Additionally, the Board authorizes the Pilot to be implemented in up to two Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts). Each participating 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.

Mr. Newton seconded and the motion carried.

Approval of revisions to the Conservation Plan Program – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones reviewed the following recommended revisions:

- Several of the forms still referenced DGIF; that has been corrected to reference DWR

- References to RUSLE have been broadened in anticipation of the use of the Universal Soil Loss Method and potential revisions to RUSLE by NRCS
- Clarifications on the required course list:
 - Updates have been provided regarding which entity is providing the course
 - Clarification that all other coursework needs to be completed before an individual attends the DCR Conservation Planning Program course
 - While there is no set timeframe for an individual to complete the training, the Department is recommending that a conservation plan be completed and submitted for review and approval by the Department within 6 months of the completion of the course work
 - This requirement should reduce the follow-up and revisions that are necessary to achieve certification
- Recertification list
 - Recognizes the importance of achieving a wide-range of educational opportunities, rather than all on-line, individual activities

BOARD ACTION

Dr. Hill moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the revisions to the Conservation Planning Program and the associated forms and templates.

Mr. Wilson seconded and the motion carried.

Approval of Expansion of Trout Unlimited and District partnerships – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that in 2019 the Board approved partnership between Trout Unlimited and Headwaters SWCD to further incentivize the installation of livestock stream exclusion practices.

- TU and the District operate under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities in operating this pilot. T
- The pilot was originally limited to Augusta County and has installed over 17,000 feet of exclusion fence.
- Trout Unlimited continues to work with new producers in Augusta County.
- There are currently agreements with producers and landowners to install over 100,000 feet of exclusion fence.
- This partnership will focus on the implementation and installation of agricultural best management practices that meet the water quality improvement goals of the Commonwealth and TU. Livestock stream exclusion practices, as well as streambank stabilization practices, will continue to be the focus of the partnership.

Ms. Mason asked who received the money.

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that Trout Unlimited acts as the contractor. The VACS contract is with the producer but funds are provided to Trout Unlimited.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Ford moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) approves the expansion of the Partnerships between Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Trout Unlimited to include all of the counties within the Headwaters, Mountain, Mountain Castles, Natural Bridge, and Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation Districts. For these Partnerships, the Board:

- Waives the bid requirements established for the components that Trout Unlimited is installing; and
- Allows the assignment of payment to Trout Unlimited for the components that Trout Unlimited installs.

All Districts choosing to participate in this Partnership with Trout Unlimited must adopt a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Trout Unlimited that outlines the roles and responsibilities of both the District and Trout Unlimited and the standard operating procedure.

Ms. Mason seconded and the motion carried.

Request from Shenandoah Valley District on amendment of WP-4 specification

Chairman Arnason called on Shenandoah Valley SWCD to make a presentation.

Mr. Craun, Chair of the Shenandoah Valley SWCD, noted that the District had encountered an issue with animal waste practices that they believed could be easily addressed.

Ms. Dalton gave the following presentation:



OVERVIEW

- **IT IS NOT OUR INTENT TO CIRCUMVENT THE AG BMP TAC PROCESS**
- WE ASK THAT A MODIFICATION TO THE WP-4 SPECIFICATION AND ASSOCIATED LIVESTOCK EVALUATION TOOL BE EFFECTIVE FOR PROGRAM YEAR 2023

BACKGROUND

- CURRENTLY LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY ARE EVALUATED DIFFERENTLY WHEN DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR A WASTE STORAGE FACILITY
- NON-POULTRY OPERATION'S ELIGIBILITY RELIES HEAVILY ON A **DIRECT CONNECTION BETWEEN THE STORAGE SITE AND LIVE WATER**

BACKGROUND

- IT IS IMPORTANT TO USE AN APPROPRIATE WORKSHEET TO EVALUATE AND DOCUMENT THE ELIGIBILITY
- THE RISK ASSESSMENT FORM IS NOT THE APPROPRIATE WORKSHEET BECAUSE IT IS INCONSISTENT WITH HOW POULTRY OPERATIONS ARE EVALUATED AND BECAUSE IT RELIES HEAVILY ON A DIRECT CONNECTION TO LIVE WATER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY POINTS TO QUALIFY

JUSTIFICATION #1

- MORE THAN \$100 MILLION ALLOCATED FOR BMP IMPLEMENTATION
 - FUNDS TO BE USED TO HELP MEET THE 2025 WIP GOALS
 - CLEAR DIRECTIVE TO FUND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES THAT ARE REPORTABLE TO THE BAY MODEL
 - ANIMAL WASTE PRACTICES ARE REPORTED TO THE BAY MODEL IN ANIMAL UNITS
 - NO REQUIREMENT FOR CONNECTION TO SURFACE WATER FOR REPORTING

CHESAPEAKE BAY TMDL PHASE III WATERSHED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
APPENDIX D – BMP SUMMARY

Appendix D shows a summary of the WIP III Final BMPs for Virginia's Bay Watershed compared to the levels of implementation reported for 2009 and 2017 progress.

APPENDIX D – BMP SUMMARY

Sector	BMP	Units	2009	2017	WIP III Final
Agriculture	Agricultural Stormwater Management	acres	-	-	436
Agriculture	Agriculture Nutrient Management	acres	543,549	591,528	951,395
Agriculture	Agriculture Nutrient Management Enhancement	acres	-	-	426,852
Agriculture	Alternative Crops	acres	113	479	1,231
Agriculture	Animal Waste Management System	Animal Units	3,416,824	3,169,609	3,225,900

CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM'S QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

A-6 ANIMAL WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- GENERAL INFORMATION**
 - AN ANIMAL WASTE BMP AS DEFINED BY THE CBP FOR BMP REPORTING INCLUDES MANURE STORAGE AND THE EXPECTED IMPROVEMENTS IN MANURE RECOVERABILITY
- ANIMAL WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (AWMS) DEFINITION**
 - ANY STRUCTURE DESIGNED FOR COLLECTION, TRANSFER AND STORAGE OF MANURES AND ASSOCIATED WASTES GENERATED FROM THE CONFINED PORTION OF ANIMAL OPERATIONS AND COMPLIES WITH NRCS PRACTICE STANDARDS
- SPECIFICATIONS OR KEY QUALIFYING CONDITIONS**
 - THERE ARE NO ADDITIONAL SPECIFICATIONS OR QUALIFYING CONDITIONS BEYOND THOSE DESCRIBED IN THE DEFINITIONS

JUSTIFICATION #2

- NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT IS A KEY TO WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**
- CONSIDERABLE TIME & MILLIONS OF DOLLARS HAVE BEEN SPENT EDUCATING FARMERS ON THE BENEFITS OF PROPER NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AND INCENTIVIZING ITS ADOPTION
- OVERLOOKING ANIMAL WASTE STORAGE STRUCTURES AS A CRITICAL COMPONENT TO PROPER NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT IS DETRIMENTAL
- ANIMAL WASTE STORAGE STRUCTURES HAVE IMMENSE BENEFITS TO WATER QUALITY
 - ELIMINATE THE POTENTIAL FOR A SOURCE OF POLLUTION
 - ELIMINATE THE LAND APPLICATION OF MANURE AT INAPPROPRIATE TIMES

JUSTIFICATION #3

- LIVESTOCK MANURE HAS A MUCH HIGHER MOISTURE CONTENT THAN POULTRY LITTER
- NUTRIENTS ARE MORE "MOBILE" AND CAN BE TRANSPORTED QUICKER AND MORE FREQUENTLY DURING NORMAL RAIN EVENTS

Table 6-4
Average Analysis for Manure Tested in Virginia

Manure Type	TN (%)	NH ₄ (%)	NO ₃ (%)	P ₂ O ₅ (%)	% Moisture
Liquid Dairy (5/87)	19.22	8.05	9.38	17.25	84.91
Semi-Solid Dairy (18/7)	15.34	3.47	7.58	14.33	87.38
Corn-Soy Bean (4/7)	18.20	2.28	8.88	18.12	87.11
Dry Chicken Broiler (5/9)	14.38	11.68	52.11	15.56	77.61
Dry Chicken Layer/Brooder (1/7)	47.87	8.51	60.79	43.68	20.48
Dry Turkey Litter (4/5)	62.50	13.05	50.23	38.31	20.61
Dry Turkey Brooder (5/3)	58.32	12.64	51.23	36.18	23.48
Liquid Swine Lagoon (2/07)	7.20	5.68	2.81	12.23	89.32
Liquid Swine PI (3/8)	29.58	15.29	14.71	15.74	87.48


FROM VIRGINIA NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT STANDARDS AND CRITERIA, REVISED JULY 2014

JUSTIFICATION #4

- THE RISK ASSESSMENT FORM IS AN NRCS FORM INTENDED TO EVALUATE AREAS OF ANIMAL CONCENTRATION AND TO DETERMINE THAT AREA'S IMPACT ON WATER QUALITY.
- THE FORM IS USED BY NRCS TO DETERMINE THE NEED FOR FACILITIES THAT INCLUDE FEEDING ONLY SUCH AS A WINTER FEEDING FACILITY AND THE NEED FOR FACILITIES THAT INCLUDE FEEDING AND HOUSING SUCH AS A LOOSE HOUSING FACILITY.
- THE FORM IS NOT USED BY NRCS TO DETERMINE THE NEED FOR STRUCTURES THAT ONLY INCLUDE MANURE STORAGE.

JUSTIFICATION #5

- THE MAJORITY OF THE VIRGINIA'S CONFINED LIVESTOCK OPERATIONS ARE LOCATED IN THE WESTERN PART OF THE STATE.
- THIS REGION IS KNOWN TO HAVE KARST GEOLOGY.
 - KARST GEOLOGY IS COMPLEX IN ITS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER.
 - STUDIES HAVE DOCUMENTED THAT ACTIVITIES ON THE LANDSCAPE SURFACE AFFECT WATER QUALITY EVEN IN SEEMINGLY UPLAND AREAS.
 - BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN AREAS WITH KARST GEOLOGY REGARDLESS OF LOCATION, ARE BENEFICIAL TO WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS.




KARST GEOLOGY OF VIRGINIA

Legend:

- 1. Karst Geology
- 2. Karst Geology
- 3. Karst Geology
- 4. Karst Geology
- 5. Karst Geology
- 6. Karst Geology
- 7. Karst Geology
- 8. Karst Geology
- 9. Karst Geology
- 10. Karst Geology

LIVING ON KARST
CAVE CONSERVANCY OF THE VIRGINIAS

- A LANDSCAPE WITH TOPOGRAPHIC DEPRESSIONS SUCH AS SINKHOLES AND CAVES, CAUSED BY UNDERGROUND SOLUTION OF LIMESTONE BEDROCK
- THIS LANDSCAPE FEATURES UNDERGROUND STREAMS AND AQUIFERS THAT SUPPLY THE WELLS THAT ARE USED FOR DRINKING WATER
- THE HOLLOW NATURE OF KARST TERRAIN RESULTS IN A VERY HIGH POLLUTION POTENTIAL



JUSTIFICATION #6

- THE NEED FOR **POULTRY** DRY STACK FACILITIES IS EVALUATED USING A NEEDS DETERMINATION WORKSHEET THAT **DOES NOT EVALUATE A DIRECT CONNECTION TO LIVE WATER**
- THE NEED FOR **LIVESTOCK** MANURE STORAGE FACILITIES IS EVALUATED USING THE RISK ASSESSMENT FORM
- THE NEED FOR MANURE STORAGE IN BOTH TYPES OF OPERATIONS ARE SIMILAR THEREFORE IT IS **APPROPRIATE TO USE SIMILAR MEANS FOR EVALUATING THE NEED AND ELIGIBILITY FOR STORAGE**

SUGGESTED LIVESTOCK WASTE STORAGE EVALUATION CRITERIA

- A COMBINATION OF THE NEEDS DETERMINATION WORKSHEET USED FOR POULTRY OPERATIONS AND THE ORIGINAL RISK ASSESSMENT FORM USED FOR LIVESTOCK
- DOCUMENTS THE EXISTING CONDITIONS AND THE NEED FOR WASTE STORAGE SIMILAR TO THE POULTRY NEEDS DETERMINATION WORKSHEET
- INCLUDES A POINTS THRESHOLD IN WHICH TO QUALIFY
- POINTS ARE ASSIGNED BASED ON
 - NITROGEN OR PHOSPHORUS NUTRIENT LOADS SIMILAR TO THE RISK ASSESSMENT FORM
 - HYDROLOGIC UNIT RANKING FOR NITROGEN AND PHOSPHORUS (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW)
 - SOIL SENSITIVITY INDEX SIMILAR TO THE OLD RISK ASSESSMENT FORM
 - SLOPE SIMILAR TO THE OLD RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Dr. Hill commented that it appeared that the District had determined the answer to the issue and would like the TAC to find the justifications.

Ms. Dalton replied that the intent was to show that the District identified the problem and had suggested tools to begin the conversation. The request was to make this practice effective the following year. The District would like to see the TAC work with the draft provided to address the issue. The matter would still go through the TAC and then to the Board.

Director Wells commented that the agency was not taking a position regarding the policy. DCR's priority is to ensure that the existing process of reviewing and discussing specifications, and modifications to those specifications, flows through the TAC. He cautioned that any motion not be overly prescriptive.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Newton moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board directs the Animal Waste Subcommittee (Subcommittee) of the AgBMP Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to review and examine the water quality impacts of livestock manure, specifically the differences between the impact of poultry litter and livestock manures. The Subcommittee shall review the existing WP-4 standards and specifications, in addition to the Animal Waste Control Facility Needs Determination Worksheet for Livestock Waste Storage Facilities (Worksheet) provided by the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, to determine the most appropriate method to evaluate the impacts of the manure. The Subcommittee shall provide their recommendation, including the standard and specification and the method used to evaluate the impacts, to the full AgBMP TAC for review and approval; the Subcommittee shall also make a recommendation on whether the revised specification and standard should be implemented during FY2023. The action and recommendation taken by the AgBMP TAC shall be presented to the Board at their December meeting.

Ms. Mason seconded and the motion carried.

Approval of process to address increased costs for FY2022 carryover practices – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that a similar action was taken in FY2021. The action allows practices that are currently approved in carryover status to be eligible to have costs revised for the average cost list of 2023.

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that Culpeper SWCD made the following comments:

- The Committee would like to see carryovers from years previous to FY22 also be eligible for utilizing the FY23 average cost list.
- They feel these projects have been equally impacted by rising cost over the most recent 12 calendar months.
- Many projects have not completed purchases for all components due to limited availability.

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Department did not object to allowing previous years' carryover practices to be eligible in addition to FY22 practices. Revised motion drafted.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Ford moved the following:

In response to the unanticipated and significant increase in the cost of certain materials during FY2022, the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board authorizes Soil and Water Conservation

Districts (Districts) to provide additional cost-share funding to producers to offset the increased cost of materials under the following conditions:

1. Only contracts from FY2022 that are not yet paid and are placed into Carryover status going into FY2023 are eligible;
2. The carryover contracts must be for the following types of practices:
 - a. SL-6N and SL-6W practices;
 - b. WP-2N and WP-2W practices;
 - c. WP-4, WP-4B, WP-4C, WP-4F, WP-4FP, WP-4LC, WP-4LL and WP-4SF practices; and
 - d. the SL-7 practice.
3. Upon the District's adoption of a new, increased average cost list for FY2023, the District will be eligible to utilize the new FY2023 average cost list to make revised cost estimates (i.e. Estimated Instance Cost and Estimated Cost Share Payments) for the impacted carryover FY2022 contracts.
4. The District, working in cooperation with their Conservation District Coordinator and Department Data Services Staff, is authorized to utilize, as needed, the District's FY2023 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program allocation to send back additional FY2023 funds to the impacted FY2022 contracts. All contract increases must be approved by the local District Board by way of formal motion as recorded in the minutes.
5. The District is not authorized to provide additional FY2022 VACS Program funds to contracts that exceed the Estimated Instance Cost developed in accordance with the District's approved FY2022 average cost list.
6. All FY2022 VACS Program funds that remain unobligated at the end of the fiscal year shall be returned to the Department, along with the proportional amount of technical assistance funds, in accordance with the *Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board Policies and Procedures on Soil and Water District Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Funding Allocations (Fiscal Year 2022)* and the *FY2022 Department of Conservation and Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Grant Agreement for Cost-Share and Technical Assistance*.

Dr. Hill seconded and the motion carried.

Approval of District Director appointments and resignations – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones presented two resignations and one appointment for Board consideration and action.

Evergreen

Resignation of Ms. Dianne Beck, of Smyth County, effective 6/7/2022, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2023).

Eastern Shore

Appointment of Ms. Sally Williams, of Northampton County, effective 6/24/2022, to fill the unexpired elected director position of Ms. Robin Rich-Coates (term of office expires 12/31/2023).

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that the Department had been informed this week that Mr. Steve Lohr had resigned as member of the Shenandoah Valley SWCD.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the appointment of the person being recommended.

Ms. Killius seconded and the motion carried.

*Acceptance of Individuals nominated to serve on the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
– Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones reviewed the recommendations of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts regarding appointments to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board. Those recommendations were:

Area I Charles Newton
Farmer and Director
Shenandoah Valley SWCD
149 Balkamore Road
Stanley, VA 22851

Paul Burkholder
Director
Lord Fairfax SWCD
521 Jefferson Street
Winchester, VA 22601

Area IV Adam D. Wilson
Farmer and Director
Holston River SWCD
14980 Black Hollow Road
Abingdon, VA 24210

Roger Elkins
Farmer and Director
Daniel Boone SWCD
8905 Middle Wallens Creed Road
Jonesville, Virginia 24263

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board accept the nominations of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and directs staff to forward these nominations to the Secretary of the Commonwealth for consideration for appointment.

Dr. Hill seconded. The motion carried with Mr. Newton and Mr. Wilson abstaining.

Motion carried with Mr. Newton and Mr. Wilson abstaining

Approval of trustee for Timberlake Watershed Improvement District – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that George Schrader had resigned as a Trustee from the Timberlake Watershed Improvement District. Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District is recommending the approval of Mr. Kim Steinhorst to replace Mr. Schrader.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the appointment of the individual being appointed by the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District to serve as a Trustee for the Timberlake Watershed Improvement District.

Mr. Newton seconded and the motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Dr. Hill commented that the loss of Robin Rich-Coates on the Eastern Shore would have a significant impact on conservation issues. Mr. Ford concurred and commented that Ms. Rich-Coates had a passion that was inspiring and that she had a huge impact on environmental issues on the Eastern Shore.

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Mason requested that the Board adopt a policy regarding meeting materials and agendas. She requested that no new items be added to the agenda within a week of the meeting.

Mr. Fletcher advised that this could be addressed in the Bylaws which were due for review. Staff will provide a copy of the Bylaws with recommended language for discussion at the next meeting.

PARTNER REPORTS

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Dr. Tyree expressed appreciation to the DCR staff working through grant agreements and changes to allocations. She noted that final products approved by this Board were important.

Dr. Tyree noted that in addition to the increased cost-share funding, the Association also received an unprecedented level of VCAP funding. Of that funding, the Association is directed to utilize 25% in low income areas.

The Association has worked with DCR and NRCS to complete a large number of trainings.

The 2022 Annual Meeting will be in person at the Hotel Roanoke in December.

Youth Conservation Camp will occur on the Virginia Tech campus in July with 55 students participating.

Dr. Tyree echoed the comments regarding Ms. Rich-Coates and noted that she helped found the Envirothon and was preparing the team to move to international competition. The team supported by the Thomas Jefferson SWCD will be moving on to the international competition in Ohio.

Dr. Tyree also noted that the Association has undergone a salary benefits retention study. Every District participated.

Chesapeake Bay Commission

Ms. Kotula noted that the CBC legislative update was provided at the April meeting. CBC is now directing attention to the 2023 Farm Bill.

The full Commission will visit the Charlottesville area in September and CBC is working with the Thomas Jefferson SWCD to schedule several field visits to demonstrate different practices.

Virginia Agribusiness Council

Mr. Shreve commented that the Agribusiness Council is thrilled to have cost-share funding that meets the needs shown in the agricultural needs assessment. He noted that the goal is to bring more producers on board.

Mr. Shreve advised that Dr. Jones is retiring from Virginia Cooperative Extension. VCE is in the process of hiring a replacement.

Virginia Farm Bureau

Ms. Moore commented that she was very appreciative of the historic levels of funding provided. She concurred that there is a need to review the needs assessment to make sure the methodology is appropriate.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no further public comment.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board will be in September 2022. Date and location are to be determined.

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 1:22 p.m.

ATTACHMENT #1

Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Division Director's Report

June 24, 2022

Presented by James E. Martin;
Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation**Chesapeake Bay Bill Update**

As required by the "Bay Bill," the Department has developed, and the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) adopted, an (office) method for determining perennial streams. A project to apply the approved methodology and develop the resulting maps of perennial streams was contracted with GeoDecisions. The preliminary map product has been provided to DCR. Initial review has found that some manual clean-up of the perennial stream data is needed along with ground truthing, and comparison to other datasets to further calibrate the model. These steps will be undertaken by the division this summer.

Tillage Survey

The Division of Soil and Water Conservation reports data on farm tillage methods on an annual basis for inclusion in the Chesapeake Bay Model. The data that is reported is updated every 5 years through a survey that is performed by creating and driving routes through cropland areas and visually inspecting crop residue on fields. The type and percentage of crop residue is estimated, and the percentages observed can be translated into the most likely tillage method that is being used. Data was collected by Soil and Water Conservation District staff along with three teams of VCU students starting during the month of April. Mobile data collection technology was used to collect the data which resulted in 13,600 point locations of observations along with approximately 3,000 pictures of the residue on the fields. The next phase of the process is quality assurance where we will be using the pictures that were collected to verify the accuracy of the observations that were entered. We will then put the data into the necessary county level format for reporting to the Chesapeake Bay Program.

Buffer Recalculation

Over the last several months the Division's Data Services staff have been working closely with Soil and Water Conservation Districts on a major effort to find and correct discrepancies in the average buffer width for stream exclusion practices documented in the Division's Conservation Application Suite. As a result 3,868 buffer acres were gained in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and 2,382 buffer acres were added outside of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed for a total of an additional 6,250 acres statewide.

Staff and Offices

- Sara Bottenfield has assumed the **Agricultural Incentives Program Manager** position. Sara previously served as a TMDL Nonpoint Source Coordinator for the Department of Environmental Quality. Sara also previously worked for the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District.

– Marie Schirmacher has assumed the **Nutrient Management Planning Specialist** position in Suffolk. Marie previously served as a Lab and Research Specialist at the VT Extension Tidewater Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC).

– Jeff Rogers has assumed the **Division Grants Manager** position. Jeff previously coordinated Environmental Stewardship Programs and Grants for the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

– Joe Tesauro has resigned his **Nutrient Management Planning Specialist** position in Radford. Recruitment is underway to backfill the position.

Positions Currently Under Recruitment: Conservation District Coordinators in Suffolk and Abingdon, and Nutrient Management Planning Specialist in Radford.

Return to Office

Effective July 5, 2022 staff are returning to our offices.

ATTACHMENT #2

NRCS REPORT**Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting**

June 24, 2022

Virginia Farm Bureau Federation ♦ 12580 W. Creek Parkway, Richmond, VA 23238

STC Highlights

- Reviewed three of five Equity Conservation Cooperative Agreements involving Virginia. Supporting implementation of finalized Africulture project through joint outreach to include a Juneteenth event.
- Unveiled Virginia People's Garden at Fairfield Middle School in Henrico County on June 1. More funding will be available for other sites to help support resilient local food systems.
- Hired new Outreach Coordinator who will start work on July 5 and finalized new Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships and Initiatives position, which will be advertised in the near future.
- Attended the May 19 Prince William SWCD board meeting to make an in-person presentation of the SE Region and National Earth Team Group Volunteer awards.
- Celebrated Earth Day (April 22) in the Shenandoah Valley with Under Secretary Bonnie and FSA State Executive Director Dr. Ronald Howell. The trip included stops to network with partners and producers at the Lexington Service Center and Farmer Focus poultry processing plant.

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

Field staff are currently managing 2,200 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent \$135 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 467,580 acres.

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**
Preapproved 463 applications for \$25 million. Obligated 283 contracts for \$15.6 million (58% obligated). Applications at the approved status are 52 for \$3.1 million. Received an additional allocation of \$1 million to fund applications in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- **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). Preapproved 103 CSP Classic applications for \$8.57 million. Received 136 FY23 CSP Renewal applications. Received an additional allocation of \$500k to fund applications in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
Currently managing 22 active contracts with total funding of \$2.6 million covering 8,210 acres. Reviewed and evaluated 4 RCPP project proposals. Selections will be made by our National Office soon. Preapproved 15 RCPP-TNC project applications in Lee, Scott and Russell counties.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
Received and rank 4 Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) applications on 1,692 acres with funding requests of \$5.6 million. Currently 7 ALE acquisitions and 2 Wetland Reserve Easements restorations 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 SW Virginia.

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting
June 24, 2022

Virginia Farm Bureau Federation ♦ 12580 W. Creek Parkway, Richmond, VA 23238

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**

Received 3 proposals for soil health on grazing land and pollinator habitat restoration priority topics. Selections have been made and will be announced soon. The maximum award for each topic is \$200,000.

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 revised based on comments received from the NRCS National Water Management Center. It is anticipated that a final environmental assessment will be completed by Fall 2022.

- **Cherrystone Creek 1 and Cherrystone Creek 2A**

Pittsylvania County will be the Sponsor for the locally led design process for the design for the rehabilitation of the structures. NRCS and the County have signed separate cooperative agreements to obligate the funding. The design process is estimated to take between 18 and 24 months. The County is in the process of procuring A&E services for the design.

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 450-22-500 National Technical Note Seed Quality
- Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-22-501 Watering Facility Design Note

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:
 - April 13 – DOF Forest Health, Pests and Pathogens – 75 participants
 - April 27 – Overview of FOTG and Ecological Science SharePoint – 65 participants
 - May 4 – NRCS/DOF programs and procedures – 73 participants
 - June 8 – Native Warm Season Grass CIG Overview – 57 participants
 - June 15 – Urban Agriculture & Forestry – 110 participants

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- Joint agency urban ag and forestry webinar to highlight partner efforts (VCE, VSU, SWCD, DOF, FSA) which complement NRCS urban ag offerings.
- Continuing the RUSLE@2 office hours help sessions for staff
 - Continuing the soil health assessment workgroup and soil health outreach meetings to evaluate and implement greater emphasis on soil health assessment and outreach/training.
 - For the first time in over two years due to COVID training and travel restrictions, we have scheduled in-the-field JED trainings, keeping under 50 staff and all outdoor events:
 - April JEDs – Pasture Condition Score Assessment & Grazing Training
 - May JEDs – Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Tool Training
 - Continue conducting soil health & basic cropland agronomy training/farm visits for field staff
 - Partnered with the Landscape Partnership Learning Network to offer a series of webinars on various aspects of Native Warm Season Grasses (NWSG) Forages and Grazing Management for Bobwhite Quail where our staff was able to attend to earn 2.0 contact hours to maintain their conservation planner certification.
 - Partnered with the Alliance for Grassland Renewal to provide a virtual training opportunity titled, All Things Fescue, to educate cooperative extension and NRCS personnel in understanding toxic tall fescue and novel endophyte tall fescue varieties. Upon completion, participants were given a 30 minute, pre-made presentation they are able to present in their counties. 50 NRCS employees attended earning 2.0 contact hours toward maintaining their conservation planner certification.
 - Conducted a multi-state technical webinar for NRCS and partners in Maryland including Univ. of MD and MD Dept of Natural Resources on our WLFW program and the lessons learned as they begin using this program in MD.

Customer Service and Outreach

- Presented to the VA Prescribed Fire Council on NRCS prescribed fire program offerings and assistance for 100+ participants.
- Partnered with NatGLC, VFGC, VA Tech, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, VCE and American Farmland Trust to coordinate and conduct the Basic Grazing School for 25 producers to attend and learn the principles of grazing and pasture management, and how that relates to building system productivity and soil health while producing healthy and safe livestock product in support of our nation's food supply. Those attending managed a combined 3,030 acres of pastureland, 1,275 acres of hay land, and 1,020 head of various types of livestock.
- Worked with VCE, SWCD, local farmers, VSHC, and industry to host a Twilight Soil Health Event in Halifax County that featured rainfall simulator presentation, a soil pit, cover crop plots, and extensive presentations by Daniel Austin, a farmer mentor. Total of 35 attendees, including 27 farmers.
- Attended and served as a panelist at a Soil Health Coalition sponsored Earth Day event in Blacksburg, VA to answer questions about agriculture and soil health
- Served as invited speaker at Valley Grazing & Soil Health Ag Production Field Day, presenting soil health demonstrations and discussing cover crops. Approx. 150 participants at event.
- Attended National Conservation Planning Partnership Meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota May 9-13.

State Soil Scientist (SSS)

National Resources Inventory Update

The NRI grazing land field data collection locations have been released and the training has happened. Field data collection is ongoing this summer.

Soil Survey Update

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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. MLRA ESD's the piedmont and northern piedmont are also in draft form.

56,318 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

Expanding Engagement. Instituted a new forward-looking events calendar and tracking system to help increase NRCS visibility at statewide meetings/conferences and build relationships with organizations that touch or represent underserved communities. This record of projected activities will help state leadership ensure a level of participation commensurate with the engagement opportunity and more fully document efforts undertaken statewide.

NRCS in the News. Highlighted climate-smart ag practices and ongoing studies to address saltwater intrusion on cropland in "Keeping the Farm" column prepared for June 14 issue of *Delmarva Farmer*.

Social Media Engagement. Leveraged state Twitter account to publicize programs, tie ag to current events and implement campaigns like 4theSoil. Posted **19** tweets between April 16 and June 17 that yielded more than **255** engagements. Top tweet: NRCS Birthday (**735** impressions).

Spring Meetings. Shared information on NRCS programs and services at an April 19 USDA Information Session for producers in Loudon and Fauquier counties and at VSU's "Boots to Roots2: Down on the Farm" veteran farmers field day on May 24. Participation was good despite the inclement weather at Randolph Farm with approximately 95 attendees.

Earth Team Program

Recognized SE Region and National Earth Team award winners Hannah Clifford (Fredericksburg) and the Prince William SWCD Water Quality Program (Warrenton) during a national ceremony held virtually on April 21. Publicized the accomplishments through a news release targeted to Northern Virginia media. Collaborating with VASWCD to schedule joint training on requirements for registering volunteers/groups and recording their hours in the new Volunteer Tracking System.