

Cunningham Creek Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

Fluvanna County Library

January 18, 2018

Meeting Attendees

Roger Black, Fluvanna County

Chuck Wright, VA Department of Forestry

Jess Codwallender, Forester

Dave Thomas, Landowner

Brian Walton, Thomas Jefferson SWCD

James Newman, Fluvanna County

Nesha McRae, VADEQ

Sara Bottenfield, VADEQ

Tom Pratley, Thomas Jefferson SWCD

Meeting Summary

Nesha McRae (VA Department of Environmental Quality) began the meeting with a review of the draft watershed plan for Cunningham Creek. The committee provided feedback as the group moved through each section of the draft document. One participant noted that the land use category of “degraded riparian pasture” could be better defined, Nesha added that total land use acres for this category could be added to the land use table (2-1). It was also noted that the estimate of the number of bears in the watershed (four) seemed rather low (Table 3-2). The table heading in Table 5-3 describing the length of stream where livestock exclusion fencing could be or has been installed was revised based on feedback from the group. It was agreed that “total potential fencing” was unclear and that it could be better described as total length of streambank in pasture/hay. Participants from the Department of Forestry (DOF) expressed some concerns about the extent of sediment identified as coming from harvested forest. They noted that DOF does extensive audits on harvested sites across the states, and that they were concerned that the 60% effectiveness for forestry BMPs is too low considering that compliance is in the 90% range, this rate seems low. Nesha offered to follow up on this concern with VA Tech (the contractor for this project who worked on crediting of best management practices. DOF staff also noted that the sediment loads for harvested land in the watershed seem really high based on the acreage and offered to follow up with a water quality engineer at the agency. It was noted that it may be good to be conservative on load from harvested acres because acreage harvested can change dramatically from year to year, this figure could go up quite a bit.

Staff from Fluvanna County shared their concerns about the Fluvanna Ruritan Dam and its impact on stream health following a meeting the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) who owns and operates the dam. The County reviewed the E&S control plan and project overview from DGIF for their upcoming dam rehabilitation project. The County’s observations of existing conditions on the site did not match what was represented in the plans from DGIF. They will be monitoring the emergency spillway going forward but did not have plans to address erosion at the spillway. Erosion at the spillway has resulted in water funneling to one side of the spillway and not spreading out, which is continuing to cause erosion. DGIF has said that they are going to address the spillway in the next year or so because they don’t have the money to address it now. Staff also implied that it has been a long time since any erosion occurred at the site; however, county staff noted that they have photos showing erosion in 2014. They will be raising the level of the dam to prevent overtopping, which will force more water through the spillway. This was a concerns in terms of additional erosion at the spillway. The County

also expressed concerns about the fact that they found pretty wet conditions on the backside of the dam. They felt that while DGIF has a plan, it does not adequately reflect all of the existing conditions at the site. The county was disappointed by plans, especially that there is no current plan to address erosion in the emergency spillway in the first phase of remediation. The County has no jurisdiction over the project and has concerns about erosion and sediment control during construction as well. It was suggested that the watershed plan include something about maintenance and stabilization issues at the spillway and future plans for DIGF monitoring and plans to pursue funding from DGIF through maintenance and repair funds. Monitoring of spillway will occur using a solar powered monitoring system to identify events when water passes through the spillway. The group discussed whether more could be done in terms of monitoring to identify future erosion happening from the spillway. DEQ staff agreed to follow up with DGIF to see whether they would be willing to serve as a larger partner in the watershed plan, and share a schedule for additional maintenance along with potential monitoring of erosion at the spillway. It may also be worth noting the need for additional monitoring to observe any movement of sediment downstream coming from the dam in the past.

One participant asked with DEQ could provide him with the monitoring site information for the DEQ station on Bells Farm Lane. Nesha offered to follow up with him on this. He also expressed a concern about undercutting of banks when trees fall in the stream on his project, noting that they are pretty significant. Following discussion about this issue, the group concluded that it would be a good idea to consider including some amount of streambank stabilization in the plan. We could also consider having someone come and talk about streambank restoration at final public meeting. This could also be a good workshop opportunity, and the Rivanna Conservation Alliance might be able to provide some volunteer assistance with managing banks.

One participant asked whether the \$2M price tag for implementation of the plan is too high. The group discussed how the cost of this plan compares to other plans across the state. Nesha noted that it is comparatively low. The group agreed that the general public may not see it this way though, and that it may look like a lot of money for a relatively small watershed. The group discussed the best way to communicate where funds come from for implementation. It will be important to stress the availability of existing funding for implementation including the VA Agricultural BMP Cost Share Program and Natural Resource Conservation Service programs as well. Participants expressed concerns as to whether the public is going to think that the price tag is worth the benefits.

The group moved on to discuss plans for the final public meeting. Participants agreed that the library would be a good location, and that a 5:30 p.m. meeting would work well. DEQ will post signs about public meeting next to the stream. Several good locations were identified including Route 53, 619, 640,660 and 15. The Fluvanna Review is the paper to submit press releases to, and DEQ could also consider the Daily Progress. Also the Rural Virginia comes free to most watershed residents. It is owned by Daily Progress. The county website would be a good place to post meeting information, and the county has a fan email newsletter that it sends out. Nesha will follow up with James on county resources for outreach. Thursday March 1st would be good date (Note: This date was unavailable, so February 27th was selected). The group discussed an agenda for the meeting. Presentations on stream restoration, Thomas Jefferson SWCD programs and Rivanna Conservation Alliance activities would be well received. It was suggested that DEQ contact the Fluvanna County Farm Bureau for assistance with outreach. Nesha will also follow up with Rivanna Conservation Alliance and Tenaska regarding potential funding for refreshments.