

**Resource Management Plan Implementation
Stakeholder Advisory Group
DEQ Richmond Regional Office, Glen Allen, Virginia
Tuesday, November 13, 2018**

Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members Present

Clyde Cristman, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
Kyle Shreve, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Dr. Kendall Tyree, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Greg Wichelns, Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District
Charles Green, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Danny Withers, Three Rivers Soil and Water Conservation District
Tim Woodward, Tellus Agronomics

DCR Staff Present

Scott Ambler, Resource Management Protection Coordinator
Barbara McGarry, Resource Management Protection Plan Specialist
Christine Watlington, Policy and Regulatory Coordinator

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Watlington called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees to this meeting of the Resource Management Plan Implementation Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). Members and staff introduced themselves. Ms. Watlington noted that staff had prepared a presentation regarding the initiatives DCR had undertaken and the Program's progress since the October 2017 legislative report. A draft of the annual program highlights report was provided to participants prior to the meeting by e-mail for review.

Overview of DCR Initiatives

Mr. Ambler provided a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation began with a program history, background, and general information. He also discussed DCR initiatives and provided a summary of a draft annual program report.

Discussed DCR initiatives included:

1. Conservation Efficiency Factory (CEF) bonus for Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) applications included in an RMP
2. Sign-up for RMP-1 and RMP-2 VACS practices
3. Targeted mailing
4. RMP Implementation and Development contracts
5. Upcoming local program reviews

A summary of the draft annual program report included:

1. Program results
2. Data regarding BMPs in RMPs
3. Upcoming periodic regulation review
4. Conservation Planning Suite Enhancements
5. Increasing the number of certified RMP developers.

During the presentation, there were questions and comments about the CEF bonus for BMP applications, when the BMPs are part of an RMP. The bonus applies to any BMP which spatially intersects with an approved, implemented, or certified RMP. So far, 825 BMP instances have received a CEF bonus, which equate to approximately 5% of the total BMP applications. A member of the group requested to know how many of those 825 BMPs were approved; however, DCR does not have the information available as it is only midway through this program year.

Regarding the RMP-1 and RMP-2 signup period, it was noted that no Districts submitted a list of participants for RMP development funding. DCR maintains set-aside VACS funding for development and certification for those requests not included in a contract. A group member was glad to hear that this funding is still available and stated that the limitation to RMP development and certification is not lack of demand from farmers, but is due to the lack of funding availability.

The presentation included an announcement that DCR staff plans to begin a pilot RMP Program Review in the upcoming year. Mr. Ambler added that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approved plans to conduct pilot reviews in the Culpeper, Headwaters, and Three Rivers Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts). These Districts were selected because they have RMPs with more advanced RMP status and/or a larger volume of RMPs. A group member questioned whether Districts with no RMPs should also be subject to program reviews. It was agreed that, at this time, DCR should conduct reviews on Districts with RMPs.

Also during the presentation, it was stated that 29 RMPs currently have the status “awaiting certification inspection”. It was asked whether these RMPs have been in this status for a significant time; DCR staff responded that these RMPs were recently submitted for certification inspection and are part of the 2019 RMP Certification and Development Project that just began in July.

Director Cristman noted the extraordinary rainfall events of 2018 and inquired if weather impacted progress of the program. Although there are no known specific delays, he suggested noting in the annual report that there could be delays to implementation due to erosion issues caused by the unusual rain events.

In addition to data included in the slideshow, Mr. Ambler pointed out that, in conjunction with current RMP certification work, nutrient management verification has been conducted on more than 14,000 acres. Additionally, precision nitrogen and phosphorous applications have been recorded on approximately 8,500 acres.

There was discussion about the limited number of certified RMP planners. DCR responded that many certified Nutrient Management Planners do not yet meet the additional conservation planning requirements. DCR’s new conservation planning training program should help potential RMP planners meet the RMP planner certification requirements.

One group member commented that farmers in a certain area are hesitant to report voluntary BMP installation or implementation to the government. There is fear that RMP participation may be reported to EPA. Also in his area, the CEF bonus affected the ranking of BMP applications and everyone with an RMP ranked high enough to receive some VACS funding in the current program year. There were some discussions about a “whole farm concept” as an alternate way to capture voluntary BMP data. Another group member endorsed the concept as a way to make funding more predictable.

A group member commented that incorrect messages about the RMP program creates a marketing problem. It was strongly stated that the program was intended to showcase good work and to prevent new state and federal regulations and that it is absolutely critical that the program not be undermined and mischaracterized.

Director Cristman informed the group of that DCR's Public Communications and Marketing Office (PCMO) has a new Director and that PCMO may be able to assist with marketing efforts.

Ms. Watlington then requested that the group make recommendations on upcoming marketing opportunities, particularly meetings and events sponsored by partners.

One District group member commented that RMPs are always mentioned by District staff when they present at crop producer meetings local to their area. It was suggested that DCR create and make available a generic RMP program presentation to provide to Districts or other partners information to present at these upcoming meetings and events.

The following event were also suggested:

Chesapeake Bay Awareness Week;

Late winter/spring crop production meetings;

VA Grains and Soybean Annual Conference (February, Richmond);

Virginia Crop Production Association;

Farm Bureau TV; and

Farm Bureau Takeover Tuesday Facebook posts.

As the meeting adjourned, DCR requested any comments to the draft report be received by November 16. The report will be finalized and provided to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board at their upcoming December meeting.