

**Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Monday, April 22, 2024
Twin Lakes State Park, Green Bay, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 10:00 a.m. the Cedar Crest Conference Center at Twin Lakes State Park, in Green Bay, Virginia on Monday, April 22, 2024.

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charles Newton, Chair
Adam Wilson, Vice Chair
Chuck Arnason
Stephanie Cornell
Jason De La Cruz
Pam Mason
Robert Mills

John Schick
Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director
Dr. Edwin M. Martinez, NRCS, *Ex Officio*
Dr. Dan Goerlich, Virginia Cooperative
Extension, *Invitee*

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Jay Ford

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director
Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety and Floodplain Management
James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Lisa McGee, Director of Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs
Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager
Michael R. Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Blair Gordon, SWCD Liaison
Denney Collins, Conservation District Coordinator
Sara Bottenfield, Agricultural Incentives Program Manager
Paul Saunders, Policy and Planning Specialist

OTHERS PRESENT

Suzanne Brown, Loudoun SWCD
Deanna Fehrer, Piedmont SWCD
Donna McRae Johnes, Peter Francisco SWCD
Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Leigh Pemberton, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Sharon Connor, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Dr. Kendall Tyree, VASWCD

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

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

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Newton called the meeting to order at 10:03 and called for introductions.

Mr. Arnason welcomed members to the Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 27, 2024

Mr. Mills moved that the minutes from the March 27, 2024, meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board be approved as submitted. Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

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

Director Wells welcomed members and guests to Twin Lakes State Park. He gave an overview of the unique park history noting that the park was operated as two separate parks until the 1960s when it became one park.

Director Wells noted that there were not many updates since the March meeting. He commented that we are still waiting on a final budget actions from the General Assembly and Governor. He advised that the General Assembly determined that the Governor's amendments were not specific and severable, which effectively returned the budget to the version approved by the General Assembly. Conferees are working to develop a compromise budget. The compromise budget will be presented to the General Assembly on May 13 and will hopefully be voted on May 15.

RECOMMENDATION REGARDING ROBERT E. LEE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S VACS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones reported the following:

- All PY 2024 cover crop sign ups have been field verified by staff. Several of the practices required changes to reflect additional acreages or changes made by the producer to the type of cover crop implemented. All of these practices were brought to the District Board at the March 28, 2024, meeting for approval. The CDC reviewed the estimate calculations and the documentation to support the changes and concurred with the approvals as proposed.
- The District held a special called meeting on April 4, 2024, to approve both Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program and District payments on five of the seven structural practices. DCR assisted with completing project check out, as-builts and check out notes, determining eligibility of components, and completing and verifying payment calculations for concurrence with payment of these practices. The District has been asked by the CDC to ensure that files are in good working order per the Conservation Folder Outline and Payment Checklist.
- Per the March 28, 2024, meeting discussion, the District will be researching options for establishing an interest-bearing account as noted in #5 of the March VSWCB motion..

- Mr. Jeff Floyd, the District Chair, resigned from the board effective March 21, 2024 (and the District Board accepted his resignation on March 28, 2024. The District is in the process of looking for someone to fill the vacancy on the board and took action at the April 4, 2024, meeting to advertise the vacancy.
- The District has advertised for a Conservation Technician position. The advertisement went out via the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' All District List . The personnel committee will be meeting on April 22, 2024, to review any applications received to select viable candidates for interviews

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved the following:

In accordance with §10.1-530 of the Code of Virginia, the District must designate a Board Chair by no later than the May District Board meeting. The positions of District Board Chair and District Treasurer may not be fulfilled by the same individual.

The District will utilize documents provided by the Department to ensure the adequate and appropriate administration of the VACS Program. The following documents will be utilized by the District:

- Conservation folder outline – details the documentation that must be included in all cost-share files and how those files must be organized and maintained;
 - Agronomic cost estimate and payment calculator – utilized to calculate both estimated costs and payment amounts for specific agronomic practices (SL-8B, SL-8H and NM-1A practices);
 - Standard cost-estimate calculator worksheet – utilized to calculate estimated costs for all structural practices and other practices that are not addressed in the agronomic calculator and worksheet;
 - Standard payment calculation worksheet – used to calculate payment amounts for all structural practices and other practices that are not addressed in the agronomic calculator and worksheet;
 - Payment checklist – verifies that the appropriate processes have been completed (i.e. bid solicitation, EJAA documentation, etc.) and that all necessary documentation has been completed and included in the cost-share file prior to issuing payment.
- After June 1, 2024, no payments will be issued without a payment checklist being completed and verified by the District's Conservation District Coordinator.

Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

DAM SAFETY AND FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT

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

Mr. Glover gave the report for the Division of Dam Safety and Floodplain Management.

Mr. Glover reported that the previous Friday afternoon, FEMA had posted on their public website the announcement of an award to DCR to fund the positions of chief engineer and two regional engineers. As of the date of the meeting, DCR had not received official notification from FEMA.

Mr. Glover noted that the Division has hired a new Business Manager. This position has been vacant since November. The new hire will begin on May 10.

Mr. Glover advised that DCR had been dealing with a few dam incidents including a partial dam failure in Gloucester County. There is no imminent threat, and the agency continues to gather information about the situation.

Finally, the agency is responding to questions from the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB) regarding the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action (NOIRA) approved by the Board at the March meeting. Once the NOIRA receives executive approval, the NOIRA will be posted for public comment and the agency will establish a Regulatory Advisory Panel (RAP).

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DIVISION

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

Mr. Martin advised that there was no Division report for this meeting and no updates since the March 27, 2024, meeting.

APPROVAL OF BOARD'S FISCAL YEAR 2025 VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL COST SHARE (VACS) BMP MANUAL –

Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that there were 2 recommended changes that were not discussed at the March meeting.

Cost-Share Administrative File Review Form

- Revisions are being recommended that more accurately reflect the language of the Part 3 of the VACS contract.

WP-4C specification

- There is a reference to an NRCS standard that is not applicable to this practice.
- The Department recommends removing the reference:

7. This practice is subject to NRCS Standards 313 Waste Storage Facility, 316 Animal Mortality Facility, 317 Composting Facility, 362 Diversion, 367 Roofs and Covers, 558 Roof Runoff Structure, 561 Heavy Use Area, 620 Underground Outlet, 633 Waste Recycling, and 634 Waste Transfer.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the 2025 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share BMP Manual as amended by the Board. The Department is authorized to make non-substantive changes to include formatting and stylistic changes as necessary to all approved sections of the Manual.

Additionally, the Board directs the AgBMP Technical Advisory Committee to review and revise, as needed, the SL-7 and SL-10 standards and specifications to ensure the consistent and appropriate implementation of these practices.

Ms. Mason seconded, and the motion carried.

REVIEW OF BOARD POLICY ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS FUNDING ALLOCATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 – *Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that both administration and operations funding and base technical assistance funding for Districts is reviewed, and amended as needed, every two years. Two years ago, an additional \$3 million was provided to Districts for administration and operations funding, allowing significant revisions to the funding provided to Districts. She commented that, using the same formula that was utilized in 2023 would result in many Districts receiving less base funding.

Recommended revisions to the Board policy include:

- Changing dates from FY2024 to FY2025 and 2024 to 2025
- Revised references to potential budget bill
 - Where it was likely there was additional funding provided, numbers have been updated (ex. Small dam repairs and district support services)
 - Increased funding provided for Association (\$27,000) and Department (\$52,500)
- Additional funding for Association reflects increased costs in those categories
- Additional funding for Department provides support for training and travel
- Reflects recommendation of Department that administration and operations funding be disbursed twice during the year, rather than quarterly
 - 1st and 3rd quarter disbursements

Mr. Martin noted that, if an additional \$1 million is provided in the budget for District administration and operations funding, the numbers can be readjusted.

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that, while a formal action was not needed at this meeting, staff needed to know if the Board agreed with retaining the 2023 District funding levels for administration and operations funding.. She advised that retaining the 2023 levels would ensure Districts retained stable funding.

By consensus the Board agreed with the recommendation.

REVIEW OF ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS SUPPORT GRANT AGREEMENT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 – *Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that no Board action was needed at this meeting. She reviewed the recommended changes that will come before the Board for approval at the next meeting.

- Changing dates from FY2024 to FY2025 and 2024 to 2025
- Reflects recommendation that administration and operations funding be disbursed twice during the year, rather than quarterly

- 1st and 3rd quarter disbursements
- Requires a documented mid-year review of the plan – review expected during a scheduled meeting of the District Board
- Requires submittal of the budget template
 - A deliverable every other year
- Clarifications in Attachment C
 - Deliverable #11 – clarifies that administrative staff must also participate in trainings, rather than solely financial staff
 - Reflects language in Attachment A which is more broad and reflects the needs of District administrative staff
 - Deliverable #12 – clarifies that employee evaluations must be conducted at least annually
 - Deliverable #17-18 – minor clarifications for outreach deliverable
- New Attachment Ds and Es
- Training table has been updated to reflect revision of “New Director Training” to “Director Orientation Training”

REVIEW OF BOARD POLICY ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COST-SHARE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FUNDING ALLOCATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 – *Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Technical Assistance Base was the same as 2023 and 2024. She noted that DCR was recommending the following revisions:

- Changing dates from FY2024 to FY2025 and 2024 to 2025
- Revised references to potential budget bill
 - Where funding is known, it has been included
- Cost-share funding (and additional technical assistance) is funded by the September 2023 budget
 - These funds are not dependent on upcoming budget actions
 - Big picture funding levels:
 - Recommending \$206,747,943 be allocated
 - This does include \$556,980 in central service adjustments, which we haven’t utilized in the last several years
 - Remaining for VACS: \$206,190,963
 - Technical assistance
 - \$31,354,825 in technical assistance
 - Funding for Whole Farm Approach
 - Recommending \$60,535,714 held in reserve
 - \$53,571,429 for BMP implementation
 - \$6,964,286 in technical assistance
- Recommending that \$3 million be allocated from recordation revenues for poultry litter transport
 - Not recommending any addition recordation revenues (or associated technical assistance) be allocated this year
- Cost-share allocations primarily based on 2024 nonpoint source assessments
- Technical assistance
- Additional percentage of technical assistance funds have been provided
 - Historically 13% of the “grand total” of funds provided for VACS Program
 - Not every District receives 13%

- Base technical assistance is based on budget template, which creates variability between Districts
- Additional technical assistance based on proportion of VACS funding provided to each District
 - In September, closer to 15%
 - Base technical assistance remains at \$4.55 million
 - Additional technical assistance
 - 13% of cost-share funding
 - More equitable distribution of technical assistance funds
- Removed language related to RMP set-asides
 - Department is utilizing different funding sources for RMPs, rather than VACS funds
- Reflects updates to 2024 nonpoint source assessment
 - Cost-share allocations primarily based on 2024 nonpoint source assessments
- Significant revisions:
 - Removal of 90% cost-share obligation goal
 - Reflects existing requirement that technical assistance be returned to the Department with unobligated cost-share funds
 - The proportional amount of technical assistance is 13%
- Reflects recommendation that the voluntary relinquishment of funds to the Department be removed
- Technical assistance recommended to be disbursed as follows:
 - First quarter – all base technical assistance
 - All four quarters – technical assistance disbursed proportionally (13%) with cost-share funds
 - Districts work with their CDCs to determine appropriate levels of cost-share based on District’s projected needs for cost-share payments in that quarter.

REVIEW OF COST-SHARE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT AGREEMENTS FOR FISCAL YEARS 2025 –

Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Department was recommending the following changes:

- Changing dates from FY2024 to FY2025 and 2024 to 2025
- Reflects recommendation that technical assistance funding be disbursed as follows:
 - All base technical assistance disbursed in 1st quarter if all previous year financial reports (both quarterly and end-of-year reports) are completed and submitted – and new grant agreement fully executed
 - All additional technical assistance disbursed in conjunction with cost-share funds over the 4 quarters
- Reflects recommendation that 90% obligation requirements for VACS allocation be removed
- Reflects existing requirement that technical assistance be returned to the Department with unobligated cost-share funds
- Reflects recommendation that the voluntary relinquishment of funds to the Department be removed
- Significant revisions to the deliverables
 - Reflects concerns found in Robert E. Lee and other districts
 - More focused on implementation on key components of the VACS program
 - Conservation planning
 - EJAA
 - Properly maintain cost-share files
 - Requirement for District staff to achieve conservation planning certification within 24 months of hire
 - Reflects significant investment by Department and Districts in training new staff

- Requirement that staff implementing VACS Program has appropriate levels of EJAA and follows the applicable standards and specifications
- Requirement to ensure appropriate development and utilization of Average Cost List
- Ensure conservation plans are developed and Board-approved prior to practice being Board-approved
 - Reflects updated language in VACS Manual just approved
- Requirements to ensure that data entry issues are addressed in a timely manner
- Ensure all appropriate tax credit documentation was provided to participant
- Clarifications provided in Attachment C

REVIEW OF DESKTOP PROCEDURES FOR DISTRICT FISCAL OPERATIONS – *Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the recommended updates were compiled from a collection of suggestions and edits identified through the audit process, Districts annual review of the handbook, and Department staff reviews. She noted that the changes were largely grammatical, based on recommendations from a professional copy editor.

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the following specific changes were made.

- Pg. 2, **Directors** – Updated language to reflect the new Director Resource Notebook and the online Director training course.
- Pg. 5, **Finance Committee**, and Pg. 6, **Treasurer’s Reports** – Added language to include District staff in the development of the budget and budget reports.
- Pg. 10, **Insured Accounts** – Updated language about the required quarterly review of public accounts on the Virginia Department of Treasury SPDA Account Balance Search System.
- Pg. 11, **Insured Accounts** – Added language to encourage Districts to utilize the Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP) and to ensure that any funds transferred from the LGIP to the District is placed in bank accounts that meet the SPDA requirements.
- Pg. 18, **Sales** – Included language about sales entered directly into QuickBooks.
- Pg. 22, **District Credit Cards** – Added language about creating a “missing receipts log” when receipts from purchases are lost.
- Pg. 26, **Fixed Assets Inventory** – Increased the suggested value to \$500. Added language to include data storage devices on fixed assets inventory lists, regardless of monetary value.
- Pg. 35, **Personnel Policy, Hiring a New Employee and Orientation** – Added language to encourage District Boards to consult with District Managers/Executive Directors regarding personnel matters when such positions exist within the District.
- Pg. 36, **Timesheets** – Clarified that employee timesheets should be approved “by their immediate supervisor (or an individual designated by the Finance Committee, this may be a Director, senior staff member, or District Manager/Executive Director)”
- Pg. 37, **Salary Adjustments** – Added language that allows the District Board to grant authority to District Managers/Executive Directors to sign the Employee Pay Action Approval Form when salary adjustments are made.

- Pg 63, **FLSA Fair Pay Exemption Questionnaire** – Noted that the U.S. Department of Labor is working to revise the regulations regarding FLSA exemptions and the most current information regarding FLSA is available on their website.

APPROVAL OF DISTRICT DIRECTOR APPOINTMENTS AND RESIGNATIONS – *Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the District Director appointment recommendations.

Patrick

Resignation of Mr. Christian Taylor, of Patrick County, effective 3/01/2024, Extension Agent appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Monacan

Appointment of Mr. Matthew Dabney, of Goochland County, effective 4/22/2024, to fill the vacant At-Large appointed director position (term of office expires 12/31/2026).

Mountain Castles

Appointment of Ms. Anne Jones, of Botetourt County, effective 3/27/2024, to fill the vacant Extension Agent appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Robert E. Lee

Resignation of Mr. Jeffrey Floyd, of Amherst County, effective 3/21/2024, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the appointments of the individuals being recommended. Mr. Arnason seconded, and the motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

Chairman Newton noted that at the March meeting, Mr. Ford offered to draft a letter to the Chairs of the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriation and the House Committee on Appropriations. As Mr. Ford was not present, this item was deferred.

PARTNER REPORTS

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Dr. Edwin Martinez

Dr. Martinez provided the report for NRCS. A copy is included as Attachment A.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

VDACS was not represented at the meeting.

Mr. Fletcher advised the Board that there will likely be an Agricultural Stewardship Act appeal hearing at the June meeting.

Virginia Cooperative Extension – Dr. Dan Goerlich

Dr. Goerlich thanked the Board for welcoming Matt Lail to the March meeting. In the event Dr. Goerlich is unable to attend meetings, Mr. Lail will represent VCE.

Dr. Goerlich gave the report for VCE. A copy is included as Attachment B.

Virginia Tech is in the process of a search for a Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts – Dr. Kendall Tyree

Dr. Tyree commented that she had been with many of the Board members at the VASWCD meeting and at Area Meetings, as well as a meeting of the state technical committee.

Dr. Tyree noted that District Managers from three districts were in attendance. She encouraged Board members to take advantage of the opportunity to discuss program implementation and practices in their respective districts.

The next VASWCD Board meeting will be in June. Dr. Tyree will provide the information to SWCB Members. This will be a virtual meeting.

Dr. Tyree advised that at the Quarterly Board meeting, the Association Board approved the names for Area Three and Area Six nominees to serve on the Soil and Water Conservation Board. Those names will be officially presented at this Board's June meeting.

Dr. Tyree noted that the Budget is a top priority for the Association. Association staff have been in touch with the General Assembly conferees.

Dr. Tyree advised that the Association Golf Tournament in support of the Education Foundation would be May 8.

The state Envirothon will be held May 19-20 at Radford University. Volunteers are still needed.

Virginia Farm Bureau – Martha Moore

Ms. Moore noted that staff have been participating in working groups concerning legislation. Virginia Farm Bureau is still focused on achieving the WIP goals for the Bay. She noted that she believes a reasonable process will be developed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group and the 2027 goal will be met.

Virginia Farm Bureau is still encouraging farmers to utilize cost-share.

Virginia Farm Bureau is also working with the Chairs of the Senate and House Agriculture Committees regarding a retreat focusing on Virginia agriculture.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING

Staff will poll the Board for a meeting date near the end of June 2024.

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting Monday, April 22, 2024
Twin Lakes State Park, Green Bay, Virginia

STC Highlights

- **Staffing Updates:** We currently have 180 full time employees on board. Our target goal is 185 by the end of the Fiscal Year.
- **State Budget:** Our FY24 state budget is \$100M, this is due to the additional funding coming from the Inflation Reduction Act.
- **Programs:** Virginia NRCS is currently utilizing **ACT NOW** to process conservation applications in some ranking pools to promote faster review and action. ACT NOW allows NRCS to immediately approve and obligate a ranked eligible application in a designated ranking pool when the application meets or exceeds a state-determined minimum ranking threshold score. This eliminates the previous need to wait for all applications to be reviewed and preapproved in a ranking pool.
 - To date for FY24 - obligated 10.1 million across 252 contracts.
- **Conservation Innovation Grants** – We have funded over 44 CIG projects in Virginia since 2010, over \$6.6M. NRCS will also have a Notice of Funding Opportunity for CIG. Our proposed 2024 State priorities, under FB and/or IRA funding authorities include: Soil Health (\$900,000), Tribal Applicants (\$50,000), Urban Applicants (\$50,000), and Forestry Applicants (\$50,000). Due date for application is May 10th.
- **Local Work Groups (LWG):** We are currently working on our FY24 LWGs for Virginia. As part of this year’s process, we’re planning a training to increase consistencies across the state. Our goal is to be champions and role models on how to complete this process effectively, while providing valuable feedback to our stakeholders.
- **State Technical Committee meeting:** Our next meeting is scheduled for April 24th at the USDA-NRCS State Office. Several SWCD representatives have been recently added to the committee.
- **WEWAI Training** - Currently, the National Office is evaluating a potential training opportunity to be hosted here in Virginia in 2024: Working Effectively with American Indians (WEWAI). Once details are available, we will share with our conservation partners to determine their interest.
- **Grants and Agreements** - Virginia remains a model of technical excellence, innovation, and sound fiscal management. Our strong partnership focus is paving the way for collaborative conservation.
 - In FY23 we funded 7 new agreements working with 8 conservation partners. Putting about \$2.9M in the state to assist with education, outreach, technical assistance, staffing capacity, development of new partnerships, and increasing conservation implementation in the state.
 - This year, we are working on three Notice of Funding Opportunities: one for cooperative agreements for outreach and technical assistance (\$4 million), and two grants, one for Tribal Conservation Grants (\$250,000) and one for Urban Agriculture Conservation Grants (\$250,000).

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- **Trainings** - NRCS is coordinating with other conservation partners to offer joint training opportunities for our staff and partners in Virginia, an example of this is last's years Agroforestry training. NRCS is working with the SWCD Association to develop an agreement that would providing funding to train NRCS and SWCD staff during the year, primarily targeting the Annual Conference.
 - **SWCD Spring Area Meetings** – The USDA NRCS Team attended all FY24 SWCD Area Spring meetings! Thank you again to the SWCDs for the invitation and for providing time for an NRCA update in each area agenda. The State Conservationist attended 5/6 of the meetings.
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ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**

Received 1,318 EQIP applications, ranking is underway for eligible applications. EQIP allocation is \$21.2 million. EQIP-IRA allocation is \$28.6 million. 205 EQIP applications are currently obligated for \$5.6 million (39 are IRA contracts).

- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)–Classic, Renewals & GCI**

Received 370 CSP- Classic applications. CSP classic allocation is \$13.8 million. Obligated 58 CSP Renewal contracts with total funding of \$2.6 million. CSP-IRA allocation is \$9.2 million.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

Five active FB14 agreements. Eight active FB18 agreements. Agreements totaling \$41.2 million. Sixty-four FY24 applications with funding requests for \$3.3 million.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**

Received 22 ALE applications with funding requests for \$14.9 million on 10,226 acres. 11 ACEP-ALE acquisitions underway. 1 ACEP-WRE restoration in progress. 145 existing recorded easements totaling 16,606 acres of land protected and monitored. One WRE application totaling 851 acres.

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**

2024 Virginia CIG Notice of Funding Opportunity opened March 11, 2024, and closes May 10, 2024. The recommended proposals topics were Soil Health, Urban Ag, Tribal and Forestry. Four CIGs totaling \$895,243, with partners like Virginia Tech, Sustainable Chesapeake, Virginia State University. Two contribution agreements with Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and the Department of Forestry totaling 183,235; One USDA agreement with Virginia Forage Grassland Council totaling \$297,223.10; One Contribution Agreement with Virginia Tech for Agronomist totaling \$1.1 million; One-VPA- HIP Agreement with DWR totaling \$2.9 million. Closed out CIG agreements for 2018-2021.

Engineering (SCE)

Staffing Updates

- Kelly Ramsey is currently the acting State Conservation Engineer (SCE), effective 1/15/24.
- Two engineering positions were advertised in late 2023 (Environmental and Watershed Dam engineers). All applicants took other positions or didn't respond to request for interviews.
- Engineering staff shortages continue.

Dam Rehabilitation

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

Pittsylvania County is leading the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structures. Pittsylvania County has retained Schnabel Engineering as its consultant. The design process is ongoing.

- **Beaver Creek 1**

The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) is leading the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structure. RWSA has retained Schnabel Engineering as its consultant. The design process is ongoing. The design is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.

- **John's Creek 1**

Mountain Castles SWCD is leading the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structure. DCR is currently assisting Mountain Castles SWCD in obtaining a consultant. The design process is ongoing. The design is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP)

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP)

NRCS is providing disaster assistance to Buchanan County through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) for a rain event in the Hurley area in August 2021 (estimated 6-8 inches). Construction will be finalized by June 30, 2024.

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 to include conservation practice standards, technical notes, planning criteria, resource concerns, conservation practice physical effects, cost lists and the Virginia Plant Establishment Guide.

Bulletins/Notices released:

- VA Bulletin 180-24-4- CRP Updates.
- VA Bulletin 180-24-5- FY 2024 Food Security Act Compliance Reviews.

Training to Field Staff

- **Webinars:**

- **Urban Agriculture Training (1/10/2024)**
- VA NRCS Ag Soil Erosion & RUSLE2 Assessment (1/24/2024)
- FSA Compliance Revision Training (2/7/2024)
- ArcGIS Pro: Tips & Tricks (2/21/2024)
- Job Approval Authority Training (3/6/2024)
- EWP Training & Urban Agriculture & Small-Scale Farming Overview (3/20/2024)

- **Staff/Partnership Trainings**

- CD/CART Training (1/17/2024)
- CSP In-person Training per area
- SWCD-Partnership Erosion Training & Certification Program (3/27/2024)
- RCCP Training (2/22/2024)
- State and Local Resources for Establishing Silvopasture Webinar (2/27/2024)

- **Staff Training/Outreach Events**

- VA No Till Alliance (VANTAGE) Winter Conference
- Novel Endophyte Fescue: A Technological Solution to a Toxic and Costly Problem (1/17/24)
- VFGC Winter Forage Conference (1/23,24,25,26/2024)

Customer Service and Outreach

- Virginia Crop Production Association Crop Summit (1/16 &18/2024)
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State Soil Scientist (SSS)

National Resources Inventory grazing land data collection training for staff teams will be conducted the first week of May.

The new SSURGO portal has been released. Since Arc Map is being retired, and Arc Pro taking its place. Arc Pro does not recognize MS Access databases which were used for the soils tabular data. SSURGO portal uses SQLITE and does the same things as before with soils tabular data a great deal faster.

Soil Survey Update

MLRA soil survey office is working on renaming a few soil map units in Hanover County. They were named as Udufts-Ocrepts on differing slopes. The project plans on studying the soil map units to give them soil series names and refine the data to give better soil interpretations.

The Currituck Sound coastal zone soil survey mapping project is set to begin this year.

Partnerships & Initiatives (P&I)

- Two new **National Equity Agreements** have been awarded for Virginia in 2024.
 - **Africulture**, to assist historically underserved farmers and ranchers in Virginia in accessing NRCS services, including technical assistance, which may lead to enrolling in NRCS farm bill programs such as EQIP and other Conservation programs. As a minority owned and led organization with experience and the target area of Virginia, Africulture will effectively perform agricultural outreach to historically underserved farmers and ranchers, including African American, Veteran, Limited Resource, and Beginning Farmers, as well as students. The goal of this project is to equip socially disadvantaged producers with the tools and skills needed for them to successfully access and utilize NRCS programs and services.
 - **M.A.D. Krew Worldwide, Inc**, to engage historically underserved producers to adopt no tillage, climate-smart conservation practices within the Tidewater Region of Virginia and encourage participation in NRCS conservation programs. The overarching objective of this project is to create a support system for beginning, historically underserved, and socially disadvantaged farmers to facilitate and support them as they begin working with NRCS. To do this the recipient will:
 - Create a network of beginning farmers for the purpose of supporting and encouraging conservation practices amongst producers within the Tidewater Region of Virginia.

- Assist producers to mitigate the impact of extreme climate conditions through instruction and hands-on demonstration of climate-smart conservation practices.
 - Increase NRCS's ability to incorporate an increased quantity of socially disadvantaged farmers by creating an awareness of NRCS planning process and program implementation to underserved communities and historically underserved producers.
 - Increase the number of socially disadvantaged farmers who understand the planning and process of working with the FSA and NRCS.
- The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications for a **\$6.1 million competitive grant program designed to improve access to fresh and healthy foods in urban areas** where such access is either limited or unavailable. The program will be administered by NRCS' **Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production**. Applications must be made online at grants.gov and must be filed before midnight on April 9, 2024, to be considered for funding in the current fiscal year.
 - **State Tribes Summit** - NRCS Virginia is leading an effort to host a 2024 State Tribal Summit for the non-federal recognized state tribes. This summit will be like what we held for Federally Recognized Tribes back in 2022.
 - This year, we are working on three **Notice of Funding Opportunities**: two grants, one for Tribal Conservation Grants (\$250,000) and one for Urban Agriculture Conservation Grants (\$250,000) and one for cooperative agreements for outreach and technical assistance (\$4 million).

ATTACHMENT B



Report to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board: *April 22, 2024*

As the Virginia SWCB travels to different locations around the state you know that I am fond of highlighting Extension programs and activities from the host site region. Located on the Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest west of Farmville, Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center is not far from Twin Lakes State Park. This month's report will highlight their Natural Resource Educational Program (NRE).

Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center offers many opportunities for students to learn about our state's abundant natural resources through hands-on programming. The Center's NRE programs include both day and overnight trips for schools and groups who are interested in experiential education in the outdoors. NRE Programs engage students with concepts and ideas that can be taught in the classroom and allows them to integrate those same concepts into real world applications. NRE programs encourage students to apply classroom knowledge and critical thinking skills about novel and relevant situations.

Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center offers 20 different NRE courses: Aquatic Ecology, Camp Fire, Entomology, Field Games, Forest Ecology, Geology, Herpetology, Mammalogy, Meteorology, Night Hike, Nocturnal Animals, Orienteering, Ornithology, Owl Pellet Dissection, Sensory Awareness, Soil Studies, Team Building, Water Chemistry, Wilderness Survival, and Wildlife Ecology.

All NRE curricula are correlated with the Virginia Standards of Learning on natural sciences, life sciences, life-skill development, and leadership development. The NRE program places emphasis on developing awareness and appreciation of the natural environment by providing opportunities to develop basic scientific analysis methods and observational skills in each subject area. NRE programs teach stewardship, increase awareness of current environmental issues, and assist teachers and other educators in conducting NRE based programs.

In 2023, more than 3,000 youth from public and private schools, as well as homeschool associations, learned through experiencing NRE programs at Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center. Upon arrival at the 4-H Center, students are issued a brief pre-test to assess their background knowledge on some topics that will be addressed during their visit to the 4-H Center. The students are told just to answer to the best of their ability, and they do not have to put their name on the test before turning it in. After having a chance to learn about each topic during their different NRE class rotations, the students are given the same questions before departing the center to see if they are able to improve their scores after visiting each station. In 2023, the overall average pre-test score was 64% and the average post-test score was 81%.

In addition to NRE programs, Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center also provides Challenge Course and Adventure programs for eligible groups. These activities are designed to bring participants together in a new environment to work together to solve problems and work on leadership and teambuilding skills. For more information about any of the programs offered by Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center please contact the Center NRE Coordinator.

In other updates, VCE and VAES recently held the ANR Summit in Short Pump, VA to engage with stakeholders on topics of importance to the industry. Robert Mills, member of the SWC Board of Directors, who served as a speaker. The search continues for a Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Opportunities exist to interact with the candidates at Virginia Tech as well as the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation Office. Mr. Mills serves as a member of the search committee as well. The April section of our New ANR Extension Agent Onboarding Program will be held April 23 and 24 at the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Blackstone, VA.

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