

**Resource Management Plan Implementation
Stakeholder Advisory Group
West Reading Room, Patrick Henry Building, Richmond, Virginia
Tuesday, June 13, 2017**

Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members Present

Clyde Cristman, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Charles Green, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Leslie Anne Hinton, Three Rivers Soil and Water Conservation District
Ann Jennings, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
Richard Street, Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Megan Seibel, Office of the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry
Dr. Kendall Tyree, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Greg Wichelns, Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District
Tim Woodward, Tellus Agrinomics

DCR Staff Present

Scott Ambler, Resource Management Protection Coordinator
David Dowling, Deputy Director of Soil and Water Conservation and Dam Safety and Floodplain Management
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Darryl Glover, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Wendy Howard Cooper, Business and Administration Manager
Stephanie Martin, Soil and Water Conservation District Liaison
Barbara McGarry, Resource Management Protection Plan Specialist
Lisa McGee, Director of Policy and Planning
Christine Watlington, Senior Policy and Planning Analyst

Others Present

Riley Henry, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Daniel Peifer, Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Welcome and Introductions

Director Cristman welcomed attendees to the second meeting of the Resource Management Plan (RMP) Implementation Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). He noted that much of today's presentation would be focused on answering questions asked by the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) at the May meeting.

Director Cristman gave an overview of the RMP program accomplishments.

Program Accomplishments

- As of June 1, 2017, 380 RMPs
 - 18 in the development or assessment stage

- 362 RMPs submitted
 - § 307 approved
 - § 55 under review at SWCDs
- 9 fully implemented; certificates issued



RMPs by Land Types

Land type included	Number of RMPs
Cropland	294
Hayland	26
Pasture	24
Hayland and pasture	17
Cropland, hayland, and pasture	11
Cropland and hayland	8
Total	380

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Director Cristman noted that the vast majority of BMPs have been developed for cropland. This is an important consideration when the Department and other organizations discuss marketing efforts.



BMP included in RMPs

BMP (cost-share vs. voluntary)	Total
Cost-share complete	291
Cost-share proposed	975
Subtotal	1,266
Voluntary complete	4
Voluntary proposed	1,352
Subtotal	1,356
Total	2,622

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Director Cristman noted that one of the challenges for the RMP program is the difference between the number of BMPs that must be completed for an RMP to be certified and the number of BMPs that have been

completed. Out of 1,266 BMPs that could be completed using cost-share funds, only 291 have been completed.

Ms. Moore noted that there is concern that credit cannot be given for BMPs that are not verified. There is a distinction between having BMPs implemented and verified; some of the BMPs included as voluntary proposed may have been implemented even if the practices have not been verified.

Mr. Dowling advised that the Department was aware of this concern and was trying to work towards addressing several issues regarding verification.

Members made a number of inquiries. A question was raised as to whether voluntary practices should bump up a producer in the cost-share rankings. It was also suggested that assurances should be provided to producers that secondary considerations not be able to exclude cost-share for RMP required practices. It was further noted that the requirement for an NMP under the RMP should not be utilized as a reason not to provide cost-share to a producer for developing an NMP. It was also suggested that verification may need to be added to the budget template.

One of the concepts that the Department is trying to analyze is how long should it take for an RMP to be fully implemented and certified. At this point in the program, it may be too early to discern the typical implementation timeframe.



Key RMP Timeframes

Quarter Code	Quarter	Number Submitted	Number Approved	Number Certified
1	July 1, 2014 - September 30, 2014	0	0	0
2	October 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014	1	1	1
3	January 1, 2015 - March 31, 2015	0	0	0
4	April 1, 2015 - June 30, 2015	71	2	0
5	July 1, 2015 - September 30, 2015	199	98	0
6	October 1, 2015 - December 31, 2015	8	119	0
7	January 1, 2016 - March 31, 2016	2	53	0
8	April 1, 2016 - June 30, 2016	28	10	0
9	July 1, 2016 - September 30, 2016	2	12	1
10	October 1, 2016 - December 31, 2016	10	1	0
11	January 1, 2017 - March 31, 2017	32	8	7
12	April 1, 2017 - May 31, 2017	9	3	0
	Total	362	307	9

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Approval Highlights

- Conversations between plan developers and SWCDs; revisions by developers as needed
- Once RMP completed, TRCs move quickly on approval
- Many approvals occur within one-month of final RMP submittal

Certified RMPs

- 6 plans written through flowchart process; 3 written by DCR
- Land types
 - 7 cropland (small grains)
 - 2 cropland, hayland, and pasture
- 91 BMPs included in certified RMPs
 - 5 required practices funded through cost-share
 - 56 additional practices funded through cost-share

Implementation Timeframes

- Based on 6 certified RMPs*
 - Average of 7 quarters (614 days) from RMP creation to implementation certification
 - Average of 5 quarters from RMP approval to implementation
- Based on certified RMP timeframes, delays appear to be occurring at implementation stage

* Does not include DCR written plans

Mr. Dowling reviewed the RMP Process Flowchart. A copy of the Flowchart is included as Attachment A.

RMP Process Flowchart

- RMP Development Request
- RMP Assessment
- RMP Development
- RMP Review
- RMP Implementation
- RMP Verification (Developer and SWCD)
- Certification
- Compliance

Director Cristman noted that it was important to remember that this was still a new program. He asked for suggestions as to how the Department could assist producers in fully implementing their RMPs. A question was asked about how the 975 practices proposed to be implemented using cost-share funds could be targeted to assist producers in achieving full implementation of their RMP.

Mr. Wichelns responded that while Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are aware of the role they play in the RMP process; they are not necessarily aware of the overall workload involved in getting the RMPs approved. It is important that SWCDs have a clear understanding of the workload.

Mr. Glover noted that the current verification requirement within the law and regulations is that an RMP is verified at least once every three years. Most of the voluntary practices included in an RMP are agronomic and are annual practices. The verification of practices impacts the SWCDs and is a significant portion of the workload concerns. The intent is not to expand the RMP program to verify BMPs every year, although

verification of BMPs is required under the Chesapeake Bay TMDL. The Department recognizes that the verification process complicates the RMP program.

Mr. Ambler pointed out that if there is a significant change to an RMP that requires additional BMPs, then the program would need to be re-approved and re-verified by the SWCD.

Priority Considerations

- Must be used to qualify cost-share applications
- Considerations for BMP;
 - Highest-ranked HUC for water quality needs or certain BMP exceptions;
 - Within or upstream of an impaired stream segment;
 - Highly erodible land (HEL) soils; or
 - BMPs in an RMP
- If application does not meet at least one of the considerations, BMP should not be funded

Director Cristman suggested that there may need to be consideration of an additional cost-share practice related to RMPs to provide some type of ongoing assistance for producers.

Conservation Efficiency Factor (CEF)

- Priority tool to assist SWCDs with ranking BMP requests
- Lower the CEF value, the higher the conservation efficiency of the BMP and the higher the funding priority should be
- Uses 10 different components including soil loss data and environmental information associated with proposed BMP location
- CEF must be considered when comparing BMPs for funding

Secondary Considerations

- Local water quality considerations determined by each SWCD
- May include:
 - Practices that protect drinking water or protect groundwater
 - Lands with existing conservation plans
 - Lowest CEF score
 - Highest percentage or largest number of acres of a conservation plan to be implemented
 - Prior program participation
 - Animal units excluded
 - Protection of healthy waters

Priority considerations are outlined in policy adopted by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board; secondary considerations are adopted by the individual SWCDs and address local water quality considerations.

Mr. Dowling noted that voluntary practices do not have a CEF score and are not part of the CEF discussion. A producer will not receive an increased CEF score for a certain practice based on the verification of additional voluntarily implemented practices.

Potential Surveys

- To RMP Participants
 - Implementation Challenges
- To SWCDs
 - Involvement; Marketing
- To Agricultural Community
 - Marketing; Increased Participation
- To Plan Developers
 - Implementation Challenges

Mr. Dowling noted that it might be helpful to reach out to groups beyond those participating in the SAG. He advised that the Department would need to be involved in the surveys as, by law, the Agency is the only entity who has access to the complete list of RMP participants. The Department will work with the appropriate SWCDs to provide the survey information, while maintaining participant confidentiality.

The questions to be asked include what is preventing the participant from moving toward achieving certification as well as determining whether the process is confusing for participants.

Members noted that there appears to be some confusion regarding the steps for verification and which entity (plan developer, SWCD, or the Department) should be assisting the producer through the process. There needs to be clarification so that all involved are operating in the same manner and have the same expectations of the program.

Ms. Jennings reported that she had done some evaluation of programs in other states. She had asked other states why they thought their producers were interested in the program and why they are participating. She heard that the farm community wants these programs as they demonstrate what the agriculture community is doing to improve water quality.

Mr. Woodward affirmed this and noted that it was not the cost-share (RMP-1 and RMP-2) and was not the certification that farmers saw as a benefit to participating in the RMP Program; it was contributing to water quality in their community and shedding a good light on their activities across the Commonwealth. It was noted that many producers are waiting for someone to assist them in finalizing the certification process.

Discussion Points

- How do we expand Program statewide?
- How do we increase implementation of existing approved RMPs?

Director Cristman asked for suggestions as to how best to improve the program statewide. He noted that there are large portions of the state with no RMPs. He noted that until the program is working more efficiently in the areas where RMPs are already developed, there should be a focus on fully implementing what already is developed and approved. He suggested that because this is still a relatively new program, there may not be an actual problem; there is too little data on implementation to draw any conclusions.

Director Cristman suggested that for the report to the General Assembly it should be noted that between 2014 and 2017 a total of 320 plans were written and that the need is to focus on getting those fully implemented.

Ms. Moore advised that it would also be helpful to list the challenges to RMP implementation. She noted the need for a smooth and consistent process across Districts.

Director Cristman noted that DCR would develop a list of questions to provide to the SWCDs to survey RMP participants. The questions should ask why they have not fully implemented their plan and how the process can be improved. A sampling of approximately 20 participants will be included in the survey.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

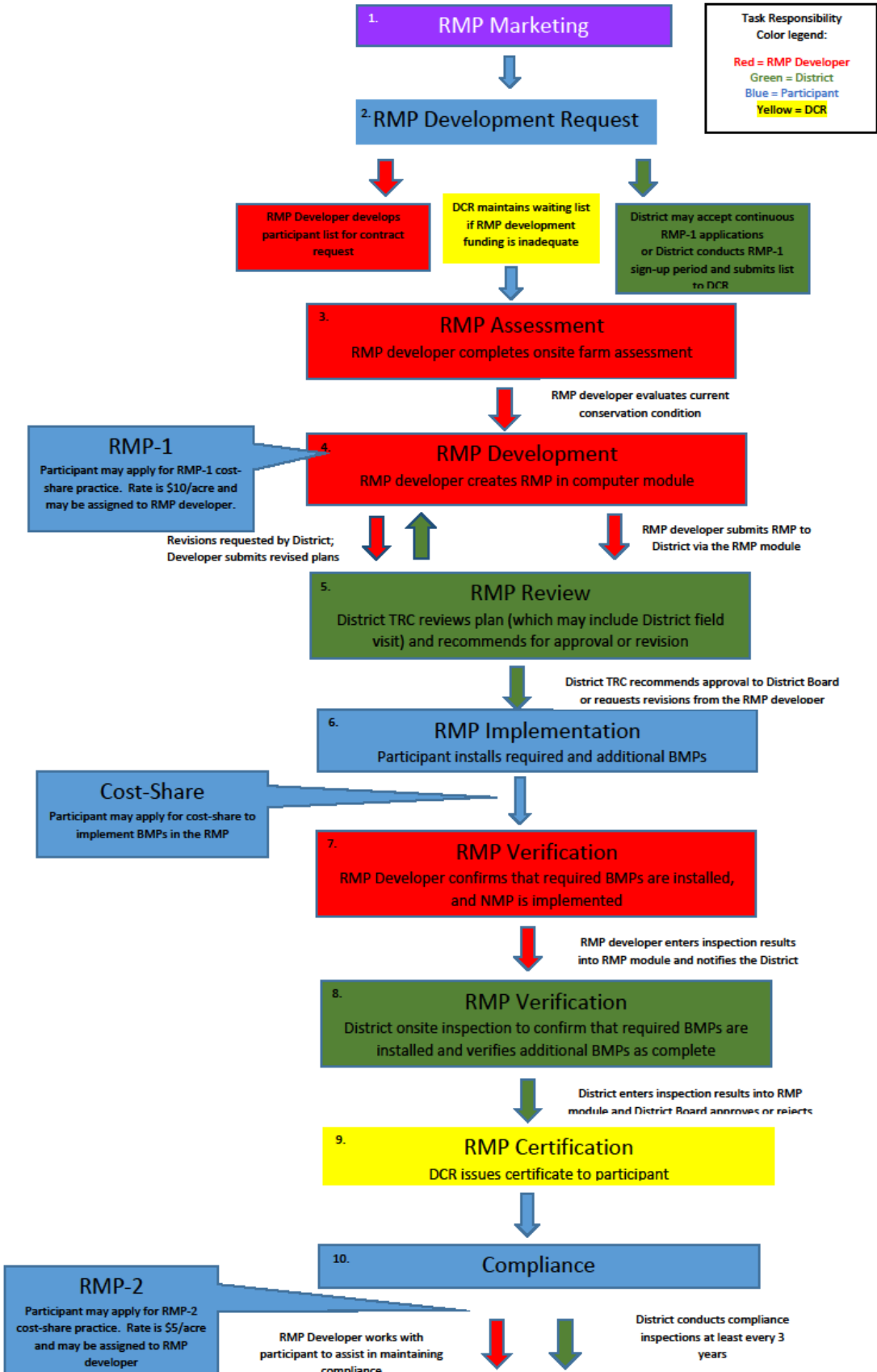
Next Steps

The Department will move forward with the survey and with a draft of the report due to the General Assembly in October.

The draft report will be provided to stakeholder advisory group members prior to a potential meeting in September for review and comment.

There was no additional business and the meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Attachment A



REV