

**Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Wednesday, June 26, 2024
Virginia Farm Bureau Federation
Richmond, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 11:52 a.m. on Wednesday, June 26, 2024, at the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation in Richmond, Virginia.

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charles Newton, Chair	Jay C. Ford
Adam Wilson, Vice Chair	Pamela Mason
Chuck Arnason	Robert Mills
Stephanie Cornnell	John Schick
Jason De La Cruz	
Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director, Ex Officio	
John Womack for Dr. Edwin Martinez, NRCS, Ex Officio	
Dr. Dan Goerlich, VCE, Invitee	

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION STAFF PRESENT

Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy
Blair Gordon, SWCD Liaison
Taylor Melton, Executive Assistant to the Director's Office
James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Lisa McGee, Director of Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs
Michael R. Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager
Paul Saunders, Policy and Planning Specialist
Darrell Kuntz, Office of the Attorney General
Marissa Roland, Eastern Area Manager
Olivia Leatherwood, Conservation District Coordinator
Denney Collins, Conservation District Coordinator
Blair Gordon, SWCD Liaison

OTHERS PRESENT

Suzanne Brown, Loudoun SWCD
Sharon Connor, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Brad Copenhaver, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Wayne Davis, VASWCD
Shannon Mitchum, VASWCD
Katelyn Jordan, Virginia Farm Bureau
Robert Pickett, Northern Neck SWCD
Greg Powers, James River SWCD
Amy Walker, Colonial SWCD
Melissa Allen, John Marshall SWCD
Luke Longanecker, Thomas Jefferson SWCD

Kelly Snoddy, Peter Francisco SWCD
Robert Pickett, Northern Neck SWCD
Becky Lakin, Henricopolis SWCD
Claiborne Yarbrough, Henricopolis SWCD

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With nine (9) members of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board present a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Newton called the meeting to order at 11:52 a.m. and asked for introductions.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM APRIL 22, 2024

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved that the minutes from the April 22, 2024, meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board be approved as submitted. Mr. Arnason seconded, and the motion carried.

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

Director Wells gave the report for DCR.

Director Wells reported that the introduced budget provided an additional \$118.8 million for Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS):

- \$76.0 million for practices in the Chesapeake Bay watershed;
- \$32.5 million for practices in the Southern Rivers; and
- \$10.3 million for additional technical assistance support for Districts.

Another \$63 million was provided in non-general funds:

- \$40.3 million for practices in the Chesapeake Bay watershed;
- \$17.3 million for practices in the Southern Rivers; and
- \$5.4 million in additional technical assistance support for Districts.

None of these funds were from surplus revenues. With the monies provided in the 2024 budget, FY2026 is also fully funded.

Director Wells also noted the following:

Additional amendments in final budget

- A \$3 million increase each year of the biennium in SWCD base operation/administrative funding in accordance with the budget template findings reported by SWCDs
- Provides funding for four positions related to NMP and VACS data support at DCR that will no longer be supported by federal funds.
- A \$350k increase each year of the biennium to support two positions at DCR to assist SWCDs with engineering and in field training needs

- Provides for one nutrient management planning position
- Provides \$250k each year and two positions at DCR to mitigate the impact of invasive species with additional companion amendments to support this work at VDACS, DOF and DWR.
- Language only amendment allowing VACS funding in conjunction with planning and construction of livestock and poultry waste facilities prior to animals being on-site.
 - This will be discussed by the AgBMP TAC to ensure it is consistently and appropriately implemented throughout the state.
- An increase of \$1 million each year of the biennium to support small dam repair needs.

Dam Safety

NOIRA (Notice of Intended Regulatory Action)

- NOIRA was published on June 3 in the Virginia Register.
- Public comment will close on July 3, 2024.
- A Regulatory Advisory Panel will be established to assist with the development of the proposed revisions to the regulations.
- The Panel will likely meet from July through November this year.
- The review of the Impoundment Regulations will be limited to: (i) roadways on or below an impounding structure for hazard potential classifications; (ii) the incremental damage analysis process; (iii) the potential expansion of special criteria low hazard dams; and (iv) simplifying the emergency preparedness plan requirements.

Review of Dam Safety Act

- In addition to the NOIRA, Department will convene a Workgroup to assist with a review of the Dam Safety Act.
- The review will primarily focus on the Department's emergency powers during an active dam failure, financial assistance for dam owners, streamlining enforcement procedures, and requirements for low hazard dams.
- Workgroup will likely meet from July to December this year and will likely have some of the same members as the Panel.
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Community Flood Preparedness Fund

- The draft manual for the fifth grant round is out for public comment.
- Public comment period closes on July 18.
- In addition to general feedback, requesting comments specifically on:
 - Definitions;
 - Eligible activities;
 - Periods of performance for various activities;
 - Match requirements and scoring; and
 - Availability of both short and long-term loans for projects.

Increased scrutiny of practices

- There will be enhanced scrutiny of practices, specifically cover crop practices, during FY2025.
- This scrutiny is partially in response to the issues identified at Robert E. Lee and more recently Henricopolis, as well as other Districts.
- The Department will likely utilize a mixture of technology – enhanced review of data provided by Districts – and field verifications.

- Exact methodology is still being developed.
- While it is important to get money on the ground, it is equally important to implement good practices.
- Good practices assist producers with enhancements to their operations and provide the best water quality benefits for taxpayers' dollars.
- All practices still need to follow the VACS Program guidelines and BMP specifications.
- The appropriate financial rules and practices still need to be adhered to.

Director Wells reported that Mr. Fletcher would be retiring on September 1, 2024.

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

Ms. Watlington Jones presented an update regarding the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District. She noted the following:

- The District has been utilizing the prescribed Conservation Folder Outline to build case files. At the May 23, 2024, meeting, the District approved a VACS payment on one of the seven structural practices listed in #4 of the March VSWCB motion, leaving one remaining incomplete structural practice from the original group of seven.
- District staff have been contacting participants and verifying cover crop practices for payment.
- The Amherst County elected director position formerly held by Jeff Floyd has not been filled. The position has been advertised to the public but there has been no interest.
- At the May 23, 2024, meeting, the District board elected Joetricia Humbles to serve the position of Chair through the end of calendar year 2024.
- The personnel committee met and conducted interviews for an additional Conservation Technician position on May 15 and May 17. A list of hiring and salary recommendations were brought before the board at the May 23, 2024, board meeting.
- It was decided at the May 23, 2024, meeting that one of the current employees will continue to work at the District on an hourly basis through December 2024, while the employee completes his college curriculum. Upon that completion, the District will revisit his employment in December.
- The District's Office Administrator, has submitted her resignation effective June 28, 2024.
- Per the March 28, 2024 action made by this Board, the District will be researching options for establishing an interest-bearing account. The District has discussed this and has decided to wait until the final structural practice is complete so that the account can be opened and all funds deposited into the account at one time.
- All outstanding practices on the SWCD's carryover report have been addressed except for 11 structural practices.
- All directors have been consistently reminded by both the Conservation District Coordinator and the District staff that Phase I of Director Orientation must be completed by all District Directors by June 30, 2024. As of June 17, 3 Directors still need to complete this training.
- SWCD staff confirmed on May 3, 2024, that the District has reimbursed the Department via certified mail for \$260,180.09 for reimbursement of the VACS program and \$33,823.41 for the associated technical assistance funding this Board's March motion.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the following:

1. Prior to approving any FY2025 VACS Program cost-share applications, the District must:
 - review and revise, as needed, the District's average cost list, secondary considerations, and the corresponding ranking worksheet;
 - ensure the District Board approves these documents; and
 - receive Department approval of these documents.
2. The District is authorized to provide payments for eligible VACS Program practices, including practices carried over from previous years, in accordance with the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board-adopted policies, grant agreements, and guidance; the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share BMP Manual; and all previous actions taken by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board. The Department will conduct periodic reviews of VACS Program cost-share files to ensure compliance with these requirements.
3. Until such time as a District employee has an appropriate level of Engineering Job Approval Authority (EJAA), the District will continue to work with the Department's Agricultural BMP Engineering Services staff to ensure that all structural practices are designed and constructed in accordance with the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share BMP Manual.
4. The District must develop a FY2025 training plan for all employees that ensures it will be able to meet the FY2025 grant deliverables. The training plan must be provided to the Department no later than September 1, 2024. Robert E. Lee employees are directed to participate in trainings provided by the Department or the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. It is expected that District technical staff will attend any Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practice Cost-Share (VACS) Program training provided, including the upcoming VACS 101 training. District technical staff will participate in engineering training and conservation planner certification training opportunities. District technical staff will participate in any AgBMP Tracking Module and Conservation Planning Module training opportunities provided as well. District administrative staff must attend all administrative and Quickbooks trainings offered; administrative staff will participate in the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Admin/Ops Committee meetings. District employees should attend the trainings provided by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Employees in August 2024 and the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' Annual Meeting in December 2024. The District will provide the Conservation District Coordinator with a list of all trainings attended or completed at the end of each quarter of FY2025.
5. The District Board members are strongly encouraged to participate in any trainings provided by either the Department or Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts that are focused on responsibilities and duties of District Directors. Additionally, at least one Director should attend the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' Annual Meeting in December 2024.

Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

AUTHORIZATION FOR BOARD TO APPOINT HEARING OFFICERS – *Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Department is anticipating hearings and appeals regarding recent dam safety actions taken by the Department. She noted that the Board By-laws allow the Chair to take certain actions without specific Board authorization; however, the Chair is not specifically authorized to appoint individuals as hearing officers. Hearing panels would likely consist of 2-3 members rather than the full Board. The recommended motion would allow the Chair to appoint hearing officers.

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that the Board By-laws will be on the September agenda for review.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board in accordance with §10.1-503 of the *Code of Virginia*, authorize the Chair of the Board to designate members to act as hearing officers.

Ms. Mason asked if hearing officers were defined by Code.

Mr. Kuntz noted that the definition is contained in the Administrative Process Act (APA).

Mr. Ford seconded, and the motion carried.

DAM SAFETY DIVISION

Division Report

The Dam Safety Division report is included as Attachment A.

*Approval of projects funded by the Dam Safety, Flood Prevention and Protection Assistance Fund –
Christine Watlington Jones*

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the projects funded through general deposit:

- 57 grant applications, with an approval amount of \$1,961,278.
- Projects include emergency action plan development; engineering designs; dam break inundation zone mapping and analysis; professional engineer inspections; engineering designs for repairs, safety modifications, and removal.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approves the 57 grant applications, with an approval amount of \$1,961,278, as recommended by the Department.

Approval of these grants is conditioned on the following:

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.

All grant agreements will require that projects be completed within 24 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 Department's discretion. No extensions shall exceed an additional year without specific Board approval.

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.

Mr. Ford seconded, and the motion carried.

Ms. Watlington Jones provided an overview of the projects funded through the American Rescue Act.

- 21 grant applications, with an approval amount of \$7,632,500.
- Utilizes remaining available federal funding (ARPA).
- Motion includes exceptions from the 2024 Grant Manual for the Virginia Dam Safety, Flood Prevention, and Protection Assistance Fund:
 - Both privately-owned and publicly-owned high hazard dams to be prioritized for ARPA funding.
 - The exceedance of the project cap for projects DSFP-477-24 and DSFP-517-24, which both have total project costs that exceed the total amount requested.
 - Relief from the operation and maintenance certification application due date for project number DSFP-491-24 due to the dam's hazard potential, the seriousness of the deficiencies, and possible misinterpretation of the requirements by the owner.

Further, for the Woodhaven Dam (Woodhaven Property Owners Association), the Board authorizes the shifting of any remaining funds from project DSFP-109-22 for use towards project DSFP-517-24, which is provided to conduct needed repairs at the dam due to a failure.

- Projects include engineering designs for repairs, safety modifications, and removal

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approves the 21 grant applications, with an approval amount of \$7,632,500, as recommended by the Department.

In recognition of the Board's responsibility to ensure the best use of available fiscal resources, to enhance public safety, and to respond to the applications received, the Board authorizes the following exceptions from the *2024 Grant Manual for the Virginia Dam Safety, Flood Prevention, and Protection Assistance Fund*:

1. Both privately-owned and publicly-owned high hazard dams to be prioritized for ARPA funding.
2. The exceedance of the project cap for projects DSFP-477-24 and DSFP-517-24, which both have total project costs that exceed the total amount requested.
3. Relief from the operation and maintenance certification application due date for project number DSFP-491-24 due to the dam's hazard potential, the seriousness of the deficiencies, and possible misinterpretation of the requirements by the owner.

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. 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.
2. All grant agreements will require that projects be completed within 24 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, 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 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 Department's 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 within 90 days of such an Agreement being sent to the applicant, the Department is authorized to rescind those grant funds and allocate in subsequent grant rounds.

Further, for the Woodhaven Dam (Woodhaven Property Owners Association), the Board authorizes the shifting of any remaining funds from project DSFP-109-22 for use towards project DSFP-517-24, which is provided to conduct needed repairs at the dam due to a failure.

Mr. Mills seconded, and the motion carried.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DIVISION

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

Mr. Martin gave the Division report. He underscored the Director's comments regarding the importance of making sure practices funded through the VACS Program are properly designed and installed according to policies adopted by the Board. He advised that he would be reallocating Division resources in an attempt to better utilize data collected through the Conservation Application Suite.

Mr. Martin advised that DCR had several new-hires in the month of June filling various management positions. He noted that as of June 25, Marissa Roland has assumed the role of Eastern Area Manager.

Approval of Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Administration and Operations Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2025 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the recommended *Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Administration and Operations Funding Allocations for Fiscal year 2025*. She noted the following edits:

- All budget language and references have been updated.
- Chapter 2 of the 2024 Special Session 1 Acts of Assembly provided an additional \$3 million in funding for District administration and operations.
- Allocations are based on the information submitted by Districts in their 2025 budget templates.
- Based on previous allocation decisions made by the Board, there is still funding that is needed to cover all of the administration and operations expenses incurred by Districts.
 - Technical assistance associated with CREP practices is considered in the recommended allocations.
 - Personnel costs associated with maintaining dams is considered in the recommended allocations.
- In order to allocate the additional funding equitably, the following recommendations are made:
 - No District will receive less funding than they currently receive (highlighted in bright yellow).
 - For Districts that submitted an increased need in funding of more than a 100%, the request has been reduced by 13% (highlighted in blue).
 - For Districts that submitted an increased need in funding between 65-99%, the request has been reduced by 11% (highlighted in green).
 - For those Districts that submitted an increased need in funding between 50- 64%, the request has been reduced by 7% (highlighted in pink).
 - For those Districts that submitted an increased need in funding between 20-49%, the request has been reduced by 5% (highlighted in peach).
 - For those Districts that submitted an increased need in funding of less than 20%, the request was not reduced.
- New River reached out about their budget template and concerns about their allocation.
 - Errors were made due to a lack of understanding.
 - A revised budget template was submitted; however, no guarantees were made that allocations would be revised.

Ms. Mason asked for an explanation of the difference in the bottom-line numbers should the adjustments for New River be made.

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the numbers were allocated based on the budget templates submitted. She noted that the bottom-line number must remain the same and noted that if relief is given to one District, staff would need Board guidance regarding the source for additional funding.

Mr. Martin noted that four Districts advised they would need less monies in Administration and Operations funds than they received in FY2024. The metric provided to the Board ensured that all Districts received, at a minimum, the same amount of funding.

The Board discussed how to provide a percentage of the amount of funding requested by the New River District. It was determined that all Districts, except those Districts that either received no increased funding or Districts that requested less than a 20% increase, would receive a minimal reduction to provide the increase to the New River District.

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 2025* with the allocations adjusted for Districts to provide New River Soil and Water Conservation District with half of the requested additional funding.

Ms. Mason seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of Administration and Operations Support Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2025 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the recommended Administration and Operations Support Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2025. She noted:

- All budget language and references have been updated.
- Due date was changed in Attachment A for the budget template submittal.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason 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 2025)*.

Mr. Ford seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval 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 presented the recommended *Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2025*. She noted:

- All budget language and references have been updated.
- Clarified language on page 7 related to additional District authorities.
- In response to comments received, language has been revised related to the reallocation of technical assistance funds
 - 6% in technical assistance funds must be returned with cancelled carryover practices, rather than the original 13%.
 - Language is a compromise.
- District cost-share and technical assistance disbursements are based on quarterly obligations for cost-share contracts, rather than potential payments to be made during the quarter.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason 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 2025) with amendments authorizing Districts the opportunity to reobligate any cost-share funds from cancelled carryover practices in the fiscal year the practice was cancelled*.

Additionally, the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District is authorized to utilize up to \$500,000 of the District's "FY25 Cost-Share Total (VACS)" allocation to incentivize the implementation of the soil health pilot best management practice (SL-10E) as it was approved by this Board.

Ms. Cornell seconded.

DISCUSSION

The Board discussed the possibility of allowing District to reobligate funds associated with cancelled carryover practices. This would provide an opportunity to ensure cost-share funds remained within the District and would enable Districts to maintain the associated technical assistance.

Mr. Wilson moved a friendly amendment to allow Districts to re-obligate funding from cancelled carryover practices beginning in FY2025.

Mr. Mills seconded, and the amendment passed.

Chairman Newton called for the vote and the motion passed as amended.

Approval of Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2025 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the recommended *Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2025*. She noted:

- All budget language and references were updated.
- Revisions mimic changes in the Board policy.

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 2025) with amendments to reflect the revisions made in the *Policy and Procedures on Soil and Water Conservation District Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Funding Allocations (Fiscal Year 2025)*.

Mr. Mills seconded and the motion passed.

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

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the recommended edits to the Desktop Procedures for District Fiscal Operations. She noted the following:

Several minor changes related to revisions to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

- Pg. 20, **Tax Exemption for District Purchases** – Added language noting that tax exemption does not extend to meal and hotel taxes, and the state rate for hotels should be obtained to the extent possible.
- Pg. 36, **FLSA** – Removed reference to FLSA Questionnaire and updated link to correct U.S. Department of Labor FLSA webpage.
- Pg 63, **FLSA Fair Pay Exemption Questionnaire** – Removed questionnaire because the U.S. Department of Labor has revised the regulations regarding FLSA exemptions and the most current information regarding FLSA is available on their website.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason 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 District Director Appointments and Resignations – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the following District Director Appointment recommendations.

Big Sandy

Appointment of Mr. Joshua McGlothlin, of Buchanan County, effective 6/26/2024, to fill the vacant elected director position (term of office expires 12/31/2027).

Headwaters

Resignation of Mr. Doug Horn, of Augusta County, effective 4/16/2024, Extension Agent Appointed Director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Appointment of Mr. John Benner, of Augusta County, effective 6/26/2024, to fill the vacant Extension Agent appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Monacan

Resignation of Ms. Erin Small, of Goochland County, effective 6/6/2024, Extension Agent Appointed Director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Patrick

Appointment of Ms. Melanie Barrow, of Patrick County, effective 6/26/2024, to fill the vacant Extension Agent appointed director (term of office expires 12/31/2024).

Skyline

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

Appointment of Mr. Daniel Smith, of Floyd County, effective 6/26/2024, to fill the vacant elected director position (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.

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

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the recommended individuals to fill upcoming Board vacancies.

The nominations for Area III and Area VI were put forward by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. These were reviewed with the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation and the Virginia Agribusiness Council.

Area III

Leigh Pemberton, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Doswell, VA

Robert Picket, Northern Neck SWCD
Reedville, VA

Area VI

Heath Locke, James River SWCD
Prince George, VA

Nick Thomas, Eastern Shore SWCD
Atlantic, VA

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.

Mr. Arnason seconded, and the motion carried.

Chairman Newton thanked Ms. Mason and Mr. Ford for their service to the Board.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion of letter to Chairs of Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations and House Committee on Appropriations

Chairman Newton advised that the recommended letter is based on a discussion from the March board meeting regarding Department resources.

Mr. Ford noted that DCR is doing more work than before, which is partially a reflection of historic funding for Districts. Market forces make it difficult to retain staff. He advised that there needs to be a recognition that a tremendous amount of funding is going to districts, but that it is also important to have sufficient resources at DCR.

Mr. Ford recommend that the letter be sent to the chairs of the natural resources subcommittees.

Director Wells advised that this was an action of the Board, rather than a recommendation of the Department.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved that the recommended letter be advanced under the signature of the Chair on Board letterhead.

Ms. Cornell seconded, and the motion carried.

Recommendations related to the payment of certain cover crop practices by Henricopolis Soil and Water Conservation District – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones presented an overview regarding Department concerns related to the implementation of certain cover crops in the Henricopolis SWCD.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) concurs with the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (Department) recommendations regarding the payment of certain cover crop practices by the Henricopolis Soil and Water Conservation District (District). No payments from FY2024 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program funds shall be provided to the producer for the following practices:

District Name	Participant ID	Business	Contract Number	Instance	Practice Code	Status	Approval Date	Approved Cost Share Payment	Planting Certification Date	Cover Certification Date	Actual Instance Cost Share Payment
HENRICOPOLIS	43918	Applewhite Farm LLC	40-24-0002	552238	SL-8B	Complete	8/17/2023	\$2,268.00	10/12/2023	11/25/2023	\$2,268.00
HENRICOPOLIS	40249		40-24-0003	552245	SL-8B	Complete	8/17/2023	\$2,790.00	10/13/2023	11/22/2023	\$2,790.00
HENRICOPOLIS	57519	Creamfield Farm	40-24-0004	552784	SL-8B	Complete	8/17/2023	\$3,510.00	10/13/2023	11/28/2023	\$3,510.00
HENRICOPOLIS	57519	Creamfield Farm	40-24-0004	552787	SL-8B	Complete	8/17/2023	\$549.00	10/19/2023	11/28/2023	\$549.00
HENRICOPOLIS	57519	Creamfield Farm	40-24-0004	552788	SL-8B	Complete	8/17/2023	\$1,719.00	10/19/2023	11/28/2023	\$1,719.00
HENRICOPOLIS	42303	Colonial Acre Farm LLC	40-24-0005	552837	SL-8B	Approved	8/17/2023	\$14,535.00	10/12/2023	11/18/2023	\$14,535.00
HENRICOPOLIS	42303	Colonial Acre Farm LLC	40-24-0005	552856	SL-8B	Approved	8/17/2023	\$1,953.00	10/12/2023	11/25/2023	\$1,953.00
HENRICOPOLIS	42303	Colonial Acre Farm LLC	40-24-0005	553123	SL-8B	Approved	8/17/2023	\$5,508.00	10/5/2023	11/24/2023	\$5,508.00
HENRICOPOLIS	28567	Henrico Farms Inc.	40-24-0013	555390	SL-8B	Approved	9/21/2023	\$5,580.00	10/13/2023	11/24/2023	\$5,580.00

The District may provide reimbursements to the producers for these practices in recognition of the short notice regarding the lack of payments; however, all reimbursements must be paid from the District's administration and operations funding or reserve funds.

Additionally, the Board expects any additional discrepancies and issues of noncompliance with Board policies, grant agreements, the *Program Year 2024 Virginia Agricultural Cost Share (VACS) BMP Manual*, and other guidance to be documented in the assessment of the FY2024 grant deliverables.

Mr. Schick seconded.

Claiborne Yarbrough, Henricopolis SWCD Director, commented that the District values relationships with producers and partners. She commented that the District would not knowingly allow either to be at risk. She advised that the District is aware of their responsibility in this matter.

Chairman Newton called for the vote and the motion carried.

PARTNER REPORTS

Virginia Cooperative Extension Service – Dr. Dan Goerlich

Dr. Goerlich presented the report for the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service. A copy of the report is included as Attachment A.

Natural Resources Conservation Service – John Womack for Dr. Edwin Martinez

Mr. Womack gave the report for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. A copy of the report is included as Attachment C.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Not represented.

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts - Wayne Davis, VASWCD President

Mr. Davis gave the report for the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Mr. Davis thanked DCR staff for meeting with Association staff regarding grant agreements and policies. He expressed appreciation for Ms. Watlington Jones, Mr. Martin, Ms. Gordon and other DCR staff.

The Association has three virtual trainings scheduled:

July 2 – VCAP program.

July 10 – Excell training for District staff.

July 23 – Local government investment pool training.

Youth Conservation Camp will be held in July at Virginia Tech.

In late July, the winning Envirothon team from Jamestown High School will advance to the International Envirothon competition in Detroit.

Chesapeake Bay Commission

Not represented.

Virginia Agribusiness Council - Brad Copenhaver

Mr. Copenhaver spoke on behalf of the Virginia Agribusiness Council. He wished members and staff a Happy Agriculture Week. He thanked members and staff for their partnership, particularly with regard to the budget development.

Mr. Copenhaver noted that Agriculture Night at the Diamond in Richmond was scheduled for August 8.

Virginia Farm Bureau Federation – Katelyn Jordan

Ms. Jordan welcomed members to the Virginia Farm Bureau offices and commented that the Farm Bureau was happy to host the Board meeting. She advised that Farm Bureau continues to encourage members to take full advantage of the VACS Program.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Mason thanked members for their work. She noted that the work of the Board is important and commented that there are many opportunities for partnering with other agencies and organizations.

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 2:07 p.m.

Attachment A

**DCR Division of Dam Safety
Prepared by Darryl M. Glover
Deputy Director, DSFPM/SWC**

Status of Review of Impounding Structure Regulations:

Following the required periodic review of the Impounding Structure Regulations, the Board approved issuance of a Notice of Intended Regulatory Action (NOIRA) at the March 27, 2024, meeting. That NOIRA was published on June 3, and public comment will close on July 3, 2024. With the help of a professional contractual facilitator, the Department will simultaneously conduct both a Regulatory Advisory Panel and a separate stakeholder group to review the Dam Safety Act from July through December of this year.

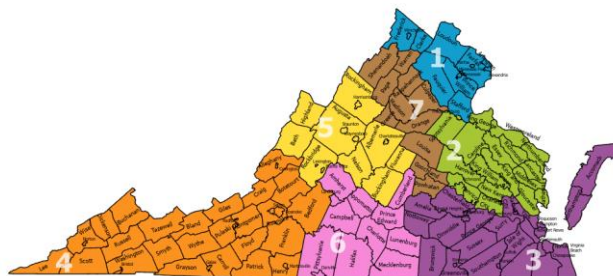
The review of the Impoundment Regulations will be limited to: (i) roadways on or below an impounding structure for hazard potential classifications; (ii) the incremental damage analysis process; (iii) the potential expansion of special criteria low hazard dams; and (iv) simplifying the emergency preparedness plan requirements. The review of the law will primarily focus on the Department's emergency powers during an active dam failure, financial assistance for dam owners, streamlining enforcement procedures, and requirements for low hazard dams. There will be no changes to the agricultural exemption.

Staffing:

The Department has received the long-awaited notification from FEMA that we are being awarded \$871,622 for each of the next five years, with satisfactory program performance, via the National Dam Safety Program State Assistance Grant. Coupled with provisions in both the FY24 and new biennial state budgets, we shall soon begin recruitment of two more newly created Regional Dam Safety Engineers, to a new total of seven, as well as a newly created Chief Engineer. The Chief will oversee the Regional Engineer team, as well as the Data Management, Enforcement, and Dam Modeling (mapping) teams. Also, three newly created Engineers in Training (EITs) will also be hired.

Once the additional Dam Safety Engineers are hired, the Commonwealth will be redivided into seven service areas as indicated on the following map.

Figure 1. Map Depicting New Dam Safety Regions



Enforcement

The Department has essentially resolved all 800+ dams with previously completely unknown ownership. Mattawan Dam in Hanover is an exception due to a very different type of situation (see below).

Anne Crosier, a long-time DCR Dam Enforcement Officer, is retiring this summer. Her position will be repurposed to expand its duties to include response coordination for both dam and flood emergencies and assisting our division Policy Manager with related regulatory, legislative, and policy work.

Recent Dam Related Incidents

Lake Pinewood, 033042 (Caroline), Special Low: Beaverdam blocked the spillway structure and caused elevated water levels which created boils (via rodent holes) on the downstream face. The beaver dam was removed, and water levels returned to normal. There are no longer any boils on the downstream face. DCR has requested for trees to be removed from the dam and rodent holes repaired.

College Lake, 068002 (Lynchburg): This is a dam removal project permitted through DCR. It is part of the City of Lynchburg's Remove-Restore-Reconnect project where dam removal is the first phase and natural stream and floodplain restoration behind the dam is the second phase. The dam is a high hazard potential classification dam on Blackwater Creek. It is owned by the City of Lynchburg and the 15-acre lake is owned by the University of Lynchburg. Lakeside Drive Route 221 used to go over the dam, but a new bridge was built just downstream of the dam. In August 2018, this dam overtopped 12 to 18-inches deep and 125 people were evacuated downstream. The overtopping event was highly publicized making multiple national, regional, and local TV and online news venues. Rather than being on edge every time it rains, the city in coordination with the University of Lynchburg, held various public meetings and decided to pursue decommissioning as a feasible alternative to absolve the need to be a state regulated dam.

This dam removal is one of the largest ever in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the total cost of the decommissioning and natural stream restoration is \$22M.

Haynes Dam, 073003 (Gloucester): One of three corrugated metal pipes within the spillway has fully collapsed. The remaining pipes are in poor condition. DCR has requested that the owner reach out to an engineer as soon as possible to complete an inspection and begin bringing the dam into compliance. This dam is believed to be low hazard.

Burkes Mill Pond, 073006 (Gloucester): Burkes Pond is a High Hazard dam, currently under a Conditional Operation and Maintenance Certificate. The 'old mill' culver pipe has failed causing significant erosion under the secondary highway. The void under the highway has been previously addressed but continues to return. The existing bridge restricts the ability for the dam to pass the Spillway Design Flood (SDF) regardless of spillway improvements.

Ashland Mill, 085070 (Hanover): Stop logs were damaged in a recent storm causing the impoundment to drop several feet in pool level. As a concrete dam with no known major structural concern, this dam is not expected to have any ongoing failure modes in the foreseeable future. DCR has requested an engineering inspection to verify its integrity. The owner intends to submit plans for abandonment of the dam very soon.

Mattawan, 085039 (Hanover): While the public safety risk due to failure of the primary corrugated metal pipe spillway in early March has been minimized due to swift action and collaboration with the Department by Hanover County, Significant erosion has occurred around the spillway pipe causing

depressions on the dam and under the roadway over this pipe. The owners closest to the dam have submitted a joint Dam Safety Grant application for an engineering study of this dam. The Department continues to work closely with the Office of the Attorney General to unravel what is a very complicated ownership situation.

Triple Z Dam, 009025 (Amherst): In April 2024 the principal spillway pipe failed leading to loss of majority of reservoir pool. There is no observed downstream damage. The owner, who also owns a construction company, excavated the failed spillway pipe and repaired the dam embankment without a principal spillway pipe. The owner has since hired an engineer to assess the current condition of the rebuilt dam, apply for a conditional certificate from Dam Safety, and has agreed to keep the reservoir level at approximately 10 feet below the normal pool elevation via on site pumps and siphon. The Department is awaiting the Engineer Inspection report.

Lower Healys, 119001 (Middlesex): The concrete spillway has been breaking apart over time. Significant settlement has occurred at multiple sections of the dam. VDOT closed and permanently abandoned the associated roadway. The owner intends to repair the dam and is waiting for the results of a simplified inundation study from DCR.

Grigg Lake, 145012 (Powhatan): There was no known failure of any portion of this dam. Although failure was previously suspected, it was found to be a communication error.

Additional Activities:

- **Lake Accotink Dam (059006, Fairfax Co):** The long-awaited dam break inundation (DBIZ) study independent analysis and peer review was recently contracted via the Department's Division of Planning and Recreation Resources Design and Construction (DAC) to Schnabel for the dam break study at just over \$60 thousand. The separate review of Schnabel's DBIZ was awarded to TRC (formerly Draper Aden Associates) for just under \$25 thousand.

- **The DCR Office of Resilience Planning:** recently entered into four Resilience Planning and Consulting contracts to assist the Department with both the Coastal Resilience Master Plan, Phase II, and the statewide Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan. These plans are scheduled to be delivered in December 2024 and December 2025, respectively. Task orders have been issued to develop the Coastal Resilience Master Plan, Phase II and to conduct public outreach for state-led flood resilience planning efforts. Additional task orders for the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan development and updates to the Coastal Resilience Web Explorer are pending. The Office recently hired Arthur Kay, formerly of the Dam Safety Division, as a Resilience Planner. A graduate Fellow from Virginia Commonwealth University has also been secured to assist with this work beginning later this year.

- **The DCR Floodplain Management Division:** recently awarded over \$52 million to localities, Planning District Commissions, and others via round four of the Community Flood Preparedness Act grants. The FY25-26 state budget will add \$100 million into this fund for future awards. Recruitment to fill three vacancies in this division is in various stages of progress.

Attachment B



Report to the Virginia Soil and Water Board
June 26, 2024

For this meeting's report we'll focus on recent Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) and 4-H Youth Development Extension agent hires.

Starting on April 25, 2024

Kendra (Kyle) Young, VCE-Montgomery 4-H. Kendra has been an Extension agent with Virginia 4-H for over 26 years and recently transferred to the VCE-Montgomery County Office. Kendra grew up in Blacksburg and is a Virginia Tech graduate. She is a Montgomery 4-H alumna and a 4-H All Star.

Starting on May 25, 2024

Quinn Bracken, VCE-Henrico County ANR. Quinn has a diverse educational background with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the Savannah College of Art and Design and an Associate degree in Horticulture Technology from Alamance Community College. Her experience includes serving as a web and graphic designer, greenhouse manager, and adjunct professor, as well as the Horticulture Technician for VCE Roanoke County.

Carly Campbell, VCE-Loudoun County ANR. Carly has a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Science and a Master of Science in Education from Virginia Tech. She has a robust background in agriculture education and is a 4-H All Star. Carly can be contacted at carlyjc@vt.edu.

Laila Ampy-Thomas, VCE-Henrico County 4-H. Laila earned her Bachelor of Science in Animal Science and Leadership from Virginia Tech. She has rich experience working with 4-H, including roles as a summer intern for Henrico County 4-H and a former 4-H Summer Hire for the City of Richmond. Additionally, Laila has volunteered at animal shelters and coached a recreational cheer team.

Megan Williams, ANR, VCE-King George and Caroline Counties. Megan brings a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Sciences and Sustainability from the University of Virginia and a Master of Science degree in Soil and Crop Science from Cornell. Megan has international experience with potable water projects in rural Morocco and has worked with the Rainfed Agriculture Innovation project at Kansas State University.

John Few, VCE-Powhatan County ANR. John has a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from Virginia State University and a Master of Science in Entomology from Virginia Tech. His previous experience includes work with VSU's Randolph Farm, pest management, and plant science. Before joining us, John was an Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Agent with Texas A&M Agrilife.

Starting on June 25, 2024

Grace Kunkel will start at the Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent for Stafford County on June 25.

Please see attached for a complete list of Extension agents in all program areas hired since January 1, 2024.

VCE New Agent Hires for 2024

Updated June 3, 2024

District	Position	Name	Hire Date
Central	Danville 4-H	Terrance Draper	1/10/2024
Central	Campbell 4-H	Yvonne Hansotte	1/10/2024
Central	Nottoway ANR (P14)	Lyle Currin	1/10/2024
Central	Pittsylvania FCS-SNAP	Shelly Boyd	1/25/2024
Central	Prince Edward ANR	Erin Small	5/10/2024
Northeast	Stafford FCS-SNAP	Amy Loveless	1/10/2024
Northeast	Chesterfield 4-H	Carter Humphries	2/10/2024
Northeast	Hanover 4-H	Bridgette Groome	2/10/2024
Northeast	King George 4-H	Tatiana DeRieux	2/10/2024
Northeast	Henrico ANR	Quinn Furman	5/25/2024
Northeast	Loudoun ANR	Carly Campbell	5/25/2024
Northeast	Caroline/KG ANR	Megan Williams	5/25/2024
Northeast	Powhatan ANR	John Few	5/25/2024
Northeast	Henrico ANR	Quinn Furman	5/25/2024
Northeast	Henrico 4-H	Laila Ampy-Thomas	5/25/2024
Northeast	Stafford ANR	Grace Kunkel	6/25/2024
Northwest	Orange ANR	Luke Bello	1/10/2024
Northwest	Warren 4-H-restricted	Emily Shultz	1/25/2024
Northwest	Albemarle 4-H	Sam Leech	2/10/2024
Northwest	Albemarle FCS	Courtney Russ	7/25/2024
Southeast	James City 4-H	Isaiah Morton	1/25/2024
Southeast	Norfolk ANR	Meghan Garrity	1/25/2024
Southeast	Newport News FCS-SNAP	Sarah Anthony	3/25/2024
Southeast	Virginia Beach FCS-SNAP	Ty McCoy	5/10/2024
Southwest	Botetourt ANR	Anne Jones	1/10/2024
Southwest	Craig 4-H	Michelle Dickerson	1/10/2024
Southwest	Craig/Allegheny ANR	Jonathan Stanley	1/10/2024
Southwest	Lee 4-H	Sarah Shuler	1/10/2024
Southwest	Wythe ANR	Ethan Henderson	1/10/2024
Southwest	Giles 4-H	Emily Moyer	1/25/2024
Southwest	Montgomery 4-H	Kendra Young	4/25/2024

Attachment C

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting
Wednesday, June 26, 2024, 10:30am

VA Farm Bureau Federation, 12580 West Creek Parkway, Richmond, VA 23238

STC Highlights

Staffing Updates: We currently have 181 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.

NRCS and VASWCD Association Cooperative Agreement: This agreement is for NRCS to provide financial support for VASWCD annual conferences scheduled for years 2024-2026. This is a joint effort to provide an opportunity to share and advance conservation technical knowledge, forums to discuss work and new ideas with a diversity of conservation professionals offering a venue for valuable networking opportunities.

Farmer Mentor Program: As Virginia's initial farmer mentor program completes two and a half years, it's preparing to double in size as the program for cropland farmers, led by Lydia Fitzgerald, is set to be joined by a companion program for grassland producers. Matt Booher is currently assembling a team of grazier/mentors that will expand the range and scope of Fitzgerald's existing group. Opportunities exist for farmers who would like to serve as paid mentors or who would like to be paired with a mentor. Contact Fitzgerald or Booher with questions or recommendations.

Local Work Groups (LWG): Field Offices have received details regarding the FY24 process, we encourage our SWCDs and NRCS staff to work together to effectively complete this task.

State Technical Committee meeting: Our meeting was held on April 24th at the USDA-NRCS State Office. We had excellent attendance. The state committee has grown by about 20% over the past three years. This includes multiple SWCDs from Virginia. NRCS published the following article via the FSA May News Bulletin: *NRCS Expanding Its State Technical Committee*.

Virginia Tribal Efforts:

- **Tribal Liaisons** - Local District Conservationists are our main Tribal Liaisons in Virginia.
- **FY25 Tribal Training** - Working Effectively with American Indians training.
- **Tribal funding** - NRCS established a Tribal funding pool in 2022 and have continued to offer this opportunity every FY.

- **State Tribes Summit** - NRCS Virginia is leading an effort to host a 2024 State Tribal Summit for the non-federal recognized state tribes.
- **Conservation Practices Implemented in Tribal Land by NRCS** - Forest Management Plans, High Tunnels, Invasive Species Control, Grade Stabilization Structures, Brush Management, Forest Stand Improvement and Herbaceous Weed Treatment, and Filter Strips.
- **TSCAN** - Tribal Soil and Climate Analysis Network (TSCAN) – Recently repaired by the USDA NRCS National Office – Located in the Pamunkey Tribe.

Virginia Dominion Energy Envirothon: NRCS Staff participated in the Virginia Dominion Energy Envirothon competition at Radford University. 18 teams of talented high school students from across the state competed by presenting their oral presentation on Sunday and rotated through five station tests on Monday in the categories of Soil, Aquatics, Wildlife, Forestry, and this year's special topic: *Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future*. NRCS lead the soils' station.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Tour: Virginia NRCS staff provided a tour to the OMB team along with National Staff to familiarize staff and NRCS Examiner with BIL/Watersheds and Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry. Tour stops included Mountain Run Dam to discuss the rehabilitation that was completed 2017-2019 and Glenmary Farm (Tom Nixon) to look at: Conservation Easement, Prescribed grazing, cover crops, riparian buffer, nutrient management, and other conservation practices.

National Umbrella Agreements – Virginia NRCS is working to participate in four of the national umbrella agreements with state specific partnerships. Summaries of those agreements are listed under the Partnerships and Initiatives session.



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. 377 EQIP applications are currently obligated for \$2.2 million (142 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. Currently obligated 73 CSP Classic and IRA contracts to date.



- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
Five active FB14 agreements. Ten 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 23 ALE applications with funding requests for \$14.9 million on 10,226 acres. Six approved for funding. 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 closed May 10, 2024. The recommended proposals topics were Soil Health, Urban Ag, Tribal and Forestry. Six proposals were received, four are currently under review. 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.

Engineering (SCE)

Staffing Updates

- Chris Hamilton was selected as the permanent State Conservation Engineer (SCE), effective 6/2/24.
- Two engineering positions have been advertised (Environmental and Design engineers).
- 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. Mountain Castles SWCD has retained Freese & Nichols as its consultant. The design process is ongoing. The design is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.

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 of rainfall). All recovery efforts have been completed and Buchanan County's consultant is currently working on finalizing the as-builts.

State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

Staffing Updates

Our new Business Tool Specialist is Amanda McAdams, and she will start in July. She is currently working with NRCS in Hawaii.

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.
- VA Technical Guide Notice 450-24-525 - Special Environmental Concerns - Invasive Species.
- VA Bulletin 180-24-7 regarding Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General Signup 62

Training to Field Staff

- **Webinars:**
 - April 3rd: RCCP Training
 - April 17th: Exploring RIADS Integrated Landscape Planning Toolbox Training
 - May 1st: Local Working Group Training
 - May 15th: Employee Development Training
 - May 23rd: CD/CART Training
 - June 12th: Environmental Compliance (CPA-52) Training
 - June 26th: New NRCS Hydrology Tool Training, Safety/PPE Update
- **Staff/Partnership Trainings**
 - RCCP Training (4/3/24)
 - Fence Standard and Specs Training (4/9 & 16/24)
 - Developing a Grazing Plan Training
 - Cultural Resources Part 2 (4/24/24)
 - NRI State Level Data Collectors Training (5/1/24)
 - Pasture Condition Score Training (5/7 & 21/24)
 - Planning Silvopasture for Landowners (5/23/24)
 - Prescribe Burning Training (5/30/24)
 - Forestry Train the Trainer Training (4/30-5/2/24)
 - Wetland Compliance Training (5/6-7/24)
- **Staff Training/Outreach Events**
 - Bath County SWCD agroforestry field day 4/19
 - Farm Visit Training (5/9/24)
- **Customer Service and Outreach**
 - Basic Grazing School (5/14-15/24)
 - Pasture Walk Happy Farmer Farm (6/5/24)

State Soil Scientist (SSS)

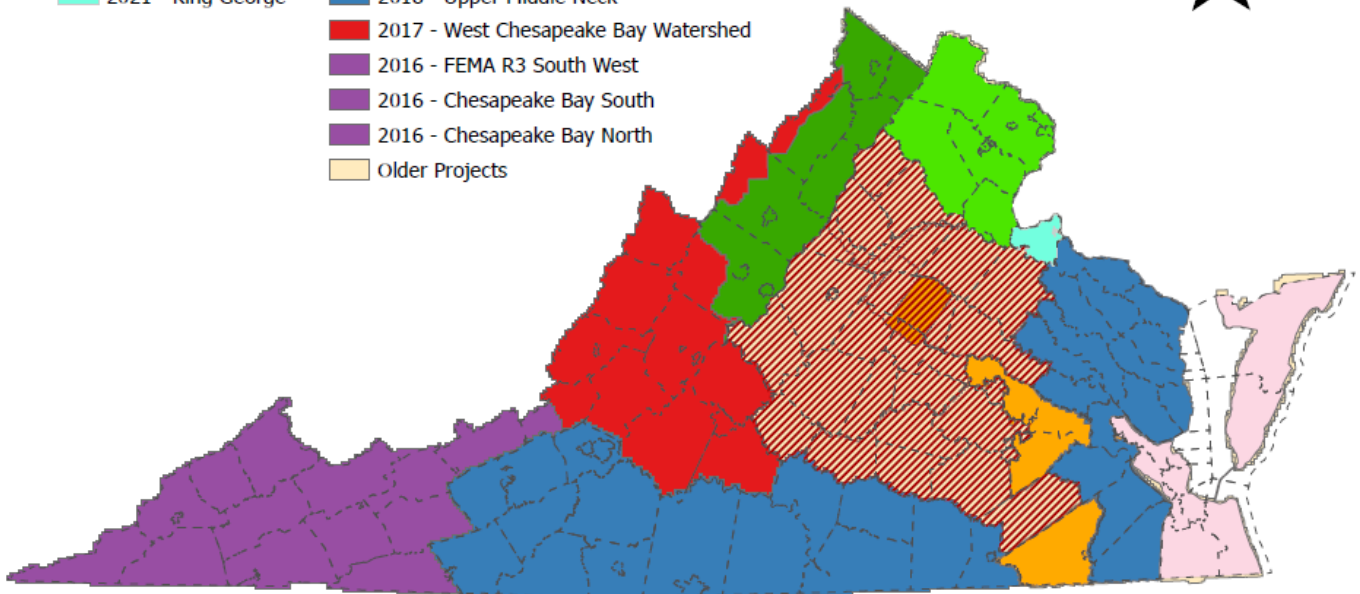
In partnership with GEO and USGS, Virginia is acquiring LiDAR for much of central Virginia counties at a quality level 1 (best). The draft task order has been received and is moving forward to be flown between November and February next fiscal year for leaf off conditions. (see hatched area on below map)

The Hampton Roads LiDAR project, flown this leaf off season, is in processing, and hopefully will be available by November. This project was also flown at quality level 1. Most of the state had previously been flown at quality level 2.

LiDAR Status

Legend

- Proposed 2024
- 2020 - Northern Shenandoah
- 2019 - Southampton Henrico Williamsburg
- 2024 - Hampton Roads
- 2023 - Fairfax
- 2018 - FEMA NRCS South Central
- 2021 - King George
- 2018 - Upper Middle Neck
- 2017 - West Chesapeake Bay Watershed
- 2016 - FEMA R3 South West
- 2016 - Chesapeake Bay South
- 2016 - Chesapeake Bay North
- Older Projects



Date: 1/30/2024

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Soil Survey Update

A quality assurance field review was held in Hanover at the end of May. The MLRA soil survey office is updating a series of soil map units for renaming to a soil series level. The changes will be announced preceding the annual soils data refresh of the Web Soil Survey in September.



We are continuing to work with the Soil Health Coalition to plan a climate smart commodities stakeholder meeting at VSU, to enhanced communication among project leaders and the broader agricultural and conservation community in Virginia which is essential for building knowledge and understanding of the CSC projects.

Partnerships & Initiatives (P&I)

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- **OMB/NRCS Virginia Tour** - Virginia hosted a tour to familiarize Office of Management and Budget (OMB) NRCS Examiner with BIL/Watersheds and Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry. Tour stops included Mountain Run Dam to discuss the rehabilitation that was completed 2017-2019 and Glenmary Farm (Tom Nixon) to look at: Conservation Easement, Prescribed grazing, cover crops, riparian buffer, nutrient management, and other conservation practices.
- **Umbrella Agreements** – Virginia NRCS is working to participate in four of the national umbrella agreements with state specific partnerships. Summaries of those agreements are below.
 - **Ducks Unlimited** - Partnership will accelerate implementation of USDA NRCS easement programs, specifically with wetland restoration. This agreement will result in the employment of two partner staff members which will provide site evaluations, survey, including boundary survey, design and approval, monitoring, hydrologic analysis, construction oversight, practice certification, and other related wetland restoration and management tasks in support of IRA and CSAF practices. It will also support the outreach, enrollment, and review of ACEP-WRE applications. Through this partnership, DU aspires to impact 500 acres (new enrollments and stewardship) of wetland restoration and/or wetland enhancement annually in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
 - **American Farmland Trust** - AFT will recruit and hire one partner grazing specialist to work in VA NRCS Area 2. The grazing specialist will work with producers to develop prescribed grazing plans that meet NRCS standards and specifications, provide follow-up technical assistance and guidance to livestock grazing producers who are currently implementing farm bill and IRA funded prescribed grazing practices, and coordinate and conduct producer outreach and education events. In addition to one new FTE, AFT will also utilize existing senior technical and communication staff to support the deliverables.
 - **US Fish and Wildlife Service** – Provide partner engineer that will be responsible for providing direct technical assistance to private landowners to implement and construct stream restoration projects that address identified aquatic wildlife and water resource concerns in support of NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) and Farm Bill Financial Assistance programs, including state-identified Working Lands for Wildlife Initiatives, with particular focus on addressing aquatic resource concerns through stream/riparian corridor enhancements, instream habitat improvement, and aquatic connectivity through barrier removal.
 - **Intertribal Agriculture Council** - IAC will meet with Tribes and Tribal producers to identify and share the appropriate NRCS resources, focusing on opportunities specific to their operations. With a focus on relationship building, IAC will identify and assess prospective engagement opportunities to inform meetings and on-site visits with Tribes and Tribal producers to discuss NRCS resources and funding opportunities, such as the Conservation Innovation Grants program. IAC

will conduct outreach, such as tabling, at 1-2 events per year that have a related focus area, such as Tribal affairs, agriculture, and natural resources.

- Participated in the **Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways Conference**. VA NRCS had a display highlighting the farm bill Agriculture Conservation Easement Programs. The State Conservaitonist also presented on current NRCS programs and updates.
- In late April on Virginia's Pamunkey Reservation a NRCS repair team arrived from Utah in to successfully repair the inoperable Tribal SCAN unit. The Natural Resources Conservation Service's **Soil Climate Analysis (SCAN) Network** was designed as a national system of inter-connected weather stations that collected both climate data and numbers of more interest to owners of farm and forest lands – specifically soil moisture content. The Pamunkey station was put into operation in 2019 as a part of a pilot program called Tribal SCAN – or TSCAN – that eventually added 22 stations on tribal lands to the larger national network, which includes more than 220 stations.