

**Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board
Thursday April 27, 2023
Pocahontas State Park
Chesterfield, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 27, 2023, in the Swift Creek Dining Hall at Pocahontas State Park in Chesterfield, Virginia.

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Charles A. Arnason, Chair
Jay C. Ford
Dr. Stephen R. Hill
Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director, for Matthew Wells, DCR Director, Ex Officio
Dr. Edwin Martinez, NRCS, Ex Officio
Dr. Daniel Goerlich, VCE, Invitee
Pamela Mason
Charles Newton
Dr. Dahlia O'Brien

VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Adam D. Wilson, Vice Chair
Two Vacancies

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety and Floodplain Management
James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy
Sara Bottenfeld, Agricultural Incentives Program Manager
Denney Collins, Conservation District Coordinator
Cassiopea Camera, Environmental Education Specialist
Blair Gordon, SWCD Liaison

OTHERS PRESENT

Suzanne Browne, Loudoun SWCD
Michelle Carter, Three Rivers SWCD
Brad Copenhaver, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Zach Jacobs, Virginia Farm Bureau
Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Leann Schmidt, NRCS
Kathy Shamblin, Hanover-Caroline SWCD
Kendall Tyree, VASWCD

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With six (6) members of the Board present, a quorum was established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Arnason called the meeting to order at 10:14 a.m. and asked for introductions.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 23, 2023

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Newton moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Board approve the minutes of the March 23, 2023 meeting as submitted by staff.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT – *Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director*

Deputy Director Smith expressed regrets from Director Wells who was unable to attend.

He noted that the agency was still waiting on final Budget action to address proposed amendments by the General Assembly.

DAM SAFETY AND FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT

Division Report – Darryl Glover

Mr. Glover reported that Ms. Wendy Howard Cooper had resigned from the agency effective Monday April 24, 2023. The agency is moving forward with recruitment procedures.

Mr. Glover commented that Ms. Howard Cooper made significant contributions to the DCR Dam Safety and Floodplain Management programs.

Initiation of periodic review of the Impounding Structure Regulations (4VAC50-20) – Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the last periodic review of the Impounding Structure Regulations was conducted in 2018 and finalized in 2019. The process is conducted to provide the regulatory community, consultants, engineers, and public the opportunity to provide comment on the regulations.

The public comment will be open for a minimum of 21 days. Following the public comment period, the Department will report to the Board on any comments received and will make a recommendation regarding any possible regulatory action.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the initiation of a periodic review of the Impounding Structure Regulations (4VAC50-20). The periodic review shall be conducted in accordance with the procedures established by the Office of Regulatory Management and all other applicable laws, policies, and procedures.

Mr. Newton seconded, and the motion carried.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

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

Mr. Martin gave the report for the Division of Soil and Water Conservation.

Mr. Martin advised that DCR, in partnership with the Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program, is hosting four outreach days across the Commonwealth. Those dates are:

Saturday, May 13

9 a.m.-noon

Host farmer:

Joe Gray

Piedmont Agriculture Service

8116 Fox Grove Road

Remington, Virginia 22734

John Marshall SWCD

Tuesday, May 16

9 a.m.-noon

Host farmer:

Albert McGee

3025 Vawter Corner Road

Louisa, Virginia 23093

Thomas Jefferson SWCD

Wednesday, May 24

12pm - 3pm

Host farmers:

Anthony and Tonja Martin

6927 Snow Creek Road

Penhook, Virginia 24173

Blue Ridge SWCD

Thursday, May 25

10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Host farmer:

Glenn Slade

1553 Brunt Mill Road

Surry, Virginia 23883

Peanut SWCD

Mr. Martin noted that when individuals hear “small farms program”, they tend to think less than 5 acres; however the majority of farms that the Small Farms Outreach Program works with are at least 5 acres and are eligible to participate in the VACS Program.

Approval of the Board’s Fiscal Year 2024 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) BMP Manual – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that there were additional changes made to the materials the Board received. Those changes are:

- **Guidelines**
 - Pages II-1 and II-2
 - Clarification of language related to which practices Districts may take applications for outside of the service area.
 - Page 11
 - Fixed reference to 2022 impairment areas, rather than 2020.
 - Page 26
 - Clarification of language related to the documents reviewed by the DCR Agricultural BMP Engineering Services Program or an individual with appropriate EJAA for practices that are funded by more than 50% federal funds.
 - Page 31
 - Revisions that authorize the use of federal and state cost-share funds to provide up to the approved estimated cost or eligible actual cost.
 - Removes unnecessary language related to other sources of funding.
 - Page 34
 - Removed unnecessary language related to projects funded by both federal and state sources.
 - Page 59
 - Fixed reference to 2022 nonpoint source assessment
- **Revisions to individual BMPs**
 - *NM-6 (Manure Injection) and the WFA-NM (Whole Farm Approach – Nutrient Management)*
 - These practices were intended to allow payments for multiple manure injections (one in the spring and one in the fall) as long as those injections are consistent with the nutrient management plan and the specification requirements.
 - Language stating this is an annual practice has been stricken as this allows only one payment per year.
 - Language authorizing multiple payments during the year (one in the spring and one in the fall) has been added, as long as those injections are consistent with the nutrient management plan and the specification requirements.
 - In order to accurately reflect the authorization to use federal and state cost-share funds to provide up to the approved estimated cost or eligible actual cost, revisions were made:
 - *Current language*
 - The state cost-share payment alone or when combined with any other cost-share program will not exceed 75% of the total eligible costs.
 - *Revised language*
 - The VACS payment will not exceed 75% of the approved estimated cost or eligible actual cost, whichever is less.
 - *Specifications impacted*
 - FR-4 (Woodland erosion stabilization);
 - SE-2 (Shoreline stabilization);

- SL-3 (Stripcropping systems);
 - SL-4 (Terrace systems);
 - SL-11 (Permanent vegetative cover on critical areas);
 - WFA-NM (Whole farm approach – nutrient management bundle);
 - WP-2A (Streambank stabilization);
 - WP-4 (Animal waste control facilities);
 - WP-4B (Dairy loafing lot management system);
 - WP-4C (Composter facilities);
 - WP-4FP (Feeding pad);
 - WP-4LC (Animal waste control facility for confined livestock operations);
 - WP-4LL (Loafing lot management system with manure management (excluding bovine dairy));
 - WP-4SF (Seasonal feeding facility with attached manure storage); and
 - WQ-12 (Roof runoff management system).
- Most specifications have language referencing “state funding”, “cost-share rate”, “state cost-share rate”; we will similarly revise those specifications to specifically reference the “VACS payment rate.”
- ***Naming convention request***
 - Current language:

Name of Practice:
DCR Specifications for No.

This document specifies terms and conditions for the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation’s [Name of specification] best management practices that are applicable to all contracts entered into with respect to that practice.
 - Requested edits:

Name of Practice:
VACS Program Specifications for No.

This document specifies terms and conditions for the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-share Program’s [Name of specification] best management practices that are applicable to all contracts entered into with respect to that practice.

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that Mr. Wilson was requesting that Washington County be removed from the list of counties eligible to receive poultry litter. He has expressed concerns about the possible transference of avian flu. He hopes to work with one of the facilities located in Washington County to provide litter to those farms requesting it.

Mr. Newton asked about additional guidance and documentation for farmers where land is in two districts.

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the Department is developing language that would allow Districts to operate outside of their boundaries. The Department does not want to add an additional barrier for a producer, especially if there is a long-standing relationship. The language was deliberately left flexible.

With regard to poultry litter, Dr. Hill asked if that was in the purview of the Board and whether the Board can address the issue of avian flu.

Ms. Watlington Jones advised that the avian flu issue was a matter for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). The application of poultry litter is the responsibility of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

DCR and the Soil and Water Conservation Board are responsible for the compensation to producers that participate in the poultry litter transport program. If Washington County is removed from the list, poultry litter can still be transported, but there will be no compensation from the poultry litter transport program to the producer using the litter.

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the removal of Washington County from the list of localities approved for poultry litter transport.

Mr. Newton seconded, and the motion carried.

Chairman Arnason called for a motion to approve the updates to the manual.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Newton moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the 2024 Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share BMP Manual as presented. The Department is authorized to make non-substantive changes to include formatting and stylistic changes as necessary to all approved sections of the Manual.

Dr. Hill seconded and the motion carried.

Review of Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Administration and Operations Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2024 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones reviewed the recommended changes to the District Administration and Operation Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2024.

- There are minor revisions to the Policy this year including:
 - Revising references to FY2023 to FY2024 and 2023 to 2024;
 - Will provide the updated budget reference once the chapter number is assigned;
 - Referenced the revised budget numbers for FY2024
 - Under dam maintenance, the \$3,000 should have been revised last year to reference \$4,500 in the heading;
 - Districts received the appropriate amount.
- Highlighted language is different than what was provided originally
 - We have received preliminary estimates on the cost of audits by Robinson Farmer and Cox Associates
 - Allowed in their contract to increase the costs of audits in accordance with federal inflation rate
 - After internal discussions and after receiving this information, the approach on how to allocate the \$170,000 provided in the budget for District support services was revised. It was determined that the most appropriate approach was to show the anticipated costs (and needs):
 - Audits estimated costs of \$129,000 for FY2024
 - Grant to Association remains stable at \$51,000
 - Other support services estimated at \$7,500

- Includes printing costs for numerous documents
 - Director training and orientation
 - Desktop guide (will be revised over the next year)
 - Printing of VACS Manual
- Language has been added stating “The Department will provide funding for any additional expenses related to audits from other sources. The additional expenses are estimated at \$17,500.”
- Unexpended state funds maintained by Districts
 - Reference has been corrected to twelve months, rather than six months
 - Conforms to the guidance in the Desktop guide

The Board will take final action regarding District Administration and Operations Funding Allocations at the May meeting.

Review of Administration and Operations Support Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2024 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones reviewed the recommended changes to the Operations and Support Grant Agreement.

- There are minor revisions to this Grant Agreement this year including:
 - Revising references to FY2023 to FY2024 and 2023 to 2024;
 - Removed reference to completion of Attachment D (Budget Template)
 - This is due every 2 years
 - Districts are completing this for FY2023
 - Will not be a deliverable for FY2024
 - Included updated Attachment E (quarterly report)
 - Minor amendment to Deliverable 18 for clarification
 - Districts should provide VSU – Small Farm Outreach Program the opportunity to participate in the events they do but do not need to have the Program on the agenda for every event
 - The community outreach event (Deliverable 17) does require Districts to invite the VSU – Small Farm Outreach Program the opportunity to participate on the agenda

The Board will take final action on the Grant Agreement at the May meeting.

Review of Board Policy on Soil and Water Conservation District Cost Share and Technical Assistance Funding Allocations for Fiscal Year 2024 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones reviewed the recommended changes to the Board Policy on District Cost Share and Technical Assistance Funding Allocations.

- There are routine revisions to the Policy this year including:
 - Revising references to FY2023 to FY2024 and 2023 to 2024;
 - Will provide the updated budget reference once the chapter number is assigned;
 - Referenced the revised budget numbers for FY2024
 - HUC map dates have been updated; data remains the same as FY2023 data
- Funding utilized for cost-share:
 - There was \$112,349,842 remaining from the FY2023 WQIF deposit
 - Also \$12,250,158 in returned and unobligated cost-share funds
- Funding utilized for technical assistance:
 - \$1,423,133 in technical assistance associated with returned and unallocated cost-share funds;
 - \$10,246,050 in additional technical assistance funds; and

- \$4,550,000 in base technical assistance funds
- Totals for FY2024: \$140,819,183
 - Cost-share - \$124,600,000
 - Technical assistance - \$16,219,183
- Recordation revenue
 - Estimates for FY2023 has been revised from \$8.5 million to \$7.3 million
 - Board did allocate \$3 million from FY2023 previously
 - \$2 million for poultry litter transport
 - \$1 million for BMP verification
- Department recommends holding the remaining anticipated revenues (\$6.5 million) and the associated technical assistance funds (\$2.6 million) for use by the Districts participating in the WFA during FY2024
- As part of the allocations approved in FY2023, \$6.6 million (plus the associated technical assistance funding) was held in reserve for the WFA participating Districts
 - Language added allows the use of any of those funds that remain unobligated to be considered as returned and unobligated.
- Additional funding for Districts participating in the WFA
 - \$13,500,000 in additional returned and unobligated cost-share funds held in reserve
 - For FY2024, a total of \$22,600 for WFA (in addition to proposed VACS allocations)
 - \$20 million for implementation of best management practices
 - \$2,600,000 for technical assistance funding
- District allocations
 - No District recommended to receive more than \$9,000,000
 - Recommendations does consider the amount (and percentage) of FY2023 funding currently obligated
 - Also considers if the District is participating in the WFA
 - Language added that authorizes Culpeper District to utilize \$500,000 of their VACS allocation to incentivize the soil health specification (SL-10E)
- Transfer of cost-share funds between Districts (page 19-21)
 - Accidently struck the word “advanced” in the version provided (highlighted to show the change)
 - Beginning in December (and in some years earlier), DCR tracks District needs across the state for funding (both to transfer and to receive)
 - There have been several instances where transfers have occurred between Districts where there is no need demonstrated by the receiving District
 - In many cases, funds are then transferred back to the Department
 - Department wants to ensure funds are transferred where needed
 - Ensuring CDCs are involved and aware of the transfers will more effectively move money to areas that need it
 - Also in this section, removed the ability of Districts to transfer cost-share funding without the associated technical assistance funding
 - Transfers need to be completed by June 15, 2024 in order to provide time for the Department (and the Districts) to ensure all the financials are ready for the end-of-year close out activities and reporting requirement
- Removed duplicative references to language in the BMP Manual related to priority considerations (pages 21-23)
 - References back to the VACS Manual
 - Avoids conflicts between the Manual and the policy if something is overlooked
- Language revisions to mimic changes in the VACS Manual (page 24) related to piggy backed projects
- Participant cap (pages 24-25)
 - Revisions to clarify what practices do not currently impact a producer’s cap

- Removes language regarding the variance process but adds reference to the Manual
 - Slightly revised the language regarding the WFA practices to be more clear (revisions are highlighted)
- An extra letter was included on page 29 (v)
 - Has been removed and is highlighted
- Transferring funds back to the Department (pages 29-30)
 - Date changed to June 15 from June 30
 - Similar language revisions as the changes made regarding transfers between Districts
- Similar revision as made in the Administrative and Operations Policy to reflect the guidance provided in the Desktop Guide (page 30)
 - Revised to reflect twelve months rather than six months of reserve funds

Ms. Watlington Jones noted that Pittsylvania SWCD transferred about half of their funding for the previous year. She advised that the Department was asking if the Board would like DCR to review Pittsylvania's allocation and potentially reassign it to other districts.

Mr. Newton commented that the District should be consulted.

Ms. Gordon advised that the District had obligated \$1.3 million this year and was a very active and productive District. She noted that typically, the District's maximum obligation was about \$1.5 million.

The Board requested that the Department review the funding for Pittsylvania SWCD in consultation with the District. Any recommended revisions will be included in the final policy for Board approval at the May meeting.

Review of Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Grant Agreement for Fiscal Year 2024 – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones reviewed the recommended changes to the Cost-Share and Technical Assistance Grant Agreement.

- There are minor revisions to this Grant Agreement this year including:
 - Revising references to FY2023 to FY2024 and 2023 to 2024;
 - Similar amendments related to transfers between Districts as in the Policy
 - Similar amendments related to the return of funds to the Department as in the Policy
 - Minor amendments to language regarding participation in the WFA

The Board will approve the final Grant Agreement at the May meeting.

Approval of District Appointments and Resignations – Christine Watlington Jones

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the recommended list of appointments and resignations.

Appomattox River

Resignation of Ms. Dama Rice, of Petersburg, effective 1/1/2023, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2023).

Appointment of Ms. Sarah King, of Petersburg, effective 4/27/23, to fill the un-expired elected director position of Ms. Dama Rice (term of office expires 12/31/23).

Headwaters

Resignation of Ms. Wendy Turley, of Staunton, effective 11/1/2022, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2023).

Appointment of Mr. Jimmy Bryant, of Staunton, effective 4/27/23, to fill the un-expired elected director position of Ms. Wendy Turley (term of office expires 12/31/23).

Tazewell

Resignation of Mr. Dan Bowling, of Tazewell County, effective 4/17/23, elected director (term of office expires 12/31/2023).

BOARD ACTION

Ms. Mason moved that the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approve the list of individuals being recommended.

Mr. Ford seconded, and the motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no additional old business.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no additional new business.

PARTNER REPORTS

NRCS

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

VDACS

Not represented.

VASWCD

Dr. Tyree gave the report for the VASWCD. A copy of her written report is included as Attachment B.

Dr. Tyree noted that several important dates were included in her written report. She also noted that the Association has heard the concerns regarding the need for HR training for District employees. A virtual session was related to HR was held on April 12.

Chesapeake Bay Commission

Ms. Kotula gave the report for the Chesapeake Bay Commission. She noted that the Commission has onboarded a new Executive Director, former SWCB member Anna Killius.

Ms. Kotula noted that much of the spring has been spent working on Farm Bill priorities.

Virginia Agribusiness Council

Brad Copenhaver reported that since the last meeting the Virginia Agribusiness Council appointed Cliff Williamson as Executive Director. He stated that he looks forward to working with partner groups.

Virginia Farm Bureau Federation

Mr. Jacobs advised that the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation is looking forward to working with the Association and with DCR regarding the Cost-Share program. He noted that, along with others, the VFBF is awaiting budget action on the proposed amendments from the General Assembly.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Kowalski commented that the Chesapeake Bay Foundation update is similar to the Commission. He noted that CBF is lobbying for efficient and effective policies. CBF is working to promote the benefits of rotational grazing.

Ms. Mason noted that she would again like to reiterate that there are multiple sources of funding available for numerous types of best management practices. She encouraged the Board and Districts to consider stacking those funding sources to increase the impact of mission-based outcomes.

NEXT MEETING

May 25, 2023

Virginia Department of Forestry, Charlottesville, Virginia

ADJOURN

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

Attachment A

State Conservationist's Highlights

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) – Virginia NRCS received a total of 300+ applications for IRA. The distribution is as follows: EQIP 270+ and CSP 60+ (our CSP numbers are subject to change and will have an accurate number for you once ranking is complete). The State Conservationists' goal is to have IRA funds in every county in Virginia within the next 3 years. We are currently preparing EQIP-IRA preapprovals – as we are pre-approving, we see the application financial requests exceed our allocation for FY23 EQIP-IRA \$2.5million with \$6.4million in requests.

- **Local Work Groups (LWG)** – NRCS has issued state guidance regarding the 2023 LWG exercise. We encourage all 47 Virginia SWCDs to work with local partners to complete this yearly task. The Virginia NRCS Programs team is requesting that each LWG convene no later than June 16, 2023, to solicit input from landowners on resource concerns and recommendations on program changes and technical practices.
- **NRCS State Technical Committee** – NRCS has resumed conducting State Tech Committee meetings in person. Our first hybrid meeting was held April 18.
- **Virginia NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)** – is a competitive program that supports the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands. Virginia priorities for Fiscal Year 2023 are emphases on soil health and forestry. The CIG budget is \$400,000 and the application deadline is May 29, 2023. Additional details are available under grants.gov. We encourage our SWCD to help us promote this opportunity.
- **Virginia Conservation Partnership and Technical Assistance** – NRCS is announcing the availability of \$1 million in funding for the purpose of leveraging agency resources to encourage collaboration with partners in providing strategic conservation delivery assistance and/or provide tools or data that enhance the ability of the agency to support conservation. Priority areas for this program are:
 1. Providing technical assistance in the delivery, development, promotion, and support of soil, water and wildlife conservation programs to Virginia's farmers, ranchers, and landowners
 2. Supporting delivery of climate-smart agriculture and forestry conservation practices and showing quantifiable carbon sequestration and/or greenhouse gas reductions
 3. Reducing barriers to programs and improve support to underserved farmers, ranchers, and landowners.
- **Urban Agriculture Partnership** – NRCS is working with state partners to secure an Urban Agriculture Office in the city of Richmond. NRCS funding will support over 40 city gardens to create, enhance, or maintain these areas with emphasis on education and outreach. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is leading our state Urban Agriculture subcommittee and is currently planning a future subcommittee meeting.
- **Central Appalachia Partnership** – Virginia NRCS joined the Nation Fish and Wildlife Foundation's team for its

Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship Program partnership roundtable discussion held in Marion. Over 45 conservation partners attended this event lead by Amanda Bassow, Northeastern Regional Director for the NFWF.

- **Longleaf Pine Partnership** – On April 4, several Virginia conservation partners met at Bill Owen’s farm, named Raccoon Creek Pinelands, to share longleaf pine success stories with Dr. Martha Williams, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

EQIP, CSP, RCPP, VPA-HIP, CIG, TSP and Easement Programs

Field staff are currently managing 2,108 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent \$142 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 468,400 acres.

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

Received and ranked 1,031 EQIP applications. EQIP allocation is \$22.18 million. Preapproved 331 applications. 46 are currently obligated for \$2 million. 14 applications were preapproved for EQIP- CIC for \$1.3 million. EQIP-IRA ranking deadline is April 21, 2023 – EQIP-IRA allocation is \$2.5 million.

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

Obligated \$7.6 million for 122 CSP renewals on 46,617 acres. CSP classic ranking deadline May 26, 2023. ProTracts currently shows 255 CSP Classic applications. CSP classic allocation is \$11.8 million, +\$200K for organic applications. Funded 14 CSP-GCI contracts for \$39,280 (all applications submitted). CSP-IRA ranking deadline TBD June 2023 – CSP-IRA allocation is \$4.8 million.

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

Currently managing 16 active contracts with total funding of \$2 million covering 6,687.6 acres. Notice of Funding Opportunity expected within next 60 days. Four RCPP proposals awarded as renewals. For RCPP HFRP, an easement application is currently being processed for Grayson County to conserve 997 acres of forested land with an estimated cost of over \$1 million.

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

Received 8 ALE applications with funding requests for \$3.2 million on 2,199 acres. 11 ACEP-ALE acquisitions underway. 2 ACEP-WRE restorations in progress. 146 existing recorded easements totaling 17,112 acres of land protected and monitored.

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**

2023 Virginia CIG Notice of Funding Opportunity posted April 14, 2023, on grants.gov and closed May 29, 2023. The recommended proposals topics are Soil Health and Forestry. Grants will be awarded for projects between one- and three-years duration with maximum awards of \$200k for each priority topic. We anticipate receiving 5 proposals for review and hope to make selections for each topic by June 15, 2023. Currently managing 12 CIG’s totaling \$1.1 million with various partners like: Virginia Tech, Sustainable Chesapeake, Virginia State University, Virginia Department of Forestry, Water Science Institute and Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources.

Engineering (SCE)

Staffing Updates

- NRCS Virginia will have the upcoming advertisements. Both positions will be in Richmond.
 - Hydraulics Engineer
 - Dam Safety Engineer

Dam Rehabilitation

- **Beaver Creek 1**

Supplemental plan – The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) is overseeing the locally led planning effort and has retained Schnabel Engineering as its consultant. The final supplemental plan EA has been developed. The NRCS plan authorization process is ongoing.

Design - Funding has been secured for the rehabilitation design. RWSA will be the sponsor for the locally led project. The agreement between NRCS and RWSA is in progress.
- **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. The design is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.
- **Johns Creek 1**

Funding has been secured for the rehabilitation design. Mountain Castles SWCD will be the sponsor for the locally led project. The agreement between NRCS and the SWCD is in progress.

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 on August 30 (estimated 6-8 inches). NRCS and Buchanan County completed damage survey reports (DSRs) for 4 county-identified sites. Funding for 3 eligible sites was received in mid-January 2022 and the EWP agreement was finalized on March 15, 2022. Buchanan County has submitted final designs for the sites and is working on obtaining permits. Construction is anticipated to begin in May 2023 and will be completed by the end of June.

State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

Chris Bradshaw is currently acting State Resource Conservationist for Virginia for 120 days or until the position is filled.

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.

- Released Virginia Technical Guide Notice 450-23-517 – Wetland Job Approval Authority

- Released Virginia Bulletin 180-23-6 – General Conservation Reserve Program Signup 60

Training to Field Staff

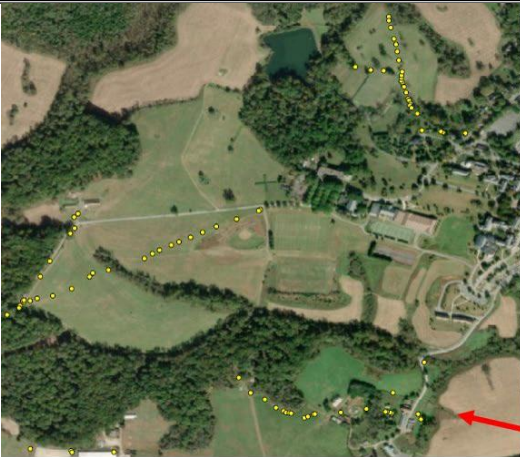
- Continue the use of SRC webinars in place of tradition in-person meetings, allowing us to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to field staff:
 - March 8, 2023 – An overview of new opportunities for CPS 511/528 for grassland birds.
 - March 15, 2023 – ArcMap to Arc-GIS Pro – a roadmap ahead.
 - March 22, 2023 – HELC Field Training 1 – Erosion Assessment/RUSLE2 follow up.
 - March 29, 2023 – HELC Field Training 2 – Erosion Assessment/RUSLE2 follow up.
 - April 12, 2023 – Food Security Act Compliance Review – Data Entry Training.
 - April 26, 2023 – CD/CART Refresher Office Hours
- RUSLE2 Office Hours – Mondays 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. – hosted 8 events since March 6, 2023.
- Staff/Partnership Trainings
 - March 21, 2023 – Novel Tall Fescue Renovation Workshop – VSU Randolph Farm Pavilion.
 - April 11, 2023 – Cultural Resources Part 2 Training – Charlotte County, VA.
 - April 18, 2023 – Prescribed Burn Training – Farmville, VA.
 - April 20, 2023 – CD/CART – Tips and Tricks – virtual
 -
- SRC Staff Training/Outreach Events
 - March 23, 2023 – Eastern Virginia Forage Conference – Fredericksburg, VA.
 - March 31, 2023 – VA Tech College of Ag & Life Sciences Experiences Showcase – Blacksburg, VA
 - April 4, 2023 – Pasture Walk – Burkeville, VA.
 - April 21, 2023 – Southeast VA Niche Farming Outreach Meeting – VA Beach, VA

Customer Service and Outreach

- Partnership meeting with DCR to discuss the ongoing collaborative Data Sharing Agreement.
- Partnership meeting with DOF – trainings, current issues, looking ahead.
- NFWF Central Appalachia Partner Round Table

State Soil Scientist (SSS)

Soil Survey Update – Working with the Soil Plant Science Division, ground penetrating radar was used at Sweet Briar College with students to assist in locating old waterlines underground that when leaking will be easier to find.



Old versus newer water storage tank.



Some of the GPS points of waterlines.



Partnerships & Initiatives (P&I)**Peoples Gardens****Existing FY22 Agreements**

- Fairfield Middle School
- Richmond Alternative School

Proposed FY23 Agreements**City of Richmond – Richmond Grows Garden**

- Supports 22 garden sites across the city.

Groundworks RVA – Hillside Micro Farm

- Provides food and learning opportunities for neighbors in the Hillside Community.

Fit4Kids

- Supports 12 sites in partners with local school and provides education opportunities on gardening and nutrition.

Kinfolks

- Support for MLK and Charles Gilpin Farm sites. “Keepin’ it Real Healthy” whole Body wellness Campaign and “Kitchen Table Conversation” healthy Education Cooking Classes.

Urban Office (Richmond)

- Offer has been made for NRCS Urban Conservationist position that will work in State Office until service center site is located.
- Working with partners and conducting GIS analysis to identify best office location for customers in the city.

Notice of Funding Opportunity for Technical Assistance

Agreements are to build partnerships that address at least one of the three priorities below. Applications due on Grants.gov by May 28.

- Provide technical assistance in the delivery, development, promotion, and support of soil, water and wildlife conservation programs to Virginia’s farmers, ranchers, and landowners,
- Support delivery of Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry conservation practices and show quantifiable carbon sequestration and/or greenhouse gas reductions,
- Reduce barriers to programs and improve support to underserved farmers, ranchers, and landowners.

Tribal

In the planning phase for 2023 Tribal Summit this fall focusing on State Recognized Tribes

Attachment B



VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (VASWCD)
Partner Report to the
Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board

April 25, 2023

Dates/Items of Interest:

- **Admin/Director Training – Tuesday, May 9, 2023** – A full day training session is being organized with content rich topics to include budget template (Attachment D) training with Blair Gordon of DCR and Human Resources Training by Charlotte Jensen, HR Consulting Manager with Gallagher Resources & Compensation Consulting. This training session will be held in person in Henrico and is open to all including district staff, Directors and Associates. Registration extended. Cost = \$100 for the first registration and \$75 for each additional registration per district. If cost is a barrier to your participation contact Kendall Tyree (kendall.tyree@vaswcd.org) to discuss scholarship possibilities. Information for training) can be found online at <https://vaswcd.org/director-trainings/>.
- **Summer Virtual VASWCD Board Meeting – Wednesday, June 21** @ 9:30am is the next scheduled VASWCD quarterly board meeting and will be held virtually using the Zoom platform. Draft agendas will be shared in coming days and posted on the VASWCD website at <http://vaswcd.org/board-meetings>. If you are interested in attending this meeting please contact Kendall Tyree at Kendall.Tyree@vaswcd.org to RSVP and receive meeting information and connection details.
- **VASWCD Annual Meeting Information** – The VASWCD Annual Meeting will kick off planning on **Wednesday, June 7 at 1pm** with an in person and virtual option. We encourage your input and training needs to ensure a successful program. Please save the dates: **December 3-6, 2023 at the Norfolk Marriott**.
- **VASWCD Committees** – The VASWCD has many standing committees that are meeting electronically to further district needs. The following committee activity might be of interest:
 - ❖ The **Admin/Ops Committee** continues to meet and further work on training resources and opportunities for all 47 SWCDs. The next committee meeting is scheduled for **June 7 at 10am** and will be made available via zoom. This session will be a follow up to May training. Conversation will also begin at this time on development of a **district assessment survey** furthering recent discussion, exploration and need of HR training and support among other needs. A virtual water cooler chat is also scheduled for July 11 @ 1:30PM.

- ❖ The **Marketing Committee** has developed a new resource that goes out once a month. Thanks to DCR collaboration and support in this effort. A snapshot of the last “Marketing Minute” is below. Ensure you’re signed up for alldistrict@vaswcd.org to receive.



Create eye-catching marketing materials with Canva

Making your outreach material visually appealing, whether it is a printed flyer, newsletter, annual report or social media post, is an important part of any messaging you share with your community or followers. [Canva](#) is a free & easy tool to create outreach materials. Use Canva's many pre-made templates, free photos and videos! [Watch](#) the VASWCD's recorded "Canva & Community Engagement" training to learn more.



Need a professional farm photo? [Click here.](#)

Grainy photos ruin a flyer fast. We can help. DCR's [Conservation Farming album](#) on Flickr is a library of professional-quality farm photos just for you. Bookmark it and check back frequently as the collection grows.

Looking for something specific? Give us a shout, and our intrepid photographers will be on the lookout.

Contact Rebecca Jones at rebecca.jones@dcr.virginia.gov



• **VCAP – Virginia Conservation Assistance Program**

- ❖ We welcomed a new VCAP Assistant Coordinator this month and continue to market and promote the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program statewide.
- ❖ A new agreement has now been finalized so that Richmond City can receive support through VCAP via James River SWCD. The City of Hampton has partnered with the Colonial Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to offer Hampton property owners access to technical and financial assistance for living shorelines through the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP).
- ❖ We continue to roll out new methods to reach participants including the Start Up Payment Pilot Program (SUPP) to provide up-front cost, up to 50%, to begin construction. If your SWCD would like to participate in this pilot please reach out.
- ❖ Staff has been conducting one on one meetings with districts to review low income outreach strategies.

- ❖ Just completed a pilot cohort of CBLP-VCAP Certificate training with both online and in person components. A second round is planned for winter.
- ❖ Save the date: New program year training will be held virtually July 11 at 10AM.

Other Training/Resources:

- **HR Trends for 2023** – On April 12 we held a virtual training with Patrick Teague, HR Director for James City County to discuss Human Resource trends. Topics discussed included recruitment, employee well-being, employment turnover, and training and development. The training was well received and recorded. It can be accessed on our virtual training library at <https://vaswcd.org/virtualtraining/>.
- **Conservation Selling Skills** – Big thanks to DCR who held an in-person Conservation Selling Skills training this week in which 24 mostly new hires participated and are working towards conservation planner certification. Staff appreciated auditing the course to ensure content meets staff needs and that together we continue moving forward with training efforts appropriately. Additional conservation planner courses including perennial stream training of which the VASWCD is sponsoring will be made available in May.



- **Training Calendar** –The Department has continued to collaborate with the VASWCD to lay out a robust curriculum of training classes for SWCD staff and Conservation Planners in training. Together with DCR and the SWCD Employees Association we are working to collectively develop an expanded curriculum of SWCD employee training needs. Please reference our website for the most up to date training calendar, a component of our newly approved strategic plan. We recognize and appreciate efforts with partners to plan, as far in advance as possible, training opportunities that are relevant and meaningful. This is a living document with partner support.

Foundation Activities:

- **Scholarship** - Four \$1,000 scholarships will be given statewide this year. A new Area V scholarship will be debuted thanks to the estate of Wilkie Chaffin, past Director and Foundation/Association leadership. Applications must be received by the VASWCD this week. Announcement of winners will be made by early June.

- **Foundation Golf Tournament – Wednesday, May 3, 2023** – The annual Foundation golf tournament fundraiser is being planned for Wednesday, May 3 with a 10am start time. **Registration information and details can be found online at <https://vaswcd.org/vaswcd-educational-foundation-golf-tournament/>.**
- **Youth Conservation Camp Application Deadline – May 8, 2023** - Youth Conservation Camp is open to all Virginia students enrolled in High School for the current year. Camp will be held July 9-13 at Virginia Tech. Applications from your local SWCD are due to the Association by May 8. Learn more about YCC at <https://vaswcd.org/conservation-camp>. Please contact Maura Christian (maura.christian@vaswcd.org) with questions.
- **Virginia Dominion Energy Envirothon – Sunday, May 21 & Monday, May 22 @ Virginia State University – Volunteers Needed** - We welcome district staff, directors, and partners to volunteer, whether you are new or old to the Envirothon program! It is a great chance to network and witness these impressive high school students compete and have fun.. Volunteers joining on Sunday, May 21 will assist with set up and oral presentations. Sunday volunteers are welcome to stay for dinner, the opening program and if wanting to volunteer Monday the VASWCD will provide overnight lodging in the dorms. Volunteers joining on Monday, May 22 will assist with station testing at Randolph Farm. Volunteers on Monday are welcome to have breakfast on campus as well as remain for the lunch and final awards program. All volunteer efforts will be wrapped up no later than 3:15 on Monday. Contact Maura Christian with questions.

CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Kendall Elaine Tyree, PhD

Executive Director, Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Email: Kendall.Tyree@vaswcd.org