

**Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board**  
**Wednesday, September 18, 2024**  
**Drury Plaza Hotel**  
**Richmond, Virginia**

**TIME AND PLACE**

The meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board took place at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, September 18, 2024, at the Drury Plaza Hotel in Richmond, Virginia.

**VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

Charles Newton, Chair	Adam Wilson, Vice Chair
Charles Arnason	Jason De La Cruz
John Schick	Robert Mills
Stephanie Cornnell	Leigh Pemberton
Nick Thomas	
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  
Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety and Floodplain Management  
James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation  
Lisa McGee, Director of Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs  
Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager  
Paul Saunders, Senior Policy Analyst  
Marissa Roland, Eastern Area Manager  
Olivia Leatherwood, Conservation District Coordinator  
Denney Collins, Conservation District Coordinator  
Barbara McGarry, DCR RMP Coordinator

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Darrell Kuntz, Office of the Attorney General  
Darrell Marshall, Agricultural Stewardship Program Coordinator, VDACS  
Suzanne Brown, Loudoun SWCD  
Sharon Connor, Hanover-Caroline SWCD  
Charlie Paullin, Virginia Mercury  
Greg Powers, James River SWCD  
Amy Walker, Colonial SWCD  
Kemper Marable, Hanover -Caroline SWCD  
Hunter Gravatt, Hanover-Caroline SWCD  
Dr. Kendall Tyree, VASWCD

**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 10:02 a.m. and asked for introductions.

## **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM JUNE 26, 2024**

### **BOARD ACTION**

Mr. Wilson moved that the minutes from the June 26, 2024, meeting of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board be approved as submitted. Mr. Schick seconded, and the motion carried.

### **OFFICER ELECTIONS**

#### **BOARD ACTION**

Mr. Wilson opened nominations for the position of Chair of the Soil and Water Conservation Board. Mr. Arnason nominated Mr. Newton. Mr. Mills seconded the nomination, and the motion carried.

Mr. Newton opened nominations for the position of Vice Chair of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board. Mr. Shick nominated Mr. Wilson and Mr. Mills seconded, and the motion carried.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT** – *Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety and Floodplain Management*

Mr. Glover provided the Board with the following updates for DCR on behalf Matt Wells, DCR Director:

- The Department and stakeholders recently completed the Agricultural Needs Assessment
  - Based on the assessment, no additional funding will be needed for the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program in FY2026
- Recognized the Board for their support for staff in the Soil and Water Conservation Division. The letter provided by the Board to the Subcommittee Chairs of the money committees has initiated discussions by those members. Further discussions will be had with the Secretariat of Natural and Historic Resources about budget proposals for next year.
- Progress is being made on the Environmental Literacy Plan, which is required by statute. It is currently under Executive Review. A draft will hopefully be available for public comment by the first of next year after a required review by the Department of Education and the Science Museum of Virginia.
- The FEMA Grant which will fund additional engineers in the Dam Safety Division has been officially approved. Recruitment of those positions will be underway almost immediately and will hopefully be filled by the next Board meeting.

### **REPORT FROM AUDIT SUBCOMMITTEE** – *Adam Wilson, Vice Chairman*

Vice Chair Wilson provided a report on the audit subcommittee meeting which took place earlier in the morning.

- The Subcommittee took actions in response to the FY2024 assessments for four Districts. Those Districts were Hanover-Caroline, Holston River, James River, and Robert E. Lee.
- An additional action was taken to address concerns at Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District. The action taken with regards to Robert E. Lee requires the Board to adopt the motion, as there are financial impacts to the District.

## BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, at the recommendation of the Audit Subcommittee, directs the Department to withhold \$750 from Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District's FY2025 administrative and operations allocation for receiving for receiving one "C" score on the FY2024 Administrative and Operations Grant Agreement and for failing to meet training requirements established by this Board.

Additionally, the Board directs the Directors that have not yet completed Phase I of Director Orientation to complete this training no later than November 30, 2024. Additional penalties will be imposed by the Board if this deadline is not met.

Mr. Arnason seconded, and the motion carried.

## REVIEW OF BOARD BYLAWS – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Ms. Watlington Jones presented the updates to the Board's bylaws.

- Bylaws are reviewed every two years.
- The only recommended revision to the bylaws reflects the action taken by the Board in June that authorized the Board Chair to designate members as hearing.

Mr. Newton asked a question regarding whether a representative of the Office of the Attorney General would be serving as a hearing officer. Mr. Kuntz informed the Board that there would be representation for the Board or the Agency from the Office of the Attorney General, however, that representative would not be acting as a hearing officer.

## BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved to adopt the revised bylaws as presented.

Mr. Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

## OVERVIEW OF AGRICULTURAL STEWARDSHIP ACT REPORT - *Darrell Marshall, Agricultural Stewardship Program Coordinator*

Mr. Marshall presented highlights of the Agricultural Stewardship Act Report.

- There were 39 official complaints;
  - Of the 39, 17 complaints were determined to have water quality issues and stewardship plans were developed to address those issues.
  - Seven complaints were unfounded.
  - 15 complaints were dismissed.
  - 13 complaints involved beef cattle operations.
  - 12 complaints involved land conservation issues.
- The ASA program utilizes the Conservation Application Suite to track and report practices and address water pollution on founded complaint sites.

- 24.1 acres of buffer were installed from current and past complaint sites statewide.

Mr. Marshall provided an update on the recent ASA Appeal hearing process and mentioned that information on that matter will be included in the coming year's report.

**DAM SAFETY DIVISION REPORT** - *Darryl Glover, Deputy Director, Soil and Water Conservation, Dam Safety and Floodplain Management*

Mr. Glover presented the division report. It is included as Attachment A.

Dam Safety

Status of Review of Impounding Structure Regulations

- NOIRA closed on July 3, 2024.
- Stakeholder groups are meeting monthly for both Impounding Regulations and Dam Safety Act.
- Objective is to have proposed regulatory and statutory amendments presented to the Board on December 11, 2024.

Dam Related Incidents

- The Department responded to five partial dam failures thus far in 2024.
  - Mattawan Dam, Hanover, VA
  - Sugar Hollow, Albemarle, VA
  - Lake Pinewood, Caroline, VA
  - Triple Z Dam, Amherst, VA
  - Fern Dam, New Kent, VA
- There have been no complete dam failures in 2024 thus far.

Additional Activities

- The DCR Office of Resilience Planning continues to work on development of the Coastal Resilience Master Plan and the statewide Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan
  - Expected to be delivered in December 2024 and December 2025, respectively.
- DCR Floodplain Management Division released the draft grant manual period for round five of the Community Flood Preparedness Fund grants and loans.

**SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DIVISION REPORT** – *James Martin, Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation*

Mr. Martin provided the division report.

- Staffing Updates – both newly-hired employees and position changes
  - Hunter Quinones - Nutrient Management Specialist - Tappahannock
  - Stacy Polk - Nutrient Management Specialist – Staunton
  - Tad Williams - Conservation District Coordinator – Staunton
  - Bobby Fincham - Ag BMP Engineering Technician
  - Marissa Roland - Eastern Area Manager
  - Pamela Capps - Direct Pay Nutrient Management Technician
  - A number of positions are still under recruitment.

**APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR CERTAIN DISTRICT DAM REPAIR PROJECTS (SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT DAM MAINTENANCE, REPAIR, AND REHABILITATION FUND)** – *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

- Three Districts have attempted to move forward with dam repair projects that had previously been approved for funding from the Soil and Water Conservation District Dam Maintenance, Repair, and Rehabilitation Fund
- The following districts require additional funding as a result of receiving bids that were higher than the estimated amounts:

*Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District*

- ID#24-02 – INV#113009 – Beautiful Run #1B (wave berm and gate valve)
  - Additional funding request: \$125, 000
  - Total project funding: \$430,000
- ID#24-0 – INV#047005 – Mountain Run #13 (wave berm)
  - Additional funding request: \$10,000
  - Total project funding: \$160,000

*Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District*

- ID#24-04 – INV#147034 – Bush River #2 (wave berm and storm damage)
- ID#24-06 – INV#147039 – Bush River #5 (wave berm and storm damage)
  - Additional funding request: \$105, 000
  - Total project funding: \$346,270

*Southside Soil and Water Conservation District*

- SDR24012 – INV#037008 – Roanoke Creek 62 (wave berm and storm damage project)
  - Additional funding request: \$58, 000
  - Total project funding: \$243,000

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved to approve the additional funding as presented.

Mr. Mills seconded, and the motion carried.

**ACTIONS RELATED TO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN PROGRAM** - *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

*Update on District Program Reviews*

- Overall, Districts meet requirements.
- Additional assistance needed on documenting Board and Committee actions (minutes training early next month could assist).
- Important to remember that there was tremendous staff turnover.
- New employees have been invited to request additional training and assistance when RMPs are submitted.

- Critical component of Department’s outreach to Districts about this Program.
- Coordinator frequently provides individual training for District staff.
- In several instances, reviewed plans that were “old”.

Highlights from Annual Report

- Yearly, the Department puts together a resource management plan overview.
  - There were 643 plant that covered 142,351 acres.
  - New RMP in Virginia Dare (965 acres).
  - There are two new RMP developers.
- RMP Direct Pay Program accomplishments:
  - Since July 1, 2020, have funded approximately 13,500 acres in development and 1,000 acres certified.

Approval of District Program Review Schedule

- Review forms have been updated to reflect District responsibilities, rather than RMP developer or producer responsibilities.
  - Revisions were compiled over the last two review cycles.
  - Simplified the forms and standardized the language across all forms.
- There are six Districts scheduled to be reviewed this year
  - Four have been previously reviewed.

BOARD ACTION

Mr. Arnason moved the following:

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approves the following Districts for program reviews as required pursuant to 4VAC50-70-130:

1. Virginia Dare;
2. Peter Francisco;
3. Hanover-Caroline;
4. John Marshall;
5. Northern Neck; and
6. Thomas Jefferson.

The Department will utilize the revised program review process, checklists, and forms presented at the September 18, 2024 meeting to conduct these program reviews.

Mr. Schick seconded, and the motion carried.

**APPROVAL OF DISTRICT DIRECTOR APPOINTMENTS AND RESIGNATIONS** - *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

There is only one resignation and subsequent appointment that requires the Board’s action.

*Culpeper*

Resignation of Mr. Thomas O’Halloran, of Culpeper County, effective 10/1/2024.

Appointment of Mr. Bob Williamson, of Culpeper County, effective 10/1/2024.

**BOARD ACTION**

Mr. Wilson moved that the Board approve the appointment of the individual being recommended.

Ms. Cornell seconded, and the motion carried.

**APPROVAL OF EXTENSION AGENT APPOINTMENTS** - *Christine Watlington Jones, Policy and District Services Manager*

Districts have worked with the Virginia Cooperative Extension for these appointments which are four-year appointments.

**BOARD ACTION**

Mr. Wilson moved that the Board approve the appointments of the individuals being recommended.

Ms. Cornell seconded, and the motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business.

**NEW BUSINESS**

*Resolution Recognizing Mike Fletcher*

- Department has provided all of the Boards that Michael worked the most closely with a resolution for their approval.
- Recognizes the 30 years of dedicated service Michael provided to Virginia, with 27 of those years being with the Department
- Commends Michael for his outstanding service, leadership, and commitment to the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

***Honoring  
Michael Fletcher  
On His Retirement***

WHEREAS, Michael Fletcher has dedicated 30 years of service to the Commonwealth of Virginia, with 27 years specifically at the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR); and

WHEREAS, Michael Fletcher began his career with the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1994 during the Administration of Governor George Allen; and WHEREAS, in 1997, he began his tenure at DCR as the Director of Development, showcasing his leadership and dedication to the Department; and

WHEREAS, Michael Fletcher has served as the Freedom of Information Officer for DCR, ensuring transparency and accountability within the Department; and WHEREAS, since 1998, he has been the DCR Board Liaison,

overseeing various Boards and Special Committees, including the Virginia Board of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Cave Board, Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, and numerous ad hoc committees; and

WHEREAS, on September 1, 2024, Michael Fletcher retired as the Board and Constituent Services Liaison, as well as the FOIA Officer for the Department of Conservation and Recreation, leaving behind a legacy of dedication and service to the Commonwealth of Virginia.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the chairs of each Board, and the Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, commend Michael Fletcher for his outstanding service, leadership, and commitment to the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be presented to Michael Fletcher in recognition of his contributions and achievements during his esteemed career with the Commonwealth of Virginia.

#### BOARD ACTION

Mr. Wilson moved to approve the resolution as presented and wishes Mr. Fletcher a long and happy retirement.

Mr. Arnason seconded, 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 B.

*Natural Resources Conservation Service – Dr. Edwin Martinez*

Dr. Martinez 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*

No additional report was provided.

*Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts – Dr. Kendall Tryree, VASWCD Executive Director*

Dr. Tyree gave the report for the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The Association has the following events scheduled:

September 19 – Quarterly Board Meeting  
State Fair – Association to participate

Upcoming Association Training:

October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> – Meeting minute trainings



October 30<sup>th</sup> – HR training  
December 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> – Annual Conference

*Chesapeake Bay Commission*

Not represented.

*Virginia Agribusiness Council*

Not represented.

*Virginia Farm Bureau Federation*

Not represented.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**ADJOURN**

**BOARD ACTION**

As there was no further business, Mr. Wilson moved to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Mills seconded, and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 11:16 a.m.

Attachment A

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

**Status of Review of Impounding Structure Regulations:**

Public comment on the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action (NOIRA) closed on July 3, 2024. The Department initiated the simultaneous review of both the Impoundment Regulations and the Dam Safety Act, using separate stakeholder groups, on July 23. These groups also met on August 27. They will both continue to meet monthly, until November. Our objective is to have both proposed regulatory amendments and statutory amendments, endorsed by the administration, and presented to this Board at its scheduled meeting on December 11.

**Dam Related Incidents**

Mattawan Dam, (Hanover): The Department continues to work closely with the Office of the Attorney General to unravel what is a very complicated ownership situation. There are a few organizations that represent different sections of this community, and there are a few residents within this community who are not associated via their deeds with either of them. The lake level behind this dam continues to be both lowered and actively monitored since the incident in early March. However, the privately owned road that crosses over the outfall of this dam, Pineslash Road, was reopened in late August by some of the residents who could not agree on who should pay for an engineering inspection to specifically address the safety of this road. Because this is a private road, and the residents chose to reopen it, absent an engineering inspection that determines it to be unsafe, the Department is recommending no further action at this time regarding this road. However, continuing to work with the Office of the Attorney General, the Department will soon resolve the dam ownership question as best we can and request authorization by this Board at its December meeting, to begin enforcement action for the owners to either repair or remove this dam. A few of the residents do want this dam removed, although the majority do not.

Thus far in calendar 2024, including Mattawan Dam, (Hanover - Significant Hazard), the Department has responded to five partial dam failures, which also include Sugar Hollow (Albemarle – High Hazard), Lake Pinewood (Caroline - Special Low Hazard), Triple Z Dam, (Amherst – unknown hazard classification), and Fern Dam (New Kent – recently discovered unknown hazard classification). There have been no complete dam failures in 2024 thus far.

**Additional Activities:**

- The DCR Office of Resilience Planning: continues to work, with the assistance of four contractors, and several sub-contractors, on the development of 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. Both a graduate Fellow from Virginia Commonwealth University, as well as a Sea Grant Fellow, have recently been secured to assist with this work.
- The DCR Floodplain Management Division: recently released the draft grant manual period for round five of the Community Flood Preparedness Fund (CFPF) grants and loans. A few changes have been made for this

round, including the ability of applicants to qualify for a Resilient Virginia Revolving Fund loan to cover the CFPF grant match.



## Report to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board

***September 2024***

- Many thanks to SWCD's, Blair Gordon, Extension agents, and VCE District Directors for working through the Appointed Director process and presenting a near full slate of agent appointees to the Soil and Water Conservation Board for approval at their September 18 meeting. Congratulations!
- Virginia is embarking on a second round of the Chesapeake Bay Voluntary Agricultural BMP producer survey. The first effort identified that farmers in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed participating in the survey collectively implemented non-cost shared and/or previously unreported conservation practices, as follows: core nitrogen and phosphorus nutrient management (88,475 acres); supplemental nitrogen nutrient management for rate (50,547 acres), placement (40,693 acres), and timing (25,174 acres); supplemental phosphorus nutrient management for rate (34,727 acres) and placement (47,715 acres); manure incorporation/injection (2,074 acres); 23 animal waste management units serving 634,218 animals; 131 barnyard water diversion and runoff control systems impacting 187,893 animals; 13,136 acres of prescribed grazing; 8,929 acres with soil conservation and water quality plans; 115,198 acres of no till/minimum tillage practices; 15,847 acres of traditional, traditional with fall nutrients, and commodity cover crops, and; 6,434 acres of riparian buffers (inclusive of all buffer types). A workgroup has been established to tackle the "Ches Bay Survey 2.0" that includes representation from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts state office and Colonial SWCD, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Chesapeake Bay Commission, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia Cattleman's Association, Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Soil Health Coalition, Office of the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, , Virginia Agribusiness Council, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and VCU Survey and Evaluation Research Lab. The team will meet throughout Fall 2024 and into 2025 to refine the survey and develop the process for implementing this important effort. More information to come!
- Congratulations to Bass Sod Farms of Gladys, the Virginia winner in the Sunbelt Southeastern Farmer of the Year program. Walter, Lou Ann, and family will now represent Virginia in the regional competition at the Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie, GA.
- VCE's Program Development team recently offered our first New Extension Specialist Orientation on August 15 at Virginia Tech. The program included panels of faculty discussing: The Role of an Extension Specialist; The Role of an Extension Agent; The Agent / Specialist Relationship, and; Promotion Expectations. Twenty (20) Extension specialists based at the

Virginia Tech and Virginia State University campuses as well as Agricultural Research and Extension Centers attended the program.

- The Agricultural Research and Extension Center field day calendar is posted here: <https://www.arec.vaes.vt.edu/arec/field-days/calendar.html> . Most field days have taken place already, but there are still two opportunities remaining to participate and learn about the research taking place at the AREC's. The SWAREC 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Forage-based Ram Sale and Field Day is on September 20 in Glade Spring. The Shenandoah Valley AREC will host the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Mill Day on October 5 in Raphine. This event consists of festivities honoring Cyrus McCormick's invention of the mechanical reaper.
- Extension agent hires since the last board meeting through the end of August include the following:

<b>District</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Start Date</b>
Northeast	Stafford ANR	Grace Kunkel	6/25/2024
Northwest	Rockingham 4-H	Ashley Craun	6/25/2024
Southeast	Virginia Beach ANR Hort.	Ashton Holliday-Goulart	7/10/2024
Central	Halifax ANR	Spencer Irby	7/25/2024
Northwest	Albemarle FCS	Courtney Russ	7/25/2024
Northwest	Culpeper 4-H restricted	Elizabeth Walker	7/25/2024
Northeast	Hanover ANR	Scot Ferguson	8/10/2024
Southwest	Lee/Scott FCS	Brandi Pettay	8/10/2024
Central	Mecklenburg FCS-SNAP	Lenora Wright	8/25/2024
Northeast	ASA CEH	Katie Strong	8/25/2024
Southeast	James City/New Kent ANR	Luke Gladden	8/25/2024

Visit Virginia Cooperative Extension: [ext.vt.edu](http://ext.vt.edu)

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gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

**NRCS REPORT**  
**Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Board Meeting**  
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**STC Highlights**

**Staffing Updates:** We currently have 185 full time employees on board. Our target goal is 195 by the end of Fiscal Year 25.

**Management & Administrative Quality Review:** NRCS Leadership have completed two of the four Area Office Management and Administrative Quality Reviews. These reviews assess conformance to legal requirements, rules, regulations, and established policy; and determine if functions, activities, and programs are being carried out in accordance with the NRCS mission and priorities.

**State Technical Committee Meeting:** Our next meeting will be held on October 9th at the USDA-NRCS State Office in Richmond, VA from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm. The state committee has grown by about 20% over the past three years. Every state has an NRCS State Technical Committee. The State Technical Committee advises the State Conservationist on technical guidelines necessary to implement the conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. State Technical Committees serve in an advisory capacity to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on the implementation of the natural resources conservation provisions of Farm Bill legislation. Committees are intended to include members from a wide variety of natural resource and agricultural interests.

**Local Work Groups (LWG):** FY24 process has been completed. The NRCS Team will be reporting during our next State Technical Committee meeting. NRCS and the SWCD Association are planning a LWG training session to be held during the upcoming SWCD Annual Meeting.

**Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP):** NRCS is currently working on the 2024 (CEAP) Survey for Cultivated Cropland. CEAP cropland assessments quantify the effects of voluntary conservation efforts across the nation's cropland at both regional and national scales. Local National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) representatives visited nearly 12,000 farmers and other operators in August and September 2024 to determine if their operations meet the criteria for the 2024 CEAP Survey. Virginia will be part of this effort.

**United States Secretary of Agriculture Virginia Townhall:** Sec. Tom Vilsack was the featured speaker at a town hall discussion on USDA's "Investments in America" initiative at Virginia State University (VSU) on July 12. The meeting highlighted the strong partnerships and community relationships among the Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, NRCS, VSU and the state's small-scale farmers. NRCS State Conservationist Dr. Edwin Martinez Martinez and other Virginia staff members attended and participated in the discussion.

**Congressional Day:** During the month of June, NRCS staff joined conservation partners in Monterey, Virginia as part of a congressional field day. The event was held at Highland Wildlife Management Area and was led by the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture. Well attended and a good congressional participation. Thanks to John W. and PAS for their assistance.

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**Summer Youth Conservation Camp:** This event was a success and NRCS was well represented at this event. The State Conservationist was able to join the event for one day, addressed the students during the morning and joined their day tours with conservation partners. NRCS greatly appreciate the efforts performed by the SWCD to provide opportunities for our youth.

**79th Annual Soil & Water Conservation Society International Conference:** The State Conservationist attended the SWCA Annual meeting in Myrtle Beach, S.C. The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) is the premier international organization for professionals who practice and advance the science and art of natural resource conservation. NRCS attended this event to provide support as a technical conservation agency but also to conduct education and outreach regarding Federal Conservation opportunities.

**Southeast National Association of Conservation Districts Meeting, NACD Annual Meeting and National Conservation Planning Partnership Meetings (NCPP):** The State Conservationist attended these events as the USDA NRCS Virginia representative. Dr. Martinez is currently leading the Performance, Outcomes and Accountability committee under the NCPP Leadership.

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### **ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)**

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**  
Received 1,318 EQIP applications, ranking was completed on approximately 870 eligible applications. EQIP allocation is \$21.2 million. EQIP-IRA allocation is \$28.6 million. 695 EQIP applications are currently obligated for \$40.6 million (297 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 212 CSP Classic and IRA contracts to date (64 are IRA contracts).
- **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. Funded 26 applications totaling approximately \$3.1 million.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**  
Received 23 ALE applications with funding requests for \$14.9 million on 10,226 acres. Eight 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.



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- **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 were reviewed. NRCS VA is currently managing 4 active CIG projects throughout the state, all of which focus on a variety of research topics related to agriculture and natural resource conservation. 4 CIGs totaling \$895,243, with partners like Virginia Tech, Sustainable Chesapeake, Virginia State University. 2 contribution agreements with Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and the Department of Forestry totaling \$683,236; 1 USDA agreement with Virginia Forage Grassland Council totaling \$297,223.10; 1 Contribution Agreement with Virginia Tech for Agronomist totaling \$1.1 million; 1-VPA-HIP Agreement with DWR totaling \$2.9 million.

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### **Engineering (SCE)**

#### **Staffing Updates**

- Two engineering positions were advertised (Environmental and Design engineers), but not filled. These positions will hopefully be readvertised soon.
- 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, and both are expected to be completed in early 2025.
- **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 and is expected to be completed in late 2025.
- **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 and is expected to be completed in late 2025.

#### **Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP)**

NRCS provided 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, final payment has been made and the agreement has been closed.

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**State Resource Conservationist (SRC)**

**Staffing Updates**

The Soil Specialist (State Compliance Specialist) came out on August 28 and will stay open until September 11, 2024.

**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
- VA Bulletin 180-24-8 Conservation Reserve Program Grassland CRP Signup 206 Updates
- VA Technical Guide Notice 450-24-526 TE Review Form- update July 2024

**Training to Field Staff**

- **Webinars:**
  - June 12<sup>th</sup>: Environmental Compliance (CPA-52) Training
  - June 26<sup>th</sup>: New NRCS Hydrology Tool Training, Safety/PPE Update
  - July 10<sup>th</sup>: Meet VA State Conservationist
  - July 24<sup>th</sup>: Forestry Training (VDOF & NRCS rules and responsibilities)
  - August 7<sup>th</sup>: WebTA Training
  - August 21<sup>st</sup>: Meet VA Civil Right Advisory Committee
  - September 18<sup>th</sup>: Concur Training
- **Staff/Partnership Trainings**
  - VA Soil Health & Sustainability Training (7/16-18/24)
  - Fencing Standard & Specification Training (7/23/24)
  - Agroforestry Fundamental (09/17/24)
- **Staff Training/Outreach Events**
  - VA Ag Expo (08/01/24)
  - Profitable Soil Health: Maximizing Diversity on Virginia farms (08/06/24)

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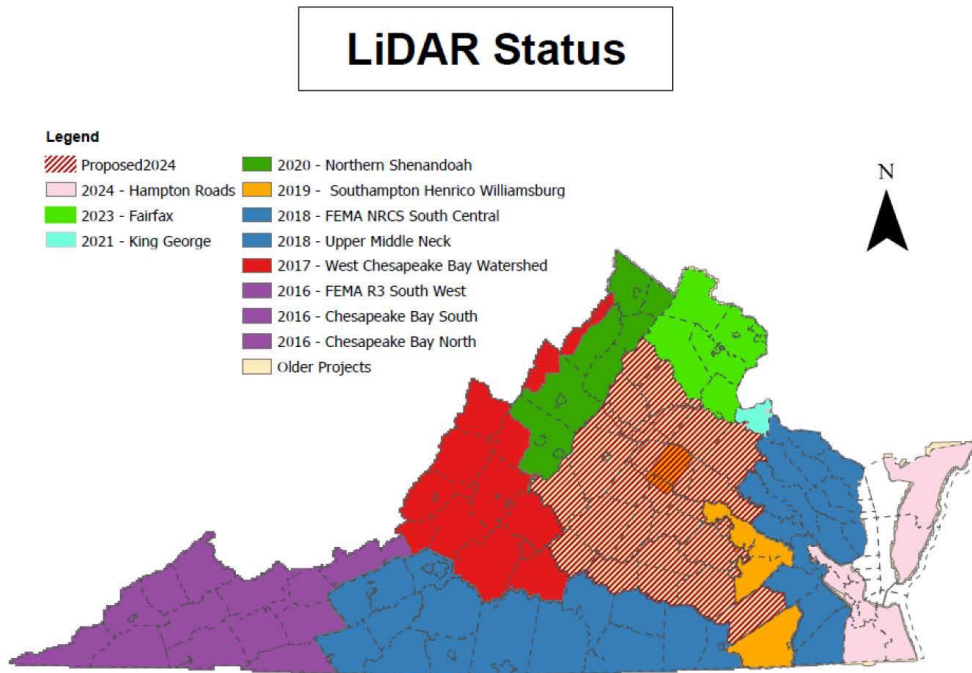
- **Customer Service and Outreach**

- Pasture Walk Happy Farmer Farm (06/05/24)
- Grazing & Herd Management Workshop (06/12/2024)
- Research Tour at the Shenandoah Valley AREC (08/07/24)
- Thriving Through Dry Times: Grazing with a Goal (08/29/24)

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### **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 January 2025. This project was also flown at quality level 1. Most of the state had previously been flown at quality level 2.



Date: 1/30/2024

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**Soil Survey Update**

108 soil survey areas will begin to be uploaded to the web soil survey this September. New national soil interpretations will be available after the annual refresh in early October.

A Climate forum was hosted by VSU on July 1 to gather many of the Partners Climate Smart Commodities together to discuss successes and challenges to implementation of their programs.

The Ag Expo was held August 4<sup>th</sup>. NRCS was there at the soils pit to help visitors obtain a better understanding of soils.

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**Partnerships & Initiatives (P&I)**

- The **USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) sent the Mid-Level Professionals Advancing Careers Together (MPACT)** group to Ronnie Nuckols' farm on August 22 in Crozier, Virginia. Mr. Nuckols has previously been through EQIP twice and is now enrolled in CSP. His current CSP contract includes these climate-smart practices:

- Management Intensive Rotational Grazing
- Soil Health Improvements on Pasture
- Forage plantings that help increase organic matter in depleted soils
- Diversifying Forage Base with Interseeding Forbs and Legumes to Increase Pasture Quality
- Herbaceous Weed Treatment



The MPACT is a professional development group targeting non-supervisory GS-13s, -14s and -15s to develop the next FAS experts and leaders through collaboration and representation. This year, 14 mid-level FAS staff traveled around Virginia to observe how the state engages in climate-smart agriculture and sustainable practices. In order to better understand these practices, the MPACT connected with NRCS Virginia for hands-on field experience.

In addition to the Nuckols' farm, the group also traveled to Virginia Tech's agricultural research centers in Middleburg, Winchester and Hampton, visited the agricultural department at Virginia Tech, met with the Virginia Wine Board and met with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in Richmond.



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- On August 13, 2024, a group from the State Office along with multiple conservation partners, staff from USDA's national headquarters and some local community leaders took a tour of several **People's Gardens** in the Richmond area last week. The tour showcased both the People's Garden initiative and the impact of community engagement on urban agriculture.



- NRCS Urban Conservationist Tatiana Gil participated in an **urban agriculture informational session** hosted by the Farm Service Agency in Williamsburg on July 24. Agenda items included the increasing importance of urban agriculture, the role of FSA county committees and other related topics. Attendees received one-on-one assistance with registration paperwork from FSA staff members at the end of the presentation.



- United States Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack was the featured speaker at a **town hall discussion on USDA's "Investments in America"** initiative at Virginia State University (VSU) on July 12. The meeting highlighted the strong partnerships and community relationships among the Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, NRCS, VSU and the state's small-scale farmers. NRCS State Conservationist Dr. Edwin Martinez and other Virginia staff members attended and participated in the discussion.



- VA NRCS participated at the August 1, **Ag Expo** in Tappahannock. Our outreach booth highlighted farm bill programs to include urban conservation, easement programs, EQIP and CSP. Visitors to the booth received a small packet of pollinator seeds and the soil tunnel was available for attendees to learn more about soil and keeping it healthy.

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**Upcoming events**

- September 22-27, 2024, will be **22nd International Soil Tillage Research Organization International (ISTRO) Conference in Virginia Beach, VA**. ISTRO 2024's theme is "***Living Roots, Living Soil***" to focus on regenerative agriculture, soil health, cover crops, residue systems and sustainable crop production as a whole. NRCS will assisting with a demonstration soil pit as one of the tour stops.
- September 27 – October 6, 2024, **Virginia State Fair**. VA NRCS will have a booth in the Natural Resources Area that will focus on soil health, pollinators, and bringing awareness to NRCS programs.

\*\*\* This report includes details that may change in the future (e.g., staffing numbers, financial assistance summaries, accomplishments, etc.). For up-to-date information, please reach out to the USDA NRCS State Conservationist, Dr. Edwin Martinez Martinez, [Edwin.martinez@usda.gov](mailto:Edwin.martinez@usda.gov)