

## Woods Creek TMDL Implementation Plan: Agricultural Working Group Meeting #1

Natural Bridge Soil & Water Conservation District Office

November 7, 2018

### Participants

Sandra Stuart

Lee Cummings (NBSWCD)

Sara Bottenfield (DEQ)

Chris Wise

Karen Kline (VT-BSE)

Nesha McRae (DEQ)

### Meeting Summary

Sara Bottenfield reviewed the goals and purpose of the working group and this meeting and asked Karen Kline to explain in more detail how the information provided by the group will be used. Karen noted that the Woods Creek TMDL calls for a 70% reduction in bacteria from agricultural sources (direct deposit and pasture runoff). The bacteria reduction BMPs that will be discussed by the group each have an effectiveness rating, which will be applied to the bacteria load to meet the reduction goals.

A representative from NBSWCD mentioned that some of the smaller streams are intermittent in the upper reaches of the watershed, which makes them ineligible for VACS livestock exclusion funding. There has been a CREP practice installed recently above the golf course. Karen confirmed that the NHD Flowline data is used to identify stream fencing needs in the watershed, which includes both perennial and intermittent streams.

The group shared their observations about the general state of agriculture in the watershed. One participant commented that there is some development pressure due to good roads and proximity to Lexington, but it is limited by available sewer capacity/connections. Another participant has heard from VCE that working with leased land has made installation of livestock exclusion practices challenging. NBSWCD staff estimated that 65% of agricultural land in the watershed is leased. Participants have noticed an increasing number of horses in the watershed. Sara noted that horse operations sometimes struggle to meet the eligibility requirements of the VACS program, although some equine-specific BMPs have been developed and might be something to consider for inclusion in the Implementation Plan. Sara referred the group to the table of estimated livestock numbers in each subwatershed on the provided handout. Participants thought the estimate of 11 horses in the Upper Woods Creek subwatershed was too low. The group also agreed that the total number of cow/calf pairs was closer to 400 and that the additional livestock are in the Upper and Lower Woods Creek and Sarah's Run watersheds. Participants knew of a recent livestock exclusion project in the southwest corner of the watershed that addressed sheet and goat access. A participant offered to follow up with VCE on livestock estimates.

Sara observed that it sounded like there are a few large landowners in the watershed who own the majority of agricultural land, and participants agreed. A participant asked about the golf course and whether they have a Nutrient Management Plan. The group agreed that they do and recalled that their staff participated in TMDL development. Participants discussed some other BMPs that they were aware of in the watershed: at least one livestock exclusion practice has been installed voluntarily (without cost share), and an older CREP practices that wasn't confirmed to still be in place. One participant noted that the results of volunteer E. coli monitoring in Sunnyside and Barbeque Creeks have been consistently

high, but there is no known livestock access in those watersheds. Karen asked what buffer widths would be most appealing to landowners who might install livestock exclusion practices. A representative from NBSWCD pointed out that some farms have small paddocks where a 35' buffer is too much land to give up, but the 10' option receives less cost share. The group agreed that a 60/40 split between 35' and 10' would be a good start. The group agreed that the amount of cropland in the watershed is not significant enough to be addressed specifically in the IP.

Sara asked about the barriers or obstacles to implementing BMPs (in addition to the issue of leased land that was already discussed). NBSWCD staff reported that most folks are not opposed to working with the government and that flooding and other fence maintenance concerns have not been a major factor for most landowners. Well depth has become an issue with wells needing to go deeper for good yield. Most buffer establishment has been through fencing with natural regeneration (not planting trees, grasses, etc.). A NBSWCD representative shared that the James River Association hopes to expand their grant program paying 100% for riparian buffer plantings, but this is still in the works. Participants didn't know of any farms in the watershed implementing rotational grazing, but agreed that overstocking is not a significant concern. They didn't know of any existing manure management systems/structures (non-poultry) but agreed that there are not any feeding areas near streams that would represent a concentrated source of manure runoff.

Participants had a number of ideas for outreach. Flyers or brochures could be placed in many public locations. There is an ongoing farming column in the News Gazette as well as a series of articles on farms and farmers by Lisa Tracy. The group agreed that highlighting farmers who have implemented BMPs would be the best approach. The goal of the IP is not to single anyone out or point fingers, and Sara noted that in a small watershed like Woods Creek this is particularly a concern.

Sara proposed the next meeting for the week of December 10 and asked about preferred meeting times and locations. Participants suggested that a later meeting time might allow more folks to attend and agreed that the NBSWCD office was a convenient location. Sara thanked the group for their input and the meeting was adjourned.