



Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
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29 MAR 2016

To: Richard Chaffin, VASWCD President,
Kendall Tyree, VASWCD Executive Director, &
All VA SWCD's.

SUBJ: Quarterly report on National Association of Conservation District (NACD) Activities for
the VASWCD Board Meeting at Glen Allen, VA on 31 MAR 2016.

FROM: John Peterson, VASWCD NACD Board Rep / Director & Chairman, NO.VA SWCD.

REPORT: This report will cover NACD and partner activities since my last report on December
8th, 2015. A quiet period as we are ramping up for 2016 activities.

The week of March 14th, over 120 conservation leaders across the country came to Washington, DC to talk to their members of Congress about the importance of local, voluntary, incentive-based conservation. On Monday, March 14, leaders in the areas of soil health and wildfire management gave briefings to Congressional staff. Presenters on soil health included Sarah Mine from Datu Research, LLC, and NACD Soil Health Champions Dorn Cox of New Hampshire and Jimmy Emmons of Oklahoma. Presenters on wildfire management included Craig Nelson, District Manager for the Okanogan Conservation District in Washington state and NACD Forestry Specialist Mike Beacom. Sarah Mine and Craig Nelson's presentations are available now on the NACD website. Other presentations from the briefings will also be made available online in the near future. On Tuesday, March 15, NACD kicked off the day with a breakfast. Speakers at the breakfast included 9b Group co-founder and partner Pelham Straughn and Senate Agriculture Committee staff Ashley McKeon. NACD also hosted a reception on Capitol Hill for national partners and Congressional staff. The event was held in the House Agriculture Committee room. Representative Cynthia Lummis from Wyoming spoke to the attendees. Attached are the hand-out sheets that those attending the Fly-In left with their Members of Congress.

This year's NACD Summer Board Meeting is scheduled for July 15-19 and will be held in Bloomington, Minnesota. A draft agenda for the meeting is now up on the Summer Board Meeting webpage. I will attend the Summer Board and SE Region Meetings.

The NACD Legislative Committee is gearing up for recommendations on the next Farm Bill. The District Outlook Task Force (DOTF) is reviewing drafts of its final task-force report.

Report respectfully submitted by,

John W. Peterson
VASWCD NACD Board Representative
Director, Chairman, No. VA SWCD
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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Fiscal Year 2017 Appropriations

Conservation Operations and Conservation Technical Assistance

Conservation Operations (CO), which includes Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). It helps landowners become better stewards of their natural resources by assisting them with resource assessment, practical designs, planning and monitoring of conservation practices. Other programs included in CO are the snow survey, soil survey, grazing lands conservation initiative, plant material centers, and support for all NRCS computers.

Importance of Conservation Title Funding

The Agriculture Act of 2014 consolidated conservation programs from 23 to 13 and cut \$6 billion in funding. Continued cuts to these programs will set a dangerous precedent at a time when voluntary, incentive-based conservation is vital. We call on Congress to maintain all Farm Bill conservation program funding for fiscal year 2017 at the levels authorized in the Agriculture Act of 2014.

Watershed Operations and Small Watershed Rehabilitation

The collective Watershed Program benefits communities and helps strengthen the economy. It represents the potential for the perfect blend of natural resource protection and the creation of economic opportunity in rural areas. The program also addresses the impacts of changing climate conditions and the subsequent visible changes in weather patterns. Districts use the flexibility offered by the program to successfully address resource concerns and require the financial and long-term technical assistance to manage and rehabilitate existing projects and to plan and implement new ones.

State and Private Forestry Programs

State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs are administered by the Forest Service. The agency works with a broad range of forestry organizations, conservation districts, and others to address the protection and management of forested lands. S&PF provides funds to help sustain the nation's forests and prevent harm caused by forest pests, invasive species, and wildfires.

319 Nonpoint Source Grants

Section 319 of the Clean Water Act establishes a grant program to assist in mitigating nonpoint source pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency awards grants to states, territories, and tribes to support water quality activities including: technical and financial assistance, education and training, technology transfer, demonstration projects, and monitoring. These grants increase the utilization of agricultural best management practices, low impact development, and stormwater management.

Program	FY 2015 Final	FY 2016 Final	FY 2017 President's Budget	NACD Request
CTA	\$846 million	\$850.9 million	\$860.374 million	\$860.374 million
Watershed Operations	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$400 million
Watershed Rehabilitation	\$12 million	\$12 million	\$0	\$100 million
S&PF	\$233 million	\$237 million	\$234 million	\$237 million
319 Nonpoint Source	\$159.25 million	\$164.9 million	\$164.9 million	\$164.9 million

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Regulatory Issues, Voluntary Solutions

Natural resource issues are best addressed locally through voluntary approaches. Pressures on land, water, and wildlife management can be mitigated by working cooperatively with landowners and land managers. Properly managed voluntary solutions are critical to the success and health of private and public lands.

Voluntary Conservation Programs

NACD supports legislative updates to improve and modernize the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to reflect current scientific wildlife management principles. NACD supports local management of habitat and species, rather than a top-down approach. Conservation districts are already leading local efforts by helping producers create habitat for endangered, threatened, and candidate species. Through voluntary, locally-led conservation practices, stakeholders have collaborated to enhance both the health of the land and recovery of species, including the New England Cottontail, Lesser Prairie-Chicken and Greater Sage-Grouse.

Invasive Species

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) conducts critical activities to mitigate damages caused by invasive species such as feral swine. NACD encourages keeping funding for the APHIS Wildlife Service program at the fiscal year 2016 level of \$120 million. NACD supports the use of native species in recovery and restoration and urges the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, and other relevant agencies, to develop and disseminate geographically specific lists of recommendations on what to plant and what not to plant to help guide recovery and restoration efforts and to avoid using invasive species.

Wild Horse and Burro

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US Forest Service (USFS) are authorized to oversee the management, protection, and control of wild horse and burros found on public lands. The estimated population of horses and burros on public land greatly exceeds the appropriate management levels. Without removal by federal agencies, these populations will not receive proper management and continue to grow. The burgeoning population on public lands threatens natural rangeland ecosystems, native fish, wildlife, plants, livestock grazing, horse and burro well-being, and taxpayer funds. NACD urges Congress to engage the BLM and USFS and support necessary actions to appropriately manage the wild horse and burro populations, ensuring the goals of the *Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971* are sustained.

Clean and Abundant Water Issues

- **Waters of the US**—NACD supports legislative repeal of the WOTUS rule and opposes any new regulation adopted by the Environmental Protection Agency or Army Corps of Engineers that expands jurisdiction.
- **Drought**—Conservation and management of water quantities is key to maintaining a sufficient supply for multiple uses. NACD encourages the integration of drought planning into the national effort to mitigate the far-reaching impacts of drought.
- **Soil Health**—Soil health minimizes the impacts of environmental and weather conditions to provide a consistent food, fuel, and feed supply for the future. Sound conservation planning coupled with financial assistance through farm bill conservation programs are important to improving soil health. They also address some of the technical and financial risks associated with practices that increase organic matter, water infiltration, water-holding capacity, and nutrient cycling.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Forestry

Background

The western United States has experienced devastating wildfire seasons in recent years. This past fire season was the most expensive on record, costing the USDA Forest Service \$1.71 billion, or just below 55 percent of the Forest Service's entire annual budget—accounting for more than triple its portion from just twenty years ago.

Wildfire Management

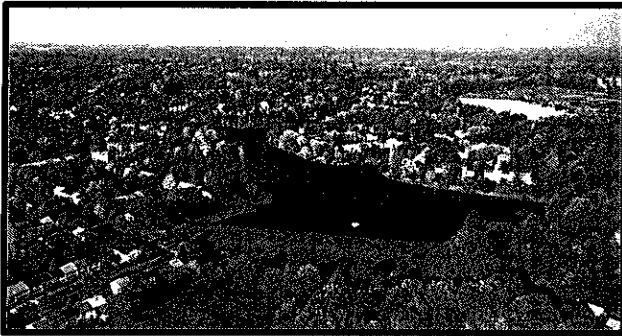
While the wildfires in Alaska, California, and Washington were front and center in the news this year, wildfires are not just a regional issue—they are a national issue. The growing cost of wildfire suppression and the need for the Forest Service to maintain a balanced budget has resulted in the Forest Service having to implement the practice of fire borrowing or fire transfers. Fire borrowing is the practice of halting other programs, including fire prevention efforts, in order to free up additional money to fund the fire suppression. The decrease in funding to fire prevention programs has led to an excessive buildup of fuels, particularly in the woody plant communities, which in turn makes suppressing wildfires that much harder.

Proper land management and post-fire emergency recovery efforts are essential to conserve America's forests as well as surrounding natural and cultural resources. NACD fully supports increased funding for wildfire prevention, management and restoration of our public forests and rangelands and continues to work to ensure that federal policies support the uninhibited flow of vital information between agencies and partners that will allow natural resource concerns to be addressed, private and public property protected, and all life, especially human, fully cared for.

Wildfire Disaster Funding Act

NACD urges Congress to reconsider Senator Wyden and Representative Simpson's Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (S.235 and H.R.167), to protect our forests and enable the Forest Service to effectively run all their programs to actively manage forestlands and mitigate wildfire damage. The legislation allows for the use of off-budget funding sources similar to funding for other natural disasters when USDA or Department of Interior wildfire suppression expenses exceed seventy percent of the ten year average. Without a change in the status-quo the fuel accumulation will continue and the intensity of fires will only increase. S.235 and H.R.167 provide a positive step in changing previous negative forest management policies.

Watershed Program Infrastructure: A Critical Investment for the Future



Background

The Watershed Program established through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (Public Law 83-566) authorizes the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to work with local sponsors to install watershed protection and improvement projects. The authorized purposes of the program are flood prevention, water quality or water quantity protection, agricultural water management, municipal water supply management, fish and wildlife habitat protection and public recreation development. Many times projects are mutually supportive of more than one purpose.

These projects create and protect vital infrastructure while conserving and protecting natural resources and contributing to local economies. The Watershed Program initially focused on the design and construction of structural water control measures. More recently projects focused on watershed plans and a greater emphasis on land treatment measures. Watershed planning provides a basis for partnering at State and local levels to identify and co-invest in projects reflecting the highest priority needs. This critical infrastructure program:

- Protect lives and property
- Builds community resiliency to extreme weather events
- Reduces the need for federal disaster assistance
- Improves water quality and quantity
- Provides reliable/high quality drinking water
- Creates and preserves jobs
- Broadens the economic base

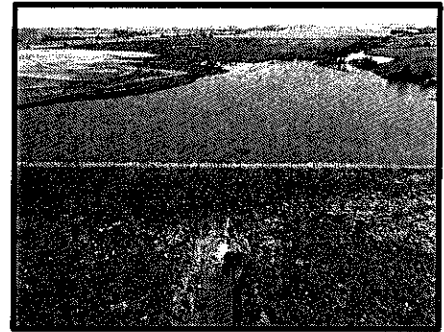
The National Watershed Coalition supports current documented needs for these federally authorized projects. The figures below represent a responsible funding level:

- ***\$300 million for Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations***
- ***\$35 million for Watershed Surveys and Planning***
- ***\$75 million for Watershed Rehabilitation***

Why the Watershed Program is Important

Protects Lives, Property and Rural Infrastructure

Flood prevention and reliable water quality created by the Watershed Program are essential to creating and maintaining strong rural communities. Watershed projects not only protect lives, property and reduce flood damages but also well managed water resources create economic growth and strengthen local economies. Flood protection is essential to prevent the unnecessary loss of infrastructure and capital to developing economies in rural America.



Economic Engine

Investment in the Watershed Program represents expanding opportunities for natural resource conservation coupled with important national economic and environmental dividends for all Americans. There are countless successful examples that verify investing in the Watershed Program in rural areas brings the water supply, recreation and flood protection benefits of the Program to bear on sustainable economic development opportunities. Watershed Program projects make the participating communities more productive places to live, work and play.

Addresses a Wide Range of Natural Resource Issues

The Watershed Program allows NRCS and local sponsors to deal with a wide range of natural resource issues, including flood control, water quality, sediment and erosion control, water supplies, and water based recreation. Watershed projects also build resilience and reduce the risk and costs associated with the impacts of changing climate conditions. It is a proven, cost-effective program with thousands of success stories.

Important to Agricultural Economy

The Watershed Program also plays an important role in protecting resources vital to the agricultural economy as well. Agricultural water management includes measures that help to manage water supply for agriculture and rural communities. Measures include drainage management, ground water recharge, irrigation management, water conservation, water quality improvement, and rural water supply.

Locally Led

The Program is federally-assisted, but locally planned and implemented. Local project sponsors use local resources to maintain constructed project measures which contribute directly to a stronger national economy and a responsible national environmental future.



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