

Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Division Director's Report

September 22, 2016

Presented by Darryl M. Glover;

Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation

Mr. President, members of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Board, Director Cristman, Deputy Director Dowling, please accept this Soil and Water Conservation Division Report.

DCR Conservation Planning and Certification

Carl Thiel-Goin, formerly from Tidewater Soil and Water Conservation District (District), started working at the Department on September 12, as our Conservation Planning and Certification Trainer. We have been invited by the Association to give a presentation on the DCR Conservation Planning and Certification Program at your annual meeting in December. That presentation will outline how this program will be implemented, including a schedule with milestones.

Training

Through the Spring and Summer of 2016, the Department provided a considerable amount of training for District Directors and staff. In addition to the usual annual training on changes to the Agricultural Cost-Share Program, orientation training to new District Directors, and book keeping/basic financial training was given to District administrative staff; training on procurement, the recently revised Desktop Procedures, Conflict of Interest, and Freedom of Information Act, was also offered by the Department with the assistance of Kelci Block (OAG) and the Department of General Services.

The Department also conducted four engineering related training sessions to District staff over the summer. Several of these were conducted with the assistance of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service through Joint Employee Development meetings. One of the sessions was also given at Graves Mountain during the Virginia Association of Conservation District Employees

annual summer training meeting. The next training session will be held in Abingdon on October 5. It will focus on watering systems.

Livestock Stream Exclusion Update

As of August 31, 2016, the backlog in SL-6 practices that remain in pending status (awaiting funding) was just over \$37 million. \$50 million of SL-6 practices have been completed statewide and another \$30 million of SL-6s, approved by local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, are currently awaiting completion. Only approximately 100 SL-6 applications have been withdrawn, out of nearly 2,900 SL-6 applications submitted by the June 30, 2015 deadline. Some of these have opted to use the federal/state Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) which has offered a combined 100% cost reimbursement for livestock stream exclusion, with the added benefit of a planted buffer, since July 1, 2015.

Resource Management Plans

As of the end of August 2016, 322 Resource Management Plans (RMPs), totaling over 65,682 acres had been developed or were in the process of being developed. 12,000 acres were projected in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in calendar year 2016 as the result of development contracts. Additionally, another 10,000 acres are still projected to be planned Outside the Bay (OCB) watershed by the end of calendar year 2016. This will bring the total RMP acreage to approximately 75,000 acres by the end of calendar 2016.

For FY2017, an additional \$120,000 in federal funds will be available for RMP development in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, plus just over a \$200,000 set aside of state cost-share available statewide for both RMP development (via the RMP-1 practice) and RMP implementation (via RMP-2).

The (second) annual RMP Report will be released this fall, documenting this program's progress.

BMP Verification

Virginia's BMP Verification Plan that the Department of Environmental Quality submitted to US Environmental Protection Agency was approved. It must be fully implemented in FY2018. However, several components in it that our Department is responsible for are already either being done or are under development. One item that the Department will soon be seeking input from Soil and Water

Conservation Districts on, is more detailed documentation for agricultural BMP spot checks.

The results of our initial efforts to experiment with BMP verification have been successful to varying degrees. A verification survey of nutrient management plans conducted by Department staff and a few contractors, on approximately 200 farms, almost all of which land applied animal manure or industrial biosolids, documented over 70% of their acres were operating consistent with their nutrient management plans.

Last year, the Department and selected Districts set out to conduct 54 tillage practice surveys statewide with the intention of updating the 2007 classification of tilling practices for cropland. All 34 Chesapeake Bay drainage surveys have been completed. Results indicate a net improvement since 2007 of 72,569 acres, or a 6.9% increase now in conservation tillage. This increases the overall percentage of conservation tilled cropland in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay drainage to around 80%, although this varies by crop type.

The 20 completed surveys in the OCB/Southern Rivers portion of Virginia indicate a net improvement in conservation tillage of 72,651 acres, which is about a 15.7% increase. This increases the overall percentage of conservation tilled cropland in the OCB/Southern Rivers to around 69%. These surveys will be conducted again in year 2020.

We also offered separate grant agreements in 2015 to selected Districts to recertify structural BMPs that had gone out of their contractual lifespans, in order to continue to receive pollution reduction credit from the US Environmental Protection Agency. Out of the 1459 BMPs that were identified for recertification, roughly 700 were successfully recertified. Unfortunately, over 500 producers could not be enlisted to participate. Of these, 291 producers declined to participate and the remaining 239 could not be reached. Also, no voluntary cover crops were documented despite \$86,000 in incentives that were offered to nine Districts (Colonial, Hanover-Caroline, Henricopolis, Monacan, Northern Neck, Peanut, Three Rivers, Tidewater, and Tri-County City).

For BMPs scheduled to end lifespan in either 2016 or 2017, the Department will again use EPA grant funding to offer applicable Districts in the Chesapeake Bay watershed the option of recertifying structural agricultural BMPs that will fall out of (pollution reduction) credit lifespan. Emily Nelson, who was recently hired, will also assist with BMP verification.

Horse Manure Project

Pursuant to a presentation by Dr. Bridgette McIntosh to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board in April, the Department is partnering with Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District, to develop and fund an educational project for small lot horse owners that will inform them on the best approaches for managing the horse manure they generate. Our Warrenton Office will coordinate this project in several Northern Virginia counties.

Outreach Internship

The Department has requested assistance from Association staff to work with the Soil and Water Conservation Division and our Public Communications Office to help market our developing Outreach Internship to participants in Envirothon and Conservation Leadership Institute. The DCR Outreach Internship will seek to promote general interest in environmental programs as an occupation among racial and ethnic minorities in Virginia. This Internship will be partially funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Chesapeake Bay Grant, to help implement the Chesapeake Bay Program's Stewardship Goal, Diversity Outcome Management Strategy. EPA has informed us that no other Bay state has proposed anything similar. Students between their graduating year of high school and graduating (undergrad) year of college will be eligible to apply in early spring 2017. The Department intends to hire our first Outreach Intern from May – August 2017. Successful applicant(s) will be able to choose one of several DCR Divisions to work in.

Area Visits

I continue to meet with District Directors as each area requests. A meeting with Area I was held in April and with Area V in August. Area II has scheduled one on October 18. I am available to meet with Directors in any Area at almost any time.