

# NRCS REPORT

## Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Board Meeting

December 8, 2015 ♦ Richmond, VA

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### EQIP, CSP, RCPP and Easement Programs

#### FY15 Program Summary:

- Grand Totals = 99.6% of funds fully utilized
- Total number of active contracts at the end of FY15: 2,125 for an obligated sum of \$70,134,331.60
- CSP – Total allocation = \$368,886
  - 39 new contracts obligated for \$368,886 (100.00%); 6 forestry contracts and 33 ag contracts out of 97 applications
  - Contacted 89 participants with expiring 2011 contracts and 75 of them applied to renew. Total contract renewals were \$3,097,564 in 190 contracts.
  - processed \$3,106,992.00 of conservation enhancements in existing contracts
- EQIP – Total allocation = \$13,550,429
  - 424 new contracts obligated on 48,242 acres for \$13,420,432(99.04%)
  - Obligated \$5,352,901 in Socially Disadvantaged, New/Beginning and Limited Resource Farmer
  - Obligated \$394,177 in StrikeForce counties
  - 120% increase in signup over FY14.
- RCPP-EQIP-Forestry
  - 108 contracts obligated for \$454,532 in year 1 of the DOF RCPP Forestry project on 14,014.50 acres.
  - 259 applications were received in Virginia's first RCPP project requesting \$958,042.

#### FY-16 Program Activities:

- FY16 Program policy, ranking tools, handbooks and training materials were developed and presented to NRCS and district staff at the November JED meetings and through the first of December.
- Application deadlines for EQIP, RCPP-DOF, RCPP-DCR, RCPP-NFWF and ACEP-WRE and ACEP-ALE FY16 batching periods are February 19<sup>th</sup>, December 18<sup>th</sup>, December 18<sup>th</sup>, November 20<sup>th</sup> and December 23<sup>rd</sup> and January 15<sup>th</sup>.
- The FY16 allocations are:
  - EQIP: \$16,096,907
  - ACEP-ALE: \$1,767,455
  - ACEP-WRE: \$404,452
  - RCPP-DOF: \$470,000
  - RCPP-DCR: \$725,000
  - RCPP-NFWF: \$578,000

#### Regional Conservation Partnership Program:

- NRCS received more than 250 pre-proposals in the agency's second announcement of program funding. 164 pre-proposals were invited to submit full proposals by November 10<sup>th</sup>. Selected projects will be awarded in January. .
- Virginia was allocated a total of \$894,327 for the State Fund Pool. One requests was invited to submit a full proposal.

#### Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP):

- Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit is now recognized as a state-level contribution. Projects could be eligible for a "Cash Contribution Waiver" that may result in a reduction of the cash match required for Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) funds from 50 to 5 percent.

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- 2 FRPP easements closed on 123 acres in Clarke County
- 1 GRP easement closed on 111 acres in Augusta County
- 2 WRP easements closed for 86 acres in Charlotte County and 92 acres Greensville County.
- FY15 ACEP allocation was 1.8 million. 4 ALE and 2 WRE were enrolled.
- A total of 117 easements were monitored this year.

### Dam Rehabilitation

- The construction of the Upper North River 10, Todd Lake dam rehab project, is substantially complete.
- NRCS has received the Chief's authorization for the Upper North River 77 Plan-EA (Plan-Environmental Assessment) in Augusta County. The final design is ongoing. The design is scheduled to be completed in FY16 and construction is scheduled for FY16/17.
- The dam rehab planning process for Mountain Run 11, Mountain Run Lake, and Mountain Run 50, Lake Pelham, is underway. The structures are owned by the Town of Culpeper. NRCS is providing the watershed planning assistance. The Town has obtained the services of Schnabel Engineering for the engineering design and construction phases. The planning process is scheduled to be completed in FY16 and the design and construction phases are scheduled for completion by 2018.
- The dam rehab planning process for Cherrystone Creek 1 and Cherrystone Creek 2A is underway. The structures are owned by the Town of Chatham. NRCS is providing the watershed planning and engineering assistance for the projects. The planning process is scheduled to be completed in FY17.
- NRCS has initiated planning for the Johns Creek 1 dam in Craig County, Virginia.

### NRCS Client Gateway

On May 27, 2015, NRCS announced the public availability of Conservation Client Gateway (CCG), which gives customers another option for interacting and communicating with NRCS through a public website. Through the gateway, clients can:

- Request technical and financial assistance;
- Obtain easy, secure access to their plans, practice schedules, applications, and contracts;
- Review and electronically sign plans, applications, and contracts; and
- Document completed practices and request and track payments due to them.

The Client Gateway will help cut down on trips to the NRCS Field Office to complete and sign forms and applications for conservation programs and give farmers the ability to request conservation technical and financial assistance at any time from anywhere with secure Internet access.

### Soil Health

Since the 2013 Soil Health Initiative "kickoff" event in Virginia, the VA Soil Health Coalition has helped organize and lead 119 different soil health events which have been attended by over 8,000 participants. These events have featured some of the top teachers and speakers from around the world on soil biology and health. Virginia has promoted soil health as a national initiative and strategy for increasing conservation adoption.

### LiDAR acquisition

Virginia NRCS committed funds to an agreement for additional LiDAR procurement in partnership with the USGS. The area to be gathered is focused currently in the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Watershed. The flights are currently taking place. The final data will be available late 2016.

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### Soil Mapping

A project has begun to map the independent cities of Waynesboro, Staunton, and Winchester. Though mostly urban, many soil interpretations can be used for planning purposes. Storm water management is one that many of the cities have requested soils data for. Waynesboro is currently in progress, and the remaining cities will be completed in 2016. The data should be available on Web Soil Survey next October.

### Training

Conducted 60+ training/outreach events on conservation planning delivery for field staff and partners to increase awareness, improve and streamline business processes and enhance technical assistance including the Virginia Conservation Planner “Boot Camp,” a week-long course designed to help boost the number of Virginia Certified Planners.

- Number of Planners Certified/Re-certified in FY15:
  - 6 NRCS New Planner Certifications
  - 6 SWCD New Planner Certifications
  - 21 NRCS Planners Re-certified
  - 9 SWCD Planners Re-certified
- Number of CEUs and Training in FY15 to maintain planner certification:
  - 40 CEU Training Events
  - 127 CEUs issued
- Looking at last 4 years (FY12-15) at Certified Conservation Planner Training Requirements:
  - Prescribed Burn Awareness Training – 54 SWCD staff trained, 26 NRCS
  - Cultural Resource Training – 78 SWCD staff trained, 36 NRCS
  - Conservation Planning Boot Camp – 26 SWCD staff trained, 13 NRCS
  - Continuing Education Credits – 216 training with 625 available CEUs

### Outreach

Participated in The Church and Urban Agriculture Symposium at the 31st Street Baptist Church on September 24. The NRCS Chief provided the keynote address and the NRCS State Conservationist participated in a panel discussion on working with partners to set up similar community gardens.

Provided an informational exhibit on soil health and pollinators for **The Gathering**, a new Native American heritage event at the Clarke County Fairgrounds on **October 31** and **November 1**. About 5,000 people joined in the three-day celebration (Kidz Harvest Fest on October 30), participating in the harvest dance, sampling Native American crafts and cuisine, and learning about the soil beneath their feet.

Shared FY16 Farm Bill program information with approximately 250 attendees at the VSU Small Farm Family Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, on November 12-13. The NRCS State Conservationist presented the Virginia Civil Rights Advisory Team Farmers of the Year award to Melvin and Mario Albritton of ASA Farms in Chesapeake, and Cropland Agronomist Chris Lawrence provided two breakout sessions on no-till vegetable production.

### Earth Team Program

Conservation partner support for and participation in volunteer projects helped the Virginia Earth Team program reach another milestone in FY15. In the past year, the number of volunteers has increased by more than 20 percent, topping out at 1,630. Virginia achieved the national goal of 100% field office participation and was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation. Virginia Earth Team award winners for outstanding individual, group, district, partnership, employee, field office, and volunteer have been selected and will

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receive their awards during the VASWCD Annual Meeting Awards Luncheon. All award winners were submitted for National award consideration.

### VA NRCS Personnel Changes

- New Hires

Brandon Cole (Soil Conservationist, Abingdon) effective 3/8/2015  
Jonathan Lipinski (Soil Conservationist, Louisa) effective 3/8/2015  
Matthew Pyle (Project Engineer, Verona) effective 3/22/2015  
Dwight Forrester (Soil Conservationist, Tappahannock) effective 4/20/15  
Brian Brezinski (Soil Conservationist, Strasburg) effective 4/20/15  
Rolf Swainston (Design Engineer, Richmond), effective 5/17/2015  
Adam Williams (Soil Conservationist, Lexington), effective 6/14/2015  
Carl Whitt (Soil Conservationist Technician, Tazewell), effective 6/28/2015  
Thomas Finsterle (Soil Conservationist Technician, Harrisonburg), effective 6/28/2015  
Matthew Jones (District Conservationist, Quinton) effective 7/12/2015  
Matthew Brown (Soil Conservationist Technician, Wytheville) effective 7/26/2015  
Loren Muldowney (Resource Soil Conservationist, Farmville) effective 8/23/2015  
Joey Davis (Soil Conservationist, Boydton) effective 9/6/2015  
Jenna Swanson (Soil Conservationist, Lawrenceville) effective 10/4/2015  
Tyler Witkowski (Soil Scientist, Christiansburg) effective 10/18/2015  
Mary Louise Jacques (Resource Soil Scientist, Rustburg) effective 11/1/2015  
David Smith (Soil Conservationist, Amelia) effective 11/1/2015  
Telicia Berry (Soil Conservationist, Hanover Service Center) effective 11/1/2015  
Robert Norris (Soil Conservationist, Smithfield) effective 11/1/2015

- Retirements/Resignations

Barry Skiles (Civil Engineer, Christiansburg) effective 4/30/2015  
Larry Wilkinson (District Conservationist, Warrenton) effective 5/2/2015  
Louis Heidel (ASTC-FO Harrisonburg) effective 5/31/2015  
Thomas Walthall (Office Assistant, Richmond) 7/31/15  
Ron Wisniewski (District Conservationist, Fredericksburg) effective 10/3/2015  
Buddy Gilmer (District Conservationist, Gate City) effective 12/31/2015

- Transfers/Promotions (in and out of state)

Gerald Wright (Civil Engineer, Verona) effective 2/8/2015  
Jackie Alexander (ASTC-Management & Strategy, Richmond) effective 2/22/2015  
John Harper (State Soil Scientist, State Office) effective 2/22/2015  
Barbara Bowen (Public Affairs Specialist, State Office) effective 4/5/2015  
Amanda Lynch (Environmental Specialist, Richmond) effective 5/2/15  
Robin Piques (Financial Resources Specialist, Richmond) effective 5/3/2015  
Twyla Gendron (Business Services Specialist, Richmond) effective 5/31/2015  
Christopher Bradshaw (Area Resource Conservationist, Lawrenceville) effective 5/31/2015  
Davie Harris (District Conservationist, Lawrenceville) effective 6/28/2015  
Kathy Holm (Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Harrisonburg) effective 7/26/2015  
Eric Capps (District Conservationist, Rocky Mount) effective 9/6/2015  
Lucia (Lucee) Kossler (District Conservationist, Fredericksburg) effective 10/18/2015  
Wesley Hedrick (Soil Conservationist, Verona) effective 10/18/2015