

Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Division Director's Report

June 21, 2017

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, please accept this Soil and Water Conservation Division Report.

Livestock Stream Exclusion Update

As of June 1, 2017, the backlog in SL-6 practices that remain in pending status (awaiting funding) was further reduced to \$20.3 million, consisting of \$7.5 million in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and \$12.8 million in the Southern Rivers/Outside the Chesapeake Bay. \$63 million of SL-6 practices have been completed statewide and another \$26.4 million have been approved by local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts) and are awaiting completion. Through June 1st, 1783 completed SL-6 practices have resulted in 7.9 million linear feet of streambank protected and over 83,000 animal units excluded.

The Department has requested that Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts) complete data entry for their remaining pending (FY2015) SL-6 applications, so they can be scored using the Conservation Efficiency Factor (CEF). This information will be used for a SL-6 supplemental cost share allocation if funding becomes available.

The Department is also requesting that its US Department of Agriculture (USDA), RCPP stream exclusion grant be modified to shift \$254,000 in technical assistance, which the Chesapeake Bay Foundation has elected to not request, into additional financial assistance for farmers. Approval of this request by USDA, will be submitted on Virginia's behalf by the Maryland Department of Agriculture, who is the lead partner on the three-state grant that also includes Delaware. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has already pre-approved \$1.4 million from this grant for stream exclusion practices in eight counties within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, under the RCPP grant to the Department. With match from the Department, these will be funded at or near 100%.

Signup for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in Virginia is under discussion and may resume very soon. The Department has been working with the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and has proposed a fiscal solution to resolve CREP applications that FSA received, but had not yet approved, prior to being notified by the Department that state CREP match funds for FY 2017 had been exhausted. All CREP applications approved by FSA prior to March 1, 2017, the date FSA halted CREP signup in Virginia, will receive 50% state match. This action alone has raised the cumulative sum of state CREP match in FY2017 to over \$1.4 million. The Department has also committed to match other pending CREP contracts as of March 1, i.e. those that were submitted but not yet approved as of March 1, 2017, at 25%.

Going forward, once CREP signup resumes, the Department will supply 25% match for any new CREP contracts. To better achieve an early warning in the future, FSA and the Department will work together to ensure CREP signup through FSA is shared much earlier in the approval process than it has until now.

Engineering

The Department, working with the District Engineering Workgroup, is preparing to meet with the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulations (DPOR) in September, in order to present a plan to fully establish DCR Engineering Job Approval Authority (EJAA). This will include a framework for periodic review of District staff to ensure their engineering proficiencies with agricultural best management practices (BMPs) are adequate and sustained. There will also be routine training of District staff by the Department.

District staff will have opportunities during the remainder of 2017 to receive engineering training either conducted or coordinated by the Department, including sessions on design of grass waterways and installation of livestock watering systems, at the annual summer District employees' meeting in August at Graves Mountain.

Other Training for Districts

The Department recently provided Accounting and Bookkeeping training for both beginners (June 5) and advanced (June 6) District Administrative staff. This training was introduced in 2016 and will be repeated again in the future. Our annual Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program training is underway. Sessions were scheduled for June 13 (Charlottesville), 22 (Farmville), 26 (Prince George), and 28 (Wytheville).

BMP Verification

The Department will soon complete development of a web application that will facilitate the more detailed documentation that will be required for BMP verification spot checks in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, beginning in calendar year 2018, in accordance with the state's BMP Verification Plan.

This project includes a mobile application with which to conduct BMP verification spot checks. These data application enhancements will be available to all Districts statewide.

The Department will also offer supplemental (separate) grant agreements in late summer/early fall 2017 to affected Districts in the Chesapeake Bay watershed to recertify structural BMPs whose contractual lifespans end in either 2016, 2017, or 2018, (and possibly 2019 if funding is adequate) in order to continue to receive pollution reduction credit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Payment for actual verification inspections will be increased as compared to an earlier project to verify lifespan expirations that occurred 2010 – 2015.

Resource Management Plans

As of June 1st, there were a total of 380 RMPs statewide, including 307 approved by Districts, 55 under review, and 18 in development. Nine RMPs have received certification. The Department will shift greater emphasis to RMP implementation and certification in FY 2018. A legislative study group is also exploring ways to increase RMP implementation and will develop recommendations on ways to increase interest in and implementation of RMPs. That report is due by October 1st.

Districts in Area III have recently advocated for a RMP signup period. This will allow producers to actively work with their District in advancing already recognized BMP needs specified in approved RMPs. This also would make the opportunity to obtain a RMP available to more farmers and would also better enable Districts to educate farmers about the RMP Program before they sign up for a RMP. The Department is considering additional RMP ranking criteria for Districts to use and will accept waiting lists from Districts within the Chesapeake Bay watershed for use by DCR contractual RMP planners. The waiting list will be used for the next round of RMP contracts in the Chesapeake Bay, which will be in spring 2018. RMP development is ongoing within the Chesapeake Bay watershed under existing contracts.

Nutrient Management

The Department welcomes Nicolas Yakish as our new Urban Nutrient Management Coordinator. He will begin at DCR on June 26th. This position has been vacant since January.

The Department continues to provide contractual private nutrient management planners who write plans for golf courses at no cost to the operators. Currently, there are 226 golf courses that have current nutrient management plans, covering 22,400 acres. Approximately 100 golf courses still need nutrient management plans; however, our contractors are already working with nearly 40 of those.

The project to fully integrate the Nutrient Management Database into the Ag BMP Tracking System is progressing well and is on schedule to be completed by the end of this calendar year.

Conservation Planning

DCR will continue to encourage the Districts to obtain NRCS training and certification to the extent possible and we will continue to honor such certification. However, we also continue to offer training to Districts on the DCR Conservation Planning computer module.

Department staff is following up on recommendations from the Conservation Planning stakeholders' group on the creation of Environmental Assessment Worksheets. The goal is to make a user friendly document that captures the information needed by SWCD staff for conservation planning and BMP development across Virginia.

To assist with resource identification and protection through the Conservation Plan module, meetings with other DCR Divisions and state agencies will continue to be held to further develop processes for addressing state resources and requirements. Good automated processes are already in place and being refined for threatened and endangered species and other state species of concern. Where necessary, Memorandums of Understanding will be developed to formalize processes for resource evaluations and assessments.

Creation of a DCR conservation planning certification training protocol and certification renewal requirements is also being developed and will be discussed with the stakeholder group. DCR staff are staying abreast of the changes with

the NRCS Conservation Planning process and working to understand their new requirements for certification.

A system for online training and records is also being worked on to provide required courses and to maintain a transcript of activity toward certification and recertification.

Other Stakeholder Groups

A second legislative study group is focusing on identifying strategies for stabilizing adequate funding for agricultural best management practices. Their report is due by November 15, 2017.

Requirements gathering for the Financial Database are essentially complete. As previously reported, this database is not intended to replace the use of QuickBooks. Although Districts will be able to use this database to submit their budget templates, it is being developed primarily to assist the Department. Budget template development is currently underway by Districts. Submittal to the Department is requested by August 1st.

Horse Stewardship Workshops

Working with Dr. Bridgette McIntosh (Virginia Cooperative Extension), the horse stewardship project, "Healthy Land for Healthy Horses," has been completed for this year. The "Healthy Land for Healthy Horses" workshop was completed on June 5. The project focused on small lot owners in Fairfax, Prince William, Loudoun, and Fauquier counties. The workshops included six sessions on consecutive Monday nights with an additional bus tour and was designed to help small horse farm owners protect water quality. The sessions included a short lecture on topics such as pasture management and manure management, followed by field visits to various best management practices at the Middleburg Agricultural and Research and Extension (MARE) Center. Approximately 50 individuals attended the event. Approximately 90 percent of the respondents indicated, because of the program, they would modify some part of their operation to improve water quality. The Department has applied for EPA Chesapeake Bay Program grant funding to conduct a similar project next year.

DCR Internships

Bruce Pfirrmann has successfully interviewed for the Shoreline Erosion Advisory Service (SEAS) internship. This graduate student intern will be working, under the daily supervision of DCR SEAS Shoreline Engineer, Mike Vanlandingham, along with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Virginia Marine Resources Commission, and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, on a Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan project to field verify and prepare data in an appropriate format, for submission to the Environmental Protection Agency Chesapeake Bay Program, that will achieve pollution reduction credits for shoreline stabilization projects that were installed over a number of prior years.

Hashim Hazelwood has been selected as DCR's first Diversity Outreach Intern. A recent graduate of North Carolina A&T, Hakim will work for 10 – 16 weeks, within the Division of Soil and Water Conservation, where he will learn under Amanda Pennington's direction about agricultural BMPs and flood control dams.