

Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Division Director's Report

September 13, 2018

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 September 7, 2018, 2,117 SL-6 livestock stream exclusion practices have been installed statewide under the 100% cost reimbursement initiative. These practices have resulted in over 8.2 million linear feet of streambank protected and 101 thousand animal units excluded from water bodies. Another 244 SL-6 practices have been funded but are not yet completed. This leaves only 121 pending FY2015 SL-6s that need just under \$6.4 million in future funding. Of these, only 15 pending practices, at an estimate cost of less than \$650 thousand, are in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Division Staffing Update

Ben Chester has joined the Department's District Engineering Services Team as our second Agricultural BMP Engineer. Ben earned his undergraduate degree in Civil Engineering from Virginia Tech and a Masters' Degree in Environmental Engineering from Old Dominion University. Ben is a registered Professional Engineer with six years of private sector experience designing utilities, water and wastewater, and site plan development. He is also an adjunct professor at Virginia Western Community College. Ben is located in our Christiansburg Office.

Joseph Tesauro has been hired as a Nutrient Management Specialist in the Christiansburg office. Joe has fifteen years of direct farm production experience, over five years of experience teaching agriculture and is currently working towards his Master's degree in Agriculture and Consumer Services. He recently sat for his Nutrient Management Certification exam and is awaiting his results. Please welcome Joe to the team when you meet him.

Chanel Wilson, Urban Nutrient Management Specialist – Golf Courses, accepted a position with Virginia Cooperative Extension. This contractual position through Virginia Tech will soon be advertised.

Gary Moore, Agricultural Incentives Program Manager, retired at the end of August. His position is currently being advertised. Denny Turner, who formerly assisted Gary Moore, has been promoted to Conservation District Coordinator for the Richmond District, replacing Blair Gordon, who was previously promoted to Soil and Water Conservation District Liaison.

Both of the 2018 Diversity Outreach Interns have finished their time at DCR. Joshua Mott has accepted a part-time position with the James River Soil and Water Conservation District. He will start graduate school at Virginia Tech in January. Gershom Ejoni (Natural Heritage) has returned to the University of Richmond. He is a member of their football team. Emma Aguerro (Nutrient Management) is returning to Virginia Tech, where she is Vice President of the Virginia Tech Chapter of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. Bruce Phirrmann (Shoreline Erosion Advisory Service) has accepted a research project in Alaska. He will then be taking a permanent position in South Carolina. DSWC is very excited over the prospects for all of the interns we had this year and wish them the very best as they go forward. Recruitment for the next pair of Diversity Outreach Interns and for our annual Nutrient Management intern will begin earlier, by January 2019, in order to make these opportunities as widely available to prospective candidates as possible.

Resource Management Plan Certification

New contracts with RMP developers that took effect on July 1, 2018 will result in at least 30,000 acres of fully implemented and certified RMPs by May 2019. The Department direct mailed every producer with an approved RMP to inform them of their eligibility for RMP-2 (certification) payments upon fully implementing their RMPs.

BMP Verification

Verification of every type of best management practice (BMP) is now required by the EPA Chesapeake Bay Program to document the level of implementation and continued performance of BMPs, for every sector, in order to secure credit for nutrient and sediment reductions over the long-term.

Nutrient management plan verification simply involves an end of season interview conducted by a planner with their clients that produces an assessment of how well

that farmer was able to implement the recommendations contained in their plan. To ensure every planned acre is credited with reductions, increased nutrient management plan verification is being pursued. Department staff met with private sector certified nutrient management planners on August 23 to explain how to verifying nutrient management plans and report such data to the Department. Forty-four planners attended.

Questions have arisen regarding expectations for Soil and Water Conservation Districts with respect to nutrient management plans. The Department is aware of this issue and is working on a resolution, including developing tools.

Training

Engineering - Department staff will conduct a multi-day engineering training class this autumn, likely to be in November. Suggestions from the District Employee Association have been requested in order to help us to plan this training. We hope to receive those suggestions by the end of September, so that we can then adequately prepare to conduct the training.

Conservation Planning - On June 28, the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board approved the launch of the DCR Conservation Planning and Certification Program. The program was developed to address a need for those Soil and Water Conservation Districts who, for various reasons, have been unable to maintain their conservation planning certifications from the USDA – Natural Resource Conservation Service. The DCR certification is unique because it emphasizes the resource concerns of related state agency programs.

On-line classes were made available in July. As of September 5, 67 Soil and Water District Employees had registered for DCR Conservation Planning Certification training. Twenty-five Districts have nearly 40 staff who qualified to be grandfathered due to either current or very recent conservation planning certification from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Another eight Districts have staff that has started working their way through the DCR curriculum. On September 11 and 14, the Department facilitated two Virginia Resource training classes, with another two to be held on October 2 and 3. These resource classes are focused on other state agency resources such as cultural, historical, and/or species of concern. Another Conservation Selling Skills class, scheduled for November 13 – 14, has been made available to as many District staff as possible.

Nutrient Management - Department staff is participating with professors in the Agriculture Technology Program at Virginia Tech to teach students about writing

nutrient management plans and becoming certified nutrient management planners. Ag Technology is a two-year program offered at Virginia Tech. The addition of the “Nutrient Management” course to their two-year curriculum will meet the education requirement to become a certified planner. This is a new offering and an opportunity to get young people that have a farm background introduced to adding nutrient management certification to their resume’ and to build a pool of future potential applicants for Department agricultural programs.

Horse Stewardship Project

A short course for horse owners on pasture and manure management has scheduled four educational workshops across Virginia’s Chesapeake Bay watershed on: September 25 (Middleburg), October 10 (Roanoke), October 11 (Free Union), and October 30 (Chesapeake). An event flier is available on-line at <https://vaforages.org/healthy-lands-for-healthy-horses-short-course/>. Each workshop will be held from 9 am – 3 pm. Online registration is \$35/person at www.vaforages.org. Interested persons can also register by mail. Lunch is included with the registration.

DEQ has announced that EPA 319 Total Maximum Daily Load project funds are now available for two types of equestrian related BMPs, using specifications developed by Hanover-Caroline District. Demonstration projects in John Marshall District have been approved by DEQ.

Chesapeake Bay WIP III

DCR began holding meetings with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Districts) that have Chesapeake Bay drainage area, and other agricultural sector partners, in May. Four initial meetings were held for VASWCD Areas I, II, III, and VI. Districts in both Areas IV and V that also have Chesapeake Bay drainage area were invited to participate with one of the listed areas near their location. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) played a key role in all four of these meetings. A second round of four similar meetings were held in August. However, only two meetings are scheduled in October, on the 22nd at the Department of Forestry in Charlottesville, and October 24 at the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences in Gloucester Point. Once all sectors have submitted their BMP projections for year 2025, joint meetings between agriculture and all other sectors, via the Planning District Commissions, will be held in November and December, to determine whether the overall reduction targets will be met.

Each Chesapeake Bay District, with the exception of Southside District, was given and asked to complete a personalized District BMP input deck spreadsheet for year 2025 and submit it back to the Department. Southside District will need no additional load reductions for 2025.

These input deck spreadsheets are still being revised by a few Districts. Once completed, Chesapeake Bay Program CAST modeling can be run in order to predict whether both individual Districts and the Area as a whole, will meet nutrient reduction targets. The key pollutant for this project is nitrogen. If nitrogen targets are met, the current assumption is that adequate reductions for both phosphorus and sediment targets will also be achieved. A few Districts have elected to commit to the prior, WIP II scenario and not propose any changes.

Once the agricultural sector contribution to WIP III has been completed, and Agricultural BMP TAC recommendations to the Board formulated, a cost estimate will be generated. This will then inform both the District budget template process in 2019, future budget requests by the Department, including our staffing needs to support this effort, and future Agricultural Needs Assessments.

Information from the new Phase 6.0 Chesapeake Bay Model, has identified these eight Districts that are vital for meeting Virginia's nitrogen reduction targets: Eastern Shore, Culpeper, Hanover-Caroline, Headwaters, **Lord Fairfax**, Northern Neck, Shenandoah Valley, and Three Rivers. This will need to be considered when future cost-share allocations are made.

Agricultural BMP Technical Advisory Committee

In addition to BMP projections for year 2025 in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, all Districts, both in the Chesapeake Bay and Southern Rivers, were asked to submit suggestions, irrespective of budget or current staffing limitations, on both policy and programmatic changes for the state agricultural cost share program (VACS), that would promote more BMP implementation. Over 170 suggestions have been received to date. These suggestions will be discussed with the Agricultural Best Management Technical Advisory Committee (Ag BMP TAC), which began meeting in early September.

Due to the number submitted, suggestions have been divided and assigned to six sub-committees of the Ag BMP TAC: Animal Waste, Cover Crop, Forestry, Nutrient Management, Programmatic, and Stream Protection. DCR staff will chair each of the sub-committees.

In order to solicit as much input as we can, over 55 people were invited to participate on the Ag BMP TAC this year. The only requirement to participate was to join a sub-committee to work on.

Any debate, presentations, etc. regarding suggestions submitted will occur in the sub-committees. Sub-committees will recommend either to “advance”, “amend,” or “table” each suggestion submitted. The full TAC will mainly vote on the recommendations the sub-committees bring to the full committee. To accomplish this, both the full Ag BMP TAC, and each of its sub-committees, will need to meet monthly until early January. A subcommittee may be able to finish sooner if the full TAC has acted on all of its recommendations.

Every recommendation from the Ag BMP TAC, including those that are tabled, will go to the Soil and Water Conservation Board next spring, for final action. Consequently, only the Board can “kill” a recommendation.

In addition to their first meeting on September 10, subsequent Ag BMP TAC meetings have been scheduled on October 18 (Waynesboro Public Library) and November 15 (Department of Forestry in Charlottesville). Tentative dates also include December (10th) and January (8th), with those locations to be determined.