

Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Division Director's Report

April 4, 2019

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

An amendment to the state FY 2019 state budget includes funding for the remaining 105 PY15 pending SL-6 livestock stream exclusion practices under the 100% cost reimbursement initiative. \$5.2M has been appropriated to complete them statewide plus \$676K in technical assistance. The eight affected Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are: Big Walker, Monacan, Mountain Castles, Patrick, Peter Francisco, Pittsylvania, Robert E. Lee, and Southside. These Districts were asked by the Department to provide updated cost estimates by April 2. They will be asked to sign a supplemental grant agreement and return it to the Department prior to June 30, so the Department can officially obligate these funds. These SWCDs will have until June 30, 2021 to complete these remaining SL-6 BMPs.

Resource Management Plan Program Update

The Department continues to explore ways to increase Resource Management Plan (RMP) implementation and certification. A new pilot project is proposed in Northern Neck SWCD. With Soil and Water Conservation Board approval of a supplemental grant agreement, approximately \$400,000 from the special appropriation in the FY 2020 state budget for RMPs, poultry litter transport, and other water quality projects, will be set aside for this project in FY 2020. All currently approved RMPs in the Northern Neck SWCD are eligible to receive funding to implement all of the BMPs included in these RMPs for one year, at the FY2020 cost share rate. RMP Technical Assistance (higher than and in place of RMP Operational Support) for the SWCD for certification/verification inspections, and a payment to participating producers equal to that of the RMP-2 certification practice will also be included. The Northern Neck SWCD Board met on March 13 and agreed to participate in this project.

The Department has also proposed \$100,000 in RMP contracts in FY 2020 for additional development and certification outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Whole Farm Approach Pilot Project

At their April 2018 meeting, the Soil and Water Conservation Board will be requested to approve a new Best Management Practice (BMP) specification, WFA-1, to be piloted in Three Rivers SWCD during FY 2020, and a supplemental grant agreement to fund the whole farm pilot project they endorsed for Three Rivers in December 2018. This “WFA-1” BMP specification combines all agronomic BMPs into one cost share contract which will consolidate administration and tracking as implementation occurs.

Conservation Planning Certification Training

Several of the required in-person classes have been scheduled, beginning this summer and continuing through early 2020. Soil and Water Conservation District staff that are already enrolled in the DCR certification training curriculum will have their seats automatically reserved unless they individually decline to attend a particular class.

Table 1: DCR Conservation Planning Certification Class Schedule

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|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| Nutrient Management Soil Science | July and Dec annually | DCR | Register when scheduled |
| VA Rare, Threatened, Endangered | Sept and Oct 2018 | DNH/DGIF | Completed |
| VA Cultural & Historical | Sept and Oct 2018 | DHR | Completed |
| RUSLE 2 | July and Aug 2019 | NRCS | SWCD staff list provided |
| Pesticide Management Orientation | In development for on-line, Fall 2019 | VA Tech | Register when available |
| VACS Program | Aug 2019 (at Graves Mt.) | DCR | Register via VACDE |
| Perennial Stream Identification | Sept – Oct 2019 | VIMS | SWCD staff list provided |
| Conservation Selling Skills | Nov 2019 | Private | SWCD staff list provided |
| Virginia Water Concerns | Under development | DEQ | Register when scheduled |

We are also planning to offer the DCR Conservation Planning Program course, or an alternative, in late winter-early spring 2020. As further details are confirmed they will be shared with Districts and the Employee Association (VACDE).

Agricultural BMP Technical Advisory Committee

The full Agricultural BMP Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will reconvene on July 9 at the Department of Forestry in Charlottesville, and will meet through December of this year. The TAC will continue working on suggestions received last year that need to either be developed further and/or require additional discussion before a consensus recommendation from the TAC can be voted on. This will include cost share caps for participants; this is the only topic tabled in 2018 that is scheduled to be revisited. The Department will present a proposal on Ag BMP and equipment tax credits to the Programmatic Subcommittee as well as some new topics for other subcommittees that have been raised since January. In addition, the Equine Workgroup, which has met since December, will present its recommendations. The Department will notify all of last year's TAC members by the end of next week regarding additional meeting dates and locations. TAC subcommittees will each receive a list of topics they are asked to discuss and are encouraged to meet again before the full TAC meeting in July.

Chesapeake Bay WIP III

Thirty-one of the 32 SWCDs with Chesapeake drainage either submitted agricultural BMP input decks for Watershed Implementation Plan Phase III (WIP III) projecting additional BMPs that can be implemented by year 2025, or opted to commit to WIP II BMP implementation targets. One, Southside SWCD, requires no additional reductions by 2025 due to the high percentage of forested land in their Chesapeake Bay watershed. DEQ evaluated these input decks and concluded that, if fully implemented, 73% of the total combined reductions for nitrogen and phosphorus from all Chesapeake Bay SWCDs would be achieved by only ten of them: Eastern Shore, Culpeper, Hanover-Caroline, Headwaters, Lord Fairfax, Northern Neck, Robert E. Lee, Shenandoah Valley, Three Rivers, and the recently added Thomas Jefferson. Consequently, the Department is recommending to the Soil and Water Conservation Board that these SWCDs receive additional cost share for "WIP III acceleration" and will make a specific proposal to the Board for implementation in FY2020.

In order to ensure that these ten SWCDs receive adequate cost share and technical assistance, even in the event of an unforeseen financial downturn before 2025, the Department is proposing changes to the cost share/technical assistance allocation and reallocation policies in FY 2020 in that: (1) each of these ten Bay SWCDs receive additional cost share and technical assistance, via either supplemental funding added to their regular allocation or pilot projects that will contribute to meeting Chesapeake Bay year 2025 nutrient reduction goals; and (2) 100% of all end of FY 2019 and FY 2020 unobligated cost share and technical assistance funds within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, be reallocated only to these 10 Chesapeake Bay SWCDs.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the SWCDs with Chesapeake Bay drainage, even taken as a whole, the SWCD WIP III input decks did not meet the earlier WIP II nutrient reductions for agriculture. Consequently, decisions were made at the state level to: significantly increase the number of agricultural nutrient management plan acres, both core and precision; significantly increase cover crop acres; continue to promote livestock stream exclusion and both grass and forested buffers; emphasize additional animal waste facilities; and significantly increase poultry litter transport.

By year 2025, nearly 90,000 tons/year of poultry litter, from Rockingham and Page counties in the Valley area and Accomack County on the Eastern Shore, needs to be transported. This will be the first time the Department has funded poultry litter transport from Accomack. In FY2020, the Department will significantly increase contracts for writing and verifying agricultural nutrient management plans, again offer contracts to Chesapeake Bay SWCDs for verification of other agricultural BMPs, increase financial assistance for SWCDs to certify RMPs, increase state match for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program forested buffers to 35%, and with the aforementioned line item in the FY 2020 state budget, begin to increase poultry litter transport.

Targeted recipient localities for newly transported poultry litter from the Eastern Shore are: Charles City, Chesapeake, Greenville, Isle of Wight, James City County, New Kent, Prince George, Suffolk, Surry, and Sussex. Litter out of the Valley area can be affordably shipped to: Albemarle, Amherst, Bath, Culpeper, Greene, Highland, Madison, Nelson, Orange, and Rockbridge.