

Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Division Director's Report

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

Resource Management Plan Program Update

The RMP Program has seen a significant increase in certified, i.e. fully implemented RMPs, notably reaching the milestone of 100 RMP certificates issued. Much of this boom can be attributed to changes made to the RMP Program last year that shifted emphasis from RMP development to RMP certification. Last year at this time, there were only 14 certified RMPs. A new round of RMP contracts to develop and certify additional RMPs, both in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and for the first time in a few years, outside of the Bay watershed as well, will be offered in the very near future. In addition, a pilot project in Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District will enable all participating farmers with approved RMPs to fully implement and certify them in a year. Efforts will also be made to encourage additional people to become RMP Developers in order to facilitate expansion of the RMP Program statewide.

Pursuant to Executive Order 14 (2018) and §§ 2.2-4007.1 and 2.2-4017 of the Code of Virginia, the Department of Conservation and Recreation on behalf of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board is conducting a periodic review and small business impact review of VAC citation: 4VAC50-70, Resource Management Plans regulations. The comment period begins July 8, 2019 and ends September 6, 2019.

The purpose of this review is to determine whether this regulation should be repealed, amended, or retained in its current form. Public comment is sought on the review of any issue relating to this regulation, including whether the regulation: (i) is necessary for the protection of public health, safety, and welfare or for the economical performance of important governmental functions; (ii) minimizes the economic impact on small businesses in a manner consistent with the stated objectives of applicable law; and (iii) is clearly written and easily understandable.

Comments may be submitted either to Christine Watlington or online to the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall at <http://www.townhall.virginia.gov/L/Forums.cfm>.

Animal Waste Storage Grant Application

DCR has applied for a grant with Virginia Environmental Endowment (VEE) to install animal waste storage facilities for cattle and poultry operations, in the Upper and Middle James River watershed that are in areas impaired by bacteria. If the grant application is approved, VEE funds will provide the lesser of \$25,000 or 25% of the cost of these facilities, significantly reducing the out of pocket costs for participating farmers. Minimum qualifications will also be at least either 30 cows, 45,000 chickens, or 17,500 turkeys at each approved farm. This grant request is for \$500,000 over three years, for no less than 20 waste storage facilities in Mountain, Mountain Castles, New Bridge, and Peter Francisco Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Training

A combined total of over 200 SWCD and partner representatives, attended four updates sessions/trainings on changes to the Virginia Agricultural Cost Share (VACS) Program in early-to-mid June. In partnership with the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, two RUSLE II (soils) classes were offered during May and June. On June 24, a few SWCDs participated in a dry run and evaluation of “Virginia Water Resource Concerns,” a new class within the DCR Conservation Planning Certification curriculum, which will be taught by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The schedule for this class will be announced soon. Engineering and more in-depth VACS training are also scheduled.

Chesapeake Bay WIP III

The Associated Press released an article, with comments from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) comparing the draft WIP documents from Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Of these, CBF considered Virginia’s plan to be the strongest. Over 800 public comments were submitted by June 7, the end of the public comment period, including approximately 50 pages by CBF, regarding the Phase III Chesapeake Bay TMDL Watershed Implementation Plan. DEQ has distributed these comments to state agencies as applicable. Responses to the comments received are being developed and will be available to the public once completed.