

Area I Quarterly Report

Kevin Craun & Rick Shiflet; Area I Co-Chairs

September 12, 2019

HEADWATERS SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Technical Staff

- Headwaters SWCD hosted a successful BMP Program Roll-Out meeting on July 17th at the Augusta County Government Center. Over 50 farmers and landowners participated to hear about all of the new changes to the VACS program for 2020. FSA, NRCS, and DEQ Ag BMP Loan Program staff also made presentations that evening.
- Headwaters partnered with NRCS and FSA to host a booth at the Augusta County Fair. The fair was held from July 30th- August 3rd.
- All BMP staff attended the Graves Mountain VACDE training held August 20-22.



Education

- In June, Headwaters assisted the Staunton YMCA with Enviroscape presentations to students in the Summer Learning Loss Retention Program. The theme for this year's camp was the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and Marine Life. The camp is for students who have completed 1st-3rd grade.



- Staff completed the construction and assembly of our Augmented Reality Sandbox this summer! Funds for the project were made possible through a Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund Grant. We thank the UC Davis KECKCAVES center for initial development of the program and use of their free software. The AR sandbox will be used to help students visualize watershed boundaries by learning to read and understand topography maps.
- Education Staff completed the Teaching Trees/Project Learning Tree Training hosted by DOF and VCE in July. Forestry supplies received at the training were added to our Envirothon trunks to help support our teams in their studies.

Flood Control Dams

- Mowing operations have been completed on flood control dams. The district also contracted the services of Weed Control Inc. to conduct herbicide applications. Staff will begin fall maintenance in September. The work will include tree removal, stilling basin repairs, debris clean up, upgrade staff/stage gauges, Mid-level gate installation (Inch Branch) and IFLOWS routine maintenance.



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MOUNTAIN SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

The Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District partnered with Virginia Cooperative Extension with a Landowner Awareness Field Day. This day included a Soil Sampling Workshop, Stress Management Presentation, Landlord/Tenant Relationships, Virginia Fence Law, and the Mountain SWCD update.



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MOUNTAIN CASTLES SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- Jeff Mutter has been hired as the District's new Conservation Technician. A recent graduate of Virginia Tech, Jeff comes to us from Russell County where he interned with Clinch Valley SWCD. Jeff has "hit the ground running" having already completed several farm visits and training, including the VACDE training at Graves Mountain Lodge.
- Mountain Castles SWCD sent one camper and one staff member to Youth Conservation Camp in July. A great time was had by all!



- Along with FSA, NRCS, and VCE, the District is organizing a "Women in Ag" learning circle for PY20. The group is expected to meet at least quarterly. Interest surveys have been distributed, and the first meeting will be scheduled soon.
- Thanks to a grant through the Upper James RC&D, the District is partnering with Valley Conservation Council and VCE to host a "Farm & Float" activity on September 28th. Guests will experience a hay wagon tour of BMPs on Oxbow Farm, then paddle a short portion of the James River.



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NATURAL BRIDGE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- The district continues to make progress on two TMDLs for Rockbridge County. Conservation staff are actively working to extend outreach to landowners in the Buffalo, Colliers and Cedar Creeks TMDL areas and is currently exploring potential stream exclusion projects and septic outreach strategies.
- Remaining cover crop payments were verified and paid on June 28, finishing up program year 18-19 contracts with agricultural producers. The Board of Directors approved the carryover of eleven (11) cost-share practices to the 19-20 program year at their June 19 meeting. Three (3) new BMP Cost-Share contracts were approved by the Board of Directors at their August 21 meeting.
- SWCD technical staff and Sam Crickenberger of the Rockbridge County Community Development office met with Secretary Strickler at Goshen Pass to discuss the Little Calf Pasture TMDL and the need for participation from the Scout Camp. Also in attendance were Directors Jay Gilliam and Sandra Stuart.
- Director Sandra Stuart offered the following update on the Boxerwood project as part of the Upper James RC&D grant: The focus of the 2019 watershed management initiatives at Boxerwood includes dealing with the extensive rainwater runoff along the downward sloping driveway. To that end we have been working on revitalizing the rain gardens on either side of the driveway. Another aspect of our stormwater management initiative is to improve drainage from the driveway to the rain gardens. Our plan is to replace the existing driveway grate which does not function well and gets easily clogged. Prior to our grant application we had received a bid from a local fabricator to replace the driveway grate that diverts water to the rain gardens, but we've learned that he will not be able to complete the work for us. We are currently looking for another source to replace the grate.



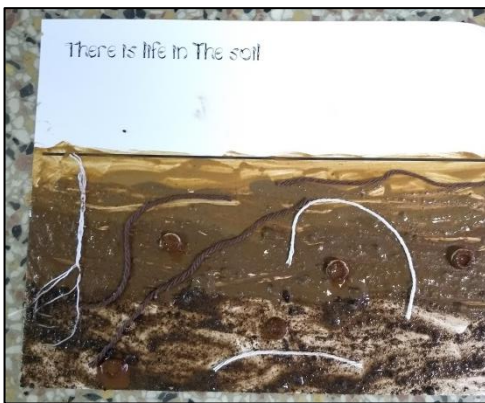
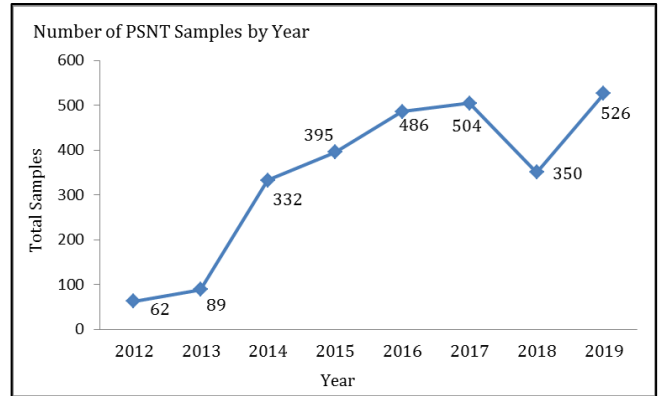
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SHENANDOAH VALLEY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- Pre-Sidedress Nitrate Testing (PSNT) season has concluded! The SVSWCD had three students from local colleges helping to collect and analyze soil samples this summer. Our season ran from the end of May to late July. This program continues to support conservation implementation, specifically nitrogen reductions in our District. Our college interns and staff worked to collect and analyze 526 samples representing over 8,650 acres of corn. 325 of those samples were part of the SVSWCD's cost-share program.



- Staff and interns worked with Rockingham County Public School's Summer Camp Program to provide a soil lesson and related activity at five elementary schools across the county. Staff and interns traveled to each school and spent a morning with the rising 1st-6th grade students, demonstrating soil erosion with our erosion boxes and teaching the students about soil health and the abundance of life in the soil. Following the lesson, the students had the opportunity to use soil paint (made with the soil collected across Rockingham and Page Counties) to illustrate their version of life in the soil.

- Staff took advantage of some nice weather to evaluate our contractors' herbicide application process at both Dry Run and Union Spring dams this summer. The contractor spot sprayed woody vegetation on the face of the dams. They made sure to leave thistle, wildflowers and grasses for the pollinators! The dams will be mowed later in the fall.
- Fun in the sun doesn't stop once you leave the field! District and NRCS staff attended On Sunny Slope Farm's 3rd



Annual Oyster & Wine Festival where they set out to educate local festival-goers about soil and water conservation. Staff worked with interns to re-vamp our Conservation Jeopardy game to include fun facts about the Chesapeake Bay and reminded players of how conservation in the Shenandoah Valley affects the Chesapeake Bay.

