

Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Division Director's Report

April 14, 2020

Presented by Darryl M. Glover;
Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation

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

Division Operations during Executive Order #55

The majority of Division of Soil and Water Conservation staff are teleworking during the public health emergency due to COVID-19. However, all regional offices are open with skeleton coverage and rotating staff. Field work by all division programs is continuing, primarily by appointment, with the exception of verification of nutrient management plans which requires review of a farmer's records at their home or office. However, all scheduled meetings and training sessions organized by division staff have either been changed to a webinar, conference call, or are being postponed for the duration of Executive Order #55.

SWCD Grant Agreements

If the Governor's Executive Order #55 is in effect for its full term, and is not lifted/changed prior to June 10, the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board will have a meeting as soon as allowable to adopt policy and grant agreements that would normally take effect on July 1. The Department will make recommendations to the Board regarding close out of the current program year at that time.

SWCD Financial Audits

Financial audits of scheduled Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) by the new financial auditing firm, Clifton, Lawson, and Allen (CLA), have been completed. DCR was briefed of their findings in February. The results of the audits will be presented to the Audit Subcommittee of the Soil and Water Conservation Board at their next meeting.

Chesapeake Bay WIP III Update

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) announced the release of Virginia's Draft 2020-2021 Milestones for public review. These milestones were developed by the various agencies responsible for implementing [Virginia's Phase III Watershed](#)

[Implementation Plan \(WIP\)](#). Virginia is committed to setting and working towards two-year Milestones to improve water quality in accordance with the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). These milestones are a part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) accountability framework designed to ensure, with confidence, that the nitrogen, phosphorous, and sediment allocations of the TMDL will be met.

The review period concluded on April 7, 2020. Virginia's Final 2020-2021 Milestones will be submitted to EPA no later than May 30, 2020 and will be available no later than June 13, 2020 on [DEQ's Chesapeake Bay Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Milestones webpage](#).

The demonstration project in Rockingham County to identify livestock exclusion fencing near stream buffers using VGIN, DEQ, and DCR reference data sets has been completed. Findings were recently presented via a brief summary to the Secretary of Natural Resources.

The Virginia General Assembly passed an amended version of HB1422/SB704. This bill requires:

- Develop an (office) method for determining perennial streams by Dec. 2020
- Portable livestock stream exclusion fencing specification by July 2021
- OSNR to appoint a stakeholder group to develop plan for nutrient management plan adoption on cropland >50 acres, and stream exclusion if 20+ cattle, and monitor progress
- Stakeholder group membership largely defined (includes SWCDs)

The Department has reintroduced "Direct Pay" for certified nutrient management planners, in counties with either less than 10% of agricultural acres under plan, or that produce more animal manure than the local crop need. Any planner that registers with the Department and eVa, can bill directly for nutrient management plans they write in the targeted counties. The targeted area for NMP Direct Pay includes over 40 counties in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Ag BMP Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Update

Over fifty suggestions have been submitted to the Department for consideration by the Agricultural BMP Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) in 2020. These suggestions were circulated on April 10. The Department will prioritize all of these recommendations and present a proposed implementation schedule at the Board's next meeting. The TAC will have fewer voting members in 2020, i.e. no more than

one per stakeholder. Each SWCD can have one voting member. Each full TAC voting member is asked to participate and vote on one TAC subcommittee. Each SWCD can also have one voting member of each of the other three TAC subcommittees, i.e. Animal Waste, Cover Crop/Nutrient Management, Stream Protection/Forestry, and Programmatic. All stakeholders are requested to designate their voting members of the TAC, and of each TAC subcommittee by May 20.

Grant Opportunities

Mapping of priority parcels needed to begin work using the \$500,000 grant from the Virginia Environmental Endowment for producers' share of the cost of new animal waste storage facilities in the Upper and Middle James River watersheds was received from the Chesapeake Conservancy in March and integrated into the Agricultural Best Management Practice Tracking System. The VEE grant will reduce, or in some cases eliminate, the farmer's portion of cost share of expenses for construction of these facilities through the state cost-share program. Grant payments up to \$25,000 could be covered for as many as 20 facilities. Eligible SWCDs are Mountain, Mountain Castles, Natural Bridge and Peter Francisco.

The Department has been invited to submit a full proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to design and install living shoreline practices in several tidal watershed, excluding the James River, and to verify existing shoreline protection practices that can be counted towards the Chesapeake Bay WIP III shoreline target for year 2025.

SWCDs have been encouraged by the Department to apply for other grant opportunities, particularly in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, to supplement state funding and/or to focus on a specific initiative, such as Resource Management Plan implementation or the agronomic whole farm approach.

Staffing and Recruitment

The Division of Soil and Water Conservation is pleased to welcome Alissa Nashwinter as the new Business Manager for both the Divisions of Soil and Water Conservation, as well as Dam Safety/Floodplain Management. Tiffany Perry is our new Executive Secretary for Soil and Water. We have also hired two Conservation District Coordinators, Elizabeth Stockton in the Tappahannock Office, and Jaclyn Friedman in the Suffolk Office. Marissa Roland has come on board as our part-time VACS Program Technician, primarily assisting David Bryan, but also helping other Division Program Coordinators as needed. Marissa is also responsible for updating/maintaining the division's web pages.

We have not yet replaced Roland Owens, our former NPS Data Manager. That position remains open until filled.