AREA V - District Reports
Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation District
Quarterly Board Meeting
September 29, 2020

Blue Ridge SWCD  Peter Francisco SWCD
Halifax SWCD  Piedmont SWCD
Lake Country SWCD  Pittsylvania SWCD
Patrick SWCD  Robert E Lee SWCD
Peaks of Otter SWCD  Southside SWCD

BLUE RIDGE SWCD

Administrative:
I. The Blue Ridge successfully completed its’ first round of records retention through the Library of Virginia.
II. The District is preparing requested documents for the upcoming audit through Clifton, Larson & Allen, LLP.

Conservation:
I. The District’s early Cost-Share sign up deadline was Friday, September 4th.

II. VCAP- Technical staff continues to provide assistance for two VCAP inquiries (The Harvest Collective (bioretention or rain garden inquiry, one in Southwest Roanoke (erosion inquiry) and the other in the North section of Roanoke (erosion inquiry).

III. The Blue Ridge SWCD is making preparation to assist those impacted by the Mountain Valley Pipeline with the installation of BMPs along 45.8 miles of pipeline through Roanoke and Franklin Counties with nearly 1.5 million dollars in proposed cost share.

IV. Dams
   a. Small Dam Repair- Due to a clogged culvert pipe at Leatherwood #4 which impacts road access during heavy rains, district’s technical staff is working with DCR Engineering to determine best solution.
   b. Watershed Dam Rehab: District technical staff is meeting with DCR Engineers on a need-be basis at Leatherwood #5 (Lawrence Dam). At this point in time the design is 15% complete.
   c. At present quotes to install remote monitoring for four watershed dams is underway.
   d. Engineering Inspections on the following dams:
      i. Marrowbone
      ii. Leatherwood #6
      iii. Leatherwood #4
BLUE RIDGE SWCD, continued:

**Education:**

I. 2020 Poster Contest: “Where Would We BEE Without Pollinators”?
   a. Approximately 19 Cub Scouts (Pack # 456) and their team leaders invited the district’s Program Manager/Education Coordinator to speak to their group on “Where Would We BEE Without Pollinators” poster contest. Submissions to this year’s poster contest will be due no later than October 1, 2020.

II. In June of 2020, the Plant Southern Piedmont Natives campaign received a 30 in 30 Green Grant ($1,000) from Keep Virginia Beautiful, in partnership with Altria and Coca-Cola, to develop a demonstration garden along the Environmental Education Nature Trail at Benjamin Franklin Middle School (BFMS) in Franklin County. This nature trail runs through a forested area on the northern section of the school property along Powder Mill Creek. Native plants were planted along the Benjamin Franklin Middle School Environmental Education Nature Trail on September 5, 2020. Signage and fencing (around specific native plants such as Spicebush, Wild Geranium and Jacob’s Ladder) were included.

III. Giving Gardens at Booker T. Washington National Monument and Cooper’s Cove Giving Gardens: The gardens continue to do well. They continue to provide an educational site for organic square foot gardening at Booker T. Washington site. Coopers Cove garden accommodates more crops and is used for experimental gardening. Over 8,000 pounds of produce and 1,200 volunteer hours were donated this fiscal year (2029-2020) to supplement the food pantry at Lake Christian Ministry.

**Envirothon:**

I. The 2021 Envirothon trunks have been upgraded. Franklin and Henry County teams each received a new Envirothon trunk.
   a. When asked, coaches for Franklin and Henry County teams prefer Envirothon training on Zoom live or by pre-recorded videos.
   b. An Envirothon Town Hall with students and coaches is planned for September 29th, hosted by Bonnie Mahl.

**Awards and Recognition**

I. Roger Holnback receives the prestigious 2020 Cox Conserves Heroes Award
   The Cox Conserves Heroes awards program is how Cox Enterprises and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) honor the unsung heroes in our communities, as well as support the local organizations doing the important work of improving our environment.
BLUE RIDGE SWCD, continued:

PY 21 Goals/Future Activities/Needs

Our PY21 goals would be to allocate all of our cost-share, see the new practices and carry over through to completion, participate on the TAC, get the remote monitoring equipment installed on the dams, and continue with the Leatherwood 5 rehab. I would say as far as needs, it would be what most districts need; more cost-share to cover sign-up and remote monitoring equipment for the rest of our watershed dams.

HALIFAX SWCD

Education and Outreach
Food Plot Contest – We had 19 contestants for this year’s contest. The plots were judged early August, and we have some excellent plots. The winners will be recognized at our banquet in November. All contestants will receive a t-shirt and a day pass to a state park.

Rain Barrel Workshop – We conducted a small Rain Barrel Workshop on August 9th. There were 7 participants and 9 barrels were constructed.
Outdoor Education Series – The district is coordinating with Virginia Cooperative Extension on a four-session series at Edmunds Park in South Boston.

Cost Share
Roughly 10 plans will be approved at our September 10 board meeting.
PEAKS OF OTTER SWCD

Since August of 2019 Peaks has performed 22 site visits with producers who have an interest in the VACS program. Out of this pool, 9 producers signed up to vie for FY21 cost-share funds totaling an estimated $478,589.75 in need. Peaks’ funding was decreased by more than 30% this fiscal year and the result is only enough cost-share to fully fund 2 practices and partially fund one other. Continued interest in the VACS program here in Bedford County coupled with decreased funding has resulted in many producers being put on a waiting list for next fiscal year. So far during the first quarter of FY21 Peaks has paid out $87,518.80 in cost-share for 1 backlog FY15 SL-6 and $14,678.25 in 2 FY18 CREP projects.
PETER FRANCISCO SWCD

Operations

• Peter Francisco SWCD has had a staff member in the office every day by alternating schedules. We continue to work with local Buckingham County Admin by using their old auditorium to conduct board meetings, allowing 6 feet social distancing precautions and masks.

Education

During the first quarter of FY 2021, both Buckingham and Cumberland County schools were physically closed. In July, they were closed for summer break. In August and September, they were closed due to fears over COVID-19. Students use chrome books to complete their studies at home and this will continue for the first 9-week grading period ending the second week in October.

• To meet the environmental education challenge presented to us, PFSWCD has added virtual programs complete with videos, lesson plans, suggested activities, fact sheets and other resources to its website: https://www.peterfranciscoswcd.org/virtual-education-programs

PFSWCD is partnering with Buckingham Elementary/Middle and Cumberland Elementary/Middle schools to provide programs for their 21st Century Grants. We are currently working with Buckingham Cooperative Extension to provide a wildlife series to Buckingham Elementary School Beyond the Bell students. In addition to online weekly
programs through Google Classroom, the District is providing take home kits for hands-on activities. Students will make edible scat, play a survival game, match tracks for common North American wildlife, etc.

- “Where would we BEE without Pollinators?” poster contest is in full swing, and posters are due October 1.

**Conservation**
- The District has allocated 100% of our PY2021 VACS funding. Staff has been busy finalizing designs, scheduling pre-construction meetings for new projects and continuing to inspect/monitor projects carried-over from last program year.
COVID-19 District Response
Piedmont SWCD continues to comply with State guidelines in battling the Covid-19 virus, but at the same time trying to provide services to our clients and farmers. The USDA Service Center where we are located is still closed to visitors, but Piedmont is continuing to work and support our clients. Two employees are working in the office with two employees teleworking and making field visits. We anticipate this work place arrangement will continue through the end of the calendar year.

Education and Outreach
PSWCD is offering K-12 schools in the District, the opportunity to receive a ‘mini-grant’ to assist with creating or enhancing outdoor classroom spaces on school campuses. The grant funds can be used to purchase native and pollinator plants, establish garden areas, purchase resources to conduct investigative activities and purchase outdoor infrastructure such as seating and tables. Each school in our District has different approaches to instruction during the Fall semester. Several schools are ‘in-person’, several have delayed opening until later this Fall and some are offering virtual on-line learning for several weeks. Piedmont hopes the mini grants will facilitate in-person instruction with science and other curriculum disciplines.

PSWCD’s 2019-2020 Annual Report can be found on our website www.piedmontswcd.org.

Virginia Agricultural Cost Share Program
Piedmont finished the FY20 VACS program year with 100% obligation of cost share funding. Conservation Specialists, Charlie Wootton and Kevin Dunn, anticipate obligating FY21 funding at the same levels and have already completed numerous field visits and sign-ups.

319 Residential Septic Program
Piedmont has been awarded two 319 funded grants to address residential septic problems and pump-outs in TMDL watersheds. These grants are a continuation of the past two grants, which cover 9 watersheds and 3 counties.

No-till Drill Rental Program
PSWCD welcomes Brendan Burke to our team. Brendan coordinates our no-till drill rental program in three counties. He is responsible for scheduling, delivering and maintaining the 4 drills. Brendan is a native of Amelia County, where he resides on the family farm.
PITTSYLVANIA SWCD

Pittsylvania SWCD has been meeting with producers that are interested in FY21 projects and will be doing project approvals at our September Board Meeting. We are also continuing to work with producers as projects near completion. The District has added to our equipment program and purchased a 7 foot drill.

We are working towards starting an education program and are using this time to build resources as well as reach out to teachers and the community through social media. On September 10th we will host our Annual Agriculture Awareness day for Heritage Academy. We are appreciative of all the volunteers that will work within COVID guidelines to help make Ag Day happen on a smaller scale this year. Due to COVID restrictions we are unable to host the Agriculture Awareness Day for the public schools, however we will be holding a virtual Agriculture Awareness Day. Teachers, parents, and students will have access to videos on agriculture topics ranging from wildlife, conservation, field crops, livestock, dairy, forestry, and 4-H.

ROBERT E LEE SWCD

Staff Photo: Jonathan Wooldridge, Kyle Bolt, Hannah Tillotson, Cindy Miller
SOUTHSIDE SWCD

September has hit and we are already out of cost-share funding! We definitely need more cost-share funding here in Southside to assist our producers.

Engineering has begun on the two wave berm replacement projects with AMT. We will begin our fall mowing for general maintenance in mid-September.

The District is supporting the school systems as they request during these unusual times. We have provided maps and suggested activities that can be virtually or in an outdoor setting. We hope to be able to get back in the classrooms as soon as we can.

We hope everyone in all SWCD’s are staying safe and well.

Respectfully submitted,
Bruce Pearce, Area V Vice-Chairman
for
Wilkie Chaffin, Area V Chairman
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