HEADWATERS SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Administrative & Technical

- Our office and the Verona USDA Service Center remains closed to the public. District staff continue to telework and staff the office on a rotational basis.
- The COVID-19 Pandemic has not slowed down conservation efforts! There continues to be a high interest from local landowners and agricultural producers in water quality BMPs. Headwaters SWCD has received over 100 VACS applications to date in PY 2021, with 28 being for a stream exclusion practice.
- Our team has grown! We are pleased to introduce Christian Anderson and Matthew Baker. Both Conservation Technicians began employment with the District in October. We hope you have the opportunity to meet Christian and Matthew and help us welcome them!

Education

- Headwaters partnered with Earth Day Staunton and The Arcadia Project to create a window display at the old Dixie Theater on E. Beverly St. in Staunton for the month of April in celebration of Earth Day. If you plan on visiting downtown we hope you will stop by!

Flood Control Dams

- The District contracted the services of Schnabel engineering and Zion Marine for a mid-level gate installation at #26 Inch Branch. Contractors performed the install underwater and successfully equipped the riser with a 10-inch gate along with a new access ladder. This gives staff and landowners the ability to lower the water level by 8 feet for maintenance and storm preparation.

- Headwaters SWCD secured the services of RXFIRE to clear both upstream and downstream abutments at Stoney Creek. Contractors were tasked with removing trees, stumps and roots within the 25ft area required to be maintained by dam safety. Abutments were also reseeded and covered with biodegradable erosion control netting. RXFIRE specializes in land clearing/ prescribed burning and vegetation management along with other various maintenance items.
Technical Updates: The Strasburg field office continues to be closed to the public, so District staff are still working primarily from alternate spaces. There is high interest from landowners in conservation practices, though the rapidly rising cost of materials has caused some landowners to have to delay sign-up until FY 22, when costs will hopefully stabilize and the District will be able to update its average cost list to accurately reflect the increases. Cover crop checks are wrapping up, with staff reporting that all fields met coverage requirements. Sign up for cover crop practices has continued to be consistent, and our producers are very much looking forward to the extended planting deadlines in FY22.

We continue to have incredibly high demand for animal waste practices of all types, as well as stream exclusion and grazing management practices. As of 4-1-21 we have obligated over 60% of our FY21 allocation, and anticipate exceeding 90% by the end of the fiscal year.

Education Updates: LFSWCD is actively working with partner organizations to plan a variety of summer camps, Earth week events and educational opportunities. Currently we are working with VASWCD to help plan the virtual Youth Conservation Camp (YCC) equivalent camp, Virginia Academy of Natural Resources, as well as our annual summer camp with Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. For Earth Day/Week, we will be participating in a Drive-Thru event at Skyline High School in Front Royal, Virginia, contributing town clean-ups, and providing educational programming at a Farm Field Day in Shenandoah County.

For the Spring 2021 semester, we are providing a practicum for a George Mason University student attending the Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute. The student is completing multiple projects within the Strasburg Community Garden, including the following:

- Research on successful community gardens and urban agriculture initiatives – including mobile markets linking farmer’s markets, community gardens and food pantries
- Renovations to the handicap accessible garden plots and area – design and implementation
- Education programming plan for 2021 – new ideas on how to reach and engage the local community and garden plot holders
- General maintenance of the garden area – includes weekly mowing, transferring of rainwater to tanks in the garden, gleaning of produce, etc.
- Tracking harvest – creation of an easy to use process for managing donations and harvest
Mountain SWCD is co-hosting the Area I Envirothon with Headwaters. As things look differently this year Area I and Area II are collaborating together in order to utilize resources and volunteers (judges). The Envirothon training as well as the Envirothon competition will be all virtual. All staff involved have communicated regularly through zoom.

The District has recently updated the 4 year Strategic Plan.

Staff have participated in several trainings through zoom. Office Administrator participated in the Video Creation Workshop (3 part series) sponsored by VASWCD and the Thomas Jefferson SWCD. This has created a spark to get out into the field and take more pictures of actual work on the ground.

Staff very busy with BMP sign up/follow up visits.
MOUNTAIN CASTLES SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

- Since the beginning of 2021, MCSWCD has had 6 new VACS signups.

- MCSWCD has allocated approximately 1/3 of the CB VACS Budget - If the remainder of the new signups get approved, the District is expected to be have a total allocation of approximately 75-80% with 3 months left in the fiscal year.

- Most projects thus far have been SL-6N or SL-6W.

- All of the OCB Funding has been allocated for the program year.

- Dam Mowing & Maintenance won the bid for the work to install the Remote Monitoring Kits (Monitors to be installed at Johns Creek Dams #1 and #2 by May 26th).

- MCSWCD is planning to repave the access road at Dam #2 in an attempt to reduce erosion in the spillway and maintain safety.

- MCSWCD received a new three-year residential septic grant from DEQ, effective October 1.

- The district has received two new education grants, including a $16,000 Appalachian Trail Conservancy Community Grant for the development and implementation of a “Plant & Animal Relatives of the Blue Ridge” 2nd grade curriculum, which will include school gardens at eight schools. The district also received a community grant from Rocky Forge Wind for the development of an 8th grade unit on renewable energy and wind turbines.
Due to state-wide mandates as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the NBSWCD staff continue to telework when possible, but are also rotating in-office days each week. Conservation staff are conducting site visits as normal (with necessary safety precautions), but no visitors are allowed in the office.

The Buffalo Creek TMDL Grant expired December 31, 2020 and the District plans to reapply for funding the Woods Creek TMDL project later this year. While previous applications were not selected, we have gained valuable feedback from DEQ staff on how to strengthen our chances for approval on our next submission.

The Springs of Rockbridge project is near completion but was delayed due to COVID. Washington and Lee interns working on the project were not available for several months, so collecting samples was not possible during that time. Sherri Tombarge has provided the District with a thorough analysis of the work completed thus far, and it is impressive. Anyone interested in learning more can visit our website or contact Lisa Howe at (540) 460-0544.

District staff have been actively updating the website and continue to do so as time allows.

Although conservation staff have had to work around COVID restrictions in terms of site visits, they have continued to be in touch with local landowners to discuss available funding programs. Cost-Share contracts are numerous, and the District surpassed goals for FY 20-21.

The District welcomed a new director, Herbie Huffman, due to the sudden resignation of Roy Swartz. Herbie is representing the community of Buena Vista.
Kudos to the Shenandoah Conservation All Stars, our office Envirothon Team, for their 2nd place finish in the VASWCD’s Mock Envirothon Competition. Our team was comprised of District Staff including Megan Trice (Team Captain), Shayna Carter, and Felicity Zimmerman, and our Conservation Partners Cory Guilliams and Phil Davis. The team was tested on their knowledge of Aquatics, Forestry, Soils and Wildlife. They enjoyed experiencing how a virtual version of the Envirothon event will work and being able to provide feedback to help with the State Contest.

The SVSWCD supported Turner Ashby High School with their February Tree Sale again this year by assisting with inventory management, placing bulk tree orders, and processing online payments through PayPal. District staff will also help with tree wrapping and distribution in late March.

Congratulations to Keith Thomas for receiving the State Earth Team Award for his efforts in supporting the VAGraze program. Keith is a former District Conservation Technician and continues to be a valuable resource, not only to the SVSWCD in his current role as an Associate Director, but also to our conservation partner NRCS. Keith’s nomination has been advanced for regional and national award consideration.

Warmer weather creates excitement to resume outside activities. The Shenandoah Valley SWCD has two Rainbarrel Workshops planned and a third one in the works for the upcoming Spring and Summer months. Workshop participants can maintain a social distance while constructing an inexpensive tool that helps to save money and conserves water at the same time. SVSWCD has a good stock of rain barrels available for bulk purchase by other Districts. For more information, contact Chelsea Trice at chelsea.trice@svswcd.org.