ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

EQIP, CSP, RCPP, VPA-HIP, CIG, TSP and Easement Programs

Field staff are currently managing 2,082 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent $117,748,161 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 455,549 acres.

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**
  Received 1,208 EQIP applications submitted by the Dec. 18 deadline, a 17% increase over those received in FY20. Preapproved 377 EQIP applications for $21.5 million. Obligated 60 contracts for $3.7 million. Approved 83 applications for $4.6 million.

- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)–Classic, Renewals & GCI**
  Obligated $3.6 million for 47 CSP renewals on 24,387 acres. This represents a 67% increase in funding, a 51% increase in contracts obligated and a 48% increase in acres enrolled over FY20. Also funded 15 CSP-GCI-1 contracts for $43,090.

  Completed 1,065 CSP Renewals, Classic, and GCI payments totaling $1,848,245 for 444 participants.

- Received 320 CSP Classic applications.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**

Capital Region Land Conservancy and Trout Unlimited RCPP proposals were selected for funding.

- Capital Region Land Conservancy award will address the accelerating threat of farmland conversion by implementing Conservation Easements on 2,500 to 10,000 acres. The award amount was $2,081,169. Target Area: Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent, Powhatan and the City of Richmond.

- Trout Unlimited, Inc. award improve in-stream habitat and water quality in high priority headwater streams in three Virginia watersheds estimating that over seven miles of stream habitat and 15 miles of eroding streambanks will be restored. The award amount was $2,906,389. Target Area: Rockingham, Page, Augusta, Highland, Bath, Rockbridge and Shenandoah.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
  Closed 3 ALE easements on 252 acres in Loudoun and Stafford counties and initiated 4 new applications with funding requests for $5.4 million on 1,767 acres.

- **Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP)**
  Coordinating with VA Dept. of Wildlife Resources on FY21 launch of new VPA-HIP project focused in Southwest Virginia’s Coalfields region.
• **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**
  Offering $300K for state CIG focused on research, demonstrations, outreach, and educational initiatives to advance adoption of soil health management practices in the Commonwealth. Deadline for applications was June 18, 2021. We are now awaiting the list of grant applications for review.

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**Engineering (SCE)**

**Dam Rehabilitation**

- **Beaver Creek 1** The planning effort is being locally led by the Sponsor, Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA). RWSA has retained Schnabel Engineering as their consultant. The planning process is ongoing. Preliminary engineering is close to completion. The planning period will take 18 to 24 months. Project is on schedule.

- **Cherrystone Creek 1** The Town of Chatham has submitted a request for funding to develop a final design to implement the recommended alternative from the dam rehab planning process that was completed in 2019. The funding request will be submitted to NHQ by the end of June. Notification about funding is expected at the start of the next FY.

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**State Resource Conservationist (SRC)**

**Technical Tools (Field Office Technical Guide)**

- Issued updated Virginia bulletins to keep staff current with CRP policy changes and provide contract information to field staff to complete required annual status reviews. Distributed a new version of the CREP participation calculator to help staff market the program. Joint agency CRP call to coordinate collaboration with all agencies and provide engagement at the local level with this partnership program to address resource concerns and effectively deliver Farm Bill programs.

- Distributed a new state bulletin to remind and clarify the requirements and transition deadline of January 1, 2022 for legacy/Previously certified planners.

- Issued a state bulletin describing the new national and state supplement Prescribed Burn Policy.

- Continue to expand the use of the Geoportal to provide technical tools and geospatial products for planners including a new wetland layer that inventories our Wetland Compliance determinations; acquisition of historic imagery to provide for more efficient and effective mechanisms to determine wetland compliance; stream study layers working with USGS, WERMS layers with VDWR, VDCR Natural Heritage T&E data; CEAP/SVI layers; and FA/SPI with Troy University agreement.

- Advanced development on using Survey123 and mobile devices to document, create reports, and provide corrective action follow-up with Ecological Science Spot Checks.

- Continue to explore with partners and prepare for a shift towards greater emphasis in our soil health work on carbon sequestration and climate issues.
Training to Field Staff

- Due to the continued Covid-19 training and travel restrictions, the team was challenged to forage new opportunities to conducted Joint Employee Development (JED) trainings to strengthen and expand NRCS and partner employee’s knowledge and skills. Utilizing weekly SRC webinars in place of traditional in-person meetings allowed us to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to field staff. These training sessions resulted in approximately 3,000 field staff and 2,305 partners being trained in 46 different training opportunities this year to-date. A few new activities since the last quarterly update include:
  - Continued FY2021 CD/CART/Farmers.gov updates, releases, and new features.
  - Prescribed Burn Awareness training
  - Joint agency trainings organized with VASWCD, Nutrient management Fundamentals
  - Cultural Resources training
  - Joint agency (FSA, NRCS, DCR, DOF) CRP call on updates and an overview of the new FMI program
  - Presented on a national ENTSC webinar with Dr. Greg Halich, University of Kentucky, on a new overwintering strategy to manage nutrients, soils, and forages for livestock.

Customer Service and Outreach

- Helped train, coordinate, and facilitate 8 partnership outreach events where over 1,651 participants attended this year to-date. These outreach events strive to strengthen and expand NRCS partnership activities to achieve common goals, address critical resource concerns and accelerate conservation.
  - Partnered with VFGC, Va Tech, Extension and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to conduct the 2-day intensive grazing school for 14 producers to learn the principles of pasture and grazing management coupled with hands-on field exercises on using temporary electric fencing, pasture condition assessment and pasture allocation for grazing livestock.
  - Partnered with VA Tech, Extension, Hanover Caroline SWCD and NatGLC to host pasture walk at Swallow Hill Farm with 40 participants attended learning about the CIG project of converting fescue-based pastures to NWSG’s.

- Participated in 11 different soil health events where NRCS organized outreach and training with partners and was a keynote presenter this year to-date. This included 2,044 agency staff, partners, industry, and producers learning and sharing together, a key feature of the VA Soil Health Initiative. Since the 2013 Soil Health Kickoff event in VA, NRCS has helped organize and lead 291 soil health events which were attended by over 25,884 participants and heard the NRCS principles on soil health.
  - Coordinated VSHC presentation at May State Technical Committee webinar featuring Mary Sketch and Michael Flessner. Focus was on conveying importance of CIG as a funding source for VA soil health work.
  - Participated as an invited speaker at a grazing field day hosted by Extension where 20 producers attended to learn more about using annual forages in transition to perennials for building soil health and developing grazing systems.
State Soil Scientist (SSS)

LiDAR acquisition
Below has been flown for new QL2 lidar this month in cooperation with FEMA, NFS and USGS. Quality assurance process has begun.

National Resources Inventory Update
- NRI Grazing land data collection has begun across the state for FY21’s collection period.
- NRI Local Data collection has been completed for FY19 and was completed in January.
- 2017 NRI data summaries were published this early Fall for use by planners.
Soil Survey Update

- Held multiple technical team and management team meetings with Virginia’s MLRA project leaders for soil survey update projects occurring in the state in FY21. The review process has begun prior to the new September refresh upload date of all 108 VA soil survey areas to the web soil survey.
- Assisting a detailed resource soil scientist in Area 1’s workload.
- Held amoozemeter training for soil health data collectors.
- Partnered with soil survey region 3 to borrow a refrigerated trailer for soil samples to be taken to Va Tech for soil biologic soil health analysis. Dynamic Soil Properties data was also acquired.

Virginia created 66,653 separate Area of Interests (AOI) on the Web Soil Survey since the beginning of 2021 Fiscal Year, stretching the NRCS customer base very far and wide.
NRCS REPORT
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting
June 24, 2021 ♦ Virtual

Public Affairs (PAS)

Communications/Outreach

Minority Producers. Helped coordinate Deputy Secretary Bronaugh’s May 26 visit to speak on the historic debt relief available for socially disadvantaged producers through the American Rescue Plan. The program, which was held at VSU’s Gateway Dining Hall and Events Center, included a closed session farmer roundtable, public town hall meeting and Q&A session with the press.

NRCS in the News. Reviewed/edited VDOF Forestry Liaison’s *Virginia Forests* magazine article highlighting NRCS assistance for forest management plan development and implementation.

Soil Health Partnerships/Networking. Collaborating with VCE and the Virginia Soil Health Coalition to help launch the 4TheSoil public education and awareness campaign on June 23, World Soil Health Day. NRCS staff served on the planning committee for this initiative, reviewed/edited the announcement release and will reach out to partners to potentially leverage their social media accounts to expand the audience for this message.

Social Media Engagement. Between April 1 and June 24, posted 17 tweets to the @NRCS_VA account in the third quarter, gaining 4 new followers and garnering 2,221 visits. Top tweet for the period: Undersecretary Bronaugh visit to VSU to discuss the American Rescue Plan.

Spring Meetings. Shared information on NRCS programs and services available for small farmers in virtual USDA Information Session on April 22. The next session in this series from VSU’s Small Farm Outreach Program will be held on June 24 and target Wythe and Bland counties.

Earth Team Program

Featured David Pace (Warrenton) and Keith Thomas (Harrisonburg) in web spotlights and digital bulletins for National Volunteer Week (April 18-24). Also highlighted Area I staff who volunteered at COVID vaccine clinics and debuted new infographic outlining the benefits of participating in volunteer programs. Coordinating in-person presentation of SE Region Outstanding Individual Volunteer Award to Keith Thomas in Harrisonburg and continuing to look for ways to link new volunteer prospects to local district staff to expand service opportunities.

Admin (ASTC-M&S)

Virginia NRCS Personnel Changes

Retirements:
Tom Smith, District Conservationist, Wytheville, 4/24/2021
Don Yancey, District Conservationist, Rustburg, 5/31/2021
Upcoming Retirements:
Darrell Reynolds, Soil Conservation Technician, Rocky Mount, 7/31/2021
Donna Heidel, Administrative Coordinator, Harrisonburg, 10/31/21

Personnel Added:
Elizabeth Hinton, Soil Conservationist, Tappahannock Service Center, 4/26/2021
Justin Brill, Soil Conservation Technician, Bonsack Service Center, 6/7/2021
Thomas Burke, Forester, State Office, 6/7/2021
Lauren Cheatham, Soil Conservationist, Rustburg Service Center, 6/7/2021
Matthew Dalton, Soil Conservation Technician, Chatham Service Center, 6/7/2021
Caroline Lancaster, Soil Conservationist, Warsaw Service Center, 6/7/2021
Jordan Lutz, Civil Engineer Technician, Farmville Area Office, 6/7/2021
Bryce Yoder, Civil Engineer Technician, Harrisonburg Area Office, 6/20/2021
Andrew Bostic, Civil Engineer Technician, Abingdon Service Center, 6/20/2021