

Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Division Director's Report

December 6, 2021

Prepared by Darryl M. Glover;
DCR Deputy Director, DS/FB, and Soil and Water Conservation

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

New Soil and Water Conservation Division Director

James Martin, who has been Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Program Manager at DEQ, has returned home to DCR as the new Division Director of the Division of Soil and Water Conservation! His first day back at DCR was November 10.

BMP Verification

In October, the Department notified applicable Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in the Chesapeake Bay watershed that they will be compensated for calendar 2020 and 2021 end of lifespan (EOL) agricultural best management practice (BMP) verification inspections. Eligible SWCDs should use an invoice template, provided by the department, and submit it, no later than December 31, 2021, for each verification inspection completed and attempted. Payment made to SWCDs by the department for verification inspections can be deposited into FY22 Technical Assistance accounts and used for any technical assistance expenditures.

The Department has worked with SWCDs this year to complete edits to stream exclusion practices installed during program years (PY) 2019 - 2021 to fix issues with discrepancies related to data entered for buffer areas. The effort to edit the PY 2021 practices was completed and resulted in a significant increase in the number of buffer acres that will be reported for use in the Chesapeake Bay Model. 209 stream exclusion practices were edited for PY 2021 which resulted in an additional 1,310 acres of buffer area statewide, of which 424 acres were in the Bay and are reportable to the EPA Bay Model. Edits for PY 2019 and 2020 practices were completed in October, and resulted in an additional 1,626 buffer acres in the Bay watershed, and 2,382 additional acres in the rest of the state. The Department thanks all of the SWCDs for their diligent work on completing this data cleanup effort.

Due to the success of this process, the Department has initiated an additional cleanup effort, within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, to fix data discrepancies for practices with buffer areas completed during PY 2017 and PY 2018. 329 practices spanning 19 SWCDs have been identified in the Bay watershed that have buffer area discrepancies that need to be corrected. This additional buffer data cleanup effort will launch on November 15 and has a deadline of April 15, 2022 to have the data corrections completed. While this is a significant amount of work for affected SWCDs, the benefit of additional acres of riparian buffer to report to the Chesapeake Bay Model is important.

As previously reported, the Department has been able to extend the federal funding awarded for the cover crop survey through March 2022 and has funding for the next conservation tillage survey through June 2022. Due to the amount of additional work SWCDs in the Bay watershed have been asked to do, the Department is contracting the cover crop survey out to Virginia Commonwealth University. This survey will be conducted over the winter break between semesters, using photographs from the edge of fields and a web application, with a completion date by the end of January 2022. SWCDs in the Chesapeake Bay watershed will be invited to participate in the tillage survey next spring, also using web applications to minimize/eliminate the need to enter any property, and SWCDs will be compensated for this work.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The Department is working with USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service on their Virginia Tribal Summit on either March 16, or an alternate date of April 6, 2022.

On November 19 – 20, 2021, DCR Deputy Director DS/FP/DSWC, Darryl Glover, and DSWC Western Area Manager Jim Echols, attended the Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach Program (VSU-SFOP) annual conference in Roanoke Virginia. Over 100 small farmers, mostly persons of color, were in attendance. Glover spoke about the importance of working with Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Follow up communication with VSU-SFOP after this conference has resulted in a commitment to begin contacting SWCD Managers and other staff within their outreach project area to invite SWCDs to farm visits and other project-related events.

Recently, VSU-SFOP completed a translation of several Department program fliers into Spanish. They will add the VSU logo as well as the Department's logo and distribute these materials in both English and Spanish within their project area.

COVID-19 has impacted planning, but if conditions improve, VSU-SFOP will also begin scheduling the 16 field events called for in the project deliverables. These will be included in a schedule of activities that will be circulated to SWCDs within the project area. This outreach project has been amended to also include a survey of farmers of color to determine what percentage of these farmers have applied for and/or been approved for either federal or state financial or technical assistance for agricultural best management practices over the last few years. Results of this survey will be presented to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board at their meeting in March 2022.

Department Staff and Offices

The Department congratulates Jim Echols, DCR- DSWC Western Area Manager on his upcoming retirement on February 1! Jim has been with the state for over 20 years and will be sorely missed. His position will be advertised immediately in the hope that his successor will have an opportunity to work with Jim for a week or two.

The Department will also soon be hiring or interviewing a Nutrient Management Program Manager, a Nutrient Management Training and Certification Manager, a Grants Manager, and a permanent part-time position with the Shoreline Erosion Advisory Service (SEAS).