

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Districts Annual Meeting
December 4-6, 2022
Hotel Roanoke
110 Shenandoah Avenue NE • Roanoke, Virginia 24016

State Conservationist (STC) Highlights

- **Smith Creek Partnership (2010)** – Established to foster conservation collaboration in our Chesapeake Bay Showcase Watershed. Continued long after the Maryland and Pennsylvania projects wrapped due to the community of committed partners involved in the effort. More than 20 groups, including the Shenandoah Valley SWCD, joined forces to help farmers and residential landowners voluntarily implement best management practices to reduce nutrient and sediment runoff into the Chesapeake Bay.
- **Soil Health Initiative (2013)** – This ongoing partnership effort has been highly successful in increasing awareness and adoption of four core management principles. NRCS established the Virginia Soil Health Coalition as part of the 2013 launch to strengthen coordination and provide a consistent message to producers. Outreach tools such as the “Gaining Ground” and “Common Ground Soil Stories” videos were great examples of this partnership in action. In May 2020, we finalized the *Virginia NRCS Strategic Plan for Soil Health Promotion & Implementation*, which formalized many of our existing strategies and outlined priorities for state-level soil health activities. The next year, the coalition teamed up with Virginia Cooperative Extension to launch the 4theSoil campaign to further extend our reach.
- **State-Level CIGs (ongoing)** – Between 2010 and 2021, Virginia NRCS provided more than \$1.7 million in funding to support 41 partnership projects to evaluate and accelerate adoption of new approaches to natural resource protection. The program has been a pillar of our soil health strategy, supporting numerous demonstration projects. CIG and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) initiatives implemented throughout the commonwealth are changing the landscape for the better by enhancing soil health, reducing damaging impacts of invasive species, protecting threatened and endangered species, and reducing nutrient and sediment runoff for improved water quality.

Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (ASTC-P)

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

Field staff are currently managing 2,207 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent \$137 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 470,400 acres.

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**
Received 1,047 EQIP applications. Applications are currently being assessed and evaluated by field staff. Added at statewide Urban Agriculture fund pool. Received an FY23 EQIP allocation of \$24.5 million.

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- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)–Classic, Renewals & GCI**
Preapproved 125 CSP Renewal applications for \$8.5 million. Preapproved 16 CSP-GCI applications. Received 218 FY23 CSP Classic applications. Received an FY23 CSP allocation of \$21.5 million.

- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
NRCS funded a new partnership project with the Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley that will focus on funding easement acquisitions in the Shenandoah Valley. Total obligations since 2015 now stand at \$10 million for 417 contracts tied to 10 projects.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
Received 6 ALE applications from three partner organizations. Currently 7 ALE acquisitions are in progress. Existing recorded easements now total 146 on 17,112 acres of farm and wetland.

- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**
Awarded \$395,351 for Virginia Tech and the Clifton Institute state CIG proposals. The Virginia Tech project will focus on soil health on grazing lands and the Clifton Institute project will be centered around pollinator habitat restoration. Virginia NRCS is currently managing 10 active CIG projects throughout the state.

- **Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)**
Virginia NRCS continues to assist DWR with VPA-HIP. The program now has 23,000 acres enrolled in the Coalfields region of Southwest Virginia. Enrolled acres consist of 13 elk viewing properties, 12 elk hunting properties, 24 birding trail sites and 350 acres of managed habitat sites.

Engineering (SCE)

Dam Rehabilitation

- **Beaver Creek 1**
The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) is the sponsor for the locally led planning effort and has retained Schnabel Engineering as their consultant. The draft environmental assessment is currently out for public and interagency review. The final environmental assessment is projected to be ready March 2023.

- **Cherrystone Creek 1 and Cherrystone Creek 2A**
Pittsylvania County is the sponsor for the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structures and has retained Schnabel Engineering as their consultant. NRCS and the

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county have signed separate cooperative agreements to obligate the funding. The consultant has started the design process, which is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.

- **John's Creek 1**

Mountain Castles SWCD is the sponsor for the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structure. NRCS has requested funding.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)

- NRCS is providing disaster assistance to Buchanan County through the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) for a rain event in the Hurley area on August 30 (estimated 6-8 inches). NRCS and Buchanan County completed damage survey reports (DSRs) for 4 county-identified sites. Funding for 3 eligible sites was received in mid-January 2022 and the EWP agreement was finalized on March 15, 2022. Buchanan County is currently working through the engineering design, permitting, and scheduling for the approved sites.
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State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

Technical Tools (Field Office Technical Guide)

Continue to maintain the Virginia Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) as a repository of technical resources and references to include conservation practice standards, technical notes, planning criteria, resource concerns, conservation practice physical effects, cost lists and the Virginia Plant Establishment Guide.

- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-503, Forestry Technical Note 5 on Shelterbelts for Livestock.
- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-504, Revised Ecological Science Practice Standards for FY2023.
- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-505, Pest Management guide for common weeds and brush on pasture, hay land and grasslands.
- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-506, Pasture Planting Cost Estimate Tool to assist planners in applying pasture and hay plantings.
- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-507, Conservation Practice Physical Effect (CPPE) and Resource Management System (RMS) planning tool.
- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-508, Plant Establishment Guide revisions.
- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-509, Resource Concerns and Planning Criteria update for FY2023.

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- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-510, Revised Engineering Practice Standards for FY2023.
- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-511, Wetland Job Approval Authority update.
- Released Virginia FOTG Notice 450-23-512, Invasive Species References to assist in identifying common invasive species and general control recommendations.
- Released Virginia Bulletin 180-23-1, which provides reminders on the Virginia Conservation Planning Policy and Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority.
- Released Virginia Bulletin 180-23-2, which provides guidance on permitting, the NRCS-CPA-52 and the new Ecological Sciences Practice Cover Sheet.
- Released Virginia Bulletin 180-23-3, which provides updated FY2023 NRCS Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Practice List.

Training to Field Staff

- Continue the use of SRC webinars in place of tradition in-person meetings, allowing us to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to field staff:
 - October 15 – FY23 Programs Rollout (82 participants)
 - November 2 – FY23 Ecological Sciences Rollout (85 participants)
 - November 9 – Engineering Emergency Animal Mortality
 - November 16 – Conservation with the Army Corps of Engineers (82 participants)
 - Continuing the RUSLE2@2 office hours help sessions for staff and partners.
 - Continuing the soil health assessment workgroup discussions and soil health outreach meetings to emphasize and evaluate the effectiveness of soil health assessment and outreach/training.
- Scheduled in-the-field JED trainings for the first time in over two years due to COVID training and travel restrictions, focusing on outdoor events and under 20 staff attendees:
 - National Soil Health Division Soil Health and Sustainability training for NRCS planner certification delivered October 4-6.
 - National Conservation Planning modules 6-8 training for NRCS planner certification delivered October through November.
 - Delivered 8 Soil Health Dig & Demo field trainings across the state in October and November.

Customer Service and Outreach

- Provided four 30-minute presentations at the VSU Farm Field Day describing forage and livestock systems demonstration site and how we used warm season and cool season

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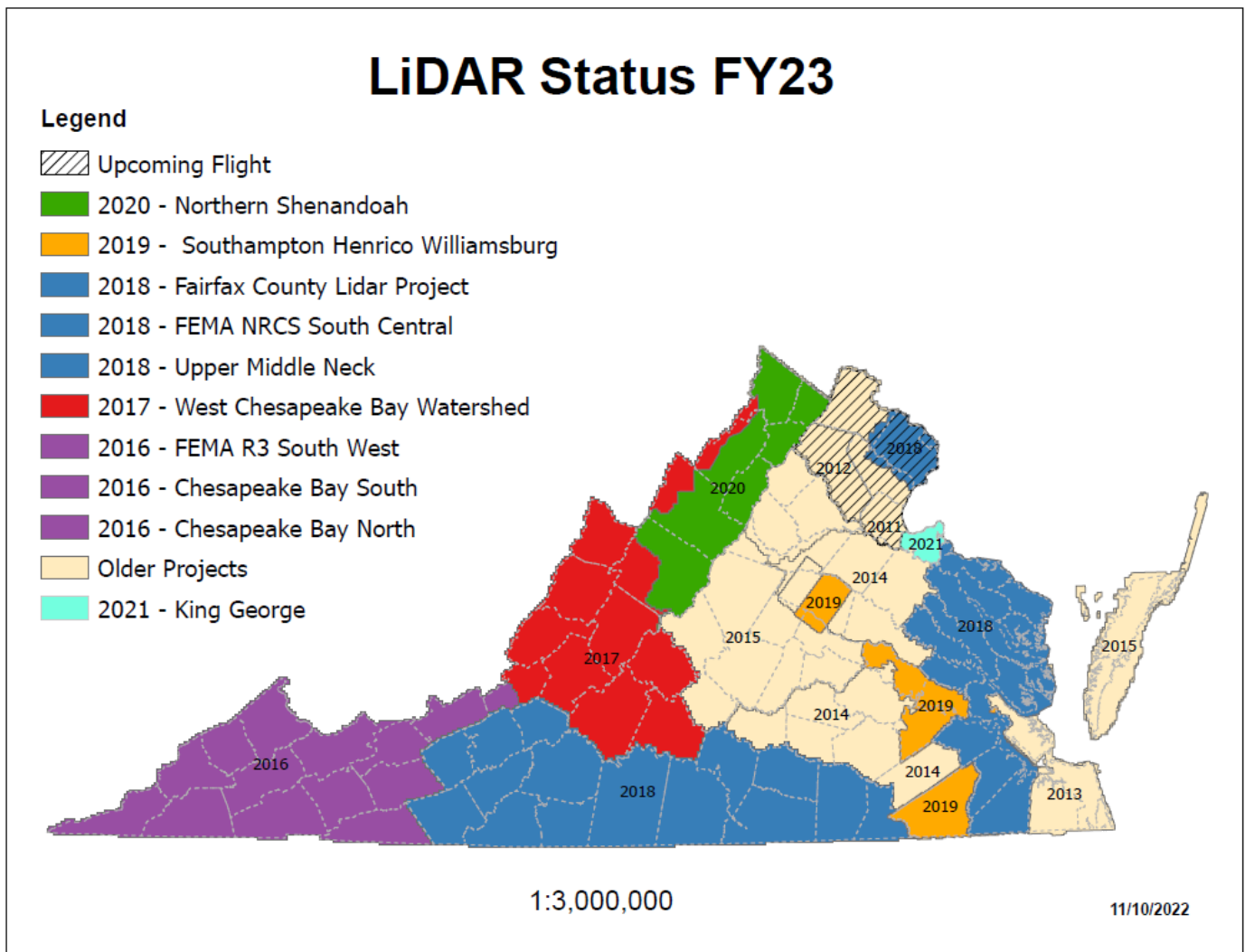
perennial forages to increase and balance the production system to meet livestock needs. Presented to 100 participants and encouraged them to contact their local conservationist to discuss technical and financial assistance that is available.

- Collaborated with Public Affairs to migrate and update the Virginia website.

State Soil Scientist (SSS)

LiDAR-

In partnership with the USGS, there will be flights in the Loudoun, Stafford, Prince William Fairfax, and Fauquier counties this December for new LiDAR acquisition.



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Soil Survey Update

All 108 soil survey area's soils data in Web Soil Survey have been updated for FY 23. Some soil interpretations were made better during this refresh. If your district uses a soil downloaded layer for conservation work in your district, they should download the latest copy.

Public Affairs (PAS)

Communications/Outreach

- **Conservation/STEM Education.** Collaborated with Harvie Elementary School staff to deliver an educational program on agricultural professions for CAMP3401 on July 26. This summer career exploration camp used project-based learning and real-life experiences to introduce rising fifth and sixth graders to various occupations and demonstrate how the required skills are connected to reading and math. The Henricopolis SWCD donated ice cream for a wrap-up activity highlighting the food value chain. Many of the rising sixth graders will attend Fairfield Middle School, where NRCS is already working to support Virginia's new People's Garden. Fairfield Middle School also hosted a "round robin Q & A" where their Backyard Urban Gardening (B.U.G.) students interviewed NRCS along with Henricopolis SWCD and RVA Black Farmers Market. The students asked questions about the importance of agriculture on the community and used the information they obtained to write letters to the school's administration inviting them to a future Fall Fest event.
- **Feds Feed Families.** Kicked off state activities for this annual summer food drive with a July 21 gleaning event at Holyoke Farm in Lancaster. A team of 11 volunteers harvested 2,965 pounds of sweet corn for distribution through the Healthy Harvest Food Bank that services the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula and Greater Richmond areas. Seven USDA agency volunteers also packaged prepared food products at Feed More on Sept. 8 for distribution to Meals on Wheels and other clients. The summer food drive yielded a total of 3,240 pounds of individual and group donations.
- **Minority Farmer Recognition.** Solicited statewide nominations for the Virginia NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee's 2022 Farmer of the Year award. The outreach subcommittee received six strong nominations this year, the highest number submitted since the inception of this recognition effort in 2009. The winner, Thelonius Cook, was presented the award at the Virginia Small Farm Conference on Nov. 3 in Portsmouth.
- **NRCS in the News.** Released a story map on the Fairfield Middle School People's Garden on July 6 through the state website, Twitter, and GovDelivery. An "Augusta Free Press" article was picked up in the July 7 NRCS national news clips and generated an invitation to

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appear on the July 29 “12 About Town” noon show

(<https://www.nbc12.com/video/2022/07/29/people-garden-fairfield-middle-school-highlights-community-nutrition/>).

Also showcased the strength of our district partnerships in the June 28 Water & Runoff episode of “Virginia Home Grown,” which featured an in-studio interview with Mat Lyons and a pre-recorded segment with Harrisonburg DC Cory Guilliams and Shenandoah SWCD District Manager Megan Dalton at the Hone Quarry Dam.

- **Social Media Engagement.** Leveraged state Twitter account to publicize programs, tie ag to current events and implement campaigns like 4theSoil. Posted **12** tweets between June 20 and Sept. 2 that yielded more than **2.7K** impressions. Top tweet: #Throwback Thursday Launch of 4theSoil (**297** impressions).
- **Other Outreach Highlights.** Shared information on NRCS programs and services at the Virginia Ag Expo in Port Royal (Aug. 4), Ethnic Crop Production and Marketing workshop in Orange (Aug. 13), the Nansemond Indian Nation Pow Wow in Suffolk (Aug. 20-21), VA Women’s Learning Circle Field Day (Aug. 24), VSU College of Agriculture Field Day (Sept. 1), VSU’s Small Farm Outreach Annual Conference (Nov. 3-4), Fairfield Middle School’s Fall Fest at Cornerstone Farm (Nov. 5), and over 20 other outreach activities. Staff members networked with more than 3,000 producers, community members and students attending these outreach events.

Earth Team Program

Public Affairs Co-hosted a joint training webinar with VASWCD on July 22 to update district and NRCS staff on recent changes in the process for registering new volunteers and tracking their service. Toni Flax from the national office provided a comprehensive overview of program changes and introduced attendees to the new tracking system to help them understand the rationale behind them. Attendees and registrants received the meeting recording, presentation, and current forms. Reached out to NRCS and district staff to solicit nominations for 2022 state and national Earth Team awards. The Earth Team Advisory Committee reviewed submissions and the state winner will be announced at the 2022 Annual Meeting.

Assistant State Conservationist for Management & Strategy (ASTC-M&S)

Virginia NRCS Personnel Changes:

Positions Filled

Acting ASTC-FO Area I, Harrisonburg Area Office: Charlie Ivins
District Conservationist, Warrenton Service Center: Casey James
District Conservationist, Amelia Service Center: Tara Ciavarella
Outreach Coordinator, State Office: Telicia Berry

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Administrative Assistant, Harrisonburg Area Office: Brenda Craig

Positions Vacated

William Hoffer – Civil Engineer Technician, Farmville, 07/15/22
Rosiel Grajales-Cortes – Soil Conservationist, Warrenton, 07/15/22
Megan Mauk – Soil Conservationist Technician, Harrisonburg, 07/29/22
Dwight Dean – Soil Conservationist, Emporia, 08/15/22
Kathy Holm – ASTC-FO Area 1, Harrisonburg, 08/26/22
Bryan Krouse – Civil Engineering Technician, Warsaw, 9/9/22
Tara Ciavarella – Soil Conservationist, Charlotte Court House, 9/11/22
Casey James – Soil Conservationist, Warrenton, 9/11/22
Matthew Carroll – District Conservationist, Hanover, 9/16/22
Barbara Bowen – Public Affairs Specialist, 11/10/2022
Arellys Ortiz-Arroyo – Area Resource Conservationist, 11/18/2022
Patrick Vincent – ASTC-Programs, 12/2/2022

Retirements

Keith Boyd, ASTC-Field Operations, Smithfield. 11/30/22
Robin Piques, Financial Resources Specialist, State Office, 12/31/22
Anthony Howell, District Conservationist, Dinwiddie, 12/31/2022
Tony Rhoton, Soil Con Technician, Jonesville, 12/31/2022