

NRCS REPORT
Virginia Soil & Water Conservation Districts Quarterly Meeting
March 15, 2023 • Drury Plaza Hotel, Richmond, Virginia

State Conservationist's Highlights

- **SWCD assistance** is essential for us to be able to address our agency goals: equity in all programs, climate smart agriculture and forestry, urban agriculture efforts, diverse workforce and leveraging innovative partnerships.
- **Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)** provides \$19.5 billion to NRCS over five years to support programs that yield climate change mitigation benefits. Please help Virginia NRCS promote this opportunity. The inflation reduction act translates into tons opportunities: for our landowners, conservation partners and our NRCS teams regarding staffing capacity, environmental benefits, research, opportunities for our agriculture and forestry sectors, benefits for the Chesapeake Bay watersheds, and certainly our state's economy. Virginia received \$2.5 million for EQIP-IRA and \$4.3 million for CSP-IRA, application deadline for both is March 17, 2023. ACEP-WRE IRA has some priority areas in Virginia; these applications will compete nationally, application deadline is March 17, 2023.
- **Locally Working Group** guide is available and local coordination and collaboration is the key to this process.
- **The Virginia Security Corridor Sentinel Landscapes Initiative** – The Team completed and submitted a Tier 2 proposal to the Federal Coordinating Committee on February 17th. This is a partnership to meet military, working lands and waters, conservation, and economic development priorities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Sentinel Landscapes is an initiative led by U.S. Dept. of Defense, U.S. Dept. of Interior, and U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. Additional key partners are the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.
- **Virginia NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG):** Priorities for FY 2023: \$400K budget: Soil Health and Forestry Emphasis. The call for proposals will be out soon.
- **Chesapeake Bay States' Partnership Initiative** – The National Office is currently assessing state needs under this initiative in FY22 we received \$6.25 million; \$1 million for EQIP, \$500k for CSP, and \$4.75 million for ACEP.
- **Urban Agriculture Partnership** – Ongoing urban agriculture efforts in the city of Richmond with the People's Garden Initiative and our assessment for a potential urban agriculture office.

ASTC-Programs (ASTC-P)

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

Field staff are currently managing 2,100 active conservation program contracts with our participants. These contracts represent \$141 million in financial assistance to Virginia farmers on nearly 468,533 acres.

- **Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)**
Received and ranked 1031 EQIP applications. Applications are currently being evaluated for preapprovals. Secured \$994,655 for funding the Joint Chiefs Eastern Divide Restoration Project. Received a total EQIP allocation of \$22.18 million.

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- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)–Classic, Renewals & GCI**
Obligated \$7.42 million for 117 CSP renewals on 46,130 acres, a 41% increase in contracts obligated over FY22. Funded 14 CSP-GCI contracts for \$39,280 (all applications submitted).
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**
Currently managing 16 active contracts with total funding of \$2 million covering 6,687.6 acres. Proposal announcement to be released soon.
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
Received 9 ALE applications on 2,433 acres.
- **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)**
Currently, finalizing State CIG proposal with \$400k available to support the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands.

Engineering (SCE)

Staffing Updates

- NRCS Virginia will have the upcoming advertisements. Both positions will be in Richmond.
 - Hydraulics Engineer
 - Dam Safety Engineer

Dam Rehabilitation

- **Beaver Creek 1**
The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) is overseeing the locally led planning effort and has retained Schnabel Engineering as its consultant. The final supplemental plan EA has been developed. The NRCS plan authorization process is ongoing.
- **Cherrystone Creek 1 and Cherrystone Creek 2A**
Pittsylvania County is leading the locally led design effort for rehabilitating the structures. Pittsylvania County has retained Schnabel Engineering as its consultant. The design process is ongoing. The design is estimated to take 18 to 24 months.
- **Johns Creek 1**
Funding has been secured for the rehabilitation design. Mountain Castles SWCD will be the sponsor for the locally led project. The agreement between NRCS and the SWCD is in progress.

Emergency Watershed Protection (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 has submitted final designs for the sites. Construction is anticipated to begin in March 2023 and will be completed by the end of June.
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State Resource Conservationist (SRC)

Chris Bradshaw is currently acting State Resource Conservationist for Virginia for 120 days or until the position is filled.

NRCS is working with DCR to coordinate a RUSLE 2 Training session for SWCDs for 2023. Logistics and the schedule are being discussed.

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 Bulletin 180-23-4, which provides updates about the Conservation Reserve Program

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:
 - January 18, 2023 – FY2023 CPA, DIA, CEMA Updates
 - February 8, 2023 – FSA Compliance Reviews – Survey Results – Lessons learned in 2022
 - February 15, 2023 – FY23 CSP Classic Webinar – Programs Staff
 - February 22, 2023 – FSA Compliance Reviews – FY2023 Training for Staff
 - March 1, 2023 – Inflation Reduction Act Webinar – Programs Staff
- RUSLE2 Office Hours – Mondays 2:00-4:00 pm – hosted 7 events since January 9, 2023.
- Staff/Partnership Trainings
 - January 24- 27, 2023 – Virginia Forage & Grassland Council Winter Conferences
 - February 7, 2023 – Soil Health & Corn Nutrient Mgt Presentation to DCR, Charlottesville
 - February 23, 2023 – CD/CART training for NRCS employees, virtual
- SRC Staff Training/Outreach Events
 - January 10, 2023 – Four Rivers VCE Ag Conference, New Kent
 - January 10, 2023 – Tri-County VCE Crop Production Conference, Prince George
 - January 17 & 19, 2023 – Virginia Crop Production Association Crop Summit, Richmond
 - February 14, 2023 – Southside SWCD Program Outreach Meeting, Keysville
 - February 14, 2023 – Overview of Grassland in Virginia, virtual with Virginia Tech
 - February 15, 2023 – Virginia Cotton Growers Association, Franklin
 - February 16, 2023 –VCE Central Virginia Women in Agriculture Gathering, Syria
 - February 21, 2023 – Virginia No-Till Alliance Conference, Harrisonburg

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- SRC Staff Training – In-the-Field-Training
 - February 28, 2023 – FSA Compliance Review Training for reviewers – Tappahannock
 - March 2, 2023 – FSA Compliance Review Training for reviewers – Fairfield

Customer Service and Outreach

- Partnership meeting with Virginia Tech and Appalachian Sustainable Development to plan for 3 Agroforestry train-the-trainer events later in the fiscal year.
- Partnership meeting and discussion with Virginia Department of Forestry regarding biochar initiatives, opportunities, and discussion of the soil carbon amendment standard.
- Partnership meeting with DCR to discuss the ongoing collaborative Data Sharing Agreement.
- Partnership meetings with FSA to keep communication ongoing regarding Compliance Issues
- Partnership meetings with the Virginia Poultry Disease Task Force to monitor and manage the two HPAI outbreaks in Western Virginia.
- Internal collaborative meetings between SRC staff and GIS to develop training for ARCs to use Survey 123 software for more effective and efficient data capture for Ecological Sciences Spot Checks.
- Partnership meeting with USFWS to begin discussions about consultation and the Programmatic Agreement.
- Partnership meeting with DU to share information and begin discussion of ways to further collaborate in Virginia.

State Soil Scientist (SSS)

Soil Survey Update

- The Sweet Briar College has requested NRCS assistance with using our ground penetrating radar equipment to assist in agriculture projects with locating water lines and the depths of those waterlines. A date has not been planned as of 2/15/2023.
- A letter of collaboration has been provided to Virginia Tech for a grant request to the Virginia Wine Board to study soil health in viticulture. The project, “How does management affect soil health in Virginia vineyards,” has the potential to help us make more informed land management decisions by addressing **soil health indicators** in differently managed parts of commercial vineyards (under-vines, row middles, tire tracks, and undisturbed adjacent soil), and develop **standards and best practices** for soil health testing in Virginia vineyards to share with growers and commercial soil health testing labs.
- HB-894 NRCS partnership with Virginia Tech extension and others released the Virginia Land and Energy Navigator (VaLEN) <https://valen.ext.vt.edu/> A collaborative effort, the Virginia Land and Energy Navigator (VaLEN) brings together GIS information related to prime farm and forestland,

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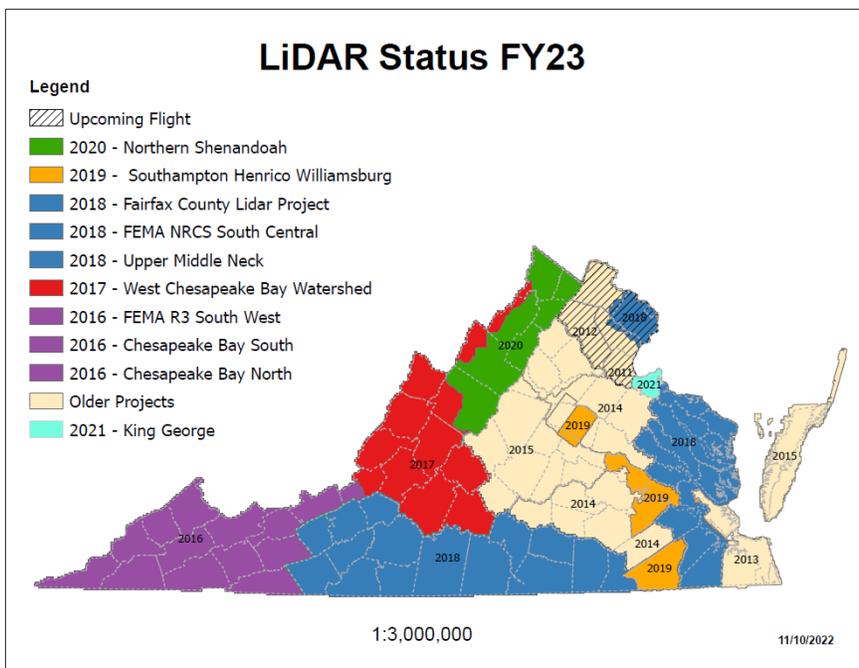
land conservation, electric utility infrastructure, and other themes to support land use planning and decision-making at the local level.

- Soil Tidbits will continue being sent to SWCD employees bi-weekly.
- An inflatable soil tunnel has been acquired by NRCS. Although we are currently gathering additional equipment needed to use it, other states have one and below is a picture.



Lidar-

Current partnership funding discussions are ongoing for new Lidar acquisition of Cities of Virginia Beach and Chesapeake, Hampton Roads, Portsmouth, and possibly Norfolk and Poquoson. This possible new acquisition would include tide coordination at a QL2+ quality. Funding hasn't been secured as of 2/15/2023.



The annual NRI grazing land field data collection training is set for the May timeframe. All 768 segments of the LDSI NRI were completed by the January 30 due date.

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Partnerships & Initiatives (P&I)

Peoples Gardens

Existing FY22 Agreements

- Fairfield Middle School
- Richmond Alternative School

Proposed FY23 Agreements

- City of Richmond (\$75,000)
 - Supports 25 Richmond Grows Gardens Sites and 5-7 additional community garden sites.
- Groundworks RVA (\$25,000)
 - The Hillside Micro Farm and Community Space has the goal of providing food and learning opportunities for neighbors in the Hillside Community. The funds from the People's Garden Initiative will be used to build-out both the farm and community space aspects of this project.
- Fit4Kids (\$25,000)
 - Partners with 24 Elementary/Middle schools throughout the Richmond Metro area to establish gardens, educate children, and engage community members in urban agriculture.
- Kinfolks (\$25,000)
 - TBD

Urban Office (Richmond)

- Urban Conservationist (2023) – Job announcement that was posted January 24, 2023, to Thursday, February 2, 2023. Waiting of certificates from HR.
- Working with FPAC leasing, FSA, and local partners on physical space.

Notice of Funding Opportunity for Technical Assistance

Not out yet, hopefully in next 30 days

Potential availability of funding for the purpose of leveraging NRCS resources to encourage collaboration with partners in providing strategic conservation delivery assistance and/or provide tools or data that enhance the ability of the agency to support conservation. The overall intent is to solicit partnerships to help enhance the implementation of key conservation objectives and priorities:

1. Provide technical assistance in the delivery, development, promotion, and support of soil, water and wildlife conservation programs to Virginia's farmers, ranchers, and landowners,
2. Support delivery of Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry conservation practices and show quantifiable carbon sequestration and/or greenhouse gas reductions,
3. Reduce barriers to programs and improve support to underserved farmers, ranchers, and landowners.

Tribal

In the planning phase for 2023 Tribal Summit this fall focusing on State Recognized Tribes.

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Administration/Management & Strategy (ASTC-M&S)

Virginia NRCS Personnel Changes

Retirements:

- Keith Boyd, ASTC-FO-Area 4, Smithfield, 11/30/2022
- Robin Piques, Financial Resources Specialist, Richmond, 12/31/2022
- Anthony Howell, District Conservationist, Dinwiddie, 12/31/2022
- Tony Rhoton, Soil Conservation Tech, Jonesville, 12/31/2022
- Greg Hammer, State Compliance Specialist, 3/31/2023

Positions Vacated:

- William Hoffer, Civil Engineering Tech, Farmville, 7/15/2022
- Rosiel Grajales-Cortes, Soil Conservationist, Warrenton, 7/15/2022
- Megan Mauk, Soil Conservation Technician, Harrisonburg, 7/29/2022
- Dwight Dean, Soil Conservationist, Emporia, 8/15/2022
- Kathy Holm, ASTC-FO Area 1, 8/26/2022
- Barbara Bowen, Public Affairs Specialist, 11/10/2022
- Patrick Vincent, ASTC-Programs, Richmond, 12/2/22
- Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist, Richmond, 12/30/22
- Austin Hunt, Economist, Richmond, 12/30/22

Positions Moved:

- Telicia Berry, Outreach Coordinator, **moved** to Richmond, 7/4/2022
- Tara Ciavarella, District Conservationist, **moved** to Amelia, 9/12/2022
- Joey Davis, District Conservationist, **moved** from Emporia to Hanover, 1/13/23

Personnel Added:

- Claire O'Brien, GIS Specialist, Richmond, 5/23/2022
- Tria Yang, Area Resource Conservationist, Smithfield, 9/26/2022
- Casey James, District Conservationist, Warrenton, 10/10/2022
- Brenda Craig, Administrative Assistant, Harrisonburg, 10/24/2022
- John Womack, ASTC-Partnerships & Initiatives, 1/3/2023
- Jared Connor, Soil Conservationist, Lexington, 2/13/2023
- Richard Hendley, Soil Conservationist, Verona, 2/27/2023
- Maggie Hermann, Natural Resources Specialist, Accomac, 3/13/2023
- Jared Bentley, Soil Conservationist, Louisa, 3/13/2023
- Hannah Clifford, Natural Resources Specialist, Courtland, 3/13/2023
- Sara Kothmann, Soil Conservationist, Rocky Mount, 3/13/2023
- Leann Schmidt, ASTC-FO Area 4, Smithfield, 3/27/2023