

State Technical Committee (STC) Meeting
October 29, 2020 at 10 a.m.
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

10:00 – 10:10	Welcome and Opening Remarks	Edwin Martinez, Ph.D., State Conservationist
10:10 – 10:15	Review of STC Functions and Structure	Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist
10:15 – 10:20	COVID-19 Issues – How NRCS sustained operations in FY20	David Kriz, ASTC-Watershed Operations
10:20 – 10:30	Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART) Update – NRCS streamlining initiative success	Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist
10:30 – 10:50	Program Delivery for FY20 – Summary of Accomplishments/Outcomes	Yamika Bennett, Acting ASTC-Programs
10:50 – 10:55	FY21 NRCS Funding Priorities (EQIP, CSP, ACEP, RCPP)	Yamika Bennett, Acting ASTC-Programs
10:55 – 11:00	Source Water Protection	Stacey Bradshaw, Soil Conservationist
11:00 – 11:10	Conservation Reserve Program	Ashlee Dalton, FSA
11:10 – 11:20	State Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) State Agreements Summary Handout	Debbie Bullock, Soil Conservationist Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist
11:20 – 11:30	Chesapeake Bay Watershed Updates	Darryl Glover, VDCR
11:30 – 11:40	Partner Presentation Updates (DOF) - Joint agency agreements	Todd Groh, VDOF
11:40 – 11:50	Soil Health Update – New VA NRCS Strategy Document & Coalition Partnership Projects	Chris Lawrence, State Cropland Agronomist
11:50 – 12:00	Closing remarks	Edwin Martinez, Ph.D., State Conservationist

Next Meeting - TBD

State Technical Committee Meeting
Thursday, October 29, 2020, at 10 a.m.
Microsoft Teams (Richmond, Virginia)

Those in attendance were:

Michelle Audie, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Russ Baxter, Virginia , Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
Kristen Saacke Blunk, Headwaters LLC
Andrew Button, Virginia Marine Resourced Commission (VMRC)
David Byrd, US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
Adam Carpenter, American Water Works Association (AWWA)
Seth Coffman, Trout Unlimited (TU)
Chase Colmorgen, Ducks Unlimited (DU)
Marcus Comer, Virginia State University (VSU)
Clyde Cristman, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
Dean Cumbia, Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF)
Ashlee Dalton, Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Christina Davis
Kristen Hughes Evans, Sustainable Chesapeake
Michael Flessner, Virginia Tech, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences (VT)
Emily Francis, New Dominion Solutions LLC
Darryl Glover, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
Hunter Hopcroft, Virginia Foodshed Capital
Peter Hujik, Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)
Mike Kane, Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)
Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF)
Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Ronald Lambert, The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
Sylvia Malm, Ground Water Protection Council (GWPC)
John W. McCarthy, Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)
Chris McDonald, Virginia Association of Counties (VACo)
Callie McMunigal, US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
Jamie Mierau, American Farmland Trust (AFT)
Timothy Mitchell, Virginia Section of the American Water Works Association (VA AWWA)
Virginia Morris
Michael Nardolilli
Jen Perkins, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
Jessica Phillips, Chickahominy Indian Tribe-Eastern Division (CIED)
Raven Jarvis, Virginia Department of Health-Office of Drinking Water (VDH)
Reggie Tupponce, Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe
Michael Reilly, Virginia Foodshed Capital
Ben Rowe, Virginia Farm Bureau (VAFB)
Diane Saintignon, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Wade Thomason, Virginia Tech, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences (VT)
Joby Timm, US Forest Service (USFS)
James Webber, US Geological Survey (USGS)
Deirdre White

Natural Resources Conservation Service employees attendees:

Edwin Martinez Martinez, PhD., NRCS, State Conservationist
Yamika Bennett, NRCS, Assistant State Conservationist-Programs
Barbara Bowen, NRCS, Public Affairs Specialist
Keith Boyd, NRCS, ASTC-FO Area 4
Chris Bradshaw, NRCS, Resource Conservationist (Primary Recorder)
Stacey Bradshaw, NRCS, Farm Bill Program Specialist
Debbie Bullock, NRCS, Farm Bill Specialist
Diane Dunaway, NRCS, Easement Specialist
Todd Groh, Department of Forestry Liaison
J. David Harper, NRCS, State Soil Scientist
Leticia Jackson Holder, NRCS, Realty Specialist
Kathy Holm, NRCS, ASTC-FO Area 1
Casey James, NRCS, Soil Conservationist
David Kriz, NRCS, ASTC-Water Resource Operations
Chris Lawrence, NRCS, Cropland Agronomist
Arelys Ortiz-Arroyo, NRCS, Area Resource Conservationist
Kilby Majette, NRCS, ASTC-FO Area 3
Dana Perkins, NRCS, Environmental Specialist
Eva Rondon, NRCS, Public Affairs Assistant
Patrick Vincent, NRCS, Farm Bill Program Specialist
Chad Wentz, NRCS, State Resource Conservationist
Robert Williams, NRCS, ASTC-FO Area 2
Ron Wood, NRCS, Farm Bill Program Specialist
Kathleen Anderson, NRCS (Assistant Recorder)

Opening Remarks – Welcome and Opening Remarks – Edwin Martinez, Ph.D., State Conservationist (10:00-10:10)

Dr. Martinez thanked the staff for coordinating the event with our partners in conservation.

He then reviewed his career path to the position of State Conservationist here in Virginia. From Puerto Rico and Nebraska (student trainee at both locations), California (Soil Conservationist), Michigan (District Conservationist-Central Michigan, and Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations-Northern Michigan), Washington, D.C. (Natural Resource Specialist-Great Lakes), Puerto Rico (Emergency Watershed Protection Program-Caribbean Area) and Maine (Acting State Conservationist) to Richmond, Virginia, Dr. Martinez was enriched by many events and experiences.

The priorities of the State Conservationist cover many categories to achieve conservation planning, delivery and implementation. Some challenges this year have been both the budget and COVID-19. Providing staff members with that they need to complete their jobs is essential in treating them as our most valued resource. Dr. Martinez has had the opportunity to meet with many partners, so far, to continue important collaboration. As we expand our partner network, we want to target all the different audiences (young, beginning, small, veteran and historically underserved farmers) to aid in providing needed programs and services. As we continue to focus on water quality and soil health, there is a lot of work to be done, and would like to continue. One priority that is addressing this is the Chesapeake Bay Water Quality Monitoring Group. The State Technical Committee Meeting plays a very critical role in addressing Virginia's conservation concerns. Dr. Martinez thanked everyone, whether individuals or entities, for bringing knowledge to give the best to Virginia.

There were no questions or group discussion.

Review of State Technical Committee Functions and Structure – Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist (10:10- 10:15)

Chad provided a review of the structure, roles and function of the State Technical Committee and stressed how important the State Technical Committee is in advising the State Conservationist and shaping the NRCS direction. The summary was a review for longstanding members, and an introduction for new members. If there is an individual

or group who is not currently a member on the State Technical Committee and who would like to be, they just need to submit a request to the State Conservationist which explains their interest in serving in that capacity. We are certainly looking to have representation of all of Virginia's diverse groups to take into account everyone's needs, including historically underserved, socially disadvantaged and limited resource groups. The attached handout from the PowerPoint presentation entitled the State Technical Committee Meeting, shows a screenshot from our website that explains the meeting. Though the slide only shows a few names of our partners, go to the website and scroll down to see the whole list.

There were no questions or group discussion.

COVID-19 Issues – David Kriz, Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resource Operations (10:15-10:20)

David Kriz reported on how NRCS sustained operations in Fiscal Year 2020 during the COVID-19 challenges. The Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center sent six slides each day showing data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Johns Hopkins, as well as data by state and county, regarding coronavirus issues.

Virginia has had three cases so far between Farm Service Agency (FSA) and NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service). On the 7 Day Case Average slide for the Top 20 States, a good number should be less than 0.8 / 10k as a threshold only one state on the list has that. It is a positive that Virginia is not listed on these two charts!

The Gating and Phasing Criteria was discussed, going from Phase One to Phase Three, and how this affected operations at the local offices. A dashboard analysis was shown on the slide where data for each county is made available. Agencies can make requests for phase changes through this tool.

David discussed some innovative solutions implemented at field offices to continue USDA business with clients while remaining safe with the coronavirus. FSA, Rural Development (RD) and NRCS do meet once per week, virtually, to discuss any changes on this important issue.

There were no questions or group discussion.

Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool – Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist (10:20-10:30)

Chad reviewed slides that cover the purpose of the Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART). CART is designed to integrate and streamline all of our conservation planning software into one integrated IT software application. Previously, planners had to open and close many different IT applications to complete our conservation planning process. CART improves the flow and eliminates unnecessary steps that we had to do previously (i.e. stovepipe processes), in the end saving time and creating efficiencies for our field staff. It is also designed to be program neutral, which integrates our conservation planning process with program delivery, modernize our tools to keep up with current science and technology and provides needed outcomes and reporting all the while improving customer service by streamlining our business processes. CART integrates our software applications that flows from identifying resource concerns and working to meet our client's goals and objectives through to program funding to help implement conservation practices on the landscape. These are priorities of the 2018 Farm Bill and the Secretary of Agriculture are to streamline our planning and program delivery and increase efficiency and effectiveness with customer service. Fiscal Year 2020 was the first year to implement the new CART software. Chad provided a review of FY2020 CART statistics on the slide in the attached State Technical Committee meeting handout. While it was a challenging year in many regards, there was also a tremendous amount of success and we are excited about another big year for FY21 as staff are more familiar with these tools and improvements are made over time.

There were no questions or group discussion.

Program Delivery for FY20, Summary of Accomplishments/Outcomes – Yamika Bennett, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (10:30-10:50)

Yamika gave a welcome and a thank you as Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (ASTC-P), to Julie Hawkins (former ASTC-P), and to partners such as FSA, DOF, DCR, DWR, DHR, VIMS and others.

Yamika gave a review of the NRCS Spotlights for FY2020, as explained on the handout's slides. She emphasized that we have a thriving program and is so proud of all programs and easement staff, as well as Field Office staff. Programs is doing a lot of land protection and is looking forward to doing more.

An important fact is that 47% of funding is going to **Historically Underserved (HU)** farmers, such as Beginning-someone who has farmed for ten or less calendar years, Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged, and Veterans. Other topics covered were **easements** (Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-ACEP and Wetland Reserve Easement-WRE), **grants and agreements** (VPA-HIP agreement for wildlife, State and National CIG, with the expertise

of NRCS's Farm Bill Specialists Stacey Bradshaw and Debbie Bullock), **ten-year trends** (review and certifications, and **staffing changes**.

There were no questions or group discussion.

NRCS Fiscal Year 2021 Funding Priorities (EQIP, CSP, ACEP AND RCPP) – Yamika Bennett, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs (10:50-10:55)

There was a review of the slides on Easements, GARC for WRE, CIG, CSP, EQIP, and RCPP.

John McCarthy, of the Piedmont Environmental Council, expressed thanks for the extended deadline on RCPP.

Seth Coffman, of Trout Unlimited, asked when would this be? Yamika answered that early January for EQIP guidance, that we are waiting on EQIP Incentive information.

Source Water Protection – Stacey Bradshaw, Soil Conservationist (10:55-11:00)

There was a review of the slides in the handout. Fiscal years 2019 and 2020 were identified with high risk areas for Source Water Protection, including the towns of Luray and Woodstock. Southwestern Virginia has been added.

For the future, we would welcome working with new partners.

The map in the slides has very small print; email Stacey for a more legible copy, if desired. She added that there was increase in practices, from 16 (2020) to 22 (2021).

Sylvia Malm, of the Ground Water Protection Council (GWPC), asked if NRCS was paying attention to Source Water Protection in other programs, such as EQIP, CSP, and Easements. Is Virginia able to identify where the Source Water Protection Areas are and to recognize that those areas can benefit from practices in the other programs? When will NRCS report back the results for SWP? Stacey answered that yes, questions in rankings get to this point. Going forward in FY21, we hope to be able to provide analysis of data/projects. We may have the data for FY20; please check back with Stacey for this.

Tim Mitchell, of the Virginia Section of the American Water Works Association (VA AWWA), said that the state is working on Phase 3 for Chesapeake Bay implementation plan, and SWP efforts have effect on the Bay, too, downstream. SWPA (Source Water Protection Areas) practices can benefit the state's Phase 3 plan; will they capture progress? This would be a question for state, Department of Conservation and Recreation. Darryl Glover of DCR mentioned that the Chesapeake Bay WIP, completed in summer of 2019, addresses all sectors; he can't speak for sure, but SWPA measures may be included, but he can only speak to ag measures. And for the Bay, we give points in ranking. Stacey referred back to Sylvia's question that the SWP funding is not a separate pot of money, but we may be able to track with ranking questions, but not by fund codes. And for the Bay, we give points in ranking. Chad Wentz mentioned that there is a lot of new interest in SWP with the new 2018 Farm Bill, and it is good to work with new partners.

Conservation Reserve Program – Ashlee Dalton, FSA (11:00- 11:10)

Ashlee Dalton was filling in for Emily Horsley at today's meeting, but Emily Horsley is still the FSA contact.

Ashlee thanked NRCS for recognizing the PT and innovation and for the strong partnership in Virginia.

She gave a review and overview of CRP with 2018 Farm Bill. There is increased enrollment authority to 27 million acres nationwide. On the map in the slide handouts, CRP in Virginia: FSA-Virginia Enrolled Acres, the dark green areas are the counties with the highest enrollment. Continuous CRP means that it is available on a continuous basis. In Virginia, CREP is most popular sign-up. There is a strong partnership with Commonwealth; water quality and wildlife habitat are priority resource concerns.

There were no questions or group discussion.

Attendance – Yamika Bennett interjected at this point that there was a housekeeping issue for today's meeting. Since there was no roll call for attendance, she asked the attendees that if they are listed with only a phone number, to go in the chat feature to list your name, to be counted on the roll.

State Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) and State-level Cooperative Agreements – Debbie Bullock, CIG Specialist (11:10-11:15)

Debbie introduced those who are new to CIG in Virginia and gave a review of the slides for the state.

Partners were asked to please send in projects by email to Debbie for Fiscal Year 2021 in the event Virginia has a signup.

Also, please contact Debbie for anything else regarding CIG.

There were no questions or group discussion.

State Agreements Summary Handout – Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist (11:15-11:20)

Chad explained the slides in his portion of the presentation regarding state level agreements. Along with CIG's that work with partners to extend innovation and technologies and RCPP that supports locally led conservation with partners, we also in Virginia have a number of active state-level partnership agreements. We utilize these partnership agreements to leverage funds and to work on and support common goals amongst state agencies and other entities. These partnerships bring in and develop the needed expertise to successfully deliver Farm Bill programs and work on those common goals.

He highlighted some of our active partnership agreements outside of CIG and RCPP, which was included as a handout in the information sent everyone listing each of these agreements and some more of the details of each agreement. One of the items Dr. Martinez wants to highlight at these State Technical Committee meetings is our success of partnerships and leveraging of those resources and common goals to help our clients. It is critically important to the agency to use partnerships to be successful at all levels. Kristen Saacke Blunk asked how are partnership agreements different from cooperative agreement? Chad answered that they are the same.

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Updates – Darryl Glover, VDCR (11:20- 11:30)

First there was mention of Chesapeake Bay WIP updates and the initiative statewide that WIP requires.

In reviewing the slides, first a bar graph each of the loads of nitrogen and phosphorus was shown. Nitrogen is a key pollutant for WIP.

We expect to do a considerable amount of work for N and P loading by 2025.

Agriculture has 76% of the loads to overcome. Most loads come from the Eastern Shore, the Shenandoah Valley, and the Potomac.

Some of the priority practices include nutrient management, cover crop, livestock exclusion, animal waste structures, poultry litter transfer, and buffers. Targeted watersheds for additional work. There is a small herd initiative for small numbers of 20-35 head of cattle, for up to 25K for livestock exclusion. Nutrient management is a direct pay program for private sector plans.

Climate change increases the amount of reductions needed. Virginia has incorporated climate change in WIP goals for 2025.

For BMP verification, there is a challenge with the old Bay model, which continued to credit BMPs that had been implemented. Now every BMP has a lifespan and fall-out of the model, with no continued credit of achieving reductions. DCR has been conducting periodic re-inspection of older BMPs to restore credit in the model. Now and in the future 500 state funded BMP is expiring in 2021. There is a 40% success rate – obtaining access, change of operation, sale of property, operation shut down, clients were no longer interested, for older pre 2010 BMP practices. There is an 87% success rate for newer BMPs.

Matt Kowalski asked for clarification: is 2019 ag-land or cropland covered by nutrient management? Darryl Glover answered that 50% of the Chesapeake Bay watershed cropland is covered by nutrient management.

Partner Presentation Updates (DOF) – Todd Groh, VDOF (11:30- 11:40)

Todd discussed joint agency agreements. He thanked everyone for the partnerships, and then began a review of his slides. It is possible that RCPP can be for Hardwood Management in the future.

Sylvia Malm asked Todd to talk more about Joint Chief's Initiative and how funding opportunities are explored and how partners can take advantage of those partnerships and funding opportunities; Joint Chiefs funding opportunities goes to states and how are partners made aware of projects and funding? Todd Groh answered that we have the Lower Cow Pasture agreement, and The Nature Conservancy is a partner and the State Forester, NRCS, and USFS get together on that, and funding is set aside for national lands; and for private lands, NRCS had a special allocation of money. Partners hear through outreach from DOF Foresters locally. Sylvia Malm suggested connecting with the State of Virginia Source Water Protection Coordinator, and maybe also rural water entities. She will follow up with Todd.

Soil Health Update – New VA NRCS Strategy – Chris Lawrence, State Cropland Agronomist (11:40- 11:50)

Chris discussed Document & Coalition Partnership Projects. The objectives are that partners need to reach out to communicate about goals; where to find more information. In a review of the slides, and looking back, list of partners – 26 Virginia state level CIGs.

Virginia Tech grant can bring additional partners for soil health. Communication is the KEY to successful collaborative partnerships. Chris Lawrence invited the attendees to reach out to him if they are not receiving communication now regarding soil health, if they want to be included. Go to the NRCS webpage and download the Soil Health 2020 strategy.

There were no questions or group discussion.

Closing Remarks Edwin Martinez, Ph.D. – State Conservationist (11:50- 12:00)

Dr. Martinez thanked the participants for presenting and thanked the partners, adding that in NRCS, partnerships are a huge part of what we do and how we accomplish work. He urged everyone to please review the attachments included in the email with the meeting invitation. Dr. Martinez expressed that he is looking forward to working with everyone.

The next State Technical Committee Meeting is to be determined.

There were no questions or group discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 pm.



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State Technical Committee Meeting

October 29th, 2020
Richmond, Virginia
Edwin Martinez Martinez, Ph.D.
Virginia State Conservationist

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Dr. Edwin Martinez Martinez Career Path

State Conservationist, 2020-Present

- Virginia

Acting State Conservationist (Summer, 2019)

- Maine

EWP Program Caribbean Area Manager (Winter-Summer, 2018)

- Puerto Rico

Natural Resource Specialist - Great Lakes, 2016 - 2020

- Washington, DC

Assistant State Conservationist – Field Operations, 2013-2016

- Northern Michigan

District Conservationist, 2008-2013

- Central Michigan

Soil Conservationist, 2006-2008

- California

Student Trainee, 2005

- Nebraska
- Puerto Rico



State Conservationist Priorities

- Keep Virginia on the **forefront** of conservation planning, delivery and implementation.
- **Treat staff as our most valued resource**, ensuring they are equipped for the job and their concerns are heard.
- **Sustain and enhance collaboration with local, state and federal agencies as well as neighbor states.**



State Conservationist Priorities (Cont.)

- Ensure team members receive **core technical training** while exploring innovative conservation planning approaches.
- **Expand our partner network** to increase awareness of agency programs and services among all target audiences (young, beginning, small, veteran, and historical undeserved farmers).
- Continue focusing on **water quality and soil health** to further enhance delivery of conservation solutions across the state.



State Technical Committee

The Virginia State Technical Committee plays a key role in supporting sustainable agriculture across the Commonwealth:

- Advise the NRCS State Conservationist on developing guidelines for implementing conservation provisions of the Farm Bill
- Help ensure we meet civil rights requirements of program delivery





Henry Ford — 'Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.'





State Technical Committee Functions and Structure

Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist



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STC Functions and Structure

Purpose:

- Serves in an advisory capacity to NRCS State Conservationist.
- Meets regularly to provide advice and technical recommendations to implement the conservation provisions of the Farm Bill.
- Committee membership includes diverse groups served by USDA including representatives from federal, state and local conservation agencies, tribal governments, agricultural producers, nonprofit organizations, agribusiness partners, and other professionals who represent disciplines in agriculture and conservation.



STC Responsibilities

- **The State Conservationist chairs the State Technical Committee.**
 - Meetings are held at least twice a year, although more could be held if determined as a need by the State Conservationist.
 - This is part of NRCS's 'locally led conservation' objective
 - The State Technical Committee provides USDA with information on conservation needs, resources concerns, priorities, and recommendations regarding program administration and implementation.
 - The State Technical Committee is advisory in nature to the State Conservationist, however, NRCS strongly considers their recommendations.
 - Specialized subcommittees may be needed at times to analyze and refine specific issues.
 - Post all material and summaries of the meetings on the VA NRCS website.



STC Functions and Structure

→ <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/va/technical/stc/>

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Technical Resources

- Conservation Planning
- Data, Maps, & Analysis
- Ecological Science
- Engineering
- Land Use
- State Technical Committee**
 - STC Minutes
 - STC Agenda

State Technical Committee

The Virginia **State Technical Committee** advises the NRCS State Conservationist on the technical guidelines necessary to implement the conservation provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill. The committee also helps ensure that Civil Rights requirements in Program Delivery are met. Although the State Technical Committee has no implementation or enforcement authority, USDA gives strong consideration to the Committee's recommendations.

Virginia STC meetings are held quarterly (or at the call of the State Conservationist) at 1606 Santa Rosa Road, Suite 209, Richmond VA 23229, unless otherwise noted. Specific dates will be announced on this [page](#). Meetings are open to the public.

Committee membership includes representatives from federal and state conservation agencies, agricultural producers, Virginia Cooperative Extension, nonprofit organizations, and agribusiness. Partners represented include:

- > American Farmland Trust
- > Black Family Land Trust
- > Center for Conservation Incentives, Environmental Defense Foundation
- > USDA Farm Service Agency
- > Virginia Agribusiness Council
- > Virginia Association for Biological Farming
- > Virginia Cattlemen's Association





Covid-19 Issues- How was NRCS successful delivering conservation



David Kriz, ASTC-Watershed Operations



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FPAC COVID Update: October 23, 2020

10 States with Highest New Cases

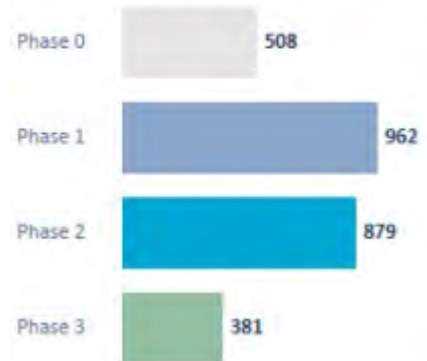
State/County	Rank	Daily new cases per 100k people (7d moving avg.)
North Dakota	1	97.8
South Dakota	2	78.0
Wisconsin	3	61.6
Montana	4	60.2
Idaho	5	46.1
Nebraska	6	43.0
Wyoming	7	41.0
Utah	8	40.8
Iowa	9	35.3
Missouri	10	32.8



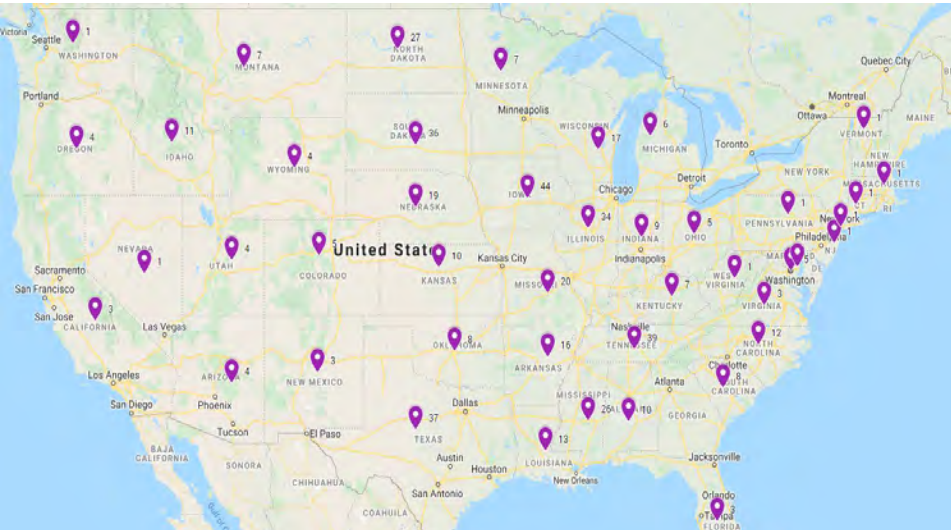
FPAC Reopening Status:

Reopening requests may be submitted using the [FPAC Reopening Request Tool](#)

OFFICES BY CURRENT PHASE



FPAC Positive Tests by State



FPAC Cases since start of COVID outbreak:

- FPAC COVID Positive Cases (w/test): **516 (+9)**
- FPAC Case Under Investigation: **24 (-2)**

Category	BC	FSA	NRCS	RMA	Total
Positive	10	294	205	7	516
Currently Under Investigation	1	15	8	0	24

Changes in the last 24-hours:

Positive Test –FSA: North Dakota, Illinois, South Dakota (x2), Arkansas, Mississippi, Minnesota; NRCS: Illinois, Nebraska
 Test Pending – None
 Negative Test – FSA: Indiana, Kansas
 Recovered and returned to work: **340**
 All Positive, Presumed Positive Tests or Persons Under Investigation must be reported to FPAC-COVID19@usda.gov immediately

7 Day Case Averages: October 23, 2020

Top 20 States

Top 20 States by 7 day new case total							Top 20 States by cases per day per 10,000 residents						
State	Population	Total Cases October 16	Total Cases October 23	7 Day Change	Average Cases per Day	Cases Per Day Per 10000 People	State	Population	Total Cases October 16	Total Cases October 23	7 Day Change	Average Cases per Day	Cases Per Day Per 10000 People
Texas	25,145,561	853500	891000	37500	5357	2.13	North Dakota	672,591	29600	35000	5400	771	11.47
Illinois	12,830,632	336200	365100	28900	4129	3.22	South Dakota	814,180	31000	36000	5000	714	8.77
California	37,253,956	870300	896400	26100	3729	1.00	Montana	989,415	21000	25700	4700	671	6.79
Wisconsin	5,686,986	171400	195800	24400	3486	6.13	Wisconsin	5,686,986	171400	195800	24400	3486	6.13
Florida	18,801,310	744900	768000	23100	3300	1.76	Idaho	1,567,582	51400	56900	5500	786	5.01
Tennessee	6,346,105	219300	234000	14700	2100	3.31	Utah	2,763,885	90400	99500	9100	1300	4.70
Ohio	11,536,504	175800	190400	14600	2086	1.81	Wyoming	563,626	8300	10100	1800	257	4.56
North Carolina	9,535,483	239300	253400	14100	2014	2.11	Nebraska	1,826,341	55400	61200	5800	829	4.54
Indiana	6,483,802	143600	157600	14000	2000	3.08	Iowa	3,046,355	104000	112200	8200	1171	3.85
Michigan	9,883,640	156900	170100	13200	1886	1.91	Tennessee	6,346,105	219300	234000	14700	2100	3.31
Missouri	5,988,927	156100	169300	13200	1886	3.15	Oklahoma	3,751,351	103800	112400	8600	1229	3.28
Minnesota	5,303,925	117100	128200	11100	1586	2.99	Illinois	12,830,632	336200	365100	28900	4129	3.22
Pennsylvania	12,702,379	182500	193400	10900	1557	1.23	Missouri	5,988,927	156100	169300	13200	1886	3.15
New York	19,378,102	484100	494800	10700	1529	0.79	Indiana	6,483,802	143600	157600	14000	2000	3.08
Georgia	9,687,653	321400	331300	9900	1414	1.46	New Mexico	2,059,179	34900	39300	4400	629	3.05
Utah	2,763,885	90400	99500	9100	1300	4.70	Arkansas	2,915,918	96500	102700	6200	886	3.04
Oklahoma	3,751,351	103800	112400	8600	1229	3.28	Alaska	710,231	11200	12700	1500	214	3.02
Colorado	5,029,196	82400	90600	8200	1171	2.33	Minnesota	5,303,925	117100	128200	11100	1586	2.99
Iowa	3,046,355	104000	112200	8200	1171	3.85	Kansas	2,853,118	70800	76500	5700	814	2.85

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DRAFT – Pre-Decisional
Controlled Unclassified Information

Federal Gating Criteria

(To assist leaders with determining if their community is ready for reopening.
These criteria apply across all three reopening phases)

Symptoms	Cases	Hospital
Downward trajectory of influenza-like illnesses reported within a 14-day period	Downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period	Treat all patients without crisis care
AND	OR	AND
Downward trajectory of COVID-like syndromic cases reported within a 14-day period	Downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period (flat or increasing volume of tests)	Robust testing program in place for at-risk healthcare workers, including emerging antibody testing

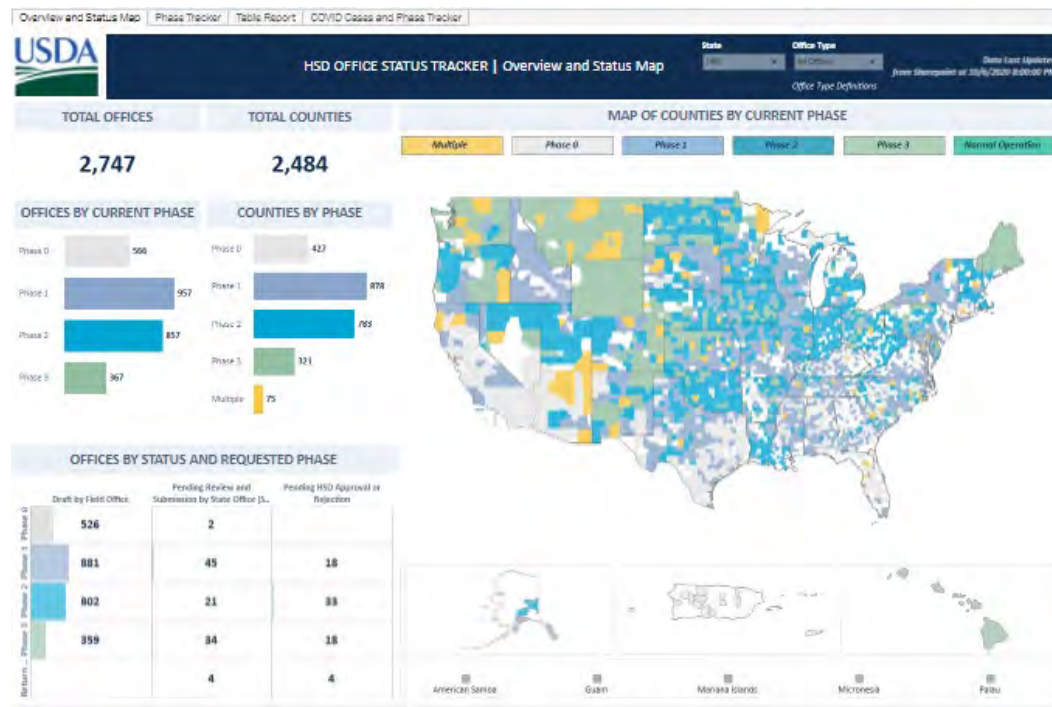
Phasing Criteria

Issue	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Telework	Strongly Encouraged	Strongly Encouraged	As required
People in Office	Not to exceed 10 people in a single office space. 6 feet of separation <u>must</u> be maintained between employees	Not to exceed the number of people in a single office space with 6 feet of separation between employees	Up to 100% of employees with appropriate cleaning and hygiene practices
At Risk Employees	Telework or Weather and Safety Leave	Telework or Weather and Safety Leave	Telework flexibility and social distancing recommended
Travel	Mission essential, time sensitive travel only	Mission essential, time sensitive travel only	Mission essential, time sensitive travel only
Visitors	Not Permitted	By appointment only	By appointment only
Common Areas	Closed	Closed	Open with physical distancing
Office Cleaning	Very frequent, daily if possible, with spot cleaning of frequent touched surfaces	Very frequent, daily if possible, with spot cleaning of frequent touched surfaces	Regular cleaning schedule, with spot cleaning of frequent touched surfaces
Masks	Must be available to all employees. Wear is required for face to face interaction with customers and other employees	Must be available to all employees. Wear is required for face to face interaction with customers and other employees	Must be available to all employees. Wear is required for face to face interaction with customers and other employees



FPAC COVID Reopening Dashboard

- Supplements the USDA dashboard
- Contains tabs that perform multiple functions to support reopening
 - Tracks actual FPAC Reopening Phase by county (can be sorted by phase, state, county and agency)
 - Displays “hot spots” (two-week rise) by each Phase of reopening
 - Offers analysis of each county’s 7-day average per capita case rate (cases per 10,000 residents)
 - Displays number of COVID cases in county for the last 14 days.



Data updates every night rather than once per week with the USDA Dashboard



“Extra” desk proves essential for personal service



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CART Update – NRCS Streamlining Initiative Success



Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist



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So what is CART and its purpose?

- Conservation
 - Assessment
 - Ranking
 - Tool
- Set of Business Practices to streamline Conservation Planning and Program Delivery
 - Program Neutral integrated Information Technology (IT) Software Application



Any USDA
Conservation
Program!

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How does CART work? => Integrating IT

Phase I

Collect & Analyze

- Identify Problem
- Determine Objective
- Inventory Resources
- Analyze Resource Data

Phase II

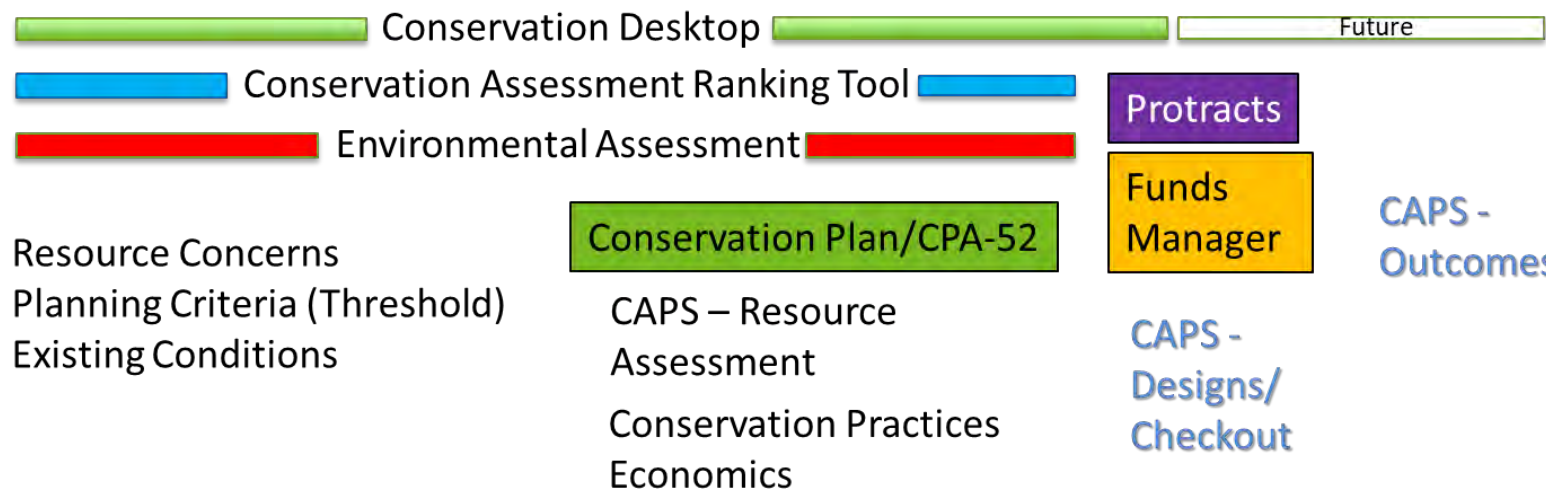
Decision Support

- Formulate Alternatives
- Evaluate Alternatives
- Make Decision

Phase III

Implementation & Evaluation

- Implementation Requirements
- Implement the Plan
- Evaluate the Plan



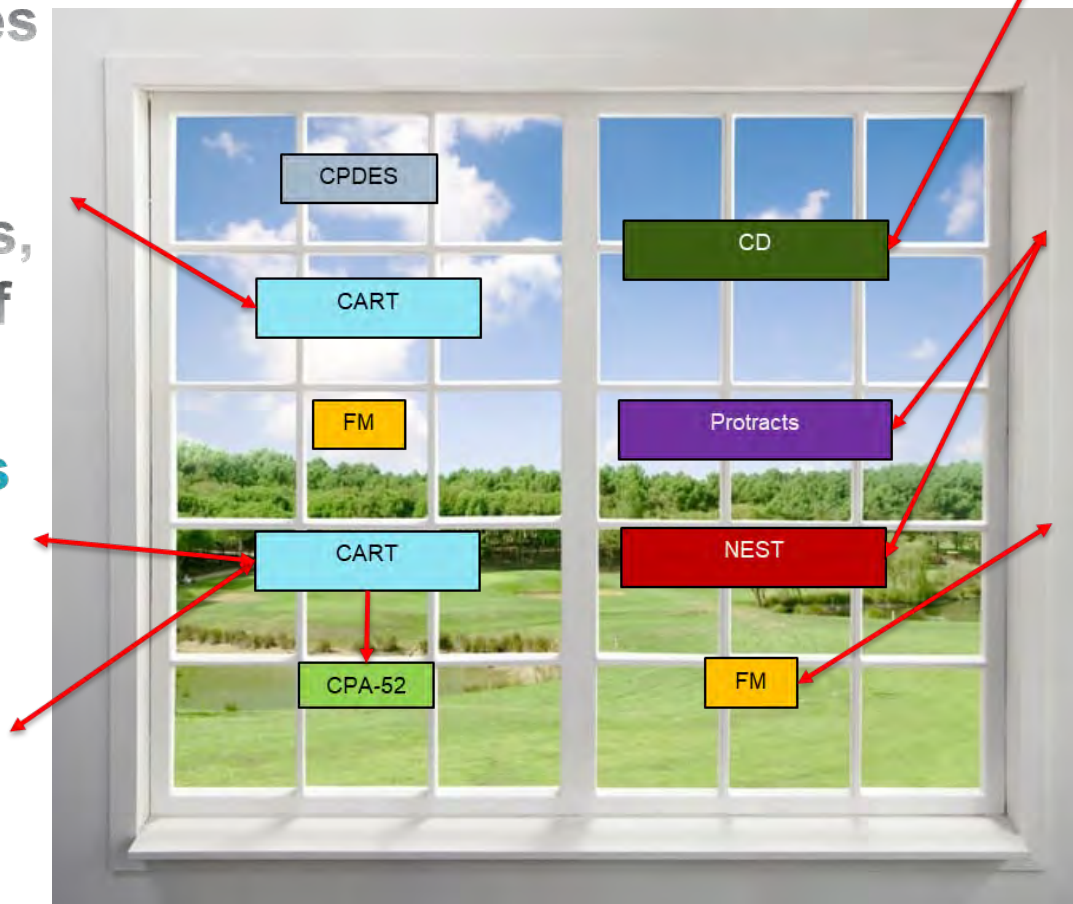
How does CART Work? => IT Integration

• Behind one pane of glass!

Automates
over
200,000
questions,
60+ Staff
Years

Replaces
many
“tools”

TSPs
FY-2021



Enhanced
Functionality

Integration
with CART,
CD, FM, and
NEST

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CART objectives, benefits, outcomes

Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool

Objectives:

- Integration of conservation planning and program delivery to improve efficiency, program neutral planning
- Streamline (modernize) “reading of the land” using GIS analysis within CART (current science & technology)

Advantages:

- Streamlined resource concern assessments
- Avoids duplication of work by our field staff
- Improve services and time to interact with our clients
- Provides needed outcomes and reporting to congress



FY20 CART by the numbers:



Number of users	88
Number of assessments performed	1,574
Average assessment size (acres)	321
Number of land units assessed	22,363
Average resource concerns per land unit	7
Acres representing those land units	505,196
Number of program rankings completed	1,533
Total number of resource concerns assessed	297,836





Program Delivery for FY20 – Summary of Accomplishments/Outcomes



Yamika Bennett, Acting ASTC-Programs



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VA NRCS Spotlight for FY20

- 2400+ Active EQIP, RCPP, CSP
- Total active funding- \$131 million in funding for conservation benefits to more than a half million acres of VA land.
- EQIP obligations- \$24.6M (441 contracts, 65,672 acres)
- CSP obligations- \$7.3M (224 contracts, 64,590 acres)
- RCPP obligations- \$591K (12 contracts)
- Historically Underserved (HU) participants received 47% of the funds obligated.

The top conservation practices planned: Fence, Roofs and Covers, Pasture and Hay Planting, Heavy Use Area Protection, Watering Facility, Cover Crop, Livestock Pipeline, Waste Storage Facility, Water Well and High Tunnel System.



VA NRCS Spotlight for FY20

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

- **\$2.14 million in ACEP-ALE funds obligated in FY20.**
- **#1 in Southeast Region of NRCS for total obligations.**
- **1,094 acres of new FY20 ALE farmland being preserved.**
- **141 existing recorded easements totaling 16,555 acres of land protected.**
- **10 ACEP-ALE acquisitions and 1 ACEP-WRE in progress.**
- **4 WRE wetland restorations in progress.**



VA SPOTLIGHT FOR FY20

- **First VPA-HIP agreement awarded to VDGIF (now DWR) will provide financial incentives to landowners for providing public access for wildlife dependent recreation and improving wildlife habitat over a 3-year period. The total award for this project is \$2,998,250.**
- **There are 12 total National and State CIG grants that are active for a total of \$9,295,845 in technical assistance funding.**



VA NRCS Spotlight for FY20

- Since 2010, Virginia NRCS has obligated more than 9,030 conservation contracts resulting in \$307.5 million in financial assistance, to help farmers implement conservation practices on 1,603,400 acres.
- In FY20, NRCS Field Staff certified 5,513 contract items for 1,856 total contracts with financial assistance approved for \$19 Million:
EQIP (3,317)
CSP (1,853)
RCPP (343)



VA SPOTLIGHT FOR FY20

Staffing changes

- Julie Hawkins, State Conservationist for New Jersey
- Reassigning Leticia Jackson-Holder to serve as Realty Specialist
- Debbie Bullock is the lead CIG and VPA-HIP Specialist
- Stacey Bradshaw is RCPP and TSP Specialist, transferred from Water Resources Program office.
- Yamika Bennett, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs





FY21 NRCS Funding Priorities – EQIP, CSP, ACEP, RCPP



Yamika Bennett, Acting ASTC-Programs



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EASEMENTS

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- **Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) and Wetland Reserve Enhancement (WRE) Signups** proposed to begin in early winter- Awaiting NHQ guidance.
- **Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP)- Partnership proposals deadline 11/30/20.**

Contact Diane Dunaway- Diane.Dunaway@usda.gov or Leticia Jackson-Holder- Leticia.Jackson@usda.gov



Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) for Wetland Review for FY21

- Maximum “cap” on NRCS payment to landowner for WRE.
- VA proposes to pay 95% of the fair market value. Rate has been used since 2011.
- Used to determine land values based on appraisal of the easement area.

Questions, concerns, comments? By Nov. 2, contact Diane.Dunaway@usda.gov, Easement Program Manager, 804.287.1634



CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS (CIG)

- Provide opportunity for public and private partners to evaluate and accelerate adoption of new approaches to natural resource protection.
- 4 National CIG On Farm Trial Projects were awarded and will have some impact on VA land:
 - Vermont Land Trust \$2M
 - Texas A&M Agrilife Research \$2M
 - Michigan State- \$2.5M
 - Candidus- \$684K

Contact Debbie Bullock, State CIG Specialist,
Debbie.bullock@usda.gov



CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

- **CSP Final Rule was published on 10/9/20 and a few key changes:**
 - Permitted certain public land to be eligible when it is included as part of an eligible person's operation.
 - Expanded eligibility to include owners and other tenants in addition to operators.
 - Provided specific support for organic and transitioning to organic production activities.
- **\$10 Million has been request FY21 funding. Highest request ever made for Stewardship Program.**
- **Application backlog exceeds 250.**
- **Accelerated payment processing for all 2020 contracts and Participants requesting payment by 11/6/20.**

Contact Patrick Vincent, CSP Program Manager
Patrick.Vincent@usda.gov



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

Final Rule released on 10/23/20 and a few of those changed include:

- Changed provisions for those transitions from Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Adjusting the “comprehensive nutrient management plan” definition to ensure only applicable natural resources need to be considered.
- Amending language in the national priorities to specifically incorporate soil health and weather and drought resilience in the national priorities.
- Authorizing reduced matching requirements for Conservation Innovation Grant projects aimed at helping historically underserved producers.

Proposed Virginia Changes

- Changes to screening processes
- High Tunnel funding priorities and special fund pools for Socially Disadvantaged and Organic applicants.
- EQIP Incentives to be offered and allow 5 to 10 years of practice implementation (Guidance is still forthcoming)
- Expect a signup period in early winter.

Contact Patrick Vincent, EQIP Program Manager, Patrick.Vincent@usda.gov and Ron Wood, Program Specialist, Ron.Wood@usda.gov



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP)

- **Renewal agreement awarded to Clinch-Powell Watershed RCPP Project**
 - TNC will be awarded a five-year focusing on biodiversity and endangered species in the Upper Clinch-Powell watershed.
 - Multi-state RCPP project \$10.6 million in financial assistance dollars to local landowners in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia and Tennessee.
 - Practices such as Critical Area Plantings, Riparian Forest Buffers, Grassed Waterways, Wetland Restoration, Livestock Exclusion are all designed to keep nutrients and sediment out of the Upper Clinch-Powell watershed.
- **Proposal deadline extended to 11/30/20**

Contact Stacey Bradshaw, RCPP Coordinator
Stacey.Bradshaw@usda.gov





Source Water Protection



Stacey Bradshaw, Soil Conservationist



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Source Water Protection – FY21

- **Sub-committee, NRCS staff plus:**
 - Environmental Protection Agency
 - VDOH, Division of Drinking Water
 - TetchTech
 - Ground Water Protection Council
- **Refined FY19 List based on HUCs/Risk Factors**
 - Nutrients, sediment and pathogens
 - Karst topography
 - Cropland and pasture acres within each HUC12
 - Livestock access to surface water
- **7% of total land acres within SWPA**
 - Surface and Sub-Surface Systems
 - 91 individual HUCs



Source Water Protection – FY21

SWPA Conservation Practices – FY21

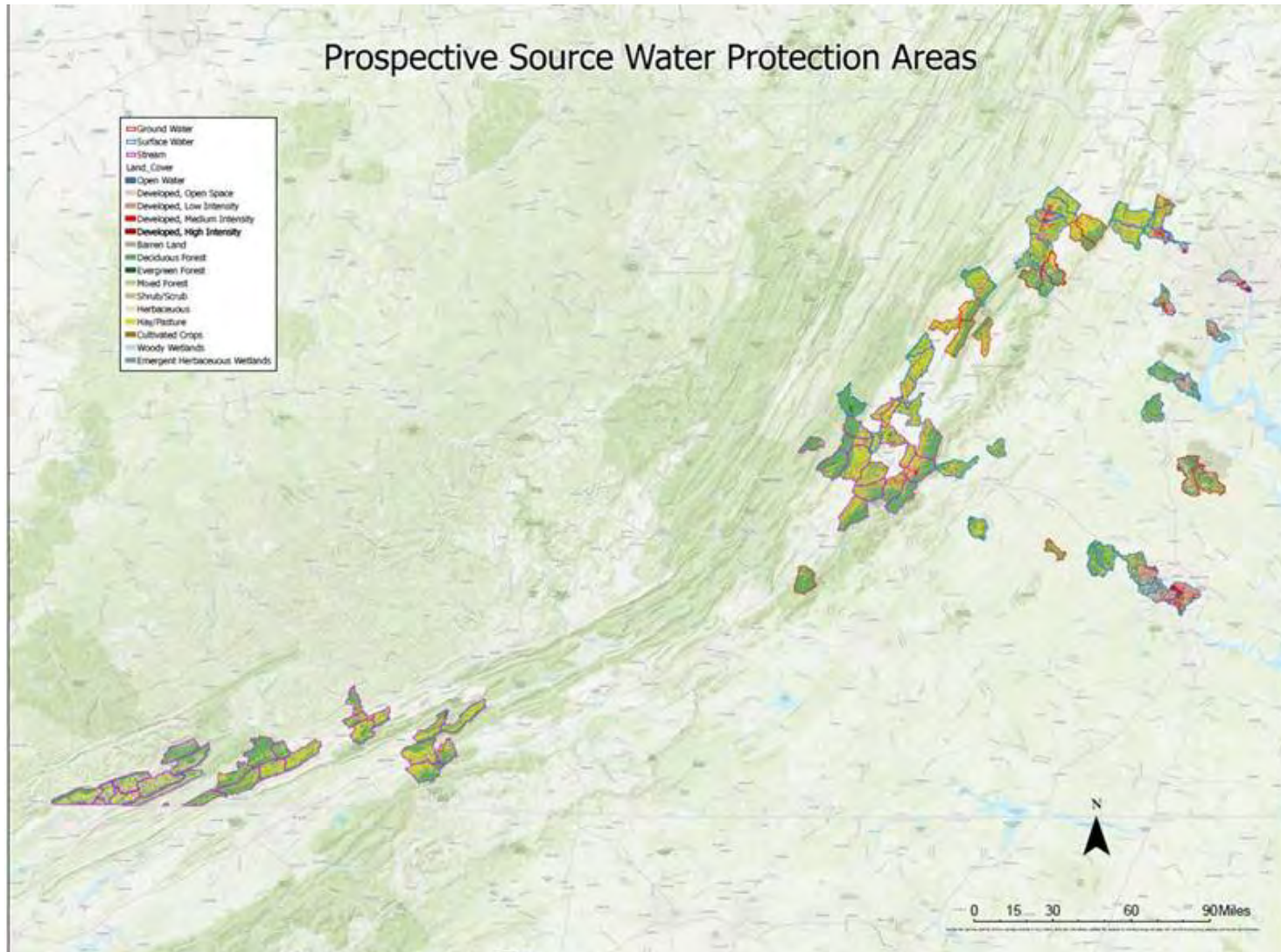
327 – Conservation Cover
328 – Conservation Crop Rotation
329 – Residue & Tillage Mgnt, No Till
340 – Cover Crop
342 – Critical Area Planting
351 – Well Decommissioning
382 – Fence
386 – Field Border
390 – Riparian Herbaceous Cover
391 – Riparian Forest Buffer
393 – Filter Strip

441 – Irrigation Sys, Micro-irrigation
472 – access Control
516 – Livestock Pipeline
527 – Karst Sinkhole Treatment
528 – Prescribed Grazing
533 – Pumping Plant
561 – Heavy Use Protection Area
578 – Stream Crossing
612 – Tree/Shrub Establishment
614 – Water Facility
642 – Water Well





Prospective Source Water Protection Areas



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Conservation Reserve Program

Ashlee Dalton, Farm Service Agency



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Overview

- Established in 1985.
- Voluntary, private lands conservation.
- Farm operators/tenants and landowners are eligible.
- Converts environmentally sensitive land from production to a conserving use to:
 - Reduce soil erosion
 - Improve water quality
 - Restore wildlife habitat
- Long-term contract (10-15, 30 years*)
- Provides financial and technical assistance to participants:
 - Financial: Incentive, Cost-Share, Rent, Maintenance;
 - Technical: Conservation Planning



2018 Farm Bill Changes

- **Extended CRP authority to 2023**
- **Enrollment authority increases from 24 million in 2019 to 27 million in 2023.**
- **Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rivers (CLEAR) practices on CRP.**
 - Continuous signup.
 - Prioritizes water quality practices such as sod waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers, wetlands, and a new prairie practice.
 - 40% of total continuous CRP signup acres in CLEAR practices
- **Updated cropping history, 2012-2017**
- **Ineligible land**
 - Land on which the use of the land is restricted through deed or other restriction prior to enrollment in CRP that **prohibits the production of ag. commodities** or requires any **resource conserving measures** during any part of the contract period.



2018 Farm Bill Changes

- **Forest Management Incentive (TBD)**
- **Mid-Contract Management**
- **Annual Acreage Reporting**
- **SIP and PIP**
- **Annual rental payments**
- **MOA with NRCS**
- **Pilots programs:**
 - CLEAR30
 - Available for certain expiring CLEAR contracts
 - 30 year contracts
 - SHIPP – Soil Health and Income Protection
 - The SHIPP pilot allows for a maximum of 50,000 acres to be enrolled in the prairie pothole states of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.



CRP Signup Types

Competitive Signups Announced on an Annual Basis:

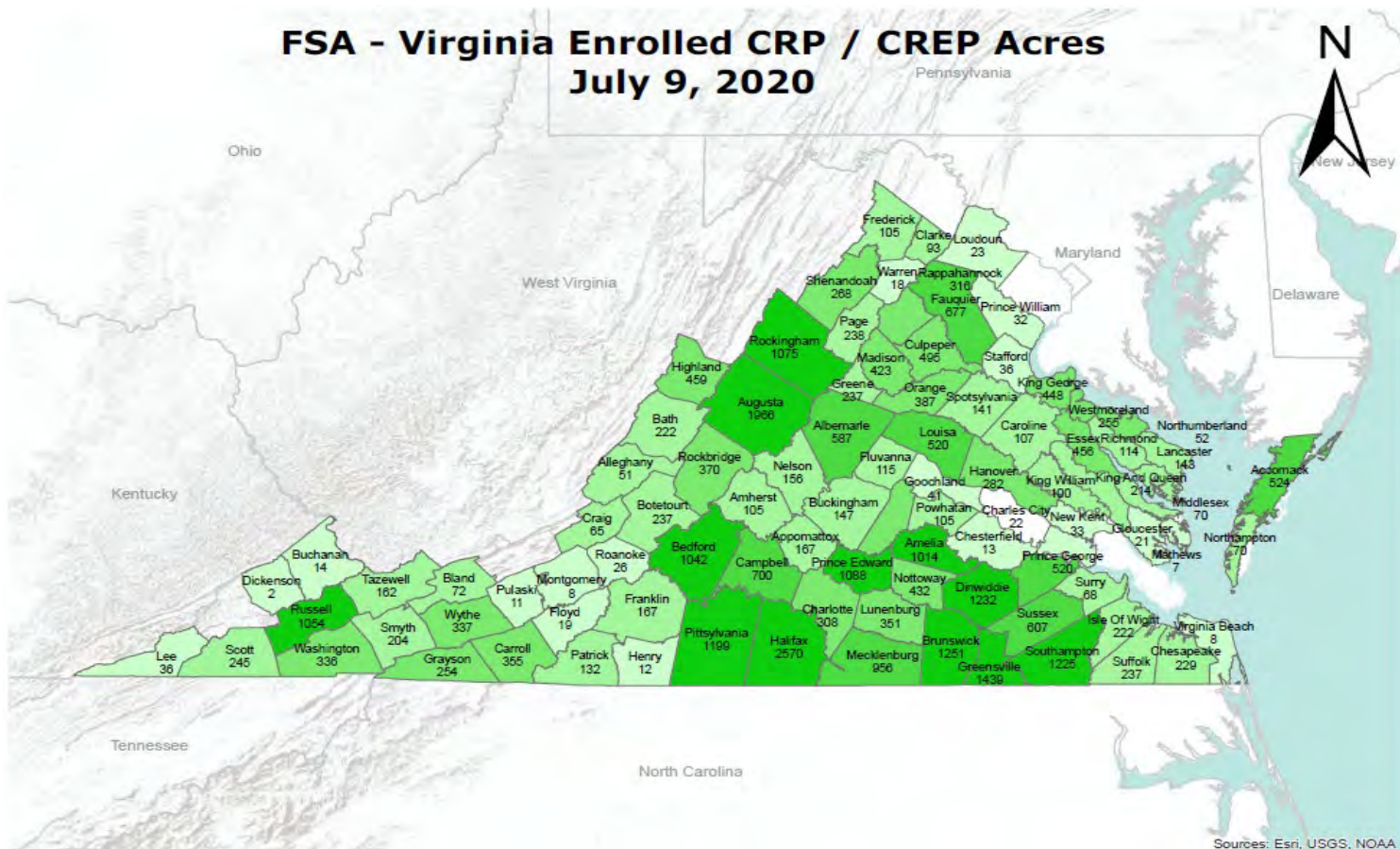
- General CRP
- CRP Grasslands

Non-Competitive, Continuous Signup

- Continuous CRP
- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
- State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)
- Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR)
- CLEAR30 (Pilot)
- SHIPP (Pilot)



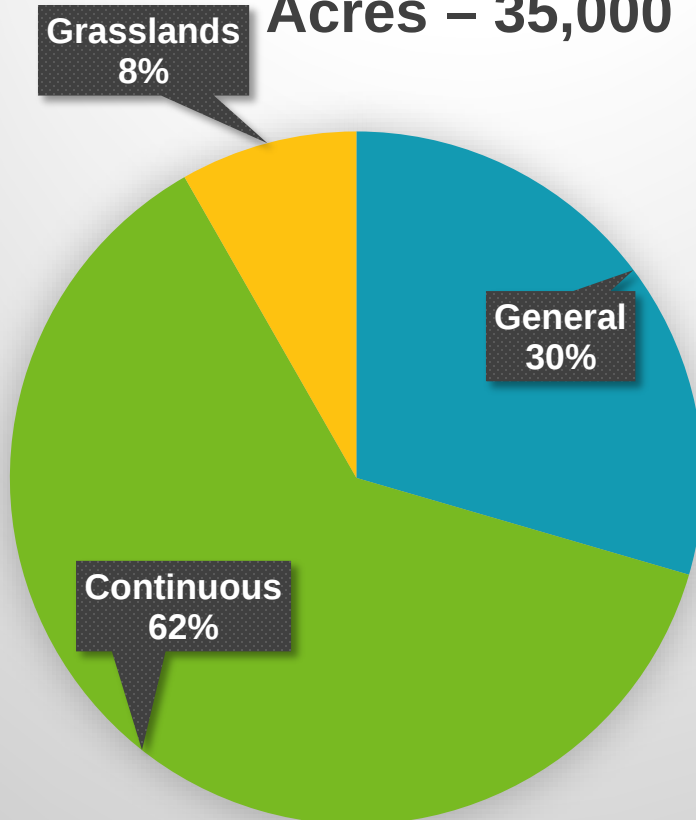
CRP in Virginia



CRP Acres in Virginia – FY2020



Acres – 35,000



- General
- Continuous
- Grasslands

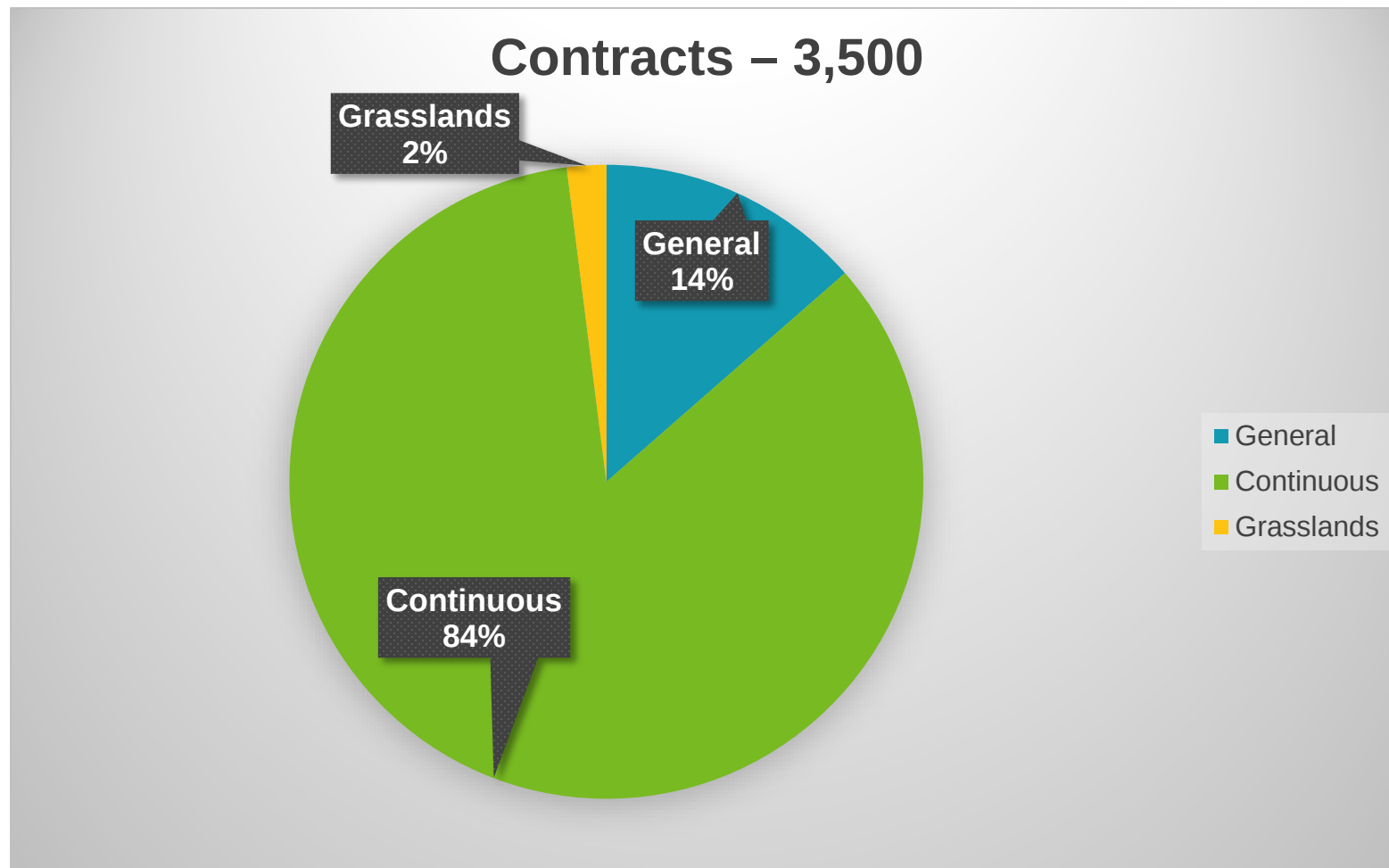


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CRP Contracts in Virginia – FY2020



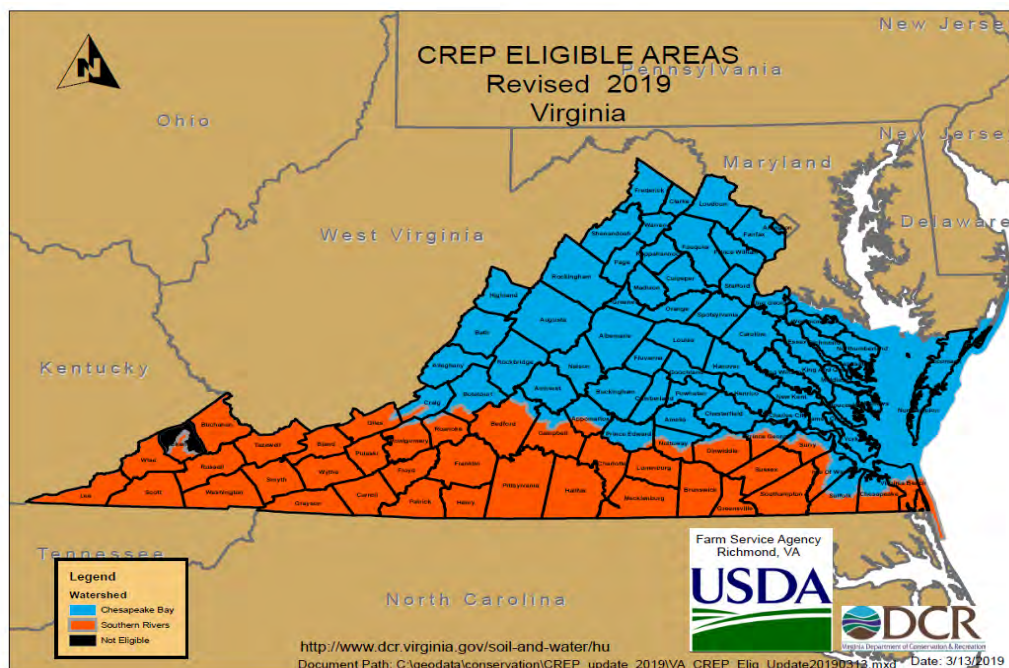
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CREP in Virginia

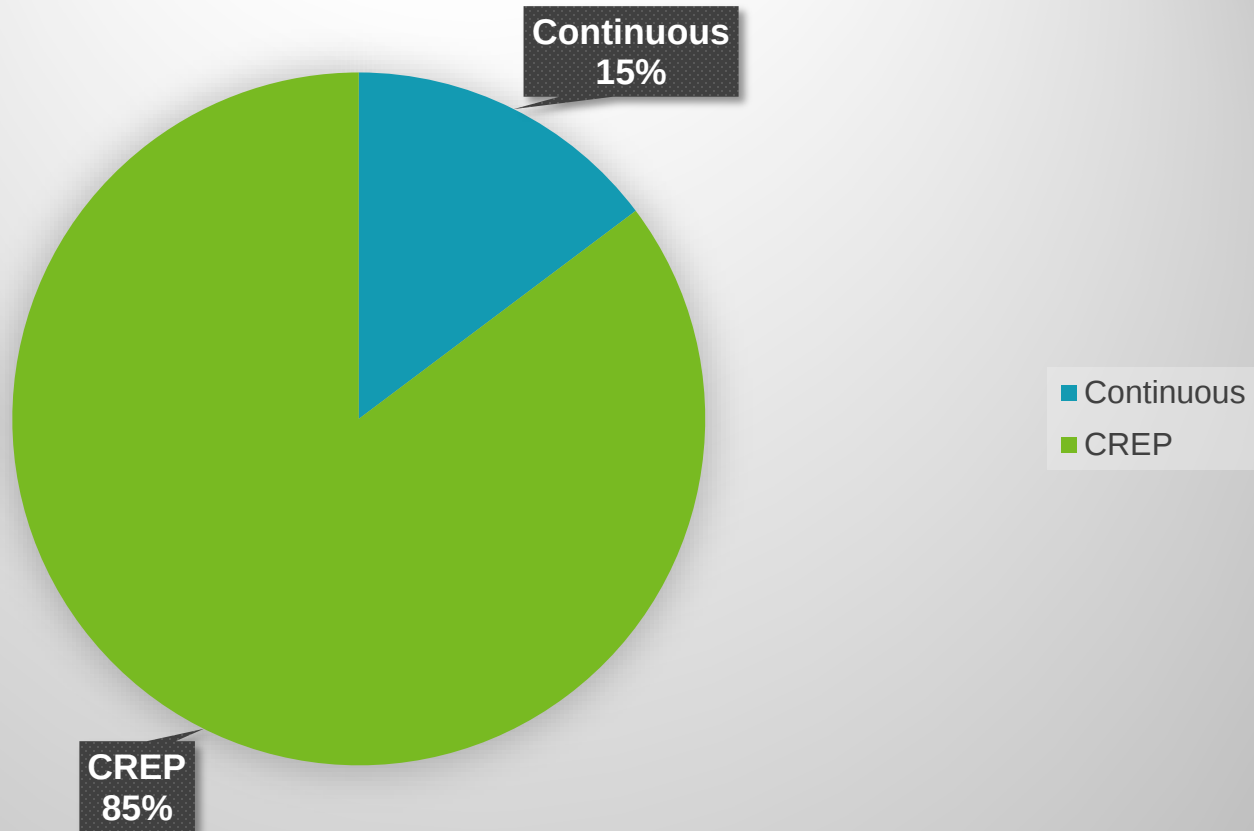
- Agreement between USDA and Commonwealth of Virginia
- Identifies high priority conservation practices
 - Filter Strips, Riparian Buffers, Wildlife Buffers, Wetland Restoration
- “Enhances” CRP by adding State funding to participants



CREP Contracts



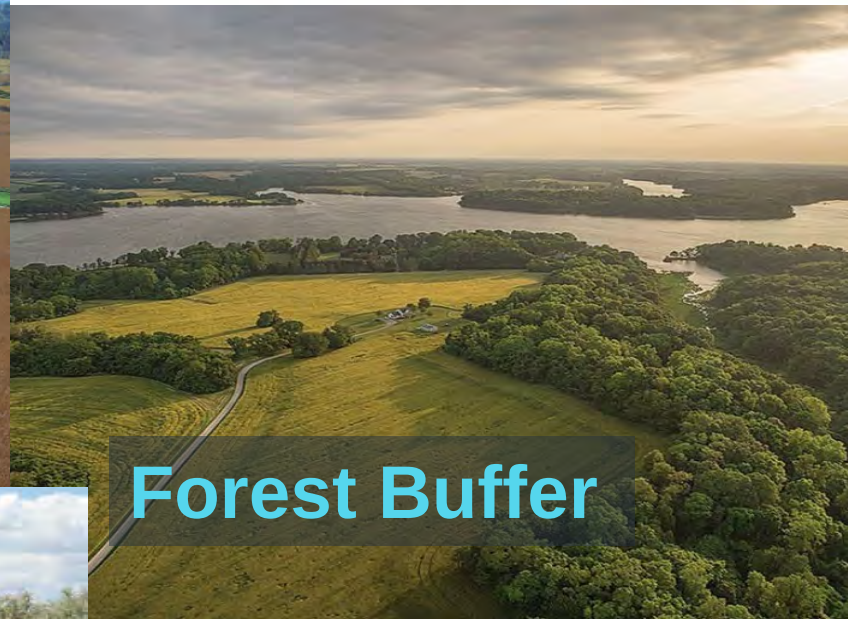
Continuous Contracts, 3,000



CREP Practices Available



Filter Strip



Forest Buffer



Wetland Restoration



MPL Wildlife Buffer





United States Department of Agriculture

State Contacts

FSA

Emily Horsley

Emily.horsley@usda.gov

NRCS

Chad Wentz

Chad.wentz@usda.gov

Todd Groh

todd.groh@usda.gov

DCR

David Bryan

David.bryan@dcr.virginia.gov



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State CIG Agreements

State-level Cooperative Agreements

Debbie Bullock, Soil Conservationist

Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist



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State-level Partnership Agreements

Virginia DWR	Funds 5 partner positions to implement wildlife practices
Virginia DOF	Provides technical assistance to implement forestry related practices
Virginia DOF	Supports a shared forestry liaison between the agencies
VT-CMI	Funds 2 engineering staff to implement stream restoration habitat
VSU	Supports technical assistance and outreach to historically underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers
Troy Univ.	Development of GIS-based tool to identify high probable archaeological site and other resource concerns
PF/QF	Funds 2 partner positions to implement wildlife practices
VT-SPES	Funds soil health integrated conservation agronomy staff and farmer mentors to advance soil health
NOWCC	Support retention of institutional knowledge and technical competency of experienced retirees



Chesapeake Bay Watershed Updates

Darryl Glover, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

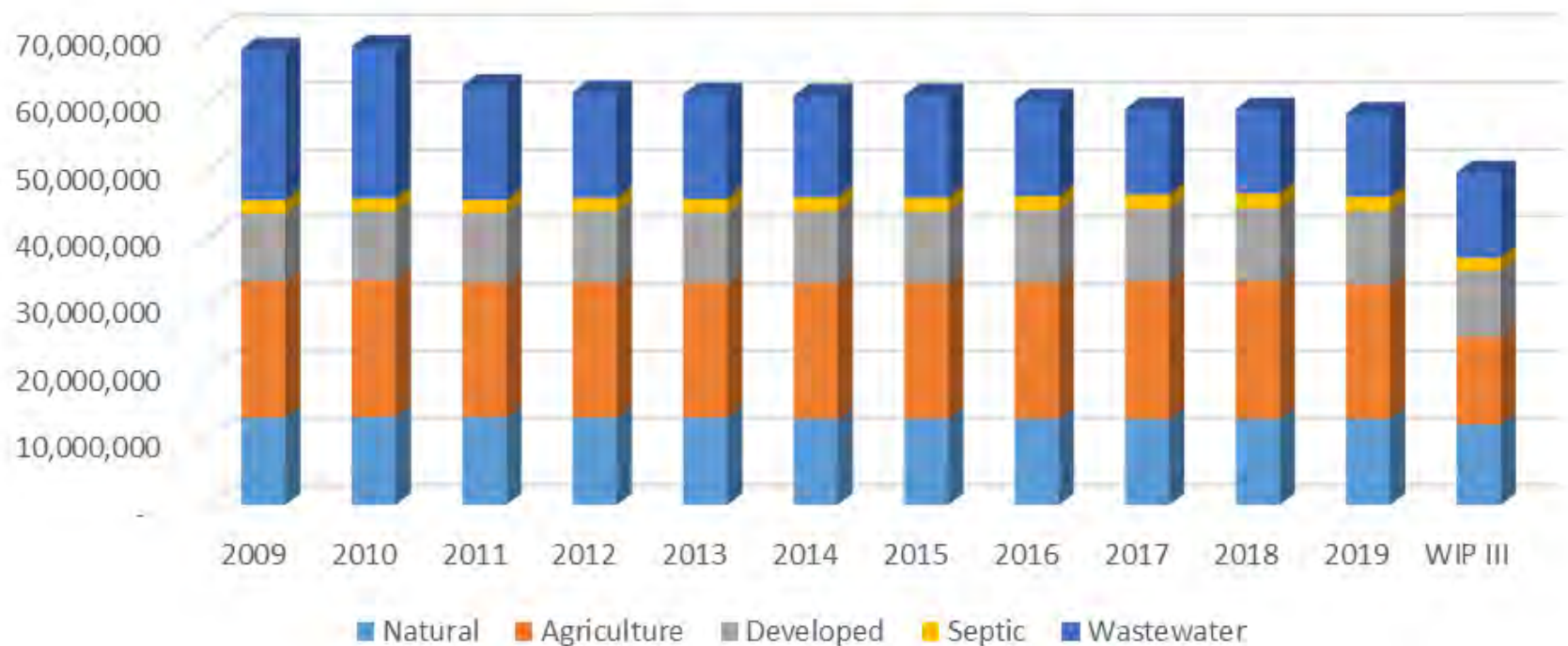


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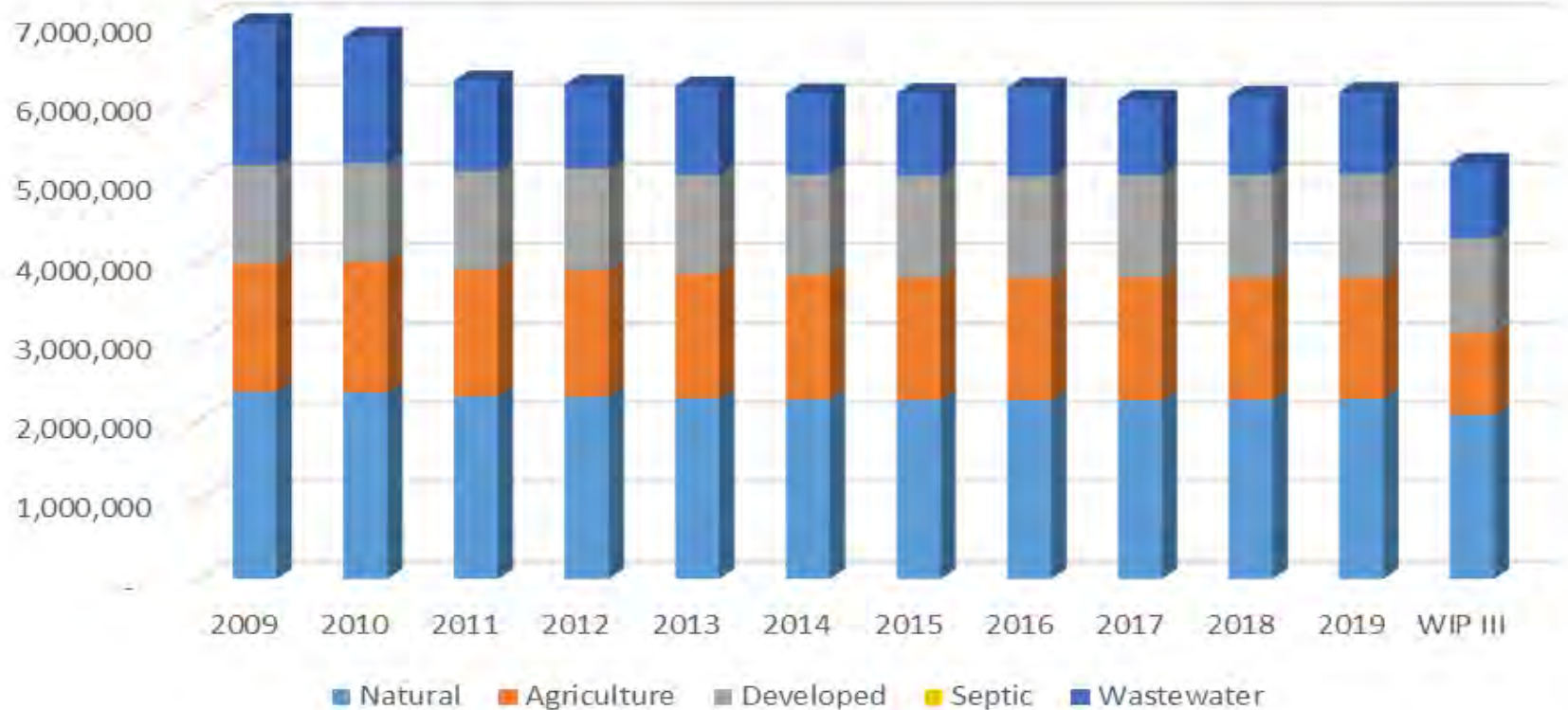
Virginia Nitrogen Loads (pounds)

(CAST19 delivered)



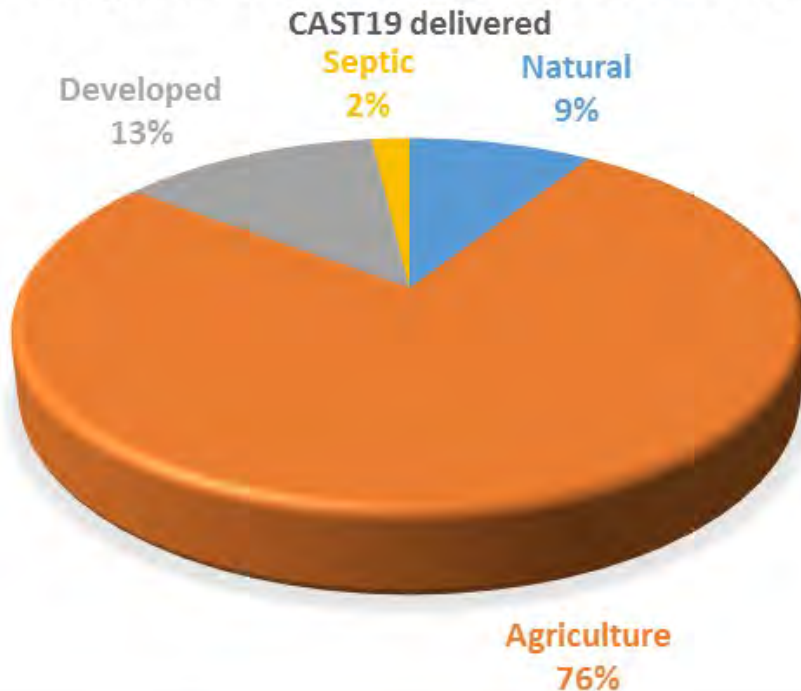
Virginia Phosphorus Loads (pounds)

(CAST19 delivered)



Virginia's Plan for 2025

Virginia Remaining N Reductions

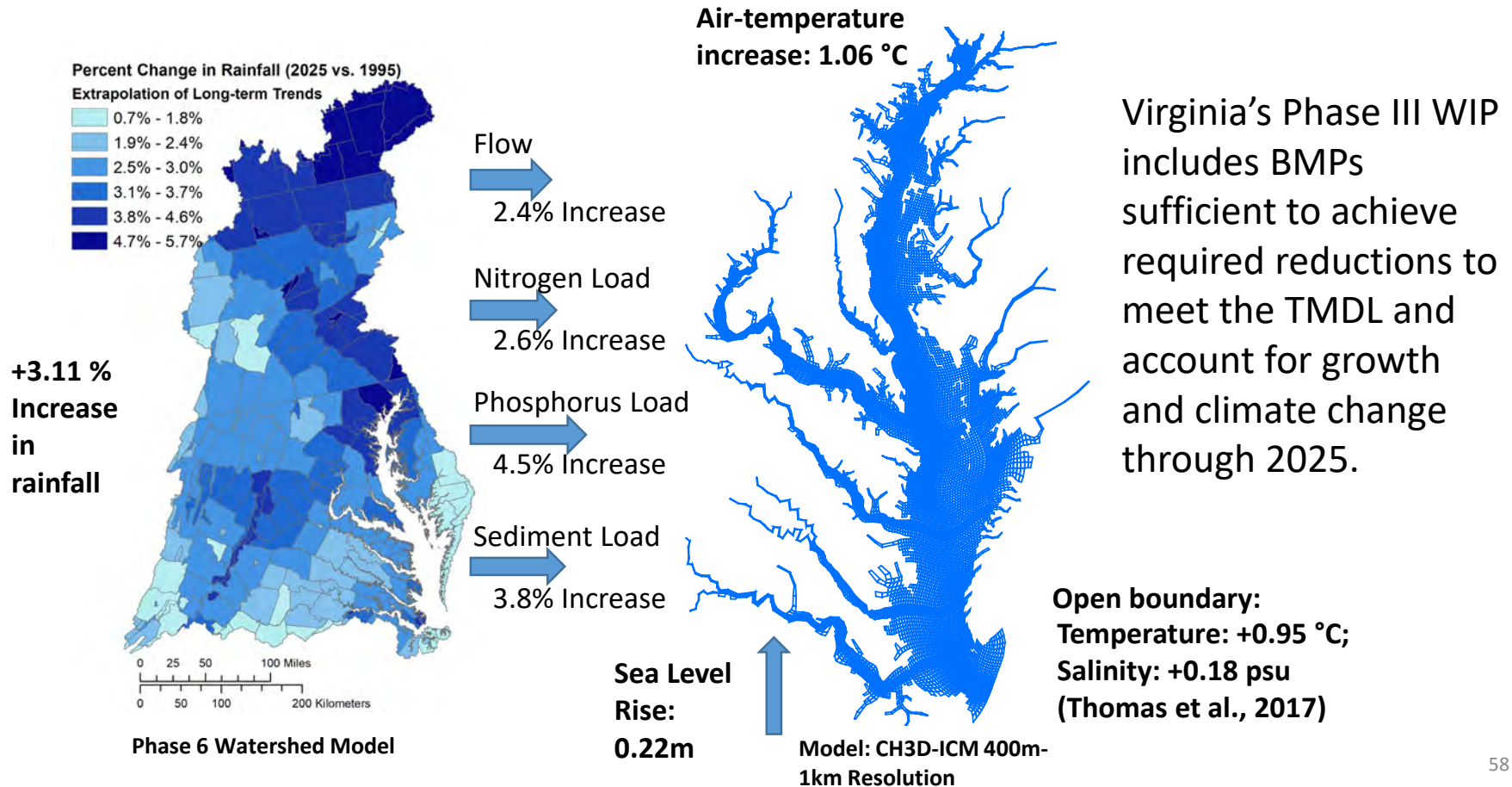


Agriculture Practices	Unit	2019 Progress	WIP 3
Nutrient Application Management Core Nitrogen	Acres	499,565	951,395
Nutrient Application Management Rate Nitrogen	Acres	39,643	758,474
Nutrient Application Management Placement Nitrogen	Acres	8,939	426,452
Nutrient Application Management Timing Nitrogen	Acres	30,704	427,076
Nutrient Application Management Core Phosphorus	Acres	499,565	951,395
Nutrient Application Management Rate Phosphorus	Acres	18,434	426,452
Nutrient Application Management Placement Phosphorus	Acres	18,434	426,452
Nutrient Application Management Timing Phosphorus	Acres	-	426,376
Conservation Tillage	Acres	157,198	402,990
High Residue Tillage	Acres	486,605	185,201
Low Residue Tillage	Acres	-	19,853
Conservation + LowResidue + High Residue Tillage	Acres	643,803	608,044
Cover Crop	Acres	125,114	384,396
Cover Crop with Fall Nutrients	Acres	346	20,038
Commodity Cover Crop	Acres	24,135	39,124
Commodity + Cover Crop	Acres	149,594	443,557
Pasture Alternative Watering	Acres	137,230	176,188
Prescribed Grazing	Acres	202,898	347,363
Horse Pasture Management	Acres	56	19,851
Forest Buffers on Fenced Pasture Corridor	Acres in Buffers	-	26,390
Grass Buffers on Fenced Pasture Corridor	Acres in Buffers	9,688	45,766
Pasture Management Composite	Acres	349,872	615,558
Forest Buffers	Acres in Buffers	3,374	21,965
Wetland Restoration	Acres	319	3,665
Wetland Enhancement and Rehabilitation	Acres	-	10,140
Land Retirement	Acres	24,551	61,271
Grass Buffers	Acres in Buffers	6,693	24,058
Tree Planting	Acres	13,073	34,256
Alternative Crops	Acres	474	1,231
Soil and Water Conservation Plan	Acres	-	1,183,460
Manure Incorporation	Acres	-	12,706
Agricultural Drainage Management	Acres	452	164,186
Non Urban Stream Restoration	Feet	235,470	925,839
Non Urban Shoreline Management	Feet	17,117	35,591



Chesapeake Bay Program
Science, Restoration, Partnership

Elements of 2025 Climate Change (1995-2025)



BMP Verification

Sector	BMP	Unit	2019AmountCredited	1985-2019VerificationLoss	Credit Duration
▣ Agriculture	▣ Precision Intensive Rotational/Prescribed Grazing	Acres	111,233	(88,969)	10
	▣ Land Retirement to Ag Open Space	Acres	16,123	(62,657)	10
	▣ Off Stream Watering Without Fencing	Acres	4,663	(15,740)	10
	▣ Forest Buffer	Acres in Buffers	2,684	(11,033)	10
	▣ Tree Planting	Acres	1,982	(9,502)	10
	▣ Grass Buffer-Streamside with Exclusion Fencing	Acres in Buffers	8,041	(8,433)	10
	▣ Grass Buffer	Acres in Buffers	1,249	(5,977)	10
	▣ Barnyard Runoff Control	Acres	32	(144)	10
▣ AgAnimal	▣ Riparian Fence	Animal Units	187,678	(127,312)	10
	▣ Animal Waste Management System	Animal Units	14,406	(22,734)	15
	▣ Mortality Composters	Animal Units	71,723	(6,737)	15
▣ Natural	▣ Non Urban Stream Restoration	Feet	160,408	(419,523)	10

The Bay Model uses established credit durations to remove practices that have not been re-inspected from the simulation

Credit can be restored when inspections are conducted to ensure practices remain in place and functioning as intended.



Partner Presentation Update Virginia Department of Forestry



Todd Groh, Virginia Department of Forestry



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Building on Success

BEING PRESENT:

- State Technical Committee Meetings
- Field staff assistance across the State



LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES:

- Forest planning MOU
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
- Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) - Longleaf pine
- Contribution agreements
 - Professional staff training
 - Technical assistance
 - Forestry Liaison Position



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Building on Success

CONTINUED COLLABORATION:

- Joint Chief Agreements
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program – Hardwood
- Technical Forestry Practice Standard refinement



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Soil Health Update – New VA NRCS Strategy & Coalition Partnership Projects



Chris Lawrence, State Cropland Agronomist

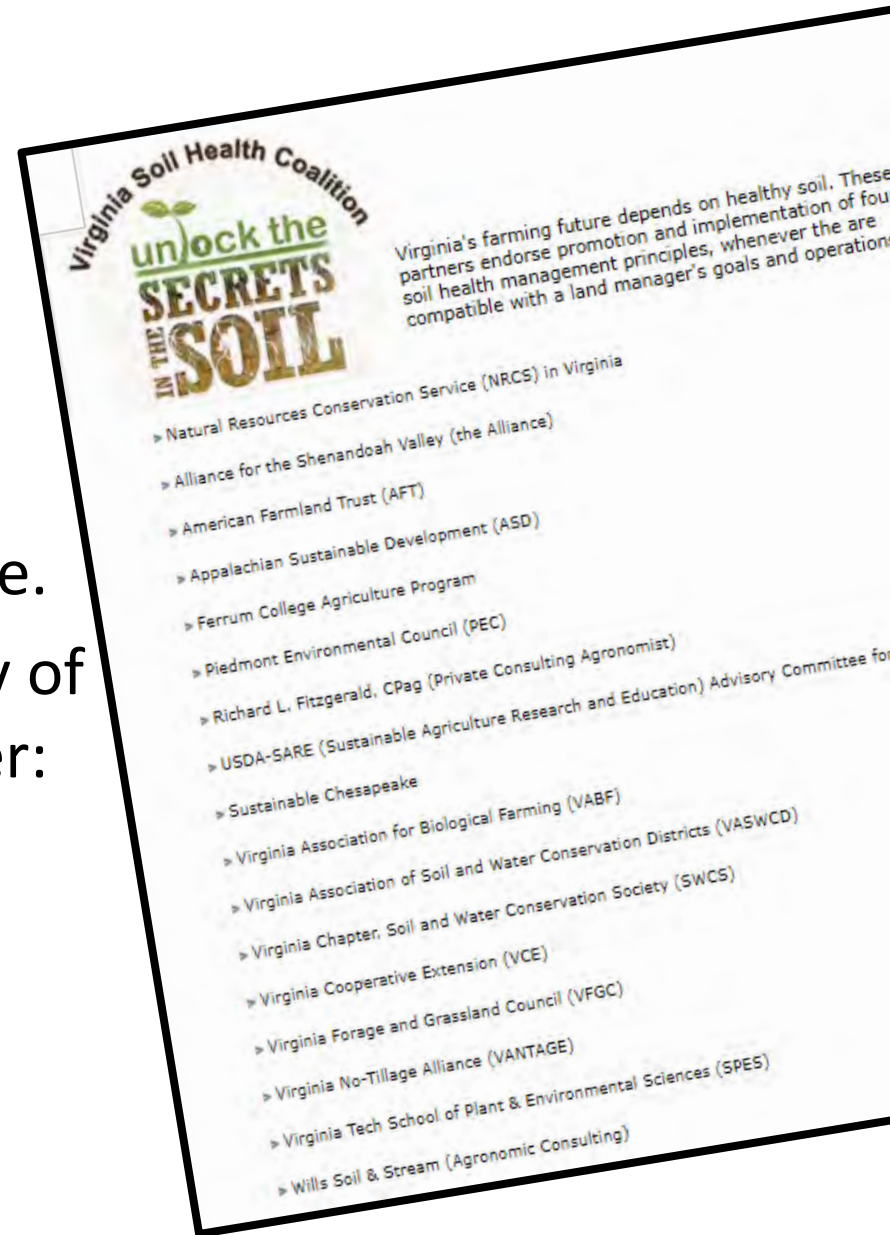


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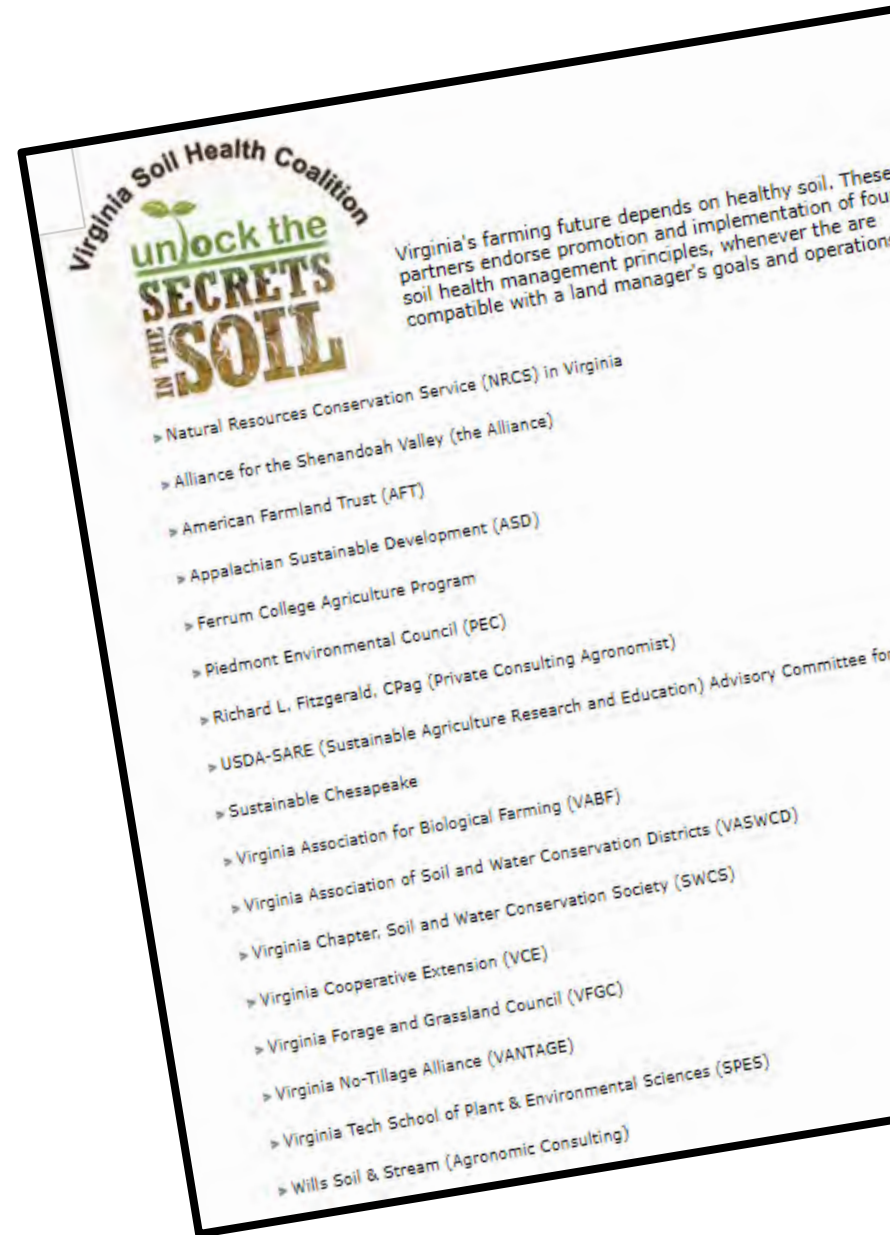
Exciting & critical time for VA Soil Health Coalition

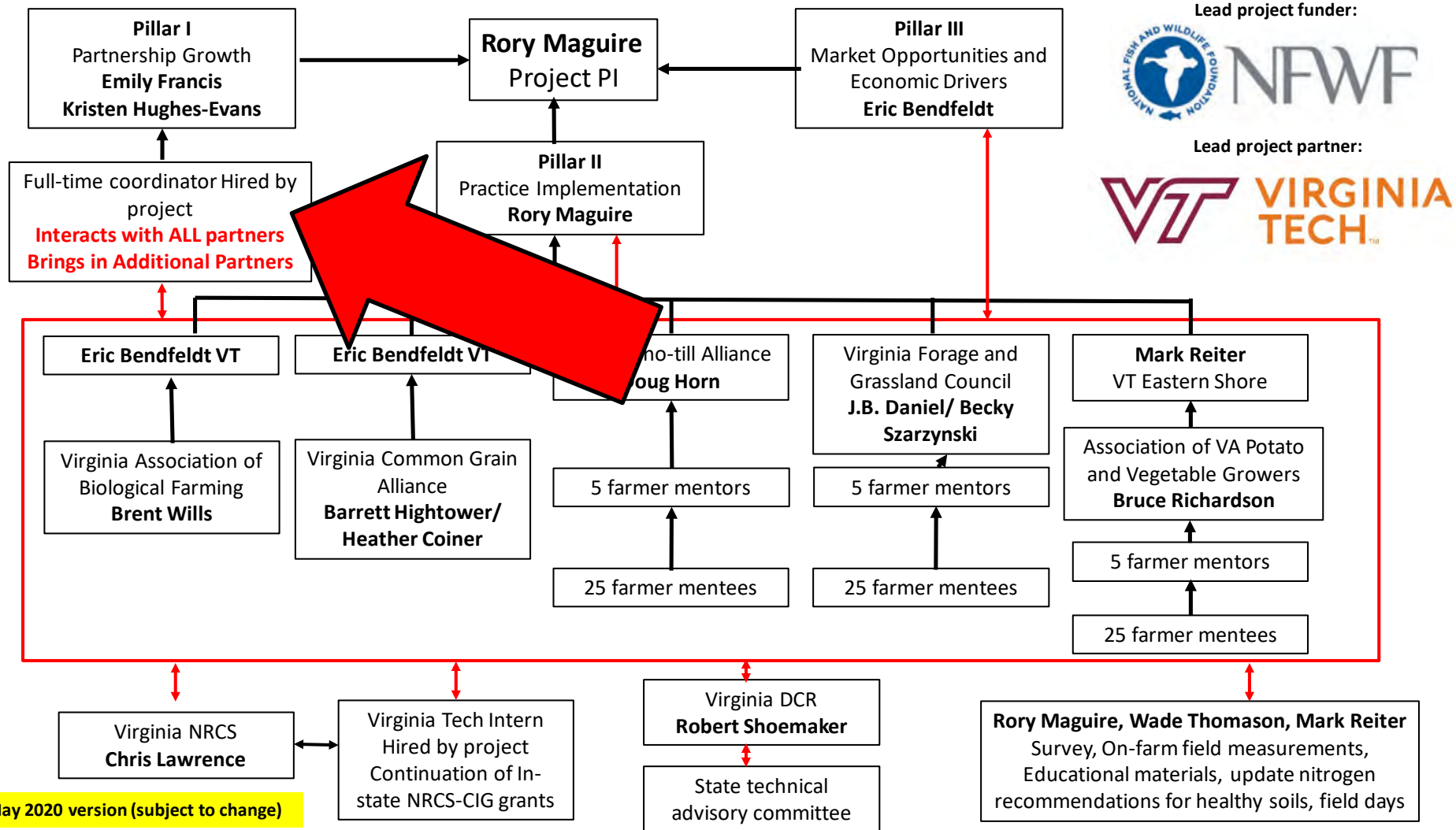
- More interest than ever!
- New partners want in!
- Looking back:
 - Since 2013, a simple list of partners on VA NRCS website.
 - The key “glue” binding many of them to us and to each other:
 - 26 VA NRCS state-level CIGs.
 - \$1.75M NRCS cash.
 - Plus at least \$1.75M match.
 - Over 9 program years.



Exciting & critical time for VA Soil Health Coalition

- Looking forward:
 - New push to expand & energize Coalition is underway!
 - VA Tech hiring first Coalition Coordinator.
 - Funded as part of \$1M NFWF Bay Stewardship grant project.





Lead project funder:



Lead project partner:



Pillar I
Partnership Growth
Emily Francis
Kristen Hughes-Evans

Full-time coordinator Hired by project
Interacts with ALL partners
Brings in Additional Partners

Pillar III
Opportunities and
Economic Drivers
Eric Bendfeldt



Lead project funder:

Lead project partner:



Virginia Forage and
Pastureland Council
Daniel/ Becky
Szarzynski

Mark Reiter
VT Eastern Shore

Association of VA Potato
and Vegetable Growers
Bruce Richardson

Farmer mentors

5 farmer mentors

Farmer mentees

25 farmer mentees

Virginia NRCS
Chris Lawrence

Virginia Tech Intern
Hired by project
Continuation of In-
state NRCS-CIG grants

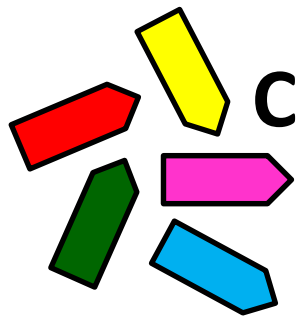
Virginia DCR
Robert Shoemaker

State technical
advisory committee

Rory Maguire, Wade Thomason, Mark Reiter
Survey, On-farm field measurements,
Educational materials, update nitrogen
recommendations for healthy soils, field days

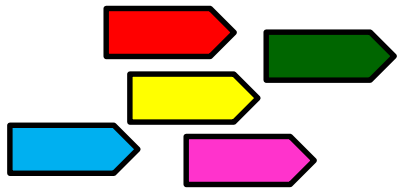
May 2020 version (subject to change)





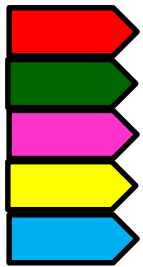
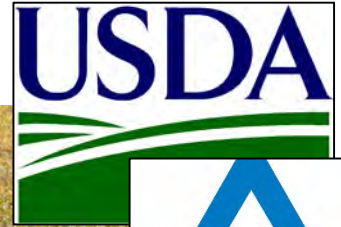
Coincidental?

What kind of soil health partnership(s) do we want?



Coordinated?

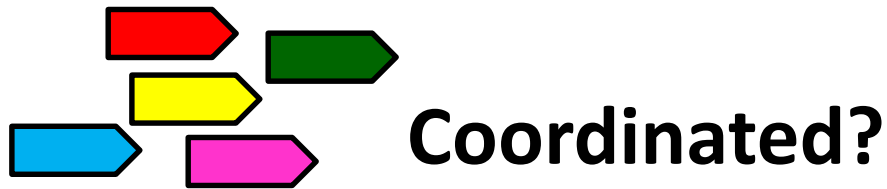
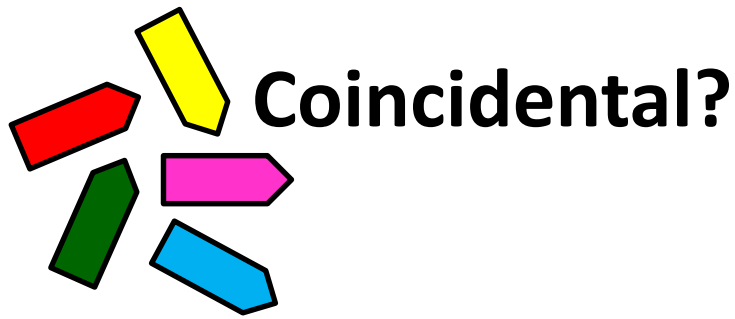
Great partnership
example:



Cooperative?



Collaborative?



What kind of soil health partnership(s) do we want?

These require:

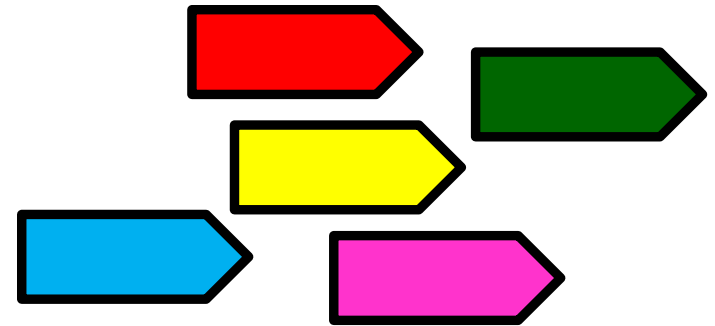
Communication

**Within and
between partner
organizations**

**To define
goals, audiences,
strategies, etc.**

Why define and communicate our soil health goals, audiences, strategies?

1. So we don't run into each other.
2. So you can help me define mine.
3. So I can help you define yours.



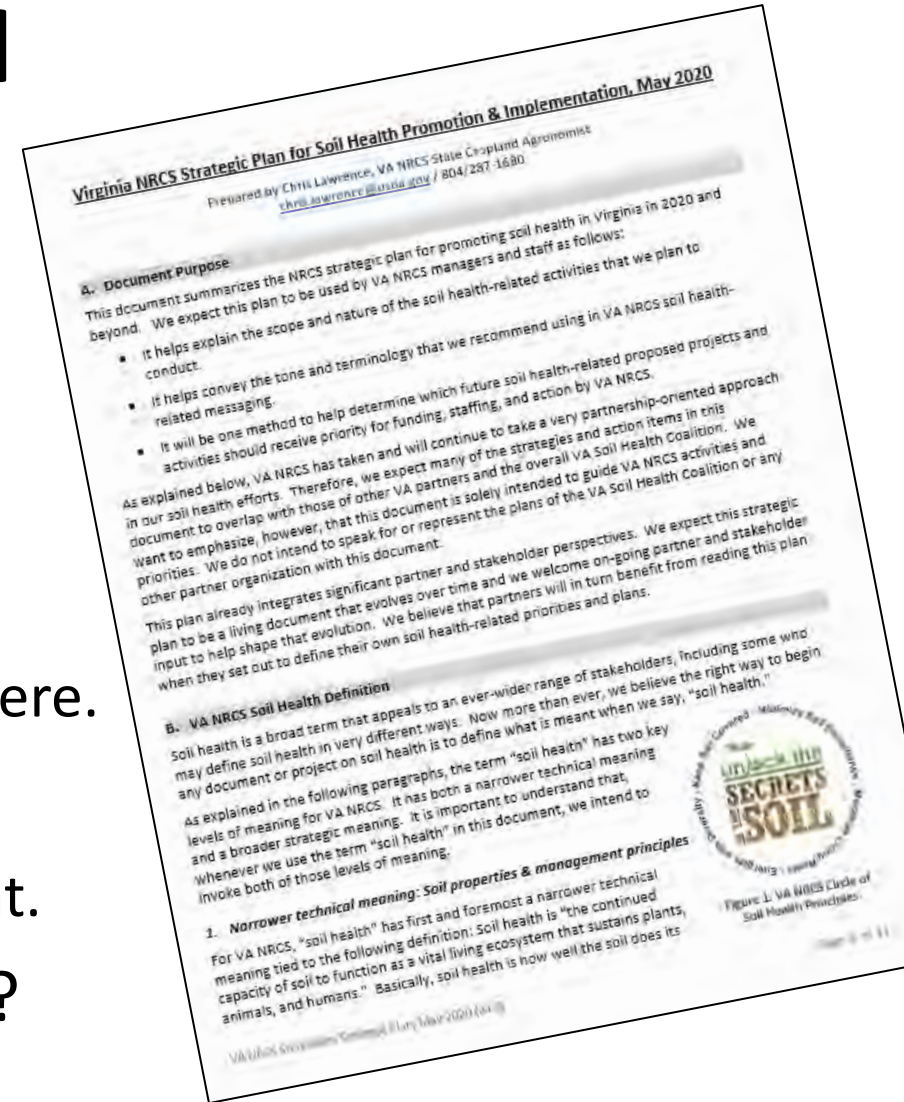
VA NRCS soil health goals, priorities, etc.: How can you learn more about them?

1. Read the May 2020 VA NRCS Soil Health Strategic Plan.
2. Look for additional October 2020 considerations for VA NRCS soil health partners from me.



VA NRCS Soil Health Strategic Plan for Soil Health Promotion & Implementation, May 2020

- Please read this document!
 - 11 pages - can't sum it all up here.
- Send feedback direct to me.
 - Contact info is in the document.
- Where can you find the Plan?





Technical Resources

- ⊕ Conservation Planning
- ⊕ Data, Maps, & Analysis
- ⊕ Ecological Science
- ⊕ Engineering
- ⊕ Land Use
- ⊕ State Technical Committee
 - STC Minutes
 - STC Agenda

STC Agenda

Agenda items for the October 29, 2020, session include:

- FY21 NRCS Funding Priorities (EQIP, CSP, ACEP, RCPP)
Yamika Bennett, Acting ASTC-Programs - NRCS
- Chesapeake Bay Watershed Updates
Darryl Glover, VDCR
- Soil Health Update: New Virginia NRCS Strategy
Chris Lawrence, State Cropland Agronomist - NRCS
View the [VA NRCS Soil Health Strategy](#) document (282KB, pdf).

View the full [meeting agenda](#) (55KB, pdf).

Moving the VA Soil Health Coalition forward: Additional considerations for NRCS partners

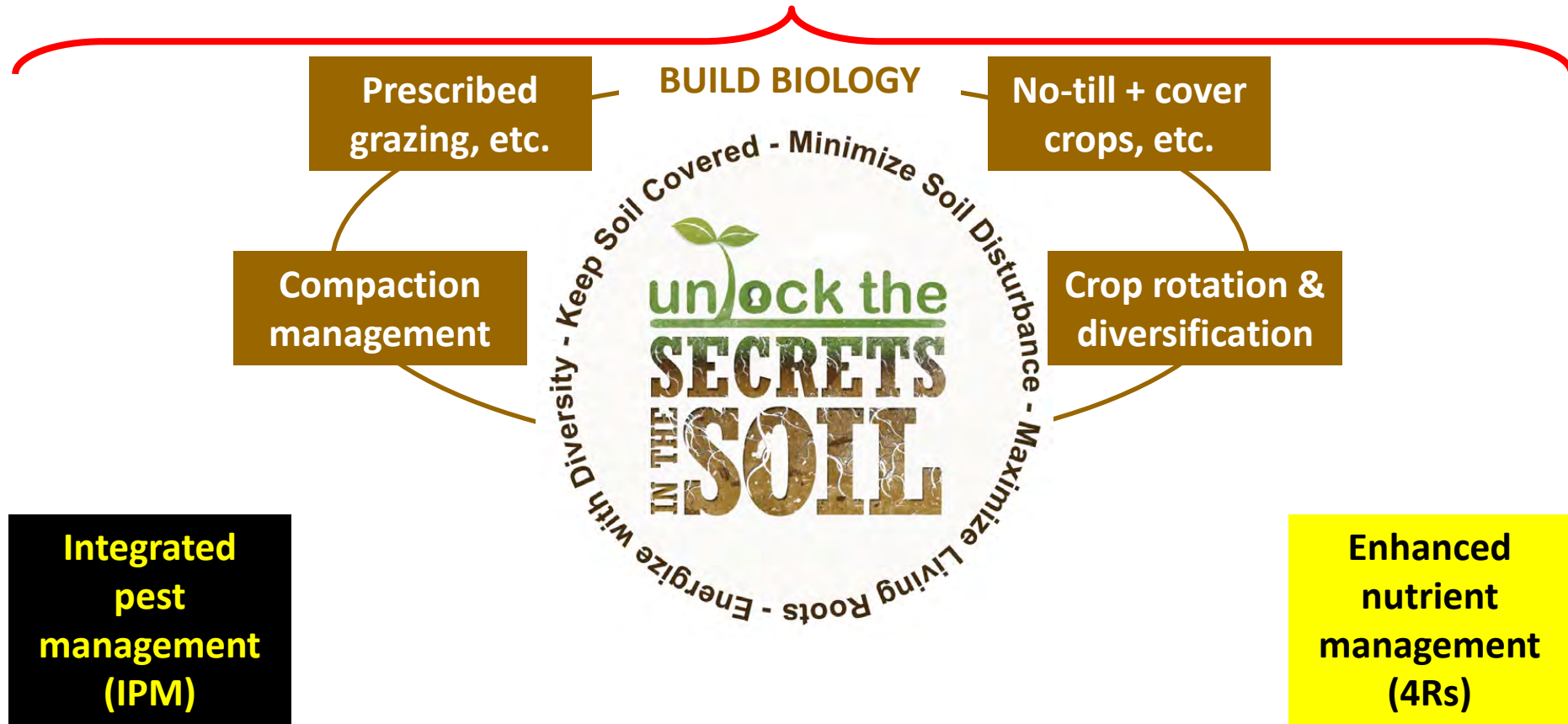
- New term & team: “Soil Health Plus”
- What role for state CIG?



New VA “Soil Health Plus” term

Soil Health + Integrated Conservation Agronomy (ICA)

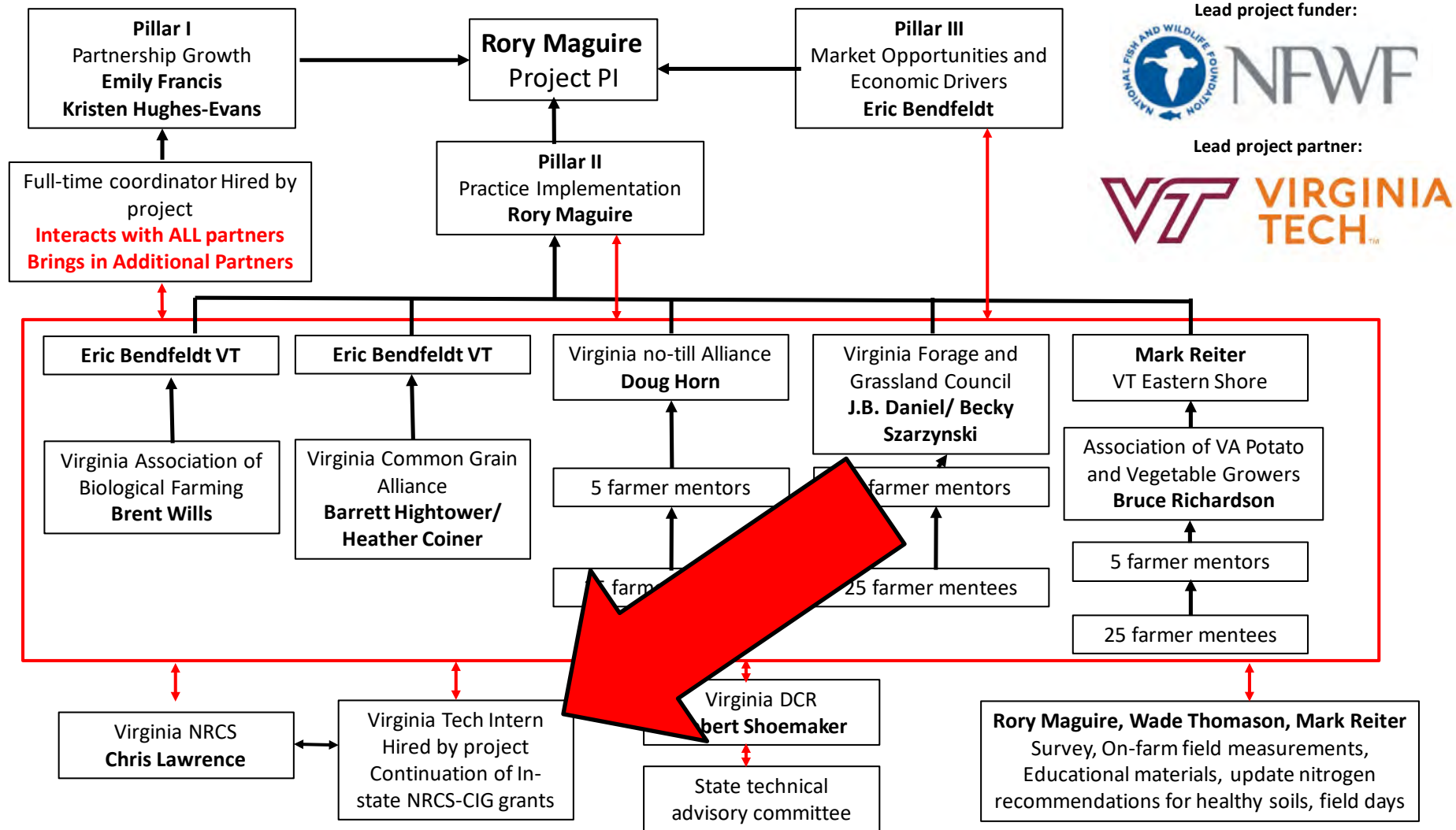
Soil Health Plus

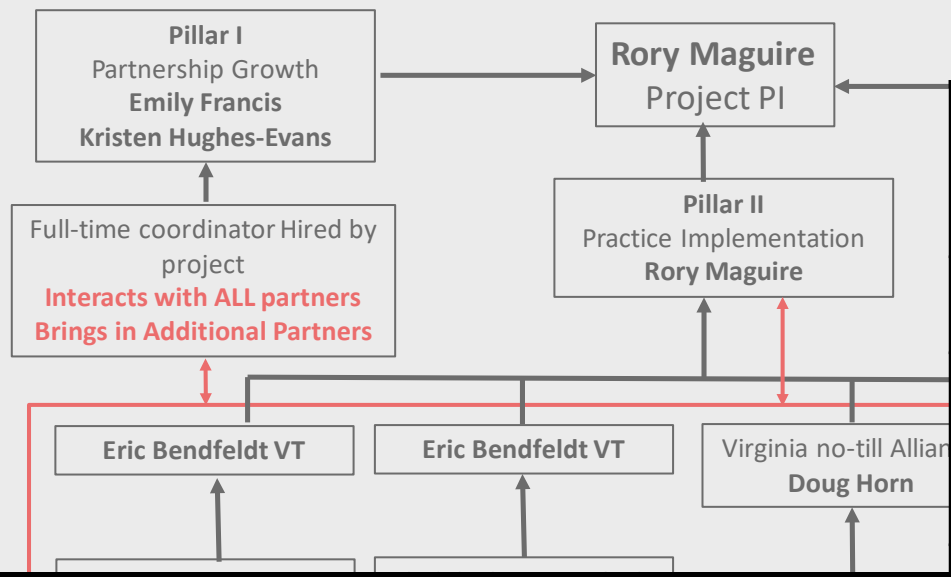


New VA “Soil Health Plus” team

- Staffing shortages are key obstacle to progress.
- The “Soil Health Plus” Team:
 - Collaborative partnership staffing strategy.
 - Full-time technical specialists.
 - Part-time farmer / field mentors.
 - Hired by VA Tech with grant (“soft”) funds.
 - Embedded with VA NRCS.
- Timeline:
 - Discussed for years.
 - Strategy written up & approved spring 2019.
 - First grants sought & awarded 2019 & 2020.
 - First positions will be advertised fall 2020.

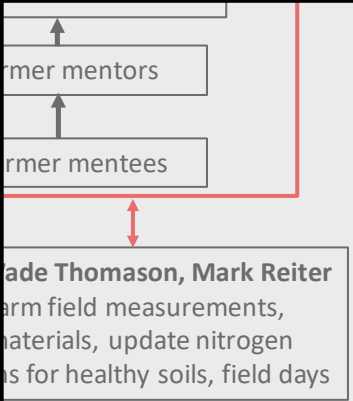
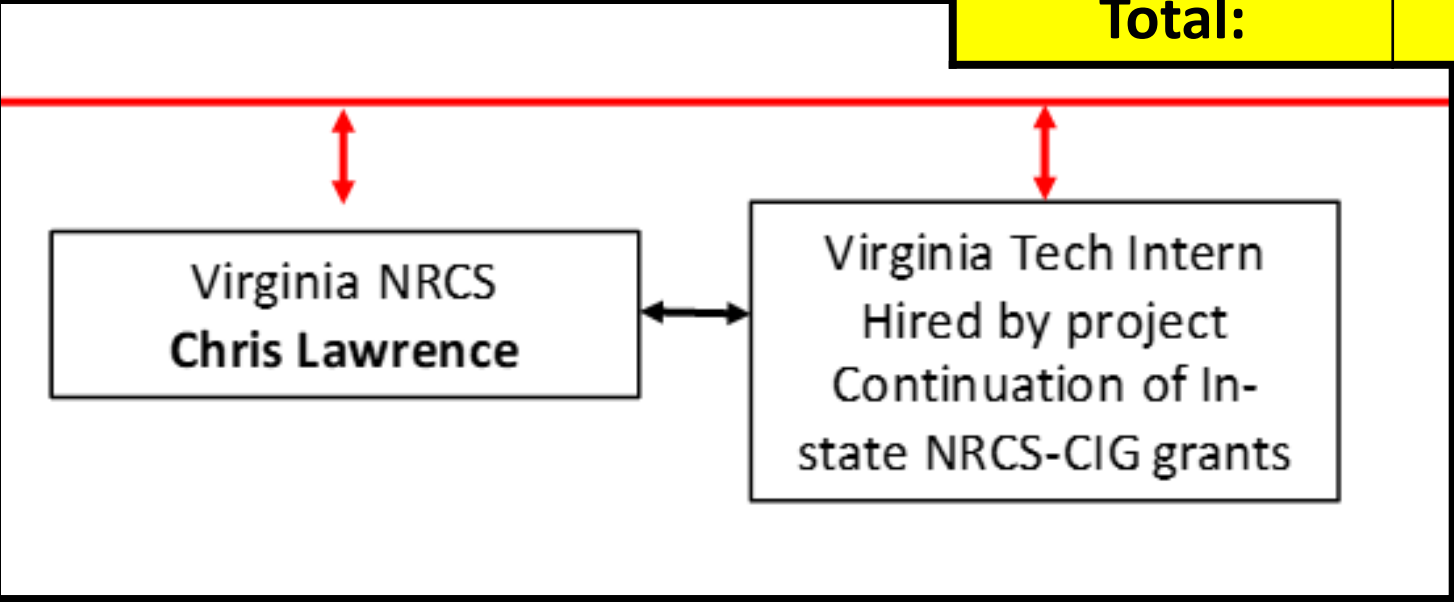






Lead project funder:

Soil Health Plus Team initial budget (Oct 2020)	
NFWF:	\$150K
NRCS NHQ:	\$330K
NRCS VA:	\$500K
Total:	\$980K



What role for State CIIG as we move forward?

- State CIIG presents multiple challenges for VA NRCS:
 - Funds are pulled from EQIP & potential farmer contracts.
 - Additional workload for administrative / programs staff.
 - Additional workload for technical / agronomy staff.
- “Soil Health Plus” Team can help with CIIG workload.
 - 2019 VA NRCS / VA Tech joint strategy document explicitly proposes that staffing strategy can help ensure continuation of state CIIG support of VA soil health initiative.
- But decision to offer state CIIG in any given year depends on many factors...
 - including stakeholder feedback!



Please contact me with questions or comments!



Chris Lawrence, USDA-NRCS State Cropland Agronomist, Virginia

chris.lawrence@usda.gov



Closing Remarks

Dr. Edwin Martinez, State Conservationist



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To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online at <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/ad-3027>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

**(1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or**

(2) Fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

**(3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov
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Virginia NRCS Programs Report (FY20)

EQIP, CSP, RCPP, ACEP, SWPA, CIG, VPA-HIP

NRCS Virginia is currently managing 2,414 active contracts totaling over \$131 million on 518,890 acres through EQIP, CSP and RCPP Programs.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

This popular Farm Bill program allows NRCS to work one-on-one with farmers to address natural resource concerns like water quality and erosion on their farms. In FY2020, Virginia NRCS obligated \$24.6 million in EQIP funds for 441 contract participants on 65,672 acres.

The top conservation practices planned under EQIP in FY2020 were: fencing, roofs and covers, pasture and hay planting, heavy use area protection, watering facilities, cover crops, livestock pipelines, waste storage facilities, water wells and high tunnel systems.

Historically Underserved (HU) participants received 47 percent of the funds obligated, which went to 207 contract participants in the following pools Beginning Farmers (171), Socially Disadvantaged (46), Veterans (16) and Limited Resource (12).

NRCS EQIP funding continues to be targeted as follows: livestock (50 percent), wildlife

(10 percent), beginning farmer (5 percent) and socially disadvantaged (5 percent). The remaining 30 percent is allocated for mandatory offerings and state priorities (cropland, forestry, conservation activity plans, high tunnels, organic, etc.)

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP offers agricultural producers and forest landowners an opportunity to earn payments for actively managing and expanding conservation activities like cover crops and pollinator habitat while maintaining active agricultural production on their land.

The agency obligated \$7.3 million for 224 CSP contracts on 64,590 acres to help participants build on their existing conservation activities. Fund pools included: CSP Renewals (23), CSP Classic (112) and the CSP Grassland Initiative (89).

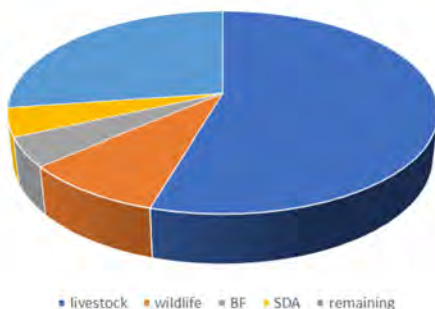
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

RCPP harnesses the power of public-private partnerships to coordinate conservation activities that expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed and regional natural resource concerns. Virginia has obligated \$9.2 million for 438 contracts tied to six RCPP projects since 2015. FY2020 obligations included 12 contracts for \$590,893 for oyster bottom restoration through

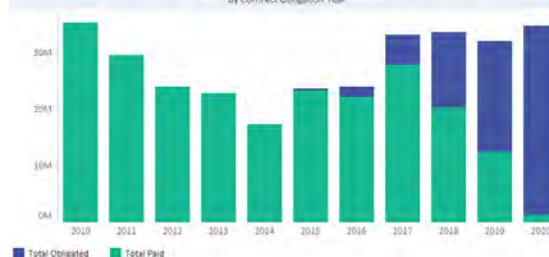
Program Success By the Numbers

- Managing **2,414** active contracts with producers and private landowners
- Enrolled **518,890** acres under EQIP, CSP and RCPP
- Obligated **\$24.6 million** in EQIP funding in FY20
- Directed **47 percent** of FY20 EQIP funds to Historically Underserved participants
- Enrolled **64,590** acres under CSP in FY20
- Obligated **\$9.2 million** for RCPP projects since 2015
- Certified **5,513** contract items in FY20
- Made **\$19 million** in payments in FY20

Statutory Funding Requirements



PAYMENTS VS OBLIGATIONS
By Contract Obligation Year



aquaculture and Franklin County dairy and ag water protection projects.

Payments and Obligations/ Applied Practices

Since 2010, Virginia NRCS has obligated more than 9,000 conservation contracts for over \$307.5 million in financial assistance to help farmers implement conservation practices on 1,603,400 acres.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

ACEP provides opportunities to protect productive working lands and to restore or enhance wetlands. In FY2020, Virginia NRCS obligated \$2.14 million in ACEP funds for three new Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) with four partner organizations to permanently protect 1,094 acres of farmland. Eleven easements are currently in acquisition and four wetland restorations are underway. Existing recorded easements now total 141 on 16,555 acres of farm and wetland.

Source Water Protection

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized NRCS and its state technical committees to work with community water systems to identify state/local source water protection priorities. In 2019, Virginia's committee convened a working group to select Hydrological Units (HUCs) to target as Virginia Source Water Protection Areas (SWPAs). This team selected the towns of Luray and Woodstock to receive this designation.

In 2020, states were asked to refine their original list to identify more high-priority areas of concern with up to 20 percent of their land area eligible for inclusion in the SWPA. Virginia worked with EPA, the Virginia Department of Health's Division of Drinking Water, TetraTech and the Ground Water Protection Council to select these additional watersheds for FY2021.

The analysis included an assessment of risk factors such as nutrients, sediment and pathogens, karst topography, HUC12 cropland and pasture acres and livestock access to surface water. The group also incorporated comments from local work groups from each area of the state to expand the original list by an additional seven percent.



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This locally led process helps ensure that NRCS identifies and targets areas of high concern and develops special ranking criteria for increased EQIP funding opportunities.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

The CIG program enables us to work with public and private partners to evaluate and accelerate adoption of new approaches to natural resource protection. Virginia NRCS did not offer a state CIG program in 2020 but is currently managing 18 active CIGs throughout the state.



The high tunnel shown above is being constructed at Virginia State University with 2018 CIG funding. The structure will be used to show small, underserved, beginning and veteran farmers how alternative energy sources can be used for high tunnel production.

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

VPA-HIP is designed to improve public access for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation on private lands through leases with willing landowners. On March 11, 2020, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) received a VPA-HIP grant of nearly \$3 million to help open more private lands to public access for wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, trapping, fishing, boating and wildlife watching.

This grant covers Southwest Virginia with emphasis on the seven-county Coalfield region. VDGIF, renamed the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), will partner with farmers, resource companies and other landowners to lease small and large parcels for boating, fishing and other recreational opportunities.

Program Success By the Numbers

- Obligated **\$2.14 million** in ACEP-ALE funds in FY2020
- Preserved **1,094** acres of new FY2020 ALE farmland
- Recorded **141** existing easements.
- Protecting **16,555** acres of farm and wetlands through existing recorded easements.
- Acquiring **10** ACEP-ALE with **one** ACEP-WRE in progress
- Restoring **four** wetlands through WRE
- Identified **two** towns for SWPAs
- Managing **18** active CIGs
- Awarded **\$2.99 million** in VPA- HIP funding to VDWR

For more information on these programs and activities, please contact Yamika Bennett, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, by email at yamika.bennett@usda.gov.

Virginia

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Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) Land Value Determination for FY-2021

Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) Process, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Please review the summary below of the process Virginia NRCS uses to determine what to pay landowners for WRE easements. If you have comments, please send them to Diane.Dunaway@usda.gov, Easement Program Manager by **November 2, 2020**. Thank you.

When NRCS receives a landowner's WRE application, we need to determine the land value to know how much to offer for the WRE easement. Following policy, we hire an appraiser to perform a Fair Market Value (FMV) appraisal (using USPAP standards).

Since NRCS is purchasing only a portion of the land rights, we do not pay the full FMV, but do pay 95% of that FMV since we are purchasing most of those rights to protect the wetland (e.g. development rights.) The WRE landowner retains 5% of the FMV for remaining land rights. The 95% is referred to as the percentage Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC). The 95% is determined by a "logical, defensible, and well-documented process".

This current process for VA was developed in FY-2015 and since then has been acceptable to WRE enrollees. It was approved by the NRCS easement national appraiser each year. For FY-2021 NRCS proposes to use the same successful process with data updates as needed.

Most VA counties will have a GARC cap of \$5,000 per acre. However, as in FY20, VA is requesting special approval of a GARC exceeding \$5,000 per acre for **20 counties**, all within the high priority Chesapeake Bay drainage area. These counties are under significant development pressure that increases per-acre land values. Economic analysis shows an assumed GARC for All Land Uses to be **\$12,893** per acre maximum, determined by appraisal and 95%.

Here are the information sources considered in developing current GARC for FY-21.

1. Data sets of previously obtained ACEP-WRE or WRP appraisals and GRP land values.
2. Forest Inventory Analysis data from VA Dept. of Forestry 2017.
3. Corresponding GARCs from adjacent states.
4. National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Cropland and Pasture Rental Rates for VA 2016.
5. National, State, or local agricultural statistics.
6. USDA/Census of Agriculture Value of Land & Buildings 2012 (or most recent).
7. USDA/Produce Prices Paid Index 2013-2018.
8. For a GARC greater than \$5,000 per acre, a written evaluation and justification of the ecological importance of enrolling these high-cost lands (if applicable).

Virginia's WRE Land Value Determination process for GARC were developed by David Faulkner, Natural Resource Economist, with VA Easement Staff.

For questions, contact: Diane.Dunaway@usda.gov . Easement Specialist & Program Manager . Natural Resources Conservation Service . [Virginia NRCS Easements](#) . 804.287.1634

Virginia State-Level Partnership Agreements

Leveraging funds (matching and/or in-kind contributions from partners which more than doubles the NRCS investment)
to support common goals and objectives

Project Entity	Years	Scope	NRCS Funds	Project Objectives/Outcomes
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources	2017-2022	Statewide	\$950,000	Funds five Private Lands Biologist positions to increase technical assistance available for protecting state wildlife resources and implementing wildlife practices through NRCS and VDWR programs.
Virginia Department of Forestry	2017-2022	Statewide	\$200,000	Enhances technical assistance available for Farm Bill programs through direct access to a statewide team of foresters to plan and implement forestry related plans and conservation practices.
Virginia Department of Forestry	2017-2022	Statewide	\$70,000	Supports a shared forestry liaison position with oversight for planning and implementation of forestry practices through NRCS and VDOF programs.
Virginia Tech - Conservation Management Institute	2018-2022	Southwest Virginia and Shenandoah Valley	\$669,993	Provides funding for two dedicated engineering staff to implement stream restoration habitat improvements for the Eastern Hellbender under the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Program.
Virginia State University*	2020-2022	Statewide	\$625,000	Supports technical assistance and customer outreach programs for small, socially disadvantaged, beginning and veteran farmers.
Troy University	2018-2023	Statewide	\$290,000	Supports development of a GIS-based tool to identify high probability archaeological sites and to evaluate other resource concerns (Stream Power Index and Flow Accumulation Models).

Pheasants/Quail Forever**	2020-2025	Statewide	\$417,500 (VA NRCS Contribution)	Supports two Private Lands Biologist positions to increase technical assistance available for protecting state wildlife resources and implementing wildlife practices through NRCS and VDWR programs.
Virginia Tech (School of Plant and Environmental Sciences)***	2020-2025	Statewide	\$500,000 (VA NRCS Contribution)	Creates and funds Soil Health + Integrated Conservation Agronomy (“Soil Health Plus”) partnership staff position and engages farmer mentors to advance soil health goals and provide on-site technical assistance and training to partnership staff and producers.
National Older Workers Career Center	2019-2023	Statewide	\$3,270,575	Supports retention of institutional knowledge and technical competency through the employment of experienced retirees over the age of 55 via the Agricultural Conservation Experienced Services (ACES).

**This is officially a national NRCS grant agreement awarded to VSU.*

***This is officially a multi-state national NRCS grant agreement to which VA NRCS contributed \$417,500.*

****This is officially a national NRCS grant agreement to which VA NRCS contributed \$500,000. A portion of the grant will fund activities in NC.*



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