

State Technical Committee (STC) Meeting
October 26, 2021 at 10 a.m.
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

10:00-10:10	Welcome and Opening Remarks NRCS Chesapeake Bay Update	Dr. Edwin Martinez, State Conservationist
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Dr. Martinez welcomed the group, DCs, and other partners. NRCS finished FY21 strong and successfully even with the pandemic. Dr. Martinez discussed the high amount cost share in the Bay and the increase in staffing capacity. There are 23 field offices which provide service in the CB, 65% of staff. Discussed backlog of applications and budget for FY2022. New year for partners with Virginia being on the forefront of several initiatives (Urban Ag, Climate Smart Agriculture for historically underserved clients, community composting/food waste in Prince William County schools). Public comment period for *Working Lands Projects for Climate Smart Agriculture Practices* is open. CRP funds (\$1.7 million) received in Virginia; these can be leveraged with partners to provide technical assistance. Outreach plan for Virginia, dedicated outreach coordinator to work with Field Offices and partners. There are 21 NRCS positions added/backfilled for FY21, many being direct hires. Tribal outreach, FY22 will hold first Virginia tribal summit, federal and state agencies working together.

Comment: The Upper Mattaponi requested NRCS to update the Tribal Outreach slide to show the correct logo, the NRCS team will be addressing this task.

Response: We apologize for the error. It will be corrected for any future presentations.

10:10-10:25	FY21 Year-End Update and FY22 Programs Update	Patrick Vincent, ASTC-Programs
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Patrick Vincent provided 10-year look at conservation programs in Virginia reviewing obligation amounts, noting that in the last 5 years, between \$30-35 million in funds obligated with expectations of exceeding this amount in FY22. Discussed the FY21 program accomplishments, that included a recap of number of practices applied (5,194 items certified for 1,677 contracts approving \$11.2 Million dollars), top practices implemented, and funding obligated, sharing that 48% of the EQIP funds obligated to HU contracts.

Fiscal Year 2021 in review:

- Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
 - \$23.8 million obligated for 393 contracts on 53,536 acres: 2,811 items in contracts
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - \$10.6 million obligated for 167 contracts on 63,125 acres: 2,234 items in contracts
- Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG)
 - Awarded \$299,891 for one project with Sustainable Chesapeake focusing on Controlled Traffic farming and Tramlining. The five-county area includes Nottoway, Amelia, Lunenburg, Brunswick, and Dinwiddie.
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program
 - \$445,000 obligated for 6 contracts: 149 items in contracts
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - \$1.1 M obligated for 2 ALEs on 839 acres; 3 ALEs closed (252 acres); 1 WRE closed (90 acres); 10 ACEP-ALE in progress and 2 WRE wetland restoration projects in progress. Overall easement program, VA has a total of 144 recorded easements protecting 16,807 acres.
- Voluntary Public Access 7 Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)
 - Assisted Department of Wildlife Resources with 13 applications covering 385 acres in coalfield region of Virginia; competitive grants program opens to state and tribal governments; provided funding to encourage landowners to allow public access for hunting, fishing and other wildlife dependent recreation; 27 states received 3 years award of \$2.9 million total

FY2022 priorities and updates were discussed, and slide deck reviewed.

- Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is decreasing to \$24,652,315 (\$7,600 less than FY21)
 - o Coronavirus relief payments will be made for 7 EQIP practices; minimum CARP payment of \$300 per contract.
 - o Deadlines for programs were discussed along with funding allocations.
 - Application deadline = November 19, 2021
 - o Ron Wood, Program Manager ron.wood@usda.gov
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Classic funding is increasing to \$8,840,000 (\$740K more than FY21)
 - o Backlog of applications continues exceeding \$15 million in requests
 - o 800 contacts on books currently
 - o Nizhoni LaFrance-Pettigrew, Program Manager nizhoni.lafrance@usda.gov
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Renewals: funding is increasing to \$5,859,000 (\$2.37 more than FY21)
 - o Processing over 100 CSP renewals contracts
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
 - o ALE funding is \$858,376 and WRE funding is \$350,537 (plus \$26,000 for stewardship)
 - o HU funding category being proposed for ALE
 - o Preliminary application due December 15, 2021 with full packages due January 31, 2022
 - o GARC rate caps reviewed; comments back by November 2, 2021
 - o Leticia Jackson-Holder, Realty Specialist leticia.jackson@usda.gov
 - o Diane Dunaway (on medical leave), diane.dunaway@usda.gov

Question: Do contracts include the ALE?

Response: Our total obligation amounts over the last 10 years did not include the Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs (ACEP) for ALE and WRE. The obligation amounts reflected funding for EQIP, WHIP, CSP and RCPP programs.

- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
 - o Provides opportunity for public and private partners to evaluate and accelerate adoption of new approaches
 - o 12 current CIGs totaling \$1.1 million with various partners
 - o \$400,000 will be offered in FY22
 - o Debbie Bullock, Program Manager debbie.bullock@usda.gov

Question: Joint Chiefs Initiative – Was there an award in FY21?

Response: Not as of yet, waiting for a decision.

10:25-10:35 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Stacey Bradshaw, Program Manager
Source Water Protection
RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA)

Stacey discussed the source water protection areas for FY2021 – 7% of land area in Virginia. Program accomplishments for FY21 included contracts for 44 livestock, 2 poultry, 1 forestry totaling 47 contracts on 5,073 acres equaling \$2,644,579. There were 29 Historically Underserved contracts with 25 beginning farmers, 8 socially disadvantaged, 1 veteran and 1 limited resource participants, respectfully. FY2022 draft map for source water protection areas submitted to headquarters for approval, not anticipating any problems, new area covers 19% of Virginia land area, large increase in Area IV. Practices will not be changing for this year. Increased payment rates only apply to EQIP and are applicable for livestock, cropland, and forestry applications only. Stacey thanked the subcommittee, mentioning each by name.

Virginia RCPP projects for FY2022 – Three projects were discussed. Upper Clinch Powell, Virginia Headwaters Restoration Initiative, and Preserving Working Farms project bringing over \$7 million on FA and TA dollars to Virginia over the next five years. Continuing work with partners to develop the program. Congratulated partners on the renewal of two RCPP Projects, VMRC and Sustainable Chesapeake as of 10/25/2021 – with notification going out to the partners by Friday. These renewals will bring an additional \$5 million in FA/TA dollars over next five years.

Alternative funding arrangements under RCPP were discussed. Guidelines similar to Classic RCPP except lead partners manage the project entirety, except for inherently governmental activities (HEL/Wetland determinations, AGI Compliance and NEPA requirements). Provided example of lead partner entering contract with participant and making payments to program participant. AFAs and Classic RCPP authorize same activities except there are no US held Easements under AFA. No word on FY2022 initiative.

Question: Joint Chiefs – Is it in the source water protection area?

Response: Bland, Botetourt, Wythe counties, possible overlap, need to investigate.

Question: What is the application deadline for next round of RCPP funding?

Response: Mid to late November, but nothing specific yet. If you'd like to receive notifications directly, contact stacey.bradshaw@usda.gov (Program Manager)

Question: What are the counties participating in VMRC RCPP project?

Response: Producers who receive services from the Accomac, Chesapeake, Gloucester, Quinton, Smithfield, Tappahannock, and Warsaw NRCS Service Centers may be eligible for VMRC RCPP funds. For more information review the information Barbara will be providing.

10:35-10:45 Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) David Kriz, ASTC-Watershed Operations
Buchanan County Mat Lyons, State Conservation Engineer

David Kriz gave EWP Overview and how NRCS works with partners, sponsor, and funding. TA and FA dollars assist communities to restore and stabilize impaired waterways impacted by severe natural disasters. The projects address imminent hazards to life and property. Projects are planned and designed, site by site, working with a local sponsor, typically a unit of government. This is not a quick fix program.

Buchanan County – provided flooding update stating a relatively small area was impacted; completely destroying 34 homes, damaging 15 others and filling stream with natural/house debris, cobble, and vehicles. Steep terrain in these areas, developments are in the valleys. Pictures shared to show the impacts of the flood. NRCS was there a few days after the event. Went back out a few weeks later with County and staff to review. As soon as we find out that we are receiving funds, we will continue to get the program moving.

10:45-10:55 Grade Stabilization Structures Marques Hunter, Area Engineer
Conservation Practice Before/After Photos

Grade stabilization is defined as a system used to control the grade in a natural or constructed channel(s) with the purpose of stabilizing grade, reducing erosion, and improving water quality. There are 12 practice scenarios with two being most effective; Pipe Drop (Drop Structure) and Rock Chute. Engineering practice contracted the most in Area 4. Reviewed the practice standard, and scenarios, soil types, runoff factors (surface conditions, drainage area, intensity, time of concentration). Tributaries (gullies) are existing and when removing or changing contributing factors (i. e. tree removal), now become evident using LIDAR imagery. VDOT culverts are contributing more water from a larger watershed to concentrate in other places. Discussed engineering computer programs used in engineering process. Landowner removed trees to expand cropping area. Photos of gullies showcased, where trees were removed, head cutting back into fields. Gullies are 25' deep in these photos, head cutting not back to the field yet.

10:55-11:05

Farm Service Agency
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Emily Horsley, Program Manager

Allison Goin – new Farm Programs Chief with FSA. Introduced herself; has been in job since January 2021.

Emily Horsley reviewed results for FY21.

- General Sign-up 55 has a 92% acceptance rate for Virginia with 85 offers received, 78 accepted and 68 enrolled on 1,264 acres.
- Grasslands Sign-up 203 resulted in Virginia having a 50% acceptance rate with 104 received, 52 accepted and 47 enrolled on 1, 585 acres.
- Continuous CRP/CREP – Virginia increased enrollment from 2020 by 10%. 25% were new CREP.
- New incentives for new enrollments with consideration being given inflation, climate smart, water quality on Annual Rental Payments.
- \$300 million across ALL FSA programs distributed in Virginia.
- FY2022 – Continuous/CREP open now, expect General and Grasslands dates TBD.
- Conservation Priority Areas – proposed and adopted in FY21, proposal is to renew the same areas
- In FY22, Priority Zone maps were reviewed, WQ and Wildlife zones, additional points awarded.
- Can review and modify zones annually, contact Emily if you have input.

11:05-11:15

Trout Unlimited Partner Update

Seth Coffman, Chesapeake Bay Project
Manager

- History of collaboration discussed with older projects in WHIP and CCPI beginning as early as 2010. Shared before and after photos of Beaver Creek improvements focusing on cold water streams, streams adjacent to public land, spring creeks, and how to improve conditions for cold water species.
- Smith Creek – EQIP and CBWI, streambank stabilization and instream habitat. Project restoration work looks at particle size, beneficial for macroinvertebrates, particle distribution shifts pre/post restoration, quickly flushing small sediments out to edge of stream improving substrate. Biological response is occurring. Provided watershed overview with photos of streambank enhancement and habitat restoration projects.
- Floodplain connectivity – When lower banks, it allows storm events to deposit sediment in floodplain and not in stream channel; improving habitat by leaving cobble-sized bottom; photo showed up to 2" deposited in the floodplain, NOT in the stream, which resulted in improved WQ.
- NRCS Partnerships; RCPP project (\$3 million); ramping up technical assistance with implementing streambank erosion and habitat restoration projects in Shenandoah Valley and Upper James River watersheds

Question: A lot of discussion is underway about stream restoration and the extent to which we can see instream work, and stream-floodplain reconnections actually result in delisting streams and restoring aquatic/stream health (as compared with focusing more-so on-stream riparian buffer

restoration/enhancement). Is TU seeing the stream health uplift in respect to actual increased trout (and supporting benthic macro) success?

Response: We like to keep available all tools in the toolbox. So riparian buffers are always a part of our riparian corridor restoration approach. The instream habitat enhancement and streambank stabilization are used where they make the most sense and are needed to arrest that erosion. So, it needs to be targeted to those sites with the worst erosion. Yes, we have seen lift in biological response. On Beaver Creek we saw brook trout in the stream when prior to our work they were not there. We did not see a marked response in Aquatic Macro Invertebrate diversity (we already had a lot of species) but we did see an increase in the abundance of sensitive macroinvertebrates; for example, pre-restoration we only saw a few mayflies and stoneflies. Post-restoration we saw many more in our samples.

11:15-11:25

Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Dr. Kendall Tyree, Executive Director of Virginia Association of SWCDs

- Record levels of VACS funding – anticipate more in coming years. Continues to be an advocate for SWCDs and leading legislative efforts for increase funding to Districts.
- Enhancing Small Farm Outreach with VSU; Other pilot projects with SWCDs (New River; Three Rivers)
- Virtual Training, with assistance from NRCS, has become the norm, providing over 50 trainings this past FY for SWCD staff. FY22 annual meeting will be held virtually.
- Soil Health Coalition – VASWCD is a member. “4 the soil: A Conversation” series of podcasts are available (2 posted) with new events coming in the future (next one October 28th).

11:25-11:35

Sweet Briar College Partner Update

Dr. Lisa Powell, Associate Professor & Director with Sweet Briar College

- Overview of Sweetbriar College, Liberal Arts College for Women, co-ed for graduate programs.
- 2,840-acre campus with amazing opportunities for conservation work and demonstration sites. Discussed Greenhouse operation; Brown Family Apiary; Vineyard having 18 acres of grapes, this year was the first commercial harvest; Community Garden – trails for different practices, research in switchgrass, loblolly pine, riparian buffer maintenance, wildlife study, wildflower meadow, invasive species management, NRCS partnership, and integrating classes and student work and learning throughout the different initiatives. Many of the initiatives have profession staff assisting students. Academic programs were discussed, certificate program for Sustainable Agriculture announced.

Question: Has Ms. Powell (Dr. Lisa Powell/Sweet Brian College) seen our requirements for the 0457 Series and does the college offer the needed course work to make graduates eligible for hire in NRCS?

Response: Will investigate with Virginia leadership for what has been provided; if not shared, will do so.

11:35-11:50

Questions and Answer Session

ALL

11:50-12:00

Closing Remarks

Dr. Edwin Martinez, State Conservationist

Thank you to the team members for making the meeting successful. Thank you for partners on the call. Its not what we do, but why, and how we do it. Look forward to a successful year and the next meeting.

Next Meeting – TBD

Participants in Attendance:

Martinez, Edwin - NRCS, Richmond, VA

Alexander, Ebonie - Black Family Land Trust (BFLT)

Bryan, David - Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR)

Byrd, David

Coffman, Seth - Trout Unlimited (TU)

Comer, Marcus

Douglas, Ruth - Blue Ridge PRISM

Flessner, Michael, Ph.D. - Virginia Tech, Assoc. Professor and Extension Weed Science Specialist

Foley, Mary - Carlson Foley Enterprises LLC

Gilley, Jacob - American Farmland Trust

Glover, Darryl - Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR)

Goin, Allison - Farm Service Agency (FSA), Richmond, VA

Groh, Todd - Department of Forestry (DOF)

Horsley, Emily - Farm Service Agency (FSA), Richmond, VA

Hujik, Peter - Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)

Jarvis, Raven - Virginia Dept. of Health, Office of Drinking Water (VDH)

Jones, Terrell - VBAVACO

Knight, Marilyn

Kotula, Adrienne - Chesapeake Bay Commission

Kowalski, Matt - Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Malm, Sylvia

Marshall, Maquel - VBAVACO

McCarthy, John - Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)

McDonald, Chris J., Esq. - Virginia Dept. of Counties

McPherson, Jake - Ducks Unlimited, Manager of Conservation Programs for the Chesapeake Bay

Miller, Christopher - Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)

Mitchell, Leigh Upper Mattaponi Tribe

Mitchell, Timothy - Virginia Section of the American Water Works Association (VA AWWA)

Norris, Ginger - Sustainable Chesapeake

Perkins, Jennifer - Virginia Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services (VDACS)

Pollak, Kyleigh - Monacan Indian Nation

Powell, Lisa - Sweet Briar College

Saacke Blunk, Kristen

Shreve, Kyle

Sketch, Mary - Virginia Soil Health Coalition, Coordinator

Steinhilber, Emily

Taylor, Warren

Timm, Joby - Forest Service

Tucker, Grace

Tyree, Kendall - Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD)

Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe

Webber, Jimmy - U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

Wolfgang, Michelle - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Arrington, Reginald - NRCS, Halifax, VA
Baker, Harvey - NRCS, Lawrenceville, VA
Barriteau, Brent - NRCS, Strasburg, VA
Bayless, Dana - NRCS, Louisa, VA
Berry, Telicia - NRCS, Amelia, VA
Bowen, Barbara - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Boyd, Keith - NRCS, Smithfield, VA
Bradshaw, Chris - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Bradshaw, Stacey - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Bullock, Debbie - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Capps, Eric - NRCS, Rocky Mount, VA
Carroll, Matthew - NRCS, Hanover, VA
Cole, Brandon - NRCS, Christiansburg, VA
Cox, Crystal - NRCS, Galax, VA
Davis, Joey - NRCS, Emporia, VA
Evans, Ann - NRCS, Rustburg
Evans, Jeremy - NRCS, Farmville, VA
Forrester, Dwight - NRCS, Tappahannock, VA
Hammond, Scott - NRCS, Gloucester, VA
Harris, Davie - NRCS, Boydton, VA
Holm, Kathy - NRCS, Harrisonburg, VA
Howell, Anthony - NRCS, Dinwiddie, VA
Howell, Trenton - NRCS, Chesapeake, VA
Hunter, Marques - NRCS, Smithfield
James, Casey - NRCS, Warrenton, VA
Jackson, Leticia - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Jessee, Mark - NRCS, Gate City, VA
Johansen, Stephanie - NRCS, Wytheville, VA
Kirby, Emerson III - NRCS, Lebanon, VA
Kirkland, Kory - NRCS, Louisa, VA
Kossler, Lucia - NRCS, Warsaw, VA
Kriz, David - NRCS, Richmond, VA
LaFrance-Pettigrew, Nizhoni - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Lipinski, Jonathan - NRCS, Rustburg, VA
Lyons, Mathew - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Martinez, Edwin - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Meade, Greg - NRCS, North Tazewell, VA
Moss, Bill - NRCS, Abingdon, VA
Ortiz, Arelys, Harrisonburg - NRCS
Palangi, Anne - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Perkins, Dana - NRCS, Richmond,
Rexrode, Rex - NRCS, Culpeper, VA
Rondon, Eva - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Shaw-McBee, Peggy - NRCS, Warrenton, VA
Simmons, Charles - NRCS, Lexington, VA
Smith, Kelley - NRCS, Chatham, VA
Southern, Jordan - NRCS, Jonesville, VA
Stanley, Wess - NRCS, Lebanon, VA
Templeton, Jennifer - NRCS, Accomac, VA
Vincent, Patrick - NRCS, Richmond, VA

Wentz, Chad - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Wood, Ron - NRCS, Richmond, VA
Wooden, Brian - NRCS, Fredericksburg, VA