

# THE WATERSHED

## LORD FAIRFAX SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2020 - JUNE 30, 2021



August 2021

All programs and services of the District are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, handicap, or political affiliation.

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### Chairman's Report

This Annual Report of the "Watershed" describes much of what the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District and its Federal and State partners have accomplished in Fiscal Year 2021. Allow me, then, to focus instead on the present and conclude with a "grand point."

According to recent headlines in the "Bay Journal"- - that passionate and informative watchdog of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation- - "The Bay Restoration Effort is Slumping in the Race to the 2025 Finish Line"! In various articles, the "Journal" continues that a third or more of the program's pledged restoration goals and outcomes are unlikely to be met, uncertain or are lacking in sufficient data to be judged. U.S. Senators from three of the 2014 Bay Agreement signing states (Delaware, Maryland, Virginia) identified a fourth signee, Pennsylvania, as "generating the greatest amount of water-fouling nutrients sent to the Bay and is the furthest behind in meeting clean-up goals." And the suit continues (brought by Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia) calling upon the EPA to use its enforcement powers "to make sure all jurisdictions are on track for 2025."

At the same time, all governors of the signatory states to the 2014 Bay Agreement (plus the Mayor of the signatory District of Columbia) have signed a letter to congressional leaders urging them to increase, by \$737,000,000, funding for the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay.

Now, even with the meeting of the 2025 Bay deadline somewhat in doubt, my "grand point" is this: whatever the Bay's prospects and outcome, we must remain fully committed. And

Lord Fairfax, as one of the ten "key" districts out of the Commonwealth, is recognized as such: our fiscal year allocation for cost share projects has more than doubled- - from \$2.265 million in FY21 to \$4.845 million in FY22. No, Virginia has not given up on the Bay! That which is good for the Bay begins by being what is good for the streams, lakes and rivers within our District. For example, look at our FY 21 AG BMP accomplishments on page 5: 33,182 linear feet of stream protected and 5,201 acres benefitted. Note, on page 6, the 701 participants in our education outreach programs. What is good within our jurisdictions is also good for the Bay!

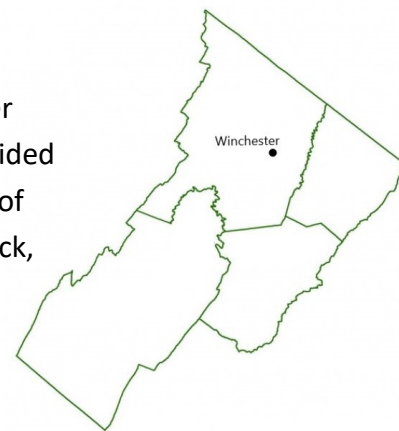
Finally, two developments testify that we are challenging environmental times. First, the District has created and filled a sixth Conservation Specialist position, a three year contract to help see the District close to the 2025 Deadline. Our new employee is Ms. Madison Coffey of Mount Jackson. With a Bachelor in Animal and Poultry Sciences (Virginia Tech '18) and various internships, she comes to us straight from Cargill Meat Solutions in Timberville. Congratulations Madison!

Second, thanks to the efforts of our Winchester Directors, Paul Burkholder and HB Simpson, who effectively conveyed the urgency of this environmental moment, both as it relates to the Bay and to the waters within the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District, the City of Winchester has joined our four county jurisdictions in making an outside agency contribution to the District. Thank you Winchester!

- Richard Hoover, Board Chairman

# LFSWCD Profile; Our Corner of Virginia

The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District through Financial and administrative assistance provided by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Funding is also provided by Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah and Warren Counties, and the City of Winchester.



	Clarke County	Frederick County	Shenandoah County	Warren County	City of Winchester
<b>Population</b>	14,363	83,199	43,190	39,083	27,543
<b>%</b>	7%	40%	21%	19%	13%
<b># High Schools</b>	1	3	3	2	1
<b># Gov. Schools</b>		1	1		
<b># Urban Ag Projects</b>			1		
<b># VCAP Practices</b>	1		1	4	
<b>6 yr Cost Share (2016-2021)</b>	\$775,316	\$1,084,232	\$2,919,219	\$201,112	Not Applicable
<b>% of Total District VACS Funds</b>	14%	22%	60%	4%	
<b># Farms</b>	427	782	965	321	0
<b>%</b>	17%	31%	39%	13%	
<b>Farm Acres</b>	66,641	109,907	130,659	38,697	
<b>%</b>	19%	32%	38%	11%	
<b>Conservation Easements</b>	5	1	8	1	
<b>Stream Miles</b>	317	1,024	1,338	565	10.5
<b>%</b>	9.7%	31.5%	41.1%	17.4%	.003%
<b>Class 1 Dams</b>			2		

Data provided by the following:

2015 Bureau of Census Estimate, 2017 USDA Agriculture Census, and USGS

## **Conservation Technical Committee:**

The Conservation Technical Committee's (CTC) main actions for FY2021 were reviewing and approving Agriculture BMP practices throughout the District that were proposed by staff. A total of 82 practices were approved, totaling over \$2.2 million dollars. Even though conservation staff continue working from alternative work spaces with limited office time, staff were able to obligate 100% of the funds. In addition to obligating the funds, the CTC continues to work with the Education & Information committee and partner with organizations like the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, and Virginia Cooperative Extension, to increase awareness and provide information to increase participation in the VA Agricultural BMP Cost-Share program

## **Dam Safety Committee:**

Operation and maintenance of the two District dams, Lake Laura and Bird Haven, was conducted throughout the year including testing the working conditions of all hydraulic valve operators and routine mowing. The Dam Safety Committee completed the annual owner inspection in September of 2020. The two dams were working well and passed inspection. The dams' biannual inspections with the DCR dam safety engineer will be scheduled for this upcoming year. The District continues to participate with the statewide Dam Owners Workgroup, sponsored by Virginia DCR, including various virtual training sessions conducted through the year.

## **Easements Committee:**

LFSWCD continues to co-hold 15 easements with the Virginia Conservation Council in Frederick and Shenandoah counties. The easements were inspected by District and VCC staff in Spring 2021. No new easements were reviewed by the committee or District board.

## **Education & Information Committee:**

Our District's education and informational efforts rely heavily on direct interactions with youth and adults. Covid-19 and the shutdown obviously eliminated that option for our activities. Committee members became adept at meeting virtually and figuring out "plans b and c" to adjust our full array of scheduled activities to the Covid "normal". The District's staff were working remotely, with limited visits to the office which continues to be closed to the public. We cancelled our 2020 annual awards luncheon to celebrate the efforts of our farmers and others, and virtually all workshops and speaking engagements were eliminated.

The annual Envirothon competition for high school students was offered virtually in February and Sherando High School went on to compete statewide after placing 3rd at the Area 1 competition. In June, LFSWCD was able to participate in summer camp activities in partnership with Friends of the North Fork, as well as present virtually to youth conservation camp students state-wide.

The Education and Information committee published 4 District newsletters, reporting on the many positive accomplishments of the District (as described elsewhere in this newsletter). We are looking forward to this new fiscal year and returning to our full menu of programs and activities, such as promoting the District's Agriculture Best Management Program Opportunities or the 2021 Annual Awards luncheon in November. Best of all we made it through Fiscal Year 2021 and are ready to take on the many challenges of Fiscal Year 2022!

# LFSWCD Committee Reports

## **Finance Committee:**

In addition to submitting the required annual reports, the Finance committee also provided recommendations for the staff FY2022 salary adjustments to the Chairman for Board approval. The committee voted on changes to the committee's Annual of Plan of work, including improving the collective goal to reflect actions made. The treasurer prepared a proposed FY2022 budget and in conjunction with the district Administrative Assistant, prepared monthly budget reports and participated in the District audit. An Attachment D for FY2022, required by Department of Conservation and Recreation, was reviewed and provided to the Chairman for Board approval.

## **Legislative Committee:**

The Legislative Committee activities for FY2021 were driven by the Covid 19 shutdown and care as mandated by the Governor of Virginia. There were no legislative visits to Richmond nor travel of any kind due to the virus. After many years of service, Jim Fagan stepped down as committee chair and Paul Burkholder, who represents Winchester, has agreed to lead that that committee. Local government financial support improved and now we have 100 percent commitment from all of our jurisdictions for FY2022.

In program year 2022 the Chair will begin in person meetings and plan for legislative days. A renewed focus will also be placed on our local government partners. The goal will be to emphasize our partnership and value.

## **Personnel Committee:**

The Personnel Committee, along with the rest of the Directors and our staff, rose to the challenges of the COVID shutdown for the entire Fiscal Year! We conducted mid-year performance reviews virtually and were delighted to see our staff in person (for the first time that year) in late June for final performance reviews for the year. Earlier, a major challenge occurred when our Administrative Assistant Amanda Campbell announced her retirement in January 2021 after a 30 year career with us! We managed to advertise for a replacement, review applications and interview top applicants virtually and selected Sarah Fleming as our new Administrative Specialist. She started with us on March 22, 2021. Because we closed Fiscal Year 2021 with a huge carry-over workload and a projected doubled cost-share funding for Fiscal Year 2022, staff strongly urged us to hire an additional conservation specialist. With Board approval, we quickly recruited a three year term employee who starts work on August 9, 2021. The Personnel Committee extends our sincere appreciation and thanks to the staff for their hard work and accomplishments during this time of COVID.

## **Operations Committee:**

The Operations Committee initiated and completed the two required reviews of the Annual Plan of Work and the District Strategic Plan. Because of the strictures caused by the pandemic, the Board elected to carry over the update of the Strategic plan for another year.

## **Urban BMP Committee:**

Urban BMPs and the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) continue to grow interest in our District. LFSWCD had one VCAP project completion in Program Year 2021, and continues to provide technical assistance to interested landowners. In FY21, VCAP funding was fully obligated early in the year. Many proposed practices were added to the statewide waitlist in case more funding was made available. Moving into the current year, VCAP has more funding for practices, totaling \$1 million for the state, which LFSWCD plans to take advantage of within our District.

# Education and Outreach Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2021 continued the trend from 2020, with many limitations on education and information efforts on behalf of the District. The Lord Fairfax District was fortunate enough to participate in various outreach programs, both virtual and in-person, totaling 701 participants and over 180 contact hours. Our jurisdiction is uniquely located, with both the North and the South Fork of the Shenandoah, and the main stem running through it. We also experience both agricultural and urban non-point source pollution issues. This is why many of our programs focus on connecting students with their watershed through soil and water health. Any watershed related program is called a MWEE, or a Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience. In the table below you will see the number of programs and students reached last year, but also how many of those worked to connect students to their watershed.

County	# of Programs	# of MWEEs	Direct Contact Hours	# of Participants
Clarke	3	2	10	103
Frederick	0	0	0	0
Shenandoah	11	5	165	556
Warren	2	2	7	42
<b>District Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>701</b>

## **D&M Farms, of Shenandoah County, Wins Virginia Basin Award**

The 2020 Annual Awards Luncheon was canceled due to COVID concerns and restrictions. Even though we were not able to recognize the full list of landowners awards, the Department of Conservation and Recreation continued to offer the Clean Water Farm awards. LFSWCD nominated three farms for the DCR Clean Water Farm Awards: Mercer Vu Farms in Clarke County, Charles DeHaven in Frederick County, and D & M Farms in Shenandoah County.

By submitting an application to the Clean Water Farm Awards, we are also nominating the farms for the prestigious Grand Basin Award, where DCR recognizes up to 10 winners representing their respective Virginia major river basin. Out of all the nominations to the Shenandoah River Basin, D & M Farms was chosen as the 2020 recipient.

D&M Farms is owned and operated by Mike Dirting in Edinburg, Virginia. He has extensively worked with LFSWCD and NRCS to complete various conservation practices on the operation, including the following: cover crops, nutrient management, waste management, stream exclusion, and/or cropland conversion from corn to hay or pasture. In addition to the work they've done to their farm, Mike and his family are also devoted to education and outreach, working with many partner organizations to help spread the word about conservation.

Conservation technician Sam Truban has worked with D&M Farms throughout his years with the District, and has helped plan and oversee many of the projects completed on the operation. When asked about working with D&M, Sam stated, "working with an operation like D&M Farms is one of those that makes the job great. We have a great relationship and they are always looking for ways to improve their operation. Not only for soil and water conservation, but also in making it more efficient. They are great to work with and we hope to continue working with them when the opportunity for more practices arises."

# State Conservation Assistance Programs Accomplishments

The Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices (Ag-BMP) Cost-Share Program, which pays a certain percentage of the installation costs for approved conservation practices to eligible farmers, is administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR), and implemented by the District.

The purpose of the program is to improve water quality in the state's streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay. The program encourages the voluntary installation of Ag-BMPs to meet Virginia's non-point source pollution water quality objectives. It is especially important as we near the Chesapeake Bay cleanup deadline in 2025.

Through these voluntary contracts, producers and landowners are given the funds to fence livestock out of streams and provide an alternative source of clean water for animals. We also help improve management and grazing of their pastures by installing practices like cross-fences and stream crossings when needed. Ag BMPs benefit the Commonwealth by reducing stream sediment, aquatic nutrients, and bacteria. Benefits to the farmer include more efficient grazing patterns,

healthier forage and healthier livestock, faster weight gains, and simplified management.

In FY2021 the District received an allocation of \$2.265 million, the entirety of which was used to fund a wide variety of conservation practices across our District's jurisdictions. Despite the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic caused and the fact that our staff has been primarily teleworking since mid-March 2020, the interest from producers has continued to be high. Some of the practices completed, reflected in the table below, were originally approved for funding in FY2020 or prior. Not all practices approved in FY2021 were completed. Those carry-over practices, worth and estimated \$5 million, will be completed in FY2022, along with new practices approved for FY2022 funding.

In FY2022 the District has received a record allocation of \$4.845 million and is currently taking applications from producers to install a wide variety of conservation practices, including cover crops, stream fencing, tree plantings, hay seedings, and animal waste facilities.

## FY2021 Completed Ag-BMP Practices

County	# Practices	Acres Benefitted	Linear Feet of Stream Protected	Animal Waste Facilities	Funds Spent	Tax Credits Issued
Clarke	8	1,798.80	0	0	\$89,878.99	\$17,500.00
Frederick	19	1,159.34	8,469.35	0	\$281,640.76	\$9,064.10
Shenandoah	58	2,157.50	23,682.90	2	\$472,795.58	\$12,146.23
Warren	3	85.00	1,030.00	0	\$80,347.19	\$844.88
<b>District Totals</b>	88	5,200.64	33,182.25	2	\$924,662.52	\$39,555.21



# Federal Financial Assistance Programs Accomplishments

The table below represents acres enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for the 2020 Fiscal year and acres enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and easement programs. All programs are applied on private lands and provide incentive payments for implementing conservation practices. The Wetland Reserve and Agriculture Land Easement Programs are monitored annually and the table below depicts the number of ongoing contracts in each county.

EQIP and CSP are voluntary conservation program that help agricultural producers improve agricultural production and improve natural resources. Through EQIP and CSP, agricultural producers receive

financial and technical assistance to implement structural and management conservation practices that optimize environmental benefits on working agricultural land.

The Farm and Ranch Protection Program (FRPP) provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep farmland in agricultural uses. NRCS partners with state or local governments or non-governmental organizations to assist with the voluntary acquisition of conservation easements from landowners. To qualify, farmland must be part of a pending offer from a state or local farmland protection program, be privately owned, and contain significant prime soils or historic resources.

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) offers landowners the opportunity to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. Eligible areas have been drained or otherwise altered so as to no longer provide benefits characteristic of wetlands. Technical and financial assistance is available to complete needed restoration activities.

The 2014 Farm Bill consolidated several programs. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program now includes the Agricultural Land Easements Program (ALE) which replaces the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) & FRPP, and Wetland Reserve Easements (replaces WRP). As land is enrolled in the easement programs, the protected acres will be represented in the table below.

## Federal Conservation Programs—Number of Contracts/Acres Enrolled

County	EQIP—FY-2020	CSP	GRP	WRP	FRPP and ALE	Total Acres
Clarke	2/39.7	2/737	1/301	1/2.5	16/1,645	2,725.2
Frederick	6/174	2/4,231.7	1/58	2/6.0	3/308	4,777.7
Shenandoah	5/151.5	4/1,496.4	1/82	1/29	5/766	2,524.9
Warren	-		-	-	-	
<b>Total</b>	<b>13/365.2</b>	<b>8/6,465.1</b>	<b>3/441</b>	<b>4/37.5</b>	<b>24/2,719</b>	<b>10,027.8</b>

# Virginia Conservation Assistance Program Accomplishments

The Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) is a state-funded urban cost-share program that provides financial incentives and technical assistance to property owners installing eligible Best Management Practices (BMPs) in Virginia's participating Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). Final approval decisions are made at the State level. These practices can be installed in yards where stormwater problems like erosion, poor drainage, or poor vegetation occur. Some of the popular practices in our district are the following BMPs: conservation landscaping, impervious surface removal, permeable pavement installation, rain gardens, rainwater harvesting systems, bioretention ponds and green roofs.

A multi-practice VCAP project was completed in Shenandoah County this past year. A total area of 3,622 square feet of native shrubs, forbs and grasses were installed in mulched beds, and turf grass in the front yard was replaced with a native meadow. Conservation landscaping was added immediately around the house following the gutter system. Two rain gardens were added to the property to help retain any stormwater overflow, letting it naturally absorb into the ground. The landowner received the maximum cost share payment for the project at \$3,500.

In addition to the water quality improvement and wildlife habitat these practices offer, the landowner has agreed to provide visual education regarding the VCAP program. Using the advantage of the location, the landowners will be displaying a sign about the program visible to the street and multiple surrounding businesses.



**This project in Shenandoah County was designed to control runoff from a residential property by establishing native vegetation. The photos above show before and after in two resource concern areas the VCAP practice were able to improve and resolve. In Area 1, a mulched bed was added and turfgrass was replaced with native meadow (the straw area). In Area 2, non-native brush was removed and replaced with native trees and shrubs in the mulched bed. Both areas were planted in Spring of 2021, and will provide more stormwater control and stabilization as they establish.**

Even though LFSWCD only had one project completed last year, staff provided technical assistance to seven eligible VCAP projects within the jurisdiction. These potential projects, and those already on the waitlist, may be forwarded now that more funding is available at the State level.

Last year, the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program was allocated \$500,000 in the Virginia state budget. These funds, which are used for projects state-wide, were quickly depleted as the VCAP program continues to grow. All submitted projects were added to a waitlist until more funds came through. For the current program year, the VCAP program was allocated \$1 million for projects across the state.



## Board of Directors



**Wayne Webb** | Clarke | Finance Committee Chair

**Justin Mackay-Smith** | Clarke | Operations Committee Chair

**Kitty Hockman-Nicholas** | Frederick

**Kermit Gaither** | Frederick | Urban Ag Committee Chair

**Joan Comanor** | Shenandoah | Board Vice-Chair | Education & Information Committee Chair | Personnel Co-Chair

**Mary Gessner** | Shenandoah | Conservation Technical Committee Vice-Chair

**Richard Hoover** | Warren | Board Chair

**Ira Richards III** | Warren | Easement Committee Chair

**H.B. Simpson** | Winchester | Personnel Committee Chair

**Paul Burkholder** | Winchester | Legislative Committee Chair

**James Fagan** | Shenandoah At-Large | Dam Safety Committee Chair

**C. Corey Childs** | Warren At-Large | Conservation Technical Committee Chair

**Bernard Nagelvoort** | Clarke | Associate Director

**Jason Bushong** | Shenandoah | Associate Director

**Marietta Walls** | Frederick | Associate Director

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