



**LORD FAIRFAX
SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

**February
2025**



The Watershed



Our Mission: **To conserve, protect, and enhance the quality of our region's soil and water.**

Soil and water conservation districts were organized under the authority of the Soil Conservation District Law as passed by the Virginia General Assembly of 1938. In 1941, the District was formed with only Frederick County. In 1944, Clarke and Warren Counties joined the District; Shenandoah County became a part of the District in 1945. In 1973, the City of Winchester joined to complete the current District service area. The Lord Fairfax SWCD is one of the 47 soil and water conservation districts in 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.

Your local partner in conservation.



Strasburg Service Center
722-B East Queen Street
Strasburg, VA 22657
(540) 465-2424 ext 104
www.lfswcd.org

Upcoming Events

LFSWCD Conservation Technical Committee Meeting

First Thursday of Month @ 10am
Strasburg Community Center

LFSWCD Board of Directors Meeting

Second Thursday of Month @ 10am
Strasburg Community Center

LFSWCD Envirothon

April 1st @ Seven Bends State Park



Chairwoman's Report

“As we continue to push through winter (and this one has been more challenging than usual, weather-wise), we are focusing on several factors simultaneously: taking stock of our progress in getting best management practices on the ground; looking to the General Assembly and our local governments for support for next fiscal year; and wrapping up projects carried over from prior fiscal years. For example, our District has about \$8 million worth of projects underway that started last fiscal year or earlier.

At the same time, we are working diligently to obligate \$7.7 million for new projects in the current fiscal year, and are about halfway to that goal. That is a lot of responsibility for our hard-working staff!! Our long-term success depends on adequate AND sustained funding from our local jurisdictions as well as the General Assembly. We won't find out what that will be for next fiscal year until late spring or early summer. We have put in our funding requests but recognize those are balanced against other important needs locally and state-wide.

In the meantime, many projects can take months to implement depending upon weather; availability of materials and contractors; getting paperwork completed and signed; and getting agreement on the best design for the specific conditions in the first place. This can take multiple site visits and coordination, working up cost estimates and plans, and getting approval by our Board before the installation can actually begin.

While our staff are busy with the core work of the District, they are also taking courses and doing projects to either maintain or acquire certifications for specific knowledge, skills and qualifications to carry out our work to professional standards. Our most recent hire has just about completed the requirements for his certification as a conservation planner – in fact by the time you read this, we hope to be celebrating his success.

With the return of spring, our extensive array of adult and youth educational programs will be in full swing once again. Our Board and staff truly enjoy the work we do, take pride in our contributions to conservation of our land and water resources, and are looking forward to the next cycle of efforts!”

VA Agricultural BMP Cost Share Program Updates

Each year, the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District receives a portion of the state budget for the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices (Ag-BMP) Cost-Share Program (VACS), which is administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) and implemented locally by the Districts. LFSWCD received an allocation of \$7.76 million for PY2025.

We are officially over halfway through the program year and staff are diligently working with interested landowners to participate in the program. The numbers below give a snapshot of current projects funded through VACS.



\$3.9 M

in state cost-share funds obligated to farmers and producers within our service area so far this program year

50%

of PY2025 allocation obligated towards conservation projects

92

landowners voluntarily signed up for the VACS conservation programming

\$8.5 MILLION

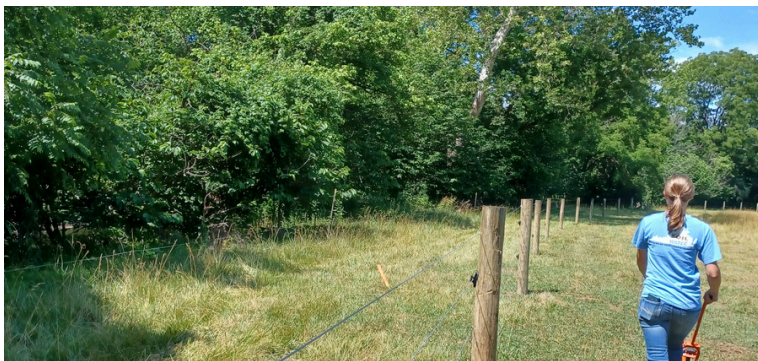
in active agricultural projects in Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah and Warren Counties.

Conservation Project Planning - Behind the Scenes

When LFSWCD is approached by a landowner who is interested in implementing a project, there is a lot of work completed by staff behind the scenes. This process is managed by the Conservation Specialists and can be broken down into the following phases: initial visit, approval for cost-share, construction, specification verification, cost-share reimbursement, and management over the contract lifespan. Here is the breakdown of what a typical VACS structural practice goes through!

Often times, projects take more than one program year to complete, which is why LFSWCD often highlights the number of active projects at any given time (referenced on page 4). Not documented on this list are the ongoing calls and meetings with producers, contractors and engineers, documentation for folders, data entry and collection of forms.

1. Receive call or email of interest
2. Set up initial meeting
3. Create initial aerial maps
4. Initial farm visit (determining eligibility and practices)
5. Receive signed application from producer
6. Create draft plan map and cost estimate
7. Once confirmed with producer, present project to LFSWCD board
8. If approved by Board, send approval letter
9. Create engineering design packets as needed (water system, stream crossing)
10. Meet with producer and contractor to review designs
11. Once construction begins, perform checks/photo documentation to ensure specifications are met on various components
12. If agronomic (planting), perform check to document germination
13. Once project is completed, perform as-built inspections and surveys
14. Ensure nutrient management plan is completed, if needed
15. Collect bills from producer and determine eligible expenses
16. Finalize project by completing Tracking data, file compilation
17. Reimburse producer and provide tax credit information if applicable
18. Complete verifications throughout contract lifespan, as well as end-of-lifespan inspections.



Winter Education Highlights



Farm Finance and Conservation Seminar

Matthew Lohr, Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, hosted the 2025 Farm Finance and Conservation Planning Seminar at Laurel Ridge Community College in December. LFSWCD was invited to represent Virginia's soil & water districts. Staff provided a short presentation on VACS and set up a booth for the day. Staff were able to connect with a few landowners that may be eligible for VACS projects.

Conservation Simulation and Field Trip

Every year, Massanutten Regional Governor's School invites LFSWCD staff to provide a conservation simulation to the junior class. The students are walked through designing a conservation project and are then tasked with putting together their own on a mock farm provided by LFSWCD. The design includes a plan map and cost estimate. At the end of the simulation, the juniors take a field trip to a local farm to see a complete functioning conservation project.



Soils Lab at Handley High School

Education Specialist, Allyson Ponn, recently was a guest speaker for all environmental science classes at Handley High School. The students learned how to texture soil, while also discussing how humans impact soils, primarily through agriculture and food production. Students conducted a soil erosion lab and brainstormed ways humans could try to protect soil as a natural resource.

Applications Now OPEN!

LFSWCD is now accepting applications for two exciting high school youth opportunities: Youth Conservation Camp (YCC) and the VASWCD/LFSWCD Scholarship!

YCC is a week long natural resources camp for high school students at Virginia Tech. Scholarships to attend are available through LFSWCD.

LFSWCD collects applications for the VASWCD scholarship, which awards four \$2,000 scholarships statewide. In addition to selecting a student application from our service area to send forward for state review, LFSWCD awards up to two local scholarships.

Applications for both opportunities are due April 7th, 2025. More information is available at the LFSWCD website.

Providing VACS Outreach: 2025 Cultivate Your Agribusiness Conference

A large part of implementing the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) program is providing outreach about the program and connecting with the local community. With record-high funding levels, LFSWCD aims to connect with a large majority of our local agricultural producers, providing them with technical and financial assistance, if eligible.

For the second year, LFSWCD has been invited to participate in the Cultivate Your Agribusiness Conference to provide information on the VACS program, popular practices in our service area and eligibility requirements. Our session, “Public Funding & Cost-Share Opportunities” will highlight various programs available to landowners and farm operators by our partners, including Natural Resources Conservation Service, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative and more.

LFSWCD staff were invited to join the planning committee for the conference and has helped coordinate the sessions for 2025. This includes brainstorming session topics, confirming speakers and finalizing the agenda. We look forward to a great 2025 conference!



February 20th, 2025
Laurel Ridge Campus
Thomas Conference Center
Snow Date: 2/27

SCAN FOR
REGISTRATION



EXPERT KEYNOTES

Hear from visionaries and industry leaders who are shaping the future of agribusiness with groundbreaking ideas and sustainable practices.

PRACTICAL WORKSHOPS

Hear from accountants and lawyers that specialize in agriculture. Hear from representatives from VDACS, USDA, VCE and more.

NETOWRKING OPPORTUNITIES

Connect with farmers, agribusiness professionals, researchers, and policymakers to build relationships and explore collaborative opportunities.

SUCCESS STORIES

Learn from real-world case studies and success stories that showcase innovative approaches to overcoming challenges and achieving growth.

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts - Annual Meeting December 2024

Each year, LFSWCD Directors and Staff are encouraged to attend the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) Annual Meeting. In December of 2024, LFSWCD Board members Joan Comanor, Paul Burkholder and Reid Hoak, along with Education Specialist Allyson Ponn, attended the VASWCD Annual Meeting at Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center.

LFSWCD is a very active District in Virginia. Our Board and staff serve on various statewide committees, support organizations, regional committees and more. Below are a few updates from this past Annual Meeting!

The Clermont Foundation was awarded the 2024 Shenandoah River Basin Award. Read more about their award on Page 9.

Paul Burkholder and Reid Hoak, LFSWCD Directors, re-elected to serve as Area 1 Chair and Vice Chair. Mr. Burkholder and Mr. Hoak previously served as Chair and Vice Chair for the last two years.

Education Specialist, Allyson Ponn, was awarded the 2024 Outstanding District Professional Award from the Virginia Association of Conservation Districts Employees (VACDE).

Allyson Ponn was nominated and elected President of VACDE for a two-year term. She previously served as the Vice President.

Over \$7,600 was raised through the annual auction for the VASWCD Educational Foundation, supported by LFSWCD staff and board.



2024 Shenandoah River Basin Award - Clermont Farm

On Tuesday, January 28th, the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District and the Clermont Foundation hosted a small reception at Clermont Farm to celebrate the 2024 Shenandoah River Basin Award. Representatives from the LFSWCD Board of Directors, Clermont Foundation Board, Clarke County Board of Supervisors and Berryville Town Council gathered to hear information about the award, Clermont's application and to see the new farm sign.

LFSWCD Education Specialist, Allyson Ponn, opened the reception with thanking the attendees for joining and introduced LFSWCD Board Chair Joan Comanor. Chairwoman Comanor spoke on the Clean Water Farm Award process, which Clermont was awarded in 2022 for Clarke County. She spoke on how LFSWCD expanded on the initial application from 2022 to reflect the increase in educational programming and conservation partnerships. From there Bob Stieg, the CEO of the Clermont Foundation, spoke about the various best management practices implemented by Clermont Farm, how they've integrated historical preservation with conservation, and increased learning opportunities for the community in Clarke County.

Joan Comanor joined Carol Sullivan, Clermont Foundation Board President, to reveal the 2024 Shenandoah River Basin sign, the newest addition to the farm entrance showcasing the award sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. This sign joins many others, including the 2022 Clean Water Farm Award, Natural Resources Conservation Service Partner, CREP Riparian Buffer and native tree planting signs. These signs highlight Clermont's incredible commitment to conservation and natural resources.



Photo 1: The Clermont Foundation Board members with Bob Stieg and the 2024 Shenandoah River Basin Award farm sign. **Photo 2:** A few LFSWCD Board members pictured with Bob Stieg and the various conservation farm signs at the Clermont gate.



Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation: College Students Working in Local Conservation

Over the last several years, LFSWCD has partnered with the Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation (SMSC) in Warren County. College students from across the region stay at the SMSC campus for a semester, taking classes, participating in field work, and working on a semester-long research or practicum project.

LFSWCD has provided a variety of practicum projects for students interested in traditional and urban agriculture, conservation and natural resources. This past semester, LFSWCD was paired with Maddox, a student from George Mason University who is interested in conservation storytelling and connecting people to nature. Maddox worked with education staff to contact landowners who have completed practices to capture media of working conservation projects. This media will be used to help recruit landowners to participate in VACS and for outreach purposes. Here is a “snapshot” of a few pictures we love!

