

# THE WATERSHED

## LORD FAIRFAX SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT JULY 1, 2022 - JUNE 30, 2023



### August 2023

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.

### IN THIS ISSUE

Chairman's Message	1
LFSWCD Profile	2
Committee Reports	3
Education & Outreach	5
State Conservation	6
Federal Cost-Share	7
Urban Conservation	8
LFSWCD Directors and Staff	9

### Chairman's Report

In this Annual Report, Board and Staff detail Lord Fairfax's many FY23 accomplishments, detail how your District obligated for the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program nearly \$4.9 million, an amount which surpassed the mandated goal of obligating 90% of our allocation from the Commonwealth.

Let me add that the just-released FY23 Annual Assessment by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), which covers the whole field of leadership, management, soil and water achievement, finance, training, education and outreach, gave the LFSWCD straight A's across the board. Our communities can be very proud of both District Staff and of the District's Directors and Associate Directors.

As for training, I congratulate Conservation Specialists Nick Livesay, Madison Coffey and Sabrina Heltzel for successfully passing their annual Engineering Job Approval Authority reviews. By the way, we continue to reel happily over Nick's selection last fall as the Virginia Conservation District Employee of the Year by the Virginia Association of Conservation District Employees!

Finally, kudos to Education and Program Support Specialist Allyson Ponn on her acceptance by the Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Program. And to Supervising Conservation Specialist Dana Gochenour for her acceptance by the Leadership Shenandoah County Program. These are both Big Training Deals!

And we are grateful that all five of our constituent governments- - Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah and Warren counties, plus the City of Winchester- - contributed to the LFSWCD in FY23. Constituent government funding is particularly critical to our Education and Outreach efforts. For example, one half of our Education and Support Specialist's salary is paid from constituent government contributions since this position is not fully covered by the Technical Assistance monies granted to Lord Fairfax by the State. So far, contributions for FY24 maintain this support. We are particularly thankful that Clarke County has generously increased its annual contribution to Lord Fairfax.

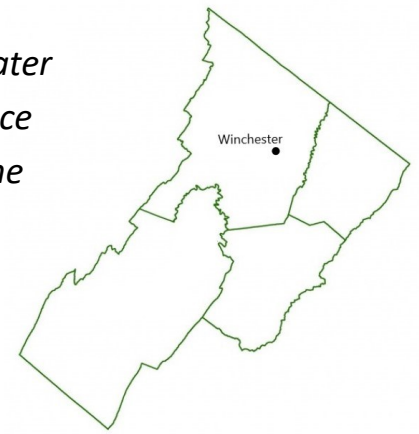
As for the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Cleanup agreement which set 31 "outcomes" for completion by 2025, the prognosis is mixed. According to the Chesapeake Bay Program, two outcomes are completed, 11 are on-course to reach their targets, but the remaining 17 are either off-course or uncertain. Current debate hinges on whether to negotiate a brand new agreement or simply move the deadline back to 2028 or 2030. At the same time, I read that while current Chesapeake Bay conservation ratings range from a D+ to a C, the Potomac River, the Shenandoah's carrier to the Bay, is given a B by the Potomac Conservancy, up from a D in 2011 and a B- in 2020. This strongly suggests that the soil and water conservation efforts made by Lord Fairfax within its five constituencies also have a positive impact downstream and, therefore, on the Bay.

- 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>	14,783	91,419	44,186	40,727	28,120
%	7%	42%	20%	18%	13%
<b>High Schools</b>	1	3	3	2	1
%	10%	30%	30%	20%	10%
<b>Gov. Schools</b>		1	1		
<b>Urban Ag</b>			1		
<b>VCAP* Projects</b>	1	1	1	4	
<b>6 yr Cost Share (2017-2022)</b>	\$1,236,019	\$1,358,461	\$4,708,867	\$962,335	N/A**
% of Total District \$	15%	16%	57%	12%	N/A
<b>Farms</b>	427	782	965	321	0
%	17%	31%	39%	13%	
<b>Farm Acres</b>	66,641	109,907	130,659	38,697	
%	19%	32%	38%	11%	
<b>Conservation Easements</b>	5	1	8	1	
<b>Stream Miles</b>	317	1,024	1,338	565	10.5
%	9.7%	31.5%	41.1%	17.4%	.003%
<b>Class 1 Dams</b>			2		

Population: from 2020 Bureau of Census Estimate

Farms/Farm Acres: from 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture

Stream Miles: USGS

\*Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (Urban Stormwater Cost-Share Program)

## **Conservation Technical Committee:**

The Conservation Technical Committee's (CTC) main actions for FY2023 were reviewing and approving Agriculture BMP practices throughout the District that were proposed by staff. A total of 124 practices were approved, totaling over \$4.8 million dollars. Staff were able to obligate over 90% of the funds allocated to LFSWCD for the VACS program, meeting state goals for technical assistance. 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 dams' biannual inspections with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) dam safety engineer will be completed in Fall 2023. 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, 9 of which are with the Virginia Conservation Council. The easements were inspected by VCC staff in Spring 2023. No new easements were reviewed by the committee or District board.

## **Education & Information Committee:**

We were thrilled to have a fully 'normal' year of activities once again. Our Committee and Education and Program Support Specialist Allyson Ponn set an ambitious plan of work for the year. From classroom briefings to briefing charts and website overhaul to District newsletters to special events to an in-person annual awards luncheon, we carried out a variety of activities.

At the direction of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, we scheduled 2 outreach events in an attempt to reach new or under-served landowners (one was held in Frederick County and one in Shenandoah County). All our conservation partners joined us in an effort to provide information and sources of assistance (in case one of us couldn't help, another partner might have just the program). While attendance was disappointing, our partners enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with each other and we were able to provide assistance to the few people who attended.

Our always fun annual Envirothon competition was a success and our winning teams went on to participate in the Area and State-level competitions. The local teams who competed included: James Wood High School, Warren County High School, and Massanutten Regional Governor's School (MRGS). MRGS won the local competition and placed 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Area level.

See the summary one page 5 for the contact hours by County for the District's Education and Information Program activities.

## **Finance Committee:**

The Finance committee provided monthly accounting statements for Board meetings through the efforts of the Administrative Specialist, Sarah Fleming, and the Treasurer who is now Stephanie Shillingburg. The committee completed many DCR grant deliverables on behalf of the District, including the PY23 and PY24 budgets, dedicated reserves, Attachment D form and completed reviews of the Desktop Procedures for District Fiscal Operations and the Purchasing policy.

## **Legislative Committee:**

The legislative efforts for the Lord Fairfax District have changed when and how we meet with state Senators and delegates. We no longer emphasize visiting elected officials during legislative days. Legislators are inundated by visitors and far too busy to have a meaningful visit. Furthermore it's too late to seek help on bills before the legislators. We now visit our elected officials at their home office throughout the year. This approach is much more relaxed and allows the time necessary to educate and persuade legislators to get behind our efforts.

## **Personnel Committee:**

The Personnel Committee began last year with filling one vacancy for a conservation specialist. We interviewed several applicants and found a terrific fit for the vacancy. Because we had received an unprecedented BMP cost-share allocation AND we were impressed with another applicant, we hired him to fill a newly created position to assist all the conservation specialists. Both individuals started September 1, 2022, and began the rigorous training to become a certified conservation planner while carrying out assigned duties. The Personnel Committee reviewed our policy and submitted updates which the Board adopted, as well as continued to refine our position and pay band structure. We carried out mid-year and end of year personnel evaluations, updated position descriptions, and monitored staff development plans. Two of our staff received accreditation by the Society for Human Resource Management. Two of our staff received their conservation planner certifications as well. As our overall funding has grown due to the approaching deadline for Chesapeake Bay cleanup, the District has made great strides in developing our staff structure and investments in their professional development.

## **Operations Committee:**

The Operations Committee initiated and completed the required reviews of the Annual Plan of Work and the District Strategic Plan. Most notable this year, the Operations Committee led in the search for a new District vehicle, proposing the purchase of a 2022 Dodge truck.

## **Urban BMP Committee:**

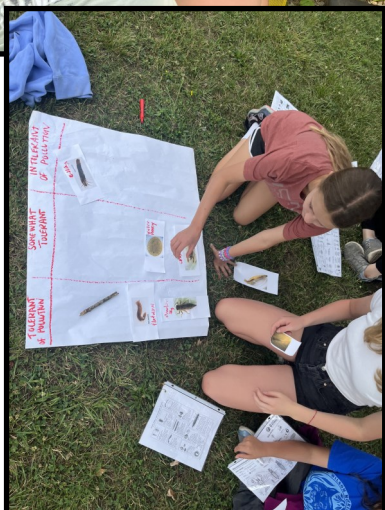
Urban BMPs and the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) continue to grow interest in our District. LFSWCD continues to provide technical assistance to a variety of interested landowners on popular Urban BMP practices, like Conservation Landscaping, Rain Gardens and Vegetated Conveyance Systems. In FY24, VCAP has more funding for practices, totaling \$2 million for the state. LFSWCD has started to evaluate how to greater promote the VCAP program within our service area, and is looking forward to working more directly with cities and counties to implement stormwater conservation practices. See more about Urban Conservation Initiatives on page 8.

# Education and Outreach Accomplishments

The Lord Fairfax District is committed to providing high quality, hands-on learning opportunities for Kindergarten-College students and interested adults. LFSWCD worked with local educators to provide various outreach programs, totaling 1,499 participants and over 230 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	4	1	11	167
Frederick	4	1	13	543
Shenandoah	15	4	181	483
Warren	5	2	18.5	224
Other	2	1	11	82
<b>District Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>234.5</b>	<b>1499</b>

## Education Snap Shots!



# 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. The cost share program has benefitted from record funding levels for the last few years, and continues to be a robust program even though the Chesapeake Bay cleanup deadline has been extended from 2025 to 2028.

Through these voluntary contracts, producers and landowners are given the funds to implement a wide variety of conservation practices, such as fencing livestock out of streams and providing them with an alternative source of clean water. Other popular BMPs include cover crops, manure storage structures, conversion of row crop fields to hay or pasture, and tree plantings. 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 FY2023 the District allocated more than \$4.88 million to agricultural producers across our service area to fund conservation practices. Some of the practices completed, reflected in the table below, were originally approved for funding in FY2022 or prior. Not all practices approved in FY2023 were completed. Those carry-over practices, worth an estimated \$6.35 million, will be completed in FY2024, along with new practices approved for FY2024 funding.

In FY2024 the District has received an allocation of \$5.5 million and its staff are actively recruiting producers to apply for a variety of BMPs. While applications for most types of conservation practices can be made at any time during the year there are a few practices, such as cover crops, that are time sensitive and have deadlines for sign-up and implementation. Staff are also actively inspecting practices that are near the end of their initial contract lifespan and talking with those landowners about enrolling those practices in our Continuing Conservation Initiative, where they receive a payment to continue maintaining those BMPs for an additional five years.

## FY2023 Completed Ag-BMP Practices

County	# Practices	Acres Benefitted	Linear Feet of Stream Protected	Animal Waste Management	Cost Share Funds	Tax Credits Issued
Clarke	16	1,767.94	23,326	1	\$577,187.52	\$2,616.84
Frederick	9	549.13	7,685	0	\$192,493.91	\$0
Shenandoah	61	4,146.99	61,025	11	\$2,033,511.55	\$93,259.60
Warren	5	415.5	6,031	0	\$345,593.54	\$0
<b>District Totals</b>	91	6,879.56	98,067	12	\$3,148,786.52	\$95,876.44

# Federal Financial Assistance Programs Accomplishments

The federal financial assistance programs are administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Strasburg Office, with which the District is co-located. The table below represents acres enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for the 2022 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 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-2022	CSP	GRP	WRP	FRPP and ALE	Total Acres
Clarke	2/207	2/579.7	2/301	1/2.5	17/1,840	2,930.2
Frederick	2/111	1/460	1/58	2/6.0	3/308	943
Shenandoah	2/35	6/1,656.6	1/82	1/29	5/766	2,568.6
Warren	1/10.2	-	-	-	-	10.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7/363.2</b>	<b>9/2,696.3</b>	<b>3/441</b>	<b>4/37.5</b>	<b>25/2,914</b>	<b>6452</b>

## Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

The Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) is a state-funded urban cost-share program that provides financial incentives and technical assistance to property owners (which can include private, commercial or public property) 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.

As LFSWCD continues into the current program year with more VCAP funding, the District board and staff are exploring options to grow this program in our jurisdiction. We have had a steady inflow of interested landowners, however have few completed practices so far. We are looking to connect with more landowners through education and outreach, meeting with city and county development planners, and providing training for



## Strasburg Community Garden

The Strasburg Community Garden has entered its sixth year of programming, including providing fresh and healthy food for the surrounding community. The garden started as a grant-funded project for LFSWCD and community partners, and has continued with LFSWCD acting as a resource for plot holders. Each year, the 12 raised garden plots and the 4 accessible beds are rented out by local families or organizations—the only rental fee required is that a portion of your harvest must be donated to someone in need, including neighbors, assisted-living facilities, community dinners or food banks. The Strasburg Community Garden has reached donations of over 600 pounds per season.

After six years of service to the community, the garden needed major repairs before the start of the 2023 growing season. LFSWCD partnered with Emma Steiner, a student at Massanutten Regional Governor's School, to provide the needed maintenance and construction as her senior research project. In the eight months working with the District and Strasburg Community Garden, Emma helped redesign the garden to maximize space, built new garden plots, painted the shed, wrote and received a grant to improve the bioswale and pollinator area, designed a new compost system, and all associated cost estimates. Emma also hosted a garden workday on Earth Day, where plot holders, LFSWCD staff and community volunteers came together to complete a variety of these projects, as pictured above. Many thanks to Emma for all of her hard work so that the Strasburg Community Garden can continue providing fresh, healthy food to all of those involved!





## 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  
**Stephanie Shillingburg** | Shenandoah | Associate Director | Treasurer

## District Personnel

**Sarah Fleming** | (540) 465-2424 ext 101 | (540) 481-5762 | sarah.fleming@lfswcd.org  
*Administrative Specialist*

**Sheryl Ferguson** | sheryl.ferguson@lfswcd.org  
*Technical Support Contractor*

**Dana Gochenour** | (540) 465-2424 ext 110 | (540) 325-8409 | dana.gochenour@lfswcd.org  
*Supervising Conservation Specialist*

**Sabrina Heltzel** | (540) 465-2424 ext 112 | (540) 325-8346 | sabrina.heltzel@lfswcd.org  
*Conservation Specialist*

**Nick Livesay** | (540) 465-2424 ext 102 | (540) 325-8403 | nick.livesay@lfswcd.org  
*Senior Conservation Specialist*

**Madison Coffey** | (540) 465-2424 ext 107 | (540) 481-5121 | madison.coffey@lfswcd.org  
*Conservation Specialist*

**Allyson Ponn** | (540) 465-2424 ext 104 | (540) 325-5330 | allyson.ponn@lfswcd.org  
*Education & Program Support Specialist*

**Sam Shelton** | (540) 465-2424 ext 107 | sam.shelton@lfswcd.org  
*Conservation Technical Assistant*