

THE WATERSHED

Chairwoman's Report



**February
2024**

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.



While this is a new calendar year, the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District (LFSWCD) is halfway through its fiscal year. We anticipate having another year of success in getting agricultural best management practices (BMPs) installed on our local farms – with many thanks to our conservation-minded farmers who voluntarily sign up. Not only do these practices improve local water quality and farm productivity but help clean up the Chesapeake Bay pollution.

While some of us may not be fans of winter weather, we should all be grateful for the winter rains and snowfalls. The Shenandoah Valley has been in a drought and this winter precipitation will definitely help replenish our groundwater. Something to think about while shoveling snow and modifying schedules!

Our Board of Directors has changed significantly, thanks to the retirement of several longstanding members. We welcomed our newest members at our January Board meeting and we are looking forward to their service on our Board over the next four years. You can learn more about them in this newsletter.

Our staff continues to develop their expertise and skills through a variety of training and on-the-job experiences. Three of our newest staff (Loyd, Shelton, Heltzel) are closing in on their required 'conservation planner certification' which is earned through hours of formal training and field projects. Allyson Ponn is participating in the highly competitive "Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute" along with individuals from across the state. Sabrina Heltzel is also well on her way to attaining her Virginia Professional Soil Scientist certification, a huge milestone. Finally, our senior staff member Dana Gochenour recently 'graduated' from Shenandoah County's Leadership Program.

I mention these accomplishments because the strength and success of our District is totally dependent upon attracting and retaining highly skilled individuals and our Board is quite proud of our entire staff!

Joan Comanor
LFSWCD Board of Directors
Chairwoman

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Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS)

As of December 2023, the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District has obligated 45% of the \$5.5 Million PY2024 VACS allocation, totaling \$2,535,547.02.

Each soil and water district has a goal of obligating 90% of their total VACS funds for the program year in order to receive the full amount of technical assistance (TA) funds from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). These TA funds are exclusively used for conservation staff salaries.

BMP Type	# Approved	Cost-Share Allocated
Tree Planting	6	\$136,920.50
Cover Crop	65	\$383,186.30
Stream Exclusion	12	\$1,327,580.77
Waste Management	6	\$540,040.26
Cropland Conversion	10	\$99,302.74
Other	14	\$83,775.36

LFSWCD staff are confident that our District will reach the 90% goal by the end of the program year on June 30th, 2024. There are currently multiple large scale projects in the application and design process that will be up for approval in the coming months.

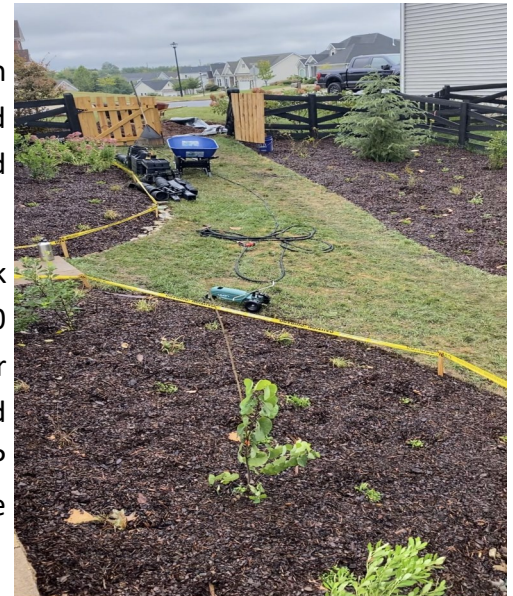
Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

LFSWCD has overseen the completion of two Conservation Landscaping projects in the past quarter, one in Warren County and another in Frederick County. Both projects address erosion and vegetation loss for homeowners due to stormwater.

The Conservation Landscaping practice installed in Frederick County established 3,900 square foot mulched beds filled with over 40 different Virginia native plants. The project has a drainage area of over 14,000 square feet, with all drainage being funneled through the yard and out one singular corner and into Abrams Creek. Through the VCAP steering committee, the project was approved and reimbursed the maximum payment of \$7,000.

The Conservation Landscaping project completed in Warren County addressed erosion and vegetation loss on a steep hillside in the front yard of the homeowner's property. Through VCAP, the project removed the sod grass and planted 2,150 square feet of hardy Virginia native plants, including jute netting to prevent further erosion on the slope. Through the VCAP steering committee, the project was approved and reimbursed the maximum payment of \$7,000.

LFSWCD staff continue meeting with landowners and other interested applicants for the VCAP program. Currently staff are working on the application packet for two new projects within the District.



Frederick County Conservation Landscaping Installation



Warren County Conservation Landscaping Completed

Chesapeake Bay Collaboration Excellence Award—Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) solicited nominations for the 2023 Chesapeake Bay Collaboration Excellence Award, recognizing exemplary, interdisciplinary partnership between agencies that achieved substantive progress toward goals outlined in item 14 of Virginia’s Phase III Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP). The Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District (LFSWCD) nominated the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative, facilitated by the Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley.

The Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative (SVCC) advances conservation outcomes through a partnership that coordinates expertise, identifies opportunities, and motivates action. The Collaborative was built upon many years of conservation agencies and organizations working together in the region who have similar or complementary missions involving clean water and land conservation. Since 2017, the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Council has worked to connect agencies, organizations, and the agricultural community. Through the partnership, the collaborative has supported:



Collaborative partners in attendance accepting the award at the VASWCD Annual Meeting in December of 2023.

- The installation of over 2,500 acres of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality.
- Supported over 2,500 acres being placed in conservation easements.
- Completed outreach to over 900 landowners for BMP and conservation opportunities.
- Grown the importance of the collaborative over the years of development with partner organizations/agencies.



VACDE 5 Year Service Awardees, Allyson Ponn with LFSWCD and Amy Moyer with Thomas Jefferson SWCD.

Lord Fairfax SWCD Recognition

At the Virginia Association Annual Meeting, District Directors and staff are recognized for their years of service to their respective conservation districts. The following Lord Fairfax SWCD personnel were awarded with service pins: Joan Comanor—20 Years, Dana Gochenour—10 Years, and Allyson Ponn—5 Years.

Other LFSWCD Updates from Annual Meeting

- Paul Burkholder remains VASWCD Area 1 Chair
- Reid Hoak nominated and elected Vice Chair of VASWCD Area 1
- Allyson Ponn nominated and elected Vice President of Virginia Association of Conservation Districts Employees Association (VACDE)

Welcome New Board Members!

Randy Buckley, Clarke County

Randy Buckley was raised on a farm growing beef, sheep, pigs, row crops and hay. He currently runs a cow/calf and hay operation with his father and brother in White Post. Randy is a founding member and current chair of the Clarke County Conservation Easement Authority, Member and vice chairman of the Clarke County Planning Commission, and active in Farm Bureau.



Jack Owens, Frederick County

Jack Owens has called Frederick County home for 15 years. After graduating High School, Jack jumped right in to preserving, restoring, and interpreting the Shenandoah Valley's historic and scenic landscapes working for the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation. It is there he fell in love with land conservation and stewardship, and where he plays an active role in the Foundation's efforts for resource preservation in the Valley. In addition to being recently elected as a Director of LFSWCD, Jack is also a member of the Frederick County Historic Resources Advisory Board. Jack is excited to help and learn as much as he can with the District and its staff.



Emma Bricker, Warren County

Emma Bricker is a conservation minded, native plant loving, former world language teacher. Her passion for plants, and language, can be traced to working at a native plant nursery where memorizing Latin names of plants also spurred a passion for learning language. Before moving to Virginia with her husband, Emma taught Spanish at a variety of levels. Prior to this, she ran a native landscaping company. Emma is currently involved in the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association, as well as being an active member of the Browntown Community Association. Emma was raised on a farm in Maryland and presently resides on a farm with her husband, their two dogs, and chickens, and enjoys visits with their three children.



Mark Huddleston, Warren County

Mark W. Huddleston is a relatively new resident of Virginia, having moved with his wife to a small farm in Browntown, VA just over two years ago. Mark retired in 2018 as longtime President of the University of New Hampshire, after having previously served as President of Ohio Wesleyan University, and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Delaware, where he was also on the faculty for twenty-four years. Mark has a PhD in Political Science, and has published widely in the field of public administration. His non-academic interests include woodworking, reading and shooting sports. In addition to his wife Emma, Mark's family includes two sons, a daughter, and two energetic black Labrador retrievers.



Reid Hoak, City of Winchester

Reid is a Winchester native, been a Funeral Assistant at Omps Funeral Home for over four years. He's a John Handley High School graduate and attended Lord Fairfax Community College & Longwood College. Retired as a Regional Sales Manager in the RV Industry after 33 years with Fleetwood Trailer Travels & Forest River Inc. Reid has two children, Ryan and Lauren. He is involved in the Kiwanis Club of Winchester, is active in his church and in his spare time enjoys walking and hiking and spending time with friends.





Dominion Energy®

ENVIROTHON



Each year, the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts facilitates the Virginia Dominion Energy Envirothon, with local competitions starting at individual Districts, advancing to regional competitions and then to state. Students work in teams to complete five field tests (Soil, Aquatics, Wildlife, Forestry and a Special Topic), in addition to an oral presentation problem based on the special topic. The special topic changes each year—for 2024, the Special Topic is Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future.

LFSWCD received a \$817 grant from Dominion Energy to help grow the Envirothon program within our district, including enhancing training efforts and purchasing materials. The grant funds will provide local trainings, the materials recommended for Envirothon Trunks (boxes filled with training materials), and help pay for the local competition. The 2024 Envirothon schedule is as follows:

Area 1 Training: March 9th at Bridgewater College

LFSWCD Competition: April 9th at Clermont Farms, Berryville VA

Area 1 Competition: April 30th, McCormick Farms, Raphine VA

VA Competition: May 19-20th, Radford University

Strasburg Riverwalk 2.0—MRGS Research Project

How does outdoor recreation connect to a person’s environmental awareness? Does being outside, utilizing natural spaces, create a more conservation-minded public? How can these open spaces help educate visitors on conservation, sustainability and natural resources health?

LFSWCD is mentoring a research project at Massanutten Regional Governor’s School (MRGS) that intends to study just that. This student, a junior at Strasburg High School, grew up playing soccer adjacent to the North Fork of the Shenandoah River in the Strasburg Town Park. His family often takes walks or runs along the Riverwalk, a two-mile trail that connects the park and high school. His project focuses on how these experiences may have led to his appreciation of the natural world around him, and how these spaces can create aware and conservation-minded citizens.

The Town of Strasburg recently received a grant from the Department of Wildlife Resources to expand the Riverwalk trail, add pedestrian access points, fishing piers and a canoe/kayak launch. The large scale improvement on the outdoor space allows for the public to connect even further with the natural resources around them. In addition to evaluating and researching how people connect with nature, this student will be looking into grants that could provide educational signage along the riverwalk, highlighting special features, Virginia natives and provide education tips—All with the hopes of creating a community that is aware and appreciative of their natural resources.

LFSWCD Conservation Technical Committee Meeting

First Thursday of Every Month
10am @ Strasburg Community Center

LFSWCD Board of Directors Meeting

Second Thursday of Every Month
10am @ Strasburg Community Center

LFSWCD Board of Directors Orientation Day

March 21st in Shenandoah County

All Agriculture Outreach Event

TBD

LFSWCD Dominion Energy Envirothon

April 9th @ Clermont Farms, Berryville VA

Area 1 Dominion Energy Envirothon

April 30th @ McCormick Farms, Raphine VA

VASWCD Dominion Energy Envirothon

May 21st -22nd @ Radford University

MARK YOUR
CALENDAR!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Joan Comanor, Shenandoah
Mary Gessner, Shenandoah
Jack Owens, Frederick
Kermit Gaither, Frederick
Reid Hoak, Winchester
Paul Burkholder, Winchester
Emma Bricker, Warren
Mark Huddleston, Warren
Randy Buckley, Clarke
Justin Mackay-Smith, Clarke

James Fagan, Shenandoah At-Large
C. Corey Childs, Warren At-Large
Jason Bushong, Associate Director -
Shenandoah
Stephanie Shillingburg, Associate
Director - Shenandoah
Ed Pendleton, Associate Director -
Winchester
Ira Richards, Associate Director -
Warren

DISTRICT PERSONNEL:

Sarah Fleming, Administrative Specialist
Sam Shelton, Conservation Technical Assistant
Dana Gochenour, Supervisory Conservation Specialist
Madison Coffey, Conservation Specialist
Ben Loyd, Conservation Specialist
Nick Livesay, Conservation Specialist
Sabrina Vladu, Conservation Specialist
Allyson Ponn, Education & Program Support Specialist



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.