

Views From The Foothills

A Publication of the Culpeper Soil & Water Conservation District
Serving Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange & Rappahannock Counties
www.culpeperswcd.org

Vol. 21 Issue 1
Winter 2021

M. Johnson

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Welcome!

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stephanied@culpeperswcd.org to remove yourself from our mailing list.

Agricultural BMP Cost-Share Program and Nonpoint Source (NPS) Pollution

Nonpoint Source (NPS) pollution can generally be thought of as any pollution that runs off the land when it rains, or from generally dispersed sources across the landscape. Reductions in NPS can be attained by reducing activities that produce the pollutants, changing management strategies to lessen the opportunity for polluted runoff, and utilizing strategies to control dispersal. While there are many sources of NPS, agriculture is among the significant ones in the Culpeper District (SWCD) simply because many acres here are devoted to farming. Developing and designing projects for farming operations aimed at reducing NPS from agricultural lands is one of the things we do at SWCD. These projects also improve options for many production benefits to farming operations. Enter.....the Virginia Agricultural BMP Cost-Share Program. Something to consider.

The Cost-Share Program supports the use of various practices in conservation planning to treat cropland, pasture land, hay land, and forest land. Some practices are paid on a flat rate or straight per-acre rate, and others are cost-shared on a percentage basis up to one hundred percent. All are designed and administered here by District staff. All help reduce NPS and help with farm productivity.

We guide the reader to page 3 of this newsletter for an overview of commonly used practices and payment rates here in SWCD. We encourage all who own or operate farm land to investigate with our staff how the program can work for you, your farm, and water quality. Our staff is very well trained, very knowledgeable and can design your project with you and help guide you through the sign-up process.



No Money for Best Management Practices? No Problem! DEQ offers 0% interest loans

Producers and landowners may be hesitant to participate in the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMP) Cost Share Program for a number of reasons. One reason may be the amount of money needed upfront to pay a contractor for supplies and labor before being reimbursed by Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District or Natural Resources Conservation Service. Fear not — the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality is now offering 0% interest loans for exactly this situation!

Virginia's Ag BMP Loan Program is now available again. The purpose of the revitalized loan program is to help producers with cash flow for installing eligible agricultural Best Management Practices that will improve water quality in the Commonwealth. (Click [here](#) for the list of eligible ag BMPs.) The Ag BMP Loan Program, part of the Virginia Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund (VCWRLF), was originally administered from 2000 to 2016. During this time, the Program provided \$46 million in 491 loans to 615 Ag BMP projects throughout Virginia. On July 1, 2019 the program resumed with additional incentives provided to producers.

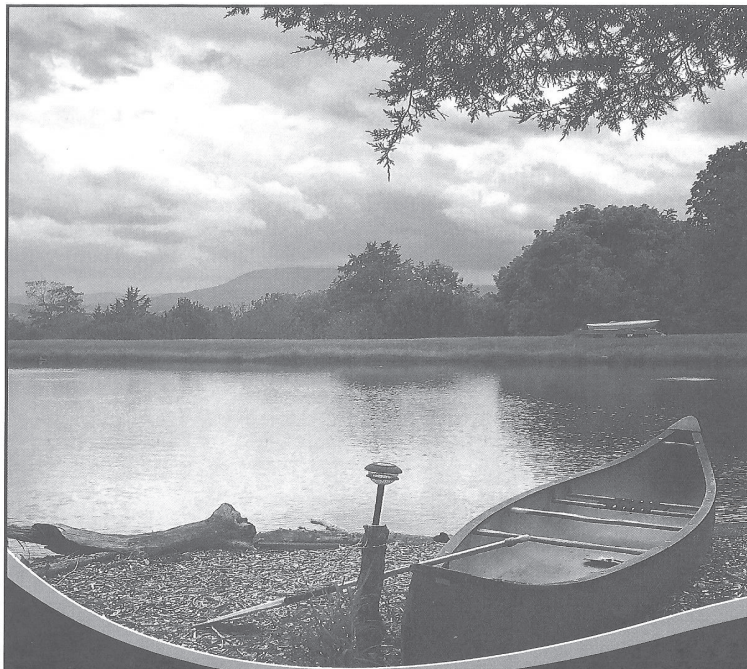
Any producer who wants to install agricultural Best Management Practices is eligible. If the applicant does not participate in any state or federal cost share program they are still eligible but the practices still must meet BMP specifications.

Applicants are required to have an approved Conservation Plan that meets DCR or NRCS standards. If animal waste practices are included a Nutrient Management Plan that meets DCR standards would also be required.

The DEQ updated guidelines (effective February 18, 2021) now allow for a \$1 million active loan utilization, so if they have a loan already they may still be eligible for another loan. The minimum loan amount is \$10,000. The new maximum loan amount has been increased to \$600,000. Producers can receive a loan up to 100% of eligible expenses. If a producer receives cost share funds, these funds must be applied to the loan payments immediately. Repayment periods range from 1 to 10 years. Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis and are reviewed and ranked monthly.

A brochure about the loan program can be found at: <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=4410>.

For additional information contact the District at 540-825-8591.



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Agriculture Cost Share Funds Available

Conservation funds for implementing conservation management practices are currently available. Now is a very good time to contact District staff to explore your options. Listed below are many of the commonly used conservation practices and payment rates.

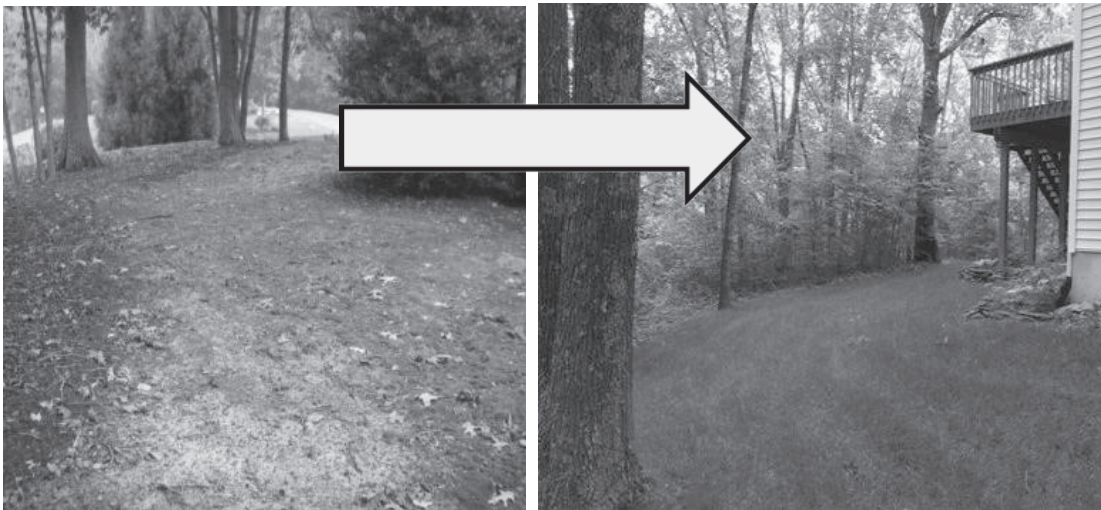
Culpeper & Rappahannock (540-825-8591):

- David Massie; davidm@culpeperswcd.org
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Greene, Madison & Orange:

- Kendall Dellinger; kendalld@culpeperswcd.org 540-825-8591 ext. 1008
- Spencer Yager; spencery@culpeperswcd.org 540-308-6301

Practice	Details
Grazing Land Management with Stream Exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stream exclusion fencing & water development • Includes fence, well, water troughs, pipe, stream crossings, rotational fences, etc. • Covers 85% of <i>estimated</i> cost with 35' buffer & 100% with 50' buffer • Buffer payment rate of \$80/acre/year paid upon installation of all practices • 10 and 15 year contracts available
Stream Exclusion with Narrow width buffer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stream exclusion fencing & water development with reduced setback • Includes fence, well, water troughs, pipe, stream crossings, rotational fence, etc. • Covers 60% of <i>estimated</i> cost with 10' buffer & 75% with 25' buffer • 10 and 15 year contracts available
Small Herd Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New program which begins 7/1/21 that pays 100% for any stream exclusion project for farmers with less than 35 total head of cattle • \$25,000 project limit • Contact the District for more details!
Afforestation of Crop, Hay & Pastureland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% of eligible cost for planting trees (hardwood or conifers) • \$100/acre for 10 year incentive & \$150/acre for 15 years
Woodland Buffer Filter Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planting trees in riparian areas • 95% of eligible cost for planting hardwoods or conifers • Conifers: \$100/acre for 10 years OR \$150/acre for 15 years • Hardwoods: \$100/acre for 10 years OR \$250/acre for 15 years
Cover Crops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 10th cut off for harvestable cover crop & early planting date for cover crops to be killed in the spring • November 1st, cut off planting date for kill down crops • Rates: \$20/acre to harvest, up to \$60/acre to kill & \$30/acre for legumes
Nutrient Management Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to \$4/acre to have a nutrient management plan written for your farm • A great way to save money on input costs!
Precision Nutrient Management on Cropland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to \$8/acre for the precision application of nitrogen & phosphorus to cropland • Must have current nutrient management plan: provide records, maps & a bill for nutrient management
No-Till & Cropland Conversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to \$70/acre to convert from conventional tillage to a no-till system for 5 years • Up to \$340/acre to convert cropland to permanent hay or pasture for 10 years
Grassed Waterway, Grass filter strips & Critical Area Seeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 75% to grade & seed gully erosion • Up to 75% to establish grass filter strips along waterways adjacent to crop, hayland or animal holding areas • Up to 75% to grade, fill & seed critically eroding areas
Continuing Conservation Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$0.50-\$1.25/linear foot of stream bank protected with fencing • \$250-\$1,000 per water system, water trough or stream crossing • A great way to receive funds to maintain existing infrastructure!



Using a soil test to inform your lawn management can yield results as seen above

Save Money with Soil Testing to Improve Your Lawn

Caring for the environment also means caring for your lawn. By using proper mowing and maintenance practices, you can enjoy a healthy, beautiful lawn while protecting local streams, rivers and lakes.

Our homes contain impervious surfaces (rooftop, patio, and driveway) that can't absorb and filter rainfall. The underlying soil characteristics of the lawn can affect how the lawn absorbs and filters the impervious runoff. Soil compaction, low pH (e.g. acid soils) and low nutrients can impact how you grow vegetation in your lawn. Improperly applied or excess fertilizer and other chemicals are not retained in the landscape, and can contribute to harmful algal blooms and other water quality problems.

What is lawn care? It's not just seeding, watering and mowing. We must amend the soil not only to feed the grass but to improve soil structure. Managing clippings and leaves are all part of lawn care too. Returning these byproducts improve the soil and vegetation. How we care for our lawn determines the degree of the environmental benefits and impacts we achieve.

Healthy lawns can help prevent erosion, reduce runoff, and filter rainwater. A healthy lawn has uniform and mature vegetation that inhibits erosion and retains nutrients. A healthy lawn can capture over an inch of rain; traps dust and dirt; convert carbon dioxide to oxygen; and reduces the heat island effect with air temperatures up to 30 degrees cooler than pavement. A sparse lawn with bare soil needs improvement either by amending the soil or selecting different landscape plants.

The soil should be tested every three years. A composite soil sample of the whole yard is collected. A soil test includes information on the amount of nutrients, organic matter and pH level. The proper balance is essential to a healthy lawn. Additional assessments of patchy bare spots could be done to verify foot traffic, recent disturbance, disease or standing water.

The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District is working with your local Extension agent to make sure homeowners like yourself have the knowledge and resources to do your part. The District is offering a voucher to cover the cost of the soil test. For these vouchers please contact the District at 540-825-8591 or stephanieD@culpeperswcd.org.

For more information on lawn care see the Virginia Extension Publication list: https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html?tag=pubs_ext_vt_edu:lawns.

A Guide for New Virginia Woodland Owners: Welcome to Your Woods

Part 4 (see <http://www.culpeperswcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/culp-swcd-nletter-summer-2020.pdf> for part 3)

By Adam Downing, Virginia Cooperative Extension Forestry Agent

It is our intention to make new forestland owners aware of this publication. To read the publication visit our website, <http://www.culpeperswcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/welcome-to-the-woods.pdf>.

As a new landowner, what do you need to know to have healthy productive woodlands that provide all of the previously outlined benefits? What follows are the top 10 items the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program and its natural resource partners think would be most helpful for you. There is a glossary of terms and information for obtaining all of the resources mentioned in the text is provided in Appendix A of the publication.

4. What are Challenges to Good Woodland Management?

As a new landowner, you may face challenges as you try to keep your woodlands healthy and productive. This section will describe some of the most common challenges and the resources available.

Exotic Invasives

These are plants, animals, insects and diseases that have been introduced to our region both intentionally and unintentionally. They are well-adapted to grow in their new environment and generally out-compete native species while providing very little value to wildlife or other ecosystem services. Exotic invasive species in your woods threaten the existing vegetation as well as future regeneration of the woods. To protect your property, talk to your local Virginia Department of Forestry forester about common exotic invasives in your area. Follow up by monitoring and controlling them, if present. The Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health's website has photos, field guides and mobile apps to help you identify and control common exotic invasive species.

Insects and Diseases

Both native and non-native species can cause insect and disease problems. The southern pine beetle is an example of a native insect that kills trees. Southern pine beetle problems are more likely to occur in overcrowded pine forests, where the trees are under stress from too much competition with their neighbors. Proper planting density and timely thinning can help keep these insects at bay.

The chestnut blight is an example of a non-native disease that kills American chestnut trees. In the early 20th century, approximately 25 percent of the hardwoods found in eastern forests were American chestnut, but the majority of these have been killed by the disease. Researchers are developing blight-resistant varieties of chestnut but commercial availability of these trees is still years away.

The US Forest Service has a series of leaflets that deal with the identification and control of common native insect and disease problems.

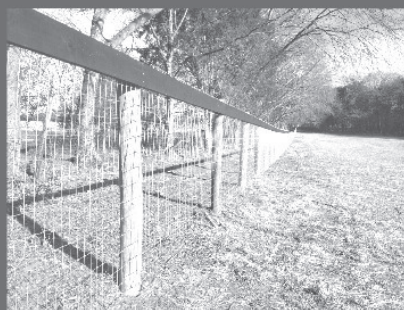
Walk your property regularly and look for changes. The sooner you identify a problem the easier it may be to handle. Keep in mind, not all changes indicate a problem.

Human/Wildlife Interactions

White-tailed deer have long been a part of Virginia. In fact, their Latin name, *Odocoileus virginianus*, translates to Virginia deer. They were quite rare in Virginia 100 years ago due to unregulated hunting and habitat loss. Now their numbers have exploded in most of the state due to conservation efforts, loss of natural predators and their ability to thrive in a fragmented landscape. Deer are herbivores and, in large populations, can denude a woodland of most vegetation within their reach. In addition, they also damage agricultural crops and landscape plantings.

Deer are just one of the species of wildlife that may cause problems in your yard and woodland. Wild hogs, known for rooting up agricultural crops, fields and young seedlings, are established in parts of Virginia. Groundhogs (woodchucks) burrow under buildings, skunks spray dogs, beavers harvest your trees; you get the picture. In response, Virginia Cooperative Extension and other Virginia state agencies developed the Center for Human-Wildlife Conflict Resolution. This site provides information on how you can safely and legally handle wildlife problems.

Continued on page 12



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New, 100% Reimbursement Small Beef Herd Initiative Program Coming Soon

There is a new cost share program initiative available beginning July 1, 2021 that targets beef producers who have between 20-35 total animals in their herd who wish to install stream exclusion fencing and alternative water systems and get reimbursed 100% of the total estimated costs. The State has provided \$2 million for practice installation of any livestock exclusion best management practices (BMP's) available through the Virginia Agricultural Incentives Cost Share Program (VACS). The new funds are non-competitive and available on a first-come, first served basis until funds are exhausted. This initiative will cover up to 100% of project costs and have a total participant limit of \$25,000. This funding does not interfere or impact the regular VACS cost share participant caps.

Producers who are interested in this initiative will work with the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District on project planning and approval. Once approved for funding, producers will have two years to complete their practice and receive payment.

Since these funds are available on a first-come, first served basis, we strongly recommend that interested producers please contact the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District at (540) 825-8591 as soon as possible, so that we can begin the planning process in hopes of funding as many projects as possible with these limited funds.



Road and Driveway Maintenance Guide Available

Spring is a great time to start maintenance of your road or driveway! Over time, many roads and driveways deteriorate for a variety of reasons: poor initial design or construction, poor maintenance, extreme weather or heavy traffic. In addition to costly repairs, many roads and roadside ditches drain into local streams delivering both sediment and gravel into stream channels. This is destructive to the stream, resulting in loss of stream bottom habitat and channel capacity. Improved maintenance incorporating best management practices (BMPs) can save money and better protect waterways.

Currently available to property owners is the Dirt and Gravel Road BMP Guide, published with funding from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund. The guide can be found at the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District website (www.culpeperswcd.org) under Publications. Hard copies can be picked up from CSWCD as well as your local Extension office or Building office.

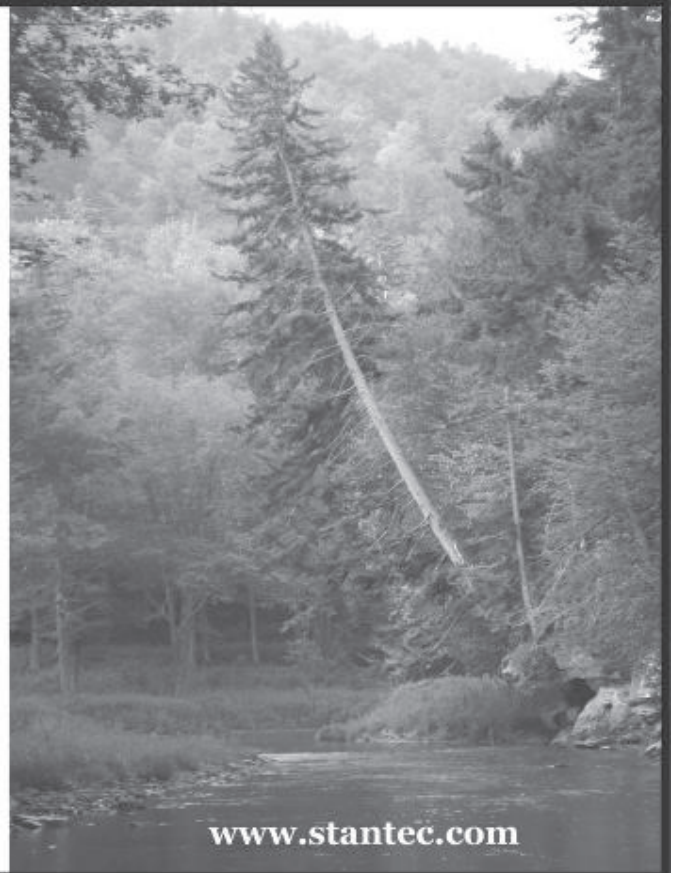
For technical assistance, contact Richard Jacobs at 540-825-8591 or RichardJ@culpeperswcd.org.



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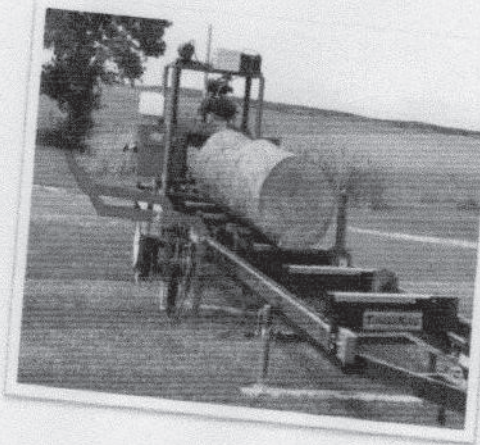
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Continued from page 5

High-Grade Harvesting

Timber harvesting is important to Virginia's economy. Sustainable harvesting practices can also be used to improve forest health and meet your ownership goals. Some harvesting, however, does more harm than good. High-grading is a harvesting practice that removes the highest-valued trees from the woods without regard to the present condition or future composition of the woods. It is sometimes described as "cutting the best and leaving the rest." Unfortunately, many acres in Virginia have undergone this type of harvesting, resulting in less healthy, less productive woodlands. A professional forester can advise you on how to improve your woodland's health and productivity.

Summary of Challenges

Recognizing and dealing with threats to your woodlands can be challenging. Caring for your woods with specific goals in mind, is pragmatic approach to dealing with these challenges. Don't become discouraged if you find you are facing several of these challenges. There are many natural resource professionals in Virginia who can provide you with information and advice on how to manage these challenges.

5. Safe Landowners

Peace and quiet, privacy, beautiful vistas, exercise. Living in the country and being outdoors sure have their benefits. However, there are also hazards in the woods. To maximize your family's enjoyment, here are some safety considerations.

Firewise

Your woodlands can provide an idyllic setting for your home. However, woodlands in all parts of Virginia are susceptible to wildfires. Wildfires play a historically significant role in the succession of our woodlands. They reduce built up debris and litter, return nutrients to the soil and help prepare a suitable seedbed for regeneration. However, they do not mix well with residential areas. If you build a home in your woodlands, there are precautions you can take to reduce risk.

Be Septic Smart — Think at the Sink!

One in five US homes have septic systems. Yours may be one of them. If your septic system is not properly maintained you may be risking your family's health, hurting the environment and flushing thousands of dollars down the drain. Septic Smart is a program developed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to educate homeowners about septic system maintenance.

- **Think at the Sink!** What goes down your drain has a big impact on your septic system! Avoid harsh chemicals and use cleaners/detergents in moderation.
- **Don't strain your drain!** Use water efficiently and stagger use of water based appliances (such as washing machines and dishwashers) to avoid a back up of your septic system into your house.
- **Keep it clean!** If you have a well, many things can contaminate your drinking water, such as a failing septic system. Test your well water regularly!
- **Shield your field!** Tree and shrub roots, cars and livestock can damage your drainfield.
- **Protect it and Inspect It!** Regular septic system maintenance can save homeowners thousands of dollars and protect public health.
- **Don't Overload the Commode!** A toilet is NOT a trash can! Disposable diapers, wipes, feminine hygiene products, cigarette butts, cat litter and more can damage your septic system.
- **Pump your Tank!** Ensure your septic tank is pumped at regular intervals as recommended by a professional and/or local permitting authority.

More information can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/septic/septicmart-homeowners>.

Resource Management Planning Program

The Virginia Resource Management Planning program provides an additional voluntary tool to promote the use of conservation practices that improve both farming operations and water quality. Resource Management Plans (RMPs) can help farm owners and operators take advantage of all the conservation measures at their disposal. The plans are designed to encourage the use of a high level of best management practices (BMPs) that reduce runoff pollution to local waters and, in many cases, improve the farmer's financial bottom line.

In return for full implementation of an RMP, the plan holder can be assured that he or she is in compliance with any proposed new state nutrient, sediment and water quality standards if any new standards/regulations are adopted. This in particular relates to regulations related to the Chesapeake Bay and all local stream segment TMDLs. The certification is valid for nine years provided the farmer continues to implement the RMP. Participation in the program is completely voluntary and RMPs can be revised during the nine years to adjust to farming or market conditions.

The RMP concept was developed at the urging of the Virginia agricultural community. The approach provides a comprehensive assessment of the conservation needs of a farming operation. Not only will RMPs serve as a tool to encourage BMP implementation, but it will also be used to document practices in use, providing verified data to validate the agricultural sector's level of conservation implementation. Better tracking of agricultural BMPs through the use of resource management plans will also provide decision makers more accurate data when determining future funding needs for cost-share and other incentive programs.

A farm owner or operator can choose to have an RMP on the whole farm, a tract or just one field. RMPs can be developed for cropland, hay or pasture land uses. All RMPs must contain a nutrient management plan and a soil conservation plan to reduce soil loss to "T." Crop and hay land require a 35-foot forested or vegetative buffer adjacent to perennial streams. Pasture fields must have livestock excluded from perennial streams, although limited acres areas and stream crossings are allowed. Also, the plan must be written by a certified plan developer.

How it Works: Four Steps

Assessment: A certified RMP developer visits the operation, meets with the farmer, evaluates the land and practices in place and begins development of options to meet the requirements.

Plan Development: The certified RMP developer meets with the farmer and discusses options to meet the requirements. Once the farmer agrees to the particular BMPs and a schedule for implementation, the RMP may be submitted to the Culpeper District for review and approval.

Plan Implementation: Once the approved plan has been fully implemented, the farmer requests that the planner visit the farm to certify implementation. Then the District reviews that certification. A certificate of RMP implementation is issued once the District certifies full implementation.

Verification: Continued verification visits are conducted every few years to ensure the continued proper functioning and maintenance of the BMPs.

Funding is being made available to pay for the development of resource management plans. Cost share funding is available for most of the BMPs needed to meet RMP requirements. For more information on RMP options contact the District at 540-825-8591.



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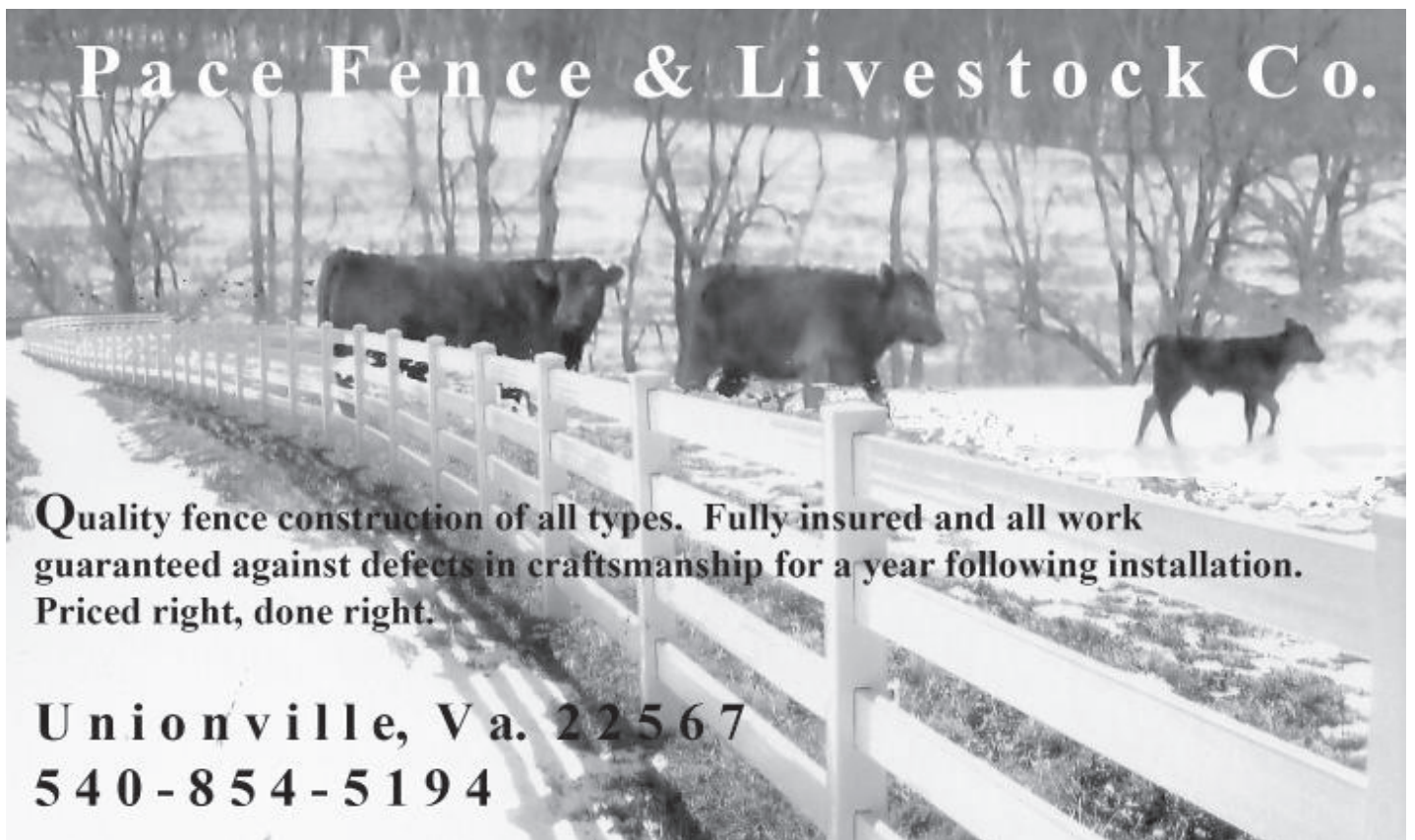
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Published Seasonally By
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