



Culpeper Soil & Water Conservation District

Serving Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange, &
Rappahannock

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Greetings,

April 1, 2022

You are receiving this because you are being asked to complete and submit a survey for us to obtain input for our new Strategic Plan. We thought a good place to start would be a quick overview for you of the “current state of business” at the District and what we foresee coming at us in the next few years due to priorities of the Commonwealth and of the Code of Virginia. We hope we can entice you to take a few moments to contemplate the survey questions and share your input. By and large we are a customer service-based entity of local government and your input towards how we serve you is critical for success. We have no regulatory function other than adherence to legal contracts we enter into.

We are funded by local county governments (both for general operating support and for direct services to county/town government), by the Virginia General Assembly, and we write many grants for both project funding and operational funding; we take on any additional work that will pay us to do it and some that does not pay but supports our mission. Currently, funding is strong, although much of our funding can be considered “soft money” so continual renewal of grant efforts, continual legislative work, and monitoring of agency funding decisions is necessary to stay abreast of money issues and attempt to positively influence these decisions. We currently operate out of 3 offices.

We currently have ten full time employees and two part time employees. All employees are well trained, productive, and busy. All staff are currently either already professionally certified for performing their work or currently working towards such. Over the past three or four years we have expanded and may have to expand more given the future expected workloads. We are prepared to do this, assuming that competent funding continues to be available, not only to support existing and expanded staff levels, but also for increased overhead expenses.

We have a twelve-member Board of Directors representing our five member counties and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Ten of our Directors are elected (2 per member county), two are appointed and all work without pay, bringing many talents and levels of expertise to our organization.

More or less everything we do can be broadly categorized into 4 main areas:

- 1) Provide Technical and Educational services and assistance to all who ask – this may be part of delivering a bona fide financial incentives (Cost Share) program or not, and it includes direct engineering project review services to counties and towns for land development projects. This is the mainstream of our mission: “to educate and provide technical services”.
- 2) Delivery of financial incentive (Cost Share) programs – agricultural, forestry, residential septic, and residential stormwater. This is the “lion’s share” of our work and supports the “lion’s share” of our payroll expenditures.
- 3) Provide Educational and Informational Programs to K-12, homeowners, farmers, groups, anyone who asks. And any group we target. We (SWCDs) function as a portal for all such information and offer to attend other’s workshops or assist with them. This portal function is not unique to Culpeper SWCD, it is true nationwide. If you

want to know anything about natural resources and management of them, your conservation district is a very good place to begin.

- 4) We own and operate eleven flood control dams. This is a major responsibility since the dam structures are state regulated and take considerable attention to remain Code compliant.

Following is a brief overview of the major program areas:

- 1) The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD) provides information, resources, and guidance on natural resource management for all farms in Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange, and Rappahannock Counties. District staff are always available to meet with landowners and producers to walk the property and address resource concerns through technical assistance, providing resources, and offering eligible state cost-share and tax-credit programs. When landowners or producers participate in the agricultural cost-share or tax-credit program, District staff assist them from start to finish. Initially discussing options during the field visit, then providing cost-share and tax-credit options with plan maps and cost-estimates and creating a full farm conservation plan if the landowner or producer is interested in moving forward. Those plans are then reviewed by CSWCD's Technical Committee and Board, and if approved for funding, the project moves on to implementation and/or construction. For structural practices, District staff survey and design structural components of the project and ask the applicants to schedule a pre-construction meeting to review the construction standards and requirements. Upon completion, District staff review final contract paperwork with the applicant and submit the project to the CSWCD Board for reimbursement.
- 2) The District also administers and delivers a Residential Septic Cost-Share Program and a Residential Stormwater Management Cost-Share Program. Staff responsibilities and professional development are of the same magnitudes as for the Agricultural Program.
- 3) Education programs in the District fall in to three main categories: K-12 education, outreach events, and publications. Traditional K-12 education programs provide hands on, interactive programs that are interdisciplinary. These include types of soil with kindergarten and first grade, Virginia's watersheds in grades 2-12, and Envirothon, North America's largest environmental science competition for high school students. Programs weave into science, art, language, and civics for traditional classrooms, home school groups, church groups, and Scout troops. Additionally, we offer scholarships to college and summer camps. Outreach events include county fairs, farm shows, street fairs, farmers' markets, and Earth Day events. By partnering with USDA, Virginia Forage & Grasslands Council, and Virginia Cooperative Extension, we have regular presence at dozens of events each year. We provide free soil testing for lawns on an ongoing basis and an annual tree seedling sale to reach new audiences. We also provide continuing education to school staff, Master Gardeners/Naturalists, Realtors, stream monitors, and more. Our publications are typically developed based on frequently asked questions from our constituents. These include reporting water pollution, moving dirt, pond planning, and dirt and gravel road maintenance.
- 4) Annual dam inspections and reporting, annual maintenance of all dams, periodic repairs on the dams since they are all 50 plus years old and require updates. Emergency responses if floods occur.

We do see challenges coming our way. There may be others. In particular, significant increases in Agricultural Cost Share Program workload, workload for localities due to possible increases in land development, the need for expanding our overhead, and keeping ahead of the development and management of grant programs.

We ask that you complete this survey and offer us your input. We thank you in advance.