

Views From The Foothills

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

Vol. 16 Issue 4
Fall 2016

M. Johnson

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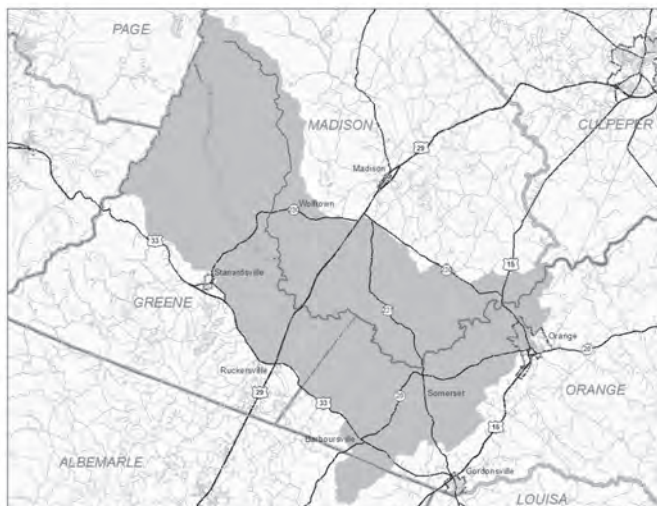
Septic System Health Care

Welcome!

You are receiving this newsletter because you receive land use tax benefits in our counties. Please call 540-825-8591 or email stephanied@culpeperswcd.org to remove yourself from our mailing list

Upper Rapidan TMDL Implementation Grant and District-wide Water Quality Improvement Grant both awarded to Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District

For nearly 10 years the Conservation District has been writing grants for implementation projects (IP) targeted at reducing in-stream levels of E Coli bacteria. This newsletter has often reported on several ongoing projects we have; the Upper Hazel IP project in Rappahannock, Madison and Counties, the Upper York IP project in Orange County, the Robinson River/Little Dark Run IP project in Madison County and now the good news is that a fourth IP project has been awarded funding to initiate the same strategies in the Upper Rapidan area. This area involves significant portions of Madison, Greene and Orange Counties. (see map). This new project is very similar to the ongoing IP projects since the same on-the-ground practices are being funded by the grant that are funded by the existing projects. This includes grazing management and livestock stream exclusion fencing and cross fencing, cropland conversion to sod, forestry practices, and residential septic system practices which correct malfunctioning septic systems and prevent further malfunctions. The septic practices include tank pump outs and inspections; distribution box inspections, repairs, and replacements;



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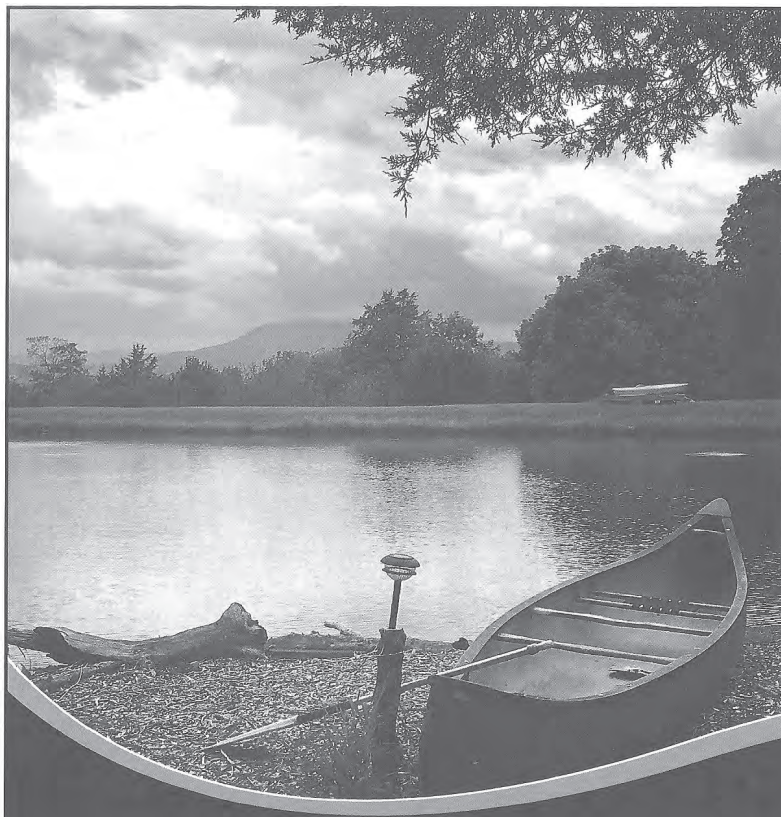
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drain field repairs or replacements; and full system replacements when that is warranted. Livestock producers may receive up to 85 percent of their eligible costs based on a district cost estimate for each project. All septic projects are reimbursed at the 50 percent level.

Livestock contributions to E Coli levels in streams are well documented. According to the TMDL study completed for the Upper Rapidan, residential septic systems are also a contributor. The replacement of ailing and failing septic systems and the installation of a system where none currently exist is a top priority for this project. Higher levels of reimbursement payments for septic practices, possibly even 100 percent under certain conditions, are available for documented low income situations under the IP funding criteria. This new grant brings an additional large area of the District into this funding source which pays higher reimbursement for some ag projects than the regular cost share programs. It also brings more septic funding to the District.

In addition, the District received notification that a second grant, a Virginia Water Quality Improvement Grant application submitted by the District has been selected to receive funding for 2 years to expand the septic system cost share program to all areas of the District. Previously this cost share was available only to the IP area streams. This is very good news since we have received many requests for septic assistance from residents in non IP areas. Together these grants bring over \$1 million in additional assistance to our localities to improve water quality and assist landowners with conservation management strategies.

For more information on these grants or any District programs call 540-825-8591.



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2nd Annual Tree Seedling & Rain Barrel Sale

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Fill out form and fax to: 540-645-6624 or clip order form and mail to: CSWCD, 351 Lakeside Drive, Culpeper, VA 22701, or email: stephanied@culpeperswcd.org or call (540) 825-8591 .

Pick up at Culpeper SWCD only in early April -- Pre-Orders must be paid in full CHECKS OR EXACT CASH ONLY
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ITEM	# IN PACK	\$ PACK	# PACK	TOTAL	ITEM	SIZE	# IN PACK	\$ PACK	# PACK	TOTAL
White Dogwood	5	\$8			Tulip Poplar		5	\$8		
Eastern Redbud	5	\$8			Tree tube	3'	1	\$4.50		
River birch	5	\$8			Tree tube	4'	1	\$5.50		
White Pine	5	\$8			Rain barrel	50 gal	1	\$70		
American plum	5	\$8								

Total Amount Included: _____

Right Tree Right Place

Kyle Dingus, Area Forester, Virginia Department of Forestry

A tree will grow well anywhere in your yard right? Well...not exactly. Trees grow best in the places where they have evolved to. If you want to plant trees in your yard, thinking about your objectives and doing a little homework on your yard will help ensure your trees are properly placed for the best chance of survival.

There are multitudes of reasons and benefits to planting trees on your property. Thinking about your objectives for the trees such as shading, fruit production, colors in fall or spring, wildlife habitat, privacy screening, increasing property value or reducing heating and cooling costs, will help guide you on selection. Native trees can accomplish these objectives and grow well in our yards. Once you have your reasons, find out growth conditions and available planting space for the trees in your yard.

Prior to planting, thought should be devoted to site conditions and the lifespan of the tree. Find out the shading pattern, drainage, or if you need to protect trees from deer browse. Are there any overhead limitations, such as power lines? Think about the size the trees may reach and if they could endanger your home in the future. Also, remember the roots will expand well out of the range of the canopy and could cause problems elsewhere! Keep in mind the maintenance that is necessary to ensure the tree's health. Tree maintenance, such as pruning, is cheaper when the trees are young. Consider the long term maintenance required for you and the future homeowner!

- Tree Owner's Manual: <http://na.fs.fed.us/urban/treeownersmanual/>
- Trees are Good: <http://treesaregood.com/>
- VA Dept. of Forestry: Tree Care: <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/trees/care/index.htm>

While planning and before digging in your yard please call Miss Utility of Virginia at 811 for locations of utility lines. For your safety and the safety of others, call prior to activities.

After you have gathered the site conditions, consult online native tree resources for information including growth characteristics, native ranges, fall colors, and proper planting sites.

- Dendrology at Virginia Tech: <http://dendro.cnre.vt.edu/dendrology/main.htm>
- VA Dept. of Forestry Tree Id: <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/trees/identify/index.htm>

The secret to keeping trees happy and healthy from insect pests, diseases and other problems is planning ahead and planting them in the right place where they naturally grow best. What better way to beautify your yard, increase property value and benefit the community?



District staff discussed cost share options with producers at the Orange Madison Coop on August 13, 2016

Welcome Amanda Chester!

Amanda Chester joined the District in September 2016 as a Conservation Specialist. She grew up in Fauquier County on her family's farm and enjoyed participating in 4-H while growing up. Amanda graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Biology from Christopher Newport University, with minors in Chemistry and Psychology. After college she volunteered at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in Front Royal, where she worked with cheetahs, black-footed ferrets, and several species of endangered birds. Amanda joins Culpeper SWCD with 2 years of experience working for the Lord Fairfax SWCD in the Shenandoah Valley. She is an amateur birder, who enjoys hiking, skiing, and time with friends and family.



Good luck Melissa Allen!

After nearly two years as a Soil Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Melissa Allen accepted a new position with the agency in the Williamsburg area. While NRCS expects to fill her position, producers should contact Rex Rexrode at 540-825-4200 ext. 101 in the interim.

The Culpeper District wishes Melissa luck in her future endeavors and appreciates her dedication on behalf of producers.



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Quail in the Woods

By David Bryan, Private Lands Biologist, NRCS/DGIF/VT

When thinking of Northern Bobwhite quail habitat, most landowners think instantly of an open native grass and wildflower field or perhaps a grown-up blackberry-dominated hedgerow or field border. And in doing so they would be correct. Wildlife biologists have pushed these habitats non-stop over the past decade as the answer to habitat declines and the associated dwindling numbers of quail. We'd be more than glad to help you develop these habitats on your property. More recently, though, biologists and foresters have been bucking that trend and focusing more on quail in the woods. Yes, you just read that correctly, quail in the woods. Let us explain.

The majority of Virginia's landscape is covered by pine, hardwood or mixed forests that provide great value to the Commonwealth – including but not exclusive to jobs, lumber and fiber production, water quality benefits and, of course, wildlife habitat. Within this forested system, conventional wisdom has said that quail benefit the most from forests only when they are cut down and either replanted or left for natural regeneration. We would agree that most clear-cuts are excellent habitat approximately 2-10 years post clear-cut, but why? Most land managers realize that during this time frame there is a great abundance of native grasses like Broomsedge, wildflowers like Partridge Pea and Goldenrod, and shrubby cover in the form of Greenbrier and Blackberry in these stands, making them an effective quail paradise. Remembering these habitats are part of a young forest, then we have quail in the woods, at least for a time until the tree canopy closes. At that point we know that the understory becomes largely shaded out, the habitat disappears, and so do the quail.

Admittedly, the majority of Virginia's mature hardwood and pine forests are closed canopy systems with little habitat in the understory and thus no quail, but they don't always have to be that way until the next harvest comes around. It all comes down to two key principles that must be discussed here, sunlight and fire, both of which must be present to have quail in the woods. First things first, in order to get quail in the woods a forest must be opened up through commercial thinning. A very general recommendation for quail is to thin the forest such that 50% or less of the ground floor is shaded at noon on a clear, summer day. What does that actually mean, however, in more technical terms?

In a loblolly pine forest setting, a forester's recommendation for a new, first-time pulpwood thinning will often be too thin down to ~80 basal area. Basal area is defined as the total cross-sectional area of all stems in a stand measured at breast height, and expressed per unit of land area (typically square feet per acre). In this case that would be 80 square feet per acre, which is typically the best recommendation if the landowner's sole goal is profit. We also recommend this level for a first pulpwood thinning because thinning too heavily on your first thinning can lead to storm windthrow problems as the residual trees will not be used to the pressure they receive from the elements. However, typically these stands are not thin enough to support wildlife habitat for long and thus a second thinning (down to 40-60 basal area) and even third pulpwood thinning (down to 30-40 basal area) are recommended after a time if habitat is the goal. From a financial standpoint, future sawtimber profits are sacrificed in favor of more pulpwood revenue (which generally pays less per tree), but on the other hand you get the benefits of the habitat and hunting.

Thinning, and thus sunlight, is only half of the answer to quail in the woods, though. Often there is a flush of saplings that comes in after a thinning which is most effectively dealt with herbicides and then the real fun begins – it is burn time! Yes, the second key to quail in the woods is prescribed burning.

Continued on page 9

Sarah Weaver Sharpe Joins CSWCD Board

Sarah Weaver Sharpe has joined the CSWCD Board as an Associate Director, effective July 1, 2016. She will assume the role of the Appointed Extension Agent Board member on January 1, 2017. She currently serves as the Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent with a focus in local foods and horticulture. While she is housed in Greene County, she will also serve Albemarle, Fluvanna, and Louisa counties.

Sarah grew up in Madison County on her family's pork, beef, hay, and row crop farm. She has personal experience in the local foods movement as she has been attending farmers markets on Saturday mornings for 20 years and has seen the local foods movement grow and explode. She is very passionate about helping producers start businesses and break into the local foods movement as well as helping to educate consumers about how food is grown and the production methods utilized.

Sarah comes into this position with extension experience- she grew up in 4-H in Madison County, participated as an intern for two summers in both 4-H and Ag and served as a 4-H Program Educator in Orange County for 4 years.

She also has experience starting and running small businesses as she started a pick-your-own pumpkin patch on her family's farm when she graduated from college.



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Conservation District Cover Crop Program Signup

Agriculture program conservation funds are currently available from the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District for a variety of conservation practices including cover crops for winter cover on crop fields. Opportunities exist for single species cover crops such as small grains for either harvest or killing and also for multiple species cover crops that incorporate forage or tillage radishes, legumes and other species to provide additional soil benefits. Payments range from \$15 to \$48 per acre depending on what is planted and when it is planted. Planting by October 10 pays higher and pure stands of some rye cultivars also pay additional amounts. A nutrient management plan is typically required to be eligible and this further benefits the producer. The agronomic benefits of cover crops are well established: scavenging of soil nutrients especially nitrogen, fixing atmospheric nitrogen into the soil, improving soil tilth and organic matter, protecting the soil from erosion in the off season and improving water infiltration into the soil are a few. Knowing your purpose(s) for growing a cover crop, targeting your species selection and management to achieve your purpose is key to attaining greater benefits. Sign up and approval is required.

Now is the time to contact the District to get more details and enroll acreage for this year's cover crops. The District has set aside part of its annual cost share allocation from the state specifically to address cover crop requests. For more information, contact the District at 540-308-6301 or 540-825-8591. For additional opportunities, contact Natural Resources Conservation Service at 540-825-4200 ext. 101.



Continued from page 6

Sunlight alone will not do the job. After the thinning is complete and the initial sapling flush is dealt with, we recommend an initial burn to reduce fuel loading, burn off the pine straw litter and open the seed bank for germination next spring. The results are usually astounding, as a wide variety of native grasses and forbs will soon germinate and dominate the stands. Surprisingly, many times these species lay dormant in the seed bank for decades waiting for an opportunity to emerge – and the fire will have provided that chance. No planting is necessary then, as you'll have the habitat you need for quail to move back into the woods. And to keep them there? Keep burning, on a two to three year cycle, never more than 50% of the habitat each year until such time that you make a final timber harvest and start the process over. Of course at that time you get the 10 or so years of habitat discussed earlier in a recently clear-cut and regenerating forest.

For details on how you can manage for Northern Bobwhite quail on your forest land (or anywhere for that matter), please contact your local Private Lands Biologist who will work together with the Virginia Department of Forestry or your private forester to help come up with a suitable plan based upon your goals. We can also help with the variety of state and/or federal programs that are available in your county, including a suite of practices specifically created for landowners interested in quail in the woods.

David Bryan, serving Culpeper, Madison and Orange – 804-537-3021 – david.bryan@va.usda.gov

Justin Folks, serving Greene and Rappahannock – 540-248-6218 x108 – justin.folks@va.usda.gov



Pictures provided by
David Bryan

Cost Share for Septic System Maintenance and Repairs Opens to Entire 5-County Area

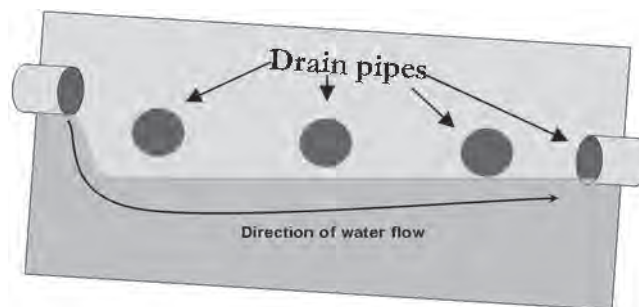
By Henny Calloway, CSWCD Conservation Specialist II

All residents of the District are now eligible for reimbursement of fifty percent of the expense of pumping, maintaining, repairing or replacing on-lot septic systems. The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District has just received a two year grant to expand their current septic system program to all areas of the five county conservation district; all areas Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock Counties. This grant is focused on reducing any existing or potential impacts on local ground and surface water quality. E. Coli bacteria in some local streams has long been identified as being higher than expected by state water quality standards, although other pollutants can also be involved, particularly nutrients. An additional benefit to the property owner is the assurance that their system is up to standards and functioning properly. It is a win-win for both water quality and property value. This grant compliments several others already in existence by expanding the options to the entire District.

Program participants are eligible for several different payments depending on the actual needs of their system. Reimbursement payments are typically fifty percent although can go as high as seventy-five percent for individuals that qualify for low income status. Maximum payments to property owners under average income levels are \$150 maximum towards a pump out and inspection; \$3,500 maximum towards a repair; \$4,000 maximum towards a conventional system or \$4,500 if a pump is required to move the liquids to the drain field; and \$10,000 maximum towards an alternative engineered system. Pump outs and inspections are encouraged by everyone; such preventative maintenance extends the life of a system and prevents higher costs later on if the systems fail. If further repairs are indicated by the inspection, the owner is still eligible for the additional repair payments. Applications are required and need to be approved prior to the work being done or funding can be declined. Free assistance with initial assessments of individual system needs is available from the District. Reimbursement payments are made promptly once the work has been completed. The program is entirely voluntary and assistance from the District is free of charge.

Further information on the program is available from the District at 825-8591 or 948-7531. Funding for these projects has been secured by the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Commonwealth of Virginia.

A Common Septic System Problem



An unlevel distribution box forces all of the septic wastewater into 1 drain line. This causes the water to appear above ground because the soil is saturated.

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Views From The Foothills

Published Seasonally By
Culpeper Soil & Water Conservation District

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