

Views From The Foothills

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Serving Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange & Rappahannock Counties
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M. Johnson

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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

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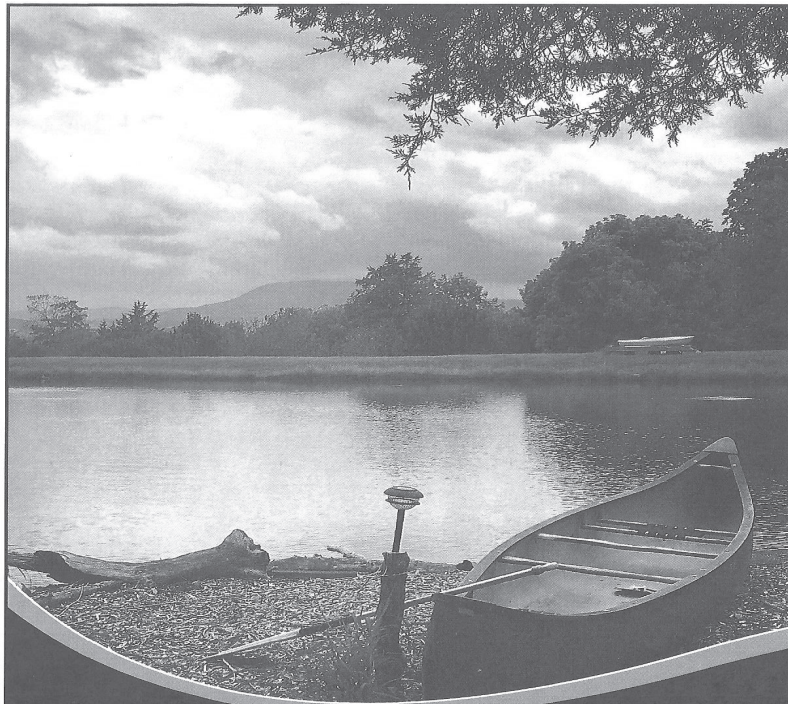
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New Invasive Pest Detected in Virginia

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) announced earlier this year the detection of a new invasive insect pest in Virginia. In early January 2018, VDACS inspectors discovered the Spotted Lanternfly (SLF), *Lycorma delicatula*, at a stone yard in Frederick County near Winchester. The Spotted Lanternfly is native to China, India and Vietnam, and prior to the January detection, was not known to occur in Virginia. Both SLF egg masses and dead adults were detected at the Winchester site.

Spotted Lanternfly feeds on more than 70 plants, including grapes, stone fruits, hops and Ailanthus (Tree of Heaven). The insect causes damage to plants because of its method of feeding, the rapid buildup of large populations and the production of honeydew, a by-product of their feeding activity that serves as a medium for fungal growth. SLF can also be a nuisance pest to homeowners when found in large numbers.

The first U.S. detection of SLF occurred in 2014 at a Pennsylvania business that imports stone products. Stone products from that business went to the Winchester site. VDACS inspectors had been monitoring the Winchester site since 2015, with no positive detections until a routine follow up survey in January. Inspectors then found SLF on Ailanthus trees located on the property.

Early detection is vital for the management of any newly introduced plant pest. VDACS has conducted a survey in the surrounding area in an effort to determine the extent of the infestation. VDACS is also working with Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to determine management and control strategies for SLF.

For more information on Spotted Lanternfly in Virginia, contact Debra Martin, Program Manager in the VDACS Office of Plant Industry Services at 804.786.3515.

For more information, visit Virginia Cooperative Extension's Spotted Lanternfly page at <https://ext.vt.edu/agriculture/commercial-horticulture/spotted-lanternfly.html>.



Pollinators of the Forest

By: Celia Vuocolo, Piedmont Environmental Council

North America has over 4,000 bee species that call it home. From the tiny *Perdita minima* (at less than 2 millimeters) to the colorful blue and green *Augochloropsis anonyma*, our continent supports a wide diversity of native bees. About 400 bee species have been found in Virginia. Our native bees have evolved with local ecosystems over time, developing intricate relationships with the flora that fill our landscape. Native bees are found everywhere (in fields, gardens, overgrown hedgerows, woodlands, and along roadsides). They facilitate the reproduction of indigenous plants, which in turn supports wildlife and ecological functions that humans rely on. Research shows that native bees effectively pollinate many commercial crops like tomatoes, blueberries, and squash, sometimes even more effectively than non-native honey bees. Understanding how these valuable pollinators use our landscape can help guide conservation efforts and farming practices. But there is still much that is unknown about how native bees use Virginia's most common land use — forests!

When thinking about pollinator habitat, a sunny flower-filled garden is usually the first thing that comes to mind. Pollinators need nectar and pollen sources, nesting opportunities (dead trees, undisturbed ground), and sunlight. It's rare that a sunny flower garden fulfills all of these needs for every bee. In reality, a mosaic of diverse habitat types are needed to provide these features. Woodlands are part of the landscape and play an important role in supporting native bee populations. However, we haven't even scratched the surface on understanding how bees use forests. It's a subject that is in sore need of study.

So bees are found in forests, but why are they there at all? Answering this question will improve our understanding of how bees use the habitat. There are likely a number of different reasons, such as pollen specialism, incidental occurrences, species with generalist habitat preferences, and forest disturbance. Pollen specialism and forest disturbance are arguably the main reason why certain native bees use this habitat type. Specialist bees have evolved to collect pollen from either one host-plant family, genus or sometimes only one species! These intimate relationships benefit both the bee and plant by allowing for pollination and foraging efficiency, but leave both susceptible to habitat degradation or alterations in flowering time. Forest disturbance, such as fire or timber management, opens up the tree canopy, allowing light in and encouraging the growth of herbaceous plant species that attract pollinators. Native bees that evolved with our eastern forests most likely learned to take advantage of forest disturbance events well before agriculture created open habitats across our landscape.

There are a few things that we do know about bees in forests that landowners can consider as part of their management plans. The highest bee diversity in Mid-Atlantic forests occurs in the spring; bee numbers decrease with canopy closure but increase with recent fire activity; and bee diversity rises as nesting opportunities (woody debris) increase. What this translates to is bees are attracted to well-managed woodlands. Prescribed fire, timber management, encouraging natural vegetation, and leaving woody debris and snags, are all part in parcel of a solid forest stewardship plan, and these management activities help bees.

Springtime in the forest is likely the busiest time for bees because of the abundance of spring ephemerals and flowering shrubs and trees. Virginia bluebell, Dutchman's breeches, Viburnum, serviceberry, spring beauty, and a host of other spring flowering plants provide nectar and pollen to newly emerged bumble bee queens and pollen specialists. A poster child example of a native bee/host plant relationship is spring beauty and *Andrena erigeniae*, a pollen specialist in the mining bee family. *A. erigeniae* only collects pollen from spring beauty and one of its sister species, which means that if the plant does not exist in a particular area, then this bee cannot survive there. Many spring woodland plants are visited by pollen specialists with life cycles perfectly synced to coincide with their blooms. Phenological mismatch, brought on by climate change, can seriously threaten the stability of many of these sensitive bee species.

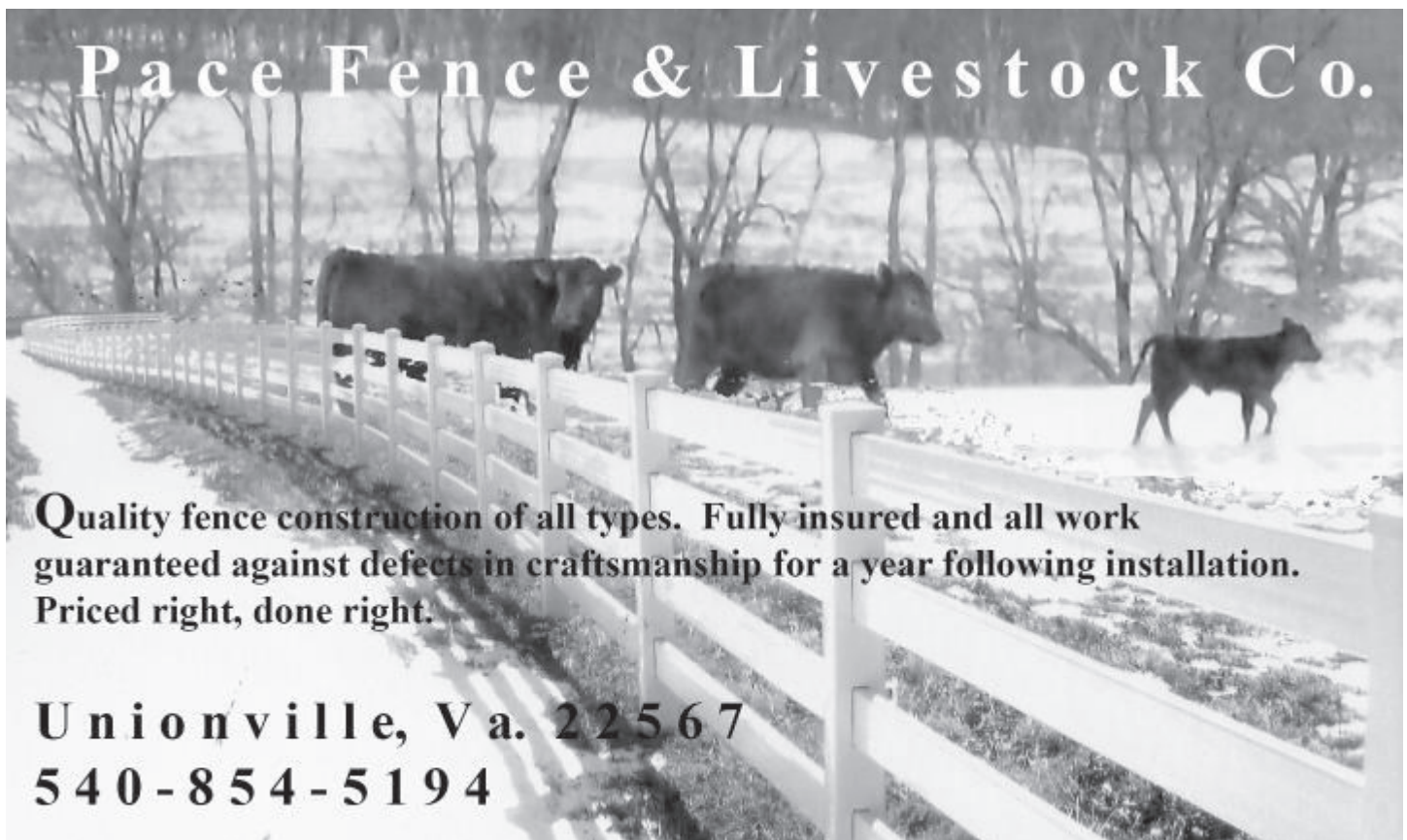
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District to Hold 2nd Round of Lawn Testing Clinics

The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District has received a grant through the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund (also known as the Bay License Plate Fund) to expand our lawn soil testing program, which was piloted in Madison County last summer. A soil test will evaluate what nutrients exist and are available in your lawn and also what is lacking. Understanding your soil test and balancing your soils helps restore healthy lawn and solve problem areas. The test costs just \$10 plus shipping but CSWCD and Virginia Cooperative Extension are offering it to landowners for free!

We plan to hold a second round of clinics in early March 2019. In addition to lawn guidance, participants will learn about other ways to address problem areas or reduce their mowed turf through the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) and cost share available for septic system maintenance. Registration is limited to 75 people per county. For more information, contact Stephanie DeNicola at stephanied@culpeperswcd.org or 540-825-8591.

**Save the date! Woods and Wildlife Conference
returns to the Daniel Technology Center on
Saturday February 23, 2019! Contact Adam
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2018 Conservation Awards

The District's Annual Conservation Awards Dinner was held on November 8, 2018 in Culpeper to honor residents who have demonstrated leadership in the stewardship of local soil and water resources.

The **Bay Friendly Farm Awards** are given to one farm in each county of the Soil and Water Conservation District that is exemplary in its protection of the state's soil and water quality, with particular emphasis on nutrient management. The recipients of the Bay Friendly Farm Awards were:

- Culpeper County, *Rillhurst Farm* (#1 below)
- Greene County, Calvin Powell (#2 below)
- Madison County, *J.C. Smith Farm Partnership* (#3 below)
- Orange County, *Old South Farm* (#4 below)
- Rappahannock County, *Thornton River Farm* (#5 below)

The **Conservationist of the Year Award** is given to an individual or individuals who demonstrate outstanding leadership, hard work and investment in conservation practices that protect the quality of soil and water in the Culpeper District and exhibit strong advocacy to others for conservation. This year's award was presented to **Robert Wilbanks** for exemplary conservation practices in **Orange** County and for support to District outreach efforts. (#6 below)

The 2018 **Forestry Award** was given to **Bradford Farms** of **Orange** County. (#7 on page 9)

The 2018 **Educator of the Year** was presented to **Brandon Allen Fincham** of **Culpeper** County. (#8 on page 9)

The 2018 **Wildlife Habitat Award** was given to **William W. Sanford** of **The Preserve at Indian Trace** of **Madison** County. (#9 on page 9)

#1



#4



#2



#5



#3



#6



Graze & Gallop: A Grazing and Pasture Management Workshop Series For Equine Owners

December 4th, 6th, and 10th 6-9 p.m.

Virginia Horse Center: 487 Maury River Road, Lexington, VA

This three night workshop series is designed for both beginning and experienced equine owners to provide tools and information to help you effectively manage your pasture and grazing to maximize the health of your horses and your pastures! Topics for the three nights will include fencing options, soil fertility, forage species in Virginia, management and control of different forages, protecting water quality and more! Join us for a light dinner each night as experts from across Virginia share information and tips to help you effectively graze and manage your pastures for optimal health and performance of your horses and your forage!

The Details:

- Each evening will begin at 6:00 p.m. with a light dinner
- There is a \$50 registration fee which will be due at the first workshop.
- Space is limited to the first 30 participants. Please RSVP no later than November 16 to reserve your seat.
- If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact Rebecca Webert at 540-347-3344 or rwebert@fcvirginias.com

New Direct Phone Numbers for USDA-NRCS Staff

- Rex Rexrode 540-317-7724
- Nancy Utz 540-317-7727
- Ashleigh Cason 540-317-7731
- John Jeffries 540-317-7726
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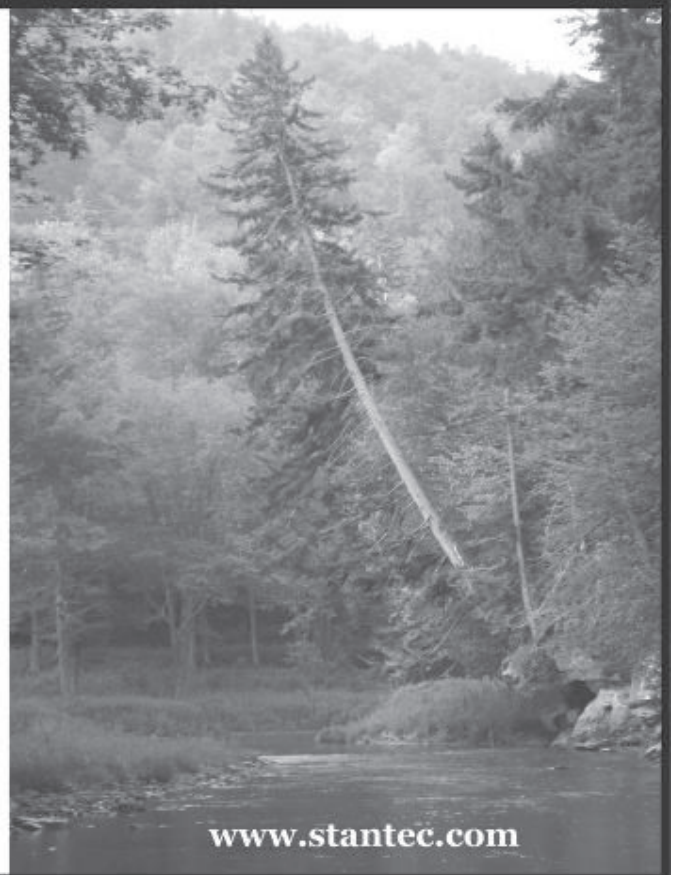
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Continued from page 4

During other times of the year, research has shown that native bees are found in woodlands with open canopies and a healthy understory of wildflowers and grasses. Sunlight is important to bees and butterflies; it creates a warm micro-environment and encourages floral resources. Managing for habitat like this, whether you have a pine or hardwood forest, is probably already occurring if you have an active forest stewardship plan. Most landowners are already controlling the invasive species and managing deer populations that are impacting forest health and, subsequently, bee populations. If more guidance is desired, the U.S. Forest Service published a report, *Pollinator Friendly Practices on Federal Lands* in 2015, which can be used as a guideline for private forest managers looking to improve habitat for bees. One important takeaway from the report is that as forest canopies have become closed over time (since colonization), bees have been negatively impacted, and the shift could be contributing to the widespread decline of their populations. It's just one more piece of the very complex puzzle of pollinator decline.

From a landowner's perspective, managing for native bees is very compatible with other stewardship goals. Many other wildlife species benefit from the same management practices that help them, such as prescribed fire for instance. Prescribed fire encourages growth of wildflowers and improves canopy structure, and if used correctly, can have a positive effect on bees. Using frequent, low intensity fire in small patches of forest has been shown to cause the least amount of mortality to bee populations while also improving floral resources. Since the vast majority of native bees nest in or near the ground, fire can have a negative impact on their survival rates. However, if prescribed fire is used thoughtfully, bees can actually flourish from its effects.

Native bees are still a mystery, in many regards, but we do know that they seem to respond to thoughtful forest management practices and healthy woodland habitat. Making room for native bees in your stewardship plan is quite easy, and your forestland will be better for it!

Celia Vuocolo is a Wildlife Habitat & Stewardship Specialist; 540-347-2334 x 7086; cvuocolo@pecva.org.

#7



#8



#9



Continued from page 1

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.



RAIN BARREL SALE!

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