

# Views From The Foothills

A Publication of the Culpeper Soil & Water Conservation District  
Serving Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange & Rappahannock Counties  
[www.culpeperswcd.org](http://www.culpeperswcd.org)

Vol. 16 Issue 2  
Spring 2016

M. Johnson

## Inside This Issue

**Backyard Conservation Funds Available**

**New Directors Join the Board**

**Drinking Water Testing Clinic**

**New Federal Benefits for Conservation Easements**

**Tall Fescue**

**The Open Land Conundrum**

**Septic System Health Care**

## Welcome!

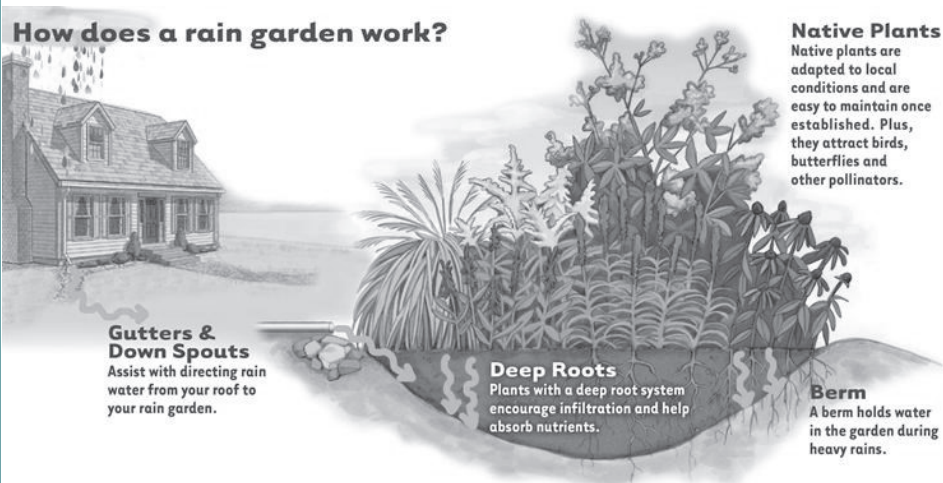
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## Seven Myths about Rain Gardens

By Asad Rouhi, NVSWCD Urban Conservation Engineer

A rain garden is a great way to handle runoff on your property, but it is important to do it right. Rain gardens serve the dual purpose of improving landscape aesthetics and draining stormwater in an environmentally friendly and natural way. Whether you are planning to install a rain garden at home or simply curious about the process, read on to learn about some common myths and misconceptions about rain garden.

*Please note that this article is intended for homeowners who are interested in building a rain garden voluntarily on their property. Design, construction, and maintenance are simpler and less stringent than when a rain garden is required as part of the development process. Rain gardens built to comply with stormwater management requirements should be designed and built according to the standards and specifications provided by the local jurisdiction where the rain garden will be built.*



<http://www.watershedcouncil.org/rain-gardens.html>

Continued on page 3

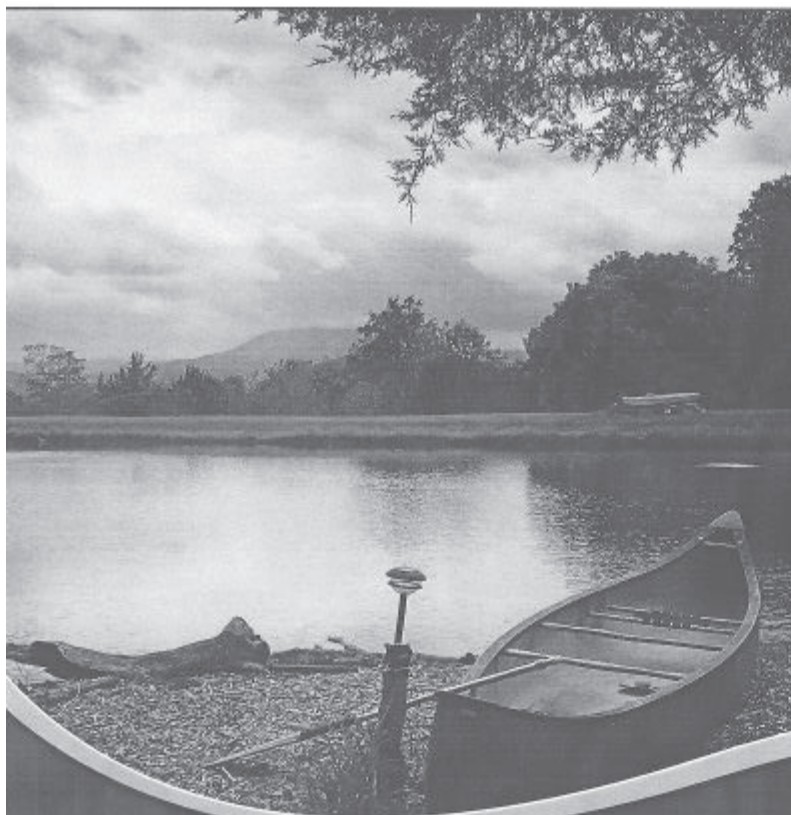
## Apologies from the Editor

The Winter 2015 issue of this newsletter was sent to the printer on February 11 but did not reach mailboxes until March 31 or later. By the time it was in mailboxes, the tree seedling sale was sold out. We sold 3,100 trees in our first sale in over a decade. We will hold the sale again in 2017. We will begin taking orders this fall.

To put your name on the first call list, please call Stephanie DeNicola at 540-825-8591 or send an e-mail to [stephanied@culpeperswcd.org](mailto:stephanied@culpeperswcd.org).

Again, my sincerest apologies.

~Stephanie DeNicola, Editor



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*Continued from page 1*

**Myth #1: That spot in your backyard that is always soggy and never dries out is a perfect place for a rain garden.** A rain garden is not a wetland. A rain garden is supposed to collect rain water, hold the water for a short period of time, and allow the water to seep into the surrounding soil within 24 to 48 hours. It is designed to absorb runoff, filter it through the soil, and remove sediment, nutrients and pollutants. Within 1-2 days after a rainstorm, the rain garden should be dry. However, if the surrounding soil cannot absorb water, the rain garden will gradually turn into a wetland with standing water.

Wet spots in a yard can be used to build a rain garden if the soil inside the rain garden is well amended or replaced. Even so, such a rain garden often needs to be equipped with an underdrain, which could increase building costs significantly.

**Myth # 2: Rain gardens require only wetland plants.** Plants selected for the rain gardens need to tolerate durations of both wet and dry conditions. However, rain gardens stay wet for a maximum of 24 to 48 hours to avoid mosquitos and other pests. Rain garden plants also need to endure periodic drought conditions during summer months. Plants should include natives that can tolerate both very wet and very dry soil conditions. Some plants that typically do well in rain gardens include Winterberry holly, Virginia sweetspire, Chokeberry, Viburnum, Black-eyed susan, Joe pye weed, Mountain mint, and Switchgrass. For more ideas, see the "Selecting Plants and Landscaping a Rain Garden" presentation at: [www.novaregion.org/raingardens](http://www.novaregion.org/raingardens)

**Myth # 3: Rain gardens cannot be built on slopes.** Small rain gardens can be built on relatively mild slopes (5% slope or 6 inches of drop for every 10 feet of slope length). When building on a slope, the rain garden needs a berm to protect the ponding area on top of the rain garden (see diagram on page 1). The berm may require more material, building and labor, which could cause costs to increase.

**Myth # 4: Rain gardens are difficult to maintain.** If a rain garden is suitably located, properly built, and adequately planted, it will need minimal maintenance. However, just like any other garden, it does need periodic weeding and other basic care. For more information, see the "Bioretention Practices" stormwater maintenance fact sheet at: [fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/stormwater/factsheets.htm](http://fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/stormwater/factsheets.htm)

**Myth # 5: Determining the right size of a rain garden is complicated and may require professional help and additional cost.** The size of a voluntarily built rain garden on your property is up to you! No particular sizing is required and it can depend on the resources available. In order to learn about recommended ponding area or depth of amended soil, you can contact your local soil and water conservation district or Master Gardeners, who might be able to provide you with technical assistance in planning and sizing your rain garden at no cost. For more information, see Rain Garden Design and Construction for Homeowners: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/raingardenbk.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/raingardenbk.htm)

**Myth # 6: Rain gardens are expensive to build.** The cost of building a small residential rain garden is between \$3 and \$10 per square foot of rain garden surface area. A typical homeowner rain garden with a surface area of 150 square feet might cost between \$450 and \$1,500. Costs can depend on soil conditions, location, type and number of plants, and whether construction is done by the homeowner or a hired contractor. Items that can increase construction costs include replacing the soil, increasing the type and number of plants, and installing an underdrain.

**Myth # 7: A permit is needed to build a rain garden.** In our member counties, you do not need a permit if you disturb less than 10,000 square feet of your yard during the installation of your rain garden.

If you are interested in installing a raingarden contact Richard Jacobs at 540-825-8591 or [richardJ@culpeperswcd.org](mailto:richardJ@culpeperswcd.org).



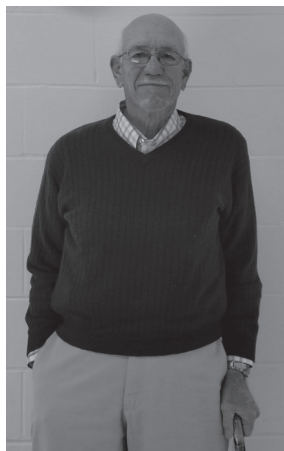
## New Directors Join the District Board

Following the election in November 2015, three new directors joined the Board. Their terms began January 1, 2016. Also, J. Robert Brame, III, previously a Greene County Director, moved from Greene County to Orange and was elected to represent Orange County.

**Dr. Stephen R. Hill** was elected as a Director representing Madison County. He previously served as Associate Director for Madison County. Prior to moving to Madison County in 2013, Dr. Hill owned and operated a cow/calf operation in Orange County, which he currently rents for grain and cow/calf operations. His Madison farm is locally known as the Aylor Hunt Club. He uses that farm for hay production, is establishing a sheep operation, and is in various stages of developing several small-scale supplemental agricultural activities including fruit, fowl and draft animals. He established clean water and forest best management practices on both farms. Dr. Hill earned a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Michigan and a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, where he was inducted into the Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society. He founded and ran a consulting firm with clients in government and industry with offices in Virginia and New Mexico. He currently advises the government on aerospace research and development, acquisition, and operations. **Picture bottom left**

**Philip Morris** was elected as a Director for Greene County. He has been married to his wife Sandra since 2006. He graduated from West Virginia University in 1964 with a degree in Civil Engineering. After serving in the US Navy he joined the Navy Oceanographic Service conducting hydrographic surveys of shorelines of locations around the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans for military operations. He also served as civil engineer with USDA Soil Conservation Service for three years building large earthen dams under Public Law 566. In 1970 he became manager of the Great Lakes Water Measurement Program at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). After several positions and 21 years of service, Mr. Morris retired from NOAA in 1997. He has gained great insight into the agriculture world by visiting his wife's family, who farm 1,500 acres in central Ohio. **Picture bottom center**

**Mike Peterson** was elected as a Director for Rappahannock County. Mike, along with his wife Molly own Heritage Hollow Farms in Sperryville. They utilize regenerative agricultural practices to raise grass-fed beef, lamb, and pastured pork. They also operate a farm store in Sperryville. Mike was introduced to farming at a young age at his grandparents' dairy farm in rural Illinois. He spent 7 years working in professional kitchens after graduating from culinary school in 2003. Through this work, he was re-introduced to farming as a career and lifestyle. He was able to connect with farmers and understand agricultural practices while he sourced ingredients and planned menus. Mike and Molly moved to Sperryville from Colorado in 2008 to pursue an opportunity that would get them started in agriculture. Their business is now a very full time job, but he also enjoys reading and just about anything outdoors. Mike lives with his wife Molly in Sperryville along with their 4 dogs, cat, and over 200 cows, pigs, sheep, and goats that encompass Heritage Hollow. **Picture bottom right**



## **Backyard Conservation Funds Available**

**By Richard Jacobs, III, PE, CSWCD Conservation Specialist III**

Conserving water while using attractive gardening and landscaping practices beautifies your yard, attracts beneficial pollinators, adds curb appeal and also helps improve the environment by reducing the amount of storm water runoff from your property. Creative management of those small areas of your front or backyard to address problem areas (too wet, too dry, doesn't drain, won't grow grass, etc...) now has funding available to support simple, on the ground landscape practices that benefit both you and the local environment. The Virginia Conservation Assistance Program or VCAP provides financial assistance to residential, institutional and commercial property owners to implement such practices. Payment rates vary among the practices but generally are focused on providing up to 75 percent of the cost. The district will provide technical resources for your planning efforts and visit your site to better understand what you hope to achieve. For more information on VCAP visit <http://vaswcd.org/vcap> or contact the District at 540-825-8591 or [richardj@culpeperswcd.org](mailto:richardj@culpeperswcd.org)



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## **Expanded Federal Benefits for Conservation Easements**

### **Submitted by the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy**

For many years, voluntary Conservation Easements have been a major means by which Virginia landowners can protect their farms, forests and historical properties in perpetuity. While such easements permanently limit uses of the land in order to restrict development and protect conservation values, landowners retain the right to farm, hunt, lease, and sell the conserved land, subject to the terms of the easement. Those Virginia landowners who donate a qualified easement are eligible for both Federal and Virginia Tax benefits. The state benefits are among the most generous in the nation.

Nationally and regionally, this form of land protection has enjoyed continuing bi-partisan support. The most recent example is the enactment of a 2015 federal funding bill making permanent an enhanced federal tax incentive for those who donate a qualified conservation easement. The new legislation permanently expands the ability for landowners to use the charitable gift deduction value of their conservation easement to deduct up to 50 percent of their adjusted gross income with a 15-year carry-forward. Further, a farmer or rancher who will receive more than 50% of adjusted gross income from the trade or business of farming or ranching is eligible for a tax deduction of 100% of adjusted gross income which could mean no federal income tax for years after donating a qualified conservation easement.

In addition to federal tax benefits, Virginia has established a state tax credit for qualified conservation easements by Virginia landowners at 40% of the value of the easement. The amount of the credit that may be used by a taxpayer may not exceed \$20,000 for taxable year 2016 and \$50,000 for taxable year 2017 and each taxable year thereafter, with any unexpended portion carried forward for the next 13 taxable years. Of particular importance, any portion of the tax credit not used to pay state taxes may be sold to another Virginia taxpayer.

Placing a conservation easement on your property is a major decision, one that deserves to be carefully considered. Below are contacts in several organizations that can help you evaluate placing a conservation easement on your property including what financial help might be available to offset the cost of placing the easement.

- Virginia Outdoors Foundation - Sherry Buttrick, Assistant Director of Easements, 434-293-3423, [sbuttrick@vofonline.org](mailto:sbuttrick@vofonline.org) or Kristin Jones, Director of Easements, 434-293-5169, [kjones@vofonline.org](mailto:kjones@vofonline.org)
- Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy (Madison and Greene Counties) – Carl Schmitt, President, 434-985-9815, [chschnitt@firstnetva.com](mailto:chschnitt@firstnetva.com)
- Virginia Department of Forestry (forestry easements) – Kimberly Biasioli, 434-220-9148, [kim.biasioli@dof.virginia.gov](mailto:kim.biasioli@dof.virginia.gov)
- Piedmont Environmental Council,
  - Peter Hujik, Orange and Madison County, 540-395-2911, [phujik@pecva.org](mailto:phujik@pecva.org)
  - Rex Linville, Greene County, 434-977-2033 X7064 [rlinville@pecva.org](mailto:rlinville@pecva.org)
  - Carolyn Sedgwick, Rappahannock County, 540-316-8306, [csedgwick@pecva.org](mailto:csedgwick@pecva.org)



**Drinking Water Testing Clinic: Madison, Orange & Greene**  
**September 6, 2016 6:30 p.m.**

**Tests to be done include:** iron, manganese, sulfate, hardness, sodium, copper, nitrate, arsenic, fluoride, pH, total dissolved solids, coliform bacteria, E. coli bacteria and lead.

**Where:** Madison American Legion Hall, 310 Thrift Road, Madison, VA 22727

**Cost: \$50** (includes sample analysis cost to test for selected chemical and bacteriological constituents)

**Register:** VCE Madison Office 540-948-6881, Katie Jenkins ([kjenk@vt.edu](mailto:kjenk@vt.edu)) You must pre-register, space is limited! Please bring a check made payable to Treasurer, Virginia Tech - Madison Office or cash for \$50 to the kickoff meeting to receive your sampling kit.

Samples must be dropped off at the Greene, Madison or Orange Extension offices on Wednesday September 28 between 7am and 9am.

The follow-up meeting will be Wednesday November 2 at the American Legion in Madison.

\*\* If you live in Culpeper or Rappahannock and missed the earlier well clinic for those counties, you may be able to sign up for this clinic but you must bring your water sample to the Greene, Madison or Orange Extension offices.



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## **Tall Fescue and that Pesky Endophyte Fungus...What to do?**

**By Ashleigh Cason, CSWCD Conservation Specialist**

Recently, the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council's 2016 Winter Forage Conference was held in Brandy Station, Virginia. This year's conference focused on understanding and managing tall fescue in grazing systems and was well attended by producers and District staff.

Here's what we learned... Everyone has heard of that not-so-little word, "ENDOPHYTE." Tall fescue is a known carrier of this fungus. During certain times of the grazing season cattle can be negatively impacted by grazing infected fescue, causing a high stress condition called tall fescue toxicosis. Research has shown that fescue toxicosis reduces the ability to regulate body heat in cattle, making them vulnerable to heat stress during our Virginia summers. It also leads to fescue foot during colder temperatures due to decreased circulation. Fescue toxicosis can even decrease cattle pregnancy rates, significantly, and can cause reduced milk production.

Is it a serious problem? Some people believe it is and take measures to minimize any negative impacts from the endophyte. There are different ways to minimize fescue toxicosis, including 1) mitigate tall fescue, 2) plant endophyte free fescue, and/or 3) plant "novel" or friendly endophyte fescue. Options for mitigating or minimizing endophyte impacts include:

- **Dilute by overseeding with clover** – Clover significantly reduces the negative impact of endophyte, even at rates of just 20%. And, benefit also is received as the clover produces nitrogen for the soil.
- **Avoid grazing in summer months** –The fungus prevails at a higher rate between the months of May and June due to the heading stage, and between July and August due to vegetative re-growth.
- **Clip seed heads** – Endophyte is concentrated in the seed. Keeping the seed heads from developing and maturing, by means of mowing, may be effective.
- **Stockpile** – Endophyte levels are at a minimum during cooler weather months making the forage safer to graze.
- **Manage genetics for tolerant cattle** – Technology has enabled us to now see which animals are responsive to fescue toxicosis through genetic testing. It also is suggested to use local cattle since they may have built a tolerance by surviving in the fescue belt.
- **Suppress seed heads** – Herbicidal suppression has been shown to work very well.
- **Manage timing/type of N application** – Nitrogen ultimately increases endophyte presence in the plant. Reduction of nutrients and/or effective timing of nitrogen fertilization may help in mitigation.

You can also plant endophyte free fescue or fescue that has low impact "friendly" endophyte in it.

For further discussion, call Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District at (540)825-8591 or Natural Resource Conservation Service at (540)825-4200, ext. 115.



## **Do you really like to mow? The Open Land Conundrum**

**By Kyle D. Dingus, NOVA Work Area Forester**

Do you have a large field or small area of open land you mow every year? Perhaps you lease it out to cut hay, or you mow it to keep it from getting too bushy. The open land I'm referring to is a typical unused fescue field that we see while driving the country roads of the Piedmont. Some of them are for agricultural production, while some are simply maintained as open fields. Wouldn't it be great to put this open land with no particular purpose to good use?

Do you want to encourage wildlife or want a timber crop? In most cases, the open land could be less than an acre all the way up to dozens of acres! Consider converting these areas to trees or wildlife-friendly grasses, such as warm season grasses.

Typically, when I talk to landowners about afforestation, I suggest using native pine species. Loblolly and shortleaf are my recommended trees. The advantage to using pines is they are cheaper to plant and manage than hardwoods, grow quickly in full sunlight and are green all year. If timber income is expected from the planting, then having at least 10 acres is recommended and planting at a minimum stocking level of 360 trees per acre.

Much like harvesting agricultural crops, forest management is based on rotations. For hardwoods in this area, it could be 60-100 years between harvests. However, managing for pines, such as loblolly, you get rotations from 25-45 years. This involves investing in site preparation, planting and, if need be, a chemical release. At age 20, you could perform a thinning to increase the growth and value of the residual trees, which could be for profit and cover the establishment costs, or be at cost. Finally, all the trees are harvested around age 35 and the process is repeated. The rotation depends upon the site, proper management and markets. Shortleaf pine, a native diminished species, is managed similarly, but has slightly longer rotations.

In contrast, less than 10-acre plantings provide thermal cover for wildlife, roosting opportunities for birds such as turkey, and diversify the landscape. Hardwoods can be planted as well, but typically are much more expensive to plant and maintain. You can even establish pine in the hopes of gaining hardwoods. An old saying in forestry is "if you want oak, plant pine." As pines die out in a stand, shade-intermediate trees, such as oak, seed in. However, it takes about 50 years of pine growth for this to occur.

Another option is to convert this idle, open land to native, warm-season grasses. These grasses are a diminished habitat type across the Piedmont. They are different than common cool-season fescue grasses because they grow very "clumpy" and allow for wildlife travel beneath the canopy. Warm-season grass fields can be inter-planted with wildflowers to create a mosaic of beautiful tall grasses and different wildflower colors based on the month in the growing season. Bringing back warm season grasses can also improve conditions for diminished wildlife and insect species, such as the bobwhite quail and various pollinators. Like establishing pines, site preparation is pivotal to ensure the warm seasons can naturally develop or be properly planted. Consult with your local Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) biologist or Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), private lands biologist for more information.

Still unsure of what to do? There are a lot of FREE sources of technical advice for landowners from state and federal agencies. Typically, these entities, such as the VDOF, VDGIF, NRCS and SWCDs, conduct joint site visits to help the landowners see the potential of their properties. Please contact your local agency office and speak with a representative to see how you can put that open land to another use. As always, best wishes in the management of your land.

## **Septic System Health Care**

**By Henny Calloway, CSWCD Conservation Specialist**

The Commonwealth of Virginia and Culpeper SWCD are currently offering a grant-based cost share program for significant portions of Rappahannock, Culpeper, Madison and Orange Counties. Homeowners that live in the eligible watershed areas of the Upper Hazel, Upper York or portions of the Robinson River watersheds are eligible for assistance for the maintenance, repair or replacement of septic systems. Residents are eligible for reimbursement of 50% of the expense of maintaining, repairing or replacing on-site septic systems (the reimbursement may be as high as 75% depending on income). For the Upper Hazel watershed, all of Rappahannock County that drains to the Hughes, Hazel, Thornton, Covington and Rush Rivers, including all of Battle Run is eligible. This is essentially most of the county except a small area north of Amissville and the Flint Hill and north area. The Etlan and Nethers areas of Madison County and Culpeper County west of Reva, Griffinsburg and Monumental Mills are also included. For the Upper York watershed, nearly all of Orange County south of Route 20 and east of US 15, except for very small areas along the county border with Spotsylvania and Louisa Counties, is in the eligible area. For the Robinson River, the eligible areas are from near the new bridge at Mulatto Run on Route 231, including all of White Oak Lake and White Oak Run areas and South to Route 230, and then all of the Robinson River areas East of U.S. Route 29.

It is important for homeowners to understand their septic systems. A typical septic system consists of three main parts: the septic tank, the distribution box and the drainfield. Septic system problems may be identified by gurgling noises when fluids leave the home and the slow draining of sinks, toilets and/or bathtubs. Also, wet spots and strange odors above your septic system components may be a symptom of septic system malfunction as this is usually due to sewage seeping above the ground.

To evaluate a septic system problem the homeowner may want to consider a few factors. If only one fixture is not draining, the problem may be in that line only. If liquids are not leaving the house the problem could be in several areas. If the septic tank is opened and the liquids are at the tank inlet level, the problem may be at the inlet or between the home and the inlet. If the liquid is above the tank inlet level, the problem may be at the tank outlet or further after your tank. Correcting problems quickly will help to ensure that your family and the environment will not be harmed by the presence of raw sewage in your environment.

Septic system failures are caused by many factors. For example, the tank outlet tees may become clogged from solids causing sewage backup into the home. Grease, paint and large amounts of cleaning solution flushed down the drain and thus added to the septic system can kill essential bacteria that break down sewage solids. Also, cigarette butts, disposable diapers, plastic and trash should never enter a septic system. A garbage disposal should not be installed unless the drainfield has been designed for it. One of the major causes of drainfield failure is the lack of regular pumping maintenance. The Virginia Department of Health recommends that septic tanks be pumped every 3-5 years to help prevent excessive buildup of solids in the tank. The frequency that it actually needs to be pumped depends on the size of the tank and the number of people in the household.

Another frequent cause of system malfunction is the presence of tree roots in one or more components of the septic system. Protecting your drainfield is another way to ensure that your septic system continues to operate efficiently. Also, heavy machinery and equipment should not be parked on or driven over your septic system because their weight causes soil compaction, which will reduce the soil's ability to receive and treat wastewater, and because system components such as the septic tank and distribution box are not designed to support the weight of a vehicle larger than a riding mower.

If you take care of your septic system, you will protect the health of your family and neighbors as well as the water that humans, wildlife, aquatic life and the environment are extremely dependent upon. All of these grant-based cost-share programs are funded by the Commonwealth and homeowners in these watersheds are eligible. The programs are entirely voluntary. The purpose is to improve water quality in and downstream from these areas. An application is required prior to commencement of septic cost share projects. Upon completion of maintenance, repair, replacement installation the homeowner will be reimbursed promptly. The Conservation District can help with a free assessment. For more information call 540-948-7531 or 540-825-8591. This cooperative project has been funded in part by EPA through Section 319(n) grant; grant agreements 15990, 15972 and 16119.

## Rain Barrels Update!

Rain barrels are available in again! Prices are \$75 for one and \$140 for two. For more information, contact Stephanie DeNicola at 540-825-8591 or send an email to: [stephanied@culpeperswcd.org](mailto:stephanied@culpeperswcd.org).



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## *Views From The Foothills*

**Published Seasonally**  
**By Culpeper Soil & Water Conservation District**

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