

Views From The Foothills

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

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M. Johnson

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Welcome!

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Introducing the Blue Ridge PRISM

A New Way to Combat Invasive Plants

By Roderick Walker

If you are a keen devotee of Virginia's majestic mountains, rolling hills, and picturesque farms, you may realize that not all the green you see around you is good. In fact, much of the greenery on private and public lands is unnatural and destructive. Nonnative invasive plants are killing and displacing native plants and are degrading agricultural lands. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation lists more than 90 such species. Aggressive and fast-growing, these bullies smother, strangle, poison and out-compete native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. Without native plants for food and shelter, our native birds, insects, and wildlife decline because their habitats are degraded. In addition, invasive plants destroy recreational opportunities and create eyesores that detract from the visual enjoyment of Virginia's farms, woodlands, scenic byways, forests, and parks, diminishing the quality of life that should be ours in Virginia.

The devastation caused by invasive plants has grown dramatically in recent years, spreading unchecked by the predators, diseases and competition that controlled them in their countries of origin. These infestations are so extensive that they annually cost Virginia landowners millions of dollars for control efforts. Because control measures have been insufficient for the scale of the problem, the destruction continues to escalate rapidly.

If you are not sure what is on your land or you do not have the time, knowledge, or funds to control these intruders, take heart. Help is on the way. A new game is in town: The Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management.) This emerging nonprofit was founded in 2014 with the mission of reducing the impact of invasive plants along the northern Blue Ridge, an area covering almost 3 million acres. The PRISM has expertise and funding assistance to help you out.

The PRISM was recently awarded a substantial pool of funds that will be administered through the NRCS EQIP program (Natural Resources Conservation Service/Environmental Quality Incentives Program.) These funds, which will significantly reimburse the cost of treating invasive plants, are available to qualified landowners in the PRISM's 10-county area, which includes Greene, Madison and Rappahannock.

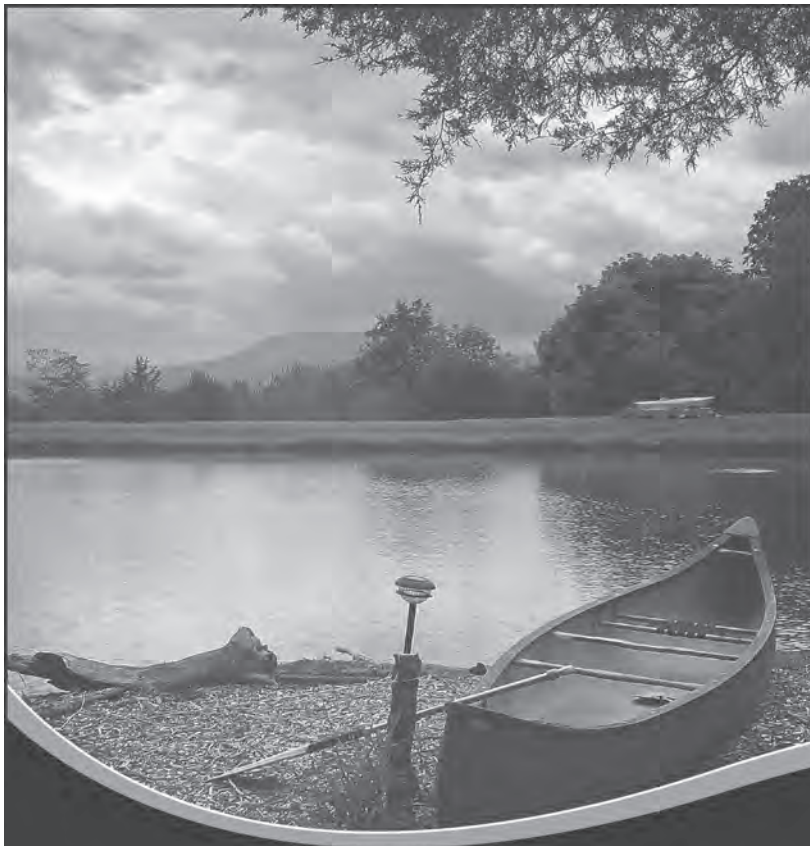
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Conservation District Announces Scholarship Recipients

Each year the Culpeper Soil & Water Conservation District awards educational scholarships to students who plan to pursue a career in a conservation related field. Financial assistance is available for eligible students living in the area the Culpeper SWCD serves, consisting of Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock Counties. Applicants must be full time students enrolled in or who have been accepted to a college undergraduate or graduate program related to soil and water conservation, natural resource management, animal science, environmental science or other related programs. For 2016, the District chose to recognize Orange County resident Tess Reeves as our top candidate with the John H. Boldridge Academic Scholarship.

- **Tess Reeves** graduated from **Orange County High School** with a 4.23 GPA. She will attend **Virginia Tech** in the fall, where she will major in landscape architecture and horticulture. (\$1,500 award)
- **Valerie Wessel** graduated from **William Monroe High School** with a 4.231 GPA. She will major in **wildlife conservation** at **Virginia Tech**. (\$1,000 award)
- **Carolina Leonard** graduated from **Wakefield Country Day School** with a 3.93 GPA. She will major in **environmental science** at the **University of Virginia**. (\$1,000 award)
- **Kelly Jarvis** graduated from **Madison County High School** with a 4.0 GPA. She will major in **biology** at the **University of North Carolina at Asheville**. (\$1,000 award)
- **Zachary Dove** graduated from **Madison County High School** with a 3.994 GPA. He will major in **agriculture** at **Virginia Tech**. (\$500 award)

The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District is honored to recognize these students and wish them well in their future endeavors.



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Rain Garden Project in Culpeper

By Richard Jacobs, 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. **It is important to note that these practices should only hold water for a few hours maximum so they will NOT attract mosquitoes when installed and used correctly.**

The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District has completed a rain garden on a residential lot in Culpeper County (see picture below). A rain garden is a depressed landscaped bed that temporarily stores runoff to encourage rain water to infiltrate into the ground. They are not wet areas except for immediately after storms. Native plants are used in the rain garden, since these plants tolerate periodic ponding and drought conditions. With proper plant selection you could also create habitat for pollinators or birds.

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



Envirothon Update

The 2016 Culpeper SWCD Envirothon competition season began on March 23 with a local competition at Graves Mountain Lodge in Madison County. The competition included one team from Eastern View High School (EVHS) and three teams from Wakefield Country Day School (WCDS). EVHS placed 1st overall and WCDS Team A placed 2nd.

Coached by Science Department Chair Leslie Jones and Envirothon alum Brandon Fincham, the members of Eastern View Team were **Anders Blair, Darryl Brown, Omar Elbulok, Philip Grotz, Mitchell Luckinbill, Josey Txkeeyang** and **Hannah Vaught**.

Coached by Environmental Science Teacher Ann Pankow, the members of the Wakefield Team were **Merriam Abboud, Brier Clough, Lucas Dumez, Carolina Leonard, Nick Lescovec, Harmony Lindstrom** and **Tanner Perry**.

Eastern View and Wakefield Team A advanced to the Area II competition, which includes 15 counties, which was held April 20 at Bull Run Regional Park in Centreville. Eastern View placed 1st overall as well as 1st in presentation, forestry, special topic and soils. The team's 1st place finish earned them a spot at Virginia's Dominion Envirothon, the statewide competition. Wakefield earned 6th place overall at the Area competition.

Eastern View High School represented Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock Counties at the Dominion Envirothon on May 15 & 16, 2016 at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg. The team placed 3rd overall against 20 teams, as well as 1st in oral presentation, aquatics and special topic.

Envirothon competitions feature five "in-the-field" test stations – soils, wildlife, aquatics, forestry and a current environmental issue – where teams answer questions in both written and hands-on formats. During an oral presentation teams propose a management solution related to the current environmental issue to a panel of judges consisting of industry and natural resource professionals. This year's issue was "Invasive Species: A Threat to Economy and Environment." The team's presentation addressed the topic as it related to a farm with invasive plants in Harrisonburg.

In addition to the hard work of the students and coaches throughout the school year, the District would also like to thank the following professionals for their help in training and supporting the team over the past year: EVHS Principal E.G. Bradshaw; SWCD employees Lauriston Damitz, Michael Trop, Richard Jacobs; Foresters Kyle Dingus and Jon Rockett; Soil Scientists Dan Schwartz and Don Flegel; and volunteers Bill Clark, Deirdre Clark, Ken Cranston and Jack Price.

The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District needs help sponsoring students for next year's Envirothon. If you can help, or would like to know more about starting an Envirothon team at your high school through 4-H, FFA, Ecology Club or home school group, contact Stephanie DeNicola at Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District at (540) 825-8591 or stephanied@culpeperswcd.org.

Envirothon is sponsored by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts with funding provided by Dominion Virginia Power and The Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund.

Students Chosen for Summer Camps

Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District has chosen two students to attend two different summer camps. Holiday Lake Forestry Camp was held June 20-25 at the Holiday Lake 4-H Center in Appomattox. Ian Bailey (William Wetsel Middle School) will represent the District.

Youth Conservation Camp was held July 10-16 at Virginia Tech. Joshua Racer (Rappahannock County High School) will represent the District.


Regional Homeowner's Guide Available

By Michelle Edwards, Rappahannock Rapidan Regional Commission

"The Rappahannock-Rapidan Homeowners Guide to a Watershed-friendly Backyard" is now available to assist area homeowners in addressing common backyard issues while protecting local water quality. Developed by the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission, this user-friendly publication contains chapters on stormwater management, lawn and garden, septic system maintenance and pet waste management, all tailored to the region. Basic how-to information is included in each chapter, as well as listings of resources and contacts for further information.

Content was developed with input from an ad hoc technical workgroup made up of staff from local and state government, and environmental organizations. Hard copies have been provided to the region's County governments, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Health Department for distribution to homeowners. It is also available for download from the Regional Commission's website at www.rrregion.org/rainscaping.html, and due to the large number of web-based resources, is the preferred method.

Development of the guide was funded through the Regional Commission's National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Small Watershed Grant. The overall grant project, which concludes at the end of August, incorporates aspects of Friends of the Rappahannock's Rainscape Retrofits Program and Virginia Cooperative Extension's Green Grass Program into a comprehensive Backyard Rainscaping program. Cost-share funding, design, and installation of best-management practices are provided to urban and suburban homeowners within the region to address the impacts of stormwater runoff. For further information on the Regional Commission's homeowner watershed education project, visit the project website at www.rrregion.org/rainscaping.html or contact Michelle Edwards at medwards@rrregion.org.



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Healthy Riparian Buffers Make Healthy Streams

By Bryan Hoffman, Friends of the Rappahannock

Riparian buffers are the single most effective means of protecting water resources throughout the Chesapeake Bay. Waterways protected by a healthy riparian buffer are cleaner, cooler, and provide better habitat for fish, wildlife, and livestock than a stream with exposed or un-vegetated banks.

This fall, Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR) and the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) are teaming up to kick off our Headwater Buffer Initiative. This program is designed to provide free technical assistance, project design, materials, and labor for the planting of native trees and shrubs in riparian zones on qualifying properties in the headwater counties of the Rappahannock River Watershed including: Rappahannock, Fauquier, Culpeper, Madison, and Orange Counties.

Riparian Buffers ...

- Act as filters to reduce nutrients, sediments and other pollutants from entering waterways.
- Help regulate water temperature and provide structure and cover to provide high quality aquatic habitat.
- Slow the flow of runoff, stabilize stream and riverbanks, and reduce erosion.
- Provide vital habitat for fish and wildlife species that rely on forested habitat corridors adjacent to water.

We have installed over 10 acres of riparian buffer restoration projects on properties throughout the Rappahannock River Watershed. This includes livestock farms, crop farms, residential neighborhoods, commercial properties, schools, government property, and more. One of the most effective places to install these types of projects is along streams that have livestock exclusion fencing. Another key area is along brook trout streams. Planting trees along these headwater streams can make a significant difference for brook trout populations, which have been declining in our region.

If you have property on a river or stream in the Rappahannock River watershed and are interested in helping to protect clean water, we want to help! This is a completely free program designed to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Please let us know if you would like to learn more:

- Bryan Hofmann, 540-373-3448 x112, Bryan.Hofmann@riverfriends.org, www.riverfriends.org/buffer
- Carolyn Sedgwick, (540) 347-2334 x7066, csedgwick@pecva.org, www.pecva.org/buffer

WANT TREES?

Our next issue will feature trees available for the District's 2nd Annual Tree Sale! Newsletters should arrive in mailboxes in September.

**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) 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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Continued from page 1

Landowners interested in participating can contact NRCS District Conservationist Rex Rexrode at 540-825-4200 ext. 101 or send a request for more information to info@blueridgeprism.org.

Generically the Blue Ridge PRISM is a Cooperative Weed Management Area or CWMA. There are several hundred CWMA's in the US, but the Blue Ridge PRISM is the first one headquartered in Virginia. Each CWMA is an independent non-profit collaboration of federal agencies, state agencies, conservation organizations, businesses, local government entities and private landowners. Each CWMA defines its own mission, its targeted geography, and its strategy for achieving its mission.

The Blue Ridge PRISM has had participation and support from many different organizations including: Virginia Cooperative Extension, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, Virginia Dept of Conservation and Recreation, Piedmont Environmental Council, Virginia Dept of Forestry, The Nature Conservancy, Virginia Master Naturalists, Ivy Creek Foundation, Virginia Native Plant Society, The 500 Year Forest Foundation, Shenandoah National Park, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Shenandoah National Park Trust, Forestry service firms, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and numerous private landowners.

The programs of the Blue Ridge PRISM are focused on helping landowners understand what invasives are present on their properties, the threats that these plants represent and how to deal with them. To that end we offer a variety of programs including the following:

Our Area Stewards Program is our proactive outreach program. Area Stewards are landowners who are not only actively treating invasive plants on their own properties, but who also work with their neighbors to create islands of control that grow larger each year as more neighbors get involved. Each year the PRISM will also sign up more Area Stewards. The Area Stewards act as coaches and make available a wide range of materials aimed at making the job as easy as possible for landowners new to dealing with invasive plants. Our General Landowners Program is for landowners who contact us seeking assistance, who don't live near one of our Area Stewards and who do not want to act as an Area Steward themselves. All the same forms of assistance are available through this program, but there is no nearby coach. If a landowner needs someone to come visit and help them identify what is growing on their property, we have volunteers willing to provide that service at no charge.

Supporting those two programs are various offerings to be made available on our website as they are completed, including:

- Factsheets on many of the most damaging species,
- Information on where to obtain professional assistance, financial assistance, equipment, and herbicides,
- How to arrange for someone to come walk your property with you at no charge,
- Upcoming events and educational opportunities,
- How to report what you suspect are new arrivals to the Commonwealth that need to be dealt before they get established,
- Updates on biocontrols (natural enemies of the invasive plants that may obviate the need for landowner action),
- Sources of additional information and How you can help.

There are many opportunities for people to obtain information from the Blue Ridge PRISM. Chief among them are:

- Attend our quarterly meetings, which are open to all interested parties and which feature updates on new programs, as well as opportunities to meet and learn from experts and other landowners dealing with the same issues,
- Access our website at blueridgeprism.org,
- Send an inquiry or a request to be added to our mailing list (e.g. for meeting notices) to info@blueridgeprism.org,
- Volunteer to be an Area Steward, and
- Ask to be part of one of our working groups.

Conservation District Cover Crop Program Signup

By David Massie, CSWCD Conservation Specialist III

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. Signup 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 540-672-1523 or 540-825-8591 or for additional opportunities the Natural Resources Conservation Service at 540-825-4200 ext. 3.

District Announces Two New Grants are Pending

The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District has recently received news that two additional grant proposals have received favorable review and funding for these projects will begin sometime in July or August.

The Upper Rapidan TMDL watershed grant, which includes all land draining to the Rapidan River from Shenandoah National Park down to the Town of Orange, will be added to the list of TMDL grant projects in the District. This includes properties in major portions of Greene, Madison and Orange Counties. This grant will bring additional funds into the District for both ag stream fencing projects and residential septic system projects. (Refer to page 10 for additional details on the septic system cost share project offerings).

In addition, since all of the TMDL grants have restrictions on where the funds can be used, the District successfully sought out a grant to provide a septic system cost share program throughout the 5 member counties. This grant should begin in August and will make this option available to all for a period of 2 years.

For more information on these new projects contact the Culpeper District at 540-825-8591.

Septic System Health Care

By Henny Calloway, CSWCD Conservation Specialist

The Commonwealth of Virginia and Culpeper SWCD are currently offering several grant-based cost share programs 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 are 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.



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Stephanie Rose DeNicola, Editor

Culpeper Office
351 Lakeside Drive
Culpeper, Virginia 22701
540-825-8591
540-645-6624 (F)

Orange Office
325-B Madison Road
Orange, Virginia 22960
540-672-1638

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