



# Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts 2004 Annual Report

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The Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts provides leadership, training and cohesive representation for Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the stewardship of natural resources.

Additional information on VASWCD and SWCD programs and services can be found on the Web at <http://www.vaswcd.org> or VASWCD 7293 Hanover Green Drive, Suite B101, Mechanicsville, Virginia 23111 Office: (804) 559-0324, Fax: (804) 559-0325

## Who We Are

The Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts represent the Commonwealth's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts led by 330 locally elected and appointed directors statewide. Districts serve as Virginia's water quality management infrastructure through which voluntary, incentive based, private sector leveraged conservation practices and programs are being implemented to help Virginia keep its waterways clean.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts help conserve, maintain, and protect Virginia's natural resources by:

- (1) *Providing technical assistance to landowners and local governments designed to improve soil and water quality,*
- (2) *Increasing public knowledge of our natural resources through education and scholarship programs, and*
- (3) *Creating effective partnerships with public and private landowners and government natural resource agencies to leverage dollars and expertise to improve Virginia's natural environment.*

## VASWCD Mission

Our mission is to serve and strengthen Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the stewardship of natural resources. The Goal of Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts is clean streams and protected natural resources throughout the Commonwealth.

## What Conservation Districts Do

Conservation Districts were established in the 1930s to develop comprehensive programs and plans to conserve soil resources, control and prevent soil erosion, prevent floods, and conserve, develop, utilize and dispose of water. Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts cover nearly all the state's land base - excluding one county and 24 cities. Today, Districts help Virginia's local and state governments deliver programs aimed at controlling and preventing nonpoint source (NPS) pollution on a watershed basis. Districts work closely with landowners and the Commonwealth's stakeholder communities.

Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts have expertise in many areas including:

### **Technical Services**

- Best Management Practices (BMPs)
- Certified Erosion & Sediment Control Plan Review
- Certified Nutrient Management Planning
- VA Save Our Streams Volunteer Monitoring Protocol

### **Education and Outreach**

- Watershed, Conservation and Soils Education
- Storm Drain Stenciling
- Volunteer Stream Monitoring
- Training and Seminars

## 2004 Conservation Partnership Programs - Improving Soil and Water Resources

### **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**

Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts have worked closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)



Riparian Buffer

within the USDA and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Commonwealth's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to administer the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program that provides incentives for landowners

to and maintain riparian forest buffers along streams and drainage ways. During the past year, 3,036 acres of riparian buffers were installed by 373 landowners under CREP.

### **Erosion and Sediment Control and Stormwater Management Programs (E&S)**

Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts work closely with local governments as technical advisors to promote innovative stormwater management and other best management practices to control soil erosion, sedimentation, and nonagricultural runoff from regulated "land-disturbing activities" to prevent degradation of property and natural resources. In some instances, Districts also have implementation authority for Erosion and Sediment Control and Stormwater Management programs. Soil and Water Conservation Districts partner with local counties and developers to review numerous plans each year.

### **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**

Another partnership program Districts work with landowners on the local level is the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. WHIP helps participants improve habitat for wildlife. NRCS currently has 77 contracts, eight on the Delmarva Peninsula for a total of \$563,000.

### **Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)**

Another federal partnership between Districts and NRCS is the Grassland Reserve Program. GRP helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, and shrub land and provides assistance for rehabilitating grasslands. During 2004, NRCS entered into eight rental agreements and five easements for a total of \$1.1 million dollars.

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**



Waste Management Lagoon

Under the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program, 443 contracts have been written obligating \$9.7 million dollars in funding this year. These include grazing land management, erosion control on cropland, reforestation management of timberland, animal waste and nutrient management. Districts assisted with the design and implementation of conservation practices implemented by Virginia landowners.

### **Agricultural Pollution (ASA)**

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services received more than 150 inquiries in 2004 regarding possible agricultural pollution. During follow-up investigations, Soil and Water Conservation Districts assisted with the implementation of conservation plans to rectify the problems.

### **Forest Management (FIP)**

Soil and Water Conservation Districts assist the Virginia Department of Forestry and NRCS in identifying landowners and cost-share program planning. The Forestry Incentive Program allows landowners to reforest and manage their timberland for wood production. This year SWCDs worked with 91 landowners on 2,486 acres of woodland in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **Dam Operation and Maintenance**

Twelve of Virginia's Soil and Water Conservation Districts are responsible for the operation and maintenance of 103 dams.

### **Dam Rehabilitation**

Virginia completed its first dam rehabilitation plan for Marrowbone Creek in Henry County. Planning is underway for three dam rehabilitation projects on the South River located in Augusta County and one on Pohick Creek in Fairfax County.

Survey, planning and design are underway for a multi year flood control project for the City of Buena Vista. Under the small watershed protection program, the project will protect 12,000 acres located in the city of Buena Vista from stream flooding.

## **Educational Programs**

Education programs sponsored by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts provide opportunities for citizens of the Commonwealth to become good stewards of our environment and natural



resources for the benefit of all. The VASWCD develops and disseminates educational materials to assist the 47 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts with their missions. There are three major education programs: Envirothon, Youth Conservation Camp and Natural Resource Conservation Week.

**Envirothon** - The Virginia Envirothon is a natural resources competition for high school students. Students who participate learn stewardship and management concepts and work to solve real and hypothetical environmental problems. The program is field oriented, community based and gives students an opportunity to work with natural resource professionals. The 2004 Virginia Team, the Augusta County 4H Home school, placed second at the National Envirothon.

**Youth Conservation Camp** - High School students from throughout Virginia spend a week during July learning about conserving Virginia's natural resources. Students canoe the New River and learn about new technologies and methods for protecting water quality. The program includes field trips and hands-on study of soils, forestry, wildlife, aquatics, watershed management and how agricultural and urban land uses relate to water quality.

**Natural Resources Conservation Week** - The third week in October is dedicated by Soil and Water Conservation Districts to educate Virginians about protecting natural resources and preserving the environment for future generations.

### **SWCD Educational Program Accomplishments**

- In school programs reach over 1,000 classrooms
- Water quality monitoring programs involve more than 700 citizens
- Agricultural Field Days reach over 8,000 students
- Conservation Field Days reach 5,000 people, Conservation Tours reach 11,000 people
- Newsletters and Website reach 38,000 people
- 53 high school students participate as Conservation Campers
- Over 600 students participate in the state Envirothon Program (135 classrooms) Virginia places second at Nationals
- 8 Conservation Districts sponsor internship programs
- Conservation Education Poster Contests reach over 50 elementary, middle and high schools
- Annual Conservation Education Teacher and Forester of the Year recognition program
- Annual Farmer of the Year award recognition programs highlight work of outstanding educators and professionals
- Earth Team Volunteer Programs encourage community conservation action



## **VASWCD Education Foundation**

The Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Education Foundation, Inc. was established in 1990 as a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization incorporated under Chapter 10 of title 13.1 of the Code of Virginia. Initial funding for the Foundation was provided by Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Funding for additional activities such as Envirothon is provided through donations made by individuals, corporations, organizations and other foundations. Contributions to the VASWCD Educational Foundation are utilized to support conservation related educational efforts within the Commonwealth. Since the Foundation began, it has awarded \$81,000 in college scholarships to students pursuing degrees in fields of study in natural resources.

The Foundation has also received a generous endowment from the family of the late George Beals, a Soil and Water Conservation District leader, to establish the George Beals Leadership Fund. The Fund is a scholarship program for adult conservation leaders in Virginia. A perpetual fund is in place with nearly \$100,000 capital.

The Board of Directors has been working over the past two years to ensure management policies are in place to administer the investments, establish long-range parameters for the scholarships, and expand fund raising efforts. To allow the fund principal to grow in the wake of the bear market of the previous year and to increase the financial base with more aggressive fundraising activities, the decision was made to forego awarding 2004 scholarships.

Scholarship program review will assure scholarships are balanced and meet the objectives of both the Foundation and the sponsoring parties. These efforts upon completion will enable the Foundation to remain on sound financial footing for future generations.

## 2004 Year In Review

### Greg Evans, VASWCD President



2004 was a good year for Districts. We built on the foundation laid in 2003 enabling us to aggressively position Districts for the future. For the first time in years, our legislative session was not focused exclusively on funding efforts. Our work with the Governor's office, the

Secretariat of Natural Resources and the General Assembly to define and build support for Districts' roles created a solid base of support resulting in District operational funding levels remaining stable. Changes in Virginia's stormwater management law represent a major win for water quality efforts in the Commonwealth and may mean additional responsibilities for Districts. We are working with our state partners to determine those changes.

The General Assembly also recognized the importance of cost share programs in providing incentives for landowners to install agricultural best management practices (BMPs). Additional funding was provided but new reporting requirements were added to provide feedback to the General Assembly on the return they receive for the dollars invested. To assist them, the VASWCD sponsored its first farm tour for legislative and appropriations staff. The tour provided an opportunity to showcase how BMPs are designed, implemented and used.

The VASWCD Board has urged a review of the outdated state District operations funding formula. A recommendation was made to and approved by the Virginia Soil and Water Board to form a group to update workload assumptions and recommend adjustments to bring operational funding into line with current District workload requirements. As part of this review, the group will also examine multi-County District versus single County District workloads to address possible inequities and make recommendations to the State Board next May.

Since education is one of the most significant services Districts provide, the Education Foundation Board has instituted management controls that will position the Educational Foundation for the future as we expand our scholarship and fundraising programs. Please review the Foundation write-up on the previous page for details.

Budgeting issues for the Association remain a major challenge. As District responsibilities increase, demands on the VASWCD, as the Districts' spokesperson, have also continued to increase, placing considerable strain on the Association budget. Major cost cutting policies have been instituted but major budget decisions need to be made at the Annual Meeting.

Our Committees have been very active. I would like to thank again the Committee Chairs and members for their efforts. The Urban Committee partnered with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to sponsor three District/Local Government conservation planning partnering initiatives. Participants are

recording what is learned and the information will be shared with other Districts. The Legislative Committee continued its success at the state level in the General Assembly and began to focus on the U.S. Congress. The Public Relations and Marketing Committee won a Directors' Selection First Place Ribbon at the Virginia State Fair with the "Soils – The World Beneath Our Feet" exhibit. The Education Committee continued to promote education programs and will develop the 2005 Celebrate Conservation Campaign – "The Year of Land and Water Conservation." The Operations Committee assisted the VASWCD Educational Foundation Board with management options; and the new Agriculture/Forestry Committee worked on organizational issues.

In closing, since this is my last report, to our Agency Partners, thank you for working so closely with Districts to promote sound conservation stewardship in Virginia. To the present and former members of the VASWCD Board of Directors and the Association staff who have served with me, I want to thank you for your dedication and commitment to your Conservation District Director and staff colleagues. I have never worked with a finer group of people. To my fellow Directors, Associate Directors and District staff, I would like to thank you for the honor of serving as your VASWCD President these past two years. The people I have met, the places I have visited, and the things we have been able to accomplish have made this job a wonderful experience and one I shall always remember. – Greg.



#### 2004 VASWCD Board of Directors and Committee Chairs

President:	Greg Evans, Northern Virginia SWCD
First Vice President:	Jim Byrne, Culpeper SWCD
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