

# VA DCR/NRCS Verification Pilot

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## Process steps

1. DCR and NRCS establish MOA laying out the framework for the pilot and data sharing
2. DCR will provide a list of conservation practices (NRCS practice codes) implemented between 2010 and the present in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay watershed for which they need expiring/recently expired information.
3. NRCS will share limited information such as names and addresses so DCR can initiate contact with producers in the study area who have targeted expired/expiring practices on their land.
4. DCR and NRCS developed a template letter and authorization form for the DCR Central Office to send to identified producers along with a stamped return envelope pre-addressed to DCR Central office.
5. Producers mail completed and signed authorization forms back to the DCR Central Office.
6. DCR scans the signed authorizations and provides a producer list and scanned copies to NRCS State Office. (Original authorizations will be forwarded to NRCS local offices to be included in the case file.)
7. NRCS extracts authorized information for release to DCR.
8. NRCS transmits authorized data to DCR.
9. DCR provides authorized NRCS data to Soil and Water Conservation Districts, along with financial incentives to conduct BMP verification inspections where authorized.
10. DCR will provide NRCS with an annual report of inspected practices along with the individual site reports and assessment criteria results.

## Pilot #1 Headwaters SWCD Summary

- Augusta County (Headwaters SWCD) was selected as the pilot area
- 26 different producer names/addresses for Augusta County were forwarded to DCR that had 44 of the selected practices and which had met the practice lifespan from CY2015 through CY2021.
- Three authorizations for the release of records were received, two of which matched client names on the data pull.
- For the two authorizations which matched the data pull, there was information on a total of 6 applied practices, practice specific data forwarded to DCR in March.
- DCR completed the verification inspections with the SWCD staff for those 6 applied practices in June and NRCS received the forms in August.
- An initial challenge to-date includes a low response rate from producers to participate in this pilot.

## Pilot #2 Thomas Jefferson & Lord Fairfax SWCDs Summary

- Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah, Warren Counties of the Lord Fairfax SWCD & Albemarle, Fluvanna, Louisa, Nelson Counties in the Thomas Jefferson SWCD were selected for the second pilot
- DCR and NRCS collaborated to update the process to include post cards to be mailed out by SWCD's hoping to benefit from local SWCD relationships.
- Thirteen different participant names/addresses within these districts were forwarded to DCR that had a total of 26 of the selected practices and which had met the practice lifespan from CY2016 through CY2021.
- One authorization for the release of records was received.
- The one authorizations included one applied practice. Practice specific data forwarded to DCR for verification.

## Summary of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Pilot Results

- Pilot #1 Headwaters:
  - 2 verified participants/26 total participants = 7.7% response rate
  - 6 practices verified/44 total = 13.6% of practices reviewed
- Pilot #2 Thomas Jefferson and Lord Fairfax:
  - 1 verified participant/13 total participants = 7.7% response rate
  - 1 practice verified/26 total = 3.8% of practices reviewed

## Next Steps toward a Third Pilot

How do we overcome the challenges of the low response rate and produce better results?

## Next Steps toward a Third Pilot

DCR and Va NRCS have discussed changing the Pilot Process to:

- Expand the practice list to include all “structural” NRCS practices allowable in CAST
- Include all practices outside of the CAST established credit duration rather than NRCS practice lifespan
- Leverage the existing trusted relationship between NRCS and their participating producer
  - Have NRCS make telephone calls to participants to explain the initiative and get buy-in before letters are sent.
  - Have NRCS send letters to the participants.
  - Have NRCS schedule and join site visits to collect the data – DCR/SWCD staff will still need to be present during site visits to complete verification forms and offer opportunities to offer enrolment in VACS Continuing Conservation Initiative

Also, outside of the Pilot process

- NRCS to consider capturing inspection dates for all practices at completion of a contract
- NRCS to consider capturing inspection dates of prior installed practices when a producer initiates a new contract

## List of Conservation Practices to be evaluated:

### Pilot #1 and #2

309 Agrichemical Handling Facility  
313 Waste Storage Facility  
316 Animal Mortality Facility  
410 Grade Stabilization Structure  
412 Grassed Waterway  
558 Roof Runoff Structure  
561 Heavy Use Area Protection  
580 Streambank and Shoreline Protection  
620 Underground Outlet  
382 Fence  
468 Lined Waterway or Outlet

### Proposed Pilot #3

313 Waste Storage Facility  
316 Animal Mortality Facility  
317 Composting Facility  
327 Conservation Cover  
342 Critical Area Planting  
359 Waste Treatment Lagoon  
380 Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment  
386 Field Border  
390 Riparian Herbaceous Cover  
391 Riparian Forest Buffer  
393 Filter Strip  
412 Grassed Waterway  
512 Pasture and Hay Planting  
528 Prescribed Grazing  
558 Roof Runoff Structure  
580 Streambank and Shoreline Protection  
584 Channel Bed Stabilization  
587 Structure for Water Control  
612 Tree/Shrub Establishment  
614 Watering Facility  
635 Vegetated Treatment Area  
656 Constructed Wetland  
657 Wetland Restoration  
658 Wetland Creation  
528A Prescribed Grazing



These Verification Pilot Projects have been and continue to be a collaboration between Virginia Natural Resources Conservation Service, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts



Much of the content in these slides was derived from a presentation by Chad Wentz, Virginia NRCS, to the Federal Crediting Task Force, April 13, 2023 and updated by Chris Bradshaw, Virginia NRCS, in January 2024.