

VA DCR/NRCS Verification Pilot

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James Martin
Director, Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation



Process steps

- 1. DCR and NRCS establish MOA laying out the framework for the pilot and data sharing
- 2. <u>DCR will provide a list of conservation practices</u> (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 <u>template letter and authorization form</u> 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. <u>DCR scans the signed authorizations and provides a producer list and scanned copies to NRCS State Office</u>. (Original authorizations will be forwarded to NRCS local offices to be included in the case file.)
- 7. NRCS <u>extracts authorized</u> information for release to DCR.
- 8. NRCS <u>transmits authorized</u> data to DCR.
- 9. <u>DCR provides authorized NRCS data to Soil and Water Conservation Districts, along with financial incentives to conduct BMP verification inspections where authorized.</u>
- 10. DCR will provide NRCS with an <u>annual report of inspected practices</u> 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 1st and 2nd 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:

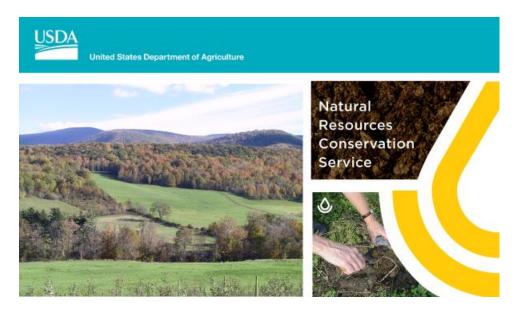
Pilot #1 and #2

Proposed Pilot #3

309	Agrichemical Handling Facility	313	Waste Storage Facility	558	Roof Runoff Structure	
313	Waste Storage Facility	316	Animal Mortality Facility	580	Streambank and Shoreline	
316	Animal Mortality Facility	317	Composting Facility	Prot	Protection	
	Grade Stabilization Structure	327	Conservation Cover	584	Channel Bed Stabilization	
		342	Critical Area Planting	587	Structure for Water Control	
412	Grassed Waterway	359	Waste Treatment Lagoon	612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	
558	Roof Runoff Structure	380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt	614	Watering Facility	
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	Establishment		635	Vegetated Treatment Area	
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	386	Field Border	656	Constructed Wetland	
	Underground Outlet	390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	657	Wetland Restoration	
620		391	Riparian Forest Buffer	658	Wetland Creation	
382	Fence	393	Filter Strip	528 /	A Prescribed Grazing	
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	412	Grassed Waterway			
		512	Pasture and Hay Planting			
		528	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.