

2009 VARCDC Annual Report

RC&D's are non-profit community organizations working on projects that help people protect and develop their economic, natural and social resources. Council members are volunteers with a keen interest in their community's quality of life.

RC&D Councils across Virginia

Black Diamond

Lebanon, VA

www.blackdiamondrcd.org

Eastern Shore

Accomac, VA

www.esrcd.org

New River-Highlands

Wytheville, VA

www.newriverhighlandsrcd.org

Old Dominion

Charlotte Court House, VA

www.olddominionrcd.org

Shenandoah

Verona, VA

www.shenandoahrcd.org

South Centré Corridors

Prince George, VA

www.southcentrecorridorsrcd.org

Tidewater

Tappahannock, VA

www.tidewaterrcd.org

Applicant Area

South Hampton Roads

Courtland, VA

757-563-2201

www.varcdc.org



Streambank conditions in the Valley before (left) and after the livestock exclusion pilot project.

Flexible Livestock Exclusion Pilot Greens Up Waterways in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley

The *Shenandoah RC&D* received nearly \$250,000 in grant funds from the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network to help keep livestock out of Valley waterways. This three-year cooperative project provides an innovative solution to mitigating the negative impacts to water quality that occur when livestock have free access to streams.

Project partners include the Headwaters and Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Virginia State Dairymen's Association, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Virginia Cooperative Extension and Virginia Tech.

Technical staff have worked with 17 participating farms to design adaptive fencing, livestock crossings and watering systems appropriate for each farm and stream segment. Top of stream bank fencing is a minimum requirement and livestock must be excluded from the stream for at least five years. Stream exclusion areas range from three to 300 feet, averaging 24 feet from the streambank. More than 940 livestock have been excluded from over 68,500 linear feet of stream.

In conjunction with this initiative, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is funding a Virginia Tech study in which they are monitoring changes in water quality and analyzing methods of targeting adaptive fencing in specific watersheds with similar use patterns. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and USDA NRCS are also assessing two new 10-foot exclusion pilot practices resulting from this project.

Virginia Association of
Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Councils



VARCDC Chair's Message

RC&D Councils are composed of local volunteers who tackle a wide array of community concerns affecting the quality of life in their areas. These Councils serve as a resource that can help bring together funding, specialized skills and talent to make community projects possible.

Some of these issues may involve solving environmental problems, creating jobs using the natural resources of the region or educating youth. We saw real successes for our Councils last year and are pleased to describe some of the year's projects and highlights in this report.

During 2009, Virginia's RC&D Councils initiated 70 projects and completed 36. The Councils leveraged \$2,494,740 in funding and created or retained 17 businesses that created or retained 18 jobs. In addition, 20 watershed-wide plans were created that benefitted 2,053,152 acres of rural Virginia.

We are truly proud of our geographic coverage under our seven authorized Councils and are pleased to have the full participation of the South Hampton Roads Council, which has been an applicant area since 2003. We also look forward to welcoming another new applicant area in western Virginia in the coming year.

We recognize that our successes are built upon the strong foundation of shared partnerships and visions. We thank the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service for its technical support and appreciate all of the community members, agencies and organizations who work with RC&D.



Member, Black Diamond RC&D



The New River-Highlands RC&D workshop demonstrated streambank restoration techniques to more than 80 conservation planners and engineers.

Streambank Restoration Studied

New River-Highlands RC&D received funding to host a streambank restoration workshop and demonstrate new field practices to stabilize eroding streambanks and improve water quality. The project treated six stream segments using a variety of techniques and demonstrated situations where certain practices are most effective.

The more than 80 workshop participants included conservation planners from local, state and federal agencies and several area engineering and environmental consulting firms. NRCS and area Soil and Water Conservation Districts provided an estimated 1,500 hours of technical assistance to survey, design and monitor installation of demonstration practices. The State's Water Quality Improvement Fund and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries matched this investment with \$200,000 in grants for installation costs.

Eco Kids' Kollege Makes the Grade

Old Dominion RC&D, together with Charlotte County, Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Southside Soil and Water Conservation District, piloted a week-long summer youth program focused on appreciating and conserving natural resources close to home. Children, ages 9 through 12, enrolled from three counties. They replaced their iPods, cell phones and video games with miniature ecosystems, a visit from Mother Earth, a litter pick-up race, and programs from foresters, game and fisheries officers, and conservationists.

At the end of each day's activities, participants wrote in their journals about what they had learned. On the last day, parents joined their children at a cookout and heard about the week at a show-and-tell. Based on feedback and the successes with the 2009 session, partners plan to continue Eco Kids' Kollege in 2010 and draw youth participants from a larger region.



Southside youth program kids drop their iPods and tune in to nature.

Building Good Will: An Outreach Mission for Virginians in Need

South Centré Corridors RC&D is assisting Mission Ministries with opening an Outreach Center in Waverly, Virginia. The Center will be a central location for Mission Ministries, a nonprofit organization of 12 churches dedicated to meeting the basic needs of area residents.

The Town of Waverly agreed to lease a historic building to Mission Ministries, who will renovate and repair it as a facility to store food and clothes and a place where people can come for assistance. With both donations and grant funds from the Altria Companies, work began on the building in mid-summer. The opening is scheduled for Winter 2010, by which time there will be a heating and air system, new windows, siding, and flooring added to the structure.

In addition to assisting Mission Ministries with the building renovation, South Centré Corridors RC&D Council has provided the organization with capacity building assistance to improve internal operations by revisiting their financial record keeping, strategic plan, bylaws, and committee structure.



Partnership donations and grant funds are building an Outreach Center and community foodbank in the Town of Waverly.

Spearheading Trails Initiative for Economic Growth

Black Diamond RC&D assisted the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority with strategic planning to oversee the development and management of a regional trail system across seven counties in Southwest Virginia. The first phase feasibility study of the *Spearhead Trail System* identified the area's great potential as a trail destination for ATV riders, bikers, hikers, canoeists, horseback riders, naturalists and others.

At a time when economic growth in the region is lagging, the study showed that a well-coordinated trail system could provide for economic diversification with new and expanded opportunities for tourist-related services. Building upon the outstanding scenic resources of the region, the *Spearhead Trail System* could potentially bring an additional 200,000 visitors to the region, add over \$30 million to the local economy, and create between 300 to 500 jobs within ten years.



A new Spearhead Trail System could make Southwest Virginia a popular tourist destination.

Mission

Enhance the ability of RC&D communities to achieve their goals by providing leadership, capacity building opportunities, training and resources.

Vision

Prosperous communities in harmony with the environment through the wise use of natural and human resources.

Fast Facts

In 2009, Virginia RC&D Councils successfully leveraged their funding for technical support from the USDA NRCS on a 3:1 basis.

All authorized Virginia Councils are members of the National Association of RC&D Councils' Circle of Diamonds, which certifies high performers.

RC&D Programs are provided on an equal opportunity basis.

Isle Be Green Grant Promotes Community Recycling and Artistic Expression

South Hampton Roads RC&D (an Applicant Area since 2003) is working with Isle of Wight County to promote plastic bag recycling as the kick-off to raise citizen awareness and expand recycling across the community. Several bag recycling bins are now set up around the area, and the Council recently received \$4,000 in grant funding to match the countless volunteer hours donated to promote the recycling project. In part, these funds will help cover the cost of a ramp needed for collecting the bales of plastic bags for transport to TREX for remanufacture into composite lumber.

Other project components include hosting a contest in the county's elementary schools to recognize the class that collects the largest number of plastic bags for recycling. The Council hosted a booth at the County Fair this Fall and distributed reusable shopping bags to promote the project. With Council support, *Isle Be Green* also plans to assist local artisans who make art with recycled products.



Community Forum Showcases Opportunity for Wood-Based Biofuels Business

Tidewater RC&D hosted a community forum to answer questions about using waste wood to produce bio-fuels. In preparation, the Council's Forestry Committee partnered with the Virginia Department of Forestry to analyze available waste wood within a 50-mile radius. This effort confirmed that more than four times enough unused local waste wood is available to support a new business to produce biofuels or mulch without any additional tree harvests.

Such use could provide a market for trees cut in pre-commercial thinning, a forest management practice that encourages faster growth and yields higher quality timber for the mature tree harvest. Speakers at the forum represented private industry, Virginia Tech's Forestry Department, the State's Department of Forestry, the Virginia Forestry Association, the Virginia Loggers Association, and area timber growers. Attendees expressed interest in pursuing the concepts presented.



Waste wood can support a Tidewater bio-fuel business.

Health Center Healing Garden to Highlight Sustainable Landscaping

Eastern Shore RC&D played a key role in establishing the new Onley Community Health Center as an official *Plant ES Natives* Campaign demonstration landscape. *Plant ES Natives* is a new multi-year social marketing effort coordinated by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program to increase native vegetative cover and improve wildlife habitat and water quality.

Campaign partners approached Eastern Shore Rural Health System, Inc., about making their new health center a model landscape for the community because the site will receive a large number of visitors. Under the first phase, site planning and design have provided a coordinated vision for the site. Much work remains to raise funds to implement the project.

Several sustainable landscaping concepts are planned. The site will be configured to include a wetlands system to improve water quality in stormwater discharge. All native plant materials will be used throughout the site with a focus area on the center's east side. Here, visitors will experience a series of outdoor spaces with plant identification, benches, sculpture and signs that reinforce the relationship between health and the environment.



The Healing Garden site design specifies native species.