

SUSTAINING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH FORESTRY

Forestry is over a billion dollar industry in the region of the Tidewater RC&D, yet few people recognize its value in sustaining local communities. Working with numerous partners, the Council researched six forestry issues: the resource base, economic impact of industry, environmental contributions, recreational value, wildlife habitats and forest fragmentation. They created a brochure with facts and figures, and a power point that was presented to ten Boards of Supervisors. As a result, numerous newspapers included articles on the importance of preserving forestland. Future plans include presentations for planning commissions and school programs.

Funding required for the project was provided by a \$1,000.00 grant from the Virginia Department of Forestry and the US Forest Service. Partners included the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula Planning District Commissions and the members of the Forestry Committee, including local forestry consultants, loggers and industry representatives.



Forest in Tidewater Area



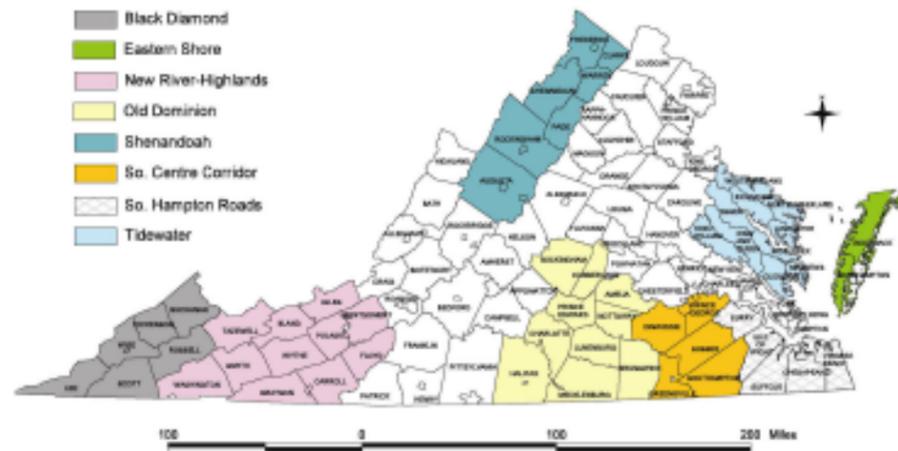
Volunteer using GPS technology to map an illegal dumpsite

ILLEGAL DUMPSITE MAPPING

A thousand and counting, that's how many illegal dumpsites have been mapped by the end of 2005, along the winding, back roads of far southwest Virginia, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the region's soil and water conservation districts, litter control offices and community volunteers. The sites have been located and mapped with GPS technology. GPS stands for global positioning system, which provides the exact coordinates specifying the site's latitude and longitude.

Dickenson County is the first county in the Black Diamond RC&D Council's region, perhaps in the state, to map all known dumpsites. Once a locality's dumpsites have been mapped, the next step in the process is to amend their solid waste management plan to incorporate this new information and to estimate how many years it will take to clean them up. Dickenson County is aggressively cleaning up their dumpsites, with almost one-third of them cleaned up so far. For more information go to www.blackdiamondrcd.org and click on the litter link.

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Areas



The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides technical and financial assistance for the RC&D program. For every NRCS dollar invested, RC&Ds generate nearly five dollars in benefits for their communities. RC&Ds obtain additional funding from grants and services provided by other federal, state, local and private entities.



VARC&DC

Virginia Association of Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Councils
2005 Annual Report

Creating jobs, protecting resources, educating, providing opportunities...

Vision

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

Mission

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

RC&D Areas:

- Tidewater
- Shenandoah
- Old Dominion
- Eastern Shore
- Black Diamond
- New River Highlands
- South Centre Corridors

Applicant Area:

South Hampton Roads

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PARTNERING TO PROTECT SHORELINES AND IMPROVE WATER QUALITY



When a group of paddlers took a short trip along Onancock Creek to preview an RC&D water trail, they discovered a dramatic contrast between shorelines with vegetation and

shorelines stabilized with bulkheads. The natural shorelines had many more egrets, herons, and other birds. Natural shorelines are less likely to be a source of sediment which can harm submerged aquatic vegetation and marine life.

A real estate agent told the RC&D Coordinator that first time waterfront property buyers have difficulty finding unbiased information on erosion prevention options, and most contractors offer only structural solutions. Thus, an ongoing partnership was launched between the Eastern Shore RC&D and a local Coldwell Banker Harbor Realty office. They hosted a fall seminar on alternative shoreline protection options, and over 100 people attended. Following the seminar, RC&D applied for a grant to provide on-site assistance to landowners and publish a listing of contractors with experience in living shoreline projects. A demonstration project on public land is also planned.

While not every shoreline erosion problem can be helped by vegetative or soft stabilization techniques,



Aerial view of Onancock Creek Photo by Len Kaufman, VTC

in many cases it is possible to limit erosion and still preserve valuable habitat. Read more about natural shoreline protection at:

http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/temphomepagefiles/shore_esrcd.pdf

VIRGINIA'S MODEL NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT EFFORT

A broad vision for clean water and thriving agriculture sparked a grassroots effort to bring together partners to develop a strategy and action plan for dealing with excess animal waste in the Shenandoah Valley.

Shenandoah RC&D helped lead the effort that included Valley farmers, agricultural leaders, conservation groups, local, state and federal government officials, and others. All participated in a two-day facilitated Waste Solutions Forum held in Roanoke, VA, in April. Expected results: strengthen the agricultural industry, create jobs, and help solve excess nutrient-related problems in the watershed. The forum implementation committee has applied for a \$1 million grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to continue on-the-ground work in implementing Forum strategies.



Canoeing on the Shenandoah River Photo by Nancy Sottosanti, VTC



Dr. Agblevor explains pyrolysis to council member, Rick Shiflet

**PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES:
BIO-ENERGY**

Shenandoah RC&D helped fund research to turn poultry litter into fuel and environmentally-friendly fertilizer and significantly reduce nutrient loads to the Chesapeake Bay.

The project funding allowed Dr. Foster Agblevor, Associate Professor, Biological Systems Engineering Department at Virginia Tech, to do a first phase of pyrolysis technology which will:

- Reduce poultry waste volumes;
- Prevent water resource pollution;
- Produce an environmentally-friendly fertilizer;
- Provide small-scale poultry growers with a portable energy source for space heating in poultry houses;
- Help create new jobs for the poultry industry.

Pyrolysis technology applies high heat to poultry litter and creates by-products including bio-oil for energy and char fertilizer, which slowly releases nitrogen and phosphorus if land applied.

CREATING JOBS

White pine roping and greenery production can significantly improve economic return to white pine plantation owners in Virginia. A New River Highlands RC&D project educated landowners and resource professionals about how this business can boost the local economy and create jobs.



White pine roping and greenery production

In Virginia, the greenery business employs an estimated 2,000 persons with revenues exceeding \$20 million annually.

Through this RC&D project, the feasibility studies and business plans were developed for a holiday evergreen cottage

industry and business—identifying resources and equipment needed and projecting cash flow.

A promotional program to encourage tree planting on marginal land was developed and presented to conservation groups, landowners, farmers and civic groups.

PROTECTING RESOURCES

South Centré Corridors RC&D continues its efforts to promote groundwater and human health protection by capping abandoned wells in this RC&D area.

Abandoned, large-diameter dug wells and cisterns are a deadly threat. If kept in good repair, they present little threat to human safety, but many well and cistern covers were constructed from wood that can be weakened or destroyed by the elements. In recent years, abandoned wells have received national attention when children have fallen into them and drowned.

South Centré Corridors RC&D capped three abandoned wells, protecting approximately 185 acre feet of groundwater. The wells were abandoned and capped according to Virginia Department of Health and USDA standards. Typically this involves bringing in clean fill material, plugging the well shaft with a bentonite plug, and reseeding and stabilizing the site after construction.



Well-capping South Centré Corridors

COMMUNICATING FOR BETTER NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION

Who is responsible when it comes to preventing natural resource problems? Due to increased regulations, agency reorganizations, staff changes and an increasing population it is easy for natural resource problems to be ignored, or shifted from one group to another with everyone saying “someone else really should do something.”

A forum to improve communication between all the local, state and federal agencies that have a role in natural resources protection on the Northern Neck, was initiated by Junius Berger, chairman of the Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District. Tidewater RC&D facilitated the session and Richmond County assisted with planning from the perspective of the county government. The Northern Neck Planning District Commission agreed to publicize the event to gain the participation of county planners.

The 25 people who attended represented each county in the Northern Neck and each of the federal, state and local agencies with water quality responsibilities. Participants left with a much better understanding of who is responsible. They also developed a working knowledge of who to call when problems arise that need multi-agency cooperation.

EDUCATING

Education creates opportunity. RC&D is raising awareness and providing resources to address critical issues.

Rail- to-Trails

Old Dominion RC&D offered a workshop about the benefits of converting abandoned railroads into hiking and non-motorized trails. Partnering with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation they educated government personnel, organizations and the public about potential economic boosts to communities and adjacent landowners. Virginia’s Governor was the keynote speaker, and participants left with a clear understanding of how these trails could benefit their communities. This workshop paved the way for initiating development of a rails to trails program within the Old Dominion RC&D area.



Parent and children enjoying Rails-to-Trails

Financing Purchase of Development Rights

Figuring out ways to finance local purchase of development rights programs is the key to making them happen. Shenandoah RC&D partnered with local land trust Valley Conservation Council to offer a workshop that looked at financing mechanisms and options to fund local land protection programs. The workshop was aimed at decision makers and featured speakers from American Farmland Trust, Evergreen Capital Advisors, Virginia Resources Authority, and the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation. Shenandoah RC&D offered two related educational workshops on purchasing development rights and conservation easements throughout the year.

Woodland Management

Landowners who manage over 14,000 acres of woodland collectively participated in a four-day intensive woodland management course offered by Southampton Roads and South Centré Corridors RC&Ds. The course covered topics such as pine and hardwood management, wildlife, water quality, and technical assistance. This course was offered in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Forestry and Virginia Tech.

USDA Funding

A one-day workshop to provide training and guidance on USDA programs and grant opportunities for local farmers was offered by Southampton Roads and South Centré Corridors RC&Ds. Covered material included Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Grants and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. A portion of the day was dedicated to proposal development, so farmers could become more competitive with grant applications.

Fire Hazard Reduction

Preventing wildfires near homes will save lives and protect property. New River Highlands RC&D secured \$40,000 in funding from the U.S. Forest Service to reduce wildfire hazards in Carroll, Grayson, and Montgomery Counties, and the City of Galax. A person was hired to coordinate development of the plan that identified at-risk communities for wildfire. Plans for wildfire protection were developed along with mitigation plans for selected hazards. Two of the eight goals included promoting fuel reduction projects in high risk communities and strengthening the ability of volunteer fire departments to fight wildfires.

Farm Safety Day Camp®

Old Dominion RC&D banded together with numerous agencies and companies to hold the first ever Progressive Farmer Farm Safety Day Camp®. Parents and children learned how to avoid day-to-day hazards on the farm.



Farm Safety Day Camp®

Professionals presented potential dangers and demonstrated safe handling practices with tractors, ATVs, pesticides, firearms, electricity, etc. The program’s basic funding came from Progressive Farmer with in-kind support and donations from local and regional businesses and manufacturing companies.