

Museum Preserves Farming Heritage

Luther Welch inspired the creation of the Northern Neck Farm Museum by donating eight acres of land and a lifetime collection of antique farm equipment and tools. With the support and help of the Tidewater RC&D Council and the Northern Neck Tourism Council, a new non-profit corporation was created that raised over \$110,000. The first priority was to construct a "Red Barn" that will be the storage area for large equipment. Until the main building can be constructed, the Red Barn will also house the first exhibits and be open to the public in May of 2008.

The museum describes Northern Neck Agriculture from the American Indians through the Colonial period, to the steamboat era where canneries abounded in the region, to the modern mechanization of farms. Even before the building was started, about 20 volunteers began a traveling exhibit that was featured at fairs, parades and community events. Three farm forums were hosted to capture oral histories of folks engaged in farming. A grant funded the development of a curriculum for five grades in the Northumberland County school system, and a consultant was hired to develop enriching programs that meet the teachers' Standards of Learning criteria. Future plans include involving the youth in community gardens and expanding the program for all grades.



Luther Welch with some of his donated equipment

Community Gardens Build Teamwork and Skills

The Community Garden project began in 2006 to serve the City of Portsmouth's Department of Behavioral Healthcare services. The goal of the project was to provide funding and technical resources to create accessible gardens for mentally challenged consumers at The Portsmouth Shop and Opportunity House. A \$6,000 grant to the South Hampton Roads RC&D was used to expand the project to a facility in Suffolk.

The success of the project was due to the combined efforts of many partners. The Department of Behavioral Healthcare Services staff attended training to become certified Master Gardeners so the facilities would have on-site specialists at all times. A total of five 16' x 5' x 8' raised planting beds



One of the planting beds

were built by the Department's staff and the consumers at the Portsmouth shop. The Opportunity House constructed raised planting beds, hanging planters and rain barrels. Both facilities grew produce such as tomatoes, squash, zucchini, cucumbers, peppers, okra, cantaloupe, watermelon, onions, Swiss chard, spinach, beans, collards, lettuce, cabbage and flowers.

The consumers assisted with all aspects of implementation from site prep of the planting beds to final harvest of the vegetables and flowers. They also assisted with tours of the gardens and helped to cook and prepare some of the harvested items. Cathy Manier, Clinician at the shops says the project has given participants a chance to work as a team and learn valuable skills they can use at home as it pertains to gardening and outdoor safety. The Council is working to secure more funding to assist with future community garden projects.



Clinician Cathy Manier and garden produce

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VARC&DC

Virginia Association of Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Councils 2007 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:

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

Applicant Area:

South Hampton Roads

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Protecting Streambanks in Southwest Virginia

When the New River-Highlands RC&D obtained \$300,000 in grants to help restore streambanks, they found that localities needed help with planning and design of these projects. To get things moving, the RC&D provided training for 80 state, federal and local resource professionals, as well as environmental and engineering consultants. As a result, a number of sites have now been designed and are awaiting construction.



Engineers receive planning and design training

The projects involve installing structures in the stream to deflect water away from the streambanks. These techniques are usually more cost-effective than installing rock riprap or armoring the banks. The structures reduce erosion on the streambank; sediment within the streams; loss of property, including farmland, cropland, and woodland; and in some places may even be used to protect homes. A total of 80 people attended all or part of the workshop. Feedback from the session was very positive and a number of people have requested to be included in future training. The workshop generated about \$3500 which will be used to fund additional streambank restoration workshops.

Promoting Tourism on the Eastern Shore

The Eastern Shore RC&D worked with the local Tourism Commission to introduce a new marketing initiative called the Lure of the Shore Passport. The idea is to draw visitors to the shore throughout the year, not just during the fall birding festival. The passport promotes special weekends at Bed & Breakfasts, fishing excursions, music and art classes, or a working trip with a Tangier waterman. The Tourism Commission offers a changing menu of promotions that are advertised on their website www.lureoftheshore.com and featured in regional travel articles and lifestyle magazines.

Every Lure of the Shore passport contains the Eastern Shore RC&D logo, which means the Council gets to promote economic activity and itself in a wonderful partnership of shared vision. The promotion is designed to provide hard numbers on its impact as each venue tracks the guests who claim their Passport discounts.

Close to 700 passports have already been distributed. Donna Bozza, Director of Tourism, says, "To successfully maintain and grow low-impact tourism, there needs to be local buy-in to the concept. The Lure of the Shore Passports reinforce community pride in the Eastern Shore cultural and natural heritage. When local people understand that money can be made by protecting the Shore's pristine environment, they are more apt to protect the environment from increasing development."



The finished product ready for sale!

Improving Water Quality in the Big Sandy River Basin

Changing the “conservation landscape” is one way **Black Diamond RC&D** makes things happen in “far” Southwest Virginia. When their nonprofit began operating in 1992, very little was being done to improve water quality within Virginia’s portion of the Big Sandy River Basin (Buchanan & Dickenson counties as well as parts of Wise & Tazewell counties). The RC&D led efforts to form the Big Sandy River Basin Coalition (BSRBC) in 2001, a tri-state nonprofit organization representing portions of Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia.

Next, the RC&D began working in 2002 to coordinate BSRBC efforts in gaining formal interstate recognition. ORSANCO, the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (formed by Congress in 1948), agreed in 2005 to begin working in the Big Sandy Basin as a pilot project to learn how they could work within their interstate tributaries.

Through ORSANCO’s valuable assistance, Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia signed the Big Sandy Interstate Water Quality Agreement on October 25, 2007, at the Breaks Interstate Park. Black Diamond RC&D facilitated this historic, multi-year process. In early 2008, ORSANCO will coordinate a meeting of the three states to begin designing an implementation plan for this agreement. ORSANCO has the potential to become the “Chesapeake Bay Commission” for the Big Sandy, New and Upper Tennessee river basins within Virginia.



Back left to right: Alan Victory, ORSANCO, Ted Withrow (WV), Carl Mullins (WV), Tom Vierheller (KY), Stuart Bruny, ORSANCO, L. Preston Bryant (VA), Bill Brannon (WV) Front: Carolyn Baker (VA)



“Alive By the James”

Old Dominion RC&D assisted with “Alive By the James,” a watershed experience geared toward Virginia’s youth. The week long camp was held at James River State Park, Virginia’s newest state park. Campers stayed in newly constructed cabins overlooking the James River and were immersed in environmental education specifically related to the James River Watershed and the Chesapeake Bay.

The camp was aimed at renewing a sense of environmental stewardship and an interest in a career related to natural resources. Studies included water quality, soils, land use and forestry. The campers learned to work together to protect natural resources and engaged in hands-on activities, including a stream bank restoration project.

Thirteen different agencies partnered in planning and conducting the camp. Funds were provided by Cooperative Extension and contributions from local businesses. The high school students were selected for the camp based on recommendations from their science teachers. Participants were required to share their camp experiences in a presentation to fellow students, an article in their local newspaper or a presentation to the County Board of Supervisors. Sponsors are already planning the 2008 camp.

Top: Students view topo maps of the area
Bottom: Seining for macroinvertebrates which are indicators of water quality



Farmer and Small Producer Biodiesel Workshop

The **South Centré Corridors RC&D** sponsored a Biodiesel Workshop in Dinwiddie County. The purpose of the workshop was to educate farmers and other potential users about the many benefits that biodiesel provides.

Sixty people went back to their communities with information and new ideas about whether biodiesel could work in their area. The program agenda consisted of topics explaining what biodiesel is, how to make it safely, how to make it legally, oilseed crops and markets and how to transition to biodiesel fleets. The South Centré Corridors RC&D Council partnered with Virginia Clean Cities and Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy to conduct the workshop.



Biodiesel digester



DOF Forester John Wright shows how to apply herbicides.

Helping Communities Control Invasive Species

Enthusiastic presentations inspired more than 50 people to work toward eliminating “killer trees” and other common urban invasives in two free invasive species workshops offered by the **Shenandoah RC&D** Forestry Committee. The workshops were held in Harrisonburg and Woodstock.



Invasive “Tree of Heaven”

John Wright with the Virginia Department of Forestry, the featured speaker, discussed the problem of invasives and how to treat them. In the afternoon he did a hands-on demonstration on invasive species identification and control at a local park. The workshops were aimed at staff in city and county parks and recreation departments, and public works departments, as well as grounds managers of resort properties and college or university properties.

Invasive trees and shrubs displace native plants and are costly and difficult to control once they become established. It is important to make sure that appropriate trees and shrubs are planted and managed to maximize the value of public spaces and ensure they do not become a refuge for invasive species.

After the workshop Jared Stoltzfus, Stream Health Coordinator in Harrisonburg, said “ The response I felt from the city employees was that controlling some of our worst invasives looked a whole lot easier than what we expected. Just a couple drops in the hatchet marks to take down a rather large Tree of Heaven was impressive. I’m working on my applicators license, and I think several others that attended the workshop already had it. Knowing how to approach the problem, I think there’s a little more desire to do so.” In addition, Joe Lehen from DOF says the Town of Woodstock is planning to start an invasive control program on one of its town properties.