

Virginia Association of RC&D Councils

Stabilizing Streambanks Provides Multiple Benefits

In Southwest Virginia eroding streambanks are causing loss of property and increasing sediment deposits in local waterways. To help landowners address this problem, the New River Highlands RC&D completed six streambank stabilization demonstration projects using \$100,000 from a WQIA grant, \$100,000 from the Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries and \$80,000 in technical assistance from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.



Streambank stabilization on Joe Cook's property

NRCS, state, federal and local agencies and consulting engineers participated in the project. Installed structures included gabion baskets, rock riprap, cross vanes and vegetation. On three sites, erosion was threatening homes by destroying two to six feet of land per year. Grazing land was being lost on other sites. Installing these structures reduced sediment in streams, and loss of property. This will keep more than one thousand tons of soil from washing into streams each year.

Keeping Children Safe on the Farm



Teaching about chainsaw safety

Farming has one of the highest rates of accidents of any occupation. Old Dominion RC&D partnered with Cooperative Extension, Halifax Soil & Water Conservation District and the Farm Bureau Ladies Auxiliary to host an Agricultural Safety Day. The RC&D Council applied to a national program which provided training for a coordinator, T-shirts promoting Farm Safety, and liability insurance for the event.

Eighty students from the Halifax Middle School agriculture class participated in the event. They learned about tractor safety, ATV safety, home alone, firearm safety, animal safety, safe food handling, lawn equipment safety, First Aid, water safety, chainsaw safety and electrical and fire safety. The total cost for conducting the event

was estimated at about \$11,000. Over 85 percent of the \$11,000 cost came from in-kind services including donated equipment and free instruction from volunteers from agencies and agricultural companies. The benefits of the training are immeasurable if it saves a young person's life.

Promoting Watershed Awareness



Wetlands help protect the Chesapeake Bay

South Hampton Roads RC&D hosted a Watershed Awareness Workshop to educate landowners about the Albemarle, Chowan and Chesapeake Bay watersheds and the easement programs, tax credits and land preservation tools available. The target audience was rural landowners within the South Hampton Roads area. A total of 51 participants attended and positive feedback was gained from the evaluations. Many asked to be advised of future RC&D projects.

The Albemarle-Chowan Watershed Roundtable provided a \$500 grant for the event. The Council partnered with the USDA-NRCS, USDA-FSA, VA Cooperative Extension, the City of Virginia Beach, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and Ducks Unlimited. Many of these agencies and organizations donated their services as expert speakers bringing the total value of the project to over \$2200.

Virginia's Resource Conservation and Development Councils receive technical assistance from the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. They are equal opportunity employers and providers.

RC&D Awards presented in April 2008 honored the following:

- Outstanding RC&D Council - Eastern Shore RC&D
- Outstanding RC&D Council Member - Joan Comanor, Shenandoah RC&D
- Exemplary RC&D Assistance - Robert Whitescarver, NRCS
- Outstanding Supporting Organization - Gloucester County Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Tourism
- Outstanding Performance by RC&D Staff Member - David Reichert
- RC&D Outstanding Project - Big Sandy River Interstate Agreement, Black Diamond RC&D
- Virginia RC&D Hall of Fame, Jeff Neal, Black Diamond RC&D



VARC&DC

Virginia Association of Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Councils 2008 Annual Report

Creating jobs, protecting resources, and providing opportunities through education

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

CONTACT

Jay Hubble, Chair
New River Highlands RC&D
100 USDA Drive, Suite F
Wytheville, VA 24382

PH: (276) 228-2879
FAX: (276) 228-4382



Bicycling produce to local markets



Preparing soil for planting



Picking fresh produce from the garden

Growing Power! Produces Food and Jobs

The Shenandoah RC&D's *Growing Power!* Project spawned several new initiatives in 2008. It assisted low-income families in growing their own food in their own neighborhoods, including Hispanic residents in trailer courts. The Urban Garden project employed low-income and homeless individuals in growing organic produce at an urban sustainable living site in Harrisonburg, VA.

Growing Power! created one new business. The Muddy Bike Urban Garden project hires homeless men and women to grow and sell produce. Some of the produce is sold at the Harrisonburg Farmers Market and some is sold directly to Harrisonburg's Ethiopian Blue Nile restaurant. The produce is transported by bicycle to reduce carbon emissions.

During the 2008 gardening season, five individuals were trained in small scale organic gardening. They gained skills in soil and garden bed preparation, planting and transplanting, soil fertility, insect and weed control, low water use techniques, marketing and interpersonal skills. Workers received monetary compensation, job references, informal counseling and the benefits of working in a calm and supportive environment. Participants used earned income to save up money for an apartment and to purchase basic material needs. One homeless woman who found full time work by the end of the season still came to volunteer daily to work in the garden.

Workers also helped start a garden in a low income trailer court in Harrisonburg. They not only received services and gained skills, they also helped serve others in need creating a double benefit. Individuals of all ages joined in the community garden at the trailer court. Each family from the trailer court had two garden beds where they grew and harvested vegetables. They estimated a savings of \$500 on grocery bills for the season for each family. A service learning program was incorporated for seventh graders from the Eastern Mennonite School where they came weekly to work in the gardens with the community.

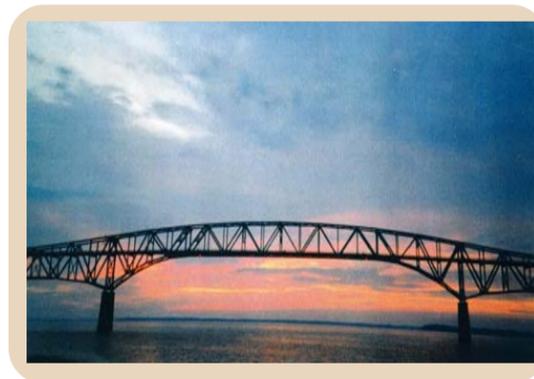
In addition to using grant funds to run these programs, community volunteers and assistance through the court system from men on probation greatly supported the work. The value of this volunteer labor for both programs was estimated at about \$9,500.

Promoting Infrastructure and Tourism

Tidewater RC&D brought together community leaders from both sides of the Rappahannock River for a year long celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Robert O. Norris Bridge. When the two mile long bridge opened in 1958, it allowed residents and visitors to cross the river on a regular basis for the first time. The RC&D project was aimed at educating people about the economic impact of the bridge and to focus attention on the need for either major maintenance work or a total replacement of the bridge.

Throughout 2008, volunteers and partners assisted with activities to highlight the bridge's importance including oral history presentations, three television programs, traveling educational exhibits, production and sale of four historical DVDs, numerous magazine and newspaper articles and the first annual Bridge Fest designed to attract tourists to the area.

Donations and grants totaling \$41,000 funded the project. Major partners included citizen leaders, Whitestone, Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission, the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck Tourism Councils, Mary Ball Washington Museum, Middlesex Museum, Business Association of White Stone, Virginia Department of Transportation, Kilmarnock and the Rappahannock Record.



Robert O. Norris Bridge

Helping Schools Meet State Learning Standards

South Centré Corridors RC&D Council sponsored an Educator & Youth Mini-Grant Program throughout the entire project area. Fourteen schools participated in ten projects. Students in grades K-12 and alternative schools participated in activities such as a youth farm day, field trips, water quality monitoring, after school 4-H programs, and outdoor gardening projects. The program benefited over 3,300 youth by increasing their knowledge of the environment and natural resources. All grant projects assisted teachers with addressing state learning standards.

The RC&D Council allocated \$3,000 to match a \$3,000 grant from Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation's South Rivers Mini-Grant Program. The grants provided financial assistance to area schools and Soil & Water Conservation Districts to educate youth about natural resources and the environment. The total project value of \$23,490 equaled a ratio of nine to one for local to federal dollars spent.



Tree planting at Patrick Copeland School.

RC&D Conference Boosts Local Economy

About 350 RC&D community leaders from nine states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands attended a four-day conference in Wytheville. In addition to developing strategies to address regional conservation issues, participants toured four RC&D projects to see on-the-ground approaches to increasing economic opportunities and conservation measures. The tours showcased a wood pellet plant in Galax, use of small scale timber harvesting equipment in Grayson County, grazing management practices in Pulaski County, and a stream restoration project in Montgomery County. The conference hosted by the Virginia Association of RC&D Councils generated about \$250,000 for the local economy.



Participants see how wood pellets are made.

Protecting Habitat, Water Quality and Property Values with Living Shorelines

The Eastern Shore of Virginia has more shoreline than any other two counties in the state. Shoreline erosion increases sediment in creeks and is a problem for shellfish. Landowners unaware of other options often construct hard structures such as rock or bulkheads to protect their land. These structural barriers which "harden" the shoreline destroy habitat and disrupt the natural processes of intertidal marsh. The Eastern Shore RC&D secured a grant to educate landowners about using vegetation and other natural materials to create "living shorelines."

The *Living Shorelines for Occohannock Creek* project provided landowners with information about techniques to slow down shoreline loss while protecting valuable habitat. A National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant of \$35,000 was matched with state and local funds. As part of the project the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) studied the area and developed a report with maps showing the ideal locations for establishing living shorelines along 10,500 feet of shoreline. The report was presented by VIMS scientist, Scott Hardaway, to local wetlands boards and Occohannock Creek landowners at two special meetings.

Landowners who adopt these techniques will expand and preserve intertidal marsh that filters sediment and reduces nutrient loads to Occohannock Creek. Up to 112 acres of marshland could benefit from private landowner actions encouraged by this project.



VIMS map is shown at public meeting.

Strengthening Efforts to Clean Up Illegal Dumpsites

Illegal dumpsites deter economic development and cost communities thousands of dollars for cleanup. Now, an on-going initiative by nine Southwest Virginia counties and two cities are helping communities clean up litter and trash dumps. It began in 2004 when the communities united at an RC&D Litter Summit to address the problem. In 2007, they set up Keep Southwest Virginia Beautiful. The group has been nationally recognized for cleaning up hundreds of dumpsites. However, lack of enforcement tools hampered efforts to prosecute offenders.

Between 2004 and 2005, an ad hoc RC&D Litter Task Force worked with Wise County to develop the Civil Damages Ordinance. This ordinance allows a local government to bring litterers to civil court rather than criminal court where it is easier to obtain convictions and to impose stiffer fines of up to \$5,000 per offense. Using this ordinance, Wise County usually obtains fines of \$1,000 to \$3,000 per conviction. Wise County's Litter Control Department receives the payments from these fines to help offset local funding to support their three litter control officers. Wise County has a 100 percent conviction rate thus far in civil court using this ordinance!

In 2008, the RC&D assisted Buchanan and Dickenson counties to adopt the Civil Damages Ordinance, which should significantly enhance efforts there. Changing cultural traditions to dump illegally and trash the roadsides will take decades, but now "far" Southwest Virginia has an effective tool to get litterers' attention. In 2009, the RC&D will work with Lee, Scott and Russell counties to encourage them to adopt the Civil Damages Ordinance.



Richard Lee, Buchanan County Litter Control Officer, gathers evidence to prosecute an illegal dumper in civil court.