

PIEDMONT SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN JULY 2017- JUNE 2021

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Mission

The Mission of the Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District is to identify and provide technical, educational and financial resources to the citizens of Prince Edward, Nottoway and Amelia Counties in order to promote the wise use and conservation of soil, water and related resources.

Vision

The Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District envisions a productive community committed to the stewardship of our natural resources.

The Piedmont Soil & Water Conservation District's four year Strategic Plan represents overall goals and objectives the District will pursue over the next four years and will guide the District through the preparation of its Annual Plans of Work July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2021.

Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District Strategic Plan July 1, 2017-June 30, 2021

Introduction

The Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District (the District) is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia and is responsible under state law to carry out natural resource stewardship. Organized in 1939, the District has delivered voluntary, locally led conservation solutions to natural resource concerns for over 75 years. The District originally included Amelia, Dinwiddie, Nottoway, Powhatan and Prince Edward Counties, but in the early 1950s it was reorganized to include the three counties it serves today - Amelia, Nottoway and Prince Edward.

The District includes an area of 663,680 acres and is located in the Southern Piedmont Region of Virginia. It is bounded on the North by the Appomattox River, part of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, and bounded on the South by the Nottoway River, part of the Southern Rivers Watershed. The District is rural and historically agricultural with a majority of the land in woodland and small farms. The main industries are timber, cattle and poultry, with a growing “local foods” cottage industry.

The Board of Directors is the governing body of the District, consisting of eight members: six directors, two from each county, elected every four years in the general election; one appointed by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Board, and one appointed as a representative of the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service within the District. The Board meets every fourth Tuesday at 11:00 am in the Prince Edward Agriculture and Natural Resources Building located on 100 Dominion Drive, Farmville, Virginia. The District office is located in the same building with normal business hours of Monday thru Friday 8:00-4:30.

The District administers the majority of its programs with funding through the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation-Division of Soil and Water, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality 319 TMDL, and from funding from the three locality governments. The equipment rental program is self-supporting. Other funds are generated through grants and donations by individuals and businesses.

District programs include:

- Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS)
- TMDL – Chesapeake Bay Watershed Improvement Program (WIP)
- Agricultural conservation planning and technical assistance
- Resource Management Plan Program
- Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)
- DEQ 319 Residential Septic Grants
- Compliance with DCR Dam Safety Regulations for 14 watershed dams
- Virginia’s Agricultural Stewardship Act
- Youth and adult conservation education program
- No-till equipment rental
- Conservation awards
- Website, newsletter, radio spot and other media outreach

The District operates as a gateway to local and national conservation resources by working in close partnership with many governmental and non-governmental agencies and individuals. This network of partnerships makes it possible to streamline the process of accessing available resources for citizens.

Goal 1- Implement natural resource conservation programs by involving agricultural and non-agricultural citizens.

Objective 1 – Administer and promote agriculture conservation programs that protect soil health, water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitat.

Strategy A – Recruit participants for agricultural cost-share programs.

Strategy B – Provide conservation planning to land owners to address natural resource concerns.

Strategy C – Provide technical assistance to help producers implement best management practices.

Strategy D – Provide and maintain no-till rental equipment to encourage participation in conservation practices. Research other conservation equipment to include in the equipment rental program.

Annual Plan of Work / Measurements

1. Report to Board each month the numbers and type of client assistance.
2. Recruit 4 new participants in agricultural cost-share programs each year.
3. Recruit 5 new participants in no till drill program each year.
4. Analyze agriculture land use data and set goals for WIP III planning 2020-2025.

Objective 2 – Implement urban/residential non-point source pollution reduction programs.

Strategy A – Promote voluntary, incentive-based programs through the DEQ 319(h) residential septic grant program and Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP).

Strategy B – Utilize appropriate partners to assist with stormwater management program participation.

Strategy C – Report to locality any Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) target pollution load reductions created by practice installation.

Annual Plan of Work / Measurements

1. Allocate 100% of residential septic cost-share funds.
2. Contact Flat/Nibbs and Prince Edward TMDL septic grant clients five years after their pump out or repair to remind them to pump their tanks again per Virginia Department of Health maintenance suggestion.
3. Involve at least 10 clients through VCAP.

Objective 3 – Raise public awareness of conservation efforts in the community.

Strategy A – Recognize outstanding conservation efforts through the District’s conservation awards program.

Strategy B – Provide signage to recognize participation in conservation programs.

Strategy C – Identify & utilize best avenues to promote different messages to different audiences (Website, Facebook, You Tube, newsletters, exhibits, press releases, radio spots and others) and develop an outreach/marketing calendar for various media and messages.

Strategy D – Produce appropriate and timely public presentation materials.

Strategy E – Utilize new logo.

Annual Plan or Work/Measurements

1. Hold an annual conservation awards banquet.
2. Distribute 5 signs (cover crops, stream exclusion and VCAP) annually to successful projects/participants.
3. Submit one conservation related article per month to local newspapers.
4. Train staff on use of video production.
5. Update Ag Cost Share program brochures.

Goal 2 – Implement youth and adult natural resource conservation education programs.

Objective 1 – Administer existing conservation education programs.

Strategy A – Administer and promote District Envirothon, Youth Conservation Camp, conservation poster contest, agricultural awareness days, and classroom presentations.

Strategy B – Work cooperatively with partners to host an annual summer day camp for youth.

Strategy C – Provide scholarships to students committed to studying natural resource conservation, water quality, or agricultural issues.

Annual Plan of Work / Measurements

1. Present 10 classroom programs each year.
2. Award 3 high education scholarships annually.
3. Sponsor 2 Youth Conservation Camp scholarships annually.

Objective 2 – Expand environmental education opportunities.

Strategy A – Develop a long-range youth education plan that reflects existing and new programs, budget information, and training needs to achieve the plan.

Strategy B – Plan and administer Meaningful Watershed Education Experiences (MWEE's) in local schools.

Strategy C – Utilize new partners in natural resource education.

Annual Plan of Work / Measurements

1. Complete the long-range youth education plan by December 31, 2017.
2. Conduct 2 MWEEs.

Objective 3 – Develop adult conservation education programming.

Strategy A -Support targeted meetings and events with farmers to promote programs and services.

Strategy B – Provide stormwater management education opportunities to residential homeowners, businesses and localities.

Strategy C – Continue education efforts in conjunction with residential septic program.

Annual Plan of Work/Measurements

1. Host 2 farm tours and/or workshops for farmers.
2. Sponsor 2 VCAP workshops (one for contractors and one for homeowners).
3. Organize 1 residential septic workshop.

Goal 3 – Increase the number and quality of natural resource partnerships.

Objective 1 – Engage with local and state governmental agencies and other conservation organizations to influence public policy and funding in the promotion of natural resource conservation and to communicate District’s value to the community.

Strategy A – Provide localities and local planning commissions with educational resources, meeting minutes, newsletters, annual reports, and other relevant conservation-related information.

Strategy B – Attend local Boards of Supervisors meetings and/or provide them with a semi-annual summary of District services performed in each locality.

Strategy C – Provide Directors and Associate Directors with appropriate knowledge to communicate with their local governing bodies and other partner alliances.

Strategy D – Strengthen legislative involvement by Directors.

Annual Plan of Work/Measurement

1. Prepare a semi-annual packet of information on District activities for Boards of Supervisors.
2. Identify 3 Directors to serve on VASWCD legislative committee (one from each locality).
3. Develop locality specific talking points for Directors.

Objective 2 – Maintain and expand stakeholder and partnership alliances to support District’s mission and goals.

Strategy A – Update partners on District activities and support common partner goals including communication of training opportunities and maintain website links.

Strategy B – Support networking of Directors and Staff. Encourage attendance and participation at VASWCD, VACDE and other partner agency/organization workshops, events, committees and meetings.

Strategy C – Identify and contact new potential partners that share the natural resource conservation mission. (Master Naturalists, Chamber of Commerce, local conservation organizations, realtors, etc.)

Strategy D – Research and submit grant funding opportunities.

1. Host a local natural resource networking event and invite new potential partners.
2. Provide resources for a grant data base search.
3. At least 2 Directors will attend either the VASWCD Annual meeting or Summer training.

Goal 4 – Manage the 14 dams in compliance with the Virginia Dam Safety Act

Objective 1 - Perform annual inspections, maintenance, EAP updates and record keeping of dams in a timely manner.

Strategy A—Annually review Emergency Action Plans.

Strategy B – Inform landowners of upcoming maintenance and site inspections.

Strategy C – Inform USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service and Prince Edward County about inspections, maintenance and other dam related issues.

Strategy D- Address current deficiencies with funding provided.

Objective 2 –Involve partners in Emergency Action Planning, updates and other requirements to maintain public safety.

Strategy A – Provide inspection reports, EAP updates, and maintenance needs to Prince Edward County.

Strategy B – Support Prince Edward County to use information from dam inundation studies as part of their comprehensive plan.

Strategy C – Coordinate with Prince Edward County Emergency Services Coordinator to generate an Emergency Action Plan Table Top Exercise and annual emergency drills.

Strategy D – Utilize DCR Dam Safety Engineer and NRCS Engineering staff to provide technical guidance and assistance in addressing small maintenance projects such as gate replacement, filter drains and other items identified thru inspections.

Strategy E – Develop long term maintenance plan for dam structures, especially those that have reached their lifespan.

Annual Plan of Work/Measurements

1. Meet with PE County Planner to assess GIS capabilities in identifying tax parcels located in DBIZ.
2. Complete a long term maintenance plan by 12/31/17.

Objective 3 – Inform landowners, realtors and developers involved with land surrounding dams of the ramifications of the Virginia Dam Safety Act and the role of the Piedmont SWCD

Strategy A – Communicate to persons and businesses involved with the land surrounding the dams of sound land use practices that protect water quality of lake and downstream watershed.

Annual Plan of Work/Measurements

1. Host a dam owners meeting to discuss relevant issues.
2. Present information to local realtors.

Goal 5 – Keep Directors and Staff informed, engaged and connected.

Objective 1 – Provide ongoing training (including in the field) to enable Directors to promote District activities within their localities and to further develop understanding of programs.

Strategy A – Develop 5 minute elevator speech for each Director.

Objective 2 – Recruit new Associate Directors.

Strategy A – Identify and engage potential conservation minded citizens.

Objective 3 – Ensure staff are well-informed about all programs and projects to provide a team approach and program continuity.

Strategy A – Promote cross-training for core programs.

Strategy B – Research technology tools to assist staff with program implementation.

Annual Plan of Work/Measurements

1. Hold quarterly staff training workshops that highlight a specific program.
2. Hold quarterly director training sessions as part of monthly board meetings.

The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Piedmont SWCD through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Strategic Planning Process

The Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District began the 2017-2021 strategic planning process in December 2016 by drafting two surveys, both in print format and Google Forms electronic format. One set of surveys was sent to stakeholders, including program participants and locality/government representatives, and one was sent to natural resource conservation partner agencies. The electronic survey link was posted on the District website and Facebook page to attempt to capture the feedback of citizens who were not on the District mailing list.

The surveys were mailed to stakeholders in early February 2017. Of the 280 surveys mailed to participants and representatives, there was a 39% return rate; 75-100 partner agency surveys were emailed with a 25-30% return rate. Some participants who received the survey via mail chose to take the survey using the Google Forms link provided on the paper survey. The following trends were noticed among the survey results:

- A. Only 10% of respondents were in the 18-34 year-old age range, indicating that the District needs to better engage the young adult population.
- B. Agricultural sustainability, environmental education, land preservation, soil erosion/soil health, and water quality ranked as the top five environmental concerns. These responses reflect the demographics of the respondents, 49% of whom were agricultural producers and 85% of whom were landowners.
- C. Of the environmental concerns not traditionally addressed by the District, recycling opportunities and energy efficiency ranked highly, therefore presenting potential new programs for the District.
- D. Direct mailing and electronic mailing were the preferred methods of receiving news and announcements, ranking 56% and 44% respectively.
- E. The most common feedback suggestion was that the District do more outreach and better advertise programs and services.

Once the survey results were compiled and analyzed, the District utilized a professional facilitator to guide discussion at the March 2017 Board of Directors meeting. Board members, staff and partners split into small groups to review the previous strategic plan goals and then presented their edits and suggestions to the entire group. After the discussion, the facilitator created a draft copy of the strategic plan based on the group's feedback. During the April 2017 staff meeting, staff members edited the draft plan in preparation for presentation at the May Board of Directors meeting.