

**PIEDMONT SOIL & WATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
JULY 2022- JUNE 2026**

*Approved 06/21/2022*



**Mission Statement**

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

**Vision Statement**

The Piedmont Soil & Water Conservation District envisions Amelia, Nottoway and Prince Edward counties as areas committed to stewardship of its soil health and water quality.

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, 2022 – June 30, 2026.

# **Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District Strategic Plan July 1, 2022-June 30, 2026**

## **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 District conservation programs to improve soil conservation and water quality.**

**Objective One:** Administer and promote the VA Agriculture Cost Share Program (VACS)

Strategy 1: Provide technical assistance and conservation planning

Strategy 2: Reinstitute natural resource agency partner meetings for the agriculture community

Strategy 3: Support NRCS and other partners on soil health initiatives

Strategy 4: Utilize appropriate marketing strategies to promote programs

**Objective Two:** Administer and promote the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

Strategy 1: Develop a marketing and education program targeting homeowners

Strategy 2: Focus on more 'urban' areas of the District including Town of Farmville, Blackstone and Amelia Courthouse residents and businesses

**Objective Three:** Continue to administer and evaluate the no-till drill rental program

Strategy 1: Send out survey cards to drill users to determine program feasibility

Strategy 2: Promote the use of the warm season grass drill

**Objective Four:** Administer and promote the septic assistance program in TMDL Implementation Plan eligible areas

Strategy 1: Reach households by utilizing direct mailing of postcards

Strategy 2: Target low-income households using partners such as Southeast Rural Community Assistance Program and local social services

### **Annual Plan of Work/Measurements**

- Develop a draft two-year VCAP marketing plan by January 31, 2023
- Hold a VCAP workshop for Farmville homeowners by January 1, 2024
- Hold, at a minimum, one agency partner meeting annually (*Agricultural/Forestry/VCE partners*)
- Participate and/or sponsor an agricultural education program for landowners
- Involve at least 20 clients through VCAP

## **Goal 2: Implement environmental and natural resource conservation educational programs for youth and adults**

**Objective One:** Plan and conduct educational conservation programs and activities for adults and families

Strategy 1: Assist with community events such as Earth Day, county fairs, library programs, state park programs and other appropriate events

Strategy 2: Conduct educational programs focused on the agriculture community utilizing videos, social media, and other technology

Strategy 3: Partner with VA Cooperative Extension on an annual agriculture conservation program.

**Objective Two:** Continue to offer existing core youth natural resource programs: Envirothon, Youth Conservation Camp, Scholarships, Classroom programs and Poster Contest

Strategy 1: Promote programs using mail, email, website, social media, and flyers

**Objective Three:** Develop and expand additional environmental education opportunities for youth

Strategy 1: Develop a monthly conservation theme for schools including a calendar, journey boxes and lesson ideas

Strategy 2: Initiate meaningful watershed experiences (MWEE) to PreK-12 students

Strategy 3: Support outdoor classroom development on local school grounds

#### Annual Plan of Work/Measurements

- Conduct two MWEE programs in local schools and/ or to homeschool groups
- Award 3 higher education scholarships annually
- Sponsor 2 YCC scholarships annually

#### Goal 3: Increase public awareness of PSWCD

**Objective One:** Utilize programs and other opportunities to increase citizen awareness.

Strategy 1: Share and advertise upcoming programs and opportunities through all media outlets

Strategy 2: Recognize individuals or groups through a conservation awards program for their 'outstanding conservation' implementation or education

**Objective Two:** Better utilize social media platforms to inform the public on District activities

Strategy 1: Develop social media guidance protocol

Strategy 2: Utilize videos and photos to share District work and feature current and relevant conservation activities

**Objective Three:** Engage underserved communities

Strategy 1: Work with VA State University (VSU) in the small farmer outreach program

Strategy 2: Identify and develop specific outreach efforts to identified underserved sectors

**Objective Four:** Continue to utilize traditional information pathways

Strategy 1: Produce appropriate and timely program brochures

Strategy 2: Provide signage to recognize participation in conservation programs

#### Annual Plan of Work/Measurements

- Develop a plan to increase citizen awareness by December 31, 2022
- Develop social media guidance protocol by December 31, 2022

## **Goal 4: Manage District dams in accordance with the Virginia Dam Safety Act**

**Objective One:** Conduct owner inspections and maintain data in the Dam Safety Inventory System (DSIS)

Strategy 1: Address any identified deficiencies with funding provided

Strategy 2: Review and update records in DSIS

Strategy 3: Update long-term maintenance plan for dam structures, especially those that are 50+ years old

**Objective Two:** Provide education to surrounding dam landowners, developers, realtors, emergency service personnel and Prince Edward County administration office.

Strategy 1: Conduct a landowner meeting with surrounding dam landowners

Strategy 2: Prepare information for local realtors

Strategy 3: Support Prince Edward County to utilize information from dam inundation studies as part of their comprehensive plan

**Objective Three:** Maintain emergency action plans and required emergency planning drills/tabletop planning exercises

Strategy 1: Implement remote monitoring technology

Strategy 2: Keep Prince Edward county and the Town of Farmville emergency services informed by providing emergency action plan information updates

**Objective Four:** Solicit for technical assistance funding

Strategy 1: Work with the statewide District Dam working group to advocate for technical assistance funding

Strategy 2: Actively educate state legislators and Prince Edward County leaders on the importance of funding to maintain dams to ensure public safety

### **Annual Plan of Work/Measurements**

- Update a long-term dam maintenance plan by January 1, 2023
- Conduct an annual emergency action plan drill including Prince Edward County and the Town of Farmville
- Communicate the importance of District dams and technical assistance funding needs to state legislators and Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors by January 1, 2025

## **Goal 5: Implement staff and Board development opportunities**

**Objective One:** Provide staff with developmental opportunities

Strategy 1: Working with the VASWCD, review career and leadership opportunities and benefits to encourage long-term employment

Strategy 2: Review/Update staff training plans on an annual basis

Strategy 3: Develop staff transition planning document

Strategy 4: Develop a cross-training plan for core programs

## **Objective Two:** Implement Board development activities

Strategy 1: Recruit for more Board diversity as openings occur

Strategy 2: Develop an “elevator” speech for District programs and functions

Strategy 3: Provide regular overview of programs to Board members to increase their knowledge of District programs

Strategy 4: Educate board and staff on recent technologies and impacts on conservation (solar, wind, drones, etc)

### Annual Plan of Work/Measurements

- Develop a staff and cross-training document by December 31, 2022
- Educate the Board on solar technologies by June 1, 2023
- Hold quarterly district training sessions as part of board meetings

## **GOAL 6: Strengthen and expand natural resource and educational partnerships**

**Objective One:** Increase engagement and support with local government partners including planning commissions

Strategy 1: Increase SWCD attendance at local Board of Supervisor meetings

Strategy 2: Develop a solar facility siting information package for localities and local planning commissions.

**Objective Two:** Re-engage with traditional partners (post covid)

Strategy 1: Update partners on District activities and upcoming programs, deadlines, and events

Strategy 2: Collaborate with partners on complimentary programs

**Objective Three:** Explore and grow non-traditional partnerships

Strategy 1: Foster relationships with Longwood University and Hampden-Sydney to use both natural resources and education students in a volunteer and teaching framework.

Strategy 2: Identify and contact potential partners that share the natural resource mission with a focus on local partners.

### Annual Plan of Work/Measurements

- Contact appropriate Longwood University and Hampden-Sydney College faculty with regards to student volunteer assistance by March 1, 2023.
- Directors attend two Board of Supervisor meetings annually per county

## 2022 Strategic Planning Process

The Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District (PSWCD) conducted a strategic planning process for the next state-mandated planning cycle, which encompasses program years 2023-2026. An outside consultant, TogetherWorks!, was hired to facilitate the planning process and provide an updated strategic plan. An electronic survey and phone interview process were conducted during February and March 2022 to gather information from stakeholders. Fifteen phone interviews were completed out of a possible 23 candidates. A total of 43 surveys out of 57 responses for a return rate of 81%. Three surveys were returned by regular mail for a total of 46 responses to the survey request. Interviewees included participants in various PSWCD programs including VA agriculture cost share program, septic assistance grants, equipment rental, education programs and representatives of partnering agencies including local government leaders. The following areas were identified as areas where the PSWCD can expand or improve its services:

- Increase public outreach and utilize more social media
- Increase staff salaries to minimize turnoff and disruption
- Increase work efforts in an urbanizing Farmville
- Develop a solar facility siting informational packet for local governments
- Increase diversity of the Board to reflect the communities served
- Increase staff or volunteers to assist with the dam safety program

The PSWCD Board of Directors, staff and key partners participated in a strategic planning retreat in March 2022 that further expanded discussion of areas where improvement or changes were needed. The updated Strategic Plan for program years 2023-2026 reflects input from the surveys, interviews, and discussions.

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