

Rush River, Hughes River, and Hazel River TMDL Implementation Plan Development

Agricultural Working Group November 18, 2008 Meeting Summary

Group Membership

The following individuals were present at the meeting: Bev Hunter, Bev Jones, Bob Slusser, Bryant Lee, Byron Petrauskas, David Massie, Debbie Cross, Don Lock, Greg Wichelns, Helen Dixon, James Henshaw, Jenn Allen, Jim Gannon, Joe Rossetti, Katie Conaway, Kaye Kohler, Melissa H. Allen, Mike Massie, Rick Kohler, Ron Frazier, and Vivian Yancey.

Meeting Topics and Discussion Summary

Brief review of the September meeting minutes was presented prompting questions regarding TMDL process and water quality issues in the state. Summary of discussion follows:

- It was stated that there are state-wide water quality issues especially for the Chesapeake Bay and unclear why the project is focused in Rappahannock County, when there are so many urbanization and runoff issues in Northern Virginia and around Richmond, Virginia.
- Population control was noted as the main environmental issue that needs to be addressed.
- It was stated that more trees, wildlife abundance, and lower pH of soil due to acid rain are the environmental changes in Rappahannock County over the last 40 years.
- Questions were raised as to the pollution extent of the streams; such as, the level sample concentrations were above the bacteria standard and comparison to other streams in Rappahannock and surrounding counties.
- Health risk associated with these streams was questioned. Several people indicated that swimming and drinking water in past occurred without adverse effects. Response included no knowledge of reported outbreaks in watersheds; however, illness can be falsely categorized as originating from another source because of similar symptoms (e.g., influenza).

A handout was distributed addressing:

1. Livestock Direct Deposition Bacteria Load
2. Pasture Bacteria Load
3. Cropland Bacteria Load
4. Milestones / Timeline
5. Priority / Targeting

Summary of discussion pertaining to the handout follows:

- Livestock exclusion fencing presented was for major streams only. Comments were made that all perennial streams need to be included in the analysis. Analysis evaluation using all perennial streams will be presented at the next Agricultural Working Group meeting.

- It was noted that fencing out livestock from the stream channels would also prevent wildlife access to the stream corridors.
- In higher elevations, lowland pasture areas along streams may be the only feasible area to raise livestock. Fencing this area and creating a 35-foot buffer would greatly diminish the land available to raise livestock for certain farmers.
- Concern was raised that a producer participating in cost-share programs may incur up-front expenses and not get reimbursed for several months. This would certainly be a deterrent especially in our current economy.
- Incentive payment for the proposed pasture management system was discussed. Incentive payment needs to cover labor, gas, harrow, etc. to ensure incentive is attractive to producer.
- It was noted that easements can be a good option; but, are not appropriate for everyone.
- Concern was raised whether converting agricultural land uses to buffers would compromise eligibility for agriculture land use status.
- Overall, group believed cropland acreage listed in TMDL report over-estimates actual area in watersheds. Generally, substantial manure collection from confined beef cows is not prevalent in these watersheds.