

Little Dark Run and Robinson River Water Quality Improvement Plan

AGRICULTURAL WORKING GROUP MEETING SUMMARY

June 15, 2010 at 8:00 PM (Madison County Volunteer Fire Company; Madison, VA)

Meeting Attendees

Dave Allen (Madison Co. BOS)	James Arrington (Madison Co. BOS)	Robert Bair (Citizen)	Evan Blumenstein (CSWCD)	O. Campbell (Citizen)
Sidney Coates (Citizen)	Katie Conaway (VADEQ)	Debbie Cross (VADCR)	Cynthia De Canio (Citizen)	Pete Elliot (Madison Co. BOS)
Lynn Graves (Citizen)	Waller Jenkins (Citizen)	Bill Jordan (Citizen)	Jennifer O'Reilly (VADEQ)	Byron Petrauskas (BRES)
Alan Spivey (Citizen)	Carl Stafford (VCE)	Tommy Utz (Citizen)	Tom Weaver (Citizen)	Frank Wilczek (Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy)
Spencer Yager (CSWCD)				

Meeting Summary

Byron Petrauskas with Blue Ridge Environmental Solutions, Inc. (BRES) led the facilitation at the Agricultural Working Group meeting. The attendees at the meeting received a factsheet that described the purpose of the agricultural working group. This group is to focus on ways to obtain the livestock bacteria load reductions that are required in the TMDLs. The group also received a handout with information and questions regarding best management practice (BMP) identification and implementation.

Agricultural Status in Watershed

Current operational status of producers was discussed. It was stated that primarily beef and dairy operations exist in these watersheds. There are no poultry facilities and confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) consist of dairy operations (four were listed in the TMDL). Beef populations listed in TMDL seemed high in the Upper Robinson and Little Dark Run watersheds, especially given the high human population in the Little Dark Run watershed. Talking with VCE, CSWCD, and investigating the latest agricultural census to determine if dairy farms and milking herd size have changed since the completion of the TMDL study was suggested. Attendees were unsure if sufficient waste storage facilities exist at the dairy operations. It was indicated that some beef operations were confining animals a portion of the year; therefore, a recommendation to include the "Animal Waste Control Facility (VA Agricultural Practice Number WP-4)" practice in the water quality improvement plan was made. It was also noted that sufficient land was available for producers to spread collected waste and sufficient exporting of manure was not prevalent in these watersheds. Majority of agricultural to residential landuse conversion has occurred on southern portion of watershed along Route 29

and Route 15 corridors. Shrinking pasture acres in the watershed was attributed to cropland conversion when corn prices increased. Options for land owners are limited in the county and most of the large farms have remained under the same owner.

BMP Identification

The group reviewed a list of best management practices (BMPs) that could address livestock with stream access and bacteria loads on pasture and cropland. Component costs for various livestock exclusion systems were analyzed. Fencing costs CSWCD are obtaining from contractors is ranging between \$3 - \$4 per foot for 5-strand barbed wire fencing and \$2 per foot for 2-strand poly-wire fencing. A watering trough cost range is \$1,800 - \$2,400. Approximately \$6,000 is charged to drill a groundwater well and about a \$2,000 fee for pump and electricity. One-inch distribution piping usually costs \$3 per foot.

Consequences of the livestock exclusion fencing buffer, such as non-native vegetation species growth, were discussed. It was noted that buffer maintenance (e.g., mowing) is allowed in some livestock exclusion practices. Livestock exclusion fencing is not practical in flood-prone areas and would be wiped out quite frequently in some areas of watershed. Current cost-share contracts require farmers to repair/replace damaged fence after each flood occurrence. In TMDL areas, farmers are eligible for cost-share funds to assist with the repair/replacement if the practice is still in life span, and funding is available. Also there is a 25% tax credit for their out of pocket costs, WP-2D. A suggested recommendation to include supplemental cost-share for fence repair/replacement when fencing is destroyed by flood was made. The WP-2T practice also provides \$.50 per linear foot of stream fencing as an incentive payment to assist with stream fencing maintenance.

If a farmer enrolls in a permanent vegetative cover BMP, and the cover dies out, the farmer is required to replant the cover and assume all associated costs. A shorter time frame for commitment to the program, possibly five years instead of 10, may ease this burden. Flexibility in cover crop planting date requirements would be helpful. For example, during some seasons harvesting may take later, which may overlap with the deadline for planting winter cover crops.

Question regarding regulations for proper disposal of animal carcasses was raised. Debbie Cross with VADCR agreed to look into this issue and provide additional information to farmers.

BMP Implementation

Concern was raised regarding tax liabilities associated with payments farmers receive when enrolled in the CREP program. This concern needs to be confirmed and if applicable fully explained before a farmer chooses to enroll in the program. It was noted that a 100% cost-share incentive would be needed for some producers to agree to a 10-year BMP commitment. This would have to be from sources outside of state or TMDL cost-share funds since the funding sources cannot exceed 90% cost-share including funding from local sources and grants. Maintenance and replacement costs were brought up as deterrents to installing BMPs. Pursuing a grant to fund BMP maintenance costs would be beneficial. Inquiry was made whether

assistance was available for BMP maintenance after the cost-share contract expires and the possibility of extending CREP contracts. Debbie Cross responded that VADCR is in the process of developing incentives for producers to continue BMP maintenance and should be available July 2010.

A producer explained cows will choose a watering trough over stream, thus decreasing time spent in stream. Apprehension was shown towards fencing amount that would be needed to eliminate access to the braided stream network throughout fields in the upper portion of watershed. Based on this discussion, it was suggested that an initial strategy in the Upper Robinson River watershed could be to install watering troughs without stream exclusion fencing.

Applicable educational /outreach methods that work well in the area include: personal communication through phone and site visits; farmer-to-farmer interaction; CSWCD and Farm Service Agency newsletters; field tours conducted by CSWCD; educational events conducted by Virginia Cooperative Extension; Cattleman's and Dairymen's Association events; information booth at Madison County Fair; and Madison Eagle articles.