

Abrams/Opequon Cleanup Initiative

As you may have heard, the Abrams and Opequon watersheds have been found to be impaired by the State of Virginia. This impairment is based on the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) of nutrients, fecal coli form and sediment being found to be too high during water quality monitoring in the Opequon Creek and its many tributaries (including Abrams Creek). A study was carried out by the Opequon Creek Implementation Plan Steering Committee and its many partners to determine the causes of impairment. The causes ranged from development and urban storm water runoff to excess fertilizer and cattle access to streams.

In order to combat these many sources of pollution, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) made funds available to hire an employee for the Lord Fairfax Soil & Water Conservation District specifically to target the Abrams/Opequon watershed with agricultural based conservation practices. This new employee is Jed Rau, who came on February 1st, 2007. Jed is a graduate of Virginia Tech (2002) with a Forest Resource Management degree, and comes to the district after working primarily in forestry for the state of North Carolina and the US Forest Service. "I am excited to use my forestry and conservation knowledge to work with farmers that want to implement good conservation on their land", says Jed. "Conservation Best Management Practices are good for both the Opequon Creek (and its many uses) and for farm management far into the future." After buying a house in Winchester with his wife, Ruth, Jed is also now a resident of the watershed he serves. "I may not have much land (less than ½ acre) but I plan to do my part by installing rain barrels, use fertilizer sparingly, and plant plenty of trees and bushes that help filter water runoff from my home."

Along with funds to hire Jed, a special pot of cost-share money has been dedicated solely to the Abrams/Opequon watershed. This money helps pay for cost-share programs like fenced stream buffers, rotational grazing systems, no-till farming, strip-cropping, manure management facilities, cover crops, grass filter strips, reforestation and many other activities. These projects are specifically planned for each farmer and typically reimburse 75% of BMP implementation costs. This cost-share program is open to any individual, partnership, corporation, trust or other business operating a farm in the Abrams or Opequon watersheds.

Want to participate but you are not sure if your land is in the boundary of the Opequon watershed? Contact the district office and they can look up your property to see if it falls within (or with-out) the borders. Is your land outside the Opequon watershed and you are wondering "what about me, can I receive cost-share too?" Have no fear, the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District has yearly funds that cover similar projects everywhere else in the 4-county district. If your land is in Clarke, Frederick, Warren or Shenandoah County you are eligible for these regular funds.

For more information, contact Jed Rau at the Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District, (540) 868-1130 ext 3.