



We work with the people who work the land.

## Strategic Plan

2009 - 2012

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### **MISSION:**

The Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District, with an elected volunteer Board of Directors representing rural and urban constituencies, addresses water quality and soil erosion problems in the Counties of Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah and Warren and the City of Winchester. It provides conservation information and technical assistance to correct those problems by use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) as defined by the Commonwealth of Virginia. These activities are performed by a professional staff, its Directors, and Associate Directors who are appointed by the Board, in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), State agencies and private organizations.

The District provides technical services to local governments (when requested), based on Commonwealth regulations to prevent erosion and sediment problems which may occur during earth disturbance related to construction projects. In addition, the District carries out education programs to promote intelligent use of land and water resources, and is responsible for the operation and management of two dams.

### **VISION:**

We envision the elimination of pollutants to surface and ground water in the Shenandoah Valley for the long term benefit of its citizens and those who live downstream.

### **Background**

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are political subdivisions of the State of Virginia, responsible under state law for conservation work within State boundaries. Districts carry out these responsibilities under terms of Article XI, Section 1 in the State Constitution that states "it shall be the Commonwealth's policy to protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth."

The Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District was organized under the authority of the Soil Conservation District Law passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1938. The District was formed in 1941 with its only locality being Frederick County. In 1944, Clarke and Warren Counties joined, followed by Shenandoah County in 1945. The present District boundary lines were completed in 1973 when the City of Winchester elected to join. Together, the five localities cover a total of 849,069 acres. The Board consists of 10 elected directors and 2 appointed directors. Voters elect two directors from each county and the city for 4 year terms. The two appointed members are named by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board upon recommendation by the District and must be "persons who are by training and experience, qualified to perform the specialized skilled services which will be required of them." One must be the Extension Agent of one of the jurisdictions. Both must live within the District. The District appoints persons to be Associate Directors who are particularly interested in conservation work

and who are able to assist in accomplishing District goals. Directors and Associate Directors perform their duties without compensation.

The District strives for effective management of personnel, funds and equipment. The District employs an Administrative Secretary (who also assists the USDA NRCS' District Conservationist who works with the District), a Senior Conservation Technical Specialist, and a Conservation Education Specialist. The District also has a Chesapeake Bay Program Conservation Technician and an Abrams/Opequon TMDL Program Conservation Technician, both of which are funded separately by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

*\*\*All programs and services of the District are offered without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, handicap or political affiliation.*

## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2009 - 2012 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Virginia Constitution establishes as State policy the protection of its lands and waters from pollution. The Federal Clean Water Act of 1972 requires the Nation's surface waters to be clean enough for body contact recreation and to permit healthy indigenous aquatic life. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has designated the Chesapeake Bay as failing to meet those mandates. The Commonwealth's Chesapeake Bay Tributaries Strategy, Chesapeake 2000, calls for substantial reductions in nutrients and sediments reaching the Bay from its surrounding watershed by the year 2010 in order to meet EPA requirements.

The Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) conducts a monitoring program to determine the quality of its surface waters as required by EPA under the Federal Clean Water Act's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program. Those waters not meeting required standards are considered impaired. Following such designation, DEQ contracts the development of Implementation Plans that quantify reductions of nutrients, fecal coliform and sediments sufficient to allow the removal of those waters from the impaired list by designated dates.

To achieve these objectives, the District, within its financial and staff capabilities, will:

1. Work with Federal, State, and local governments, the Virginia DEQ, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), other state and federal agencies including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), consulting firms, local citizens' agricultural and environmental groups, and any other stakeholders as they develop TMDL Implementation Plans designed to remove streams from DEQ's impaired list by designated dates.

2. Work to develop stable and adequate funding sources to accomplish the work of the District, including, but not limited to BMP installation, Erosion and Sedimentation Plan Review, Tributary Strategies, TMDL implementation, and dam operation and maintenance.

In addition to the above mandated water quality-related obligations, the District will participate in the following activities to further its obligation to promote the intelligent use of District land and water resources:

- A. The Conservation Technical Committee will guide efforts to protect and improve water quality by administering the State's Agricultural Best Management Practices Program and supporting related USDA NRCS programs.

- B. The Dam Safety Committee will administer the operation and maintenance of the 2 dams owned by the District in compliance with all Federal and State regulations. The committee will continue to pursue financial support through the USDA NRCS for watershed management planning for the Lake Laura Dam and subsequent funding for dam repair from the State and Federal Government.

- C. The Easement Committee will seek to protect water quality within the District by assisting landowners to permanently protect their land from development.

- D. The Education and Information Committee will lead District efforts to increase knowledge of and commitment to the conservation of soil and water. This will be accomplished by providing information programs to school-age youth and adults; by providing timely conservation information to public officials, District partners, landowners and residents; by informing the

public about District activities and accomplishments; and by annually recognizing significant conservation efforts by citizens and partners.

E. The Erosion and Sedimentation Control Committee, as agreed to with local jurisdictions, will review development plans in accordance with the Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook to insure that they protect water quality and are properly designed to reduce sediment in State waters.

F. The Finance Committee will develop an annual budget to be approved by the Board of Directors to cover District operations, consistent with the District's Annual Work Plan and Strategic Plan.

G. The Legislative Committee will work with the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) to support legislative proposals to the Virginia General Assembly and/or the US Congress to address conservation issues and will evaluate enacted legislation to determine its effects on the District and its operations.

H. The Personnel Committee will develop and implement personnel practices that enable Directors, Associate Directors and staff to contribute effectively to District activities.

I. The Royal Phoenix Committee will, with the assistance of the other co-easement holders, monitor and enforce the Avtex Conservation Easement so the land can heal from previous abuse. Human contact will be allowed only to the extent permitted in the Conservation Easement.

In summary, the District will provide on-the-ground conservation of land and water resources and maintain its dams to benefit its citizens and those who live downstream.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION BY DISTRICT COMMITTEES**

### **A. CONSERVATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

Goal: To protect and improve water quality in the Commonwealth of Virginia by administering the State's Agricultural Best Management Cost Share Program and supporting Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs. In so doing, the Committee will make every effort to devote time and resources equitably in all jurisdictions in the District.

Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Establish priorities for the allocation of BMP cost share funds.
2. Recruit program participants and offer them incentive payments to promote the most effective nutrient reduction strategies.
3. Concentrate conservation planning and BMP installation in those watersheds that show the highest nutrient levels, fecal concentrations, or benthic impairments, especially those identified as TMDL watersheds.
4. Inspect previously installed practices to insure that they continue to provide water quality protection for the life span intended.
5. Technical staff to devote one (1) day a week to Frederick, Clarke, and Warren Counties.

### **B. DAM SAFETY COMMITTEE**

The District owns, operates and maintains Lake Laura Dam ( Stony Creek # 9, Inventory # 17101) and Birdhaven Dam ( Stony Creek # 10, Inventory # 17102) both in Shenandoah County. The District is responsible for compliance with all Federal and State regulations pertaining to the dams.

Goal: To comply with Federal and State standards for the life expectancy of the dams.

Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Obtain technical and engineering support for the maintenance of the District's dams, working through NRCS and DCR Division of Soil and Water Conservation's Dam Safety Consultant.
2. Conduct required dam inspections and maintenance through District staff, the Dam Safety Committee, and the DCR Division of Soil and Water Conservation's Dam Safety Consultant.
3. Maintain and operate the District's dams safely, satisfying Federal and state requirements, working primarily through Bryce Resort and Alexander Properties.
4. Secure current operating certificates for the dams, and work with Shenandoah County to update emergency action plans.
5. Obtains funds for maintenance and repair to the extent possible.
6. Encourage both staff and Directors to participate in the quarterly Dam Owners' Work Group

meeting in Charlottesville, to learn about dam safety, maintenance and other dam issues.

7. Cooperate with the Legislative Committee to encourage funding by the State and Federal governments of dam maintenance and repair.

### **EASEMENT COMMITTEE**

Goal: To protect water quality within the District by assisting landowners to permanently protect their land from development. We encourage agricultural and forestal use of easement properties as support for a viable agribusiness community and to maintain the rural character of protected land.

#### Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Evaluate easement opportunities on behalf of the Board to determine the following: The extent to which proposed easements are consistent with the District's overall mission; Whether or not proposed easements will unduly burden the District.
2. For each proposed easement, recommend that the Board accept or decline to hold such easement.
3. Ensure that a process is in place to monitor all easements held by the District.

### **D. EDUCATION AND INFORMATION COMMITTEE**

Education Goal: Increase the knowledge and commitment to conservation of soil and water and sound land use practices by providing an ongoing education and information program focused on both youth and adults.

#### Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Sponsor annual District Envirothon (as well as provide support for Area and State Envirothons), and promote participation by all District high schools, including private schools and home school counterparts and seek private funds to assist in underwriting costs.
2. Sponsor annual attendance by students, selected competitively, at Youth Conservation Camp.
3. Develop and offer SOL-based conservation education programs to elementary, middle, and high schools in the District as time and priorities permit.
4. Sponsor SOL-based training workshops for teachers to provide in-class conservation education with an emphasis on watershed management, water quality and quantity challenges, wetland functions and benefits, and sustainable land use.
5. Make available periodic agricultural and urban conservation-oriented articles, fact sheets, and other written materials and audiovisual presentations for use by District board members, partners and watershed groups to promote conservation of soil and water. Write or contribute to articles, fact sheets, or other materials on urban environmental issues and accomplishments within our district for release to news media and for use by government and private environmental groups.

6. In cooperation with other District committees and partners, hold topical workshops and site visits to demonstrate conservation issues and both agricultural and urban best management practices.
7. Assist DCR with outreach and education related to the proposed changes to stormwater rules and regulations. Work with local governments especially Directors of Planning and Planning Commissions for the purpose of assisting with reviews and updates of comprehensive plans in all areas relating to natural resource conservation.
8. Recognize land stewardship and conservation efforts through an annual awards event, demonstration tours, articles and other methods. Recognize outstanding examples of urban environmental practices in our District.
9. Develop partnerships and cooperate with other Federal, State and local governments in conservation education efforts. Seek relations with a wide range of groups to accomplish specific plans of work developed under our goals. Such groups that are considered potential partners include, but are not limited to, Friends of the Shenandoah River, Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River, and Valley Conservation Council.

Information Goal: Provide timely information to public officials, partners, landowners, and residents about conservation issues, District activities, and accomplishments.

### **NEED TO INSERT SOMETHING ABOUT MONITORING**

#### Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Maintain the District website with up-to-date information about District activities, program opportunities and requirements, links to relevant information resources, with support from all District committees.
2. Develop and maintain a file of conservation success stories with photo documentation for use in District communications.
3. Issue a quarterly newsletter and annual report.
4. Maintain a working relationship with local news media.
5. Coordinate the preparation of summaries, with input from other committees and staff, by jurisdiction of District accomplishments for use in briefing public officials and use in District communications.

Public Relations Goal: Maintain credibility and visibility of the District by active involvement in conservation issues; by being recognized as a knowledgeable source for soil and water related information; by having consistent messages and presentation style in written and audiovisual communications.

#### Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Keep Board members and partners informed of conservation issues and District position in addressing them.
2. Share the District Strategic Plan and Annual Plan of Work with partners and the public.
3. Develop standard formatting and presentation style for written and audiovisual informational materials.

## **E. EROSION & SEDIMENTATION CONTROL COMMITTEE**

Goal: To protect water quality in areas being developed and to reduce the amount of sediment in state waters by interpreting and enforcing state erosion and sediment standards as presented in the *Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook*.

### Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Conduct regular meetings of the Erosion and Sedimentation Control Committee and perform it in a thorough and responsible manner plan review and inspection duties requested by localities.
2. Continue to improve our E&S plan review services by developing uniform fees and policies.
3. Continue to provide educational opportunities, with the cooperation of the District's Education Committee, for the construction industry, engineering firms, and localities about erosion and sedimentation law, storm water management and the benefits to local watersheds and the Chesapeake Bay when proper practices are in place.

## **F. FINANCE COMMITTEE**

The Finance Committee oversees financial aspects of District operations. The Committee ensures compliance with applicable laws, regulations, grants and generally accepted practices concerning financial matters. The Finance Committee will assist in obtaining funding for District operations.

Goal: To insure that the District's Annual Plan of Work and its Strategic Plan are realistically supported by the funds available.

### Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Prepare an annual budget commensurate with the level of service required and the funding provided by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), our member localities, and other sources.
2. Maintain funding accounts appropriately.
3. Manage restricted funds for long term growth.
4. Identify and obtain grant funds for special projects to supplement base funding.

## **G. LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE**

Goal: To monitor political activity on the local, state, and federal levels to insure that conservation activities mandated by law are supported by ordinance and adequate funding. It is also incumbent upon the committee to propose changes to existing legislation as deemed necessary to fulfill our soil and water quality conservation mandate.

### Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Maintain working relationships with local officials and State and Federal legislators.

2. Work for legislative changes based on sound science that permanently improve soil and water conservation.
3. Cultivate close working relationships with other agencies and organizations that have similar conservation and agricultural water quality goals to enable coordination of programs and resources.

#### **H. PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

Goal: To foster personnel practices that encourage directors, associate directors, and staff to contribute effectively to District activities.

Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Conduct personnel management according to written policies in a fair and equitable manner.
2. Maintain appropriate staffing levels within the District.
3. Provide training opportunities to all employees, Directors and Associate Directors to improve job skills and performance and to provide knowledgeable customer service.
4. Provide compensation to employees based on merit, experience, and education.
5. Fill vacant Board positions with capable individuals and offer them orientation and development opportunities.

#### **I. ROYAL PHOENIX EASEMENT COMMITTEE**

Goal: A Royal Phoenix site that allows the land to heal from its previous abuse, that allows human contact to the extent permitted by the 1999 Conservation and Environmental Protection Easement (Agreement), and permits activities consistent with the Agreement.

Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Maintain contact with organizations that are key to the prospective activities on the land that is covered by the Agreement including, but not exclusively, the Valley Conservation Council (VCC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Economic Development Authority (EDA).
2. Keep abreast of monitoring activities on the land and periodically inspect the premises with a view to making sure that the uses of the site are not inconsistent with the Agreement.
3. Bring any shortcomings in implementing the Agreement to the attention of the District Board with recommendations for action.



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