



We work with the people who work the land.

## Strategic Plan

2013 – 2017

### **MISSION:**

Soil and water conservation districts provide conservation information and technical and financial assistance to improve water quality, reduce soil loss and address nonpoint source pollution on agricultural land. The Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District (the District) is responsible for those activities in the counties of Clarke, Frederick, Shenandoah and Warren, and in the City of Winchester. The State provides funds to the District and establishes requirements for Best Management Practices (BMPs) to carry out those conservation activities. Local counties also provide limited funds for the District's work, and the District seeks grants and other financial assistance when possible. The District's professional staff, its Directors, and Associate Directors work with landowners who want to undertake BMPs. The District performs this work in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), State and local governments and private organizations. The District provides educational programs targeting both youth and adults to promote ecologically sound use of land and water resources. The District is responsible for the operation and management of two dams, both located in the Basye area of Shenandoah County.

### **VISION:**

We envision the protection and wise use of local waterways by elimination of pollutants from agricultural practices and the alleviation of soil erosion for the long term benefit of local citizens and those who live downstream.

### **Background**

Article XI, Section 1 in the State Constitution provides that "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."

Soil and water conservation districts are political subdivisions of the State of Virginia, responsible under state law for conservation work within their boundaries.

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. In 1941 the only jurisdiction in our District was 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 Lord Fairfax Soil and Water Conservation District is governed by a Board consisting of 10 elected directors and 2 appointed directors. Voters elect two directors from Winchester and two

from each county 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, a Senior Conservation Technical Specialist, two Conservation Specialists and a Conservation Education Specialist.

*\*\*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 2016 - 2020 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 determined that the Chesapeake Bay fails to meet those mandates and has established a Chesapeake Bay TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load nutrient limitation program) with nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment reduction targets to be achieved by 2025. The Commonwealth of Virginia is developing and carrying out an Implementation Plan (along with Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware and the District of Columbia) to meet the 2025 objectives.

The Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) also conducts a monitoring program to determine the quality of its other surface waters as required by EPA under the 1972 Act. Those waters not meeting required standards are considered impaired. Following such a designation, DEQ contracts for the development of Implementation Plans that quantify reductions of nutrients, fecal coliform and sediments that would be sufficient to meet the Federal standard. .

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

1. Work with Federal, State, and local governments, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), other state and federal agencies including NRCS, consulting firms, local citizens' agricultural and environmental groups, and any other stakeholders to meet TMDL requirements.
2. Work to develop stable and adequate funding sources to accomplish the work of the District, including, but not limited to BMP installation, 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 sound use of land and water resources:

A. The Conservation Technical Committee will guide efforts to protect and improve soil and water quality by promoting and administering the State's Agricultural Best Management Practices Program and work in conjunction with its related 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 for dam repair, rehabilitation and watershed management for the Lake Laura and Bird Haven Dams

C. The Easement Committee will seek to protect water quality within the District by assisting landowners who wish to permanently protect their land through conservation easements.

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 educational programs to school-age youth and adults; providing timely conservation information to public officials, District partners, landowners and residents; informing the public about District activities and accomplishments; conducting the annual Envirothon and annually recognizing significant conservation efforts by citizens and partners.

E. 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.

F. 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 the US Congress to address soil and water conservation issues. It will evaluate proposed and enacted legislation for effects on the District and its operations.

G. The Operations Committee will conduct reviews of the Annual Plan of Work, the District's Strategic Plan, and the Standard Operating Procedures in conjunction with committee chairs and the Board Chairman, making recommendations as circumstances require.

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 Urban BMP Committee will expand the District's relevance and presence in localities where storm water and receiving streams are affected by increasing residential, commercial and industrial growth. The Committee will develop an urban BMP program for District implementation.

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

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

Goal: To protect and improve water quality in the Commonwealth of Virginia by promoting and administering the State's Agricultural Best Management Cost Share Program in conjunction with related Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs.

Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Establish priorities for the allocation of BMP cost share funds.
2. Recruit program participants and offer technical and cost-share assistance (where applicable) to promote the most effective nutrient and sediment reduction strategies.
3. Target conservation planning and BMP installation in those watersheds that show the highest nutrient levels, fecal concentrations, or benthic impairments, especially those identified as local TMDL watersheds.
4. Inspect previously installed practices to insure that they continue to provide water quality protection for the life span intended.

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

The District owns, operates and maintains Lake Laura Dam (Stony Creek # 9, Inventory # 17101) and Bird Haven Dam (Stony Creek # 10, Inventory # 17102) 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, working with District staff, 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.

4. Secure current operating certificates for the dams, and work with Shenandoah County to update emergency action plans.
5. Obtains funds for maintenance, rehabilitation, and repair to the extent possible.
6. Encourage staff, Directors, and other stakeholders to participate in the Dam Owners' Work Group meetings in Charlottesville, to learn about dam safety, maintenance and other dam issues.
7. Cooperate with the Legislative Committee to encourage funding of dam maintenance and repair by the State and Federal governments.
8. Work with DCR's Design and Construction group to bring the dams into full compliance with current regulations.
9. Keep all stakeholders informed of the status of the rehabilitation programs for the dams.

### **C. EASEMENT COMMITTEE**

Goal: To protect water quality within the District by assisting landowners who wish to permanently protect their land through conservation easements. In addition we encourage agricultural and forestal use of protected lands to support agribusiness and to maintain the rural character of the community.

#### 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.
4. Provide technical assistance to land owners, local governments and land trusts in developing, implementing, and monitoring conservation plans associated with specific conservation easements.

### **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.

#### 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.
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. Hold topical workshops and site visits to demonstrate conservation issues and both agricultural and urban best management practices with other committees and District partners.
5. Assist DCR, localities and the NSVRC in carrying out of Watershed Implementation Plans (WIP) associated with the Chesapeake Bay and local TMDLs. .
6. Recognize land stewardship and conservation efforts through an annual awards event, demonstration tours, articles and other methods.
7. Develop partnerships and work with 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, local Farm Bureaus, Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River, Friends of the Shenandoah River, Potomac Conservancy, Shenandoah Forum, and Valley Conservation Council.

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

Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Maintain the District website and Facebook page 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. Annually, issue three newsletters 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 maintaining active involvement in conservation issues; being recognized as a knowledgeable source for soil and

water related information; and 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. 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 DCR, our member localities, and other sources.
2. Assure that accounts are maintained on a cash basis in accordance with sound accounting procedures.
3. Manage restricted funds in accordance with grant requirements.
4. Identify and obtain grant funds for special projects to supplement base funding.
5. Invest funds in excess of current needs with emphasis on optimizing investment yield while insuring investment safety.

**F. 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.

## **G. OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

Goal: Conduct reviews of the Annual Plan of Work, the District's Strategic Plan, and the Standard Operating Procedures in conjunction with committee chairs and the Board Chairman, making recommendations as circumstances require.

### Plan to Achieve Goal:

1. Conduct quarterly reviews of the Annual Plan of Work, in conjunction with committee chairs.
2. Conduct an annual review of the Strategic Plan, making recommendations to the Board for its consideration.
3. As circumstances require, review the District's set of Standard Operating Procedures, making recommendations to the Board.

## **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; in conjunction with the Finance Committee, this would include the securing of reliable funding to ensure the hiring of a permanent or full time Education and Information Coordinator.
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. URBAN BMP COMMITTEE**

**Goal:** Expand the District's relevance and presence in localities where storm water and receiving streams are affected by increasing residential, commercial and industrial growth.

### **Plan to Achieve Goal:**

1. Consult with relevant localities to identify public education and outreach needs in the field of water conservation, and determine how the District can help meet those needs;
2. Consult with DEQ and other Commonwealth-wide authorities to determine the urban BMP roles they foresee for districts, and the availability of Commonwealth resources to assist the Districts in carrying out those roles
3. Recommend for LFSWCD Board approval an urban BMP program which the District can implement.



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.