

WEST VIRGINIA CONSERVATION AGENCY



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West Virginia
Conservation
Agency



The West Virginia Conservation Agency's mission is to provide state funding for conservation programs, education and support activities; provide administrative, technical and financial assistance to citizens of West Virginia through the 14 conservation districts; assure proper operation and maintenance of flood control structures and properties; and secure the assistance of various federal government agencies for cost share programs.

Conservation Outreach and Education

West Virginia conservation districts and the WVCA continued to support and encourage conservation education throughout the state. Districts were responsible for a multitude of unique conservation themed programs made available to West Virginia teachers, students and citizens.

These programs help ensure that future generations make informed decisions about keeping our air, soil and water clean for future West Virginians. More than 3,000 students and adults attended a variety of field days, pasture walks, outdoor classrooms, tree seedling giveaways and agriculture workshops, all with the common theme of conservation.

Many conservation districts also offered teacher training in programs related to conservation by sponsoring workshops such as Project Learning Tree, Save Our Streams and The Wonders of Wetlands. These programs serve to educate teachers on the resources available to them and offer a wealth of hands on activities that stimulate students to think about the wise utilization of our natural resources.

Alongside our partnering organizations and the conservation districts, the WVCA continued to support and organize the West Virginia Envirothon competition as a strategy to promote and help high school students learn about the value of natural resources and the environment. This annual event continues with strong support and participation. A total of 26 teams from across the

state took part in the 2008 event held at Canaan Valley. The top five teams received a share of scholarships totaling \$13,000 and the winning team, Doddridge County High School, went on to represent the state at the North American Canon Envirothon in Arizona.

The conservation districts and the WVCA continued to work with federal and state agencies as well as citizen organizations in an effort to promote conservation education. Many districts served as a resource by providing financial support and technical expertise to local citizen groups concerned with erosion control and water quality for their local streams.

Designed to be fast to find, easy to read and simple to use, the Conservation Agency Web site is another key tool in connecting people with information about their local conservation districts, available conservation agriculture programs and educational programs.



The site features a section to help teachers and students learn about opportunities such as the West Virginia Envirothon, West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts (WVACD) photo contest and the WVACD Auxiliary poster contest.

Flood Disaster Response Summary

In response to the Federal Disaster caused by severe storms and flooding in 2008, the affected conservation districts and the WVCA worked with partnering agencies to remove stream blockages and restore floodplains. The affected districts were the Monongahela, Tygarts Valley, Upper Ohio and West Fork. Blockages caused by flood debris often increase the severity of the flooding or create additional flooding, because the water does not drain properly. Additionally, the debris adversely affects water quality.

The Agency watershed staff responded promptly to the disaster with assessment and stream recovery work that began as soon as the event locations were safe.

In FY08, the watershed section's work in flood recovery and floodplain restoration resulted in the completion of 48 contracts totaling \$829,453.

With a floodplain defined as the flat land adjacent to a stream that holds the water when the stream overflows its banks, the purpose of floodplain restoration is to restore the ability of a stream to carry larger quantities of water while minimizing future flood potential and erosion. For example, 72,000 cubic yards of material were removed along Buffalo Creek in Marion County to restore floodplains.

In response to landowner questions about various stream problems, 230 Citizen Contact Reports were completed in which stream sites were assessed by WVCA watershed section staff to determine what options are available for the landowners.

Eligible blockages may be corrected with help from the local conservation district and the Conservation Agency. Potential options are technical assistance from the Stream Access Permitting Program, referral to the US Army Corps of Engineers or other appropriate agency.

Grassland Programs

The 14 conservation districts and the WVCA worked with many partners on improving pastures in West Virginia. By enhancing the percent of vegetative cover and overall quality of pastures, erosion rates can be dramatically reduced thus reducing the amount of sediment reaching our streams.

The Agency worked closely with the conservation districts, West Virginia Grazing Lands Steering Committee, West Virginia

University Extension Service and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service on a wide variety of programs affecting grasslands in West Virginia.

The Conservation Agency began the intensive process of planning and coordinating with other sponsors for the 2009 Appalachian Grazing Conference in Morgantown. Speakers were chosen from among local and national experts to share their knowledge and experience in the management of pasture land.

Traing topics were selected based on the common issues and challenges affecting grassland farmers in West Virginia and the surrounding states. These topics were animal health, alternative soil amendments, weed control, drought management, weaning calves on pasture and energy conservation on the farm.

Additionally, many conservation districts agreed to offer scholarships to help their local cooperators attend the Grazing Conference.

The West Virginia conservation districts and the Agency, along with our conservation partners, sponsored the annual West Virginia Grassland Evaluation Contest. The purpose of the contest was to improve participants' knowledge of grassland management in West Virginia.

High school level students were tested on grassland condition, soil interpretation, wildlife and plant identification. Each of these factors were used in the evaluation process to help the students learn to wisely use natural resources and to make good land management decisions.

Teams from across the state competed in 2008 with the Ravenswood FFA taking 1st place with each team member winning a \$500 scholarship.

The Lime Incentive Program

The Lime Incentive Program continued to be one of the most requested programs available through West Virginia conservation districts. This vital West Virginia Legislature funded program reimburses eligible farmers a portion of the cost of applying lime to areas with permanent grasses and legumes.

Since the inception of this program three years ago, more than 94,000 tons of lime were applied to 38,000 acres of pasture and hay land.

West Virginia University Extension Service Professor Jeffrey Skousen Ph.D. wrote in an article "*Liming Principles and Lime Products*" that most native soils in West Virginia have a naturally low pH level. Lime is frequently needed to raise the pH for state pasture and hay land to the level at which plant nutrients are most available and toxic elements are less available.

With beneficial results for agricultural producers, this program served three important purposes:



- To provide incentive to local farmers for the maintenance of permanent grasses and/or legumes on grassland;
- To provide soil and watershed protection by reducing erosion on grassland; and
- To help reduce water, air and soil pollution from non-point sources on grasslands.

With the success of the lime program, many conservation districts were able to increase the farm equipment available for rent at nominal fees to local agricultural producers. Because ninety-five percent of the farms in West Virginia are family owned, district equipment rental is a particularly important service.

Lastly, this program also significantly contributed to the economy. In FY08, the combined producer and program shares equaled more than \$1.9 million dollars that were put into the West Virginia economy.

Multiflora Rose Control Program

With funding from a grant from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Multiflora Rose Control Program cost shared with farmers to encourage them to treat multiflora rose, so that productive pasture and grazing land could be reclaimed.

More than 350 individuals have applied for funding through the program with an estimated 34,000 acres for treatment. The program allowed those holding a private applicators license to do the spraying on their land. The other option was to hire a commercial applicator to administer the herbicide as necessary in the program guidelines.

West Virginia farmers benefit by being able to increase forage grown for their livestock so that they may better support themselves and their families. Furthermore, state residents are more likely to have safe, healthy and locally raised meats available to them.

Multiflora rose can decrease access to livestock forage in pasture land. Dense thickets of this plant often prevent native shrubs and herbs from growing. As a result, farmers may be unable to sustain the same number of cattle or livestock on the same number of acres. Unfortunately, this problem can cause financial

hardships for affected farmers.

Stream Access Permitting Program

When people use proper techniques and materials to prevent erosion along streams and to remove debris in streams on their property, water quality is protected and the likelihood of flooding is decreased.

For these reasons, the Landowner Stream Access Permitting Program is vital to the state's water conservation efforts.

The Permitting Program helps individuals by coordinating stream access permitting activities with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and by providing follow-up technical assistance.

The program is designed to help landowners follow an approved stream plan to remove debris and rock or silt deposits from established stream channels. The program also allows landowners to manage streambank erosion in a way that protects the overall integrity of the stream.

In FY08, conservation districts and the Agency processed 257 applications in the Stream Access Permitting Program.

The Regional Permit authorizing the program was renewed by the US Army Corps of Engineers to 2013.

Water Quality Implementation

In partnership with the 14 conservation districts, the Conservation Agency is the primary entity responsible for the coordination and implementation of the West Virginia Agriculture and Construction components of the Section 319 Nonpoint Source Program. WVCA Conservation Services have funded a total of \$400,000 in water quality improvement projects with federal 319 Grant and state dollars throughout West Virginia's Conservation Districts.

The Agency's conservation specialists provide statewide support to volunteer watershed associations and landowners through the coordination and implementation of projects on such issues as runoff, erosion and sediment control, storm water management, nutrient and pest management, stream clean-up,

streambank stabilization, pre and post monitoring, watershed assessments, best management practices (BMP) selection and installation.

The WVCA Watershed Resource Center (WRC) provides training, information transfer and assistance to all aspects of water quality efforts throughout the state as required by watershed associations and citizens. The WRC promotes awareness and understanding of nonpoint source pollution issues through the development and distribution of publications about nonpoint source pollution, BMPs and project successes through the Water Net newsletter and WRC Web page.

The Agency continues to promote cleaner water within the Chesapeake Bay drainage area by participating in the West Virginia Chesapeake Bay Implementation Committee. Through this program, targeted watersheds have been identified for reduced nutrient and sediment loading to local waters and the Bay.

These watersheds include Sleepy Creek, Mill Creek of the South Branch of the Potomac, Opequon Creek and Rocky

Water Resource Development

Conservation districts and the WVCA remain committed to assisting county governments with water resource planning. Detailed resource assessments and plans are designed to address the complex and interrelated issues involving population growth and the need for adequate public water supply.

These custom resource studies are essential for maintaining citizen health and improving economic development. Water Resource Studies serve in the development of clean, safe water supplies; improved fire and water protection; and water-related recreation. Local governments can use the plan for infrastructure development adjusted to population growth projections and economic development planning.

With the average cost per plan at \$250,000, countywide water resource plans have been completed for Berkeley and Morgan counties. Doddridge and Barbour County studies are underway. The next counties to be addressed are Greenbrier, Hampshire and Jefferson. Marsh Run. The WVCA has led efforts to prepare watershed based plans in both Mill Creek and Sleepy Creek to meet the total maximum daily load (TMDL) reduction requirements. Funding proposals for both watersheds have been submitted to the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) this year with funding for Incremental 319 projects expected to become available in summer 2009.

The WVCA is a strong leader within the Chesapeake Bay Program. The agency partners with West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and West Virginia Department of Agriculture as well as non-profit groups in an effort to reduce nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment from entering local waterways and ultimately the Bay. A Tributary Strategy and an Implementation

Plan have been developed to carry out these goals.

The US EPA is currently moving forward with the writing of the TMDL on the Bay. Priority watersheds have been identified within the drainage area and staff are currently working in Sleepy Creek, Opequon, Mill Creek and Rocky Marsh. Project teams and watershed based plans have been developed and funding requests have been put forth to secure Section 319 funds to assist in meeting the required reductions.

The plans are focused on agricultural, septic and storm water issues. The WVCA staff has been involved in education and outreach activities which have exposed more than 1,750 individuals to hands-on workshops and demonstrations. Best management practice implementation figures are collected and reported annually to the Chesapeake Bay Program. The staff works diligently with its partners to ensure that all information submitted is accurate. Their focus will continue to be on implementing and identifying additional funds and partners to support the efforts of the program.

Watershed Structures Update

West Virginia relies on watershed structures to help minimize potential flood damage, provide clean water supplies and water recreation opportunities to its citizens while also providing aquatic habitat and wildlife benefits to the state.

During FY08, 170 watershed structures and 23 channels were inspected quarterly and repaired as necessary to ensure safe and efficient operation in major storm events. Upon completion of these inspections, work plans were developed and implemented with conservation districts and sponsors.

Maintenance contracts for items identified on the annual inspections are underway and ongoing in all conservation districts and associated watershed project areas.

Emergency Action Plans are current for each structure along with a training program for watershed structure monitors. To provide monitors with the knowledge and skills for emergency situations, the WVCA staff train them on an individual basis or in small groups. Furthermore, certificates of training and ID cards are provided to each monitor to allow access to structures and accurate reporting during emergency situations.

Construction on the Elkwater Fork Structure in Randolph County is nearly complete. The estimated completion date is December 2008. The structure is 123 feet high, 700 feet wide, roller compacted concrete dam with an integrated spillway system. With a reservoir size of 54 acres, this watershed structure has a water supply pool storage capacity of 1,400 acre feet.

Final design and land rights acquisition are underway for Lost River flood control structure site 16 with construction scheduled to begin in the spring of 2009.