

Serving the Counties of Chesterfield and Prince George



**JAMES RIVER  
SOIL AND WATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**



# ANNUAL REPORT

2023/2024

July-June

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# JAMES RIVER SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## OUR HISTORY

During the Dust Bowl crisis in 1935, Congress passed Public Law 74-46, recognizing that “the wastage of soil and moisture resources on farm, grazing, and forested lands... is a menace to the national welfare,” and established the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) as an agency in the USDA. To supplement this effort and to provide a local level of administration, the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law was passed, providing for the organization of “Soil Conservation Districts” as governmental subdivisions of the States. Franklin D. Roosevelt described the program in a letter to each state governor. Districts in Virginia are self-governed subdivisions of the State and are comprised of one or more localities. Each SWCD is governed by a locally elected Board of Directors, ensuring that they remain a local influence with local people, local decision-making, and local programs.

On September 26th, 1940 the James River Soil and Water Conservation District was established, it included Prince George, Chesterfield, and Henrico County as part of a three-county unit. In 1975, Henrico split to form a single county District. Chesterfield and Prince George remained to comprise the current James River SWCD

## WHO WE ARE

The James River Soil and Water Conservation District is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia, organized and managed by local people assigned under the law to protect and improve our soil and water resources. The District is comprised of three staff members and a Board of Directors. The public elects two directors from each county, and two positions are appointed, each serving a four-year term. The Board of Directors is composed of six citizens from Chesterfield and Prince George counties, which directs the activities at the District.

Our mission is to promote stewardship and conservation of soil and water natural resources by educating and providing assistance that encourages citizens to manage, protect and enhance land and water quality.

## STAFF

**Brianna Morring** *District Manager*

**Joseph Gerdes** *Conservation Specialist*

**Anne Devine** *Conservation Technician*

## DIRECTORS

**Carey Allen** (Chairman) *Chesterfield*

**Laura Thompson** (Vice Chair) *Chesterfield*

**Greg Powers** (Treasurer) *Appointed Chesterfield*

**Andrew Petik** *Prince George*

**Avis Bennett** *Prince George*

**Scott Reiter** *Appointed Prince George*

## ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS

**Sierra Seekford** *Chesterfield*

**Marlie Creasey-Smith** *Chesterfield*

**Jacqueline Gooden-Seay** *Chesterfield*

**Heath Locke** *Prince George PY24*

## AGENCY PARTNERS

**Olivia Leatherwood** DCR

**Andrew Faison** NRCS

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

## Carey Allen, Chair;

In working with the team to prepare this annual report, I was reminded just how formative and inspirational a year it has been for the District! We are a small but mighty team, from our Board of Directors to our staff, each position, and the person volunteering or working in it, is critical to the success of our mission. This year's report will not only review our finances and work but also showcase the members of the conservation community who inspire all of us! I look forward to the upcoming year and working together with the Board of Directors, the staff team, and our partners to develop a new Strategic Plan and continue to get as much conservation out there as we can!

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

### Conservation Achievements

- **Community Workshops:** We hosted two events focused on sustainable agriculture practices, attended by over 100 local farmers and landowners. We worked with Virginia State University's Small Farm Outreach Program to host a training that presented the benefits of our agricultural conservation program. Our Rain Barrel Workshops continue to be one of our most popular events.

### Education and Outreach

- **School Programs:** We implemented educational programming via in-school field trips and promoted and participated in the Envirothon program and Conservation Poster Contest.
- **Public Engagement:** We participated in multiple community events, such as the Chesterfield County Fair and Outdoorfest, to spread information and resources on conservation.

### Partnerships and Collaborations

- **Non-Profits:** We partnered with Capital Region Land Conservancy to provide VCAP to the City of Richmond in PY24.
- **Local Government:** We partnered with Chesterfield County and Prince George County to address citizens' concerns that cannot be addressed at the local government level. We work with many county departments throughout the year to ensure we collaborate and communicate effectively to solve community concerns.

## LOOKING AHEAD

In the upcoming year, we are excited to:

- **Expand our Physical Footprint:** Add an additional office space, which will be located in Chesterfield at the Beulah Recreation Center (6901 Hopkins Rd)
- **Develop a New Strategic Plan:** Focus on long-term goals and innovative approaches to conservation.
- **Expand Educational Programs:** Hire a full-time education staffer to reach more schools and communities with tailored conservation education.
- **Enhance Partnerships:** Strengthen collaborations with local government, businesses, and non-profits to maximize our impact.

We hope you will stop by to tour our Chesterfield County office when we open or return to our Prince George County Office as well. Please call to make sure there are staff available to meet and greet you. Our number is (804) 732-6550. We are here to serve you and encourage you to call upon us for any natural resource concerns you may have. Your support and involvement are vital to our continued success. Thank you for your commitment to conservation!

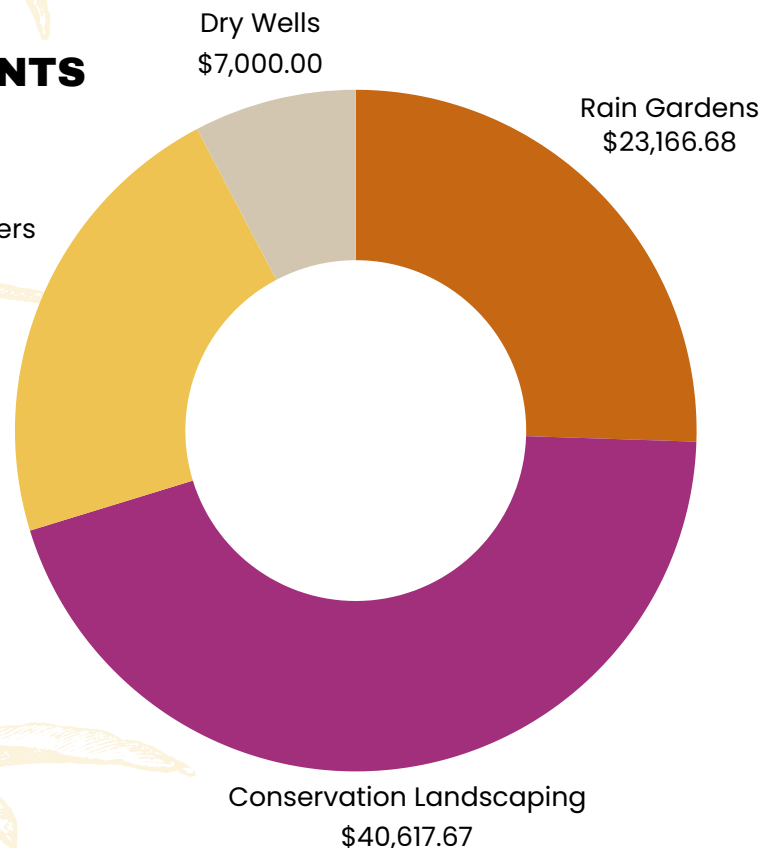
# COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

## VCAP

### VIRGINIA CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The District provides support to landowners in urban, suburban, and rural areas to control erosion and runoff on non-agricultural properties through the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP). Properly managed stormwater can help recharge groundwater and protect land and streams from erosion. The VCAP program has twelve practices available to help landowners understand and manage the unique aspects of stormwater runoff on their property. In Program Year 2024, the James River SWCD approved the installation of 18 total practices, 15 within the boundaries of the District and 3 in Richmond. 8 were Conservation Landscaping practices (7 District; 1 Richmond), there were 6 Rain Gardens approved, 3 Permeable Paver practices (1 District; 2 Richmond), and 1 Dry Well. \$110,784.25 in cost-share funding was disbursed to VCAP participants in PY24, almost twice as much funding as was disbursed in PY23. With the implementation of the Start Up Payment Program (SUPP), which helps to provide up to 50% of the approved cost-share upfront to cover contractor start-up fees for qualifying participants, more people than ever are able to participate without the up-front financial burden. In PY24 we disbursed \$14,217.83 in SUPP to cover the initial installation costs on 5 VCAP contracts and have an additional \$10,211.44 in cost-share to be paid to finalize those 5 contracts in PY25.

### PY24 VCAP REIMBURSEMENTS BY PRACTICE



### ELIGIBLE PRACTICES

- Conservation Landscaping
- Impervious Surface Removal
- Permeable Pavement Installation
- Dry Wells
- Constructed Wetlands
- Bioretention
- Rain Gardens
- Rainwater Harvesting System
- Vegetated Conveyance System
- Infiltration
- Green Roofs
- Living Shorelines



# CONSERVATION IN ACTION

A rain garden is a landscaped, shallow depression designed to capture and absorb stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces like roofs and driveways. Filled with native plants and grasses, it helps filter pollutants and reduce erosion while providing habitat for local wildlife. By mimicking natural water absorption processes, a rain garden enhances the aesthetic appeal of a property and contributes to improved water quality in the surrounding ecosystem.



In this example, roof runoff from the downspout is diverted underground to the excavated rain garden area and is connected to a pop up emitter which allows water to discharge into the rain garden. The berm retains the water allowing it to infiltrate instead of running off, causing erosion.



Additional downspouts can be connected for greater conservation benefits.



This Rain Garden was one of six that were installed using VCAP in PY24. This project will be maintained for ten years, ensuring long-term conservation benefits and improved water quality in the surrounding community.



# CONSERVATION IN ACTION

A permeable paver driveway is a sustainable surface designed to allow rainwater to seep through the gaps between pavers, reducing runoff and improving drainage. Built with layers of gravel, sand, and specially designed pavers, it effectively filters water into the ground, preventing erosion and flooding. This eco-friendly solution combines functionality with aesthetic appeal, enhancing both the property's value and its environmental impact. Qualifying for Permeable Pavers requires the removal of an impervious surface of equal size (asphalt, concrete, and compacted gravel).



This Permeable Paver practice was one of three that were installed using VCAP in PY24. This project will be maintained for ten years, ensuring long-term conservation benefits and improved water quality in the surrounding community.

## PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIAL

"We had a wonderful experience with the VCAP program! The team was responsive and thorough in their communication. You can tell they are passionate about what they do, and professional throughout every step of the process. I have passed on the VCAP information to many neighbors and friends since we are so pleased. We are incredibly happy with how our project turned out, and know that we can continue using Anne and her team as a resource in the future!"

-PY24 VCAP Participant (Chesterfield Resident)



# AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION

## COVER CROPS

Cover crops are plants, typically small grains or legume/grain mixes, sown in the late fall after harvesting a cash crop. These cover crops stay on the field through the winter and early spring. These fields would otherwise remain fallow. Cover crops help prevent soil erosion and capture excess Nitrogen that would otherwise leach out of the soil and run off into nearby waterways. Cover crops have also been shown to suppress weed and insect pests and add valuable organic matter to the soil ecosystem. In PY24, producers in the James River SWCD planted 12,180 acres of cover crops and received \$977,390 in cost-share reimbursement for this vital agronomic practice.

## NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

Nutrient Management is a critical component of any agricultural operation, especially for row crops that require specific and well-timed fertilizer applications to achieve good yields. Therefore, Nutrient Management Planning is an important part of growing crops and using nutrients wisely and effectively. In PY24, farmers in the James River SWCD enrolled 12,722 acres in our Nutrient Management Planning program and received a total of \$25,408 in cost-share reimbursement for these new plans. These farmers then utilized these plans to split- and precision-apply their fertilizer on over 7,158 acres of corn and small grains. By applying these nutrients in an environmentally sensitive way, these producers received \$58,887 in combined cost-share reimbursements.

## FARMERS EVENTS

Each year James River Soil and Water has the opportunity to talk with local producers about the opportunities offered by our District, NRCS, and Virginia Cooperative Extension at our Farmer's Events. This year we held our Program Kickoff on August 17th at the Scott Memorial Park Pavilion and were joined by many of our local producers. On November 29th, we hosted the Farmer's Breakfast to re-certify producers for private pesticide applicator licenses and provide information on the upcoming projects and programs from our partner agencies.

## OTHER AGRONOMIC PRACTICES

Additionally, our producers committed 1,484 acres of cropland to continuous- no-till planting and received \$37,119 for their commitment. We completed the installation of Virginia's first Equine Manure Management & Loafing System, which includes covered manure storage capacity for six months and a rotational grazing system with a heavy-use winter area. In PY24 we welcomed five first time VACS participants to the program. James River SWCD thanks all our producers for their commitment to protecting the natural resources in our community. The success of our programs only happen with their hard work.

## ADDITIONAL COST-SHARE PRACTICES

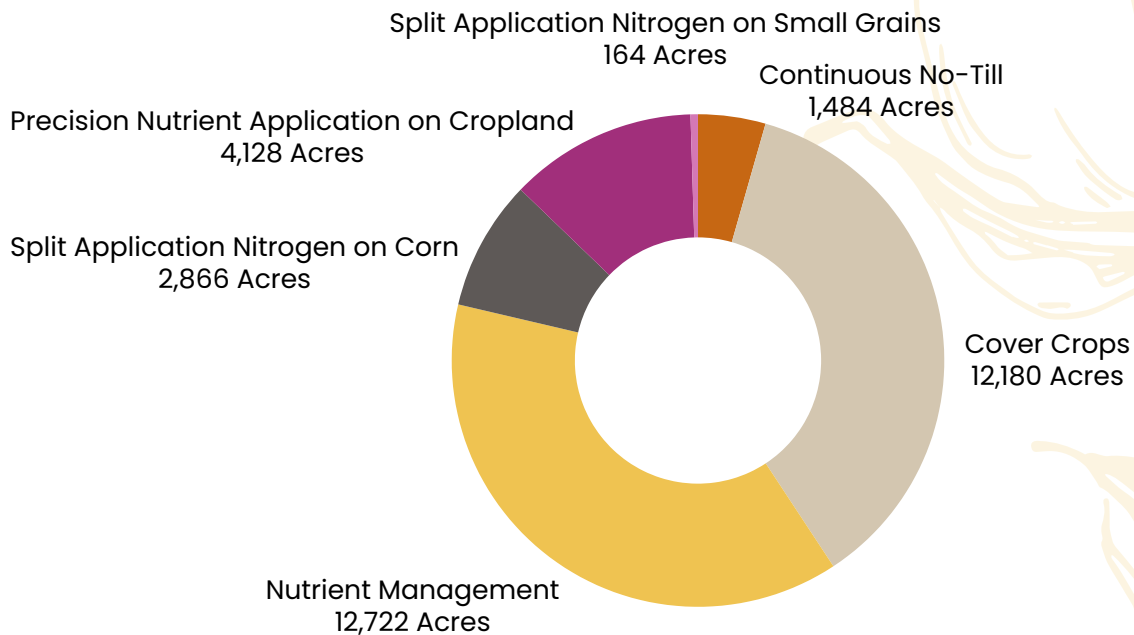
- Cropland Conversion
- Stream Exclusion with Grazing Management
- Riparian and Grass Buffers
- Strip Cropping
- Grassed Waterways
- Erosion Stabilization

# AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION

## AGRICULTURAL COST-SHARE FUNDING PAID TO PRODUCERS IN PY24

- Inside the Chesapeake Bay Watershed **\$547,919.93**
- Outside the Chesapeake Bay Watershed **\$545,273.61**

## PY24 VACS PRACTICES BY ACRE



## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANNING

A Virginia Resource Management Plan (RMP) is a comprehensive conservation plan that includes proven agricultural best management practices to ensure the farm is meeting a conservation farming standard. A farmer's decision to have an RMP written, or to implement the plan, is completely voluntary. The plans are written by certified RMP developers and are specific to the farm operation. The RMP will address onsite erosion issues, including measures to protect perennial streams, and include recommendations for nutrient management. The RMP provides a list of agricultural BMPs for the farmer to implement.

Once all required BMPs are implemented, the RMP can be certified. In addition to the environmental benefit to the community, RMP certification means several things for the farmer, including "certainty" that they are considered environmentally compliant. Should newer, more stringent state regulations related to the Chesapeake Bay or local stream TMDLs be adopted, the certified RMP farm operation is considered already to comply with nutrient, sediment and water quality standards. The certificate is valid for nine years provided the farmer continues to implement the RMP.

This Program Year, James River SWCD reviewed and approved two separate RMPs for implementation, covering over 1,450 acres of high priority cropland in our District.



# CONSERVATION IN ACTION



Pictured is the Equine Manure Management Facility that was installed in PY24. Manure Management is a burden for many horse owners. A covered Storage Facility provides up to six months of storage capacity and a layer of separation from the soil. The roof ensures protection from rainwater runoff, significantly reducing the adverse environmental impact of open manure storage. Additionally, this producer installed three rotational paddocks, which will extend the grazing season on their property, further reducing operating costs.



This project will be maintained for fifteen years, ensuring long-term conservation benefits and improved water quality in the surrounding community.



# CONSERVATION EDUCATION

## ENVIROTHON

The Virginia Dominion Energy Envirothon is a team-based natural resources competition for high school students. Students who participate learn stewardship and management concepts and work to solve real-world environmental problems. The program is field-oriented and community-based and allows students to work with natural resource professionals. In Program Year 2024, we had two teams representing our District at the Area VI Competition, which was held on April 16th at the VIMS Eastern Shore Laboratory. Our team from CTC@Hull qualified to move forward to the State competition. The State Envirothon was held May 19th-20th at Radford University. Our team represented us well and placed 5th in the State!

## YOUTH CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Youth Conservation Leadership Institute (YCLI) is a recognition program for students in 9th-12th grade that focuses on volunteer service and environmental stewardship. YCLI began as an expansion of Youth Conservation Camp to keep students engaged in the environmental topics introduced at camp. YCLI offers self-motivated and enthusiastic high school students interested in environmental conservation and stewardship an opportunity to build leadership skills and connect with local mentors involved with environmental issues.

## YOUTH CONSERVATION CAMP

Youth Conservation Camp is a week-long summer conservation camp for Virginia high school students (currently enrolled in grades 9-12) on the campus of Virginia Tech. During YCC, high school students get to explore nature and natural resources with conservation professionals from across our Commonwealth. The District provides scholarships to cover costs associated with YCC to two students each summer.

## ENVIROTHON EXPERIENCE TESTS

The James River SWCD has created both a High School and Middle School Envirothon Experience Test to share with Educators in our District. Both tests cover the four main sections of Envirothon; Soils, Forestry, Wildlife, and Aquatics and are available with the corresponding answer key at any time. Please email [jrsxcd@princegeorgecountyva.gov](mailto:jrsxcd@princegeorgecountyva.gov) for more information on Envirothon or to receive the free tests.

## OTHER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

- Conservation Poster Contest
- Donald Bagshaw Memorial Scholarship
- Continuing Education College Scholarship
- In-School Field Trips

## YOUTH CONSERVATION CAMP ACTIVITIES MAY INCLUDE

- Map Your Watershed
- Hike to the Cascade Waterfall
- Electroshock Fishing
- Beekeeping Demonstration
- Tour of Lane Stadium
- Canoe the New River
- Explore the Vet School
- Tour Virginia Tech Colleges
- Tree ID Hike with DOF



# PARTNERSHIPS AND OUTREACH

## RAIN BARREL WORKSHOPS

James River SWCD and Chesterfield Environmental Engineering partner to provide Rain Barrel Workshops where local homeowners and community members can make their own custom rain barrels that collect rainwater to use as non-potable watering sources. Workshops in PY24 took place in March and April. Participants met at the Chesterfield County Fairgrounds and the Chesterfield Central Library where they received training from a stormwater professional and took home over 50 rain barrels, which will put conservation immediately into practice.

## JAMES RIVER CLEANUP

Each Year we partner with the James River Advisory Council to help sponsor a regional river clean up at the Dutch Gap Boat Landing and Conservation Area in Chesterfield County. In 2023 the cleanup took place on September 9th with around 40 volunteers joining us for a morning of conservation and community. Please consider joining us or JRAC at one of the many sites at next year!

## FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

Our Vice Chair, Laura Thompson, is also the James River SWCD Legislative/Outreach Committee chair. Through her outreach efforts, we had a booth at the Chesterfield County Fair, Midlothian Days, and Chesterfest. Our District Manager also attended the first ever Chesterfield Outdoor Fest on April 13th at the County Fair Grounds. At these events, we were able to hand out information on our District programs and services and talk with conservation-minded citizens about the environmental issues they are seeing and experiencing in their communities.

## JAMES RIVER SWCD PARTNERS

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation  
Natural Resource Conservation Service  
Virginia Department of Environmental Quality  
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources  
Virginia Department of Forestry  
Farm Service Agency  
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors  
Prince George County Board of Supervisors  
Crater Planning District Commission  
Prince George Farm Bureau  
Chesterfield Farm Bureau  
Chesterfield County Environmental Engineering  
Prince George County Community Development  
Chesterfield Cooperative Extension  
Prince George Cooperative Extension  
Capital Region Land Conservancy  
James River Advisory Council



# **JAMES RIVER SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

James River Soil and Water Conservation District would like to thank all of the producers and partners that make soil and water conservation happen in Prince George and Chesterfield Counties. In Program Year 2024, James River focused on the practical ways we can help curb pollution in our district. By working with farmers, land, and homeowners, and the next generation of conservation-minded citizens, we were able to fight non-point source pollution in Prince George and Chesterfield Counties. These efforts were made possible by Brianna Moring, our District Manager, our Conservation Specialist, Joseph Gerdes, and our Conservation Technician, Anne Devine.

This year we obligated \$1,093,193.54 in agricultural cost-share funding through the VACS program and an additional \$110,784.25 through the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program. We are proud to support our program participants with this cost-share funding and hope to spend even more on conservation in PY25.

Monthly Board Meetings of the James River SWCD Board of Directors are held on the third Thursday of each month to conduct business. All meetings are open to the public. Don't hesitate to contact our office for the location, date, and time of our monthly Board Meetings. If you have questions or suggestions about our programs or want copies of this Annual Report, please get in touch!

**The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the James River Soil and Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation**

## **CONTACT US**

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