

Roanoke River Implementation Plan Part 2: North Fork & South Fork Roanoke River, Bradshaw Creek and
Wilson Creek
Agricultural Working Group Meeting

Meadowbrook Community Room, Shawsville, VA
6/16/15, 6-8 pm

Participants: Nick Tatalovich (Louis Berger), Joe Williams (DGIF), Spencer Winfrey (citizen), Leigh Anne Weitzenfeld (City of Roanoke), Randy Lease , Cynthia Hancock (Skyline SWCD), Robert Trout (citizen), Charlie Lunsford (DEQ), and James Moneymaker (DEQ)

General Questions:

1) *How did you hear about tonight's meeting?*

E-mail communication and stream crossing signs

2) *Are there individuals/organizations not present tonight who you think should be here?*

Working group members suggested the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). However, Cynthia Hancock was in attendance representing the Skyline Soil and Water Conservation District. Skyline SWCD, which is collocated with USDA NRCS, helps administer DCR programs and USDA programs.

Other suggested individuals or organizations included the following: Ellett Valley Beef Company, Izaak Walton League, Nature conservancies and more individuals from the farming community.

3) *Are there other ways that we could get the word out about meetings?*

DEQ could partner with Virginia Cooperative Extension to send out mailings to the farming community. Other options include the Link Letter Newsletter or working with farmers market managers to spread the word. Advertisements at the farmers markets were mentioned.

It was mentioned that when DEQ advertises public meetings DEQ should more effectively communicate the purpose of the meeting and describe those that the meeting will affect.

4) *Are there any other bacteria sources that have not been discussed that we should consider in the plan?*

The Implementation Plan accounts for the bacteria sources per the exiting land use categories. No other sources were discussed.

5) *Are there any other sediment sources that have not been discussed that we should consider in the plan?*

Participants mentioned the Mill Creek-Preston Forest subdivision and Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) construction projects.

Agricultural Questions:

6) What is the current growth trend for agriculture in the area?

Current agricultural trends include the following: fewer cropland acres, more sod acres (South Fork Roanoke River), higher concentrations of horses in some areas and fewer beef cattle, increase in the number of non-traditional agricultural operations that are not eligible for USDA and state agricultural cost-share but may be eligible for other grant funds and could benefit from technical assistance through VCE and SWCDs.

Participants mentioned the Bradshaw Creek area as an area with a greater concentration of horses. Many residents have one or two horses. Participants believe the increase in the number of horses will create more denuded pasture areas.

Regarding cropland, more changes have occurred in the South Fork watershed. One participant asked if there are soil loss calculations for crop fields. Those calculations have not been made. It was mentioned that fields previously farmed as cropland had more residue than current sod farms. Fewer farmers are planting crops.

7) Are local cattle producers receptive to stream fencing and improving grazing management?

Many challenges face farmers. Some participants expressed that the stream fencing needed to improve water quality is impractical for individuals to accomplish. Implementation Plans take time. It was mentioned that even the time frame identified in this Implementation Plan may not be long enough to implement the necessary BMPs to improve water quality.

Not all farmers are anti-stream fencing. The majority of large farming operations already work with local soil and water conservation districts and understand the benefits of installed BMPs. It was mentioned that cost-share programs do not always work for every farming operation.

Another common issue is the issue of rented land. A large percentage of farm land is rented. It is more difficult to reach the owners and interest the tenant. Owners are often elderly and on a fixed income. Some tenants are interested in stream fencing; however, they cannot participate based on the uncertainty of their lease agreement.

There is some interest as long as stream fencing remains voluntary. It was mentioned that equine issues exist, but the state has been hesitant to cost-share on equine water quality issues. The thought of local ordinances to control equine issues was suggested. However, some participants expressed they do not agree with local ordinances to regulate equine.

8) What barriers are holding back progress to implementing stream fencing and improving pasture management?

Barriers to stream fencing were discussed as follows:

- Fence maintenance during flood events
- Agricultural programs need to provide money for practice maintenance
- Topography and the inability to give up prime farm land on limited acres
- Farmers farming steep terrain cannot give up the required acreage to establish a buffer or setback
- State and federal programs change each year and many farmers do not know what changes occur

9) *Is there existing manure storage in the watershed? Is there a need for additional manure storage?*

According to Skyline SWCD confined feeding operations have mostly addressed manure management issues. Areas of interest may include the Riner area. There are few small dairies and very few intensive beef operations.

10) *Are there any problems with manure spreading on crop or pasture fields locally? What are the best BMPs to address this source?*

Many farmers follow a Nutrient Management Plan and know not to spread on frozen ground. Skyline SWCD reported that there is no manure spreading on cropland in the North Fork Roanoke River, Wilson Creek, and Bradshaw Creek watersheds but was unsure about the South Fork Roanoke River.

11) *Is there poor pasture or erodible cropland in the area that should be converted to forest?*

Very little reforestation occurs in the watershed. It is estimated that less than five percent of cropland is reforested.

12) *In general, are there practices that are more easily implemented and/or more appealing than other practices in this area?*

With cost-share funding so limited many participants utilize tax credit practices.

13) *What are the best ways to outreach to local farmers about water quality and conservation practices in the area? Is there a need for additional education activities/events/materials?*

Outreach opportunities include the following:

- Field days
- Farm Bureau meetings
- Young Farmers
- Pesticide licensing meetings
- Livestock and Farmers markets
- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Trail riding clubs

14) Is there a need for education and outreach on pasture management for horse owners or owners of other types of livestock? Who is best to disseminate this type of information?

Pasture walks and field days are beneficial outreach tools for owners of all types of livestock. Events need to be scheduled to encourage the most participation such as on a weekend or weekday evening. It was suggested that Virginia Cooperative Extension disseminate information to the farming community.