

Tye River Water Quality Improvement Plan: Final Community Meeting
Massies Mill Ruritan Hall
May 15, 2014

The meeting began with a welcome from Emily Harper, Nelson County Parks and Recreation Director. Ms. Harper discussed the scenic rivers designation for the Tye River and how the river is used by the local community. The scenic river designation will become effective July 1, 2014 and includes a 12.7 mile stretch of the river from Depot down to its confluence with the James River. There is also a rail trail along the river, which is frequently used by walkers and bikers. Ms. Harper noted that the Tye River is a real asset to the Nelson County community and welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Nesha McRae, Non Point Source TMDL Coordinator for the VA Department of Environmental Quality provided an overview of the planning process and the contents of the plan. Agricultural and residential BMPs included in the plan were reviewed in addition to education and outreach strategies and the project timeline. It was noted that VA Cooperative Extension will be holding a Master Well Owner Network training in Amherst County on August 25th. This was identified as a good outreach tool for septic system maintenance in the plan. It was also noted that DEQ will be holding a citizen monitoring training on May 27th. DEQ is currently looking for addition volunteer monitors for the Tye River. This will be the second year of the monitoring program.

One participant asked about support available for low income residents with failing septic systems or renters. Concerns were expressed about the financial burdens that installing a new septic system would place on these property owners. Nesha explained that in other watersheds, funding has been secured to provide between 50% and 75% of the cost of septic system repairs and replacements. In addition, there are other programs out that that provide assistance including the South Eastern Rural Community Assistance Program.

Brian Walton, Conservation Technician with the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) presented information on the programs that the SWCD has available to assist agricultural landowners with BMP installation. On participant asked for some background information on the different buffer widths and their capacity to filter out bacteria. Nesha offered to follow up on this and provide some information to the participant.

Mike Campbell, local Nelson County farmer spoke next about the BMPs that he has implemented on his farm and how they have worked for him. He became interested in installing BMPs back in 2003, but it took some time until the SWCD and Natural Resource Conservation Service offered the reduced setback fencing programs that he was interested in. Placing the fencing 35 feet back from the stream on his property would have taken too much of his grazing land. He went with a livestock exclusion system with 10 foot buffers and pressure fed waterers. He does not have livestock totally excluded from the stream on his property, where he has left a 3 acre field open to the stream in case of a power outage or some other reason his livestock need access to the stream to water. He has found it easiest to phase construction. Repayments from the SWCD occurred in a timely manner, and his livestock are finding other shade to cool off in now that the streams are excluded. Mr. Campbell responded to one participant's question about rotational grazing and how it has impacted his stocking density. He explained the installing a rotational grazing system has allowed him to stock more cattle on his land while also preventing overgrazing.

Tom Eike spoke next on behalf of the Nelson County Health Department. He explained that septic systems are often contentious issues when they are failing and that it has been very useful to have financial assistance programs available to work with homeowners on making repairs and replacements. Mr. Eike noted that installing treatment systems on land that doesn't perk and septic repairs can often be very expensive. Matters can be more complicated in instances where someone is renting a home with a failing septic system since the owner is the individual responsible for correcting the problem. The Nelson County Community Development Foundation was once a big help for funding; however, their funds have dwindled since 2008. Mr. Eike noted that the grant that is in place now to provide landowners assistance with septic systems for the Rockfish River implementation plan has been a big help. People are contacting him for help now and looking for cost share funding.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 following closing remarks from Nesha McRae. The public comment period for the water quality improvement plan will go from May 16, 2014 through June 16, 2014. Written comments are to be sent directly to Nesha at the Department of Environmental Quality.