

**Little Calpasture River Water Quality Improvement Plan**  
Agricultural Working Group Meeting: Rockbridge Baths Fire Hall  
November 1, 2016

***PARTICIPANTS***

Sandra Stuart (RACC/NBSCD)	Karen Kline (VA Tech)	Gene Yagow (VA Tech)
Donald Vess	Phyllis Vess	Ebrahim Ahmadisharaf (VATech))
Nesha McRae (DEQ)	Tom Stanley (VCE)	Conrad Wyrick (DEQ)

***MEETING SUMMARY***

Nesha McRae, from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VADEQ) reviewed the meeting summary from the last agricultural working group meeting with the group and provided a series of updates since the meeting. She explained that Rockbridge and Augusta County staff has been contacted regarding illegal dumping sites in the watershed. Rockbridge County staff visited the site out at the bluffs and discussed options for cleaning out the site including partnering with VMI and their cadets. The Boy Scouts may also be interested in assisting with the effort. Tom Stanley provided an update on the Augusta County Correctional Center property that was discussed at the last working group meeting. Following the meeting, an Agricultural Stewardship Act complaint was filed with the VA Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) against the Correctional Center due to the fact that their livestock have access to the stream. After speaking with VDACS staff, the complainant agreed to retract their complaint to allow time for VA Cooperative Extension staff to work with the prison to pursue a voluntary solution to the problem. Tom explained that he was hopeful that this will serve as an opportunity to explore some innovative demonstration practices on the prison property. He has yet to hear back from the farm manager, but continues to call and leave messages for him. DEQ staff explained that while the prison cannot qualify to receive financial assistance through NRCS or the VA Agricultural BMP cost share program, they may be able to apply for grant funds to support implementation efforts through the 319 program. Hopefully this will be an incentive for the prison to cooperate voluntarily so that the situation is not pursued through VDACS's regulatory program. Details on demonstration projects to be implemented on the property could be included in the plan to assist in securing future funding. DEQ staff will work with VCE staff to identify project specifics and outline them in the plan.

DEQ staff reviewed the results from the survey that was completed by participants at the last working group meeting. Nesha explained that the BMP implementation scenario that has been developed for the watershed was based on the rankings that participants assigned to different BMPs. Livestock exclusion from stream, streamside buffers and streambank stabilization were ranked as the three most important practices. In addition, estimates of the types of livestock exclusion systems included in the plan and their relative proportion of overall fencing was based on the obstacles of exclusion fencing that were ranked by participants in the survey. The group reviewed the implementation scenario beginning with livestock exclusion estimates and associated costs. DEQ staff explained that these estimates were developed using aerial imagery of the watershed. Pasture land along streams was identified and the length of fencing needed was delineated. County tax parcel data was then used to determine how many

different fencing projects were needed. It is estimated that a total of 40 properties need to be fenced. One participant asked what proportion of streams in the watershed need to be fenced to meet goals of the TMDL study that was completed in 2010. DEQ staff explained that a total of 66% of streams will need to be fenced out from livestock. Fencing installed since the study was completed was credited towards achieving this goal when the estimates shared with the group were developed. The group discussed the different cost share rates associated with each practice, and the fact that 85% cost share was available for a 35 foot buffer practice, while 50% cost share was available for a 10 foot setback practice. These practices can be combined by a landowner as long as they are installed in different fields. Since technical staff from the Soil and Water Conservation District were unable to attend the working group meeting, these cost estimates will be shared with them for review as well. DEQ staff shared expected overall costs along with the average cost to landowners in the watershed.

The group reviewed streambank stabilization practice estimates, which Nesha explained would most likely be installed with livestock exclusion fencing. These projects typically involve around 500 feet of stream. Consequently, estimates were developed for seven streambank stabilization projects for a total of 3,500 feet of stabilization. One participant asked what this typically involves. Nesha explained that typically, the stream banks are laid back to a more gentle slope, stabilized and revegetated. Often times in-stream structures are put in place (rocks, logs) in order to redirect streamflow to avoid additional scouring of banks and return the stream to its natural hydrology. Another participant asked whether DEQ has implemented many streambank stabilization projects through the TMDL program. Nesha responded that they have seen the greatest success in areas where there is the potential for establishment of a trout fishery. In these cases, DEQ has been able to partner with the SWCD and Trout Unlimited to complete projects. Several examples of successful streambank stabilization projects in Rockbridge County were discussed by the group including a project on the Maury River and one on Hays Creek in Indian Bottom.

The group discussed pasture management and rotational grazing. DEQ staff explained that the implementation scenario presented is based on this practice being implemented on a large portion of pasture in the watershed (over 80%). This does not translate to a large number of acres of the practice, but it will require a high level of participation from landowners. One participant asked what improved pasture management includes. Nesha explained the DEQ has a practice for which they provide a \$25 annual incentive payment for a period of three years if certain pasture conditions are met (forage height and % cover, lime and fertilizer application according to soil testing, rotational grazing to facilitate better manure distribution). However, the feedback that DEQ has received from SWCD's on this practice to date has been relatively negative. Participation rates have been low since many farmers feel that the required benchmarks are too challenging to meet. Nesha explained that in other areas, SWCDs have directed their efforts to improve pasture conditions by promoting rotational grazing and appropriate stocking rates. These measures can have a considerable impact on runoff of sediment from pastures.

Lastly, the group reviewed estimates for cropland BMPs. DEQ staff noted that at the last meeting, participants stated that there is very little cropland in the watershed. While it appears that there are only three properties with cropland in the watershed, there is some tillage and some fields that could use cover crops on these properties. One is an organic farm, making no till a challenge. Another is the

prison property, which one participant estimated has about 60 acres of cropland that they are tilling. This could be a good opportunity to work with them on cover crops and no till practices. The organic farm might also be interested in cover crops. The group agreed to increase the amount of cover crops in the plan to 30 acres in order to accommodate potential interests. A small amount of continuous no till will also be included in the plan.

The group discussed funding available for implementation efforts. Nesha explained that typically, SWCDs apply for implementation grants from DEQ once plans are approved by EPA. One participant asked whether DEQ allows for more flexibility with respect to BMPs offered through the 319 program. Nesha responded that the 319 program has a BMP manual with specifications for practices that have to be followed in order to receive grant funding. However, the program has supported demonstration projects in the past that are not included in traditional cost share programs offered across the state. The group discussed opportunities to receive 100% cost share for livestock exclusion, which were offered through the state several years ago. The state no longer offers cost share at 100%; however, there are opportunities to supplement state and federal cost share with other grant funds. DEQ staff noted that the Natural Bridge SWCD is planning on working with the James River Association to supplement state and federal cost share funds with additional grant money to bring cost share for livestock exclusion up to 100% in the Cedar Creek and Buffalo Creek watersheds. An opportunity like this could be pursued in the Little Calfpasture as well.

The group discussed a timeline for implementation efforts. DEQ staff provided some guidance, explaining that grants for implementation are typically offered for 2-2.5 years with an option to come back for additional funding if efforts are successful. A ten year timeline was suggested for implementation efforts and participants were in agreement. Stage 1 will cover the first five years of implementation. Karen Kline (VA Tech) explained that we typically include a larger proportion of the overall implementation goals in the first five years. One participant asked how progress will be evaluated and suggested a role for citizen monitoring in gaging progress moving forward. DEQ staff agreed that supporting citizen monitoring along with water quality updates meetings has shown to be a great way to educate the local community on the impacts that BMPs are having on water quality.

Nesha reviewed next steps for the project. She explained that this will serve as the final agricultural working group meeting. A steering committee meeting will be held in the spring in order to review the draft plan and make plans for the final community meeting. Nesha asked that participants in the agricultural working group attend the steering committee meeting in order to ensure that local interests and concerns are reflected in the plan. The final community meeting will be held in the early summer. DEQ staff thanked participants for their attendance, and the meeting was adjourned.