

**Virginia Agricultural Resource Management Plan Regulations
Department of Environmental Quality Piedmont Regional Office
Richmond, Virginia
Friday, August 12, 2011**

MINUTES

Subcommittee Members Present

Daniel Belin, Ecology and Environment, Inc.
Paul Bodenstein, Ag Systems, Inc.
Katie Frazier, Chair, Virginia Agribusiness Council
Bill Street, James River Association
Charles Wooton, Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District
Stephanie Martin, Department of Conservation and Recreation

Technical Staff Present

Emily Horsley, Farm Service Agency
Chad Wentz, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Neil Zahradka, Department of Environmental Quality
Diane Beyer, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Christine Watlington, Department of Conservation and Recreation

Others Present

Kristen Evans, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Peggy Sanner, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Sharon Conner, Hanover-Caroline Soil and Water Conservation District
Adrienne Kotula, James River Association

Meeting

The chair called the meeting to order and welcomed members and attendees. A regulatory timeline was provided for the subcommittee which outlined the process going forward. The goal is to present proposed regulations to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board at their December meeting.

The subcommittee began discussing some of the key issues. It was recognized by the subcommittee that flexibility is a key component of the resource management plans. There are no mandatory practices in House Bill 1830; there is a good list to consider, but not all the options are provided. One key issue is how to determine compliance with the TMDL (total maximum daily load) going forward. There was discussion about whether there should be a tiered system of resource management systems, similar to a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) program. The Virginia Department of Forestry also utilizes a tiered program.

It was noted that Water Stewardship, Inc. utilizes a continuous improvements approach to its assessments. It is an 8-12 year program, with commitments by the agricultural operator for 2 year increments. A list of all recommendations for BMPs (best management practices) is prepared and the agricultural operator chooses which BMPs to implement when.

The subcommittee recognizes the need for operators to have incentives to participate. A suggestion made was to increase the amount of cost-share dollars an operator would be eligible for if the operator had a resource management plan. NRCS provides additional incentives if an operator has a conservation plan.

A key issue for this subcommittee is the need to define what the “management units” are the plan. Could the units be tracts, the whole farm or operation, or fields? It was recognized that the smallest unit should be tracts, although it didn’t necessarily need to Farm Service Agency (FSA) recognized tracts. It was noted that not all agricultural operations have FSA tract numbers and there may be some issues with forcing all operations to receive FSA tract numbers. The goal of a resource management plan is that the whole farm operation be included in the plan. It is important to make sure the water quality goal is not compromised if smaller units than the whole operation are utilized. It was also recognized that different operations will need different considerations. Livestock operations may utilize different BMPs than grain operations.

The subcommittee discussed some potential components of a plan including: the assessment, target/goal for the operation, a list of BMPs to meet the goal (that are prioritized for water quality benefits and are flexible for each operation), other potential BMPs that may be utilized to go above and beyond the goal, a timeline for implementation, the lifespan of the plan and the scope of the plan (what lands does the plan cover). The subcommittee also discussed with other program plans should be included in the resource management plan such as CREP or EQIP plans. It was also noted that if a different type of plan (a NRCS plan for example) was providing equal information and recommendations that there should be a way to include those plans in the resource management plan.

The subcommittee discussed when a plan might need to be updated or revised. The subcommittee recommended that if the agricultural landowner or operator was changed and that the BMPs being implemented were also changed that the plan would need to be updated. Additional reasons a plan would need to be updated include an increase or decrease in acreage; changes in TMDL requirements; changes or additions to BMPs being implemented, or a significant change in the type of operations (examples include increase or decrease in the amount of livestock, changes from crop operation to livestock). It might also be possible that a plan would be reviewed on a set schedule (3 years was an example timeframe) to see if the plan is working. At that time, the plan could be updated if there were any identified issues.

There are several items for the subcommittee to still discuss. Those items include: who writes plans; what are their qualifications; who approves plans; and who authorizes a renewal or revisions to a plan. It was recommended that the subcommittee look at NRCS planner training as well as crop advisor training and DCR nutrient management training for examples of what certifications might be appropriate for a plan writer.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.