



Prepared by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

HIGHLIGHTS REPORT | Nov. 1, 2015 – Oct. 31, 2016

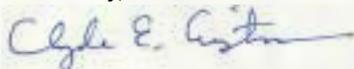
Members of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board:

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation has prepared a report on the status of the Resource Management Plan (RMP) Program from Nov. 1, 2015, through Oct. 31, 2016. As of Oct. 31, 2016, there were 326 plans covering 68,147 acres statewide. Of those, 47 RMPs covering just over 19,500 acres have been developed in the last 12 months. We are also pleased to inform you that we surpassed the 2016 calendar-year goal of 10,000 acres covered by RMPs in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, with more than 17,000 acres included in new RMPs. Also in that reporting period, the program expanded into 10 counties which previously had no RMPs and into areas of the state outside the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Fifteen new participants have had plans written, but what's more exciting is that several participants are now inquiring about adding additional acreage to new RMPs. Positive feedback has been received from certified RMP developers who see the plans as a valuable conservation tool.

We are pleased by the progression of the program as new participants are having plans written, participants are installing and implementing planned BMPs, and others are in the final stages of becoming certified. With each plan, we know we are making contributions toward meeting the department's nonpoint source pollution reduction goals. The farmer is getting credit for practices that are installed and implemented, including those practices installed voluntarily at the farmer's expense, and the farmer can take pride in the fact that he or she is meeting a higher standard of conservation and retaining our important soil resources.

Sincerely,



Clyde E. Cristman

Director, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Program background and focus

In 2011, the Virginia General Assembly passed House Bill 1830 (Chapter 781 of the 2011 Virginia Acts of Assembly), which allowed for the creation of the Resource Management Plan Program. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board worked with representatives from the soil and water conservation districts, agricultural commodity groups, conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies to develop RMP regulations. The board approved the regulations in 2013, and they became effective July 1, 2014. Information on the regulatory process is available at: <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/laws-and-regulations/lr7>.

About the program

The RMP program is a voluntary participation program that promotes the use of conservation practices to maximize water quality protection. Each plan is written to include, at minimum, those BMPs that have proved most effective at reducing runoff pollution to local waters, while encouraging farmers to take conservation to the next level.

Success stories

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board recognized commendatory participation in the RMP program. In a December 2015 official resolution, Kevin Engel was praised for exemplary participation for having plans written on more than 13,000 acres.



How to become a certified farming operation

The process for an operation to become certified as having implemented an RMP is shown below.

Assessment – A certified RMP developer visits the operation, meets with the farmer, evaluates the land and BMPs in place, and begins development of options to meet the RMP requirements.

Plan Development – The certified RMP developer meets with the farmer and discusses options. Once the farmer agrees to the particular BMPs and a schedule for implementation, the RMP may be submitted to the review authority, which is usually the local district but could be the department, for review and approval.

Plan Implementation – Once the required BMPs have been implemented or installed, the farmer may request that the review authority visit the farm to verify RMP implementation.

Verification – The plan developer and Technical Review Committee each conduct an inspection to verify that the RMP has been fully implemented.

Certification – A certificate of RMP implementation is issued once the review authority verifies implementation. “Certainty” begins at the date of issuance of the certificate. Continued verification visits are conducted at least once every three years throughout the nine-year certainty period to ensure the continued proper functioning and maintenance of all required BMPs.

RMP participant Kevin Engel of Engel Family Farms with his daughter, Savannah.



“I participated in the RMP program to see how conservation efforts I have made on my farm compare with the program’s requirements, and I am very happy with the results. I believe as farmers we are better off educating the public on the water quality efforts most farmers are making. Hopefully this will result in better decisions being made concerning additional regulations that affect agriculture.”

— **Gerald Garber**, Augusta County dairy farmer and first RMP participant

Benefits of RMP certification

- Provides “certainty” (safe harbor) for nine years.
- Establishes a comprehensive approach to determining the best conservation practices for each farming operation.
- Gives farmers credit for implementing voluntary practices that protect water quality.
- Shows farmers as “good actors” and may help stave off future regulations.
- Gives decision makers better data to determine funding needs for cost-share and other agricultural incentive programs.
- Enables certified participants to display signs for marketing and promotion purposes.
- Increases confidence among landowners that operators renting their land are being environmentally responsible.

Results since the program’s beginning

- As of Oct. 31, 2016, there were 326 plans covering 68,147 acres. Of those, 47 RMPs covering just over 19,500 acres have been developed in the last 12 months.
- Fifty-nine participants (owner or operator) with 319 plans in Chesapeake Bay drainage area.
- Three participants (owner or operator) with seven plans outside Chesapeake Bay drainage area.
- Average plan coverage area is 209 acres.
- Includes 57,791 acres of cropland, 6,524 acres of hayland and 6,514 acres of pasture.*

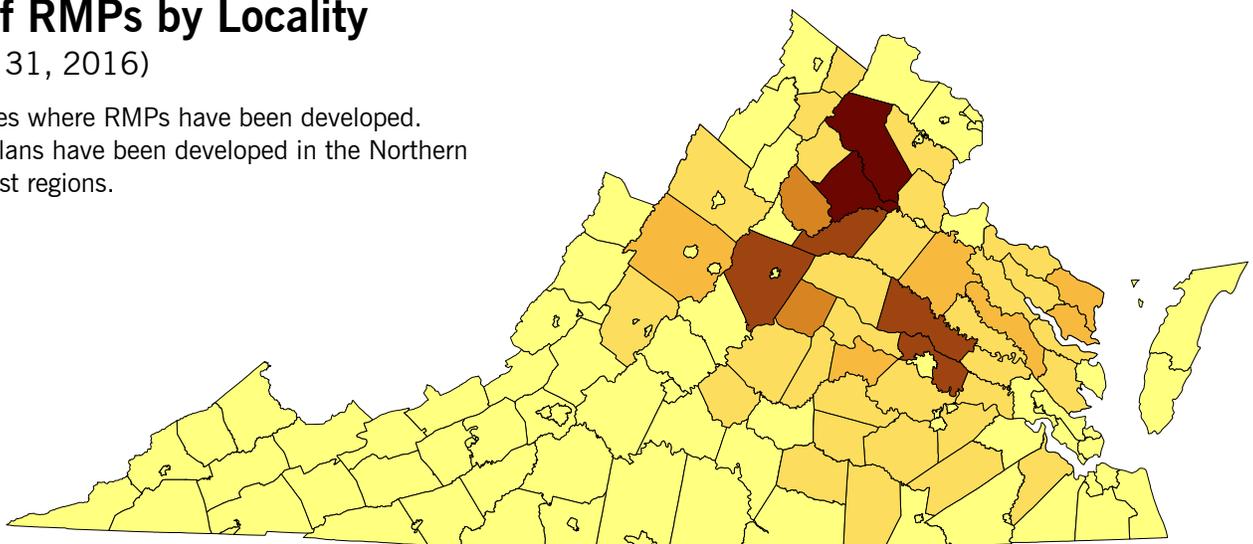
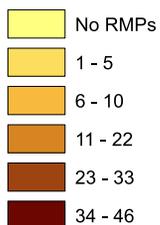
* 2,682 acres are in multiple crop types since fields can be classified in more than one category.

Number of RMPs by Locality

(as of October 31, 2016)

This map indicates where RMPs have been developed. The majority of plans have been developed in the Northern Piedmont and East regions.

Number of RMPs



“A lot of farmers are doing the right thing. It’s hard to take credit for that if you can’t show what you’re doing. I grew up on the river. My heart is in saving the waterways and being a good steward of the land.”

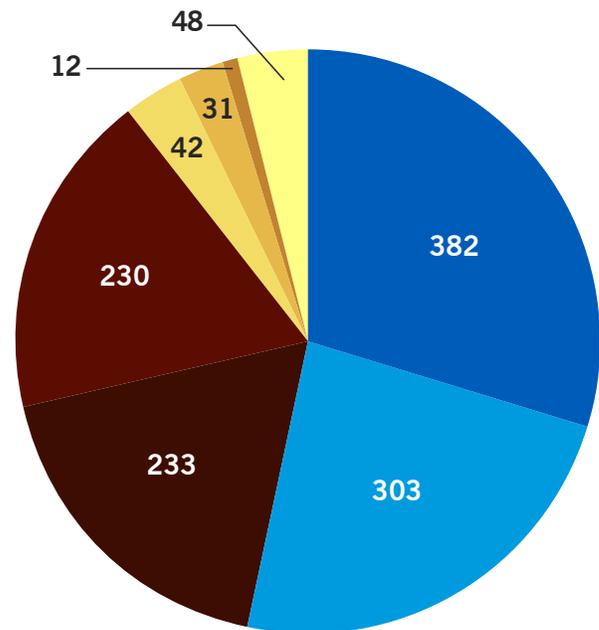
— **Rob Waring**, grain producer in eastern Virginia



Best management practices in RMPs without public funding

- **382** Cover Crops (VSL-8B and VSL-8H)
- **303** Continuous/High Residue Tillage System (VSL-15A)
- **233** Split Application of Nitrogen on Corn (VNM-3)
- **230** Late Winter Split Application of Nitrogen on Small Grain (VNM-4)
- **42** Grass Filter Strips (VWQ-1)
- **31** Permanent Vegetative Cover on Critical Areas (VSL-11)
- **12** Stream Exclusion Practices (VSL-6, VSE-5)
- **48** Other BMPs

1,281 Total



Status of RMPs

- 326 plans have been developed in the RMP program.
- 35 plans are being completed and will be submitted to the appropriate district for approval.
- 286 plans have been approved.
- Four RMPs have been implemented, and certification has been requested.
- Two RMPs have been verified, and the participants have received a certificate of implementation.

All best management practices included in RMPs

- 2,170 total BMPs are included in RMPs to meet or exceed the minimum requirements.
- 1,621 of the total BMPs exceed the minimum RMP requirements.
- 264 BMPs installed or implemented using cost-share assistance are already completed.
- 625 BMPs are proposed to be installed or implemented using cost-share assistance.
- 1,281 are proposed to be installed or implemented without any cost-share assistance.

Program Funding for Plan Development

Funding for the RMP program comes from state and federal sources. Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program funding is available to pay for the development of resource management plans. Cost-share funding also is available for most of the BMPs needed to meet RMP requirements and for RMP implementation assistance. In addition to state funds, many of the plans have been developed through federal Environmental Protection Agency grant funding used to develop contracts with private RMP developers.

- The 2016 federally funded Chesapeake Bay RMP Development Grant for \$120,000 resulted in 28 RMPs developed on 12,000 acres.
- The 2016 state funded Outside Chesapeake Bay RMP Development Grant for \$100,000 is anticipated to result in 28 RMPs developed on 10,000 acres by Dec. 31, 2016.
- A request for applications for a federally funded Chesapeake Bay RMP Development Grant has been issued. At least \$120,000 in grant funding will be available, and work is expected to begin Jan. 1, 2017.



“As a certified RMP developer since the program’s start, I’ve been asking my farmer clients what they like most about the program. I keep hearing that landowners like this program because it strengthens their relationships with people renting their land. It is no secret that much of the farmland in Virginia is rented land, and it is a very competitive environment for farmers. The RMP program seems to improve farmer-landowner relationships, therefore securing land rental agreements for the future.”

— *Al Dews, certified crop adviser and owner of Mattaponi Resources*

Certified RMP Developers

The RMP regulations established specific criteria for becoming a certified RMP developer. All RMP developers must be certified nutrient management planners in Virginia. Candidates must also demonstrate a suite of conservation and water quality planning skills or be a certified NRCS conservation planner. Finally, an application must be submitted to DCR for evaluation.

Currently, DCR has a registry of 16 certified RMP developers (see www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/document/rmp-developers.pdf). Several are district employees who intend to write plans as needed, when a private RMP developer is not available to write a plan.

Signs of progress

DCR has been working with the Virginia Farm Bureau and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to create signs to recognize RMP certified farm locations. These signs will be available for purchase to certified RMP participants. While participation in the program continues to be protected from public disclosure, this is an option for participants who choose to advertise participation and certification.

Looking ahead

DCR is encouraged by producers' interest in earning certificates through the RMP program. We anticipate the number of certified operations to increase significantly in fiscal 2018.

According to the program's regulations, a periodic program assessment will be conducted by DCR at least once every five years. DCR will develop a schedule to begin assessment of district RMP review activities in fiscal year 2018.



“I am able to use the RMPs as a tool to work with producers to identify conservation opportunities and to formalize plans for best management practice adoption. This has led to consistent and planned participation in conservation programs administered by the soil and water conservation districts and Natural Resources Conservation Service. The results of RMPs have only been positive.”

— *Tim Woodward, certified crop adviser and CEO of Tellus Agronomics*





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