

Resource Management Plan Program



VIRGINIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD
Highlights Report | Sept. 1, 2017 – Aug. 31, 2018



Members of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board:

This update is being submitted by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board on the status of the Resource Management Plan (RMP) Program from Sept. 1, 2017, to Aug. 31, 2018. We are pleased to inform you that we surpassed the calendar-year goal of 10,000 acres in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, with more than 14,000 acres included in new RMPs.

DCR has contracted with three private RMP developers to certify more than 30,000 acres of RMPs by May 31, 2019. Additionally, RMPs covering more than 3,500 acres are scheduled to be developed. During 2018, there have been unusually high levels of rainfall throughout Virginia. This rainfall has led to many erosion issues that will take time and funding to rectify. While the department is not currently aware of any specific RMPs that may be delayed due to the rainfall or current field conditions, it is possible there will be delays in RMP implementation due to unusual weather conditions.

Participants with approved RMPs are eligible for a boost in the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) ranking process when applying for cost-share funds to install best management practices (BMPs). Applications for cost-share funds are ranked using a Conservation Efficiency Factor (CEF), a tool that provides guidance to assist districts with ranking applications. DCR has implemented, within the BMP tracking program, a 10 percent reduction of the CEF score for BMPs within the land units of an RMP. The reduction of the CEF score provides a higher ranking for those BMPs that are included in an RMP.

The new program continues to progress as new participants are having plans written; participants are installing and implementing planned BMPs and other plans are in the final stages of becoming certified. With each RMP, we know that the agricultural community is making significant contributions toward meeting Virginia's water quality goals. The farmer is getting credit for practices that are installed and implemented, some 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

RMP Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG)

DCR, at the direction of the General Assembly, held a series of three Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings beginning in May 2017. A final report titled, “An Examination of the Needs and Potential Incentives to Encourage Implementation of Resource Management Plans,” was submitted to the governor and chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance committees on Oct. 1, 2017. The report can be found at <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2017/RD353/PDF>.

Department Initiatives

DCR has begun several initiatives focusing on increased implementation of RMPs.

1. RMP Implementation and Development Funding for FY2019

A. Contracts with RMP Developers

DCR continues to utilize federal grant monies from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to directly contract with RMP plan developers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. These contracts have led to the development of most of the RMPs across the state. Just over \$700,000 has been issued to RMP plan developers for the development of RMPs in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. For areas outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, DCR has utilized nearly \$94,000 in Water Quality Improvement funds to contract with plan developers. An additional \$120,000 of these federal funds has been allocated for the current contracts in the Chesapeake Bay watershed through May 31, 2019. While plan development is still included in the current contract, significant emphasis has been placed on certification work. This year’s contracts are anticipated to result in more than 32,000 acres certified and 3,544 acres included in new RMP plans. It is anticipated that another \$120,000 will be available in program year 2020 for additional certification and development projects.

B. SWCD Operational Support

DCR continues to provide operational support payments to districts for duties associated with RMP plan review; however, there is also an impact to district workloads related to RMP inspections. In recognition of this impact, DCR has provided supplemental operational support payments to districts for RMP certification inspections. As of Aug. 31, 2018, more than \$71,000 in additional operational support has been provided for work performed in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and more than \$8,000 have been provided to districts for review activity performed in areas outside of the bay watershed.

C. Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program

DCR continues to strongly encourage districts to advertise RMP-1 (plan development) and RMP-2 (available

upon RMP certification) practices that may be funded through an RMP VACS Program set-aside or individual district VACS allocations.

RMP -1

This practice assists producers with the costs related to the actual development of an RMP. Funding is provided at \$10 per acre with a total maximum funding amount of \$6,500 per plan. If a producer so chooses, payment may be made directly to the RMP developer. To date, nearly \$130,000 has been disbursed for RMP-1 payments.

RMP-2

In recognition of the financial investment by the producer in fully implementing the RMP, the practice provides \$5 per acre with a total maximum funding amount of \$3,250 per plan. Once a producer has received a certificate of implementation, he is eligible to apply for RMP-2. More than \$12,500 has been disbursed for RMP-2 payments to date. These payments are expected to grow considerably throughout FY2019. A change to practice specifications this year eliminated the ability for an RMP-2 payment to be assigned to an RMP developer. The participant is eligible for the practice, regardless of whether or not the RMP planner was paid for certification work through a contract with DCR.

In FY2018, districts were encouraged to offer an RMP-1 sign-up period similar to the sign-up period now used for the VACS program. The sign-up period allowed districts to advertise the opportunity for RMP development and to discuss the RMP program with interested participants between August and December 2017. Submitted applications would then be ranked and prioritized for funding. DCR planned to use information provided by districts to determine how federal grant funds and any remaining state funding could be best used to promote RMP certification and development. No potential participants were identified by districts or were provided to DCR by districts. Therefore, contractors were allowed to choose the participants included in their contract project workload in FY2019, as they had in previous years.

2. Conservation Efficiency Factor (CEF)

The CEF factor is calculated by the BMP tracking program to serve as a ranking tool and provide some guidance for ranking applications for BMPs implementation. This tool is designed to help districts rank cost-share practice applications. The CEF uses 11 components, including soil loss data that is inputted by the district, as well as the environmental information associated with the location of the practice, to generate a factor used to rank the proposed practice compared with other instances of the same BMPs as well as instances of other BMPs.

For FY2019, DCR has implemented, within the AgBMP Tracking Module, a 10 percent reduction of the CEF score for BMPs within the land units of an RMP. The reduction of the CEF score provides a higher ranking for those BMPs, thus promoting faster implementation of RMPs and faster RMP certification.

3. Department Programmatic Assistance

DCR staff has been working with individual districts to help deal with the significant workload created by the RMP development contracts. DCR staff has spent about 270 hours participating in plan review, inspection, perennial stream determinations and technical review committee meetings during the previous 12 months.

4. Targeted Mailing and Outreach Efforts

In June 2018, DCR sent a mailing to 85 eligible RMP participants. The mailing encouraged implementation of RMPs in order to achieve RMP certification. The letter informed participants of the newly established CEF bonus for BMPs included in an RMP as well as the availability of an RMP-2 payment for achieving certification. Also included were a graphic of RMP phases and more information about the benefits of having a certified RMP.

There have been several prominent agricultural publications that have featured articles on the RMP program. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services included a brief program profile in its annual Virginia Agriculture publication, which is available at <https://www.farmflavor.com/virginia/virginia-agriculture-2018/>.

The News & Advance, a Lynchburg newspaper, published an article this spring featuring an RMP participant who is electing to expand the scope of his RMP to include a newly acquired portion of his operation. The article is available at https://www.newsadvance.com/news/local/state-program-incentivizes-conservation-practices-on-local-farms/article_afa5a511-a1fd-5f5c-8b87-b130358236fd.html.



825 BMP instances have received the CEF 10% reduction resulting from having an RMP.

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.

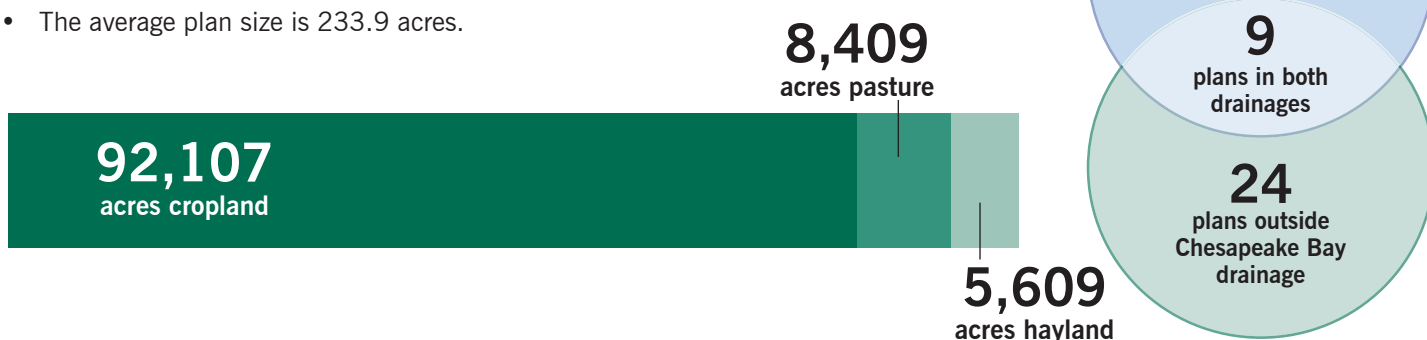
Plan Implementation – Once the required BMPs have been implemented or installed, the farmer may request that the review authority visit the farm to verify RMP implementation.

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 Program Results *(as of Aug. 31, 2018)*

- 457 plans covering 106,125 acres.
- 69 plans covering just over 14,000 acres have been developed in the last 12 months.
- The average plan size is 233.9 acres.



Status of RMPs *(as of Aug. 31, 2018)*

457 plans have been developed through the RMP Program

69

plans are being finalized and will be submitted to the appropriate soil and water conservation district (SWCD) for approval.

373

plans have been approved.

1

implemented RMP is awaiting certification inspection.

14

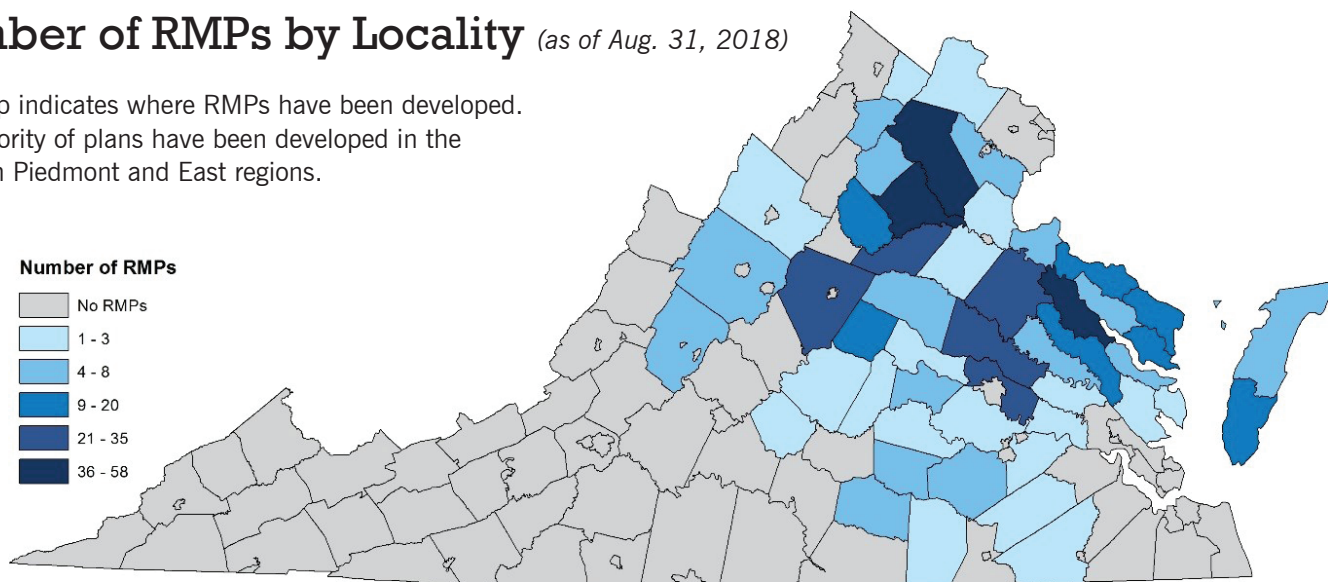
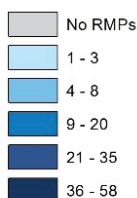
RMPs have received a certificate of implementation.

128 plans are on track to be certified before June 30, 2019, through the current contract project.

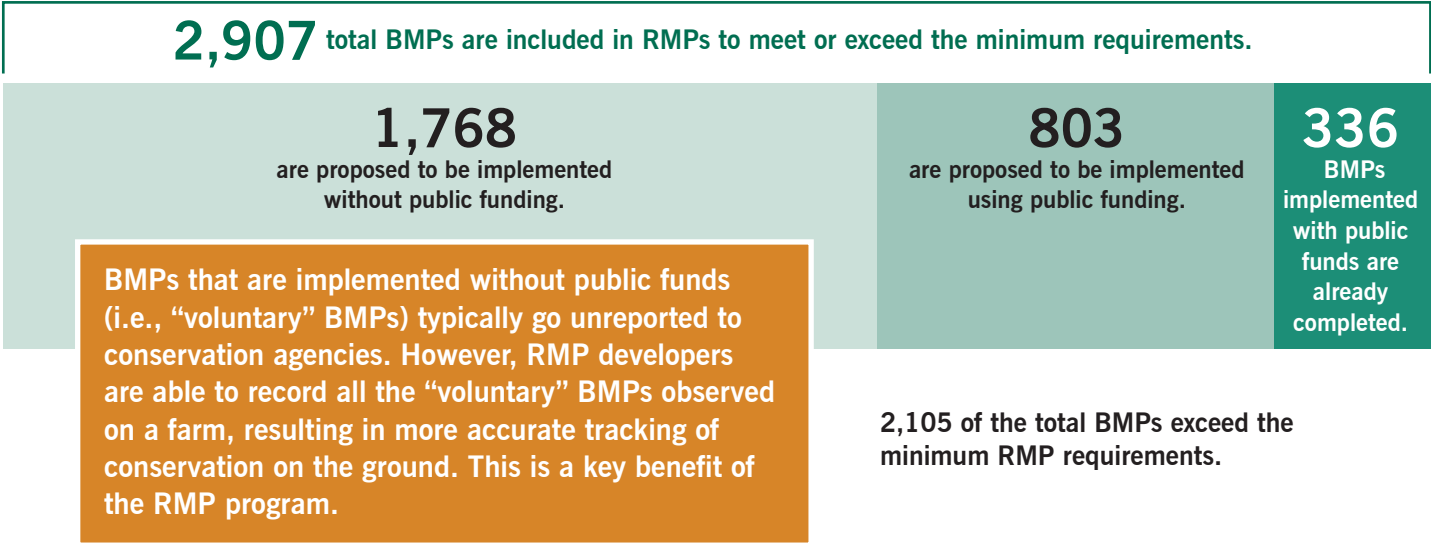
Number of RMPs by Locality *(as of Aug. 31, 2018)*

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



All Best Management Practices Included in RMPs



On The Horizon

RMP Local Program Review

In September 2018, the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board authorized DCR to conduct a pilot program review of District duties related to the RMP program. During FY2019, DCR will conduct pilot program reviews for three Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The reviews will consist of a personal interview between DCR and district staff, a review of the District files and other applicable documents, a review of a sample of the RMPs approved by the District Board, a review of certification and compliance inspections (if applicable), and a review of the information entered into the DCR Conservation Planning Suite.

RMP Regulations Review

In accordance with §§2.2-4007.1 and 2.2-4017 of the Code of Virginia and Executive Order 14 (2018), all regulations are required to undergo a periodic review at least every four years. It is DCR's intent to request authorization from

the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board to initiate a periodic review of the Resource Management Plan regulations at the Board's spring 2019 meetings. The periodic review must include a public comment period. At the close of the periodic review, DCR may request the Board initiate a regulatory action to amend the regulations based on the comments received.

Conservation Planning Suite Enhancements

As the program has progressed, DCR has identified modifications to the department's Conservation Planning Suite which will improve the workflow for all users, including the department, RMP Developers and Soil and Water Conservation Districts. DCR has completed several module enhancement projects over the course of the RMP program lifetime and is currently working on another enhancement which is expected to be completed before the beginning of program year 2020.

Participant Profile

Mary Lund, Lund Angus Farm

"The Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District does a good job promoting the RMP program and they even give additional ranking points for cost-share applications if the applicant has an NMP or an RMP. The RMP gave us additional points when our application was ranked by the SWCD and helped us qualify for cost-share for the stream fencing project."

"The RMP pushed us to take soil tests which have shown us we could manage our soil and nutrients better, giving us better grazing production. We now soil sample each year as part of our intensive grazing system. The RMP has given us the discipline to soil test annually, before it was easy to just put it off."

Participant Profile

Glenn Dye

"We were already doing the proper practices and enhancing a few things ... it keeps my operation on the up-and-up and looking at new things as well."

"With the threat of additional regulations, the RMP is a tool in the tool box to make sure we operate in an economic and sustainable way"





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