

Resource Management Plan Program

Highlights Report | Sept. 1, 2018 – Aug. 31, 2019



Participant Profile

Number of RMPs: **7**
Number of Certified RMPs: **7**
Acres in RMPs: **2,362**

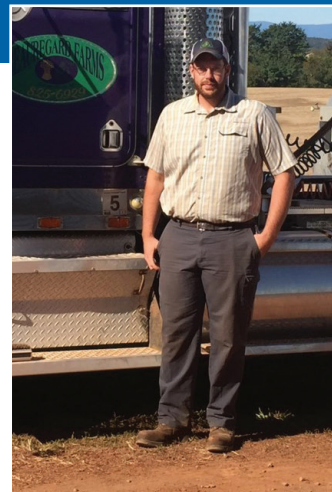
Practices included in RMPs:

- Harvestable cover crop (voluntary)
- Small grain and mixed cover crop for nutrient management and residue management (voluntary)
- Continuous high-residue minimal soil disturbance tillage system (VACS and voluntary)
- Livestock stream exclusion (VACS and voluntary)
- Grass filter strips
- Grazing land management



Jamie Shenk

*Farm manager of
Beauregard Farms
Brandy Station,
Virginia (Culpeper County)*



Jamie Shenk took over management of Beauregard Farms in 2015. The cow-calf operation in Culpeper County has a history of conservation, and Jamie is continuing the legacy. Under his leadership, seven resource management plans have been implemented and certified. The plans cover the entire 2,362-acre farm.

Participant Q&A

Q: Why did you decide to pursue RMPs?

A: *We saw the RMP as a comprehensive assessment tool, like a report card, that would show us how we were doing conservation-wise. Even though we were already doing so many practices and trying to be good stewards, the RMPs actually highlighted a few things that weren't on our radar, such as buffers on some ponds and streams.*



Q: What new best management practices did you implement as a result of your RMPs?

A: *Our farm has many streams that run throughout the pastureland, and the idea of fencing those seemed overwhelming. But we pushed to finish that project because it meant being able to fully implement our RMPs.*

Q: Did you face any hurdles during the implementation phase?

A: *Our plans were written in 2015, but it became too wet and rainy when we planned to plant grass and complete some fence installation. We couldn't complete implementation until 2019 because of those delays, but now the whole farm is included in certified RMPs.*

Q: How did the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District assist?

A: *The district would ask about the status of our RMPs and offer to help advance the progress, where possible. They offered their assistance with BMPs to get the work done. The district has such helpful staff and really made this come together.*



Farming is hard work. The farmer bears the social responsibility of growing their crops or animals in such a way that minimizes the impact to the environment. The RMP helps Jamie know that he has been a responsible farmer."

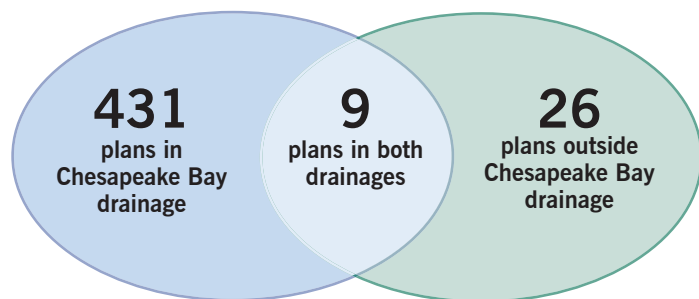
Timothy Woodward,
Tellus Conservation
RMP Developer

Advancing Certification

The goal of the RMP program for 2019 was to increase significantly the number of certified RMPs. DCR is pleased to announce that there are now more than 100 certified RMPs. A majority of these were previously in the "implementation" phase, meaning that the RMP had been approved, and BMPs were being installed.



RMP Program Results *(as of Aug. 31, 2019)*



- 466 plans covering 110,016 acres.
- 93 plans covering just over 23,271 acres have been certified in the last 12 months.
- The average plan size is 237 acres.

6,723
acres pasture

94,974
acres cropland

6,723
acres hayland

Status of RMPs *(as of Aug. 31, 2019)*

466 plans have been developed through the RMP Program

43

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

305

plans have been approved.

14

implemented RMPs are awaiting certification inspection.

104

RMPs have received a certificate of implementation.



All Best Management Practices Included in RMPs

2,972 total BMPs implemented or proposed.

1,163

BMPs implemented or proposed
with public funding.

1,809

BMPs implemented or proposed
without public funding.

BMPs that are implemented without public funds typically go unreported to conservation agencies. However, RMP developers are able to record all the BMPs observed on a farm, resulting in more accurate tracking of conservation on the ground.

This is a key benefit of the RMP program.

The Value of Privately Financed Conservation

While many of the conservation practices included in RMPs are installed with financial assistance from the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share program or federal conservation programs, the majority of practices in planned RMPs receive no public funding. One of the biggest conservation benefits of the RMP program is the ability to report these privately financed BMPs. One of the clearest examples is nutrient management plan implementation verification. As a result of RMP certification inspections, many nutrient management plan acres were verified, and enhanced nutrient management practices have been reported.

- 68,177 acres of verified nutrient management plans
- 37,956 acres verified as using advanced nitrogen management
- 33,738 acres verified as using advanced phosphorus management



RMP Signs

Farmers are often enthusiastic to place a sign on their farm to advertise equipment, seed or fertilizer. When other farmers see a certain product working well for their neighbors, they take notice. DCR will apply the same advertising concept to increase awareness and farmer participation, and to promote the benefits of the RMP program. By the end of 2020, DCR plans to provide RMP signs to all certified RMP operations. The agency will coordinate a media campaign around the distribution of signs to make the public aware of the program.



Northern Neck RMP Bundle Pilot Project

DCR began a pilot with the Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District as a means to accelerate certification of additional RMPs. Farmers participating in this pilot are eligible for funding for all BMPs included in their RMPs, with the exception of practices to repair significant gully erosion. The district conducted signup in the fall of 2019. Ten farmers signed up to participate in the pilot and committed to install all practices in 25 RMPs before June 30, 2020. The district was provided \$348,000 to fund these RMP bundle practices. The pilot is expected to demonstrate that RMPs can be easily implemented and certified when the necessary BMPs are approved for funding as a bundle rather than individually.

RMP Certification and Development Projects

The 2019 RMP Certification and Development project dramatically increased the number of certified RMPs in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. In 2019, DCR used federal Chesapeake Bay Regulatory and Accountability Program funds to offer RMP developers contracts to conduct certification and development work. These contracts emphasized certification but also included funding for new plan development. This project resulted in 100 RMPs becoming certified (more than 25,000 acres). Additionally, 24 new RMPs were developed (more than 4,000 acres).

In calendar year 2020, DCR will again fund an RMP Certification and Development project in the bay watershed with \$120,000. This is expected to result in the certification of more than 9,000 acres and the development of new RMPs on over 9,000 acres. For areas outside of the bay watershed, \$100,000 is available and is expected to result in the certification of more than 9,000 acres and development of more than 7,200 acres of RMPs.



Technical Assistance Funding to Districts

Funding is provided to districts that have recently reviewed RMPs or conducted RMP certification inspections. In previous years, districts have been provided a rate of 50 cents per acre, plus \$100 per plan. For FY20, DCR changed the rate to \$3 per acre for both RMP plan review and certification inspections to match the rate paid to RMP developers for certification inspections.



Chesapeake Bay TMDL Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan

The Watershed Implementation Plan is the roadmap for how bay jurisdictions, in partnership with federal and local governments, will achieve the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load allocations. The importance of the RMP program is highlighted in Virginia's recently released Watershed Implementation Plan. Several state initiatives included in the Phase III document are related to the RMP program.

Help Needed: More RMP developers

RMP developers work closely with farmers to get them to RMP certification. This includes writing plans, helping to implement the necessary BMPs and ensuring BMPs are verified. There is demand for more RMP developers who can help expand the program throughout Virginia. DCR is working to meet that demand, primarily by helping individuals receive the training needed to be certified as RMP developers. DCR offered several classes this year in the conservation planner course curriculum that meet the professional standards needed to achieve RMP developer certification.

Local Program Review

In 2019, DCR conducted a pilot program review of soil and water conservation district RMP programs. DCR worked with three districts for this review. The review evaluated SWCDs' implementation of the program. At the conclusion of the pilot, DCR had no suggestions for modification to either the program review documents or the review process. DCR will proceed with local program reviews for four additional districts in 2020, and results will be reported to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board.

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. The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board initiated a periodic review of the RMP regulations that opened on July 8, 2019, and ended on Sept. 6, 2019. The board will review comments received from the public at its Dec. 11, 2019, meeting.

The Process

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.



For more information

Scott Ambler

Scott.Ambler@dcr.virginia.gov

540-332-9231

Barbara McGarry

Barbara.McGarry@dcr.virginia.gov

804-371-0297

www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/rmp

