## Moores and Mill Creek Clean-Up Plan Stakeholder Group MeetingRockbridge County Administration Building, Lexington VANovember 17, 2022

### Attendees

Bill Sweeney (VDOF) Spencer Suter (Rockbridge County)
Robert Wagner (Apex) Lewis Straub (Landowner)

Evan Everson (Apex) Becky Szarzynski (Landowner)

Reid Mackey (Landowner) John Pancake (RACC)

Marsha Heatwole Charles Robertson (Landowner)

Tom Stanley (VCE) Sandra Stuart (RACC)

Lee Cummings (NBSWCD) Deborah Woocock

Ray Lewis (Rockbridge Co BOS) Leslie Ayers (Rockbridge Co BOS)

### Meeting Summary

Nesha McRae (DEQ) began the meeting with introductions and a brief recap of the clean-up study (formally known as a Total Maximum Daily Load, TMDL) that was completed for Moores and Mill Creek in November 2022. Nesha explained that sediment was identified as the primary stressor for the two streams, and that the study identified the reductions in sediment from each stream needed to restore aquatic life. One participant asked if the study identified exactly where the sediment was coming from (did it identify sediment originating from upland pasture versus riparian pasture or from particular properties). Nesha explained how a watershed model is used to simulate the transport of sediment from different land use types in the watersheds. She noted that forests contribute very little sediment to the streams, while sediment from pasture comprises the largest amount of sediment in the streams. Pasture and forest are the predominant land uses in both watersheds, which is why pasture is the largest contributor of sediment. Another participant asked how the sediment reductions identified in the study align with Chesapeake Bay TMDL goals. Nesha explained that this is a separate effort and that DEQ has worked with partners to match up local goals with Chesapeake Bay TMDL goals at their request, but that this is not a requirement.

The group moved on to discuss the role of the stakeholder committee, which is to provide local input on implementation actions and strategies that are best suited for the Moores and Mill Creek watershed community. Nesha explained that the plan will be implemented on a voluntary basis, making local buy in critical to its success. The group discussed potential best management practices to include in the plan, beginning with livestock exclusion fencing. Nesha shared information on a variety of fencing practices offered through state and federal cost share programs with varying setback requirements and financial incentives. Nesha asked the group to assign priority rankings to the different fencing practices. One participant asked who is responsible for maintaining the fence when it is installed on rented land. Tom Stanley explained that this can be a challenge. Ultimately the landowner is responsible for contractual requirements, but they often ask the renter to take care of maintenance since they are typically absentee landowners. Many farmers have 1-year leases on rented land, which be a deterrent to installing fencing since there is no long-term commitment to assistance with maintenance for the property owner. One participant suggested increasing tax incentives for agricultural land placed in riparian buffers. Agricultural land in Rockbridge County does receive land use tax benefits, but these benefits to not differentiate between agricultural land and riparian buffers. Several participants expressed concerns about maintenance of fencing and control of invasive species. The wider the buffer is, the less likely the fence is to wash out and the great the financial incentive is however, a wider buffer is also more work to maintain with respect to control of invasive species. One participant noted that it is difficult to get into a buffer area with a bush hog due to the uneven terrain and space constraints caused by the fence and the creek. The need for greater flexibility was expressed. Temporary fencing was suggested as a good way to keep cows out of the stream most of the time but also allow for easier maintenance of buffer areas. The James River Association has a program targeted at removing invasive species from old CREP buffers, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation has a program to plant trees in riparian buffers, but there is not a great program out there to maintain new buffers for landowners. Participants noted that all of the red tape associated with state and federal cost share programs for livestock fencing is a major deterrent to participating in these programs. Lee Cummings (NBSWCD) explained that these requirements are in place to ensure the durability of these programs and make sure that taxpayer dollars are being spent appropriately. It was noted that farmers can install these practices on their own if they want greater flexibility. One participant noted that Boxerwood has a carbon offset program in place to support tree planting, this could be a good resource for farmers looking for different programs. Bill Sweeny (DOF) noted that some of the maintenance concerns expressed by participants could be addressed if landowners were more involved in planting plans for their buffers. Participants agreed that the clean-up plan should prioritize practices with minimal maintenance requirements. Nesha asked if landowners would prefer grassed buffers or forested buffers. One participant responded that grass would be preferred since it is easier to maintain. Nesha asked the group about local interest in rotational grazing and installation of off stream water. Participants agreed that rotational grazing works well and that off stream water is key to making it work. Wells can be very expensive to install. An electric line is needed, though solar is another, less dependable, option. One participant noted that it is difficult to get funding for gravity fed systems anymore. Cover crops are another popular practice in the area that should be included in the plan.

Participants were reluctant to assign priorities to practices without input from more farmers in the area. Nesha suggested that she review records of practices installed in the watersheds historically and assign similar ratios to practices included in the plan.

The group moved on to discuss stormwater practices to include in the plan. Nesha suggested identifying a series of high priority practices so that it would be easier to pursue funding for these projects. The Pilot Travel Center in the headwaters of Moores Creek was identified as a priority area for stormwater management in addition to White’s Travel Center, also in the headwaters of Moores Creek. Representatives from Apex noted that one of the two basins at the Pilot Travel Center is under a maintenance agreement with Rockbridge County and looks pretty good. The other stormwater basin dates back to the old Wilco Station and is blasted out. This would be a good area to focus on. A check basin and check dams could be installed at the site. In addition, the small tributary below the basin going into Moores Creek could use some bank stabilization work. Catch basins and curb inlets would be good practices to consider at the truck stop properties. The bags that are installed have an estimated 5-year lifespan and cost around $250-$300 each. Pervious pavement will not withstand tractor trailer traffic. Nesha agreed to reach out to representatives from Apex to arrange a site visit before the next meeting. There are additional opportunities for streambanks stabilization in the lower reaches of the White’s Travel Center property. Since the property is now under next ownership, additional discussions will be required in order to gage interest in pursuing restoration practices. Nesha asked participants for potential areas to target with stormwater practices in the Mill Creek watershed. One participant suggested a residential subdivision in the lower watershed. Several residents in this area are active Master Gardeners and might be interested in implementing stormwater management practices. Nesha asked whether Devils Backbone might be interested. Since the property is now under new ownership by a larger corporation, it may be more challenging to work with the owners.

Nesha discussed next steps with the group. A second stakeholder meeting will be held in early 2023, during which participants will review BMP scenarios and discuss associated costs. Nesha thanked participants for attending and the meeting was adjourned.