

Moores and Mill Creek Clean-Up Plan Community Engagement Meeting  
Rockbridge County Administration Building, Lexington VA  
May 31, 2023

Attendees

Dave Walsh (Perkins and Orrison)  
Spencer Suter (Rockbridge County)  
Jonathan Griffin (Rockbridge County)  
Lee Cummings (NBSWCD)  
Barbara Walsh (Rockbridge Conservation)  
Sandra Stuart (Rockbridge Conservation)  
Tom Stanley (VA Cooperative Extension)  
Billy Grose (Rockbridge County)  
Ashley Wendt (DEQ)  
Kaitlin King (DEQ)  
Madison Whitehurst (DEQ)

Meeting Summary

Nesha McRae (DEQ) began the meeting with a welcome and introductions, followed by a brief recap of the implementation planning process currently underway for the Moores and Mill Creek watersheds. The group moved on to discuss the implementation scenario for best management practices (BMPs) in the watersheds shown in Table 2 of the handout. Nesha explained that the table includes cost effectiveness rankings for each practice so that participants could weigh costs and benefits. Nesha noted that the scenario includes a greater extent of agricultural BMPs when compared to urban and residential practices. This is due in part to the predominance of agricultural land in the watersheds. Additionally, cost effectiveness rankings for cropland and pasture BMPs were highest, while urban stormwater practices were lowest.

The group discussed livestock exclusion practices included in the proposed BMP scenario. Lee Cummings noted that fencing project costs have nearly tripled in the past 10 years. The Natural Bridge Soil and Water Conservation District (NBSWCD) is currently looking at raising their fencing cost share rates by \$1/foot (woven wire) in the next program year, bringing the average cost up to \$7-\$7.20/ft. Lee noted that a fencing project complete with a watering system is currently costing between \$60K and \$80K, though some projects cost even more. During a recent site visit with a landowner in Moores Creek interested in exclusion, Lee noted that the practice cost was a clear deterrent. While state and federal programs cover much of the cost of exclusion practices, farmers still have to cover the upfront costs, for which they are reimbursed. Nesha noted livestock exclusion practices do not give us a significant sediment reduction credit since we do not currently have a good way to credit the reduction in downcutting of banks that occurs when livestock no longer have access to the stream. Sediment reduction credits for exclusion practices are based on riparian buffer installation and rotational grazing. Nesha noted that if costs are an issue, we could focus more on pasture management practices since these reduce a greater amount of sediment runoff for a lower cost. The group discussed the practice listed as “conversion of poor pasture to fair pasture.” This is not a practice included in the state cost

share program, but rather a change in overall pasture management that would be achieved through targeted education and outreach efforts focused on the establishment of a greater degree of vegetative cover through more frequent rotation of livestock between fields, and lower stocking rates. The group discussed whether the Continuous Conservation Initiative Practice could be included in the plan to track voluntary fencing installed as an alternative to higher cost woven wire fencing. Participants did not see a need to include this practice in the plan as voluntary fencing is not common in the area. The group agreed to leave the fencing practices in the plan while moving forward with targeted outreach to encourage improved pasture management.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) has a fantastic riparian buffer program that has been very helpful in getting buffers established in the area. The James River Buffer Program was launched in 2019 for landowners in the Middle James region, then extended to the Upper James region the following year. The program directly pays for all project costs, including design, site preparation, materials, installation, and three years of establishment support. There is no out-of-pocket cost to the landowner. Participants thought that this program would be available for several more years given its widespread success. Farmers have experience far lower mortality with buffer plantings and have been receptive to the option to select their own buffer species (as long as they are native trees). This program should be included as a resource in the plan.

The group discussed cropland management practices included in the proposed BMP implementation scenario. Lee noted that there was a big decline in cover crops this past year, as landowners moved to selling for grain.

A participant asked how agricultural BMPs are marketed to farmers. Lee Cummings responded that he tries to focus on the economic benefits of practices and how it will improve the overall productivity of the farm. It was noted that there is a lot of bureaucracy associated with state and federal cost share programs. Having a basic brochure outlining resources available to farmers that is specific to the Moores and Mill Creek watersheds might be helpful in navigating these programs. Lee noted that farmer to farmer communication is also a very helpful tool. Farmers like to see how practices work on other farms when considering whether to adopt them. Neshia asked participants about other outreach possibilities to promote pasture and cropland management practices. The McCormick Farm (VA Tech) hosts a large field day every other year that focuses on new tools for farmers wishing to explore conservation farming. The NBSWCD hosted a field day a few months ago that was very well attended, so it appears that interest in the area is relatively high. Tom Stanley (VCE) offered to partner with the SWCD on development of a brochure for farmers in the watersheds. He also noted that we need to be aware that the landowner and the farmer may be two different people.

The group discussed urban and residential management practices. The Pilot Travel Center is interested in installing storm drain inserts to treat runoff from their parking lots. Truck stops have large amounts of dust and other pollutants deposited on their lots, making other filtering practices like bioretention filters impossible to maintain. These inserts are reusable and fairly effective. A participant asked if there are any regulatory requirements regarding installation and maintenance of storm drain inserts. This would be a voluntary practice with maintenance integrated into existing stormwater management planning. Neshia noted that a site visit would be helpful in better understanding other stormwater management practices that could be implemented at the site including stabilization downstream of the outlet to one of the two stormwater ponds on the property. Jonathan Griffin agreed to visit the site

with Nesha in the next several months. Nesha asked participants about the other truck stop in the Moores Creek watershed, formally known as White's Travel Center. Participants did not think that the new ownership would be interested in pursuing streambank restoration plans previously developed for the site with Bobby Berkstresser. This site had significant streambank erosion issues downstream of the developed portion of the property. The group discussed the high cost and design needs associated with streambank restoration. In order to address bank erosion issues in the watersheds, it will be important to identify the properties with the worst issues. It is likely that the bulk of the sediment is coming from a handful of highly eroded areas. Louise Finger (Department of Wildlife Resources) has been a great resource for streambank restoration design in the region, but is currently not exploring new projects. Due to the high cost of projects, targeting will be very important. A participant asked about the overall contribution of streambank erosion to the sediment impairments. Nesha noted that pasture and cropland contribute more sediment due to their predominance in the watersheds, but that there may be a few reaches of streambank contributing a large amount of sediment. The group discussed other resources to assist with streambank restoration design work. Trout Unlimited has staff who can assist with design work, but they only work in trout waters. Shenandoah Streamworks may be undergoing a change in management and doing less streambank restoration work in the area these days.

The group discussed opportunities for riparian buffer and turf to trees plantings in the watersheds. Nesha noted that Willow Lake would be a great location for a demonstration project, and suggested collaborating with the Buffalo Creek Boys School on this effort. The school recently purchased a property on Moores Creek just downstream of the lake. Participants noted that the school was struggling with enrollment and may not remain in business much longer. There may still be some opportunities for buffer plantings on their Moores Creek property. Nesha asked participants if they knew anyone who owned a property in the subdivision. Spencer Suter offered to ask around to see if there is a homeowners association for the neighborhood. Nesha asked participants if they thought Devil's Backbone might be interested in implementing any stormwater management practices on their property. They are already treating runoff from their paved parking lot with a filtering BMP, and participants were unsure of other opportunities to treat stormwater from the site. It would still be worth reaching out to them to see if they have any ideas and if they are interested in participating in the project. Boxerwood could be a good partner in tree planting projects. They are currently in the process of applying for an urban forestry grant from USDA, though the Moores and Mill Creek watersheds are not in their project area. Sandra Stuart noted that the Department of Forestry will be issuing a request for proposals for a tree planting program later this summer. This might be another option for the watersheds.

The group moved on to discussed development of a staged timeline for implementation. Nesha shared a proposed implementation scenario that featured a focus on implementation of the most cost effective practices in the first stage, and the less effective practices in the second with a 70%/30% split in each stage. Participants thought that it would be best to set a target of implementation of 30% of all practices in the first stage in order to allow time to build momentum and 70% of practices in the second stage. Nesha asked about an appropriate timeline for implementation. Participants agreed on a ten year timeline split equally between the two stages.

The group moved on to discuss next steps for the project. Nesha explained that she will be working on drafting the plan over the next few weeks. Once complete, it will be circulated to meeting participants who will have two weeks to review and document and provide comments. Participants recommended

holding the final public meeting in early September, just not on the Thursday or Friday after Labor Day since this is when the Rockbridge County Fair will be held. One participant suggested reaching out to the Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church, though they usually charge a fee to use their meeting room. The McCormick Farm is another option, though it may be a little warm in early September. The Lexington Presbyterian Church has a nice space for meetings, though they are not located near the two project watersheds. Participants suggested engaging the Rockbridge County Farm Bureau along with the Sam Houston Ruritan Club.

Nesha thanked participants for attending and the meeting was adjourned.