

## Hat and Black Creek Community Engagement Meeting

Nelson Memorial Library, Lovingston VA

February 27, 2024

### Participants

Dick Whitehead	Sara Senn (TJSWCD)
Robert Saunders	Yvette Stafford
Robert McSwain	Conny Roussos
Ernie Reed (Nelson Co BOS)	Nesha McRae (DEQ)
Sara Jordan (DEQ)	

### Meeting Summary

Nesha McRae (DEQ) welcomed participants to the meeting and everyone introduced themselves. She shared a handout showing possible best management practices that could be included in the watershed plan for Hat and Black Creek. These practices (BMPs) were identified based on their ability to remove both sediment and phosphorus from non point source runoff. The group was then asked to assist in prioritizing the practices on a scale of one to four: 1= High likelihood of implementation; 2 = Moderate likelihood of implementation; 3 = Low likelihood of implementation; 4 = Remove from consideration.

### Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs): Prioritization

State and federal agricultural BMP cost share programs are administered by the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Agricultural landowners can receive reimbursement for anywhere from 75% to over 100% of BMP implementation costs. The group reviewed a table showing practices available through these programs that help to reduce sediment and phosphorus in streams. Participants reviewed different fencing practice options and their associated cost effectiveness with respect to their ability to remove sediment and phosphorus from runoff. Nesha explained that the fencing practice that does not include off stream water is the most cost effective because installation of a well and waterers is very expensive; however, producers don't select this practice very often because they need to provide water for their livestock if they fence them out of the stream. A participant asked if limited stream access points or crossings are allowed with this practice. These are allowed and may bring up the cost. A representative from the SWCD noted that most of the buffers they see are either 35 or 65 feet in width. Participants noted that it would be hard to install many 100-foot buffers in these watersheds due to the narrow pastures and surrounding topography. Several participants shared that they used to have livestock on their property, but that it became difficult to manage and that the return on their investment just wasn't there anymore. Making hay requires a lot less time and effort. It is likely that other landowners in the area have converted to hay, or have chosen to lease their land to other producers who are using it to graze livestock. Fencing out properties with many small tributaries would be very difficult and would require many gates, making rotating livestock around the property very labor intensive. A participant noted that it would also be beneficial to fence out wet areas.

Participants looked at maps showing opportunities for livestock exclusion fencing and buffers in addition to buffers on hayland. Two participants made notes on the maps noting the location of their property

and the fact that they no longer have livestock. Nesha asked the group for feedback on whether property owners would be willing to plant trees in their buffers, or if they would be more likely to leave the buffer in grass. One participant shared that he had opted to plant trees, but that only 30-40% of his plantings remained several years later. Nesha shared information about the James River Buffer Program, which provides landowners with assistance maintaining their buffers for several years after they are planted. Participants thought that offering this sort of assistance to landowners in the watersheds might increase the likelihood that trees would be planted in the buffers. Nesha explained that we could include this program in the plan and look for an opportunity to partner with the James River Association to target the watersheds for assistance.

The group moved on to discuss pasture management practices including rotational grazing and nutrient management planning. Nesha explained that nutrient management plans can be developed for farmland by certified planners to help with manure and litter management and overall fertilizer application rates and timing. A participant noted that a lot of poultry litter is being trucked into the area from the Valley, and that those receiving the litter probably already have nutrient management plans. It would be a good idea to include the practice in the plan to reduce phosphorus in Black Creek and to ensure that existing plans are updated over time. Nesha noted that the afforestation of erodible pasture might be a good practice to include for steeper areas where farmers are no longer finding it profitable to graze livestock. Permanent vegetation on critical areas could be used to remediate historic damage to pastures dating back to Hurricane Camille. The group reviewed cropland BMPs for Hat Creek (there is no cropland in Black Creek), noting that there is barely any cropland in Hat Creek. It will be difficult to have much success in meeting implementation goals for cropland if they are set too high, since there is probably only one or two landowners to work with in the watershed.

### **Streambank Restoration Prioritization**

The group moved on to discuss opportunities for streambank restoration in the watersheds. Everyone agreed that this would need to be a major component of the watershed plan. Nesha explained that this is an expensive practice that the SWCD does not have sufficient funding to support. It will be helpful if a few priority projects could be identified in the plan where a high level of erosion is occurring. If these projects could be identified and scoped in terms of the extent of bank work needed, it will be helpful in identifying grant funds to support projects going forward. The group identified a couple of priority areas, and discussed opportunities to collaborate with the Department of Energy on targeting practices based on their landslide mapping in the watersheds. Areas where unconsolidated materials have been deposited in flood plains as a result of landslides during/following Camille may be contributing a large amount of sediment and phosphorus to the streams as the channel carves its way through these unconsolidated materials. Mapping of debris flow paths could also be used to identify erodible pastures that could be stabilized and/or planted with trees. A participant asked what streambank restoration includes and why it is so expensive. Nesha explained that people must often work with an engineer to design these projects, which brings up the costs. Eroded banks are graded back to allow the stream to access its floodplain, then stabilized with vegetation. Sometimes work in the stream is conducted to help direct flows and create habitat. A participant shared a great experience that he had working with the Department of Wildlife Resources on a streambank restoration project on his property. He had recently cut down a tree on his property, and they were able to use the log to help redirect flow and prevent further bank erosion. A participant noted that a lot of streams were channelized after Camille, which did not help with bank erosion. These areas may also need to be prioritized for restoration.

The group ran out of time to review urban BMPs included in the handout. Nesha explained that the group will meet one more time to go over a BMP scenario that meets the sediment and phosphorus reduction goals and discuss education and outreach strategies, costs and a project timeline. Following that meeting, a larger final community meeting will be held to present the plan to the public. A larger push to get the word out about this meeting will occur. Nesha thanked participants for attending and the meeting was adjourned.