

SHENANDOAH VALLEY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

STRATEGIC PLAN
JULY 1, 2019 – JUNE 30, 2023



1934 Deyerle Avenue, Suite B
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
(540) 433-2853 ext. 3
1-800-528-3276
www.svswcd.org

MISSION

To promote stewardship and conservation of our natural resources.

VISION

The Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District's service area has improved soil and water resources. Local water quality is enhanced resulting in fewer impairments providing fishable and swimmable waters for citizens. Soil erosion is reduced and soil quality is enhanced, leading to more fertile soil that ensures not only the viability of the agricultural community in the Valley, but the overall health of the local waterways and Chesapeake Bay.

The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Equal opportunity provider and employer

All programs and services of the District are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis, without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status, handicap or political affiliation.

Approved by Board: 7/3/2019

	Review Date
2019-2020 Review	
2020-2021 Review	
2021-2022 Review	
2022-2023 Review	

Background

The Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District (SVSWCD) is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Founded in 1940, the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District is one of 47 Conservation Districts in Virginia. Its geographic boundaries include Rockingham and Page Counties and the City of Harrisonburg.

A Soil and Water Conservation District is an organization that joins local, regional, state and federal agencies in a common effort with citizens to conserve and promote the wise use of the area's natural resources. The SVSWCD serves as a community clearinghouse for natural resource information and services which help constituents and producers make sound conservation and land use decisions. In addition, the District works collaboratively with government agencies throughout the service area to resolve local resource issues and problems.

The District is governed by an eight member Board of Directors. Two directors are elected from each of the three localities in the general election. Two additional directors are appointed by the SVSWCD Board and approved by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board. Directors serve 4 year terms and their service to the District is voluntary.

This Strategic Plan was developed under the authority conveyed through the Soil and Water Conservation District Law of Virginia as follows:

“A soil and water conservation district...shall constitute a governmental subdivision of this State, and a public body corporate and politic, exercising public powers...”

“They (a district and its directors) shall have the power to develop comprehensive programs and plans for the conservation of soil resources and for the control and prevention of soil erosion and for flood prevention or agricultural and nonagricultural phases of the conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water within the district...”

This strategic plan was updated through the following means:

- Online stakeholder surveys were completed in March and April 2019 by partners, agricultural producers, educators and other constituents
- Staff and Director input
- Review and discussion at 6/6/2019 Board Meeting

This plan serves as guidance and a framework to the Board members, staff and other local decision makers as they work together to address local natural resource issues and problems. It forms the basis for the District's Annual Plan of Work. The District exists to serve the best interests of all its citizens in protecting natural resources.

Goal 1: To maintain and/or increase sustainable funding to support projects and services of the District

Objective 1: Maintain and/or increase grant funding from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for District operations, cost-share and dam maintenance, rehabilitation and repair. Seek out and consider other funding opportunities to support water quality efforts

Action Steps

- Comply with terms and conditions set forth in the District’s Administration and Operations grant agreement
- Comply with terms and conditions set forth in the District’s Cost-Share and Technical Assistance grant agreement
- Comply with the terms and conditions set forth in other grant agreements
- Research and apply for competitive grants

Expected Outcomes

- Install BMPs in accordance with VACS Manual
- Improved soil and water quality
- Increased number of farmers and landowners adopting BMPs

Objective 2: Maintain and/or increase funding from localities

Action Steps

- District Board Members will attend at least two locality meetings and report on District programs
- Request support from the 13 localities located within the District by providing detailed information outlining the programs and services offered by the District
- Approach localities to collaboratively work on addressing local natural resource concerns
- Approach non-funding localities to offer an overview of District programs and services

Expected Outcomes

- Level or increased locality funding
- New partnership(s)
- Non-funding locality(s) to provide support
- Increased awareness of the District by localities

Objective 3: Work with partners (agencies/organizations) to obtain competitive grants to support ongoing education/outreach efforts and innovative conservation projects

Action Steps

- Collaborate with partners to apply for at competitive grants
- Seek out and consider additional funding sources applicable to the District’s programs and services
- Establish new partnerships and build upon existing partnerships

Expected Outcomes

- Obtain outside grant funding to support the District's programs and services
- Form new partnerships
- Expansion of current District programs and services to reach new clientele
- More flexibility in programs and services specifically for innovative BMPs

Goal 2: Educate local citizens about natural resource conservation

Objective 1: Educate school communities (students & teachers) to be good stewards of our natural resources

Action Steps

- Annually conduct a local Envirothon competition Annually sponsor high school students to attend Youth Conservation Camp & VADOF's Woods & Wildlife Camp
- Annually conduct and/or partner to support and participate in educational events for students
- Annually conduct and/or partner to support and participate in educator trainings/workshops
- Work with schools to incorporate or enhance conservation/natural resource curricula in classroom instruction
- Annually conduct a poster contest
- Annually recruit, and mentor interns to introduce them to natural resource conservation and job opportunities

Expected Outcomes

- Winner of local Envirothon advances to Area competition
- Increase students' and teachers' knowledge of natural resource conservation
- Submit local winners to the state contest
- Foster a conservation ethic and provide an impactful experience for interns

Objective 2: Educate the agricultural community on the benefits of, and encourage the adoption of, best management practices

Action Steps

- Partner with cooperating agencies to sponsor and support field days showcasing natural resource conservation
- Administer and provide technical assistance for the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program and increase interest
- Annually recognize members of the agricultural community for outstanding accomplishments in the conservation of natural resources

Expected Outcomes

- Informative field days with increased conservation knowledge of participants
- Increase knowledge of natural resource conservation and conservation best management practices in the agricultural community
- Increased interest in the Cost-Share Program

- Annually award the Rockingham and Page County Clean Water Farm Awards and nominate one producer for the Shenandoah River Basin Clean Water Farm Award

Objective 3: Educate constituents on the importance of natural resource protection and opportunities for conservation

Action Steps

- Conduct and/or partner in community educational/outreach opportunities and local events to increase conservation knowledge
- Offer District resources for use by partners for education and outreach purposes
- Conduct and/or partner in presentations related to natural resource conservation to civic organizations and community groups
- Encourage participation in TMDL implementation planning

Expected Outcomes

- Successful Educational/outreach events
- Increase constituents' knowledge of natural resource protection and opportunities for conservation
- New partnerships
- Constituents adopt/implement conservation practices resulting in water quality improvements
- Participation from local residents in TMDL implementation planning

Objective 4: Educate local, state and federal decision makers on conservation issues, pertinent regulations and the work of the District so that they can make informed decisions that affect natural resource conservation

Action Steps

- Staff and/or District Board Members will participate in public meetings/events to present evidence-based conservation information to encourage informed decision making
- Staff will participate in work groups focused on areas of conservation concerns and other natural resource issues
- Staff and/or District Board Members will attend pertinent meetings regarding natural resource related issues and regulations as they arise
- Work with localities to assist them with regulations and policies related to natural resource conservation

Expected Outcomes

- Localities' regulations and policies encourage natural resource conservation
- Localities actively integrate conservation and natural resource management into their standard operating procedures
- Localities promote natural resource conservation

Objective 5: Work with local organizations and citizen groups to educate them on conservation issues and the work of the District in order to help spread our conservation message

Action Steps

- Provide presentations highlighting District projects, programs, goals and objectives
- Offer District resources for education and outreach purposes
- Provide opportunities for participation with District activities and events

Expected Outcomes

- Local organizations and citizen groups engaged in spreading conservation awareness
- Increased awareness of District and our programs
- Cadre of volunteers to support District outreach

Goal 3: Maintain 8 flood control dams with current certifications

Objective 1: Annually conduct inspections of 8 flood control dams and maintain dams in accordance with state standards/requirements

Action Steps

- Work with Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and localities and/or private landowners to schedule and conduct annual operation and maintenance inspections
- Develop and carry out corrective action plans to address deficiencies found during the inspections in accordance with DCR's operation and maintenance requirements
- Develop and carry out an annual dam maintenance plan
- Obtain additional funding for small dam repairs as needed
- Obtain current certifications for all District owned dams

Expected Outcomes

- Maintain current certification for each dam
- Dams are in full compliance and safety of downstream landowners is protected

Objective 2: Partner with localities and other relevant individuals to test Emergency Action Plans to ensure preparedness for emergencies

Action Steps

- Work with localities to ensure that Emergency Action Plans for each dam are up to date
- Work with localities and other relevant individuals to hold 'dry run' exercises for testing Emergency Action Plans
- Work with Emergency Services to provide training to emergency responders regarding dam basics
- Review EAPs with the District Dam Maintenance Committee, District Directors, and staff
- Develop policies and guidelines to ensure safe and efficient actions during emergency situations
- Obtain and maintain radio units for efficient communications

Expected Outcomes

- Updated Emergency Action Plans

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- Prepared emergency responders
- Staff and District Directors that are prepared for emergency situations

Objective 3: Update and/or Expand automated monitoring of dams

Action Steps

- Work with vendors/contractors to get existing IFLOW devices functional
- Coordinate with DCR for the implementation of new monitoring devices
- Staff work to maintain functional monitoring devices

Expected Outcomes

- Functional monitoring devices that provide useful information

Objective 4: Increase awareness and knowledge of the history and importance of dams

Action Steps

- Encourage localities' utilization of GIS Dam Break Inundation Studies
- Complete North River Watershed Study
- Educate the public on the benefits of District dams

Expected Outcomes

- More informed constituents
- More informed localities
- More informed emergency responders

Goal 4: Promote and ensure staff and Board member development

Objective 1: Board members will obtain the necessary training to be effective in their roles as Directors and Associate Directors

Action Steps

- District Board Members will attend quarterly Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) Board meetings when possible
- Board Members will shadow District staff and attend staff meetings when possible
- Upon appointment to the District Board, new Directors will complete New Director Orientation (Part 1-In Person) (Part 2-Provided by SWCD staff or CDC)
- All Directors will complete COIA training every two years
- Board members will attend trainings and/or meetings regarding District operations and other natural resources related issues as they arise

Expected Outcomes

- Better informed Board members
- Knowledgeable about the VASWCD's functions and services

- Clear understanding of District Manager and staff duties and responsibilities and a deeper appreciation of all District staff
- Directors who knowledgeable about COIA and associated expectations

Objective 2: District staff will obtain the necessary training to perform their assigned duties effectively

Action Steps

- Each technical staff member will obtain Conservation Planner Certification and Engineering Job Approval Authority as it becomes available
- Staff will attend relevant trainings and/or meetings
- District Manager and the Personnel Committee will conduct annual evaluations with all staff and provide feedback regarding staff's knowledge and professional skills and offer training recommendations
- All staff will complete required USDA trainings and certifications as appropriate
- District Manager will coordinate cross training among staff
- District Manager will conduct regular staff meetings
- District Manager will seek and attend supervisor training
- District's FOIA officer will receive necessary training
- District staff will receive required Records Retention training

Expected Outcomes

- More knowledgeable, effective and efficient staff
- Staff have a clear understanding of duties and expectations
- Unified team
- More informed and knowledgeable District Manager
- Technical staff with Conservation Planner Certification and appropriate Engineering Job Approval Authority
- Properly trained FOIA officer
- Staff who are trained to utilize Records Retention guidelines

Goal 5: Promote stewardship and conservation of natural resources through public relations and marketing via relevant methods

Objective 1: Create a broader outreach through utilizing various forms of media

Action Steps

- Maintain an informative and up-to-date website
- Maintain an informative Facebook page
- Create and maintain email distribution lists to use to inform stakeholders about relevant programs, activities and services
- Distribute and or post outreach materials
- Contact local radio, TV and print media outlets regarding conservation efforts

Expected Outcomes

- Broader awareness of District’s conservation efforts and mission
- More participation in District programs

Objective 2: Acknowledge outstanding conservation efforts in our service area

Action Steps

- Recognize outstanding conservation efforts
- Disseminate information regarding outstanding conservation efforts

Expected Outcomes

- Broader public awareness of local conservation efforts
- Increased enthusiasm and motivation towards conservation implementation