

SHENANDOAH VALLEY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

STRATEGIC PLAN

JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2027



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MISSION

To promote stewardship and conservation of our natural resources and safeguard people and property with the consistent maintenance of our eight District owned dams.

VISION

Through outreach, education and partnership, the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District strives to help improve natural resources. These improvements, in our local water quality will result in fewer impairments and provide fishable and swimmable waters for all. Through programs, activities and services, we intend to support local government, citizens, the agricultural community in the Valley, and the health of our local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District (SVSWCD) through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

We are an 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: 7/6/2023

Fiscal Year	Review Date
2023-2024 Review	
2024-2025 Review	
2025-2026 Review	
2026-2027 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 the ninth 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 local governments, conservation partners, constituents and agricultural producers make sound natural resource and conservation decisions.

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.

The District Board also consist of Associate Directors, appointed by the District Board and serve as advisors and representatives of particular interests. Associate Directors augment Director's knowledge and experience by providing relevant support and advice. Associate Directors are appointed for a two-year term 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 political subdivision of this Commonwealth.” (§ 10.1-538)

“Districts are authorized to develop comprehensive programs and plans for the conservation of soil resources, for the control and prevention of soil erosion, for flood prevention or agricultural and nonagricultural phases of the conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water within the district...” (§ 10.1-546)

This Strategic Plan was updated through the following means:

- Online stakeholder surveys completed in March and April 2023 by conservation partners, agricultural producers, educators and other constituents
- Staff and Board Member input
- Review and discussion at 5/4/2023 Board Meeting

This plan serves as guidance and a framework for the Board and staff as they work to address local natural resource issues and work to implement our programs, services and activities. This plan forms the basis for the District's Annual Plan of Work.

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.

Action Steps

- Comply with terms and conditions set forth in the District’s Administrative and Operational grant agreement
- Comply with terms and conditions set forth in the District’s Cost-Share and Technical Assistance grant agreement
- Submit funding requests for small dam repairs to DCR as needed

Expected Outcomes

- Installed BMPs in accordance with VACS Manual
- Improved soil and water quality
- Increased number of farmers and landowners adopting BMPs
- Completion of needed small dam repair projects leading to well-maintained dams

Objective 2: Maintain and/or increase funding from localities

Action Steps

- District Board Members attend at least one locality meeting and report on District programs and services annually
- 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 and encourage future funding

Expected Outcomes

- Maintained and/or increased locality funding
- New or strengthened partnership(s)
- Non-funding locality(s) provided support
- Increased awareness and appreciation of the District and programs and services offered

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

Action Steps

- Collaborate with partners to apply for grants and other funding opportunities
- Seek out and consider additional funding sources applicable to the District’s programs and services and conservation efforts
- Establish new partnerships and build upon existing partnerships
- Comply with the terms and conditions set forth in other grant or funding agreements

Expected Outcomes

- Obtained outside grants and/or funding to support the District’s programs and services and conservation efforts
- New or strengthened partnerships
- Expanded District programs and services to reach new clientele
- Increased flexibility and opportunities in programs and services specifically for innovative conservation efforts

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 students to attend Youth Conservation Camp & VADOF’s Woods & Wildlife Camp
- Regularly conduct and/or partner to support and participate in educational events for students
- Regularly conduct and/or partner to support and participate in educator trainings/workshops
- Work with schools to incorporate or enhance conservation/natural resource curricula; as well as make available digital resources
- Annually conduct a local conservation themed poster contest
- Recruit, and mentor interns to introduce them to natural resource conservation and job opportunities

Expected Outcomes

- Local Envirothon winner advanced to Area competition
- Increased students’ and teachers’ knowledge of natural resources and conservation
- Submitted local poster contest winners to the state poster contest
- Fostered a conservation ethic and provided an impactful experience for interns

Objective 2: Educate the agricultural community about the benefits of best management practices and encourage their implementation

Action Steps

- Partner with cooperating agencies and organizations to sponsor, support and conduct field days showcasing natural resource conservation and best management practices
- Administer and provide technical assistance for the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share (VACS) Program and actively promote the Program to increase interest and participation
- Annually recognize members of the agricultural community for their outstanding accomplishments in the conservation of natural resources

Expected Outcomes

- Informative field days with increased understanding and awareness of conservation programs and best management practices

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- Increased knowledge of natural resource conservation and conservation best management practices in the agricultural community
- Increased awareness, interest and participation in the VACS Program
- Annually awarded Rockingham and Page County Clean Water Farm Awards and nomination of 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 education/outreach opportunities and local events to increase conservation knowledge and awareness of opportunities
- 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
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- Promote and implement urban conservation programs to include VCAP, HCAP, Rain Barrel Program, among others

Expected Outcomes

- Successfully conducted educational/outreach events
- Increased constituent knowledge of natural resource protection and opportunities for conservation
- New and strengthened partnerships
- Constituents implemented conservation practices resulting in water quality improvements
- Constituents have enhanced awareness and understanding of natural resources and conservation
- Increased awareness and participation in urban conservation programs (VCAP, HCAP, Rain Barrel Program, etc.)

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

Action Steps

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

Expected Outcomes

- Local regulations and policies encourage natural resource conservation
- Local governments integrated conservation and natural resource management into their decision making process
- Localities promoted natural resource conservation

Objective 5: Work with local agencies, 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 meetings, activities and events
- Increase social media presence and make additional content available digitally

Expected Outcomes

- Local agencies, organizations and citizen groups engaged in spreading conservation awareness
- Increased awareness of District and our programs, services and activities

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), localities and private landowners to schedule and conduct annual operation and maintenance inspections
- Administer annual contract for mowing and regular maintenance
- Develop and carry out action plans to address deficiencies found during the inspections in accordance with DCR's operation and maintenance requirements
- Obtain additional funding for small dam repairs as needed
- Obtain current certifications for all District owned dams

Expected Outcomes

- Clear, current awareness of the maintenance needs of each dam
- Maintained current certifications for each dam
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Objective 2: Partner with localities and other relevant individuals to test Emergency Action Plans to ensure emergency preparedness

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 annually
- Work with Emergency Services to provide training to emergency responders regarding dam basics and appropriate emergency response
- Review Emergency Action Plans with the Dam Maintenance Committee, District Board, and staff
- Maintain radio units for efficient communications during emergencies

Expected Outcomes

- Updated Emergency Action Plans
- Prepared emergency responders
- Prepared Board Members and Staff

Objective 3: Install automated remote monitoring devices on dams

Action Steps

- Coordinate with DCR for the installation of new remote monitoring devices
- Staff to maintain functional remote monitoring devices
- Work to ensure that staff, Board Members, partners and emergency services have access to and can interpret and utilize data from remote monitoring devices
- Set up notifications and alarm levels for each dam

Expected Outcomes

- Functional monitoring devices that provide useful information that can be readily accessed and used during emergency situations by multiple users

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 history and importance of District dams

Expected Outcomes

- More informed constituents and landowners potentially impacted during high water events
- More informed localities/representatives
- 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

- Board Members attend quarterly Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) Board meetings when possible
- Board Members 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 and FOIA trainings upon assuming office and 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

- More informed Board Members
- Knowledgeable about the District and VASWCD's functions and services
- Clear understanding of District Manager and staff duties and responsibilities and a deeper appreciation of all District staff
- Board Members who are knowledgeable about COIA and FOIA and associated expectations

Objective 2: District Staff will obtain necessary trainings to perform their assigned duties effectively

Action Steps

- Each technical staff will obtain/maintain Conservation Planner Certification and Engineering Job Approval Authority as applicable and available
- Staff will attend relevant trainings and meetings
- Technical staff will attend relevant DCR or other partner trainings and meetings
- District Manager and the Personnel Committee will conduct annual evaluations with all staff and provide feedback regarding staff's performance, knowledge and skills and offer personal development training recommendations and individual goals
- All staff will complete required USDA trainings and certifications as appropriate
- Staff coordinate cross training within the office
- District Manager will conduct regular staff meetings
- District Manager will seek and attend relevant management trainings
- District FOIA officer completes required/necessary training
- District Records Retention Office completed required/necessary Records Retention training

Expected Outcomes

- More knowledgeable, effective and efficient staff with clear understanding of duties and expectations
- Unified, collaborative team
- More informed and knowledgeable District Manager
- Technical staff with Conservation Planner Certification and appropriate Engineering Job Approval Authority
- Properly trained FOIA officer
- Properly trained Records Retention Officer with clear understanding of records retention guidelines

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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 informative social media pages
- Create and maintain email distribution lists to use to inform stakeholders about relevant programs, activities and services
- Distribute and post outreach materials and stewardship and conservation content
- Contact local radio, TV and print media outlets regarding conservation efforts

Expected Outcomes

- Broader awareness of District’s conservation efforts and mission
- More awareness and potential participation in District programs, activities and services

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