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**Strategic Plan**

**July 2020-June 2024**

**Mission**

**The mission of the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District is to be a leader in natural resource conservation through partnerships, conservation education and technical assistance.**

**The main goals of the district are improving water quality, providing educational outreach, and maintaining watershed dams.**

**The Commonwealth of Virginia supports Conservation Districts through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Department of Conservation and Recreation.**

**All programs and services are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status or handicap.**

**History**

The idea of soil and water conservation districts in the United States originated during the first term of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The stimulus was the massive ecological, economic, and human tragedy of the Dust Bowl of the 1930’s, which was caused by severe drought and a failure to apply dryland farming methods to prevent wind erosion. History has documented the terrible scenes of those days when millions of tons of suffocating dust filled the air of great regions of the United States, ruining farms and driving people from their homes in despair.

In 1935, Congress responded to that crisis by passing Public Law 46, the Soil Conservation Act. The Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District was organized on July 24, 1940, under the provisions of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Act of 1938. The District was originally made up of the counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Campbell, Buckingham and Cumberland. In 1972, the City of Lynchburg joined the District and Buckingham and Cumberland Counties withdrew to form a separate Soil and Water Conservation District known as the Peter Francisco District. The Counties of Amherst, Appomattox, and Campbell, and the City of Lynchburg are the current localities in the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District.

The District covers an area of about 1,385 square miles and is located in the Central Region of Virginia. It is bounded on the North by the James, Tye, and Piney Rivers, part of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, and is bounded on the South by the Staunton River, part of the Southern Rivers Watershed. The District is mostly rural and historically agricultural with a majority of the land in woodland and small farms with the City of Lynchburg as an urban center. The main industries are timber, cattle, and poultry with a growing “local foods” cottage industry.

The Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District oversees the operation and maintenance of six watershed dams. The three dams in Campbell County are located along the Little Falling River, with the names/locations Liberty Lake (1965), Joy Lake (1966), and Watts Dam (1965). The three dams in Appomattox County are located along the East Fork Falling River; the locations are Conners/Gala Lake (1965), Caldwell Lake (1956), and Moses Lake (1958). These impoundments provide flood control and sediment control for large rain events. The district maintains the six watershed dams to keep them in the best shape possible to handle hazardous weather conditions.

**Major Goals**

**Goal I: Protect water quality within the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District.**

1. Be the authoritative source of soil and water conservation information, education, and technical assistance for District citizens.
2. Cooperate with USDA and other agencies to promote and implement the Best Management Practices (BMP) and Cost-Share Programs. Solicit input from local natural resource professionals to optimize District effectiveness.
3. Educate landowners about available Cost-Share Programs .
4. Facilitate riparian buffer and stream bank stabilization projects and provide technical assistance to landowners requesting assistance for repair of flood damage and/or stream bank erosion.
5. Provide assistance to local governments upon request in the development of agricultural conservation ordinances as funding and staffing allows.
6. Maintain affiliation with the National Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (NACD) and the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) and participate in their programs.
7. Network and partner with conservation minded agencies and foundations as funding and staffing allows.
8. Start building the VCAP program in the District.

**Goal II: Provide environmental conservation education and outreach programs**

1. Promote participation in VASWCD programs.
2. Distribute and promote the district’s scholarship program.
3. Support and participate in school-based conservation studies/projects for both student and teacher audiences, especially related to the Virginia Standards of Learning, upon request and as staffing allows. Also partner with local organizations to provide a career day in environmental and natural resources.
4. Select and recognize conservation contributions from throughout the District.
5. Sponsor and/or participate in workshops, conservation programs or other educational events for youth, agricultural producers, and district citizens for the purpose of improving awareness of watershed issues and conservation practices. Examples include rain barrels, rain gardens, Low Impact Development, urban storm water management, and Best Management Practice demonstrations.
6. Distribute the Annual Report to local governments and to members of the Virginia General Assembly who represent our District.
7. Utilize the “branding” initiative to raise awareness, visibility and recognition level of the District, as well as market our programs and services.
8. Update the District’s website and Facebook page with news, opportunities, and activities.
9. Network and partner with conservation-minded agencies and foundations as funding and staffing allow.
10. Organize events to educate the public. i.e. stream clean ups, invasive species, fertilizer and pesticide use.

**Goal III: Oversight of Watershed Dams**

1. Continue to provide flood control for the Falling River watershed under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954.
2. Operate and maintain District owned dams according to state regulations in Little Falling River (3) and East Fork Falling River (3) watersheds.

**District Operations**

The long‑range responsibilities of Virginia’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts are to ensure the retention of topsoil, safeguard water quality, and collaborate in maintenance of rural and urban forests. To help fulfill these long-range responsibilities, technical assistance and cost-share programs are available to producers and environmental instruction for children to adults. These programs both encourage the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs).

As of July 2020, District staff consists of an Office Administrator, two Agriculture Best Management Practices (Ag BMP) Conservation Specialists, and a Conservation Education Specialist.

District responsibilities and programs include:

* Virginia Agricultural Cost Share Program (VACS).
* Agricultural conservation planning and technical assistance.
* Resource Management Plan Program.
* Virginia’s Agricultural Stewardship Act.
* Youth and adult conservation education programs.
* Website and other media outreach.
* Operation and maintenance of 6 watershed dams located in Appomattox and Campbell counties in compliance with Virginia’s dam safety regulations.

The District administers the majority of its programs with funding through the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Division of Soil and Water, and from funding from the four locality governments.

**District Administrative Office**

The administrative office manages the operations of the District, and serves citizens by providing assistance with programs and information about District activities.

The office provides the public with access to the District’s financial documents (including grant tracking and reporting), strategic plan, annual report, grant and program guidance documents, as well as many other education and information resource materials.

The office works with local boards/councils, government agencies, and other conservation partners and keeps them up-to-date on District activities and contributions.

As of July 2020, the District office is located at 7631-A Richmond Hwy, Appomattox, VA (History Junction Shopping Center).

**District Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors is the governing body of the District, and consists of ten members: eight Directors, two from each county and the City of Lynchburg, which are elected every four years in the general election; one At-Large Director nominated by the District Board and appointed by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Board, and one appointed as a representative of the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service within the District. Associate Directors may also be appointed for their expertise, as they apply to the District's mission.

**District Meetings**

Board meetings are typically held on the fourth Thursday of every month (no meeting in December). Committee meetings are scheduled as needed. All Board and committee meetings are open to the public and are advertised on the District website. Board meetings are also advertised in local newspapers. As of July 2020, Board meetings are held at The Spring House Restaurant (on Rt. 460, 9789 Richmond Hwy., Lynchburg, VA) starting at 6:00 P.M. The District office and the Board meeting facility are accessible to persons with disabilities.