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**Strategic Plan**

**May 2016 – June 2020[[1]](#footnote-2)**

**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 Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Department of Conservation and Recreation.**

**All programs and services of the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District are offered on a non discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status or handicap.**

[**www.releeconservation.com**](http://www.releeconservation.com/)

**THE ROBERT E. LEE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

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. 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. Congress responded to that crisis by passing Public Law 46, the Soil Conservation Act. In response to the broader implications of the Dust Bowl disaster, the Virginia General Assembly enacted the Soil Conservation District Act in 1938.

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 Districts Law of 1938. The District was originally made up of the counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Campbell, Buckingham and Cumberland.  It was reorganized in 1972, when 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.  Amherst, Appomattox, Campbell Counties and the City of Lynchburg now make up 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 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 Board of Directors is the governing body of the District, consisting of ten members: eight directors, two from each county and the City of Lynchburg elected every four years in the general election; one 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 are also appointed by the Board for their expertise, as they apply to the District's mission. District meetings are held at The Spring House Restaurant on Rt. 460 (9789 Richmond Hwy.) Lynchburg, VA, on the fourth Thursday of every month (no meeting in December). Meetings are open to the public and the meeting facility is accessible to persons with disabilities. The District office is located at 7631-A Richmond Hwy, Appomattox, VA, in the History Junction Shopping Center with.

The District Staff consists of an Office Administrator, two Ag BMP Conservation Specialists, and a Conservation Education Specialist. The Office Administrator, Ag BMP Conservation Specialists, and Conservation Education Specialist operate out of a suite of offices in Appomattox, Virginia. The District provides office space for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Responsibilities of the staff include:

* Administration of the Virginia Agricultural Cost Share Program (VACS)
* Environmental Education and Outreach
* Coordination of District Operations
* Operation and Maintenance of 6 Watershed Dams located in Appomattox & Campbell Counties

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

The long‑range responsibilities of the Districts are to insure the retention of topsoil, prevent precipitation of eroded earth into our waterways; prevent the run‑off of pollutants, safeguard water quality, collaborate in maintenance of rural and urban forests. Technical assistance for agricultural producers as well as cost share programs to encourage best management practices (BMPs) and environmental instruction for children to adults are important parts of the Districts work.

District programs include:

* Virginia Agricultural Cost Share Program (VACS)
* Agricultural conservation planning and technical assistance
* Resource Management Plan Program
* Compliance with DCR Dam Safety Regulations for 6 watershed dams
* Virginia’s Agricultural Stewardship Act
* Youth and adult conservation education programs
* Website and other media outreach

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

1. Coordinate information on conservation issue programs pertaining to the District contained in the DCR/SWCD Administration and Operations and Cost Share grant agreements.
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. Inform and encourage landowners to utilize Cost-Share Programs available to them via the grant agreement.
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 conservation projects that are the responsibility of the District.
7. 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.
8. Network and partner with conservation minded agencies and foundations as funding and staffing allows.

**Goal II: Administrative Operations**

1. Coordinate and convene monthly Board meetings, utilizing committees as much as possible to expedite business.
2. Reference Strategic Plan, Annual Plan of Work, *Desktop Procedures for District Fiscal Operations, VASWCD Operations Resource Guide* and *VASWCD Personnel Resource Management Guide* for planning and program guidance. Review and make adjustments where appropriate.
3. Utilize sound financial and personnel management policies to guide District programs.
4. Manage, track and report funding provided to the District through the DCR/SWCD Administration and Operations and Cost-Share and Technical Assistance grant agreements.
5. Request and document need for appropriate funding levels from state and local governments.
6. Apply for grants when applicable and/or appropriate.
7. Continue service to localities and ensure their boards/councils recognize District contributions.
8. Recognize the conservation partnership the District has with DCR and the support and assistance provided by the DCR to each district. Acknowledge this partnership and support through District recognition of DCR’s primary partner agencies within the various printed documents produced by the district. Specifically, the District’s Strategic Plan, Annual Plan of Work and Annual Report will acknowledge DCR support and financial assistance by written acknowledgement in the following format:

The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Robert E. Lee Soil and Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

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

1. Promote participation in Youth Conservation Camp, Envirothon, District and VASWCD Scholarships.
2. 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.
3. Select and recognize conservation contributions from throughout the District.
4. 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.
5. Distribute the Annual Report to local governments and to members of the Virginia General Assembly who represent our District.
6. Utilize the “branding” initiative to raise awareness, visibility and recognition level of the District, as well as market our programs and services.
7. Utilize and update the District website.
8. Network and partner with conservation minded agencies and foundations as funding and staffing allows.

**Goal IV: 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.

1. RELSWCD Board of Directors approved and adopted this Strategic Plan on May 25, 2017

   Reviewed and revised March 28, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)