

CONSERVATION AROUND THE NECK

2024 Employee of the Year Goes To...



At the Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) Annual Banquet on Tuesday, December 10, 2024, our very own Education Conservation Specialist, Lowery Becker, received the 2024 Chaffin Soil and Water Conservation District Employee of the Year award. Three full-time District employees are recognized for their hard work, achievements, and goals met at their individual Conservation District. Lowery received the award for "Employees who have been working full-time in the same district for at least four years, but less than ten years."

Lowery began working for Northern Neck SWCD in 2018 and has represented this district with an outstanding manner and excelled in her job duties. Within fiscal year 2023-2024, Lowery has implemented 9 Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) projects with over 1,300 linear feet of living shoreline, while also planning and executing various 6th grade classroom visits and field days. She is armed with certifications as an Erosion & Sediment Control Plan reviewer, Stormwater Plan reviewer, Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional, Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience instructor, and much more. Lowery has a strong, working relationship with DCR's Shoreline Erosion Advisory Service (SEAS) and is positioned as a leader on living shorelines with implementation through VCAP.

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Education & Outreach

Calling all high school seniors and college students! The 2025 NNSWCD and VASWCD scholarships are now available. This year, we are happy to announce the scholarship fund has increased for both NNSWCD and VASWCD scholarships to \$2,000. NNSWCD offers one scholarship for high school seniors and one scholarship for currently enrolled college students. The VASWCD scholarship is available for high school seniors and/or currently enrolled college students. If you, or someone you know is interested in applying for these scholarships, visit our website or scan this QR code. The deadline to apply is Thursday, March 13, 2025 by 4:00pm.



SCHOLARSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT

Deadline: March 13, 2025



On October 15 and 16, our office participated in the Menokin Foundation's Field Day Experience for Richmond County 7th graders. Students rotated between 4 stations - a guided nature hike with NNSWCD, brick making with Menokin, kayaking with Friends of the Rappahannock and a tour of the Glass House Project with Menokin. We taught the students a fun and active game called "Sediment, Sediment, Come & Get It" which they absolutely loved. They get to run around and be active while learning the importance of planting trees to slow down sediment runoff.

On November 1st, Richmond County's 6th graders enjoyed a fun-filled field day at Belle Isle State Park. Students rotated through 6 different stations learning about oysters, water quality, habitats at the park and so much more. Throughout the school year, Friends of the Rappahannock, Department of Forestry, Belle Isle State Park, NNSWCD, Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association and Virginia Cooperative Extension's 4-H leader will visit with each 6th grade class and teach a lesson that correlates with 6th grade SOL topics and incorporates their experience from the field day.



We decorated our trunk for the 2024 Warsaw-Richmond County Main Street Program's Trunk-or-Treat. As always, the turnout was phenomenal and we had just enough candy to make it to the end. We look forward to the 2025 event.

Mark your calendars:

- Lancaster Co. Spring HHW - Saturday, March 22, 2025
- Northumberland Co. Spring HHW - Saturday, April 26, 2025
- Westmoreland Co. Spring HHW - Saturday, May 17, 2025



Operations

NNSWCD's Holiday Dinner

On December 18, we celebrated a successful year in holiday fashion by enjoying a delicious meal prepared at Old Rapp Taphouse, cheery conversations, and a special appearance by Santa Dan!



Prior to the Holiday Dinner, NNSWCD's Board members met for a brief period to conduct their December Board meeting. Directors received a field cooler with the new NNSWCD logo embroidered on the front along with a special commemorative ornament inside.

We want to take this time to thank all of our staff, Board members, and partners for their public service throughout the year. We appreciate you all!



Operations (continued)

2024 Employee of the Year (continued from page 1)

She serves as a member of the VCAP Steering Committee, NNSWCD's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) NNSWCD's Education Committee, and actively contributes to the Rappahannock Roundtable. She also serves as the Secretary for the Virginia Association of Environmental Education (VAEE). Lowery is reliable, dedicated, concise, and always delivers on her promises.

Please join us in recognizing Lowery Becker on receiving the 2024 Chaffin Soil & Water Conservation District Employee of the Year Award!



VASWCD Annual Meeting



The VASWCD hosted their annual meeting at Hotel Roanoke December 8-10, 2024. NNSWCD Chairman, Robert Pickett, and Vice-Chairman, Frank Johnson, were in attendance along with 4 members of our staff, Kathy Clarke, Joanna Balderson, Kelly Brann & Lowery Becker.

Tuesday, December 9th was a big day for Northern Neck SWCD at Hotel Roanoke. The day started off with our Marketing & Outreach Specialist, Kelly Brann, partnering with Shernita Phillips, Friends of the Rappahannock, giving a presentation during the morning breakout sessions. Kelly & Shernita provided a presentation on Canva to share their tips and tricks with other soil & water conservation districts. This session was very engaging and provided a quick step-by-step tutorial on creating Facebook posts. Later in the evening, Joanna Balderson, our Administrative Assistant was recognized for her 5 years of dedicated service to Northern Neck SWCD. Joanna is a reliable and dedicated member of our staff. Her knowledge, experience, and great personality are continuously helping us achieve excellence every day.



USDA CORNER

Happy new year to all! I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas and holiday season. We are looking forward to a fantastic 2025.

We are still making payments on Conservation Stewardship Program contracts (commonly referred to as CSP...the five year contracts) through mid February. If you have a CSP contract and did not receive your payment in December of 2024, we will be calling you in the next month to come in to sign your paperwork. IF you lost land in your contract or your rotations, residue, or fertilizer records didn't meet practice specifications, we will have to modify the contract prior to certifying for payment. This takes a week or so to do, so if you know you lost land that was in your contract or weren't able to meet specs for one reason or another, please call us soon so we will have time to accomplish both tasks in order to meet the payment deadline of 02/14/2025.

Speaking of CSP, we have several active CSP contracts expiring 12/31/25. If you hold one of these, we will be in touch in the spring to begin discussing what we can plan together to make your application as competitive as possible for renewal funding. If you have any questions about whether your contract falls into this category, give us a shout at the office.

Once we're caught up with payments on our existing contracts, we will begin ranking and submitting our FY25 applications for funding consideration. If you have any questions about an application that you submitted prior to 10/11/2024, give us a call at the office. For all aquaculture applications, we've been specifically directed to have those obligated by 4/30/2025, so if you have an aquaculture application in with us for FY25 and you haven't submitted your technical form to VMRC, please do that as quickly as possible. If you need another copy, call the office and we'll be happy to email one to you.

From what I've included above, I'm sure everyone can tell that we're spending a lot of time indoors and on our computers. If anyone needs our services in the field to look at what we can do to assist with erosion issues, agronomic sustainability, wildlife habitat or forestry stand improvement, etc., please give us a call and give us an excuse to get out! We're happy to do it and welcome the chance to work with our landowners and land managers in whatever way we can. I hope everyone has a productive and safe planting season!

Lucee Kossler

A reminder from the FSA office - the acreage reporting deadline for all fall crops is January 15, 2025.

USDA-NRCS:

Lucee F. Kossler, District Conservationist
Caroline Lancaster, Soil Conservationist
Brody Ellis, Soil Conservationist
Dylan Lockwood, Natural Resource Specialist
Karen Balentine, Soil Conservationist
Brooke Jenkins, Farm Bill Program Assistant

USDA-FSA:

Abigail Davis, County Executive Director
Kelsey Keyser, Program Technician
Tara Brann, Program Technician

Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS)

NNSWCD 2025 Producer Conference

It's hard to believe but the season to begin planting spring crops is right around the corner. Before things take off, please join us for our annual Producer Conference breakfast. The conference will be held on Thursday, March 6, 2025 from 8:00-10:00am at the Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department in Lively. This event is open to all producers within the Northern Neck area and a catered breakfast will be provided.

For more information or to RSVP, give our office a call at (804) 313-9102 x105.

Cover Crop Dates:

Be sure to keep these important cover crop dates in mind:

- Begin Kill or Destroy - March 15, 2025
- Final Kill or Destroy - June 1, 2025
- Nutrient Management Plans Due - March 14, 2025



Beginning on March 15th, producers may start the cover crop burndown period and must be completed by no later than June 1st. However, if a producer waits to begin the cover crop burndown process until May 1st, they will receive an extra \$10/acre. It's very important to keep an accurate record of which cover crop fields were burned and the date. For those who prefer pen and paper, NNSWCD has created planting and harvesting record notebooks for producers. These notebooks will be available for pickup in our office starting March 1st.



Another important item to keep in mind with planting season approaching, our office has two no-till drills available to rent. There is a minimal charge of \$100 due at rental for the first 10 acres and the amount charged is determined by the acreage meter on the drill. A minimum of a 45-horsepower tractor with two hydraulic remotes is required to operate each drill. Call (804) 313-9102 x106 today to reserve.

Young Farmers Banquet

In December, we had the honor of attending the Northumberland County Young Farmers Banquet. Every year this association completes a corn contest with its' members and the results are announced at the annual banquets. Congratulations to NNSWCD Directors, Vince Garland & Bobby Vanlandingham, and NNSWCD's Agricultural Conservation Specialist, Aaron Saunders, on receiving awards for the annual corn contest.



Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)



Did you know that the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) provides financial reimbursement to property owners who install eligible best management practices (BMPs) in areas of their yard where problems like erosion or poor drainage exist? VCAP is an urban cost-share program for homeowners, property owners, and even businesses that are non-agricultural.

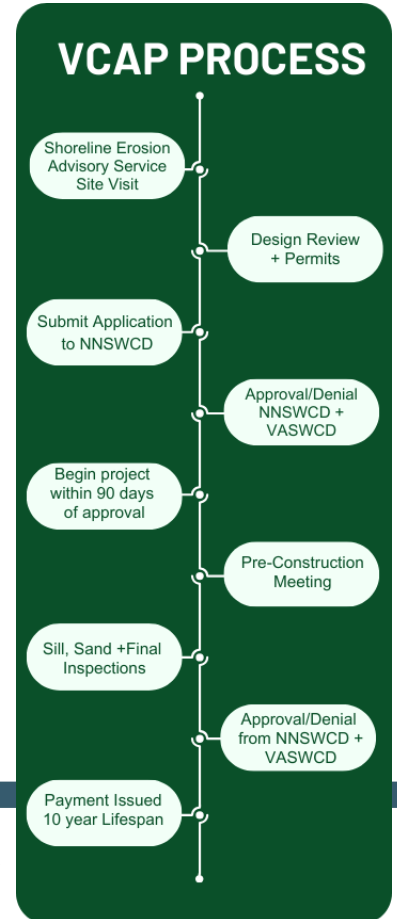
Eligible conservation practices include but are not limited to:

- Living Shorelines
- Conservation Landscaping
- Impermeable Surface Removal
- Rainwater Harvesting
- Rain Garden

The most common VCAP conservation practice in the Northern Neck is Living Shorelines. A living shoreline is a shoreline management practice that provides erosion control and water quality benefits. These benefits include protection and restoration of natural shoreline habitat and maintenance of coastal processes. The image to the right shows NNSWCD's VCAP process. If you are a homeowner or property owner looking to learn more about VCAP, check out our website or contact our Education Conservation Specialist, Lowery Becker, via email: lowery.becker@nnsacd.org.

Upcoming VCAP application deadlines:

- February 7
- March 7
- April 4
- May 2



From September through December, VCAP has had three living shoreline projects completed. Two projects consisted of a riprap sill, sand nourishment and marsh plantings. The other had oyster sentinel structures for a sill, followed by sand and plantings. There are also eight approved projects in a phase of construction. Big thanks to SEAS for all of their support with site evaluations, design reviews and inspections. Our VCAP program depends on your great efforts. We look forward to a busy and successful spring!





5585 Richmond Rd.
P.O. Box 220
Warsaw, VA 22572
www.nnswcd.org

Phone: (804)313-9102

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Warsaw, VA 22572
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Staff:

Kathy Clarke, District Operations Manager
Brandon Dillistin, District Technical Manager
Joanna Balderson, Administrative Assistant
Lowery Becker, Education Conservation Specialist
Kelly Brann, Marketing & Outreach Specialist
Aaron Saunders, Agricultural Conservation Specialist

Elected Directors:

Robert E. Pickett, Chairman (Northumberland)
Frank A. "Bert" Johnson, Jr., Vice-Chair (Richmond)
J. Vince Garland, Treasurer (Richmond)
Benson C. Braxton (Westmoreland)
James A. "Aaron" Rowland (Lancaster)
Robert G. "Bobby" Vanlandingham (Northumberland)
Lewis K. Walker III (Lancaster)
Richard E. Wilkins (Westmoreland)

Appointed Directors:

Louis Gregory "Greg" Basye, At Large Appointed Member (Northumberland)
R. Trent Jones, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent



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The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District programs, activities, and employment opportunities are available to all people regardless of race, color, religion, ethnic or national origin, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, disability, military status, or any other bases protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.