

Resource Management Plan Program

Highlights Report | Sept. 1, 2019 - Aug. 31, 2020



2020 In Summary:



Many people, including those who work with state government programs, will consider 2020 a challenging year. The RMP program was not exempt, and we will note the more significant challenges.

- Unprecedented rain events have caused erosion problems that must be corrected before many RMPs can be certified.
- Soil and Water Conservation District Boards and their Technical Review Committees have statutory and regulatory responsibilities to review and certify RMPs. These responsibilities were impacted by public gathering restrictions associated with COVID-19. Due to these restrictions, there was some delay in the Soil and Water Conservation Districts' review and certification of RMPs.
- Training that would assist individuals in becoming new certified RMP developers was delayed, while DCR and partners pivoted to online training formats .

Despite challenges of 2020, the RMP program continued to grow, seeing a significant increase in the number of new RMPs developed. There was a significant increase in the number of new participants. In this reporting year, 18 participants had their first RMPs developed, in eight different districts. This continued progress is encouraging and demonstrates that conservation and water quality continue to be a priority for Virginia's farmers.

Participant Profile



Amanda and Glenn Dye

Number of RMPs: 3

Number of Certified RMPs: 1

Acres in RMPs: 1,319

The Dyes are not new participants, but have a success story to share. Glenn and Amanda farm in Stafford County and had RMPs written on that farm. When they expanded their operation to include land in Appomattox County, over 100 miles away, they immediately had an RMP written on that farm as well. The urgency with which they had the RMP written is a testament to the value that they place on the RMP program.



Participant Q&A

Responses from Glenn Dye.

Q: Why did you decide to pursue RMPs?

A: I feel that it's my responsibility to be the best steward of the land that I can be. The RMP program helps to bring that stewardship full circle. I wanted to make sure that my operation was doing everything that it could to take care of the land to the best of my ability, and the RMP helps me do just that. I think it helps to show that we [farmers] want to improve our greatest resources, our soil and water.

Q: What new best management practices did you implement as a result of your RMPs?

A: Most of the BMPs were already being implemented, but there was a pond that was fenced off from cattle use.

Q: Did you face any hurdles during the implementation phase?

A: The biggest hurdle I face most years is getting the cover crop in and established in a timely manner. This usually involves flying the seed into the standing crop to be harvested. It's an added expense and a gamble but necessary in most years to accomplish the end goal.

Q: How did the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts assist?

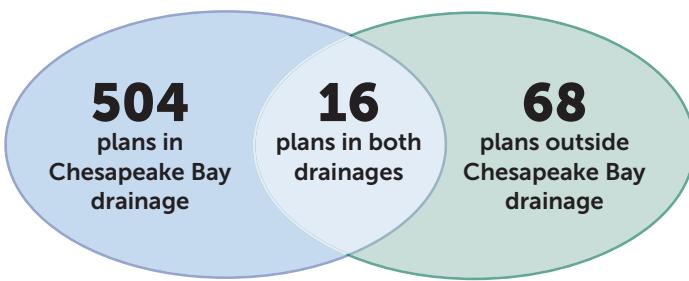
A: They were available to address any questions or concerns, not just from my side, but also from any landlords. They worked with me to make sure the fence was practical to keep the cattle out of the pond.

Q: Please feel free to share any other thoughts about the RMP program.

A: An RMP is a great "report card" to see how we're doing with our conservation efforts. It also challenges us to try new things whether that's flying cover crop or changing the way we apply fertilizer. There's always room for improvement, and the RMP shows us those opportunities.

Photos courtesy The News & Advance-NewsAdvance.com.

RMP Program Results (as of Aug. 31, 2020)



A single RMP may be included in multiple categories.

- 569 plans covering 126,896 acres.
- 27 plans covering just over 16,880 acres have been certified in the last 12 months.
- The average plan size is 224 acres.



Status of RMPs (as of Aug. 31, 2020)

569 plans have been developed through the RMP Program

75

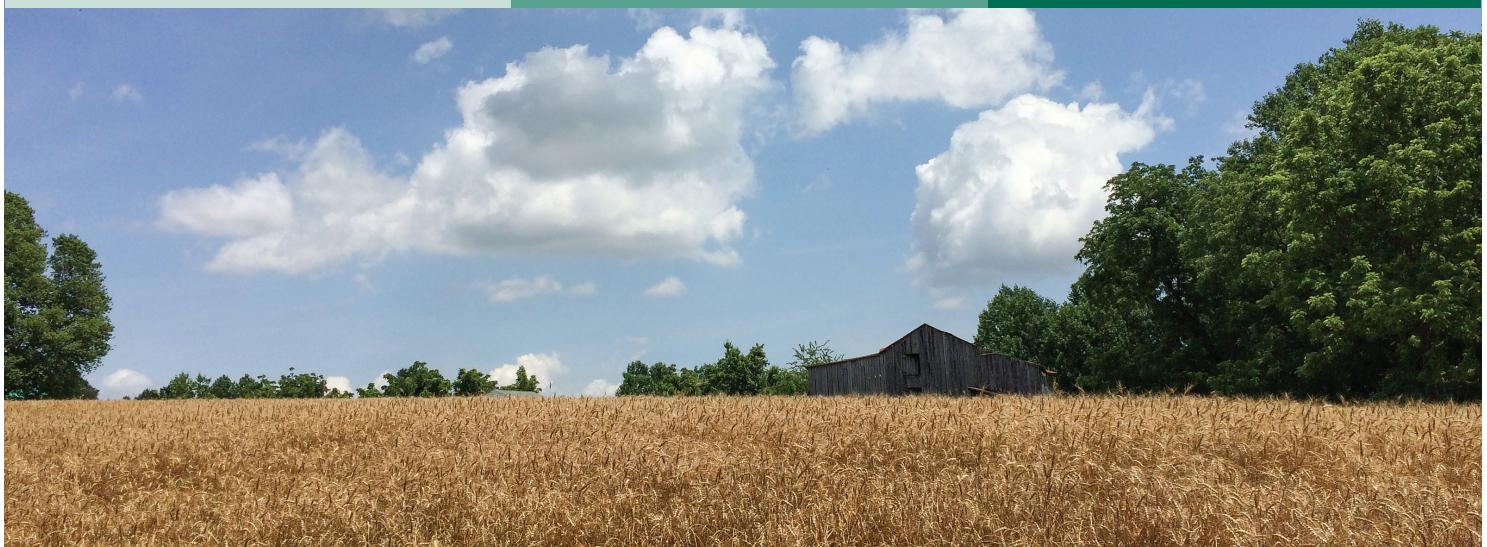
plans are being finalized and will be submitted to the appropriate soil and water conservation district (SWCD) for approval.

363

plans have been approved but not yet certified.

131

RMPs have received a certificate of implementation.



All Best Management Practices Included in RMPs

3,614 total BMPs implemented or proposed.

1,799

BMPs implemented or proposed
with public funding.

1,815

BMPs implemented or proposed
without public funding.

BMPs that are implemented without public funds typically go unreported to conservation agencies. However, RMP developers are able to record all the BMPs observed on a farm, resulting in more accurate tracking of conservation on the ground.

This is a key benefit of the RMP program.

The Value of Privately Financed Conservation

While many of the conservation practices included in RMPs are installed with financial assistance from the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share program or federal conservation programs, the majority of practices in planned RMPs receive no public funding. One of the biggest conservation benefits of the RMP program is the ability to report these privately financed BMPs. One of the clearest examples is nutrient management plan implementation verification. As a result of RMP certification inspections, many nutrient management plan acres were verified, and enhanced nutrient management practices have been reported.

- 25,517 acres of verified nutrient management plans
- 8,589 acres verified as using advanced nitrogen management
- 6,346 acres verified as using advanced phosphorus management

Numbers are for this reporting year only.



The Process

Assessment – A certified RMP developer visits the operation, meets with the farmer, evaluates the land and BMPs in place, and begins development of options to meet the RMP requirements.

Plan Development – The certified RMP developer meets with the farmer and discusses options. Once the farmer agrees to the particular BMPs and a schedule for implementation, the RMP may be submitted to the review authority, which is usually the local district but could be the department, for review and approval.

Plan Implementation – Once the required BMPs have been implemented or installed, the farmer may request that the review authority visit the farm to verify RMP implementation.

Verification – The plan developer and Technical Review Committee each conduct an inspection to verify that the RMP has been fully implemented.

Certification – A certificate of RMP implementation is issued once the review authority verifies implementation. “Certainty” begins at the date of issuance of the certificate. Continued verification visits are conducted at least once every three years throughout the nine-year certainty period to ensure the continued proper functioning and maintenance of all required BMPs.

Northern Neck RMP Bundle Pilot Project

In a cooperative project with Northern Neck Soil and Water Conservation District, an RMP bundle pilot project was completed. Farmers who participated were eligible for funding for all BMPs included in their RMPs with a single cost-share application.

Through this pilot, eight participants had 13 RMPs that moved from implementation to certification. This represents a significant portion of certified RMPs in 2020.



Direct Pay

In 2020, DCR announced a new compensation initiative, RMP Direct Pay. Through this initiative, RMP developers can request pre-approval of funding to write RMPs for interested farmers. RMP developers can also request pre-approval of funding to conduct inspections and other duties to help farmers achieve RMP certification. Upon completion of the pre-approved services, RMP developers may request payment for provided services.

This is an opportunity for both RMP developers and for farmers needing RMP services. RMP services will be available "on-demand" instead of limited to work included in service contracts.

Local Program Review

Following pilot program review in 2019, DCR conducted program reviews on four Soil and Water Conservation Districts in 2020 to evaluate implementation of their duties associated with the RMP Program. These districts were Hanover-Caroline, Thomas Jefferson, Northern Neck and John Marshall. All four districts were found to have a satisfactory review.

RMP Regulations Review

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board initiated a periodic review of the RMP regulations in 2019. Public comments were received in 2019. Further action was delayed in 2020.





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