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We are coming to visit!

As part of the Smith Creek Showcase watershed outreach efforts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in partnership with the two local Soil & Water Conservation Districts and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), is working to contact every agricultural landowner within the Smith Creek watershed. This effort is part of the outreach plan for the watershed and is designed to offer landowners the opportunity to learn more about available programs and education events. It will also provide NRCS with a more complete picture of the agricultural land use in the watershed.

Conservation Technicians from these agencies and organizations will be contacting landowners to gather this information. To schedule your inventory visit to discuss the use and management of your land (type of operation (poultry, beef, dairy), nutrient management, and crop/pasture land use) please contact your local Conservation office to set up an appointment.

For More Information:

Smith Creek Coordinator:

Kathy Holm (540) 434-1404 Ext. 114

NRCS Field Offices:

Harrisonburg (540)433-9126 (Rockingham County citizens)
Strasburg (540)465-2424 (Shenandoah County citizens)

Soil & Water Conservation District Offices (SWCD):

Shenandoah Valley SWCD:(540)433-9126 (Rockingham County)
Lord Fairfax SWCD:(540)465-2424 (Shenandoah County)

The NRCS/USDA Smith Creek “Showcase” activities and the work of our partners within the watershed can be accessed at:

www.shenandoahrcd.org

or by contacting your local NRCS or SWCD office.

New Opportunities and Resources Available

- ◆ Funding for septic tank pumpouts, repairs or replacements
- ◆ Funding for agricultural conservation practices
- ◆ Technical assistance and farm planning
- ◆ Grazing management planning
- ◆ Stream fencing and livestock watering systems



USDA/NRCS
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Lower Smith Creek-Gap Creek and War Branch Subwatersheds

Cost-Share Available for Septic System Maintenance and Repair for Smith Creek Residents

The Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District (the District) was awarded a grant from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation in January 2012 to support Smith Creek water quality improvement efforts. Through the *Smith Creek Residential and Urban Implementation Program*, grant funds will support public education for homeowners and help implement cost-effective residential and urban practices that improve water quality.

This program will provide information about septic maintenance and provides financial assistance to repair and/or replace failing septic systems within the Smith Creek watershed. The program also funds a portion of the cost of a septic tank pumpout. Landowners with straight pipes (pipes directly discharging untreated sewage) are also eligible to receive financial assistance to install a septic system. Everyone within the Smith Creek watershed is eligible for the program, regardless of income level.

Urban components of the program will address excess sediment and bacteria from runoff associated with rooftops, driveways, parking lots, and roads. This program will also significantly expand current partnerships with local government, citizen organizations, and government agencies, aiming to involve the whole community in stewardship of local soil and water resources. In partnership with the Town of New Market, the program will focus on installing a variety of urban practices including: an urban streamside buffer planting, a pet waste program (to encourage pet owners to pick up after their pet and prevent pet waste runoff), five rain gardens designed to treat stormwater runoff, and two bioretention filters to treat urban stormwater runoff.

While current restoration efforts and associated partnerships are substantial in the Smith Creek watershed, most of the efforts to date have focused on agricultural conservation practices and have not addressed water quality impacts related to urban and residential land uses. Establishing a Residential and Urban Program is a vital component for successfully meeting water quality goals set forth in the clean-up plan.

For more information about the Smith Creek Residential and Urban Implementation Program, contact Megan O’Gorek at the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, 540-433-2853 ext. 120; megan.ogorek@svswcd.org.

Warning Signs of a Failing Septic System

- ◆ Slow draining toilets or drains.
- ◆ Lush green growth over the drainfield.
- ◆ Sewage back-ups in the house.
- ◆ Sewage odors.
- ◆ Sewage surfacing over the drainfield (especially after storms).



Local Farmer Grazes Cattle All Winter Without Feeding Hay

Over 30 people gathered at Gene and Betty Fox’s Farm in Luray, VA, on December 14, 2011, to see how the Fox family is trying to overwinter their brood cow herd without feeding much hay. With mild temperatures and slightly overcast skies, Mr. Fox explained to the group how he and his family have worked with the local conservation office to fence out streams and ponds and install a pressurized watering system. This work has resulted in a clean and reliable source of water for their herd and now provides the opportunity for improved grazing management.

The Fox family manages their livestock in a simple rotational stocking system but they hope that winter grazing will be the real key to decreasing their annual production costs and result in a higher profit margin. The workshop participants looked at the accumulated fall growth on the 17 acre stockpiled pasture. Twenty four cows and one calf were turned in the stockpile pasture on December 3rd. Mr. Fox is strip-grazing the livestock to maximize forage utilization and stretch the grazing season.

Strip-grazing is a technique that uses portable electric fence to allocate just enough forage for the livestock to graze 1-3 days. This technique has the potential to increase grazing days on the stockpile by 50%.

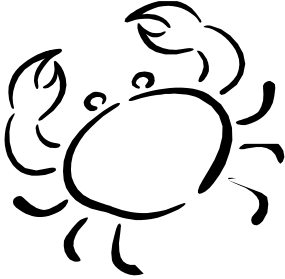
For now, the winter grazing season is going well for the Foxes and the cattle are in great condition. A follow-up field meeting is scheduled for February 22nd at the Fox farm to see how much forage is left to graze throughout the winter, examine Nutrient distribution over the pasture and consider the economic implications of this management technique.


For more information about stockpiling or the follow up meeting contact your local NRCS office.



Farmers to the Bay Exchange Program– March 16-18, 2012

Farmers participate in an overnight trip to Port Isobel located in the center of the Chesapeake Bay to learn about Bay ecology and the historic commercial waterman community of Tangier Island, Virginia. This trip allows Shenandoah Valley farmers to understand how their lives are much like those of the Tangier waterman and how their communities and futures are surprisingly interconnected. This **free** trip is hosted by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) and the Virginia State Dairymen’s Association (VSDA) and includes meals and lodging. For more information contact: Elizabeth Ronston at (804) 780-1392 ext. 302. **Space is limited! Call now!**





•Maintain Farm Productivity

•Receive Financial Incentives for your Conservation Efforts

•Receive Technical Assistance

If you are interested in receiving free technical assistance or learning more about financial assistance and incentives available to support conservation practices contact your local Conservation office.

Smith Creek Happenings...Calendar of Events

- ♦ **March 3rd – Smith Creek Breakfast– 9:00 am- Mountain Valley Tenth Legion Ruritan Hall**
 - ♦ To RSVP or for more information: Megen Dalton at (540) 433-2853 ext. 119 or megen.dalton@svswcd.org
- ♦ **April 21st – Family Fun Day on Smith Creek -12:00 noon-3:00 pm**
 - ♦ Led by Friends of the North Fork and sponsored by the Smith Creek Partnership. Free Event! To RSVP or for more information: (540) 459-8550 or friends@shentel.net
- ♦ **April 21st – Shenandoah Valley Canoe Trip**
 - ♦ One day canoe trip to explore the Smith Creek watershed sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Virginia State Dairymen’s Association (VSDA). For more information contact: Joan Gardner at the VSDA office (540) 828-6960. Space is limited!
- ♦ **April 26th – Smith Creek Partnership Meeting**
 - ♦ Join this interested group of stakeholders focused on improving water quality and the health of Smith Creek and its tributaries. For more information: (540) 434-1404 ext. 114 or kathy.holm@va.usda.gov

Growing Nitrogen while Improving Pasture Forage Quality

One of the simplest and most economical ways to improve the quality of grass pastures is by introducing legumes such as red and white clovers into the pasture mix. Achieving and maintaining a 25-35% stand of clover in a pasture mix will greatly reduce the need for nitrogen fertilizers while increasing forage protein content.

Under ideal growing conditions, clovers are capable of fixing between 75-100 lbs. of nitrogen per acre per year. This nitrogen is slowly released to the grasses over the course of a growing season. Pastures containing a proper balance of protein (clover) and fiber (grasses) have proven to produce higher weight gains in livestock. Well established clover often will continue to grow after grass species have become dormant due to heat or water stress. During such periods, clovers in a pasture mix can help to dilute the toxic effect of endophyte infected tall fescue while at the same time fixing nitrogen from the atmosphere. White and red clover are not the only options to consider when improving forage quality. Other legumes to consider include annual lespedezas such as Korean, birdsfoot trefoil, and alfalfa.

Typically, an ideal pasture mix in the Shenandoah Valley should contain between 25-35% clover. However, most pasture mixes in the Valley only contain between 10-20%. This is mainly a result of overgrazing and/or the use of broadcast treatments of pyralid type herbicides such as Gazon, Milestone, and Forefront. These herbicides are used for broadleaf weed control and can have a residual effect for up to two years following a treatment.

Obtaining 25-35% clover in a pasture mix is not difficult or costly. Pastures with a low weed content, no recent treatment(s) with residual herbicide, a pH between 6.0-6.5, and soil test levels for P and K at the medium or higher level are ideal candidates to be overseeded with clover. Fields meeting these criteria should be grazed close in the fall or early winter to reduce grass cover in preparation for frost seeding clover. Frost seeding relies on the freezing and thawing to incorporate the seed into the soil. Between February 20- March 15, broadcast white clover at a rate of 1-2 lbs./ac. mixed with red clover at a rate of 2-6 lbs./ac. on these pasture fields. Dragging pastures before, during, or following broadcast seeding can also help increase seed-to-soil contact. If broadcast seeding is not an option, the same clover mixtures at the same seeding rates can be drilled during the month of March.

Fields overseeded with clover should be minimally grazed for at least one year following seeding to allow the clover to become established. In addition, weed control should be limited to spot chemical treatment or mechanical methods to avoid damaging the stand. To maintain an optimum stand fields should be overseeded with clover at the same seeding rate every 2-3 years.

