



Smith Creek Connection

The connection to your watershed

Lower Smith Creek-Gap Run and War Branch Subwatersheds

Join Us! Stockpiling Fescue Event

A "Healthy Livestock, Healthy Streams" DVD was just released by Shenandoah RC&D, VCE, DCR and NRCS. This DVD explains benefits to herd health and farm productivity by excluding livestock from streams. It features Bob Threewitts, Rockingham County farmer, and can be viewed online by accessing: www.WVPT.net, search for Virginia Farming and click on the October 7 program.

Good fall rains and sunny days made the fall of 2011 a year to remember for forage growth, especially for farmers who are stockpiling fescue for winter grazing. Gene and Betty Fox in Luray, VA, are conducting a field demonstration to highlight stockpiling tall fescue in late summer and fall and to demonstrate how strip grazing this forage over the winter can greatly decrease hay feeding days and provide many other benefits.

If you are interested in learning more about stockpiling please attend **the producer meeting scheduled for Wednesday, December 14, 2011**. The meeting will begin at 10:00 am in the field and end after lunch with a short indoor program summarizing forage growth and quality throughout the Shenandoah Valley.

For more information, directions and to register, please call the Page County Extension office at (540) 778-5794. Registration is free for producers and \$10/person for agency staff and non-producers.



J.C. Fox estimates 5,000 lbs forage dry matter/acre stockpiled on October 20th.

Technical Advice Critical for Conservation

By Cory Guilliams, NRCS-District Conservationist

When the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was created in April 1935, the agency had one mission: to work with farmers and landowners in rural America to reduce all forms of soil erosion. While the mission was broad, its focus was on SCS personnel knowledgeable about local agricultural practices applying that knowledge in the field. SCS staff worked with farmers and landowners one-on-one, providing technical advice to address soil erosion issues. The advice was practical and involved inexpensive measures that could be easily carried out with materials and equipment already available on farms. It also included SCS personnel time to lay out and oversee proper installation of those practices.

Today, over 75 years later, SCS is now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Our mission has expanded to include protecting soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources across rural America. As in the past, we continue to work with farmers and landowners to help them implement conservation based on technically sound principles that address resource concerns. Now, in addition to providing advice and guidance, NRCS offers financial incentives through several programs and initiatives under the 2008 Farm Bill. These incentives help people implement conservation measures planned for their land.

In June of 2010, USDA named Smith Creek a "Showcase Watershed" to demonstrate how conservation can be implemented through voluntary programs. Smith Creek is one of three Showcase Watersheds in the Chesapeake Bay region. In response to this designation, and as an efficient way to focus efforts on key areas and issues, NRCS identified Smith Creek as a priority area. Priority areas address resource concerns and can serve as models for future projects. The 67,335 acre Smith Creek Showcase Watershed in Rockingham and Shenandoah Counties sets the course for multi-year projects to improve soil and water quality across the landscape and within the watershed.

To help make the Smith Creek project a success, NRCS has received support from many partners. Partners plan to collect information, through farm inventories, from all farmers and rural landowners within the watershed on installed soil and water quality conservation measures. In addition, NRCS is working with its partners to conduct field days and set up demonstration projects to educate farmers and landowners about innovative conservation measures.

Over its 76 years of existence, NRCS has accomplished a great deal towards improving the natural resources on the landscape of rural America. What has made the agency successful is the ability of its personnel to change, adapt, and stay relevant to agriculture as it has changed over the years. The Showcase Watershed project is an experiment. If we work together we can demonstrate that the voluntary approach to conservation works.

Virginia Farmers are Gaining Ground

A farming revolution is spreading across Virginia. Crop producers are switching to continuous no-till systems; livestock farmers are switching to rotational grazing. Both approaches not only save the farmer time and money, but also benefit the land, restoring soil health and dramatically reducing runoff and erosion. The net result is more profitable and productive farms—and better water quality downstream.



To learn how successful farmers "Gaining Ground" we encourage you to watch a short movie at: www.gaininggroundvirginia.org/. If you don't have a computer or web access, contact your local NRCS or SWCD office to obtain a copy of the DVD for your viewing convenience.

Mark Your Calendar!

January 18, 2012

VFGC Winter Forage Conference

Keynote Speaker: Kathy Voth, *Livestock for Landscapes*
Featured Speakers: Dr. Scott Haygood and Dr. Chris Teutsch *from Virginia Tech*

Location: Weyers Cave Community Center

Visit: <http://vaforages.org>

Innovative Farming Successful Smith Creek Summer Tour

On August 11, 2011, the Virginia Forage and Grasslands Council (VFGC) hosted a summer tour at Mike Phillips' Valley View Farms in Broadway. The farm is located in the heart of the Smith Creek "Showcase" watershed.

Pastureland is the single largest agricultural land use within the watershed and grazing management is a key focus of the VFGC. Mike manages a cow calf operation on approximately 235 acres of pastureland along with two broiler houses. His message to producers was that a grazing system that is efficient, productive, and reduces soil erosion, is a progressive process. He stressed that he has been working on it for more than 30 years.



More than 80 farmers, agency staff, and landowners attended the tour. They were transported through a series of educational stops covering a variety of grazing management topics:

1. Summer annuals for pasture renovation and grazing
2. No-till Teff grass establishment... is it possible?
3. Stockpiling tall fescue for low-cost winter grazing
4. Development of a rotational grazing system
5. Protecting surface water with vegetated buffers
6. NRCS rainfall simulator demonstration
7. Managing cover crops to extend the grazing season



Mike uses these management practices to improve forage diversity while increasing grazing management to increase grazing days, minimize feeding days, and to produce beef in a cost effective, sustainable system. This tour of his farm was a great opportunity for farmers to see first-hand the implementation of these innovative conservation practices.

For more information on this tour and other VFGC events, visit <http://vaforages.org>.

Property Owner Tips: Cleaning Up Smith Creek Through Stormwater Management

By: Faye Cooper; partial excerpt from www.cleanstream.org

Water pollution can be controlled if everyone plays a part in managing stormwater runoff where we live and work. The most effective way to reduce water pollution is to prevent pollutants from entering the system in the first place. Making responsible decisions about what enters the storm sewer system upstream and drainage areas improves water quality and the downstream aquatic habitat in Smith Creek, the Shenandoah River, and the Chesapeake Bay.

Top 10 Things You Can Do To Protect Our Watershed

1. Keep litter, pet waste, leaves, and debris out of street gutters and storm drains. These outlets drain to streams and rivers.
2. Always conserve and use water wisely; capture and reuse rainfall whenever possible (install rain barrels).
3. Test soil before you apply fertilizers. Use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly and according to directions. Try natural alternatives instead of traditional pesticides and fertilizers.
4. Use native vegetation and eliminate turf grass.
5. Purchase household detergents and cleaners that are low in phosphorus to reduce the amount of pollutants discharged into our streams.
6. Wash your car on the lawn or direct the wash water to the lawn. Use phosphorus-free cleansers.
7. Clean up spilled brake fluid, oil, grease, and antifreeze. Use kitty litter as an absorbent for oil. Rags can be used for brake fluid, antifreeze or grease. Do not hose them into the street.
8. Dispose of used oil, antifreeze, paints, and other household chemicals properly, **not** in storm sewers. You can take used oil and antifreeze to your local auto supply store. Recycle and dispose of household chemicals properly.
9. Inspect and maintain septic systems and sewers. If you have a septic system, inspect and pump it out at least every 3-5 years.
10. Tell a friend or neighbor about how to prevent water pollution and get involved in your community.

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.

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