

Little Dark Run and Robinson River TMDL Implementation Plan

AGRICULTURAL WORKING GROUP REPORT TO STEERING COMMITTEE

AWG Meeting Attendees

Dave Allen (Madison Co. BOS)	James Arrington (Madison Co. BOS)	Robert Bair (Citizen)	Evan Blumenstein (CSWCD)	Beth Burnam (PEC)
O. Campbell (Citizen)	Jennifer Carlson (VADEQ)	Sidney Coates (Citizen)	Katie Conaway (VADEQ)	Debbie Cross (VADCR)
Cynthia De Canio (Citizen)	Pete Elliot (Madison Co. BOS)	Lynn Graves (Citizen)	R. Clay Jackson (Madison Co. PC)	Waller Jenkins (Citizen)
Bill Jordan (Citizen)	Rodney Lillard (Madison Co. PC)	David Massie (CSWCD)	Byron Petrauskas (BRES)	Lisas Robertson (Administrator, Madison Co.)
Alan Spivey (Citizen)	Carl Stafford (VCE)	Tommy Utz (Citizen)	Tom Weaver (Citizen)	Frank Wilczek (Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy)
Spencer Yager (CSWCD)				

Background

Two AWG meetings were held at Madison County Volunteer Fire Company in support of this project, the first following the public meeting on June 15, 2010 and the second on October 26, 2010. A total of 26 people attended one or both of the meetings. The overall goal of the AWG was to identify obstacles to implementation of best management practices to reduce bacteria from agricultural operations and recommend workable solutions that will overcome these obstacles.

Key Topics

- ★ Several issues were raised regarding water quality monitoring performed by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VADEQ), these included: sampling frequency, data validity, correlation to flow conditions, and monitoring in Shenandoah National Park. Suggestions for providing additional water quality monitoring included citizen monitoring or a monitoring project financed with grant funds.
- ★ Primarily beef and dairy operations exist in these watersheds. According to attendees, beef numbers reported in TMDL seemed high in Upper Robinson River and Little Dark Run. Sufficient liquid manure storage and landuse is available for producers to collect and spread collected manure according to nutrient management plan. It was indicated that some beef operations were confining animals a portion of the year; therefore, a recommendation to include the “Animal Waste Control Facility (VA Agricultural Practice Number WP-4)” practice in the water quality improvement plan was made. Majority of agricultural to residential landuse conversion has occurred on southern portion of watershed along Route 29 and Route 15 corridors.
- ★ Concerns regarding livestock exclusion systems included: non-native vegetation species growth, not practical in flood-prone areas and would be wiped out quite frequently in some areas of watershed, and fencing amount that would be needed to eliminate access to the braided stream network throughout fields in Upper Robinson River.

- ★ Based on view that cows will choose a watering trough over stream, thus decreasing time spent in stream, an initial strategy in the Upper Robinson River watershed could be to install watering troughs without stream exclusion fencing.
- ★ Liability associated with BMP maintenance was discussed. Specifically, farmers are required to repair/replace damaged fence after each flood occurrence or re-plant permanent vegetative cover if it dies out and assume all associated costs. A shorter time frame for commitment to the program, possibly five years instead of 10, may ease this burden. In TMDL areas, farmers are eligible for cost-share funds to assist with the repair/replacement if the practice is still in life span, and funding is available. Also there is a 25% tax credit for their out of pocket costs, WP-2D. A suggested recommendation to include supplemental cost-share for fence repair/replacement when fencing is destroyed by flood was made. The WP-2T practice also provides \$.50 per linear foot of stream fencing as an incentive payment to assist with stream fencing maintenance. Pursuing a grant to fund BMP maintenance costs would be beneficial
- ★ Constraints to BMP implementation indicated by group include – BMP maintenance and replacement cost, fence maintenance in flood prone areas, and belief that producers need to spend money on BMPs when confidence in water quality monitoring data and extent of contamination is lacking.
- ★ Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) announced the availability of some funding for livestock exclusion fencing for the next six months. Funds remaining from a grant for BMPs on the Upper Hazel River may be used to supplement the cost share program administered by the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD). It was noted that the state mandates a 90% cap on financial assistance; producers must provide a 10% match.
- ★ Applicable educational /outreach methods that work well in the area include: personal communication through phone and site visits; farmer-to-farmer interaction; CSWCD and Farm Service Agency newsletters; field tours conducted by CSWCD; educational events conducted by Virginia Cooperative Extension; Cattleman's and Dairyman's Association events; information booth at Madison County Fair; and Madison Eagle articles.

Recommendations

- ★ Increase VADEQ water quality sampling and assure testing on a regular basis. Pursue additional water quality monitoring opportunities such as citizen monitoring or a monitoring project financed with grant funds.
- ★ Determine facilities that could benefit from installing an Animal Waste Control Facility (VA Agricultural Practice Number WP-4) practice
- ★ Further evaluate effect decreasing trend in agricultural landuses has on bacteria loads.
- ★ To encourage participation in the Upper Robinson River, promote tax credit available for installing watering troughs without stream exclusion fencing and seek supplemental funding to provide additional incentives. Fencing type alternatives should be reviewed to address producer's needs.
- ★ Incentive is needed to maintain BMPs beyond the typical 10-year lifespan requirement of cost-share assistance programs. Pursuing a grant to fund BMP maintenance costs would be beneficial.
- ★ Fencing options in flood prone areas should be assessed to not preclude full program incentives for producers.
- ★ Advertise funds available from PEC for livestock exclusion fencing.