Virginia Agricultural Resource Management Plan Regulations
Department of Environmental Quality Piedmont Regional Office
Richmond, Virginia
Friday, August 19, 2011

M I N U T E S

Subcommittee Members Present
R.O. Britt, Murphy-Brown
Brad Jarvis, Chair, Virginia Tech – Cooperative Extension
Ann Jennings, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Tom Simpson, Water Stewardship, Inc.
Meaghann Terrien, Three Rivers Soil and Water Conservation District
Stephanie Martin, Department of Conservation and Recreation

Technical Staff Present
Chad Wentz, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Neil Zahradka, Department of Environmental Quality
Mark Hollberg, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Mark Meador, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Christine Watlington, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Betsy Bowles, Department of Environmental Quality

Others Present
Kristen Evans, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Jim Tate, Hanover-Caroline Soil and Water Conservation District
Jack Frye, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Katie Frazier, Virginia Agribusiness Council

Meeting

The chair called the meeting to order and welcomed members and attendees. A regulatory timeline was provided for the subcommittee which outlined the process going forward. The goal is to present proposed regulations to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board at their December meeting.

There was a presentation by Water Stewardship, Inc. regarding their current assessment and plan development process. Water Stewardship works on a whole farm plan, which may mean that there are several different tracts included in the plan, although they are all located in close proximity to each other.

The subcommittee discussed the voluntary best management practice (BMP) pilot program that is currently underway between the Department and 6 soil and water conservation districts. Currently, the only BMPs that are being tracked are those BMPs being implemented with cost-

share funds. Those BMPs must meet the required design standards and specifications. Virginia and other states, in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are working to develop a way to track BMPs that are "functionally equivalent" to those BMPs that are clearly designed to certain standards and specifications. The 6 pilot soil and water conservation districts are working to collect information regarding both voluntary BMPs and "functionally equivalent" BMPs. The districts are also collecting information regarding what a "functionally equivalent" BMP is lacking in terms of meeting the design standards and specifications.

The subcommittee discussed the use of an assessment tool. A discussion of what components an assessment tool should contain was had. It was decided that an assessment tool should include: basic farm information (names, acres, acres of each type of operation); types of BMPs currently implemented (nutrient management plans, soil conservation plan, conservation tillage, etc.); an interview with the operator or agricultural landowner; and a field by field visit to examine how the land is managed. It was also mentioned that what was not on the agricultural operation might be key; an example would be if there were no streams on the property. Knowing the operator's objectives for the operation might also be key in determining how to complete the plan. There was a discussion of whether the assessment tool needed to be the standardized. It was mentioned that the form could be standardized, but the technical assistance provided to the agricultural landowner or operator may vary. There was discussion concerning whether the BMPs that could be installed on a certain agricultural operation be included in the assessment or whether that is more appropriate to include in the plan. It might be important to have standardized assessments for different land use categories such as crop fields, beef operations, or dairy operations. It was noted that a nutrient management plan would have much of the basic information on the operation and its management. It might be important to access the nutrient management plan during the assessment. The subcommittee decided that having a nutrient management plan was not mandatory prior to having an assessment completed.

The subcommittee discussed whether the operator would be able to provide a self survey that might start the resource management plan process. The operator would be able to fill out the basic information (operation data) as well as some BMP data. If an operator did not complete a self survey, the individual preparing the assessment could complete it.

The subcommittee discussed who might be qualified to complete an assessment. It was noted that the qualified individuals should be able to be from either the private or public sector. The conservation planning certification from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was discussed. It was decided that a conservation level 1 planner from NRCS would be qualified. An individual working under a conservation level 1 planner would also be considered qualified with the level 1 planner certifying the assessment. There was significant discussion as to whether a nutrient management planner would be considered qualified. It was recommended that DCR look at the components of the NRCS certification program to see if there were components that could be added to the existing nutrient management certification training to make individuals eligible to complete assessments as well. It was mentioned that it would be

important to be able to “disqualify” an individual from preparing assessments if the assessment were not completed to standards.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.