

Mountain Castles Soil & Water Conservation District

Annual Report 2006—2007

Serving the Counties of Botetourt and Craig

OUR MISSION

Promote leadership in conservation of natural resources through stewardship and education programs

Vision Statement

The Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District serves as a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia to assist in utilizing state, federal and private sector resources and makes decisions that enhance and protect natural resources, improve water quality, and will engage in actions that promote soil and water stewardship for all citizens of Botetourt and Craig Counties.

Conservation Partners Working Together

OWAA Farm Tour In Craig County



Pat Paul, Jack Bricker, NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster

Charlie Barnes, NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster, Bill MacIntosh

The 80th Outdoor Writers Association of America (OWAA) Conference was held in Roanoke, Virginia June 16—19, 2007. As part of the conference, panel discussions were held to cover a variety of topics and the 2007 Farm Bill was one of the discussions. A bus tour was organized with the assistance of Pat Paul (pictured above) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Jack Bricker, NRCS State Conservationist. The outdoor writers traveled from Hotel Roanoke to Craig County to visit Charles Barnes' farm on June 19th. Mr. Bricker welcomed the NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster who offered information on the 2007 Farm Bill to the outdoor writers group. The Barnes were presented with a plaque of appreciation and then the group loaded onto the bus and toured the 780-acre farm along Barbour's Creek outside of New Castle. Mr. Barnes was recognized by the District and awarded the Conservation Farmer of the Year for Craig County in November 2006. The writer's group were shown conservation practices installed through the Farm Bill programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and programs under the Virginia Agriculture Best Management Practices Program.

Area I Envirothon at McCormick Farm Steeles Tavern on April 25, 2007

The 2007 Area I Envirothon was hosted by the Mountain Castles and Natural Bridge Soil and Water Conservation Districts and financial support was provided by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) and VMA Outreach Group. Pictured below, David Friske from the McCormick Farm is standing beside Don Drake, as he reads the plaque of appreciation for making the Envirothon a success for the second year.



David Friske
Don Drake
Margaret Spencer,
Jenny Templeton,
Lexi Martin
(R to L)

The Virginia Envirothon is a natural resources competition for high school students. Students who participate, learn stewardship and management concepts and work to solve real and hypothetical environmental problems. Four teams participated and placed in the following order, Harrisonburg High School, first place, followed by Fort Defiance High School, Central High School, and Bath County 4-H. Each team's knowledge was tested under the supervision of foresters, soil scientists, wildlife specialists and other natural resource professionals. Teamwork, problem solving and presentation skills were evaluated as each team offers a panel of judges an oral presentation on alternative and renewable energy. Judges and volunteers were from many agencies that included, the VASWCD, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Virginia Department of Forestry. Everyone worked together to make this year's Envirothon a great success!

District Activities

BMP Cost Share Kick-off Meeting



Mark Hollberg, District Coordinator Speaks to the Group about BMPs

2006—2007 Cost Share

The most common practices in the District are Permanent Vegetative Cover on Cropland, Grazing Land Protection, Alternative Water System, and Permanent Vegetative Cover on Critical Areas. Approved BMP projects can be reimbursed up to 75% of project costs along with receiving a 25% VA Tax Credit on out-of-pocket expenses.

Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts James River Watershed Connection Award



Ricky Rash, VASWCD President, presents Watershed Connections Director Awards to (pictured left to right) Bill MacIntosh, Melvin Atkinson, Sally Ormsby, Laura Campbell, Wayne Miller and Joyce Buchanan (for Bob Moss) at the 68th Annual

Director William “Bill” MacIntosh received the James River Watershed Connection Award at the 68th Anniversary (1938 – 2006) meeting of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The meeting was held December 3 – 5, 2006 at the Hotel Roanoke in Roanoke, Virginia. Director MacIntosh was elected in November 2003 and has been an active supporter in district activities and outreach programs, since beginning his term in January 2004. He continues to support the efforts in seeking public and legislative support for the rehabilitation funds for the Johns Creek Dams, in Craig County.

Directors get elected just like the president or governor, but candidates for soil and water conservation district (SWCD) director are unknown to most people until their names and the position appear on a ballot. Approximately 325 SWCD directors serve voluntarily on 47 districts’ boards around the state. Districts cover every county in Virginia except Arlington. Soil and water conservation districts are political subdivisions of state government; they receive funding from state, federal and local sources. Besides a board of directors, these offices have technical and administrative staff. They are community resources for a variety of natural resources stewardship programs.

District Receives \$273,048 Allocation for BMP Cost Share

A Cost Share kick-off meeting was held on August 22, 2006 at the Greenfield Education Center to allow individuals to meet with local conservation partner representatives and ask questions about available programs. Light refreshments and sandwiches were served. The Commonwealth of Virginia significantly increased funding for year 2006—2007 to support the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMP) Cost Share Program. This year a total of 14 million dollars were available, up from the 10 million from the previous year, for the 47 conservation districts across the Commonwealth due to the members of the Virginia General Assembly willing to invest in the voluntary implementation of the BMP Program.



Dam #1 Summer of 2006



Dam #2 Summer of 2006



Dam #4 Flood Nov. 2006



Dam #3 Summer of 2006

Rehabilitation Application Approved For John's Creek Dam #3

The Johns Creek Flood Control Dams were built in the late 1960's by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for the purpose of protecting agricultural land in the Johns Creek Valley. The Mountain Castles Soil & Water Conservation District and Craig County both signed the Watershed Agreements and the Operation & Maintenance Agreements for the dams, making them co-sponsors of the structures. Since the dams were built, many homes have moved into the area downstream from the dams. This increased the hazard classification of the dam to Class I. Due to this change, the required amount of water that can pass through the emergency spillway increased, and therefore, the dams must be upgraded to pass current Dam Safety Regulations. The district and the county had submitted three applications for federal assistance in order to make the necessary upgrades. The application for Dam #3 was approved April 2007 by the Craig County Board of Supervisors and the District Board of Directors and has been received by the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Richmond, Virginia.

Annual District Awards and Recognition Banquet

Botetourt and Craig Conservation Farmers of the Year

Local conservation partners gathered to recognize the Conservation Awards recipients on November 30, 2006. Representatives from the Farm Service Agency, Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Western Virginia Land Trust, Valley Conservation Council, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service attended the Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District's annual awards dinner to recognize the Conservation Farmers of the Year for Botetourt and Craig Counties and an Award in Forestry Management at the Greenfield Education and Training Center in Daleville.

Andy Allen, Virginia Tech Extension Director opened the meeting and guests were welcomed by Tim Ward, Associate County Planner, with Botetourt County. A special thank you is extended to Botetourt County and Virginia Western Community College which made it possible for use of the Greenfield Education and Training Center.



Marilyn and Charles Barnes (left) Bill MacIntosh (right)

Craig Conservation Farmer of the Year

The Craig County Conservation Farmer of the Year Award was presented to Charles and Marilyn Barnes of Craig County. Their 780 acre farm is located along Barbour's Creek outside of New Castle. The Barnes has participated in several state and federal conservation programs, which have allowed for stream and pond exclusion and the installation of an alternative water system. An intensive rotational grazing system is used to manage pastures and a mix of cool and warm season grasses encourage wildlife. The Barnes also use Stewardship Forestry Practices on their woodland acres. The Conservation guests were delighted to hear presentations from the Conservation Award recipients, Andy and Katherine Meadows, Botetourt County and Charles Barnes, Craig County speak about their farming operations and conservation practices they have used to help protect and improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.



Harold and Janet Entsminger, Jr. with Andy and Katherine Meadows presenter was John Seibel.

Botetourt Conservation Farmer of the Year

The Botetourt County Conservation Farmer of the Year Award and the Clean Water Farm Award was presented to Springwood Angus Farm. The beef and sheep operation is operated by Andy & Katherine Meadows, Harold & Janet Entsminger, Jr., and Willie Morris. The 500 acre farm has participated in the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practice Program to complete conservation projects on the beautiful farm in Botetourt. The installation of stream fencing, cross fencing, and an alternative water system has allowed for an excellent rotational grazing system using over 25 paddocks. The farm also has a current nutrient management plan which decreases nutrient runoff and costs.



Bob Boeren (left) Thecla and Lanier. Frantz (right)

Forestry Award

Bob Boeren, Forester, presented the Forestry Award to Mr. Lanier Frantz. Mr. Frantz owns 1,500 acres near New Castle in Craig County. The property is under a conservation easement and borders the national forest. Mr. Frantz has been managing his property since 1960 for forestry, wildlife, and agriculture. He has worked with the DOF, MeadWestvaco, Mountain Castles SWCD, NRCS, VDGIF and Ducks Unlimited to name a few. He also has a gliderport on the property and he was featured in MeadWestvaco's Forest Focus magazine in 2005.

Mountain Castles Soil & Water Conservation District

Bonsack Service Center

36 Executive Circle, Suite 1
 Roanoke, VA 24012-8939
 Telephone: 540.977.2698
 Fax: 540.977.2754

Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRCS's natural resources conservation programs help landowners and farmers reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat. Technical assistance is provided on Farm Bill Programs: EQIP, WHIP, WRP and CREP Programs. NRCS sponsors Earth Team Volunteers to provide educational assistance on various programs.

On-the-Ground Conservation October 2006 — August 2007	
Wells	3
Stream Crossings	8
Residue Mgt.—No till	132 acres
Pipeline	2838 ft
Cropland Conversion To Permanent Grass	137 acres
Cover Crop	122 acres
Watering Troughs	10
Nutrient Management	750 acres
Prescribed Grazing	125 acres
Pest Management	10 acres
Brush Management	18 acres
Tree Plantings	35 acres

Changing Faces of Conservation



(Pictured L—R)

District Staff - Katie Stuller, Staci Merkt, and Alvin Phelps, ASTC (FO) with Jane Shaw, District Conservationist taken at the OWAA Farm Tour in Craig County

The Mountain Castles Soil & Water Conservation District welcomes Jane Shaw, as the new District Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Mrs. Shaw joined the staff at the USDA Bonsack Service Center in May of 2007, filling the position vacated by Bill Moss in December. Alvin Phelps, ASTC (FO) also pictured above works in the Christiansburg Area Office and supervises NRCS offices from the Bonsack Service Center to Lee County and a avid supporter of training opportunities for NRCS staff, as well as, district employees.

Also pictured above are the two new district employees who joined the Bonsack Service Center in June 2007, as District Conservation Technicians. Katie Stuller is a full-time tech and Staci Merkt is part-time Ag BMP tech.

Farm Service Agency

The Farm Service Agency (FSA), a branch of USDA, helps ensure the well-being of American Agriculture, the environment and the American public through efficient and equitable administration of Federal farm programs. These programs are designed to help farmers in time of natural disasters, to improve the economic stability of agriculture during low market swings for farmers, to help farmers adjust production to meet demand through commodity programs, and to assist with obtaining credit when private lenders are not an option. In addition to financial assistance, FSA administers conservation programs (CRP/CREP) that help farmers improve water quality and animal health, stop erosion, improve wildlife habitat, and protect endangered species.

Counties	Botetourt	Craig
CRP/CREP Contracts	19	16
Total Acres Enrolled	211.0	116.0
FY 2006 Annual Payments	\$16,015	\$8,543
FY 2006 Cost Share Payments/Incentives	\$16,319	\$15,418

The Mountain Castles SWCD, NRCS, VDOF and FSA provide assistance on CREP projects.



Virginia Cooperative Extension

VCE is a product of cooperation among local, state, and federal governments in partnership. The VCE programs are needs-driven by local citizens and local councils. Offices are located in Botetourt County at 9 West Main St., Fincastle and in Craig County at 24838 Craig Creek Rd., New Castle. The VCE offers a variety of programs that includes Pesticide Safety Training; Soil Testing and Fertilization Recommendations; insect, disease, and weed identification and control measures; forage testing; plant and feed toxicology testing; pre-sidedress nitrate soil test for corn, manure testing. Local citizens are encouraged to contact the VCE for answers to your questions in farming and pest management.

Virginia Department of Forestry

The local forestry office is located in the Town Hall in Buchanan which serves Botetourt, Craig, and Roanoke Counties. Two employees work out of this office, Robert (Bob) Boeren and Jon Willoughby. Forestry assistance is available in several areas that include forest management, reforestation, logging, wildland fire, education, and limited cost-share. A forest management or stewardship plan is written based on the landowners objectives. The mailing address and telephone number for the local Virginia Forestry office is: **P. O. Box 1126, Buchanan, Virginia 24066; Telephone (540) 254-2831.**

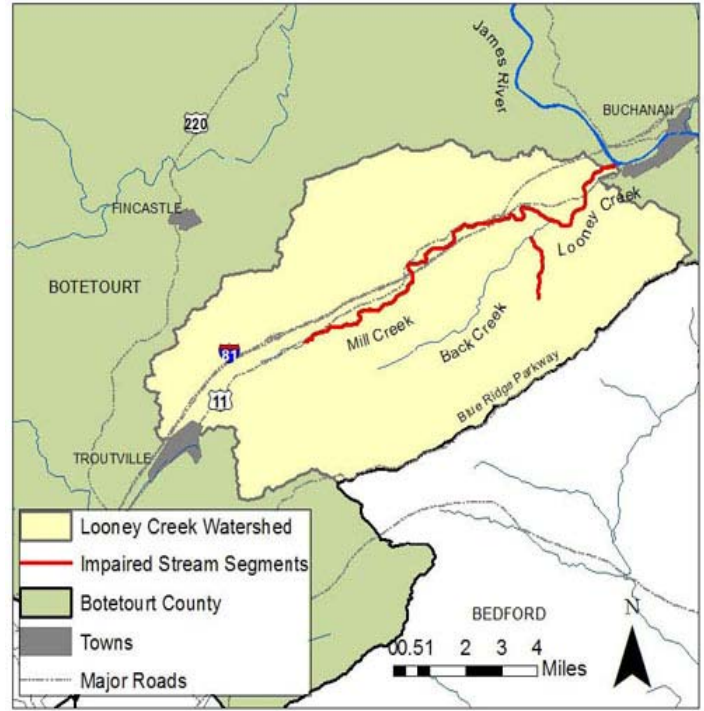
Mountain Castles Soil & Water Conservation District

The Goal: Improved Water Quality for the Looney Creek Watershed

Looney Creek and its tributaries in Botetourt County are on Virginia's list of impaired or "dirty" waters because bacteria levels in the streams exceed Virginia's water quality standards. Levels of bacteria in the stream measured by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) indicate an increased risk of illness for people who come in direct contact with the water. The Looney Creek watershed is located in the eastern section of Botetourt County, and includes Mill Creek and Back Creek. Water from Looney Creek flows directly into the James River near the Town of Buchanan.

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation in conjunction with The Department of Environmental Quality and Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District has been working with local government representatives and citizens to develop an implementation plan to reduce bacteria in the streams so that the risk of illness is reduced.

The first meeting for the Looney Creek Watershed was held September 14th 2006 and several public meetings have been held to receive public comments. The public meetings also served to inform citizens within the watershed, as well as, to get them involved in the Watershed. The implementation plan, which is being developed, will outline the improvements, or best management practices, needed to reduce the sources of bacteria and the associated costs and benefits. Examples of best management practices to reduce bacteria sources include repairing failing septic systems, fencing livestock from streams and establishing vegetated stream buffers. Implementation will occur in stages as outlined in the plan. The steering committee for the Looney Creek Watershed project will be working with the rough draft in August/September to hold an additional public meeting to review the implementation plan sometime later in the Fall of 2007. Cost share funds will be available to pay up to 75% of the costs of approved agricultural BMPs. The agricultural BMPs will focus on stream exclusion practices for livestock, and practices to reduce the bacteria reaching streams from runoff from agricultural land. Funds will also be available to remove straight pipes (pipes directly discharging untreated sewage into the stream) and to repair/replace failing septic systems in close proximity to streams. Landowners may be eligible to receive 50% cost share for the residential BMPs and up to 75% based on economic need.



Volunteer Citizen Monitoring

Tom Wilbon pictured on the right is with Bob Boeren, Forester and Drew Miller with DEQ on the Wilbon farm in the Looney Creek area.



Mr. Wilbon has been involved with a volunteer citizen monitoring group collecting samples from several creeks within the Looney Creek Watershed, working with the District and DEQ checking for levels of e-coli to serve as data prior to implementation of the proposed Looney Creek TMDL.

The TMDL implementation plan is expected to begin in the winter months of 2007—2008.

Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) Program

BMPs Completed in 2006—2007

SL-6 Grazing Land Protection:	9
SL-1 Permanent Vegetative Cover on Cropland:	7
SL-8B Small Grain Cover Crop:	24
NM-3 Sidedress Application of N on Corn:	1

District Cost Share Practices Paid FY 06-07

Chesapeake Bay Base	\$24,354.38
Chesapeake Bay Priority	\$47,530.12
Chesapeake Contractual	\$ 4,089.00
Southern River Priority	\$ 7,836.79
CREP	\$ 7,764.00

Carried over FY 05-06 Paid FY 06-07

Southern River	\$ 9,108.75
James River/CBay	\$22,924.63
Carried over FY 07-08 Unpaid	\$69,642.16

BMP Farm Visits - Employee Training



Kati Stuller, Lanier Frantz, Jay Day
Andy Allen, Staci Merkt,

Mountain Castles SWCD assists landowners financially in conservation practices that qualify under the BMP Program. Farmers can be reimbursed up to 75% of project costs along with a 25% state tax credit on out of pocket expenses with approved conservation practices. The district had a successful year implementing the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practice Program across Botetourt and Craig Counties.

For fiscal year 2006—2007 cost share dollars paid amounted to \$123,607.67 and another \$69,642.16 is obligated for BMPs for FY 07/08. Some of the most popular BMPs included grazing land protection, small grain cover crops for nutrient management, permanent vegetative cover on cropland, and stream bank protection.

*Mountain Castles Soil & Water
Conservation District
36 Executive Circle, Suite 1
Roanoke, VA 24012*



**In remembrance of the tragedy
April 16, 2007
on the Virginia Tech campus.**



Conservation Partners



Board of Directors

Elected Directors

Harold P. Entsminger, Jr, Chairman - Botetourt County
Jay R. Day, Vice Chairman - Craig County
William MacIntosh, Craig County
Jeffrey T. Bowles, Botetourt County

Appointed Directors

John Seibel, At-Large
Andy Allen, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Associate Director
Michael Beahm, Treasurer

Conservation District Coordinator

Mark Hollberg

USDA Bonsack Service Center

Telephone: 540.977.2698 Ext. 3
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Mountain Castles SWCD

Email: mcsxcd@vaswcd.org

Charlene Oliver, District Manager
Kati Stuller, Conservation Technician
Staci Merkt, Ag Conservation Technician

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Jane Shaw, District Conservationist

Farm Service Agency

C. Jean Hazlegrove, County Executive Director
Joan Crenshaw, Program Technician
Pat Willoughby, Program Technician
John Price, Field Assistant

Department of Conservation and Recreation, (DCR)
Botetourt County Board of Supervisors
Craig County Board of Supervisors
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Farm Service Agency (FSA)
Rural Development (RD)
Valley Conservation Council
Virginia Cooperative Extension
4-H Craig County
4-H Fincastle
Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD)
Virginia Department of Forestry
National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)
Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
Virginia Outdoors Foundation
Western Virginia Land Trust
Upper James River Watershed Roundtable

The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Mountain Castles Soil & Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. The District also received local support provided by Botetourt and Craig Counties. All programs and services are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.