



Winter, 2024



Currents....

The quarterly newsletter of the Headwaters SWCD

In this Issue

- Clean Water Farm Awards
- Coming Events
- Conservation in our Communities-
Headwaters Master Naturalists
- Education News
- Critter Corner-Silent Migrators
- Ag News

2023 Board of Directors

- Joseph "Buzz" Easterling (*Chairman*)
- Otis Bilkins (*Vice-Chairman*)
- DuBose Egleston, Jr. (*Secretary*)
- Robert Drumheller
- Doug Horn
- Walter Heeb, III
- Jimmy Bryant, Appointed, Staunton

Associate Directors

- Jim Boland
- Urbie Nash
- Charles Huppuch
- Leo Tammi
- Steve Talley
- Charles Schooley
- Adam Schellhammer (*Treasurer*)

Staff

- Michael Jimenez, Dist. Manager/Dam
Management Technician
- Rhonda Cline, Dist. Operations Manager
- Jack Carlton, Conservation Tech.
- Aaron Shull, Conservation Tech/Animal
Waste
- Butch Rohrbauch, Conservation Tech.
- Rich Wood, Education & Outreach Coord



We work with the people who work the land.

2022-23 Clean Water Farm Awards

*In recognition of outstanding contributions to water quality through the
installation of agricultural Best Management Practices.*

Shenandoah Basin Winner

Driver Brothers Inc. & JMD Farm - Staunton



James Basin Winner

Rock Bottom Farm - Deerfield



COMING EVENTS

2024



January 18-20, 2024

Augusta Expo
Fishersville, VA

*Stop by our Headwaters SWCD table
booth space # 132*

2024 Virginia Tech Sheep Basics 101 Workshop

Virginia Tech Copenhaver Sheep Center
Blacksburg, VA



January 19th - 20th, 2024

10:00 AM Friday - 12:00 PM Saturday

Topics to be covered include:

Basic Record Keeping, Facilities and
Handling, Flock Health, Newborn Lamb
Management, Nutritional and
Reproduction Management



January 26, 2024

9am-3pm

Blue Ridge Community College
Weyers Cave, VA



February 23-25, 2024

Augusta Expo
Fishersville, VA



Conservation In Our Communities Headwaters Master Naturalists

by Sarah Foster



Display photo by Carl Droms

When my daughter was growing up, we did every nature-oriented activity we could find - Earth Day festivals, wildflower walks at Wintergreen, Riverfest, open houses at the Wildlife Center. It was at one of these events that we came across a display table set up by Virginia Master Naturalists and it was full of nature 'stuff' - animal skulls, bird feathers, cicada shells and snake skins. The same stuff that we collected at home. These people were sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm about the outdoors with others, and kids in particular were eating it up. I am a teacher, and I love working with children, so I knew right then that becoming a Master Naturalist was going on my empty nester bucket list.

The Virginia Master Naturalist program manages 30 chapters throughout the state. These local chapters coordinate volunteer training classes and collaborate with local partners including schools, nature centers, nonprofits, and local governments. According to the most recent annual report, the VMN program had 2,388 active volunteers in 2022 who made 288,000 contacts through educational outreach and improved more than 703 sites through stewardship. Volunteers also served as citizen scientists –reporting sightings of spotted lanternfly, monitoring vernal pool habitats and testing water samples in streams and rivers. Augusta and Rockingham counties both fall under the Headwaters Chapter, which has been around since 2011.

It took a few years, but I was finally able to start the training course this past February. Training for my cohort of 20 students included roughly 45-hours of classroom instruction plus 15-hours of educational field trips. The instructional sessions, held in the evenings at Bridgewater College, were split between spring and fall semesters so that we could experience field trips during different seasons. We had excellent speakers, including the bird club's own Dr. Robyn Puffenbarger, on topics such as ornithology, herpetology, forestry, ecology, mammals, insects and invasive species.

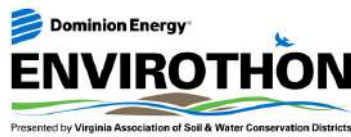
In addition, the field trips were well organized and very informative. For example, we had a behind-the-scenes geology tour of Grand Caverns led by JMU's Dr. Angel Garcia, and a personal tour of Lake Shenandoah in Rockingham County by Jason Hallacher, a Senior Fisheries Biologist with DWR who has been instrumental in the establishment of pollinator gardens and educational displays at the lake. Carl Tugend, a black bear expert also with DWR, trained us on how to present a "Living with Bears" workshop, a new outreach program designed to facilitate a reduction in human-bear conflicts.

Once the training is complete, a Master Naturalist is expected to accumulate 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of continuing education each calendar year. There are many volunteer projects to choose from, including educational outreach, citizen science – such as Bumble Bee Watch and the Christmas Bird Count; and stewardship – restoring wildlife habitats, installing rain gardens, trail maintenance, etc.

As an educator, I have unfortunately noticed a significant decline over the years in environmental awareness in children. It is a trend that I hope to help reverse through both community outreach and volunteer service projects as part of the Master Naturalist program. More information can be found at VirginiaMasterNaturalist.org.

Education News!

Check out our website for more information on the
Envirothon and many other cool opportunities!
(www.headwatersswcd.org)



2024 Envirothon is coming! Teams are forming now!

The Headwaters SWCD Local Envirothon Program is up and running, and we want more teams to join us! The program has two levels of competition-High School level (students in grades 9-12) and Middle School level (grades 6-8). Teams can be formed by public, private or parochial schools, Boy/Girl Scouts, Clubs (4-H, Ecology). For more information, please contact Rich Wood, Education & Outreach Coordinator at (540) 248-0148 ext. 8, rwood@co.augusta.va.us.

2024 Area I Envirothon Training

Saturday, March 9, 2024 (8:30 am - 4:00 pm)
Bridgewater College

2024 Local Envirothon Competition*

Wednesday, April, 10, 2024 (HS level)
Thursday, April 11, 2024 (MS level)
Grand Caverns Park-Grottoes, VA

** All participants receive a free t-shirt and free lunch!*

TEACHER WORKSHOPS NOW AVAILABLE!

Free



Free



Free



Free



Contact Rich Wood
for more information
rwood@co.augusta.va.us



\$10/person materials fee

Youth Conservation Camp

Virginia Association of Soil & Water
Conservation Districts



Tentative dates for the 2024 Youth Conservation Camp are July 7-13th, applications will be open in the new year through Headwaters Soil & Water Conservation District.

Reservations now being accepted for the 2024 Underground Classroom tour season!

The Headwaters SWCD's Underground Classroom is a handicap accessible 22-foot cargo trailer that serves as a mobile learning unit bringing soils and conservation education to our local schools and communities throughout Augusta County, Staunton, Waynesboro and surrounding areas.

Interested in having the Underground Classroom visit your school, or come to your local fair or festival? Want more information? Contact Rich Wood, Education & Outreach Coordinator at (540) 248-0148 ext. 8, or email rwood@co.augusta.va.us



....and more educational opportunities!

2024 Poster Contest

This Year's Theme is:



For students in grades K-12, girl scouts, boy scouts or 4-H clubs.

For more information and entry rules, go to our website: www.headwatersswcd/poster-contest/

2024 Conservation Scholarship Program

Each year, Headwaters Soil & Water Conservation District offers (1) \$1,000 Conservation Scholarship to graduating high school students as well as college students. Preference may be given to applicants who have not previously received a Headwaters SWCD scholarship. **The application deadline for the 2024 scholarship is Friday, March 29, 2024**





Critter Corner

This feature spotlights a different species of native Virginia wildlife each issue. Enjoy!

by Rich Wood, Education & Outreach Coordinator

Silent Migrants

It was a rainy night in February, temperatures were in the high 40's, but the ground still had patches of snow in the forest setting. As the rain fell under the cloak of darkness, a quiet migration was just beginning. The destination—a small vernal pond (temporary or seasonal pools of water), filled by snow melt and early spring rains. The “mysterious migrants” were Spotted salamanders (*Ambystoma maculatum*). These 7” long, black amphibians with two, irregular rows of bright yellow spots were returning to the place of their birth to mate and lay eggs, just like they have been doing for thousands of years.

Like other “mole salamanders,” Spotted salamanders spend most of the year underground in burrows that they find or dig themselves on the forest floor. But, on warm, rainy nights in early spring, a great, synchronized migration occurs, as hundreds start the long trek to these seasonal water holes.

Spotted salamanders go through several life stages: egg, larva, juvenile, and adult. Their eggs are laid underwater, so when the larvae hatch they have external gills for breathing in their aquatic environment, a broad tail to help them swim, and weak legs. The larvae feed in the water while they grow into juveniles. After 2-4 months, the juveniles, now breathing with lungs, return to live on land with strong legs, where they will remain for up to five years before reaching maturity. It will then be their turn to make the journey back to same the pool where they were born. Although the survival rate is low for baby Spotted salamanders, they can live more than 30 years.

Spotted salamanders can be found in the eastern United States along the Atlantic coast and throughout the southeastern states, with the exception of Florida. Their range extends west as far as Texas and north into eastern parts of Canada. They live in hardwood and mixed forests close to stagnant water sources like swamps, ponds, and vernal pools. Their predators include skunks, raccoons, turtles, snakes and some birds.

Spotted salamanders face many dangers: deforestation, cars (when crossing roads during migration), predators, pollutants, and climate change are all known threats to this species. You can help Spotted salamanders by protecting vernal pools and surrounding forests on your property, helping them cross roads in spring time and advocating for protecting large swaths of woodland in your community. Let's give these awesome amphibians the opportunity to keep thriving for another thousand years!



An adult Spotted Salamander heads toward a vernal pool during its spring migration.

photo by Rich Wood



Augusta County Designated Drought Disaster Area by USDA, Farmers Eligible to Apply for Assistance

November 29, 2023

Augusta County has recently been designated as a drought disaster area by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Livestock producers may qualify for the Livestock Forage Disaster Program. Farmers interested in learning more about the Livestock Forage Disaster Program should contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) office in Verona at 70 Dick Huff Lane. Farmers will need to have up-to-date acreage reports along with some additional reporting requirements to qualify for the program. Questions can be directed to the Verona Farm Service Agency at 540-248-6218.

Are You Ready For Some Ag Conservation in 2024?

The staff at Headwaters SWCD is already in full swing meeting with producers and planning out Best Management Practices (BMPs). If you're interested in how we may be able to help you with technical assistance and financial assistance please give us a call at (540) 248-0148! We would love to hear from you!



Farm Self-Assessment Workshop

Would you like to know about all the **local** technical assistance providers (TAs) and conservation practitioners (CPs), their expertise, and the full suite of (technical and financial) resources, knowledge, and programs they can provide?

This workshop focuses on having these TAs and CPs engage one-on-one with each participant discussing how their programs apply specifically to each landowner's property and conservation goals, using a large, hard-copy map of each property as a focal point for discussion.

We're looking to team up with the *Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley*, and several conservation agencies & organizations to offer these workshops in your community! **But we need your help!** If you're interested, and have some neighbors who could join you, please contact us so we can organize one for your community!

For more information, contact Rich Wood (rwood@co.augusta.va.us) at (540) 248-0148 ext. 8.

Cost Share Reminders!

- Cover crops have to remain on fields until March 14th (can't be killed or harvested before then)
- Any producers looking to sign their corn acres up for our side dressing practice (NM-3C), they need to have the acres reported to us by April 1.



**Do you have an idea for an article, or would like to know about a specific topic?
Do you have a particular question we might be able to answer?**

We would love to hear from you!

Send your inquiry/questions to: Rich Wood (rwood@co.augusta.va.us)

Would you like to join our E-Newsletter mailing list?

Drop an email to: rwood@co.augusta.va.us

Headwaters SWCD

70 Dick Huff Lane

Verona, VA 24482

(540) 248-0148

www.headwatersswcd.org

**Join our mailing
list! It's FREE!**



HAPPY NEW YEAR

