

Looney Creek TMDL Implementation Plan

Agricultural Working Group Meeting

Buchanan Town Council Chambers: January 22, 2007

Attendees

Tom Wilbow
Eddie Wells, RVARC
Rebecca Evans, MCSWCD
Cassie Driskill, VACE
County

Jeff Cline, DCR
Nesha Mizel, DCR
Bob Boeren, DOF
Carol Linkenhoker, Botetourt

Meeting Summary-DRAFT

The working group began the meeting with a review of the agricultural working group fact sheet. Nesha Mizel (VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation) explained some of the topics that the working group would address including appropriate best management practices to include in the plan and potential obstacles to implementation. The group moved on to discuss the reductions in bacteria that would be needed to meet water quality standards in the Looney Creek watershed. Nesha explained that the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study developed for Looney Creek was very conservative, which was a contributing factor to the very high reductions required from humans, pets and livestock (all 99%). The group expressed some concern about these reductions, and agreed that they were unreasonable. Nesha explained that success in implementation will be measured on the basis of water quality improvement as indicated by water quality monitoring, not the percent reductions that are achieved.

The group moved on to a discussion of the population estimates for livestock, humans and wildlife provided in their handout. Everyone agreed that the estimate for beef cattle in 2007 was too high. One watershed resident explained that while beef cattle numbers may have doubled or tripled in Ellis Run, it is highly unlikely that they have done so throughout the watershed. The group thought that an increase by 1/3 from 1997 was more reasonable (around 3,000 beef cattle was suggested). They explained that several operations have gone out of business, and that a recent drought had caused many farmers to reduce their cattle numbers. Initially several group members thought that the sheep and swine numbers were on the high side, but after more discussion took place, it was agreed that these estimates were probably okay. Harmony Farms, a sanctuary for livestock in the watershed, was sited as one possible location for swine and other livestock that would drive up population estimates for the watershed. One group member mentioned that goats are increasing in popularity in the watershed, and are probably present in numbers similar to sheep. Llamas and donkeys were also mentioned as populations that should be accounted for as more landowners use them to ward off coyotes. One group member estimated that there are probably around 15-20 llamas in the watershed. Everyone agreed that there are a number of recreational farmers in the

watershed that have small numbers of livestock that have probably gone unrecorded. It was suggested that we check with the FSA office to get updated cattle numbers since they updated their figures 3-4 years ago as part of an Emergency Conservation Plan during a drought.

Estimates for pet populations were also discussed. The group was in agreement that the change in pet population estimates between 2002 and 2007 was too large. They felt that both dog and cat populations were much larger in the watershed and suggested that the American Veterinary Medical Association Center for Information Management estimates were not appropriate for this watershed. They estimated that there are probably around 1.5 dogs and 2 cats per household (on average).

Estimates for human populations and housing units were evaluated. Several members of the group thought that the housing units estimate was a little high. Eddie Wells explained that the RVARC has been reviewing tax maps to determine the number of parcels in the watershed, and had arrived at approximately 1600 (not all of which have houses on them). Eddie said he would look back at their numbers to help in developing an accurate estimate. Carol Linkenhoker thought that the county might be able to provide some assistance with refining this estimate as well. *Both Eddie Wells and Carol Linkenhoker followed up on this estimate after the meeting and found that the estimate of 1,832 housing units in the watershed was accurate.* Initially the group thought that the estimate of the number of homes on sewer seemed a little high. They agreed that a small section of Ashley Plantation was in the watershed and were trying to determine if a portion of Troutville was also in the watershed. Both of these areas have homes with public sewer. The county is currently mapping water and sewer lines, and should have information on availability of public sewer in the next 6 months. The group did not think that the number of homes on sewer had increased between 2004 and 2007, and it was assumed that the 2004 estimate of 0 was incorrect.

After reviewing the wildlife population estimates, the group felt that several animals, including coyotes, opossums, and skunks should also be included. A study was recently conducted (still ongoing) by students at an area school to survey the coyote population, which has been growing in the county. One group member offered to look into getting some of the results from the study to assist in refining the wildlife population estimates.

Following their evaluation of population estimates in the watershed, the group moved on to discuss stream fencing. Nesha explained the two fencing practices for which cost share is available through the Ag BMP program and asked if the group felt that flooding and fence repair/maintenance would be a major obstacle in the watershed. The group agreed that this is not too much of a problem in the watershed, and that giving up the 35 ft. buffer would be the larger obstacle for producers. Rebecca explained that when a conservation specialist is working with a farmer to sell a fencing practice, they will discuss the SL-6 practice (grazing land protection) with them first since it has the greatest conservation benefits when compared to the stream protection practice. Rebecca asked why the 50 cents/linear ft. maintenance funding was only offered with the stream protection practice and not the grazing land protection practice. Nesha said that she did

not know, and that she would do some research and get back to her on that. Nesha asked whether they thought that many farmers would be willing to fence intermittent streams on their property. Rebecca Evans said that the SWCD has fenced several intermittent streams before. The group agreed that fencing all of the intermittent streams in the watershed would be impractical. Rebecca noted that the current BMPs table did not appear up to date since it only went up to 2001 (the SWCD installed several BMPs in the watershed between 2001-2007). She thought that once these were accounted for, the cost estimates might go up slightly.

The group ended the meeting with a discussion of outreach methods. Rebecca explained that the SWCD is participating in a DCR-sponsored marketing study, and will be putting up a billboard in Troutville and airing some radio advertisements as part of this study. The effectiveness of these different media sources will be evaluated in order to determine the best methods of outreach to use in communicating information about the agricultural cost share program to landowners. Lessons learned by the district from this study will be easily transferable to Looney Creek. The group agreed that farmers often become interested in installing ag BMPs after a neighbor has success with them.

Coliscan monitoring was mentioned as an excellent way to get people involved and aware of water quality issues in the watershed. The VA Dept. of Environmental Quality will be holding a training for citizens interested in Coliscan monitoring on February 2 in Roanoke. Tom Wilbow was very interested in conducting monitoring in the watershed, and he felt that this would help us to better target our efforts. The group discussed how karst geology could make pinpointing pollutant sources very difficult in the watershed.

The group discussed the possibility of conducting stream walks to detect straight pipes in the watershed. They were unsure of whether the streams in the watershed fell under Kings Grant regulations, and they felt that this information would be useful in developing detection methods.