

WINTER 2026 NEWSLETTER

CONSERVATION AROUND THE NECK

Goodbye 2025 & Hello 2026

Happy New Year! The 2025 calendar year has come and gone but not without it's share of hardships. Although the year proved to be troubling for several, Northern Neck SWCD has a multitude of accomplishments and a few exciting changes to share!

1. In June of 2025, we completed another successful year of the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program's Whole Farm Approach. Our technical staff worked with over 160 producers to implement over \$7.2 million in cost-share funding within the Northern Neck.
2. In 2025, NNSWCD reached \$1.3 million of cost-share funding from the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) since 2017. Of that \$1.3 million, \$1.2 million of those funds were allocated to living shorelines.
3. On December 1st, we had two well-deserved promotions within our office. Kelly Brann was promoted to District Operations Manager and Joanna Balderson was promoted to Financial Administrative Specialist.
4. Due to those promotions, a job position became available for an Administrative Assistant. On January 1, 2026, we welcomed Tina Withers to the NNSWCD staff. Tina brings years of administrative and financial knowledge and we are beyond excited to have her a part of our team.

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Next time you are in Warsaw, stop by our office and introduce yourself. We would love to see you!



Education & Outreach

Household Hazardous & Electronic Waste Collection

EXCITING NEWS ALERT - Richmond County is now offering a spring HHW event for 2026. During the December Board of Supervisors meeting, it was discussed and decided to provide Richmond County residents and property owners with two household hazardous and electronic waste collection events. Check out the 2026 HHW event dates below. If you have questions about acceptable items, be sure to visit our website at nnswwcd.org or give our office a call - (804) 313-9102 x105.

Lancaster County:

- Saturday, March 21, 2026
- Saturday, September 12, 2026

Richmond County:

- Saturday, April 11, 2026
- Saturday, October 17, 2026

Northumberland County:

- Saturday, April 25, 2026
- Saturday, October 24, 2026

Westmoreland County:

- Saturday, May 16, 2026
- Saturday, September 26, 2026

Northern Neck Crops Conference

Every year, Northern Neck SWCD is a proud sponsor of the Virginia Cooperative Extension's annual Northern Neck Crops Conference. We took this opportunity to set up a sponsor table at the conference, network with various organizations and introduce our newest staff member to several agricultural producers in attendance. Speaking of attendance, this conference had the highest number of attendees this specific event has ever seen! During the conference, NNSWCD's Agricultural Conservation Specialist, Aaron Saunders, provided a few updates regarding the VACS program and cover crop deadlines.

2026 NNSWCD Producer Conference

The 2026 NNSWCD Producer Conference date has been set. Mark your calendars for Thursday, March 5th starting at 8:00AM. The conference will be held at the Menokin Road Farm in Warsaw with a catered breakfast. This free event is open to all agricultural producers in the Northern Neck. Flyers will be placed in the mail in the coming days so keep an eye on your mailbox. If your organization is interested in donating a door prize or you have questions regarding the conference, please reach out to Kelly at kelly.brann@nnswwcd.org or (804) 313-9102 x105.

SAVE *the* DATE

NNSWCD PRODUCER CONFERENCE

March 5, 2026
Menokin Road Farm
2709 Menokin Rd., Warsaw

INVITATION TO FOLLOW

2026 Scholarships

The 2026 Northern Neck SWCD and Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) scholarship applications are now available. The VASWCD is awarding four \$2,000 scholarships and NNSWCD is awarding two \$4,000 scholarships. This past year, the NNSWCD Education Committee and Board of Directors approved an increase of both NNSWCD scholarships from \$2,000 to \$4,000.

The NNSWCD scholarships are open to students with permanent residency within the four Northern Neck counties who demonstrate an active interest in agriculture, natural resource conservation and/or environmental studies.

For consideration, fully completed applications must be received in the NNSWCD office by **Wednesday, March 11, 2026 by 4:00PM**. Incomplete or late applications will not be considered. To view the scholarship applications, visit our website. If you have questions regarding the application, reach out to Lowery at lowery.becker@nnsxcd.org.



NORTHERN NECK SWCD SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Scholarships Available

- J.C. Berger - current high school seniors with permanent residency within the Northern Neck
- James Edward Minor - enrolled undergraduate college students with permanent residency within the Northern Neck
- VASWCD - current high school seniors who reside in or attend school within in the Northern Neck

More Information:
www.nnsxcd.org
lowery.becker@nnsxcd.org
804-313-9102 x104

APPLY NOW

For consideration, your fully completed application must be received in the NNSWCD office by Wednesday, March 11, 2026 by 4:00 PM. Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.

2026 VAAE Conference

The Virginia Association for Environmental Educators (VAEE) holds an annual conference in February to give educators an opportunity to participate in hands-on activities and network with peers in the same field. This is another conference and organization that NNSWCD proudly sponsors. The 2026 VAAE Conference will take place February 26-28 in Richmond, VA. If you are interested in attending, registration ends February 11th. For more information, visit www.eevirginia.org/conference.



This past July, Kelly & Lowery (NNSWCD) partnered with Robin & Claire (FOR) to administer the first Project WET training for Virginia environmental educators in several years. This professional development workshop was such a success that we decided to offer it again on a larger scale. At the 2026 conference, Kelly, Lowery, Robin & Claire have the opportunity to partner again to offer the Project WET training to educators across the state. If you are interested in receiving this training, be sure to register by February 11th and attend the 10:30AM session on Thursday, February 26th.

Education & Outreach Opportunities

Our education and outreach team is always looking for opportunities to educate the community on the importance of natural resource conservation, soil & water districts, water conservation and so much more. If you would like Lowery & Kelly to visit your classroom, organization, and/or event, reach out to our office at (804) 313-9102 or email us: kelly.brann@nnsxcd.org or lowery.becker@nnsxcd.org.

Operations

2025 VASWCD Annual Meeting

The Area III Winter Meeting took place at the end of the first day at the conference. Several updates from all 8 Districts were given as well as voting in a new vice-chair and treasurer. Northern Neck SWCD is proud to announce Director Lewis Walker (Lancaster) was voted in as the Vice-Chair of Area III and District Operations Manager, Kelly Brann was voted in as the Treasurer.



Fun Fact: There are 47 Soil & Water Conservation Districts in Virginia that are broken up into 6 Areas. Northern Neck SWCD is one of 8 Districts apart of Area III.

To conclude the 2025 VASWCD Annual Meeting, 5 Directors, 1 Associate Director and 2 staff members attended the VASWCD Banquet. NNSWCD Director and Treasurer, Vince Garland, was recognized for 25 years of service. Vince is a trusted and dedicated member of our Board and community. We greatly appreciate all of his hard-work and dedication that he has given Northern Neck SWCD and we look forward to his continuous service.



NNSWCD Holiday Dinner

On December 17th, we held our 2025 Holiday Dinner. We changed the location and menu slightly from previous years and it was an amazing evening! We moved our dinner over to the Old Rappahannock Brewing Company but the Old Rapp Taphouse still prepared the food. It was a great evening reflecting on the accomplishments of 2025 with Directors, staff and partners. NNSWCD is beyond grateful for our amazing team.



USDA CORNER

Happy new year to all! I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas and holiday season. We're looking forward to a fantastic 2026.

If you've been in the office lately, you've probably noticed that there aren't nearly as many staff on the NRCS side. We are now covering the Tappahannock office in addition to Warsaw so we are alternating between the two offices and have roughly half of our team in each location Tuesday through Friday. If you need to reach one of us specifically and we don't answer our regular lines, try the Warsaw shared line (804-250-4472). Someone can tell you if we're in Tappahannock, the field, or just away from our desk. If you need to reach us in Tappahannock, that number is 804-443-3571.

We are still making payments on Conservation Stewardship Program contracts (commonly referred to as CSP...the five year contracts) through mid February. If you have a CSP contract and did not receive your payment in December of 2025, we will be calling you in the next month to come in to sign your paperwork. IF you lost land in your contract or your rotations, residue, or fertilizer records didn't meet practice specifications, we will have to modify the contract prior to certifying for payment. This takes a week or so to do, so if you know you lost land that was in your contract or weren't able to meet specs for one reason or another, please call us soon so we will have time to accomplish both tasks in order to make payment in February.

Once we're caught up with payments on our existing contracts, we will begin planning, ranking, and submitting our FY26 applications for funding consideration. If you have any questions about an application that you submitted prior to 01/15/2026, give us a call at the office. For all aquaculture applications, if you have not submitted your technical form to VMRC, PLEASE do that as quickly as possible. If you need another copy, call the office and we'll be happy to email one to you.

Between covering two very busy offices, we're extremely busy, BUT if you need us for any reason, don't hesitate to reach out at our contact information below. There will probably not be another newsletter until late spring, so I hope everyone has a productive AND SAFE planting season!

Lucee Kossler

USDA-FSA Dates to Remember:

- January 15 - Acreage reporting deadline for small grain crops
- February 2 - Final date for votes to be returned or postmarked for COC Election
- February 28 - Farmer Bridge Assistance Program payments will begin
- April 30 - Supplemental Disaster Assistance Program Stage 1 & 2 sign-up

USDA-NRCS:

Lucee F. Kossler, District Conservationist
Caroline Lancaster, Soil Conservationist
Brody Ellis, Soil Conservationist
Karen Balentine, Soil Conservationist
Brooke Jenkins, Farm Bill Program Assistant

USDA-FSA:

Abigail Davis, County Executive Director
Kelsey Keyser, Program Technician
Tara Brann, Program Technician
Sarah Cole, Program Technician

Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS)

Spot Checks

Brandon and Aaron have been working tirelessly this past quarter ensuring cover crop has been planted. When it comes to planting cover crop, there are two big deadlines you need to be aware of - November 10th (early) and November 30th (late). While our producers are hard work harvesting their crops and planting cover crop, Brandon and Aaron are creating spot check maps. They use these maps to highlight farm fields that have been reported as planted with cover crops. These maps serve as a guide to ensure all fields are being checked while the workload remains manageable. Our technical team completes 3 rounds of spot checks. The first round occurs after the early deadline, the second occurs after the late deadline and the third occurs in late December, early January. The final check is to make sure the late planted cover crop is growing like it should be.

Program Updates

Now that spot checks are completed, our technical staff is updating the tracking program to prepare for burndown season. All kill or destroyed dates must be reported to NNSWCD office by June 1, 2026. Once you've reported, our staff will begin preparing your cost-share payment. If you have any questions, please give our office a call at 804-313-9102 x106. Be sure to keep these important cover crop dates in mind:

- Begin Kill or Destroy - March 15, 2026
- Additional \$10/acre Burndown - May 1, 2026
- Final Kill or Destroy - June 1, 2026
- Nutrient Management Plans Due - March 16, 2026
- PY 2027 Sign-ups - Begins July 6, 2026



No-Till Drill Rental

Spring planting is right around the corner! Do you have a small pasture or food plot that needs to be seeded? Look no further, NNSWCD has two no-till drills available for rent - 2016 Esch 5507 and 2018 Great Plains 706. These drills are perfect for planting or reseeding pasture, hay land, field buffers, wildlife plots, and small acreage fields. Call 804-313-9102 x106 today to reserve, appointments fill quickly.



Did you know that no-till farming:

- conserves soil moisture
- reduces erosion
- lowers fuel expenses



Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

This past quarter, a total of 8 VCAP projects were completed in the Northern Neck; 7 living shoreline projects and 1 conservation landscaping project. Together, the 7 living shorelines projects totaled in 1,125 linear feet while the conservation landscaping project totaled in 972 square feet. If you or someone you know is interested in participating in the VCAP program or would like to learn more, stop by our office and pick up or brochure or give Lowery Becker a call at 804-313-9102 x104.

Upcoming VCAP Application Deadlines:

- February 6, 2026
- March 6, 2026
- April 3, 2026
- May 8, 2026
- June 5, 2026



VCAP Funding Update:

As mentioned on the first page, over \$1.3 million of cost-share funding has been allocated through VCAP into the Northern Neck since 2017. This funding provides homeowners and landowners the opportunity to save their property from erosion by implementing best management practices.

Currently, VCAP is experiencing high demand, showing a powerful commitment to conservation from Districts and landowners across the state. For fiscal year 2025-2026, the state invested \$4M to support VCAP through cost-share, technical assistance, and administration needs. This investment is actively helping Virginians implement best management practices on their properties. Approximately \$2M in cost-share funds have been obligated between January and July 2025 alone. With approximately \$1.4M in cost-share remaining, the current rate of demand means that monthly obligations are outpacing available funds. This challenge isn't a setback; it's an indicator of the program's value and impact.

Here are the changes you need to know: Starting August 2025, the VCAP Steering Committee will utilize a nontraditional rolling waitlist to sustain program momentum and ensure practices continue to be approved throughout the remainder of PY26. This new approach allows practices that aren't funded in one month to be considered for funding in subsequent months. The committee will prioritize practices with the highest water quality benefit and fund as many as possible each month, balancing the limited budget with program goals.



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Staff:

Kelly Brann, District Operations Manager
Brandon Dillistin, District Technical Manager
Joanna Balderson, Financial Administrative Specialist
Lowery Becker, Education Conservation Specialist
Aaron Saunders, Agricultural Conservation Specialist
Tina Withers, Administrative Assistant

Elected Directors:

Robert E. Pickett, Chairman (Northumberland)
Frank A. "Bert" Johnson, Jr., Vice-Chair (Richmond)
J. Vince Garland, Treasurer (Richmond)
Benson C. Braxton (Westmoreland)
James A. "Aaron" Rowland (Lancaster)
Robert G. "Bobby" Vanlandingham (Northumberland)
Lewis K. Walker III (Lancaster)
Richard E. Wilkins (Westmoreland)

Appointed Directors:

Louis Gregory "Greg" Basye, At Large Appointed Member (Northumberland)
Stephanie Romelczyk, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent



The Commonwealth of Virginia supports the Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Northern Neck Soil & Water Conservation District programs, activities, and employment opportunities are available to all people regardless of race, color, religion, ethnic or national origin, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, disability, military status, or any other bases protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.