

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

CONSERVATION AROUND THE NECK

2026 NNSWCD Scholarship Recipients

This year, NNSWCD awarded two \$4,000 scholarships to well-deserving students:



The 2026 J.C. Berger Conservation Advancement Scholarship was awarded to Northumberland High School Senior, Kameron Maith. Kameron will be studying Agricultural Technology at Virginia Tech. Kameron is the Vice President of the Northern Neck chapter of the Future Farmers of America. He has received the Northern Neck Technical Center's Excellence Award two years in a row. Kameron also volunteers with Healthy

Harvest Fresh and Just Harvest. His passion for natural resources grew throughout his life and has shaped his goals for the future. Kameron's community volunteering and hands-on training have made him the standout recipient of this scholarship. Good luck, Kameron!



The 2026 James Edward Minor Ag Stewardship Award was awarded to Chloe Garner of Westmoreland County. Chloe is studying Agricultural Education and Animal Science at Oklahoma State University. Chloe was very involved with the Essex County 4H Livestock Club and the Light of the World FFA chapter. Her dedication to her education is evident in the success of her first year at OSU. Chloe's goal is to be an agriculture teacher to educate future generations about the importance of the environment. Her continued pursuit of conservation in agriculture meets the District's vision. We can't wait to see what you accomplish, Chloe!

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Education & Outreach

Household Hazardous & Electronic Waste Collection

In 2026, we are implementing several changes to the HHW collection events. The first change we made is to the event time. For the past several years, all HHW events began at 9AM and ended at 2PM, however, recently, event staff began to notice a decline in participation after 12PM. This year, in collaboration with the localities and VCE offices, we changed the event time to begin at 8AM and end at 12PM.

The next change is something we talked about in our last newsletter - Richmond County is adding a spring event! This event will take place on April 11th and we are excited to see the results.

The final change, thus far, is the most exciting of all. Westmoreland County is finally adding electronic waste to their HHW events. For the first time since 2009, all four localities are offering household hazardous AND electronic waste collection. Great things are happening right here in the Northern Neck so stay tuned to see how these events turn out.



To kick off the 2026 Household Hazardous and Electronic Waste collections, we had our first successful event for the year in Lancaster County on March 21st. With 190 vehicles participating, we collected 24,000lbs. of HHW and E-Waste for proper disposal. We hope to see you at your localities spring event coming soon.

2026 VAAE Conference

At the 2026 Virginia Association for Environmental Education (VAEE) Annual Conference, NNSWCD had the honor of partnering with Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR) on another professional development workshop. Lowery, Kelly (NNSWCD), Claire and Robin (FOR) spent countless hours and days preparing for the Project WET workshop. 16 environmental educators participated and received certification.



Also at this conference, our wonderful education partner, Robin Didlake received an award for "Exemplary Service to Environmental Education". This award is given to an outstanding VAAE member who has provided exemplary service to environmental education and leadership. Robin certainly demonstrates all of these qualities and more. Congratulations Robin!

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.

2026 Producer Conference

On March 5th, we had a record turnout for our annual Producer Conference. This year, the event was held at Menokin Road Farm in Warsaw with a delicious breakfast catered by Excellent Eats. Producers had the opportunity to hear from our partners on several different topics.

Ag Cost-Share Updates:

- \$8,701,629 in cost-share allocations for PY25/26
- Report CC burndown dates
- PY27 Sign-Ups: July 6 - August 14
- Start planning crop rotations

Aaron Saunders,
NNSWCD Agricultural
Conservation Specialist

USDA Updates:

- General Conservation Reserve Program Sign-ups: March 9 - April 17
- Farmer Bridge Assistance Program Deadline - April 17

Abby Davis, County
Executive Director (FSA)
Caroline Lancaster, Soil
Conservationist (NRCS)

Power Line Safety on the Farm

- Look up. Look out.
- Wait to unfold your farm equipment
- Know what's below - va811.com
- If you make contact with a pole - do NOT exit the cab

Rich Steensma, NNEC
Manager of Safety &
Security

Legislation Updates

Priorities:

- sustaining and protecting the working lands
- preparing a strong workforce for the future of agriculture and forestry in VA
- supporting SWCDs

Katie Frazier, Secretary
of Agriculture & Forestry
of Virginia



On behalf of NNSWCD, thank you to all of our partners, sponsors, staff and Directors for making this event possible. We are grateful for the opportunity to work closely with the agricultural community and helping producers implement best management practices.



We greatly appreciate Jim Robertson (NNEC) for connecting us with Tim Poole at Virginia 811. Tim provided the Display Truck on the morning of our event. We used this opportunity to highlight NNSWCD, NNEC and VA811.



Marine Career Day

We had the pleasure of participating in Friends of the Rappahannock's (FOR) Marine Career Day. Claire & Robin utilized the Rappahannock Tribe's Indigenous Conservation Education Center at Cat Point Creek National Wildlife Refuge. We had a wonderful time chatting with students from different schools and learning what inspires the next generation.



6th Grade Science Lesson

In February, Lowery and Kelly visited Mrs. Beale's 2nd semester science students at Montross Middle School. Throughout the day we focused on the impacts humans have on water sustainability and steps we can take to improve water conservation. Lowery utilized the erosion boxes, students participated in the Water Footprint Calculator, and we took a trip outside to see the school's conservation landscaping project.



Operations

2026 Legislative Day



This past General Assembly session, NNSWCD Directors and staff, alongside staff and Directors from neighboring soil and water districts and the Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD), had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the House of Delegates and the Senate. District Operations Manager, Kelly Brann, joined NNSWCD Directors, Robert Pickett, Aaron Rowland and Lewis Walker at Capitol Square in Richmond. We met with Delegate Hillary Pugh Kent and Jake Salmons with Senator Richard Stuart's office. During these meetings we advocated for our agricultural and conservation programs, including VCAP.

VASWCD Marketing Committee

In February, the VASWCD Marketing Committee proudly launched a Canva Team. This team offers each of the 47 soil and water conservation districts, 1 individual login. The purpose of this project is to make promoting district programs, accomplishments and more, much easier. A majority of districts participate in the same programs and there are several flyers already created, so why re-invent the wheel? We are excited to see several marketing materials already being shared.

"As the co-chair of the Marketing Committee, I am ecstatic this dream is finally a reality. I hope all 47 SWCDs utilize this tool to the full advantage." - Kelly Brann, NNSWCD



USDA CORNER

I hope all of you are having a great planting season and are enjoying these growing degree days that have taken hold of the Neck. Let's all cross our fingers for consistent (but not too much!) rain for the remainder of the spring and summer! I don't have a whole lot to share for this newsletter, but see below for a few things I thought worth mentioning.

The deadline for all FY27 financial assistance applications has been set for October 9, 2026. We DO accept applications year round, however, this deadline applies to all applications specifically seeking financial assistance for agronomic, forestry, wildlife, and easements in our various programs for FY27. We'll have quite a bit of time to make farm and field visits afterward, but if the application is not received by that deadline, it will not be a priority until FY28 or until all FY27 visits have been completed. If you have any questions about assistance, please give us a call at any of the numbers below.

With the loss of over 25% of employees in VA NRCS and a hiring freeze in place, we are scrambling to assist multiple offices to ensure service is not disrupted to customers. My staff and I will continue to cover the Warsaw and the Tappahannock field offices for the foreseeable future. Please be patient as we try our best to assist all customers in this 7-county coverage area. If you need to speak to a specific team member, please call before you come see us, as we may be in another office or the field.

We will be conducting our LWG (local working group) meeting soon. This is the annual meeting where we take feedback and responses from our customers and partners and try our best to integrate changes into future programs (within reason, some policy is dictated by the farm bill) for customer service improvement. The meeting is scheduled for the June technical committee meeting for the NNSWCD (6/23/26 at 8:30 am). If you are unable to attend the meeting, you can still submit your ideas and recommendations to me either in the office, over the phone, or via email (see my contact info at the end). I take this meeting and all contributions very seriously and want as much feedback as I can get to make positive changes from the local level to the state level. So PLEASE don't hesitate to let me know if you have suggestions for improvement!

We are busy planning our FY26 applications right now, but will also be doing field checks for payments on active contracts soon. We usually try to call folks to let you know we'll be making rounds, but sometimes, we slip in some field checks if we're in your area. If you see our white trucks on the side of the road by one of your fields, please feel free to stop and say hi or ask about any help you think we may be able to assist with on the farm.

I hope everyone has a great remainder of your summer and a safe harvest season!

Lucee Kozsler

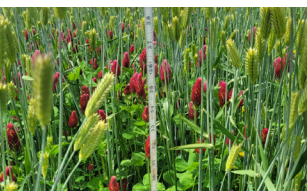
USDA-FSA Dates to Remember:

- March 9th-April 17th: General Conservation Reserve Program Signups
- April 17th: Farmer Bridge Assistance Program Signup Deadline
- April 30th: Supplemental Disaster Assistance Program Stage 1 & 2 Signup Deadline

Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS)

Happy planting season! We recognize this time of year is extremely busy for all those involved in the agricultural community and we would like to say thank you. Thank you to all the agricultural producers who are planting the crops. Thank you to the agricultural businesses that are providing essential products and services. Thank you to those who are implementing best management practices to preserve our natural resources. Lastly, thank you to all the behind-the-scenes partner organizations that help keep this community going. It's partnerships like these that makes the Northern Neck a powerhouse region for agricultural production.

Program Year 2027



Mark your calendars! The upcoming program year (PY) is swiftly approaching. During PY25/26, NNSWCD allocated \$8.7 million of cost-share funds throughout the Northern Neck. Currently, we are expecting to receive similar funding for PY26/27. We will hold our annual signup period for PY27 July 6th - August 14th. Sign ups are made by appointment only so be sure to call our office to get on the schedule.

Dates to Know:

- Begin Kill or Destroy - March 15, 2026
- Additional \$10/acre Burndown - May 1, 2026
- Final Kill or Destroy - June 1, 2026



No-Till Drill Rental

Did you know that no-till farming has several benefits to your field, pasture, and food plot? It conserves soil moisture, reduces erosion, and increase nutrients. 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, the schedule is filling quickly.



*Lined Waterway
& GSS*

Our technical staff is currently working with a landowner to address erosion issues on his farm located in Northumberland County. This project requires 4 separate grade stabilization structures due to severity of field soil loss. The image shown shows the first completed structure which is a lined waterway. This image was captured when our Agricultural Conservation Specialist, Aaron Saunders, and DCR Engineering Technician, Raleigh Coleman, completed a final inspection of the structure. The landowner has since completed a second structure that is pending final inspection. The landowner is implementing these best management practices in order to conserve his land for future generations.

Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

With Spring comes a new wave of projects! The District currently has 16 approved projects in progress. It has been a difficult year with the rolling waitlist, but there has been some slow progress. At the time of this writing, the state budget is still not approved and funding for VCAP is up in the air. The positive; it is included on both sides, so there should be funding coming, even if it is level. There is still uncertainty but the District greatly appreciates all of the emails and calls our participants have made. The Northern Neck was well represented for the call to action!



Lowery hosted the VCAP Water Cooler chat and spoke about the NNSWCD's Living Shoreline process. The District has added a few steps to the VCAP process to provide clarity and have more successful outcomes. After approvals, the designer, contractor, homeowner, SEAS and the District meet to review the process, discuss the plans and answer any lingering questions. From there, the District performs three checkpoint inspections during the construction process: one after the sill has been placed, one once the sand has settled for a minimum of two weeks and then the final inspection after plugs. NNSWCD has found that this catches any construction issues that may result in a denial of reimbursement. Since implementing this system, all projects have been reimbursed.

Although there is a rolling waitlist, the District is still accepting applications. If you believe you have an erosion issue at your home, give Lowery a call! She will work with SEAS and arrange for a site inspection.



Upcoming VCAP Application Deadlines:

- May 8, 2026
- June 5, 2026



During an inspection, we spotted a contractor in action putting the final touches on a rock sill.



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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:

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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

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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:

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Kelsey Keyser, Program Technician
Tara Brann, Program Technician
Sarah Cole, Program Technician

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.