

**REPORT OF THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND
RECREATION**

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE NEEDS AND
POTENTIAL INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE
IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT PLANS**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE CHAIRMEN OF THE HOUSE
APPROPRIATIONS AND SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEES**



**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
OCTOBER 2017**

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Secretary of Natural Resources

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October 1, 2017

The Honorable Terence R. McAuliffe
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr.
Co-Chair, Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Chris S. Jones
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Dear Governor McAuliffe, Senator Hanger, Senator Norment, and Delegate Jones:

I am pleased to provide this report, ***An Examination of the Needs and Potential Incentives to Encourage Implementation of Resource Management Plans***, on behalf of the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

This report is presented in accordance with the requirements established in Item 364 Q of Chapter 836 of the 2017 Acts of Assembly in which the Director is directed to convene a stakeholder group to examine the funding, training, and resource needs, as well as explore new incentives, for additional implementation of Resource Management Plans (RMPs) pursuant to §§ 10.1-104.7 through 10.1-104.9 of the Code of Virginia.

If you have any questions regarding this report or require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Clyde E. Cristman".

Clyde E. Cristman

Preface

This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements established in Item 364 Q of Chapter 836 of the 2017 Acts of Assembly. The Item states "the Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation, shall convene a stakeholder group consisting of, but not limited to, designees of the Secretary of Natural Resources, the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, the Virginia Agribusiness Council, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to examine the funding, training, and resource needs, as well as explore new incentives, for additional implementation of Resource Management Plans (RMPs), pursuant to §§ 10.1-104.7 through 10.1-104.9, Code of Virginia".

The members of the stakeholder group included:

Mr. Russ Baxter, Office of the Secretary of Natural Resources

Mr. Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Mr. Clyde Cristman, Department of Conservation and Recreation

Ms. Martha Moore, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation

Ms. Katie Frazier, Virginia Agribusiness Council

Dr. Megan Seibel, Office of the Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry

Mr. Charles Green, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Mr. Richard Street, Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board

Ms. Leslie Anne Hinton, Three Rivers Soil and Water Conservation District

Dr. Kendall Tyree, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Ms. Ann Jennings, Chesapeake Bay Commission

Mr. Greg Wichelns, Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District

Ms. Adrienne Kotula, James River Association

Mr. Tim Woodward, Tellus Agronomics

The Department would like to thank all the members of the stakeholder group for their insight and contributions to this report.

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Executive Summary

The Resource Management Plan (RMP) Program is a key mechanism by which the Commonwealth strives to meet its water quality goals. The Program is relatively new, with only three years of active implementation; however, more than 92,000 acres throughout the Commonwealth are currently included in 388 RMPs. These achievements far exceed the goal of having RMPs developed for 10,000 agricultural acres established in the Commonwealth's Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan. Due in part to these Chesapeake Bay specific water quality goals, marketing activities and funding for the RMP Program have been focused on the Chesapeake Bay watershed; there is now increased interest in developing RMPs throughout other regions of the state.

The RMP Program has been successful in encouraging the development of RMPs, primarily through utilizing financial incentives. Federal grant funds and limited Water Quality Improvement Funds have allowed the Department to contract with private sector RMP plan developers for RMP development. The vast majority of RMPs have been developed under these contracts. Additionally, the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) has approved cost-share funding incentives related to RMP development (RMP-1) and RMP implementation and certification (RMP-2). While there are a significant number of RMPs developed, there are only ten certified RMPs, totaling 2,335 acres. In order for the RMP to be certified, all required BMPs must be fully implemented. This relatively low number of certified plans was the primary focus of the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

In its discussion over three meetings, the Stakeholder Advisory Group (Group) recognized:

1. The linkage between this effort and the Stakeholder Advisory Group established in Item 364 R of the 2017 Appropriations Act that was tasked with evaluating methods to stabilize the funding for agricultural best management practices. Adequate and stable funding for agricultural best management practices is critical to the success of the RMP Program.
2. Increased rates of both RMP plan development and RMP plan certification will continue to increase the workload for Districts and additional funding support for RMP associated workload should be secured.

The Group also proposed several recommendations to encourage the implementation of RMPs.

Recommendation 1: The Group should continue to meet periodically to continue discussions and exchange ideas related to the implementation of RMPs.

Recommendation 2: A communications plan should be developed and should focus on both educational and marketing opportunities. A combined approach by all stakeholders and partners could dramatically increase the number of RMPs that achieve certification and

increase the number of RMPs in the southern and western areas of the Commonwealth. Additionally, a coordinated effort will ensure marketing materials and information provided are accurate, complete, helpful, and relevant.

Recommendation 3: The Group recommends the Board and the Department review and examine several financial incentives that are currently offered through the Virginia Agriculture Cost-Share Program (VACS) to encourage RMP implementation. Offering additional funding support to Districts for verification and certification activities was also suggested.

Recommendation 4: The Board and the Department should review the current program requirements for potential programmatic efficiencies. Clarification regarding the roles of the plan developer, the Districts, and the Department may also be helpful in streamlining the verification and certification process. Providing additional guidance regarding the prioritizing of BMPs in an RMP when Districts review applications for VACS funding could also be beneficial.

1. History of the Resource Management Plan Program

During the 2011 General Assembly Session, then-Delegate Edward Scott introduced legislation (Chapter 781, 2011 Acts of Assembly) establishing the resource management plan (RMP) Program. The legislation recognized the significant efforts of agricultural producers to be good stewards of their lands. The Program encourages producers to voluntarily install agricultural best management practices (BMPs); in return, the producers are provided a degree of certainty from additional BMP installation requirements for a period of nine years.

In June 2011, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (Department), on behalf of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board), convened a regulatory advisory panel to assist in the development of regulations. Between June 2011 and February 2012, the panel met five times and the panel's subcommittees met six times.

The Board proposed regulations on March 29, 2012. After a public comment period, final regulations were adopted by the Board on March 27, 2013. The regulations became effective on July 1, 2014.

Benefits of an RMP

There are numerous benefits of an RMP. For agricultural producers, a certified RMP:

- Provides "certainty" (safe harbor) for nine years;
- Establishes a comprehensive approach to determining the best conservation practices for each agricultural operation;
- Gives producers credit for implementing voluntary practices that protect water quality;
- Shows producers as "good actors" and may help stave off future regulations;
- Enables a producer to display signs for marketing and promotional purposes; and
- Increases confidence among landowners that operators renting their land are being environmentally responsible.

RMPs also provide decision makers with better data for determining funding needs related to cost-share and other agricultural incentive programs.

2. Requirements of the Program

Chapter 781 established many of the programmatic requirements of the RMP Program while calling for the regulations to "be technically achievable and to take into account the economic impact to the agricultural owner or operator". The regulations (4VAC50-70) were also mandated to contain provisions related to:

- minimum standards of an RMP pursuant to §10.1-104.8;
- processes for the development and approval of an RMP;
- methods to ensure and verify the full implementation of an RMP;
- qualifications necessary for an RMP plan developer; and
- a requirement for an individual onsite farm assessment to be conducted.

RMP Fundamentals

- The RMP Program is completely voluntary; an agricultural producer is able to opt out of the Program at any time without penalty.
- An RMP may be developed for either an agricultural owner or an operator.
- RMPs may be developed for any land management unit whether the unit is a single field, tract, farm, or the entire agricultural operation.
- An RMP includes a list of all existing BMPs on the land management unit, a list of all recommended and required BMPs, and the schedule of implementation as agreed to by the producer. A producer that has fully implemented an RMP receives a "Certificate of Implementation". Once a Certificate is received, the producer is deemed to be in full compliance with:
 - any total maximum daily load (TMDL) for nutrients, sediments, benthic, or bacteria;
 - the Chesapeake Bay TMDL Watershed Implementation Plan; and
 - state water quality requirements for nutrients and sediment.

RMP Minimum Standards

Section 10.1-104.8 of the Code of Virginia and the Resource Management Plan regulations (4VAC50-70) establish certain minimum standards for BMP implementation depending on the type of farm operation. The three types of operation specifically mentioned are: cropland (including specialty crops), hayland, and pasture.

BMP Requirements	Type of Farming Operation		
	Cropland	Hayland	Pasture
A nutrient management plan (NMP) (that meets Department standards)	√	√	√
A forest or grass buffer (minimum of 35 feet along all perennial streams)	√	√	
A soil conservation plan <u>or</u> pasture management plan (achieves a maximum soil loss of "T")	√	√	√
Cover crops meeting BMP specifications (if needed to for the NMP or to meet "T")	√		
A system that limits or prevents livestock access to perennial streams			√

RMP Process

There are five distinct stages in the RMP process: (1) farm assessment, (2) plan development, (3) plan implementation, (4) verification, and (5) certification. A producer is able to begin the RMP process by requesting an RMP be developed by a certified RMP developer or by requesting this service at their local soil and water conservation district (District). The District will also be able to provide information on potential financial assistance options available through the Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS).

Stage 1: Farm Assessment

A certified RMP developer visits the farming operation and conducts an onsite assessment for the land unit that will be covered by the RMP. The developer gathers basic information including the location and description of the land unit, the type of agricultural operation, water features, any environmental concerns, and any existing BMPs.

Stage 2: Plan Development

Based on the knowledge gained from the onsite assessment, the plan developer will create an RMP for the land unit. The RMP includes a list of existing BMPs, a list of required BMPs, and a BMP implementation schedule. The plan developer may include additional BMPs, beyond those BMPs specifically required, that may be beneficial to the agricultural operation. Once an RMP is developed and the producer approves the BMP implementation schedule, the RMP is submitted for approval to either the local District or the Department. Districts have

established Technical Review Committees (TRCs) to review RMPs prior to approval. The Department reviews and approves RMPs only if the District has developed the RMP. To date, all RMPs have been reviewed by the Districts.

Stage 3: Plan Implementation

Once an RMP is approved, the producer installs and implements the BMPs required in the RMP. The practices in an RMP may be eligible for cost-share funding through the VACS program.

Stage 4: Verification

When all the required BMPs have been installed or implemented, the producer requests a verification inspection by the plan developer and the District. Upon verification that the RMP is fully implemented, the local District board affirms the adequacy and implementation of the RMP and submits the required documentation to the Department.

Stage 5: Certification

The Department issues a Certificate of Implementation which is valid for nine-years from the date of issuance. Inspections are conducted at least once every three years throughout the nine-year certainty period to ensure the proper functioning and maintenance of all required BMPs.

District Responsibilities

Districts are typically responsible for conducting RMP reviews and inspections. District staff generally conduct all administrative tasks associated with RMP reviews, inspections, and approvals. Districts have established Technical Review Committees (TRCs) which provide recommendations to local District boards regarding RMP approvals and certifications. RMP reviews involve, at a minimum, a desktop review of the plan as submitted by the RMP developer; however, many Districts conduct an onsite review of the RMP to verify the location of water features.

An inspection must be conducted onsite by the District prior to certification being issued. The inspection includes a review of the nutrient management requirements, evaluation of cropping rotation and management, and verification of all existing BMPs, whether installed with or without cost-share assistance. The Department recognizes that this is a significant workload conducted by District staff and has provided additional operational support related to initial RMP reviews at a rate of \$100 per plan plus \$0.50 per acre. The payment is approximately \$204.50 for an average-sized RMP.

3. Highlights of the Program

The RMP Program is a relatively new program, with only three years of active implementation. More than 92,000 acres throughout the Commonwealth are currently included in RMPs. The majority of RMPs developed are located within the Chesapeake Bay watershed; however, there has also been some interest in RMPs being developed outside of that watershed. Producers are installing and implementing BMPs contained in the RMP and are moving through the RMP stages towards certification.

RMP Statistics

As of August 31, 2017, there are 388 RMPs, covering over 92,000 acres, of which:

- 50 are in the development or assessment stage;
- 323 have been approved by Districts;
- 15 are under review by Districts;

Of these 388 RMPs:

- 4 are awaiting certification inspections; and
- 10 have been fully implemented and are certified, totaling 2,335 certified acres

In the Chesapeake Bay watershed, seventy-four producers have requested the development of three hundred and fifty-nine (359) plans. Twelve participants have requested twenty-one (21) plans in areas outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Six participants have eight plans (8) that are in both watersheds.

There are currently 15 certified plan developers in the Commonwealth; however, the vast majority of RMPs have been developed by only two private-sector plan developers.

RMPs by Land Types

The vast majority of RMPs have been developed for cropland but there have been RMPs developed for other types of agricultural lands.

Agricultural Land Type	Acres in RMPs
Cropland	76,875
Pasture	8,099
Hayland	4,102
Hayland and pasture	1,313
Cropland and hayland	1,192
Cropland, hayland, and pasture	358

Cropland and pasture	77
Total	92,016

BMPs Included in RMPs

There are numerous BMPs included in each RMP. Some of the BMPs included may be eligible for VACS funding (cost-share); other BMPs may be implemented at solely the producer's expense (voluntary). Verifying voluntary BMPs and reporting those BMPs to the Chesapeake Bay Program to demonstrate the Commonwealth's continued progress towards meeting the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan goals is a critical benefit of this Program. The table below shows the BMPs that are currently implemented versus the BMPs that are included in an RMP but have not yet been verified as implemented.

BMP (cost-share vs. voluntary)	Total
Cost-share complete	307
Cost-share proposed	779
Subtotal	1,086
Voluntary complete	4
Voluntary proposed	1,438
Subtotal	1,442
Total	2,528

RMPs by Locality

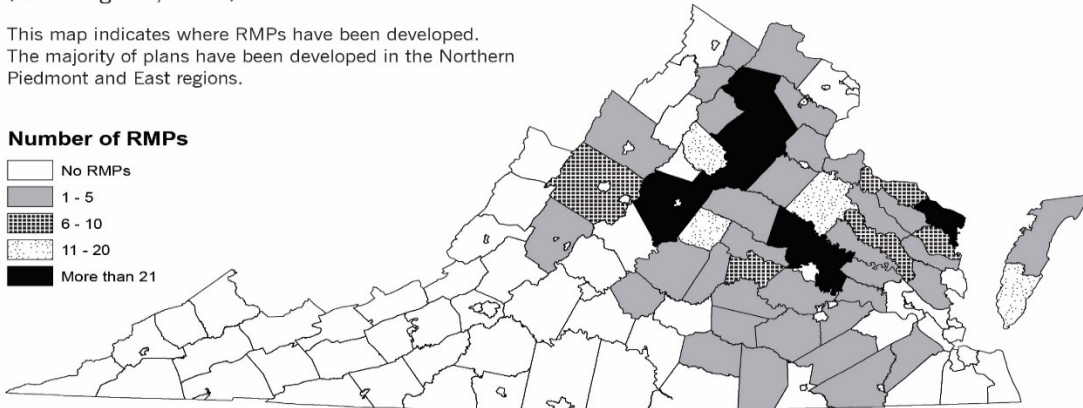
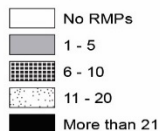
The majority of RMPs have been developed in the Northern Piedmont and Eastern regions of the Commonwealth. Between November 2015 and October 2016, the Program expanded into 10 counties that previously had no RMPs and into areas of the state outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Number of RMPs by Locality

(as of Aug. 31, 2017)

This map indicates where RMPs have been developed. The majority of plans have been developed in the Northern Piedmont and East regions.

Number of RMPs



NOTE: For detailed information by county and District, please see the Appendix A.

4. Current RMP Incentives and Opportunities

The Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (Board) and the Department have established several financial assistance incentives and other opportunities related to the RMP program.

Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS) Funding Incentives

The Board has approved two cost-share funding incentives related to the RMP program, RMP-1 and RMP-2.

RMP -1

This practice assists producers with the costs related to the actual development of an RMP. Funding is provided at \$10.00 per acre with a total maximum funding amount of \$6,500 per plan. If a producer so chooses, payment may be made directly to the RMP developer. To date, nearly \$117,554 has been disbursed for RMP-1 payments; an additional \$17,826 in payments is pending.

RMP-2

In recognition of the financial investment by the producer in fully implementing the RMP, the practice provides \$5.00 per acre with a total maximum funding amount of \$3,250 per

plan. Once a producer has received a Certificate of Implementation, he is eligible to apply for RMP-2. Nearly \$9,334 has been disbursed for RMP-2 payments to date. These payments are expected to grow considerably throughout FY2018.

Financial Incentives for Plan Developers

The Department has leveraged federal grant monies from the U.S. Environment Protection Agency to directly contract with RMP plan developers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Approximately \$584,000 has been paid to the RMP plan developers for the development of RMPs in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. An additional \$120,000 of these federal funds has been allocated for contracts with the developers through May 31, 2018. For areas outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Department has utilized nearly \$94,000 in Water Quality Improvement funds to contract with plan developers. These contracts have led to the development of most of the RMPs across the Commonwealth.

Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (VACS) Policies

Priority Consideration

The Board recognizes the critical role the RMP Program plays in meeting the Commonwealth's water quality goals. In administering VACS, the Board has determined that producers with an RMP should receive one of the priority considerations for cost-share funding, as reflected by language in the VACS BMP Manual. Priority considerations must be used by the Districts to qualify cost-share applications; if a cost-share application does not meet at least one of the priority considerations, the BMP in the application should not be funded.

Secondary Consideration

In addition to the primary considerations established by the Board, Districts also use secondary considerations to determine funding priority for cost-share applications. Secondary considerations address local water quality concerns and are determined by each SWCD; these considerations are reviewed and approved by the Department. Several Districts include RMP implementation as a secondary consideration; the Department encourages this practice.

5. RMP Implementation

The RMP Program has been remarkably successful in encouraging the development of RMPs. However, there is concern about the limited number of RMPs that have received a Certificate of Implementation. To date, ten RMPs have been certified.

Key RMP Timeframes

Based on a review of certified RMPs, the RMP process (from RMP development to certification) took an average of seven calendar quarters (614 days). There was an average of five calendar quarters between RMP approval and certification. Between RMP development and RMP certification, there are typically revisions made to an RMP by the plan developer in response to concerns or questions raised by the District. However, once those revisions are made, the Districts move quickly on approvals which usually occur within one month of final RMP submittal.

Fiscal Year	Number Submitted (acres)	Number Approved (acres)	Number Certified (acres)
July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015	72 (11,822)	3 (474)	1 (74)
July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016	237 (48,790)	280 (49,166)	0 (0)
July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017	53 (9,831)	24 (9,513)	8 (1,888)
July 1, 2017 – August 31, 2017	0 (0)	16 (6,978)	1 (372)
Total	362 (70,443)	323 (66,131)	10 (2,334)

Based on the timeframes shown above, it does appear that delays are occurring at the implementation stage.

Survey

At the request of the stakeholder advisory group, the Department and several Districts surveyed 20 producers with RMPs that have not yet been certified. The producers represent a variety of Districts (11), agricultural operations (crop, hay, or pasture), and RMP plan developers. Only producers that have had ample time to implement an approved RMP, as determined by reviewing the BMP implementation schedule, were surveyed. Producers with plans that had been approved in the last three quarters were not surveyed. Efforts were made to represent several types of farm operations and a variety of Districts.

Districts were given the option to contact the producer within their area directly or for the Department to contact the producer. Of the 20 selected producers, Districts requested that six be contacted by the Department. Responses were received from 18 producers.

The survey questions asked producers what was necessary for them to fully implement their RMP. The need for additional details regarding the RMP process after an RMP was developed was a common response. A point of confusion among producers seems to be who to contact to request certification once the RMP is fully implemented. Increased communication and

consistent information needs to be provided by the plan developer, the District, and the Department. Responses also indicated that additional financial incentives for RMP development, implementation, and certification, including additional considerations for VACS cost-share funding, would be helpful to producers working to achieve RMP certification.

6. Department Initiatives

The Department has begun several initiatives focusing on increased implementation of RMPs.

RMP Implementation and Development Funding for FY2018

The Department is continuing to strongly encourage Districts to sign-up producers for the RMP-1 (plan development) and RMP-2 (available upon RMP certification) practices which may be funded through either an RMP VACS set-aside or individual District VACS allocations. Districts have also been asked to develop a list of producers that have implemented RMPs and need assistance completing the certification process. During the remainder of calendar year 2017, the Department will emphasize funding for RMP-2.

For FY2018, Districts have the option of utilizing a sign-up period for RMP-1, similar to the sign-up period that is currently used for the VACS Program. Utilizing a sign-up period will allow Districts to advertise the opportunity for RMP development and to discuss the RMP program with interested participants. Sign-up periods must be concluded by December 31, 2017. In January 2018, the RMP-1 applications will be evaluated by the Department according to newly established RMP ranking criteria which considers the amount of farm participation (whole farm, tract, or field), stream or river proximity, highly erodible land (HEL) acreage, watershed degradation (HUC ranking), and bacteria or nutrient impairment.

The Department will utilize the information provided by the Districts to determine how federal grant funds and any remaining state funding would be best used to promote RMP certification and development. Federal funds may be applied to new contracts with RMP developers that require both the development of new RMPs and the advancement of existing RMPs to certification. State monies would most likely continue to be utilized to fund both RMP-1 and RMP-2, with a focus on RMP-2.

The Department also continues to encourage Districts to notify their producers of funding opportunities such as VACS cost-share that may help implement or install BMPs that are in approved RMPs.

Future Grant Proposals

A majority of the RMPs developed has been as a result of the grant-funded contracts offered by the Department to RMP plan developers. These contracts are funded through either federal monies or funds from the Water Quality Improvement Fund. Currently, these contracts only

focus on RMP development. However, beginning in June 2018 (the next grant cycle), the Department plans to include assisting producers with the RMP verification and certification process as part of the contract with RMP developers.

RMP Verification Pilot Project

One of the potential elements that delays the certification of an RMP is the need for an inspection by both the plan developer and the District. It may be possible for the Department to facilitate the necessary verification inspections by coordinating with both the plan developer and District. If the inspections occurred simultaneously, the verification inspection review times could be shortened. If the Department participated in the inspection process as well, voluntary practices could be verified and reported to the Chesapeake Bay Program. This would increase the amount of reportable BMP data for practices that did not receive state cost-share funding.

Increase the Number of Plan Developers

There are currently a very limited number of active plan developers; increasing the number of developers could lead to additional RMPs being developed and implemented throughout the Commonwealth. The limited number of plan developers also restricts the areas of the state where RMPs are actively being developed.

The requirements for becoming an RMP developer are stringent and require a broad knowledge of both nutrient management and conservation planning. Very few certified nutrient management planners meet the additional conservation planning requirements. The Board has directed the Department to establish a Virginia-focused conservation planning and certification program. Increased availability of conservation planning and certification should lead to an increased number of RMP plan developers, especially among individuals who already possess nutrient management plan certification. As gaining the additional required knowledge and skills necessary to become an RMP developer becomes easier through the Virginia-focused program, more individuals will be able to achieve the necessary qualifications.

7. Recommendations

The Department recognizes the importance of this Program in achieving the Commonwealth's water quality goals. While the Program is making remarkable strides, the Department also recognizes there are several action items that could make the Program more successful.

Recommendation 1: Continuation of the Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Stakeholder Advisory Group recommends that this effort be continued for another year. Building on the initial discussions and the progress this Group has already made would be beneficial.

Recommendation 2: Development of a Communications Plan

The Stakeholder Advisory Group recommends that a communications plan be developed to ensure coordinated, effective marketing and education activities are conducted by all stakeholders. A similar type of plan was utilized when the Program was first implemented, but nothing has been developed since. A coordinated approach by all stakeholders and partners could dramatically increase the number of RMPs that achieve certification and increase the number of RMPs in the southern and western areas of the Commonwealth. Additionally, such an effort will ensure marketing materials and information provided are accurate, complete, helpful, and relevant.

Focus on Education

Despite the significant benefits of RMPs, further education is needed to ensure these benefits are communicated clearly, consistently, and effectively to the agriculture community from state, local, and private sector experts. Survey results identified the need for increased educational efforts related to the RMP process, specifically the process after an RMP is developed. Continuing to increase producer knowledge of the Program and its associated benefits must be a priority. The Department is currently working on developing materials for producers which will outline the benefits of certainty and how to receive certification for a fully implemented RMP.

Marketing Activities

The Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and the Department have discussed potential marketing strategies that could be used to increase awareness of the RMP Program. As a result of those discussions, the Department has designed a new logo for the Program and producers with a certified RMP may purchase a sign with the logo. If the producer chooses, a Virginia Grown sign could be attached to the RMP sign.

Including information, materials, or panels related to RMPs at certain occasions, such as annual meetings and key outreach events, convened by partner agricultural organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders could expand interest in and understanding about the Program beyond its current boundaries.

Recommendation 3: Financial Initiatives

The Board and the Department should review the incentives that are currently offered to encourage participation in the RMP Program and strongly consider the following:

- Reviewing the current maximum funding amounts allowed under VACS for BMP implementation and installation for potential impacts on achieving RMP certification;
- Requesting Districts establish RMP-2 (certification) waiting lists;
- Utilizing a portion of annual grant funds for RMP-2 based on waiting lists;
- Increasing the funding amount paid to a producer under the RMP-2 practice and increasing the maximum funding amount allowed;
- Exploring a cost-share practice that provides funding, every three years, for a producer at each inspection after initial certification is achieved; and
- Investigating a cost-share practice that funds the continued implementation of practices that are voluntarily installed or implemented by a producer.

To support Districts and in recognition of the increased workload, the Board and the Department should consider providing additional funds related to the inspection of RMPs including the verification of all voluntary BMPs in the RMP. Similar to the currently available support related to the review of RMPs, the payment rate could be established at \$100 per plan plus \$0.50 per acre.

Recommendation 4: Administrative Action Items

The Board and the Department should review the current program requirements for any potential administrative efficiencies. Based on the results of the Department's pilot efforts to assist Districts with RMP verification inspections, the roles of the plan developer, District, and the Department could potentially be clarified, or amended, to streamline the verification inspection process.

Additionally, the Board and the Department could provide stronger guidance to Districts on how to prioritize BMPs in an RMP when Districts review applications for VACS funding. Potentially applying a ten percent reduction to the Conservation Efficiency Factor (CEF) score for required BMPs in an approved RMP would provide an incentive to RMPs while also prioritizing those BMPs that have the most impact on water quality.

APPENDIX A

Number of RMPs by locality and soil and water conservation district

Number of RMPs (range)	Locality (County)	Soil and Water Conservation District
More than 21	Albemarle	Thomas Jefferson
	Culpeper	Culpeper
	Fauquier	John Marshall
	Hanover	Hanover-Caroline
	Henrico	Henricopolis
	Northumberland	Northern Neck
	Orange	Culpeper
11-20	Caroline	Hanover-Caroline
	Fluvanna	Thomas Jefferson
	Madison	Culpeper
	Northampton	Eastern Shore
6-10	Augusta	Headwaters
	King and Queen	Three Rivers
	Lancaster	Northern Neck
	Powhatan	Monacan
	Westmoreland	Northern Neck
1-5	Accomack	Eastern Shore
	Amelia	Piedmont
	Appomattox	Robert E. Lee
	Brunswick	Lake Country
	Buckingham	Peter Francisco
	Charles City	Colonial
	Chesterfield	James River

1-5	Clarke	Lord Fairfax
	Cumberland	Peter Francisco
	Dinwiddie	Appomattox River
	Essex	Three Rivers
	Gloucester	Tidewater
	Goochland	Monacan
	Isle of Wight	Peanut
	King George	Tri-County/City
	King William	Three Rivers
	Loudoun	Loudoun
	Louisa	Thomas Jefferson
	Lunenburg	Southside
	Middlesex	Tidewater
	New Kent	Colonial
	Nottoway	Piedmont
	Prince George	James River
	Prince William	Prince William
	Rappahannock	Culpeper
	Richmond	Northern Neck
	Rockbridge	Natural Bridge
	Rockingham	Shenandoah Valley
	Southampton	Chowan Basin
	Spotsylvania	Tri-County/City
	Stafford	Tri-County/City
Sussex	Chowan Basin	
Warren	Lord Fairfax	