

CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRESS REPORT WEST VIRGINIA

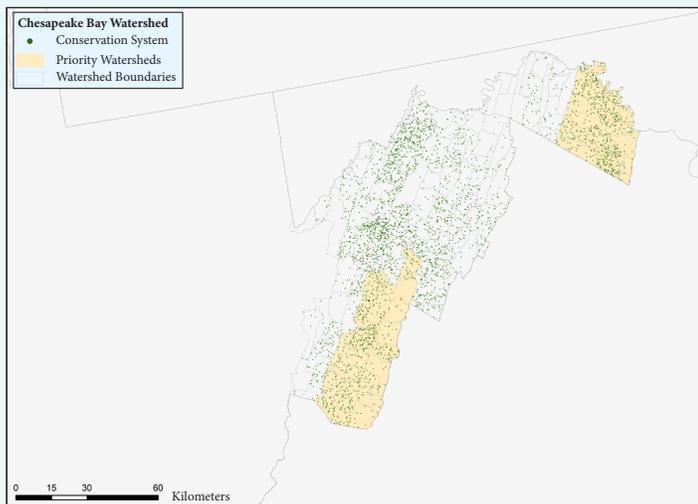
Agricultural Lands in West Virginia Key to Healthy Bay

The saying, “everything flows downstream,” is especially important in a place like West Virginia, where the land management decisions of farmers and forest landowners are helping send cleaner waters to the Chesapeake Bay. Many of the streams and rivers that form the Potomac River watershed, a major tributary of the Bay, originate in the hills of West Virginia.

Farmers and forest landowners are using conservation systems that are reducing nutrient and sediment runoff by keeping soil in place and making agricultural lands more efficient and productive.



NRCS works closely with farmers to implement soil health management systems to decrease nutrient and sediment runoff from crop fields.



Each dot represents a farm where “Avoid-Control-Trap” conservation systems were implemented. Dots are randomly placed within priority watersheds to protect landowner privacy.

Targeted Approach in West Virginia

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed a systems approach for designing and installing conservation activities on farms and forests to protect and improve water quality. The core parts of this approach are practices that avoid, control and trap potential nutrient and sediment losses from farm fields.

Most of the conservation work in the Potomac and Eastern Panhandle areas of West Virginia is focused on controlling nutrients on livestock operations and on croplands where farmers use manure as fertilizer. NRCS targets investments in high-priority watersheds where nutrient and sediment pollution is highest. Common practices include conservation buffers, nutrient management, cover crops, prescribed grazing, waste storage facilities and heavy-use area protection. Since 2009, NRCS and conservation partners have worked with West Virginia landowners to install conservation systems on more than 227,000 acres in the Chesapeake Bay basin.

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NRCS works with livestock producers to implement prescribed grazing systems.

INVESTMENTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

YEAR	INVESTMENT	ACRES
2009	\$6.3 million	22,000
2010	\$7.9 million	57,000
2011	\$9.3 million	44,000
2012	\$7.1 million	29,000
2013	\$12 million	43,000
2014	\$4.8 million	18,000
2015	\$5.3 million	14,000
TOTAL	\$52.7 million	227,000

Source: NRCS Resources Economics, Analysis and Policy Division.

Leveraging the Help of Partners

Coordinated efforts with other USDA agencies and multiple federal, state, local and non-governmental partners allow NRCS to increase conservation delivery in West Virginia. The West Virginia Conservation Agency and conservation districts have provided more than \$1.1 million since 2012. Through the Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP), NRCS is bringing together partners at the grassroots level to address natural resource challenges while bridging the gap between conservation science and innovation.

Under RCP, conservation partners across the state and basin are investing a total of \$17 million to get conservation practices on the ground. The Chesapeake Bay is one of the

eight critical conservation areas for RCP funding. Two diverse projects are ongoing in the basin, bringing together an array of partners like the West Virginia Agricultural Land Protection Authority, American Bird Conservancy and others.

One of the RCP projects, the Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement Project, will enhance 4,000 acres of forest habitat on private lands over the next five years. The other, the West Virginia Chesapeake Headwaters Conservation Partnership Project, addresses water quality degradation and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife. With partners, NRCS provides assistance to landowners in protecting West Virginia farmland and sensitive areas to safeguard water quality for the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Positive Outcomes in West Virginia

Monitoring points on the Potomac in West Virginia are showing reduced nutrient loading and suspended sediments. These water quality trends mean improved habitat and positive effects on aquatic species. One example is the NRCS partnership with Trout Unlimited to install natural stream restoration projects on private lands on Whitethorn Creek. Natural bank stabilization, in-stream habitat structures, removal of obstructions that inhibit natural passage, and establishing forest riparian buffers are benefitting native brown trout in this area.



Natural stream design with in-stream habitat and riparian buffer planting.

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