

West Virginia
Conservation Agency

2023 Annual Report



West Virginia
Conservation Agency

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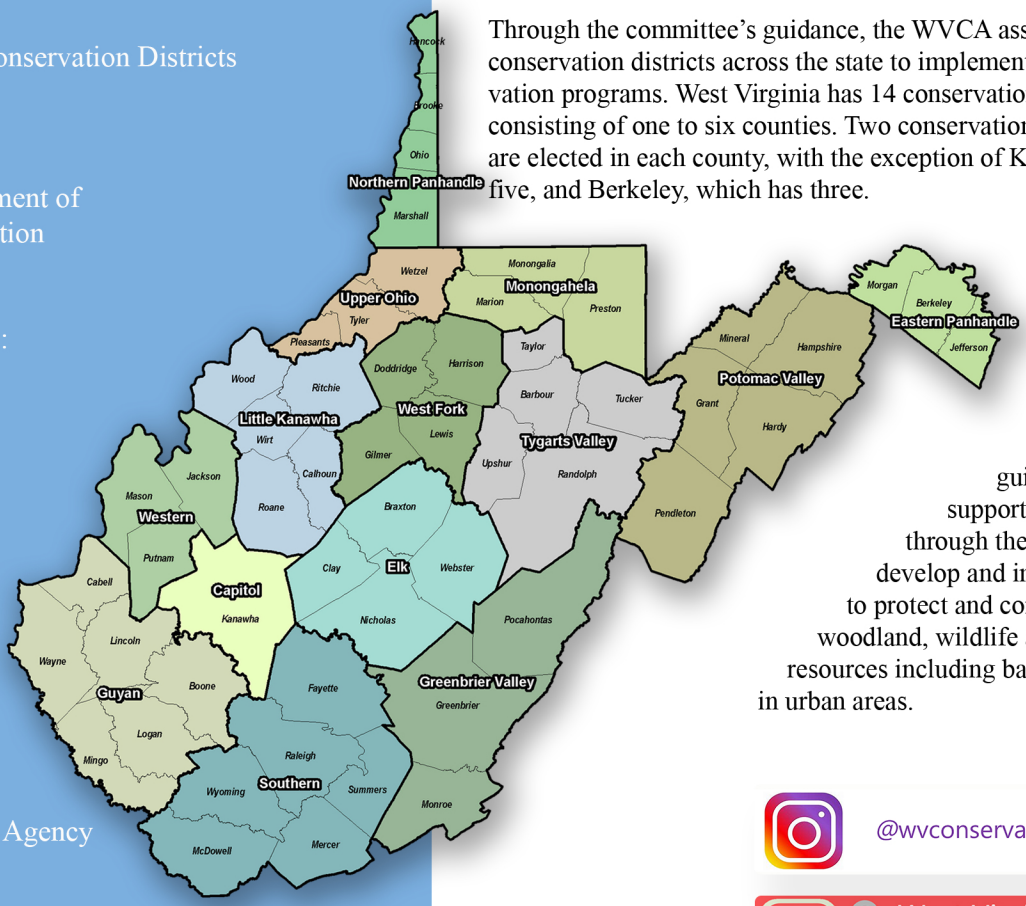
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Introduction

The mission of the West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA) is to provide for and promote the conservation of West Virginia's soil, land, water and related resources for the health, safety and general welfare of the state's citizens. The State Conservation Committee (SCC) serves as the governing body of the WVCA.

Through the committee's guidance, the WVCA assists and works with conservation districts across the state to implement a variety of conservation programs. West Virginia has 14 conservation districts, each consisting of one to six counties. Two conservation district supervisors are elected in each county, with the exception of Kanawha, which has five, and Berkeley, which has three.



These local boards operate under the guidance and with the support of the SCC, through the WVCA, and develop and implement programs to protect and conserve soil, water, woodland, wildlife and other renewable resources including backyard conservation in urban areas.

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Watershed Maintenance Key Figures (FY 2023)

$729,933
Cost of regular maintenance to dams

$839,510
Cost of repairs to dams

$637,879
Engineering costs

170
Dams considered "high hazard"

107
Dams are 50 years of age or older

$53.2 million*
In flood protection provided to West Virginia in 2023

(*estimate ending Dec. 11, 2023)



*** There are 170 small watershed flood-control dams and 22 flood-control channels in WV.**

*** "High hazard" means failure of the dam could result in loss of human life and/or property.**

*** Nearly 60 percent of West Virginians (1.06 million) are benefited by the flood-control dams and channels.**

WVCA preparing to put significant dam investment into action across the state







***Top left**: Brush Creek No. 14 dam in the Princeton area sits within Glenwood Park. **Top right**: The riser at Brush Creek No. 15, known locally as Dan Hale Reservoir in Mercer County. **Bottom right**: Workers repairing a slip at Polk Creek No. 6 dam in Lewis County in late summer.*

The most significant federal investment in small-watershed dam rehabilitation in more than a generation was matched by $21,060,000 in funding from the Legislature in 2023 to rehabilitate multiple dams across West Virginia.

This investment will get the dams up to current design and safety criteria, starting with Brush Creek No. 15 and Brush Creek No. 14 in Mercer County, which are dams in the Princeton area used primarily for flood control but also for recreation and as a water supply.

The full rehabilitation of both dams will address deficiencies and updated design criteria such as: new filter and drainage criteria, auxiliary spillway capacity and integrity, slope stability, seismic stability and sediment storage of the dams, said WVCA Engineer Levi Cyphers.

In early 2024, the Agency was preparing for the contracting and construction phase of the two projects.

Dams that are approved for full rehabilitation no longer meet current state or USDA-NRCS design and safety criteria and performance standards.

Multiple state, federal and county-level agencies have worked together on the project over many months. These include: the WVCA, USDA-NRCS, the Southern Conservation District, the Mercer County Commission and the Glenwood-Green Valley Public Service District.

The local sponsors have handled many aspects of permitting and land rights on the projects. They've been very involved in the discussion and logistics of the Brush Creek improvements during NRCS planning/design group calls, construction and contract planning, and on-site meetings.

"Sponsor cooperation is key to long-term success on these projects," said Gene Saurborn, WVCA Director of Watershed Projects.

The federal government covers 65 percent of the construction costs. The local sponsor (including state) responsibilities would include the remaining 35 percent of construction, future operation and maintenance costs, as well as permits, mitigation if needed, and property purchases and land right acquisitions.

The additional future rehabilitation projects that received legislative funding in 2023 are: Brush Creek No.

See **DAM INVESTMENT** on Page 25

Agricultural Enhancement Key Figures (FY 2023)

The Agricultural Enhancement Program supports West Virginia's farm community with cost-share practices to reduce soil erosion, provide alternative water for livestock and improve the productivity of farmlands in the state's 14 conservation districts.

The program is administered by the conservation districts with assistance from the West Virginia Conservation Agency. Supported practices are determined at the local level. Financial and technical assistance are offered to implement best management practices.





51,379
feet of pasture division fence

47,574
feet of exclusion fence

6,172
acres of lime spread

1,569
acres of nutrient management

93,873
square feet of heavy use area protection

22,526
total feet for pasture division/water system combo *and* exclusion fence/water system combo

Grants showing Conservation Services is in demand

The WVCA's Division of Conservation Services' expertise was in high demand in 2023, as evidenced by the awarding of three key grants providing federal money for conservation practices that the Agency will be directly involved in.

The Agency is taking a lead role on a $240,192 grant from the USDA-NRCS Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative to develop a series of training videos -- led by top-level academic experts and geared toward farmers -- that address soil health, forages, grazing techniques, nutrient management and weed control.





WVCA conservation specialists, Director of Conservation Services Jennifer Skaggs and Conservation Services Manager-North Cindy Shreve will be actively involved in administering the grant.

The videos will be promoted through social and traditional media outlets and housed on a website available to cooperators.

The development portion of the grant will run through early 2025, and the produced videos will be available for farmers well into the future.

WVCA is also a part of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) Foundation grant, geared toward historically underserved farmers.

The $211,500 grant is intended to protect and improve water quality and habitat, using regenerative techniques for farms in West Virginia. The plan is to incorporate native vegetation, using warm season grasses, into rotational grazing plans. A portion of the grant also involves reclaiming the log landings of recent logging operations.

The partnership includes the West Virginia Conservation Agency, the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts and the state Division of Forestry.

A forestry demonstration project in the Elk Conservation District is related to and has preceded the NASDA Foundation grant in West Virginia.

The grant runs through December of 2026.

The Agency also will take an active role in the Grazing for Appalachian Sustainability (GRASS) grant from the USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities. Funding for the implementation of "climate-smart" conservation practices will come to the Conservation Agency and will be sent down to the conservation districts.

Some of the expected climate-smart practices are silvopasture (integrating trees into livestock-grazed pasture), prescribed grazing, nutrient management, and planting perennial legumes and native warm-season grasses through no-till plantings.

The impact these practices have on carbon in soil and greenhouse gases also will be measured and studied.

West Virginia and Virginia farms will both be included in the climate-smart grant. Other partners in West Virginia include USDA-NRCS, WVU Extension, the WVU Research Corporation and the 14 conservation districts. The grant runs until August of 2028.

Skaggs said the climate now, so to speak, is that there's just a lot of federal funding available, and that Conservation Services is poised to manage the grant funding from both an administrative and a technical standpoint.

"We're in a great place to be able to take advantage of these funds to help our cooperators," she said.

The needed expertise of staff in handling the grants' goals is also being seen.

"The work that we do and the value in it is recognized," Skaggs said. "And working through the districts, we are well equipped to handle these outside dollars and this federal money."

Shreve said that as a manager, working to accomplish the goals of these grants should be valuable experience for the Agency's conservation specialists.

"It'll give them different ways to work with cooperators. The video series, for instance, that's not something that could easily be accomplished with just one district," she said. "So doing a project like that statewide, it gives them some extra tools in their toolbox, so to speak, and is a way to approach folks that maybe learn in different ways or have different interests."

Chesapeake Bay Program

Encouraging the use of voluntary best management practices to promote cleaner water in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in West Virginia.

Project	Federal	Match	Total
Eastern Panhandle BMPs	$170,000	$170,000	$340,000
Potomac Valley BMPs	$170,000	$170,000	$340,000
Chesapeake Bay Communications and Website	$6,000	$6,000	$12,000
PVCD Most Effective Basin Funding for Ag Best Management Practices Implementation	$54,681	$54,681	$109,362
Equipment and Supplies	$5,000	$5,000	$10,000
Conservation District Support - PVCD and EPCD	$10,000	$10,000	$20,000
Sleepy Creek Implementation	$15,000	$15,000	$30,000
WV Soil Tunnel Trailer	$10,000	$10,000	$20,000
Internships	$10,560	$10,560	$21,120
CREP Training and Outreach	$2,000	$2,000	$4,000
Travel	$7,500	$7,500	$15,000





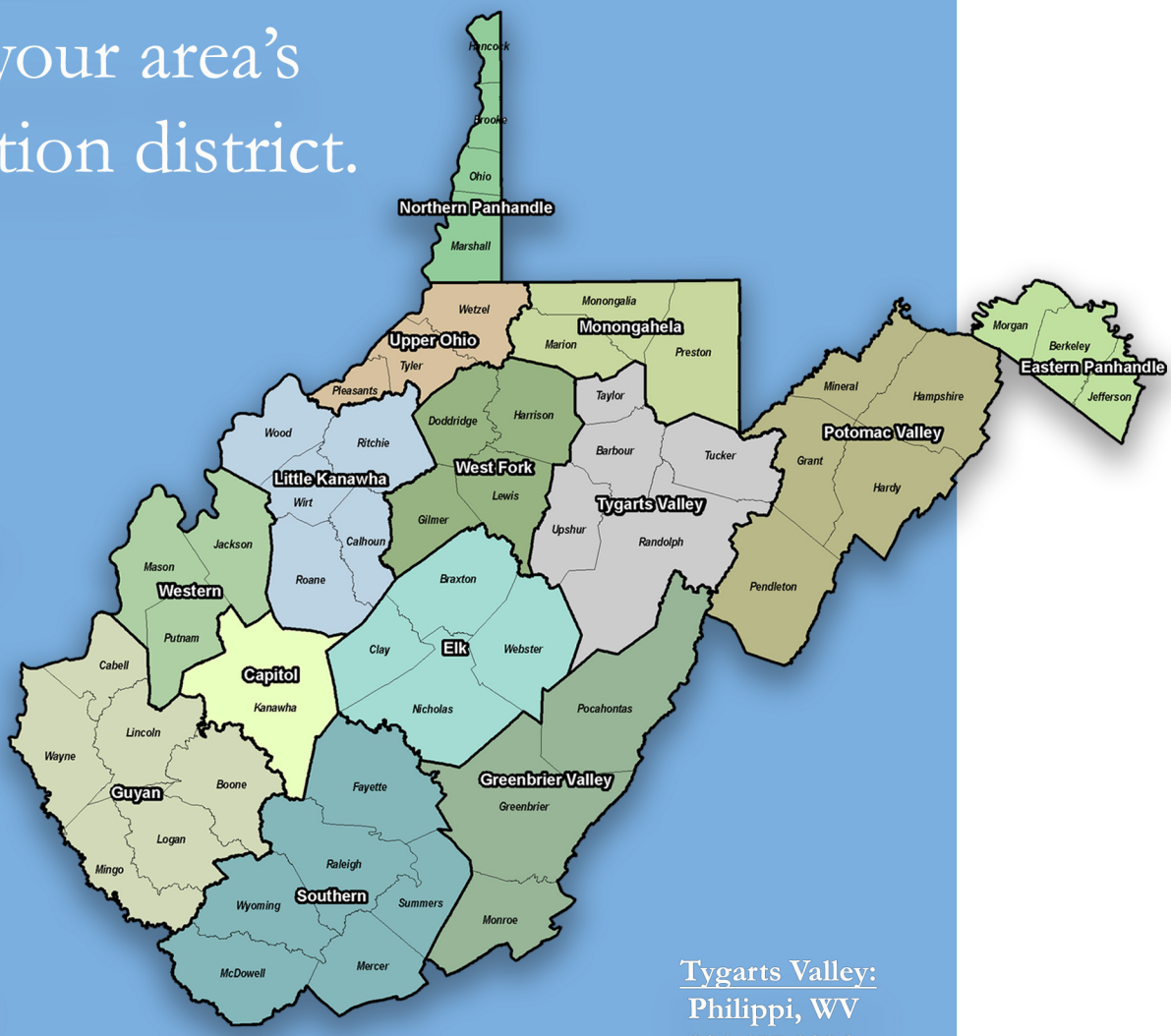
Nonpoint Source Program Key Figures

Nonpoint Source pollution results from land runoff due to rain or snowmelt, and may include pollutants like fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides from agricultural lands and residential areas.

Project	Conservation District	Federal Grant	Match	Total
Anthony Creek Phase II	Greenbrier Valley	$150,000	$100,000	$250,000
Indian Creek Phase IV	Greenbrier Valley	$67,000	$45,000	$112,000
Second Creek VI-monitoring	Greenbrier Valley	$14,500	$11,236	$25,736
Spring Creek Phase II	Greenbrier Valley	$145,000	$111,000	$256,000
Nonpoint Source Program Base Grant	none - agencywide	$156,200	$104,133	$260,333

Questions?

Contact your area's conservation district.



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Elk:
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Guyan:
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Little Kanawha:
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Monongahela:
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304.238.1231
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Southern:
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Tygarts Valley:
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Upper Ohio:
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Capitol Conservation District

2023 Highlights

In September, the Capitol Conservation District hosted a successful field day at Deep Sea Acres, a Kanawha County farm owned by Kevin Jones. The field day featured many of CCD's partners, including USDA-NRCS, WVCA, WVU Extension, WVSU Extension, USDA-FSA, Timeless Fence and Hustler Equipment.



August brought a torrent of rain to Witcher Creek and the surrounding area, flooding homes and leaving tremendous amounts of debris in the creeks. CCD worked with contractors and the WVCA to clean up the damaged areas and remove debris from the waterway.



CCD has worked on funding for educational purposes to promote agricultural- and garden-based learning in schools through additional grant opportunities, which also allowed the district to hire a new employee to work on the promotion of bi-monthly educational workshops for the community.

During the summer, the district supervisors met with cooperators and partners to evaluate the needs of the district, in order to better meet some future goals.

In 2024, and as a result of CCD's plan of work, the district looks to focus on storm rainfall and runoff, invasive species control, education about herbicides, invasive species management and educating the public about raised beds and other aspects of urban agriculture.

The district also would like to complete some dam repair work at Elk Twomile No. 14 this year, and will continue to look at ways to mitigate stormwater runoff to protect the communities they serve.

Also in 2024, the district plans to host a spring forestry field day on April 6, another gathering of partners and cooperators to discuss current and future goals of the district, and a two-day conference focused on homesteading in September.

The goal of the latter conference will be to reach a broader audience for conservation education.

The district works closely with and finds value in its partnerships with: USDA-NRCS, WVCA, WVACD, Great Kanawha RC&D, WVU Extension, WVSU Extension, NACD, the WV Envirothon, WVDA, WVDNR, WVDEP, the WV Division of Forestry, and many municipalities, local community groups, schools and educators across the district and beyond.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Urban and community agriculture, lime, pollinations, heavy use area protection, frost seeding
- District contribution toward practices: $34,003.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $63,983.

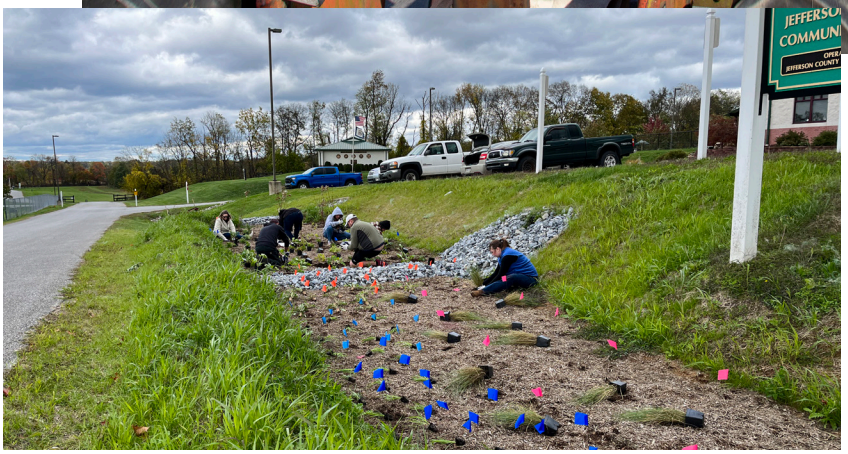
Eastern Panhandle Conservation District

2023 Highlights

The Eastern Panhandle Conservation District had a busy year in 2023, including the installation of a new rain garden in front of the community center at Sam Michaels Park in Jefferson County in July.

The 595-square-foot rain garden will catch and filter stormwater runoff before it reaches nearby Elks Run, the stream that serves as the drinking water sources for the towns of Harpers Ferry and Bolivar. Sam Michaels Park receives many visitors from the community, and the project will demonstrate to them the benefits of a rain garden. Another key goal of the project is to improve the water quality of Elks Run, which contains too much fecal coliform bacteria to meet its water quality standards.





The EPCD partnered with the West Virginia Conservation Agency, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and Jefferson County Parks and Recreation on the project.

The project cost $55,000, with funding coming from the EPA's Clean Water Act Section 319 Program and WVCA state funds. Flowers were planted at the rain garden in October.

Also, during the summer, the district's representative in the West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year competition was the Linton Brothers Farm in Berkeley County.

In April, the West Virginia Envirothon competition was held at Cacapon Resort State Park in Morgan County. Several teams from within the district also participated. EPCD also held a training session for area Envirothon teams prior to the event.

In 2024, EPCD supervisors plan to promote more conservation education and support the district education specialist's work.

They have plans to offer instruction on how to construct and operate a high tunnel and also plan to implement an urban agriculture program.

EPCD also will host the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts' quarterly meeting this coming July.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, heavy use area protection, pasture division fence
- District contribution toward practices: $37,173.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $91,042.

Elk Conservation District

2023 Highlights

In 2023, the Elk Conservation District continued their work on the Forestry Demonstration Project.

Elk supervisors partnered with USDA-NRCS, the WV Division of Forestry and landowners on the project.



Funding was provided by the Elk district to establish wildlife habitat and food plots on recently reclaimed logging operations. This year, the program expanded to include projects in all of the Elk district counties (Braxton, Clay, Webster and Nicholas).



The program worked to complete approximately 10 plots covering 4.5 acres belonging to five different landowners. The project also helps with invasive species control.

The Forestry Demo Project was also used as a template and played an important role in applying for the NASDA grant (see Page 4), which will provide funding for similar projects in other areas across the state.

The district also co-sponsored with WVU Extension and USDA and participated in a farm and forestry field day on Oct. 14 at Stone Run Hill Farm in Flatwoods. The field day included sessions on grazing and grass health, soil testing and nutrient management, Ag EP and USDA-NRCS programs, forest carbon credit programs, chainsaw safety, landowner exemptions for timbering and more.

The district also held its annual tree sale again in March, with pickup of orders on March 28 and 29. The last day to order for the 2024 tree sale is March 8, with pickup on March 21 and 22. Administrative Specialist Mary Beth Smith is accepting orders at the Elk Conservation District office. Call the office at (304) 765-2535.

Supervisors and staff with Elk CD remain involved with the West Virginia Envirothon, and hosted a training day for team members and advisors in 2023.

The district also hosted a local workgroup meeting to connect supervisors, partnering agencies and cooperators with goals and programs.

Also, funds from Elk CD purchased plant identification signs, plants to improve habitat for pollinators, and plants for wetland areas along the Boggs Walking Trail in Clay County. Signs were in both braille and print. These efforts improved the physical grounds while supporting accessibility at the walking trail.

Elk CD's Jocee Miller, a program support specialist, also led a butterfly release for children at the Webster County Fair this past year.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Nutrient management, lime, exclusion fence
- District contribution toward practices: $58,729.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $174,280.

Greenbrier Valley Conservation District

2023 Highlights

The Greenbrier Valley Conservation District hosted a successful farm field day geared toward agricultural producers, landowners and the public at Teaberry Farms in Ronceverte on Nov. 11.



Discussions at the field day covered soil micronutrients, farm-specific resource concerns, the relationship between karst geology, water and agriculture, controlling invasive plants in pastures, and strategies for maintaining clean water. A special presentation during lunch featured live birds of prey by the Three Rivers Avian Center.



The district also is involved with an intensive water quality monitoring protocol with Section 319 to try to de-list streams once their water quality is improved. Once that's developed more fully with the state DEP, the goal is to make it a statewide 319 monitoring protocol. A future 319 project in western Greenbrier County could address acid mine drainage cleanup within a watershed.

GVCD also will take a lead role in the National Association of State Department of Agriculture grant to incorporate native warm-season grasses into rotational grazing plans and reclaim the log landings of recent logging operations. (See page 4.)

In July, Shawlin Hills Farm was recognized (see above photos) as the district's conservation farm of the year. Jack and GeorgeAnne Morgan have been farming in the Second Creek area of Ronceverte since 2019, and have added agricultural best management practices that include woodland exclusion fencing, pasture division fence, high-magnesium lime, clearing and establishing pasture, and brush hogging the pasture to control weeds and assist with soil health.

The Morgans raise beef cattle, goats, honeybees, chickens and grow vegetables on their 205-acre operation.

In 2024, GVCD expects to make some more progress on educational outreach in schools and host a Women in Agriculture conference in the spring. Completion of agricultural enhancement program contracts is always a priority, supervisors said. Increased participation from students in soil judging and the WV Envirothon is also a priority.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, exclusion fence, pasture division fence, watering systems
- District contribution toward practices: $105,643.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $311,593.

Guyan Conservation District

2023 Highlights

The Guyan Conservation District saw strong turnout during their educational field days in 2023, emphasized urban agriculture in a bigger way than ever before, and had a great local workgroup meeting in the summer.



The district supervisors held a second high tunnel field day on May 20 at Lincoln County Supervisor Ronnie Hager's farm in Hamlin. Topics included managing pests in high tunnels, starting seeds, soil testing and fertility management, coverings and shade clothes for high tunnels, and new urban agriculture practices and demonstrations.



Supervisors also hosted a field day at Keith Viers' farm in Prichard in Wayne County on Aug. 19. Some of the topics included low-stress cattle handling, farm economics and nutrient management, dung beetle research on pasture health and invasive species management.

The district received a grant from the USDA-NRCS and the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts to provide more educational outreach and field days in 2023, and the turnout at the field days was tremendous.

Urban and community agriculture was among the district's most popular agricultural enhancement program practices. In all, the district paid out $47,785 to cooperators implementing best management practices under the AgEP program.

The local workgroup meeting on June 6 saw 47 people in attendance. The goal was to get feedback from cooperators about what's needed in the district.

Supervisors also recognized four conservation farm county winners in 2023. They are: Roger Ball in Boone County, Josh Yates in Cabell County, Rodney Dial in Lincoln County, and Tabatha Ekers in Wayne County.

The district also distributed pollinator seed packs to members of the public in March.
In 2024, Guyan supervisors hope to secure more funding for agricultural enhancement best management practices like lime application and high tunnel plastic replacement.

They also would like to get more participation and have more success implementing practices in all six of the district's counties.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Urban and community agriculture, pollination, heavy use area protection, lime and nutrient management.
- District contribution toward practices: $47,785.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $73,815.

Little Kanawha Conservation District







2023 Highlights

The Little Kanawha Conservation District emphasized informational meetings for cooperators in 2023, worked on dam improvement projects and saw its work crew continue to work on conservation-related projects.

The informational meetings began in January and continued in the spring. In March, an invasive species control educational workshop on autumn olive was held at the Wood County 4-H Campgrounds, and included Bruce Loyd from WVU Extension, who discussed how if left uncontrolled, autumn olive can significantly affect pasture productivity.

A two-part local workgroup meeting to discuss conservation programs and receive feedback from cooperators was held over two days in May in both Parkersburg and Spencer.

The district also purchased a debris boom for the North Fork of the Hughes River dam in Ritchie County for $351,525. It's scheduled to be installed in 2024. Debris booms hold back large woody debris to help ensure the performance and function of a dam's riser and principal spillway outlet system. Supervisors also are looking to secure a road into Bonds Creek No. 1 dam in Ritchie County.

Some of the partners Little Kanawha works closest with are USDA-NRCS, USDA-FSA, WVU Extension, the state Division of Natural Resources and the state Division of Forestry.

LKCD Supervisor Bob Buchanan also would like to strengthen the district's relationships with local garden clubs, and also look into a high tunnel partnership project with a local school.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Heavy use area protection, watering systems, lime, exclusion fence, invasive species management
- District contribution toward practices: $96,919.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $230,672.

Monongahela Conservation District

2023 Highlights

The Monongahela Conservation District was home to the 2023 West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year, Mountain Harvest Farm, owned by Mary Oldham and Chico Ramirez off Goshen Road near Morgantown.



Following the announcement of their award in October, Oldham and Ramirez were quick to respond to media inquiries about their farm, seeking to spread the word about the conservation they were putting on the ground. They've also welcomed school groups and others interested in their practices to the farm, as well.



Some of the conservation best management practices enacted at Mountain Harvest Farm are crop rotation, cover crops, contour farming, no-till farming, buffer strips, pollinator planting, nutrient management practices and more.

MCD supervisors were happy to celebrate Mountain Harvest Farm's recognition this fall. "That was a big accomplishment for this district," MCD Chairman Mark Myers said.

The district also recognized three Century Farms in 2023: the Teets Farm in Terra Alta in Preston County and The Blaney Farm and Ringgold Farms, both of Monongalia County.

In 2024, MCD would like to continue with farmer education and safety programs, including sessions on chainsaw and weedeater safety.

During the summer, MCD Associate Supervisor Art Mouser and his late wife, Anna, were inducted into the West Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Hall of Fame.

MCD supervisors also would like to continue working with elementary schools within the district on conservation projects like high tunnels and more.

In the spring, the district hosted a successful local workgroup meeting, attended by cooperators and partnering agencies.

Some of the district's closest partnering agencies are: USDA-NRCS, the WVCA, the state Division of Forestry, USDA-FSA and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Heavy use area protection, lime, pasture division fence, exclusion fence, nutrient management
- District contribution toward practices: $81,694.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $145,224.

Northern Panhandle Conservation District





2023 Highlights

The Northern Panhandle Conservation District had another busy year in 2023, with a heavy focus on educating cooperators and young people about conservation.

Two public planning meetings were held in April for cooperators to share their conservation needs with supervisors, Agency staff and the USDA-NRCS representatives.

In May, the district held its 11th Women in Agriculture Day in Moundsville, with presentations on urban agriculture, food preservation and sheep production. The event returned after a three-year hiatus. Also in May, the district held an invasive species dinner and then a field day in Brooke County over two days. It was geared toward educating cooperators about problem solving and identifying invasive species in their pastures, hay and forests.

Hands-On Ag Day returned in October (see photos above), which is a significant undertaking that exposes fifth-grade students in Marshall County to soil and animal health, caring for animals, forestry, beekeeping, growing produce and much more.

The district, through its foundation, also awarded scholarships to students planning to attend college or technical schools who intend to major in an agricultural or environmental field of study.

The district also joined other agencies in taking their services periodically to the New Manchester Fire Department, in an effort to reach more potential cooperators in the northern counties (Hancock and Brooke) of the district.

For its education and outreach efforts, the NPCD was recognized by the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts as the Education District of the Year and also won its first Excellence in Conservation Communication Award.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Pasture division fence, lime, watering systems, exclusion fence, heavy use area protection
- District contribution toward practices: $45,125.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $158,615.

Potomac Valley Conservation District





2023 Highlights

The Potomac Valley Conservation District had an eventful 2023 at their numerous dams, hosted a West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts quarterly meeting in July, and hosted a stop on the Area Farm Tour-East at BJ Haggerty's cow-calf operation.

New trash racks (see photo above right) were installed at 10 dams within the district in 2023. Trash racks collect large, often woody debris and prevent it from clogging a riser structure's intakes.

In July, the district hosted supervisors and WVCA staff at Canaan Valley Resort State Park for the WVACD's quarterly meeting.

The two-day meeting included a tour of several spots within the district, including Sonny Taylor's poultry farm. PVCD hosted a homemade evening meal and attendees watched a video recognizing many of the district's recent accomplishments, including dam repair projects and past conservation farm of the year winners.

Haggerty's farm in Hardy County competed in the 2023 West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year competition. Haggerty bale grazes and has taken on several other best management practices on his farm, including pasture division fencing, rotational grazing and watering systems.

The district in 2024 is looking ahead to design work on two major dam rehabilitation projects in Mineral County at New Creek No. 1 and New Creek No. 17.

It also wants to be a resource for cooperators seeking drought assistance through water tanks and other measures, as the Eastern Panhandle has been particularly affected by drought in recent years.

The PVCD also wants to do more to promote urban agriculture and also the more traditional practices it offers through the Agricultural Enhancement Program. The district paid out $121,386 to cooperators for AgEP best management practices in FY 2023, the second-highest amount in the state.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Heavy use area protection, lime, invasive species management, pasture seeding, frost seeding
- District contribution toward practices: $121,386.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $184,619.

Southern Conservation District





2023 Highlights

The Southern Conservation District in 2023 was preparing for the major rehabilitation of three dams in Mercer County – Brush Creek No. 14, No. 15, and further down the road, Brush Creek No. 9.

Construction could begin in 2024. District supervisors joined with the Mercer County Commission, West Virginia Conservation Agency, USDA-NRCS and other interested local partners in making preparations for the rehabilitation project. Land rights acquisition, permitting and communications about the projects have been underway in 2023.

Also, the district is involved with a pasture weed management program this year. Two farms in the district have agreed to participate, and the goal of the project is to reduce undesirable weed species by 95 percent, increase pasture production by 25 percent, and reduce soil erosion and nutrient loss on the farms.

The program will offer participating farmers assistance with seeding, herbicide application, temporary fencing, solar fence chargers, a temporary watering system, troughs and pipelines.

"This is kind of like a test run," said WVCA Conservation Specialist Braden Snyder. The program could be expanded to involve more farms down the line.

Also in the fall, the district held its 2023 Women in Conservation and Agriculture Workshop at Pipestem State Park. SCD Administrative Specialist Marty Walker-Owen organized the event, which featured sessions on pollinator habitat, beekeeping, raised bed construction, marketing a West Virginia farm product, soils and fertilizer and forestry. (See photo above left.)

Turnout for the Nov. 15th workshop was tremendous, and it received regional news coverage.

In July, the Southern Conservation District recognized the work of Pamela Bailey at Five Springs Farm in Fayette County as the district farm of the year.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, watering systems, heavy use area protection, exclusion fence, nutrient management
- District contribution toward practices: $78,946.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $157,087.

Tygarts Valley Conservation District





2023 Highlights

The Tygarts Valley Conservation District celebrated a Carroll Greene award winner and recognized three Century Farm recipients in 2023.

Supervisor Donnie Tenney, who is also president of the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts, received the 2023 Carroll Greene award in October during an awards luncheon in Sutton. The "supervisor of the year" award is the top award presented to a West Virginia conservation district supervisor annually.

Also, the 101-year-old Ferguson Family Farm, the 120-year-old Moss Farm and the 101-year-old Koerner Farm within the TVCD were recognized as Century Farms this year.

The West Virginia Century Farm Program is designed to recognize those families who have been farming the same tract of land for at least 100 years.

The supervisors have seen some progress on making biochar an interim best management practice used by cooperators in the district. Biochar is a carbon-rich substance used to aid crop growth that can become a habitat for beneficial soil microorganisms.

In 2023, the TVCD heavily promoted urban agriculture and cover crops, and look to continue to do so. They also plan to promote the establishment of pollinator plots.

Educational promotion of agricultural best management practices also is a top priority in 2024.

Supervisors also would like to consider a pollinator plot or cover crop demonstration at one or more schools in the district, as well.

Also in 2023, TVCD supervisors hosted a successful local workgroup meeting, involving partnering agencies and district cooperators.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Urban and community agriculture, pollination, nutrient management, lime, roof runoff management
- District contribution toward practices: $94,089.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $164,548.

Upper Ohio Conservation District

2023 Highlights

The Upper Ohio Conservation District benefited from two grants in 2023. The first allowed for a community garden in the Brooklyn area of New Martinsville, and the second was geared toward educating interested cooperators and the public about the benefits of biochar.

Each grant was part of the Urban, Small Scale, and Climate Smart Agriculture and Social Equity Community Outreach program awarded by the USDA-NRCS and the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts.





A workshop was held at the Wetzel County Museum in early March, where people could sign up for a spot in the community garden and learn how to make the most of their space. The district's supervisors would eventually like to add up to 20 beds at the community garden.

The biochar grant covered the cost of two biochar rings, as well as educational outreach about using biochar in planting. Biochar is a carbon-rich substance used in planting that can become a habitat for beneficial soil microorganisms.

A free biochar workshop was held April 29 at Supervisor Bill Gellner's home in St. Marys, with the goal of providing free biochar for participants and sharing how it can improve soil by increasing water and nutrient retention and moderating the acidity of the soil.

UOCD supervisors continued to be involved in educational outreach for young people in 2023.

A training for students participating in the 2023 Envirothon was held at the Tyler Rod and Gun Club. UOCD also hosted land judging and forestry contests for students in 2023. Informational booths about conservation and forestry were also set up at the Tyler County Fair and the Pleasants County fair in 2023, as well. A forestry field day was also hosted in Wetzel County.

In July, Joe and Hannah Ferrell's cow/calf operation in Wetzel County was the district's conservation farm of the year, and competed in the Area Farm Tour-West division of the West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year competition.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Pasture division fence, heavy use area protection, lime, urban agriculture, watering systems
- District contribution toward practices: $38,824.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $77,398.

West Fork Conservation District







2023 Highlights

The West Fork Conservation District recognized several district cooperators in 2023, supported educational opportunities for young people and district residents, and prioritized Agricultural Enhancement Program dollars to get best management practices on the ground.

In October, supervisors presented John and Robert Stenger of Stenger Farms in Harrison County with a sign recognizing them as the WFCD's 2023 Conservation Farm. The district also recognized Cole and Samantha Williams of Harrison County as the WFCD Grassland Farm for 2023, and recognized Jim and Shelia Stout's 137-year-old Stout Farm in Gilmer County as a Century Farm.

West Fork supervisors also offered continued support of the West Virginia University soils team, area Envirothon teams and will sponsor scholarships for cooperators to attend the 2024 Appalachian Grazing Conference. They've also continued to support WVU Extension educational dinners.

In March, a few weeks before the 2023 West Virginia Envirothon competition in Morgan County, the WFCD hosted an Envirothon Training Day at Doddridge County Park for teachers and students from area schools.

In July, a state 4-H Land Judging and Homesite Evaluation Contest was held at WFCD Supervisor Steve Cronin's farm in Lewis County.

WFCD district supervisors also said they've had a plan to spend their agricultural enhancement program money to get more best management practices on the ground, and the WFCD paid out more than any other district in 2023: $130,358.

Also in 2023, Supervisor and Vice Chairman Jim Foster was recognized as the Doddridge County Citizen of the Year and was also inducted into the West Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Hall of Fame.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, heavy use area protection, watering systems, pasture division fence, exclusion fence
- District contribution toward practices: $130,358.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $211,894.

Western Conservation District







2023 Highlights

The Western Conservation District again sponsored a finalist in the West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year contest.

The Finley Farm, owned by Cody and Jessica Finley in Apple Grove in Mason County, was the 2023 competition's runner up. The cow/calf and goat operation has added pasture division and exclusion fencing, a concrete pad feeding facility and watering systems to the farm. Lime, frost seeding, and rotational grazing are other best management practices implemented on the farm.

Western supervisors are quick to recognize the Ravenswood FFA team from Jackson County, which won their second West Virginia Envirothon competition in a row, and also their second Grassland Evaluation Contest in the past two years. The talented team also won a national grasslands competition in Springfield, Missouri, in 2022.

Supervisors also are looking forward to the 2024 West Virginia Envirothon competition being held at Cedar Lakes Conference Center in Jackson County, and are hoping to get more teams from the district involved in the competition.

The district also sponsored four educational pasture walks in 2023, in cooperation with NRCS.

Supervisors also would like to see more participation in a spring education day, the poster contest and see an increase in the number of submitted scholarship applications in 2024.

Further, the supervisors in Western try to maximize cooperator participation in the Agricultural Enhancement Program. In 2023, Western spent $100,118 on cooperators' best management practices and cooperators contributed an additional $63,276.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, watering systems, pasture division fence, exclusion fence, frost seeding
- District contribution toward practices: $100,118.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: $163,394.

Education and Outreach

Throughout 2023, the Education and Outreach Program continued delivering educational materials, training sessions, and support programs for the West Virginia Conservation Agency. Our efforts focused on creating awareness, promoting conservation practices, and engaging with the community to foster environmental responsibility.

Educational Materials and Training: In the past year, our program developed and distributed a range of educational materials tailored to community needs, conveying essential information about environmental conservation practices, sustainability, and soil health. WVCA's educational materials are accessible and engaging.

Support for the WV Soil Tunnel Trailer: We provided transportation and, when necessary, staffing for this mobile educational resource. The trailer served as an effective tool in reaching communities across West Virginia, attending numerous events throughout the year.

Outreach to 60,000 WV Residents: The WV Soil Tunnel Trailer's presence at events allowed us to engage with over 60,000 West Virginia residents in 2023. This provided a unique opportunity to directly interact with the community, promote soil conservation practices, and answer questions from concerned citizens. The significant outreach achieved demonstrated the impact of our efforts on a statewide scale.

Support for Conservation Services Team: In addition to our primary activities, we provide outreach support to the Conservation Services team. This support included marketing initiatives for Agricultural Enhancement best management practices and 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution programming. By collaborating with the team, we furthered the WVCA's commitment to assisting districts in enhancing natural resource stewardship across the state.

As we look ahead to the upcoming year, we remain dedicated to advancing our mission of environmental education and outreach with a detailed plan to expand our reach and continue providing innovative educational resources while supporting the invaluable work of the WVCA.

We anticipate another year of having a positive impact on West Virginia's environment, for its residents.





Judith Lyons takes on WVCA executive director role

In April, Judith Lyons spoke to a room full of the West Virginia Conservation Agency's partners on her first official day as executive director of the Agency.

That afternoon, she was addressing directors with the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts at their quarterly meeting, as she delivered the Agency's report.

Of her first day in the role, she said: "What better way to spend it than with our partners?"



Partnerships are a key focus for Lyons, who outlined her vision for working together to put conservation on the ground across West Virginia.

"The districts are our main partner," she told the directors. "You are the foundation of our work."

She expanded on partnerships, saying to some amusement that while the concept of a three-legged stool is more familiar, "I have a four-legged stool because I like things to be squared away."

Lyons considers the four legs the Conservation Agency, the 14 conservation districts, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

She wants to strengthen existing partnerships through honest and transparent communication, and build new partnerships when possible to put more work on the ground.

And there's plenty of work to come.

In addition to the Agency's base operating budget of $11.4 million, the Legislature in 2023 approved $21,060,000 in funding to match federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law dollars to rehabilitate six dams, which would be the first of three planned phases to rehabilitate multiple small watershed dams across the state.

U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito also announced $6 million in congressionally directed spending that's devoted to putting some flood hazard mitigation measures in place – including stream restoration work, floodplain enhancement and sediment removal – to prevent flooding in McDowell, Mingo, Wayne and Wyoming counties.

"My vision is to provide the very best service to the citizens of the state that enables them to take care of their land, the soil and the water by sustainable, practical methods for the longevity and enhancement of their lives," Lyons told the WVACD directors.

A day later, Lyons attended her first State Conservation Committee (SCC) meeting as executive director, also at the Summit Bechtel Reserve's JW Marriott Jr. Leadership Center. The SCC had chosen Lyons as the Agency's newest executive director – and the first woman in the permanent role – in March.

Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt, who serves as chairman of the State Conservation Committee, welcomed Lyons in a statement.



"Judith has served in the environmental and conservation field for over 20 years," he said. "Her management and technical experience will be a tremendous asset to the West Virginia Conservation Agency and the Committee looks forward to working with her in continuing its mission."

Lyons has been with the WVCA since 2010, most recently as the assistant director of watershed projects. She had also been a longtime watershed program manager for southern West Virginia and a contract/permitting manager with the agency.

See **JUDITH LYONS** on Page 26

Envirothon 2023 Highlights



$25,450
In scholarship money, awards and adviser/school stipends

164
Students participated

More than **3,150**
Students participated since 1997

More than
$260,000
In college scholarships granted since 1997

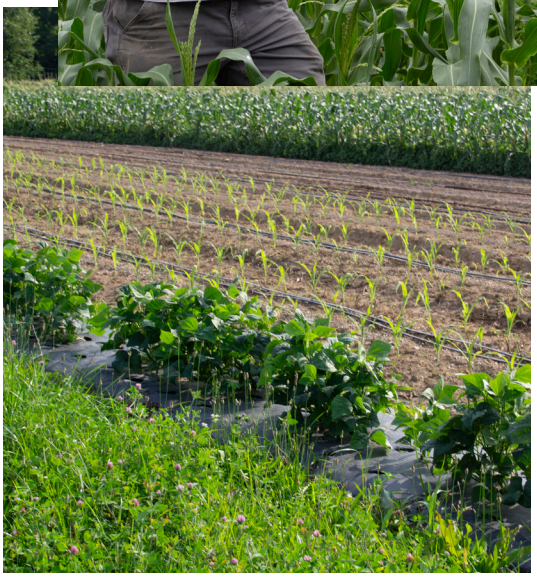
Mountain Harvest Farm wins 2023 West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year

A farm outside Morgantown specializing in certified naturally grown vegetables won the West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year award Oct. 17 during an awards luncheon in Sutton.

Mountain Harvest Farm on Goshen Road near Morgantown, which is owned by Chico Ramirez and Mary Oldham, won the award during the West Virginia Conservation Partnership Conference luncheon.

Each year, one West Virginia farm receives the Conservation Farm of the Year honor after winning at the county, district and area levels. Judges grade the farmers on their use of best management practices, impact on ecological systems and community-based activities.





Mountain Harvest Farm represented the Monongahela Conservation District of Monongalia, Marion and Preston counties.

Ramirez and Oldham earned a $1,000 award for their win. They also will receive 200 hours, or three months, use of a John Deere tractor from Middletown Tractor Sales in Fairmont, with an option to later purchase the tractor at a discounted rate.

Some of the conservation best management practices used at Mountain Harvest Farm are crop rotation, cover crops, contour farming, no-till farming, buffer strips, pollinator planting, nutrient management practices and more.

Ramirez and Oldham grow tomatoes, carrots, greens, herbs, corn, peppers, eggplant, broccoli, cut flowers and other produce on the farm. In addition to growing produce in traditional soil beds on the farm, they use two high tunnels and four low tunnels to extend their growing season. Following their recognition in October, Oldham and Ramirez were gracious with their time, granting multiple interviews to West Virginia MetroNews, WBOY-TV and WDTV to talk about their operation and conservation efforts.

"We want to grow healthy food for people, and we also want to be able to keep the farm in good shape for the future," Oldham told WBOY-TV in an interview. "So, if we use these practices, then we're keeping the soil in good shape and we're improving it."

Mountain Harvest Farm follows organic growing standards and is currently Certified Naturally Grown (CNG), which is a grass roots alternative to USDA Certified Organic that Oldham said is more appropriate for small-scale local growers who have relationships with local customers.

Ramirez and Oldham also take part in a subscription vegetable farm share program often called a "CSA" or "Community Supported Agriculture."

The couple supports their family through their operation, and they also employ three workers on work visas, and two part-time employees to manage CSA deliveries.

They also provide produce to the Morgantown area through local farmers markets, Oldham said.

They've hosted tours of the farm for a variety of groups, including WVU students and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field staff, and annual tours for their customers. They also host students as young as preschool age at the farm. In 2019, they hosted the Nuffield International Farmers Scholars as part of their global tour to expand the recipients' knowledge of agricultural best management practices.

In the spring of 2023, they hosted an "Earth Day at the Farm" event with a conservation walk and pollinator planting.

DAM INVESTMENT from Page 2

9 in Mercer County, Wheeling Creek No. 25 in Marshall County and New Creek No. 1 and New Creek No. 17 in Mineral County.

Several other significant small-watershed construction projects were underway or completed in 2023, and the Agency's watershed division also responded to emergency flooding during the summer.

Emergency Watershed Program work

WVCA watershed technicians and the Capitol Conservation District responded to flooding in late August in areas and along creeks in eastern Kanawha County.

Work was done along Witcher Creek, Slaughter Creek, Horsemill Hollow Road and other areas to remove debris and sediment impacting streams.

The work continued for multiple weeks, well into September.

Polk Creek No. 6

In September, a slip repair was completed at Polk Creek No. 6 in Lewis County, which is within the West Fork Conservation District. Contractors with Eastern Arrow completed the project on time and under budget, Cyphers said.

The repair to the dam's auxiliary spillway was completed Sept. 8.

"The final product is good, performing exactly as it was supposed to," Cyphers said.

The construction cost of the project was $72,800 and investigation and design was $29,000.

Warm Springs No. 7

Crews made some additional repairs to the Warm Springs No. 7 dam in the Berkeley Springs area of Morgan County.

Correcting deficiencies to the drainpipe, and reconnecting it to the principal spillway system, were made in the fall. This temporary measure is providing a level of flood protection to the dam before more permanent repairs are made to correct an internal embankment erosion problem which led to an emergency drawdown of the dam's pool in the fall of 2021.

The permanent repairs to the dam are coming down the road.

North Fork of the Hughes River

The Little Kanawha Conservation District purchased a debris boom for the North Fork of the Hughes River dam in Ritchie County for $351,525. It's scheduled to be installed in 2024.

Only found in some dams, debris booms hold back large woody debris to help ensure the performance and function of a dam's riser and principal spillway outlet system.

Trash racks

Trash racks were installed at multiple dam sites in 2023, most significantly in the Potomac Valley Conservation District, which includes Hardy, Grant, Pendleton, Mineral and Hampshire counties.

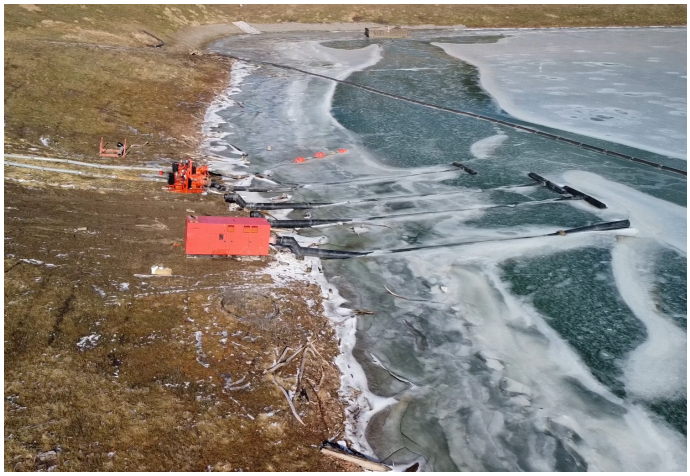
Trash racks collect large, often woody debris and prevent it from clogging a riser structure's intakes. Risers allow a dam to function properly.

Other work

An embankment repair at Wheeling Creek No. 3 dam in the Northern Panhandle Conservation District was completed in January, and the cost of the work exceeded $600,000.

In October, a regrade of the auxiliary spillway at Upper Deckers No. 2 dam was completed, correcting issues related to a historic flow of water at the dam in 2021.





***Far left**: At the bottom of this riser is one of the many trash racks replaced in the Potomac Valley Conservation District.*
***Left**: Pumps at Wheeling Creek No. 3 dam in early 2023.*

JUDITH LYONS from Page 22

In her previous roles, Lyons supervised other watershed managers and staff, took responsibility for professional development training of all watershed technicians, established and managed a team that specialized in stream restoration, wrote and edited the agency's Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) policy and procedural manual that is used during flood events, and worked with county commissions on 7-1-3u agreements, which allow the agency, districts and counties to partner on watershed projects.

Staff training is another one of Lyons' key areas of focus as executive director.

"It leads to good staff job satisfaction if they know how to do their job well, they're very comfortable with it and they're more likely to want to learn more," she said. "And they will be happy at their job."

In her previous roles with the Agency, she also managed watershed projects through completion by obtaining funding, budgeting, contracting and construction oversight. She has worked extensively with county, state and federal agencies and representatives on dam rehabilitation and repair projects and flood-related work.

Before joining the agency, she served as an environmental resources specialist with the state Department of Environmental Protection's Construction Stormwater Team.

Lyons holds an associate degree in general education and a bachelor's degree in sociology from West Virginia State University.

As executive director of the WVCA, Lyons oversees the agency's entire operations and works closely with elected supervisors in the state's 14 conservation districts and the State Conservation Committee. She will report directly to the SCC.

At the April 10 meeting, she told veteran district supervisors who have been involved in conservation for years: "We want to learn from you. We respect you and we value you."

She wants to offer more training opportunities to benefit supervisors, as well.

Of the younger generation, Lyons would like to increase partnerships that will get more students interested in and knowledgeable about conservation, learning how to grow their own food and how to protect the environment.







***PHOTOS**: (Top Left): WVCA Director of Watershed Projects Gene Saurborn discusses work at Warm Springs No. 7 dam with NACD Next Generation Leadership Institute participants. (Bottom left): Scene during a farm tour at the Finley Farm in Apple Grove in Mason County. (Above right): Eggplant growing at Mountain Harvest Farm in Monongalia County.*

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