



West Virginia
Conservation Agency

2024 Annual Report





West Virginia
Conservation Agency

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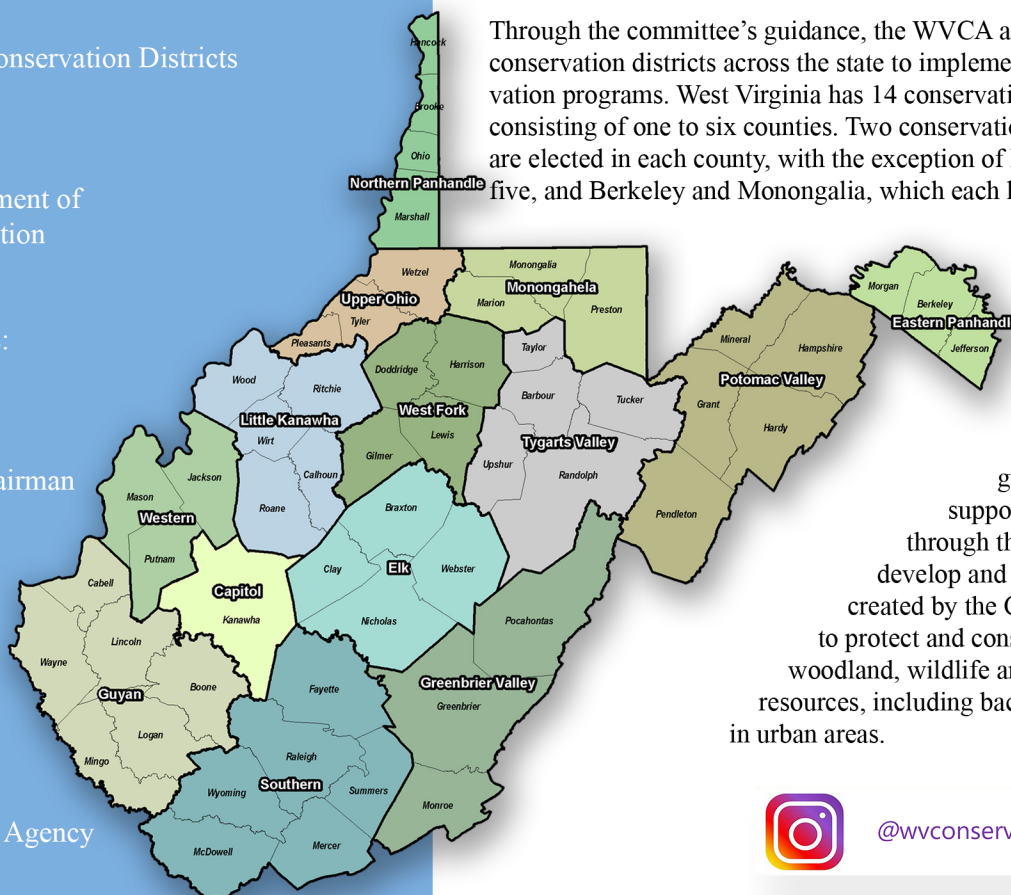
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Introduction

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 and Monongalia, which each have three.

These local boards operate under the guidance and with the support of the SCC, through the WVCA, and develop and implement programs created by the Conservation Agency 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 2024)

\$768,367

Cost of regular
maintenance to dams

\$411,946

Cost of repairs
to dams

\$70,076

Engineering costs

170

Dams considered “high
hazard”

112

Dams are 50 years of
age or older

\$44.8 million

In flood protection
provided to West Virginia
in 2024



*** 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.**

*** Non-flood benefits in 2024,
including municipal water supply
and recreation, totaled \$23.8 million.**

WVCA's work on dams in '24 included intensive O&M, major rehab planning



***Top left:** A forestry mulcher was used at Patterson Creek No. 30 dam in Mineral County to help reclaim the dam's footprint. **Top right:** The riser and embankment on a snowy day at Brush Creek No. 14 in Mercer County. **Bottom right:** A regrade of the auxiliary spillway at Patterson Creek No. 27 dam was completed in 2024.*

The West Virginia Conservation Agency oversaw a significant amount of work on its small watershed flood-control dams in 2024, ranging from intensive operations and maintenance (O&M) at many of its dams in the Potomac Valley to preparations for major rehabilitation of dams across West Virginia.

The Legislature in 2023 matched a \$46.8 million federal investment in small watershed dam rehabilitation with \$21,060,000 in state dollars to rehabilitate six dams in Mercer, Marshall and Mineral counties.

Brush Creek No. 14 and No. 15 dams in Mercer County are the furthest along, with construction expected to begin as early as the spring of 2025. Major rehabilitations of New Creek No. 1 and No. 17 dams in Mineral County are in the planning and design stages, respectively, and Brush Creek No. 9 in Mercer County and Wheeling Creek No. 25 dam in Marshall County are in the design stages.

In Braxton County, federal money is also available for the design of all five dams in the Saltlick watershed,

which is in the planning stage.

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

“Legislators took advantage of an opportunity to match federal infrastructure dollars to rehabilitate flood-control dams across the state that were in need of significant improvement,” said WVCA Executive Director Judith Lyons. “This is the most significant infrastructure investment to help protect people and property by improving dams in more than a generation.”

These multiyear projects will progress through 2025 and beyond.

On the ground in 2024, about 40 small watershed dams in the Potomac Valley saw significant operations and

See **WATERSHED PROJECTS** on Page 24

Agricultural Enhancement

Key Figures (FY 2024)

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.



43,106
feet of pasture
division fence

48,289
feet of exclusion fence

6,012
acres of lime spread

790
acres of nutrient
management

68,442
square feet of heavy
use area protection

1,000
acres of invasive species
management

Severe drought response was agencywide in 2024

Staff across the West Virginia Conservation Agency responded to the needs of cooperators and citizens who were negatively impacted by the severe drought in the summer and fall of 2024.

In working with the 14 conservation districts, the WVCA helped to accept applications and process payments for drought relief across a variety of programs.

The exigency component of the WVCA's statewide Agricultural Enhancement Program (AgEP) was a beneficial tool to combat drought last year. Districts accepted exigency applications and provided cost-share relief through livestock water, irrigation, temporary fence, cover crops and pasture revegetation.

As of Dec. 31, there were 624 paid applications for a total that exceeded \$212,480.

The conservation districts also approved 191 applications for drought relief through the Governor's Drought Relief Reimbursement Grant Program, which concluded last fall. In all, the districts paid out \$57,884 in cost-share through the Governor's Program.

The WVCA and the districts also played a key role in the West Virginia Department of Agriculture's Drought Recovery Program. The Legislature in the fall allocated \$10 million to fund the program. WVCA staff statewide have accepted applications and conservation districts

will process payments after the WVDA makes funding decisions.

The Drought Recovery Program funding is intended to support farmers by covering critical needs such

as restoring drought-damaged pastures, assisting with water resources, and addressing other pressing drought-related expenses. It aims to fill gaps not covered by federal disaster relief programs.

"We wanted to do our part to help West Virginia farmers recover from this severe drought," said WVCA Executive

Director Judith Lyons. "We took an all-hands-on-deck approach to process every Drought Recovery Program application we received, and the WVCA's Exigency Program was an early remedy to address farmers' immediate needs in the summer and fall."

The U.S. Drought Monitor for the first time in its history had multi-county swaths of West Virginia in the "exceptional drought" category in 2024, which exceeds the "severe drought" category.

The drought was most severe in different parts of the state at different times. For instance, earlier in the summer the Eastern Panhandle and Potomac Valley were hard-hit while later in the summer and into the fall, counties in central West Virginia and along the Ohio River Valley were hardest hit. But the drought persisted statewide and affected all counties.

The WVCA had helped organize and staff attended drought relief informational meetings alongside other partnering agencies in several areas around the state. The meetings were well attended and were an opportunity for farmers and residents to learn about the relief available for their operations.



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
Keyser River Access Revitalization	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$96,000
Internships	\$10,560	\$10,560	\$21,120
CREP Training and Outreach	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$4,000
Travel	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$15,000



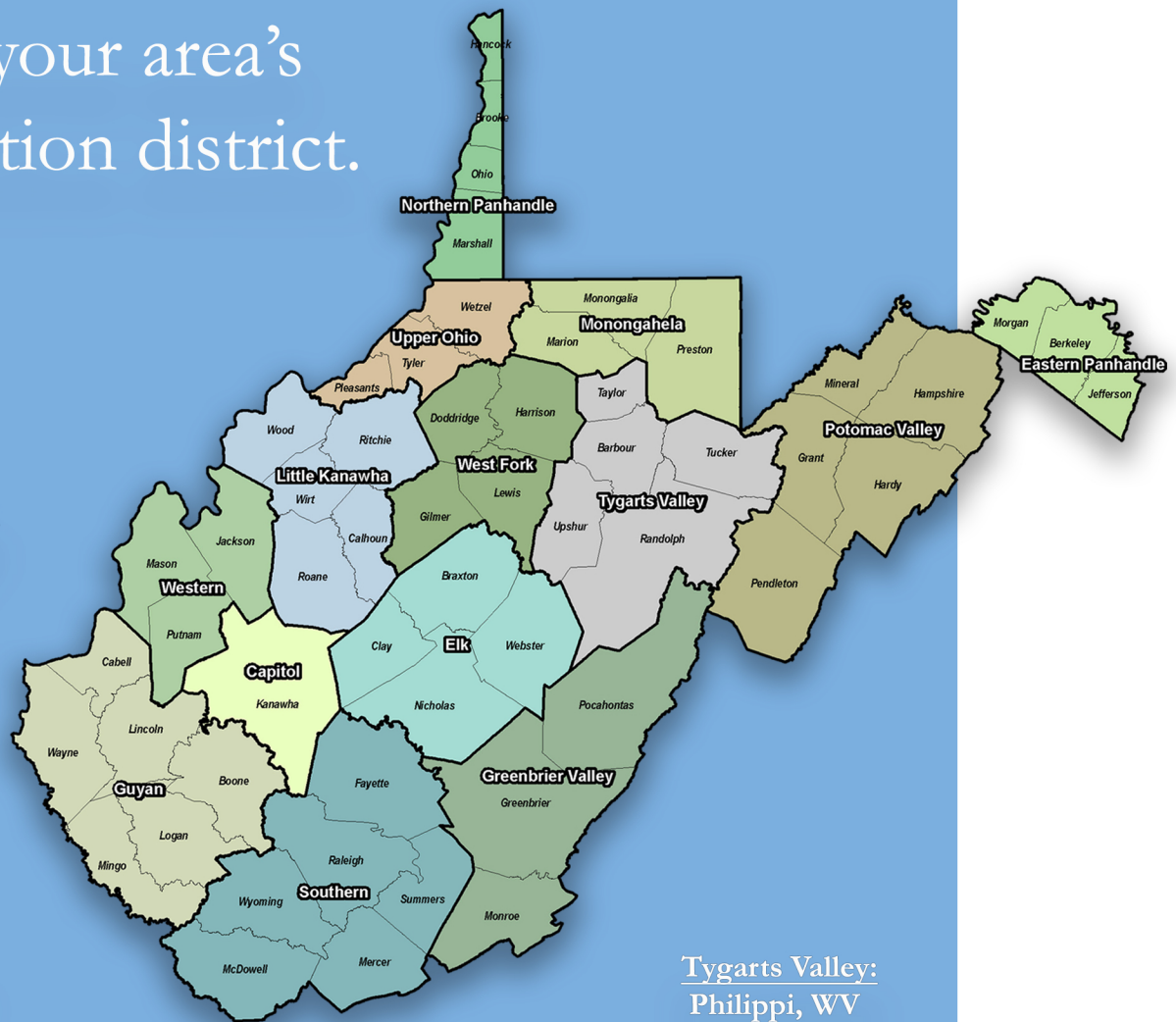
Nonpoint Source Program Key Figures

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 Award	Match	Total
Nonpoint Source Program Base Grant FY 23	None - agencywide	\$100,500	\$67,000	\$167,500
Upper Meadow River	Greenbrier Valley	\$50,000	\$49,461	\$99,461
Nonpoint Source Program Base Grant FY 24	None - agencywide	\$44,000	\$29,333	\$73,333

Questions?

Contact your area's
conservation district.



Capitol:

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Eastern Panhandle:

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Capitol Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Capitol Conservation District held its first Homesteading-ish Conference Sept. 13 and 14 in Charleston. The numerous topics included food self-sufficiency, forest management, land preparation, sawmilling, maple production, high tunnels, beekeeping, chainsaw safety, irrigation, urban gardens, foraging and much more.

The event speakers included Joel Salatin and the district looks forward to hosting its next Homesteading-ish Conference in 2025. (See bottom photo.)

Also in 2024, Capitol's supervisors were heavily involved with the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts' booth at the State Fair of West Virginia. Capitol CD Supervisor Clyde Bailey is a longtime chairman of the State Fair committee.

The district also held a Forestry Management field day on April 13 at Ridenour Park in Nitro. A chainsaw giveaway was part of the forestry field day, as well.

The district also responded to help address cooperators' needs during the 2024 drought.

Capitol Conservation District worked with the Kanawha County Commission, Kanawha County Homeland Security and Emergency Management, and the St. Albans water department to provide areas of free water access. CW Sigman with the Kanawha County Homeland Security and Emergency Management provided two water taps for farmers to fill tanks. One was in Elkview and a second in Sissonville. St. Albans provided water fill up at their water plant.

Using grant funding, the district also partnered with West Virginia State University (WVSU) Research &

Development Corporation and Charleston Manna Meal to produce and test biochar in two flame cap kilns. Multiple burn demonstrations in the CCD and around the state promoted biochar production as a routine farm activity to turn wood and other biomass waste into biochar for uses such as carbon

sequestration, rebuilding soil carbon, and production of reliably higher value soil amendments by mixing the biochar with routinely available manures and composts.

A second biochar grant has been awarded to the Capitol district, partnering with WVSU, the state Department of Agriculture and others to develop protocols to mix biochar with the routinely available manures and compost to produce nutrient-rich soil amendments to rebuild garden, crop, pasture and forestland soils.



Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Urban and community agriculture, heavy use area protection, roof runoff management, lime
- District contribution toward practices: \$20,253.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$42,327.

Eastern Panhandle Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Eastern Panhandle Conservation District held its annual tree sale in late April. The tree species offered in 2024 were: Norway spruce, Eastern white pine, American arborvitae, Fraser fir, American redbud, red oak and sugar maple. The district also offered Liberty and Triumph apple trees.

This past year, EPCD also offered new practices that helped with cooperators working on smaller parcels of land. For instance, a cost-share best management practice that Eastern Panhandle Conservation District supervisors introduced was the establishment of pollinator habitats, management or improvement of existing habitat, and increasing healthy pollinator populations on a plot size not to exceed 0.25 acres. The cost-share is 75 percent up to \$300 on native seed.

EPCD Board Chairman Danny Lutz noted the Eastern Panhandle's role in helping West Virginia overall to improve the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay watershed through voluntary best management practices.

Waters of the entire Eastern Panhandle, including the Potomac Valley, and a portion of Monroe County feed into the Chesapeake Bay.

"We can take pride in our role in having met the 2025 guidelines for nitrogen, [sediment] and phosphorous reduction levels to the Chesapeake Bay," he said.

The district also hosted the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts' July quarterly meeting in Harpers Ferry. EPCD hosted a tour of Harewood in

Jefferson County, a home that dates back to the 1780s and where the brother of President George Washing-

ton, Samuel Washington, had lived. Dr. James Gibson was the tour moderator and is president of the Jefferson County Historical Society.

The district continued its involvement with former Delegate John Overington's Big Tree Contest in the fall of 2024. The

winning found tree turned out to be a 65-foot-tall Sassafras in the Charles Town area of Jefferson County.

WVCA staff who work closely with EPCD also planted trees at Sam Michaels Park in Harpers Ferry and along Sleepy Creek in 2024.



Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, pollinators, urban agriculture, pasture seeding
- District contribution toward practices: \$51,827.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$68,075.

Elk Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Elk Conservation District (ECD) hosted two educational dinner outreach meetings in Nicholas and Braxton counties in February 2024 and reached nearly 300 people. The first was at Nettles Equipment in Braxton County and the second dinner meeting was at the Nicholas County Career and Technical Center.

The district saw a strong number of new cooperators sign up for the district's programs based on the two outreach dinner meetings. A strong communications effort in getting the word out ahead of time drew 180 people to attend the dinner at Nettles Equipment.

For these and other strong efforts throughout the year, the Elk district won the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts' Excellence in Communication Award for 2024 at an October banquet in Sutton.

"We're awfully proud of our communications award," said Mary Beth Smith, WVCA administrative specialist with the Elk Conservation District.

Elk also completed a successful fruit tree sale in March and hosted food trucks during tree pickups.

In May the district coordinated a Conservation Day at Braxton County Middle School, and provided six stations for students to learn about soil health, watersheds, forestry, wildlife, pollinators and more.

During the spring and summer months, the district

advanced Tony and Aine Slabaugh's "In the Nook Farm" in Burnsville, which was later the statewide finalist for Non-Traditional Conservation Farm of the Year, and also Don and Brenda Burroughs' farm in Heaters.



Johnny King with the state Division of Forestry, a regular ECD partner, hosted monthly logging safety classes at the district office. About 200 loggers were trained in 2024.

In June the district hosted its first "Tailgates and Tomatoes" event outside in its large

parking lot. Local producers and food trucks were on hand for the event, which also featured rain barrel, tire trough construction and campfire safety demonstrations.

A grasslands training for students was held in October at Linda Brown's Farm on Stone Run in Flatwoods.

Supervisors also made several preparations in planning for the Saltlick watershed rehabilitation project and selected an engineering firm to begin the planning phase of the project.



Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Nutrient management, exclusion fence, lime, frost seeding
- District contribution toward practices: \$57,389.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$183,898.

Greenbrier Valley Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Greenbrier Valley Conservation District (GVCD) had a busy year promoting conservation, celebrating local farmers and assisting cooperators who were impacted by severe drought.

By late December, the district had processed 21 applications and made payments of nearly \$9,100 as part of the Agricultural Enhancement Program's Exigency Program, meant to help farmers supply water to livestock during the drought.

The district recognized David Furrow of Furrow Family Farm in Waiteville in Monroe County as its 2024 West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year for the Traditional category. Furrow's cow/calf operation also features Border Cheviot sheep, rotational grazing and riparian protection of miles of streambank along Potts Creek in southeastern West Virginia. Furrow's farm was a finalist for the state-wide West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year award in the Traditional category.

The GVCD and Southern Conservation District Land Judging and Homesite Evaluation Contest was held April 23 at the Plant Materials Center in Alderson. Six teams were competing and a seventh joined for practice during the 2024 competition.

The district also hosted its 2024 Legislative and Awards Banquet on Sept. 26. The annual banquet was a good opportunity to connect with legislators representing residents within the conservation district and to celebrate individuals who made significant contributions to conservation in 2024. Sixty-one people attended the banquet.

The GVCD also took part in outreach efforts at the Cider Festival in Union in October and at Farmers Day in June, where a booth was shared with partners from the US-DA-NRCS.

WVCA employees who work regularly with the GVCD, including Angela Sawyers and Morgan Dial, also helped to staff the Agency's booth at the State Fair of West Virginia in August.



GVCD also has completed its Anthony Creek stream restoration project and is on its way to possibly getting Second Creek de-listed as an environmentally impaired stream.

The top agricultural enhancement best management practices paid out in GVCD are watering systems, exclusion fence, lime and pasture division fence. GVCD Grassland Technician Barry Level said a 29 percent cost-share rate for GVCD shows that cooperators are putting in a lot of the work and money on their own to implement agricultural best management practices, which is a good thing.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, watering systems, exclusion fence, pasture division fence
- District contribution toward practices: \$96,756.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$304,791.

Guyan Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Guyan Conservation District (GCD) supervisors and staff took part in several direct outreach events to promote the district's conservation efforts and reach new partners in 2024.

Supervisors co-hosted an open house on Dec. 6 to provide information about the assistance available to help farmers, livestock producers and forest managers in the district's six counties of Boone, Cabell, Lincoln, Logan, Mingo and Wayne counties. The open house was held at the district's Huntington office and included partners from USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) and USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA), the West Virginia Conservation Agency, Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture, West Virginia State University, Quail Forever and the area's VA hospital.

The goal was to discuss how local, state and federal programs could benefit cooperators' operations and their land. On-site demonstrations included soil testing, micro irrigation, rotational grazing fence and tree planting. About 80 people attended the successful open house.

Two high tunnel field days were held in May and June, and allowed residents to learn about crop varieties for high tunnels, trellising vegetable crops, pest ID and management, common plant and tomato diseases, managing micro-nutrients and high tunnel kits. Guests also heard from local growers about their successes.

The first high tunnel field day was held in May at Lincoln County Supervisor Ronnie Hager's Hamlin farm on

May 18. The second was held at (Boone County Supervisor Marlene) and Bill Woods' farm at Hewett on June 15.

The district has received grants through the West

Virginia Association of Conservation Districts to host two future field days in May and June of 2025 and also a pasture walk and a forestry field day. GCD will also use grant funding to create two new community gardens – one urban community garden and the second in a coalfield county.



Supervisors also sought information from their district's cooperators about problems, concerns, and successes happening in their communities. The information gathered helped the district and USDA-NRCS make decisions about program availability, funding levels, and future events.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Urban and community agriculture, heavy use area protection, lime and nutrient management.
- District contribution toward practices: \$42,795.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$72,547.

Little Kanawha Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The purchase of a debris boom for the North Fork of the Hughes River dam in Ritchie County was one major accomplishment for the Little Kanawha Conservation District in 2024.

The boom was first purchased and later, LKCD supervisors accepted a low bid in December for anchoring and installation of the boom.

As a cost-saving measure, LKCD purchased the boom directly.

Debris booms hold back large woody debris to help ensure the performance and function of a dam's riser and principal spillway outlet system.

Pacific Netting Products is holding onto the boom until it's ready for installation, and supervisors look forward to its successful installation in 2025.

The LKCD work crew has purchased a Ventrac mower, which supervisor Mike Nichols said does a great job on mowing projects. The work crew continues to help landowners and conservation districts with their projects.

LKCD's district supervisors in November also honored farmers from all five counties in the district at their annual banquet, which was held in Roane County. Recognized farmers received a jacket, plaque and were served dinner, Chairman Bob Buchanan said.

The LKCD also put forth a lot of effort to help cooperators who needed drought assistance in 2024. The Agricultural Enhancement Program's Exigency Program helped farmers provide water to livestock and also tap into city

waterlines.

The district also took part in a multi-agency education and disaster relief meeting in September in Spencer to update the public on drought relief efforts. LKCD and partners like USDA-NRCS held local work group meetings in May at the Parkersburg and the Spencer USDA Service Centers, which served to help gauge cooperators' conservation priorities and interests.

The district also co-sponsored forestry and wildlife field days in February and September in both Williamstown and Parkersburg.

Also, Bonds Creek No. 1 dam in Ritchie County is in the planning phase of a possible rehabilitation.

"We'll complete the engineering study of what to do with it and then move on to the next facet," Buchanan said.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Heavy use area protection, invasive species management, lime, pasture division fence
- District contribution toward practices: \$92,210.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$167,291.



Monongahela Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Monongahela Conservation District (MCD) had a busy year in 2024 engaging with communities in Marion, Monongalia and Preston counties to promote conservation and the district's mission.

The district hosted two Farm Safety Days in Fairmont and in Preston County in March and April. Tractor and chainsaw safety presentations were included in the Farm Safety Days, and the district partnered with the state Division of Forestry, Middletown Tractor Sales and other partners to put on the safety days.

Supervisors with the district also hosted chainsaw safety courses, including one in May at Fern-Faye Farm on Bunner Ridge in Marion County.

Also in May, the district hosted its local workgroup meeting, hearing from cooperators and partners about their priorities and the programs the district has to offer.

During the summer, McKee's Sky Ranch in Terra Alta was recognized as the district's Conservation Farm of the Year, and was entered in the statewide Farm of the Year contest in the Traditional category. Tom and Debbie McKee own and operate the farm.

Supervisors joined with state Department of Agriculture officials and West Virginia Conservation Agency staff during a visit to Mountain Harvest Farm near Morgantown, as USDA-NRCS Chief Terry Cosby and members of his staff toured the farm, which was the 2023 West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year.

In October, the district held a dam monitor training and dinner in Preston County, and a second in Marion

County in early November. Dam monitors are important partners who help keep an eye on the state's small watershed dams and can alert district supervisors and the West Virginia Conservation Agency of concerns if they arise.

The district, in its involvement with the Wes-

MonTy RC&D, also planted a pollinator plot in Mannington and Dunstan hybrid chestnut trees using grant funding.

The district also in October received an \$8,166 Community Outreach Grant from the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts (WVACD), which can be used for developing community gardens, conducting workshops, promoting climate-smart agricultural practices, and

finding solutions to improve access to healthy food.



Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, heavy use area protection, pasture division fence, exclusion fence
- District contribution toward practices: \$74,567.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$122,549.

Northern Panhandle Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Northern Panhandle Conservation District, which once again won the WV Association of Conservation Districts' Education District of the Year award, had another busy year educating the public about the many benefits of conservation.

During a dinner meeting on April 25 at the Valley Grove Community Center, attendees learned about improving their property and also about opportunities to eradicate the Tree of Heaven and the invasive spotted lanternfly.

The district's 12th Annual Women in Ag Day event was held May 7 in Moundsville, and more than 200 people learned about sourdough breadmaking, forest farming and beekeeping from guest speakers. The NPCD co-sponsored the event with the Upper Ohio Conservation District.

The district also held a farm field day on small scale farming at Eric Freeland's farm in Wellsburg on July 17. Those in attendance learned about equipment safety, urban/community gardening, and soil health.

The district in June built an apiary for the "What's the Buzz: All About Bees & Pollinators" event at the district office on June 21. It was an educational and fun-filled day that allowed attendees to rotate through four stations and learn about the importance of pollinators. State Apiarist Shanda King with the state Department of Agriculture presented on introductory beekeeping methods and pollinators' importance to the food chain. The NPCD wants to continue using its apiary as a hands-on learning tool.

The district in 2024 harvested over 850 pounds of produce, which was donated to "Feeding Body and Soul

Community Kitchen" in Moundsville and the Wheeling Soup Kitchen, through its NPCD Community Garden. John Marshall High School's Horticulture Class started the plants for the district's garden this

year, including cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbage, celery, peppers, beans, and more.

The district had a farm that was a finalist for the West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year award in the Traditional category – Dague Stock Farm in Valley Grove, owned by Fred and Mary Ellen Dague.

NPCD also launched its new website in the spring of 2024. It can be found at npcdvw.com.

Also, in July, NPCD Board Chairman Mark Fitzsimmons was inducted into the West Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Hall of Fame.



Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Pasture division fence, exclusion fence, nutrient management, and lime
- District contribution toward practices: \$46,435.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$138,406.

Potomac Valley Conservation District



2024 Highlights

The Potomac Valley Conservation District nominated the two winning farms in different categories -- Traditional and Non-Traditional – and swept the top West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year awards during a banquet in Sutton in October.

Cottage Hill Farm in Grant County (Traditional Farm) and Powder Keg Farms in Hampshire County (Non-Traditional Farm) received the awards during the West Virginia Conservation Partnership Conference luncheon on Oct. 22.

Each farm received a winning sign to display, a \$1,000 award and the use of a tractor from Middletown Tractor Sales in Fairmont, a longtime sponsor of the conservation farm awards.

Each farm demonstrated a commitment to conservation practices that protected soil, land, water and related resources.

With 73 small watershed dams, the Potomac Valley Conservation District has the highest concentration of dams in the state.

Work crews in 2024 took on significant operations and maintenance work, which included work to remove brush and sediment and also extensive outlet channel maintenance, at several of the district's dams.

The district is also in the planning stages of major

dam rehabilitation projects at New Creek No. 1, New Creek No. 17 and North/South Mill Creek No. 3 and No. 4.

Also in 2024, the Moorefield Gold team from Hardy County won the West Virginia Envirothon competition at Cedar Lakes Conference Center, then went on to compete during the international NCF-Envirothon competition against other states and countries at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, N.Y., in late July and early August.

During the October awards banquet in Sutton, the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts recognized PVCD's longtime Administrative Specialist, Nadene Jewell, with the Member at Large WVACD award.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, frost seeding, invasive species management, pasture seeding
- District contribution toward practices: \$124,979.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$206,555.

Southern Conservation District



2024 Highlights

As a part of its strong local outreach efforts, the Southern Conservation District held its first open house at the district office in Beckley on Sept. 6.

The open house, held on a sunny Friday and featuring snacks and refreshments, was an opportunity for new and existing cooperators to get information about programs and services offered by the district and also the West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA), USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA), and USDA Rural Development.

The district's rental equipment was on display at the open house, as well, and the district hopes to continue to host it in the future.

SCD also reached out to cooperators about emergency funding assistance in 2024. In April, disaster assistance was available in Fayette County and other areas of the state following severe storms that caused stream blockages and other damages. And beginning in the summer, the district regularly notified cooperators about drought assistance that was available through the WVCA's Exigency Program to help supply water for livestock.

SCD Work Crew Chief Dave Parkulo and the crew also continued working in areas around the state on small watershed dam operations and maintenance

projects, as well as other jobs.

In May, the district held its Local Workgroup Meeting to identify local natural resources priorities and criteria for USDA and also Southern Conservation District priorities.

District supervisors also joined with the Greenbrier Valley Conservation District to host its annual land judging and homesite evaluation contest on April 23 at the Plant Materials Center in Alderson. The goal of the hands-on learning day was to test students' knowledge of West Virginia soils. Six teams competed and a seventh joined for practice during the 2024 competition.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Nutrient management, lime, heavy use area protection, pond cleanout
- District contribution toward practices: \$71,901.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$165,176.

Tygarts Valley Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Tygarts Valley Conservation District's work crew experienced a busy year, with more projects coming up, and the district supervisors were busy connecting with youth and adults on topics like biochar and natural resources priorities for the five counties within the district.

Supervisors have held biochar workshops for adults, like one at the Barbour County garden market, but have also visited schools like Pickens Elementary and worked with students at Tucker Valley Elementary Middle School to share the benefits of biochar. Biochar is a carbon-rich substance used in planting that can become a habitat for beneficial soil microorganisms.

Board Chairman Donnie Tenney has also been instrumental in a statewide biochar roundtable discussion, which was first held in May. Representatives from the West Virginia Division of Forestry, the conservation districts, the WVACD, the state Department of Environmental Protection, the USDA-NRCS, the West Virginia Conservation Agency, WVU Extension, the WVU Davis College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Metzler Biochar (a private company) attended the first meeting. There, they discussed the possibility of future biochar pilot projects.

The district also received in the fall a \$8,166 grant through the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts that could be used to develop community gardens, conduct workshops, promote climate-smart agricultural practices, and find solutions to improve access to healthy food.

Treasurer Delbert Vandevander has begun oversight of the district work crew, which saw several successes in 2024. Some of the crew's work included eradicating invasive plant species on 17 farms, repairing or cleaning eight farm ponds, fencing, spring developments and hydroseeding, and jobs on watershed dams and water

channels, including mowing and general repair.



In the coming year, the work crew has five farms waiting for brush work, six pond repairs, one watershed dam repair, and two water trough installations. Through a contract with the U.S. Forest Service, the work crew also has a contract to mulch brush around public use areas, mow wildlife clearings and thin trees along the edge of clearings.

The district in 2024 also recognized three West Virginia Century Farm recipients. Seven Islands Farm, LLC, was recognized as a Sesquicentennial Farm (150 years) and Nesters Polled Herefords (operated by James B.

“Jim” Nester, Sr.) and Linger Farms, Inc. (operated by Russell T. Linger III) were recognized as Century Farms, having been in operation for more than 100 years.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, invasive species management, pollinators, urban agriculture
 - District contribution toward practices: \$78,131.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$145,233.

Upper Ohio Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Upper Ohio Conservation District was one of 30 grant recipients in the country to receive a National Association of Conservation Districts' Urban Technical Assistance Grants, which allowed the district to hire in the fall Outreach Coordinator John Jennings, who had an active end to 2024.

Jennings' role is to promote urban farming, conservation and sustainable agriculture in the UOCD counties of Pleasants, Tyler and Wetzel. He'll be providing conservation education opportunities to adults and children and will assist residents interested in gardening and urban agriculture.

The district continued to grow its community garden in the Brooklyn neighborhood of New Martinsville in 2024. (See a video about the garden on the West Virginia Conservation Agency's YouTube Channel.)

In November the district distributed more than 1,000 boxes of apples to residents of the district. The state Department of Agriculture purchased the apples, which were picked up outside the district office but also taken to local schools and food pantries and the New Martinsville library. (See bottom photo above.)

In March, the district hosted its usual Envirothon practice at the Tyler Rod and Gun Club, preparing area teams for the annual competition at Cedar Lakes in Jackson County the following month. (See top photo above.)

Also that month, the district co-hosted a Forest Management for Wildlife Habitat Field Day at Bens Run. Topics included "Forest Stand Improvement for Wild Turkey,"

"Understory Management for Deer Browse," "Invasive Species Treatment," "Tree Planting" and "Food Plots."



An Invasive Species Control Field Day was held in September, and topics included strategies to control invasives, cull tree removal and how to deal with autumn olive, Tree of Heaven, Japanese knotweed and stiltgrass, and more.

The district co-sponsored other workshops and field days throughout the year, as well.

In continuing their education and outreach efforts, the district also hosted a forestry contest and a land judging contest, including the second annual Steve McAnarney Forestry Judging Contest with partners from the state Division of Forestry, USDA-NRCS and the West Virginia Conservation Agency.

Also, Rowan Blacker of New Martinsville Elementary School was a youth poster contest winner in the grades 2-3 category.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Watering systems, invasive species management, heavy use area protection, urban agriculture, pasture division fence
- District contribution toward practices: \$31,654.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$77,357.

West Fork Conservation District



2024 Highlights

The West Fork Conservation District supervisors were proud of their Agricultural Enhancement cost-share payouts to help cooperators get best management conservation practices on the ground in 2024. The total cost of BMPs in West Fork in 2024 exceeded \$119,000. This included district contributions to cost-share and also the cooperators' own contributions.

Supervisors in 2024 also provided \$18,248 in exigency funding to West Fork cooperators to provide water for livestock and more amid the devastating 2024 drought.

West Fork supervisors Jane Cain and Larry Sponaugle also organized a Conservation Day at Cedar Creek State Park for sixth graders in Gilmer County in June. Volunteers brought live snakes and furs, a forestry trailer, bees, and gave soils and streams demonstrations to enhance students' knowledge about conservation. Cain said in a Facebook post that the students had some really good conservation experiences.

The district also held its annual Envirothon training day in April at Doddridge County Park to help prepare students for the 2024 West Virginia Envirothon competition. Several volunteers helped make the day a success.

Also, in October, Cain was awarded the prestigious Carroll Greene Award during a WVACD awards banquet in Sutton. The Greene award is the top award

given to a West Virginia conservation district supervisor in West Virginia each year. Cain is very involved in her region and with WesMonTy RC&D, the West Virginia Envirothon, and the WVACD and its State Fair committee.

In July, WFCD Supervisor William "Bill" Coffindaffer was inducted into the West Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Hall of Fame at Jackson's Mill.

Also in the spring and summer of 2024, West Fork had two West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year entries in both the Traditional and Non-Traditional categories. The Rt. 18 Farm Market in the Troy area of Gilmer County was the Non-Traditional contest entry, and the Stenger Farm in southern Harrison County competed in the Traditional category.

Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, heavy use area protection, nutrient management, watering systems
- District contribution toward practices: \$71,576.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$119,028.

Western Conservation District

2024 Highlights

The Western Conservation District (WCD) was honored to host the West Virginia Envirothon within the district in 2024 – at Cedar Lakes Conference Center in Jackson County – and will be hosting the Envirothon at Cedar Lakes once again in 2025.

WCD Supervisor Don Stephens, a member of the WV Envirothon Committee, also arranged for a tractor to be used in team photos for Envirothon participants during the opening day of the event last April.

The district took a direct role in helping cooperators deal with the 2024 drought, providing up to \$500 per cooperator in AgEP exigency cost-share assistance to help provide water for livestock and more. The district processed 182 applications and paid cooperators \$59,336.66 in cost-share for livestock water, irrigation, temporary fence, cover crops and revegetation.

WCD took on several educational and outreach initiatives in 2024. These included an open house in March to let potential cooperators know about conservation programs available to them, and also an agriculture workshop in Point Pleasant that month, which included discussion of climate-smart practices, pond management and weed control, hay testing and nutrient requirements, animal vaccinations and more. Their outreach efforts also included school visits at stops like Poca Elementary in April.

In June, supervisors held a pasture walk at Luke Hunter's farm in Ripley, which included topics of discussion around prescribed grazing, soil health and nutrient management.

Supervisor Joe Casto was selected in October as the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts'

(WVACD) Rookie Supervisor of the Year. Casto has been active within his district and with the West Virginia Envirothon, and he joined a group of WVCA staffers in Salt Lake City in October of 2023 for a National Watershed Coalition and National Association of State Conservation Agencies' joint annual meeting, where he brought home information about dams and watersheds for his district and for fellow

directors with the WVACD.

During the October awards ceremony, Gabriel Lemle also won first place in the WVACD photo contest in the "Close Up" youth photo category.

The WCD also had two farms competing for the West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year award in two categories. Tim Harper's farm in Mason County was a finalist for the Non-Traditional Conservation Farm of the Year, and Harmon Beef Stock Farm in the Buffalo area of Putnam County competed in the Traditional Farm category.



Conservation by the Numbers:

Top agricultural enhancement best management practices:

- Lime, watering systems, exclusion fence, heavy use area protection
 - District contribution toward practices: \$95,141.
- Combined district and cooperator contribution: \$169,178.

Envirothon 2024 Highlights

158
Students
participated

\$23,300

In scholarship money, awards
and advisor/school stipends

More than 3,310
Students participated since 1997

More than
\$275,500
In college scholarships
granted since 1997

Two Potomac Valley farms win the WV Conservation Farm of the Year awards for 2024

Two Potomac Valley farms received the top West Virginia Conservation Farm of the Year awards in 2024 for their efforts to protect soil, water and related resources.

Cottage Hill Farm in Grant County (Traditional Farm) and Powder Keg Farms in Hampshire County (Non-Traditional Farm) received the awards during the West Virginia Conservation Partnership Conference luncheon on Oct. 22.

W.C. “Sonny” and Carole Taylor own and operate Cottage Hill Farm and Gini and Brian LaMaster own and operate Powder Keg Farms.

Each farm received a \$1,000 award and will receive use of a tractor from Middletown Tractor Sales in Fairmont, a longtime sponsor of the conservation farm awards.

Both farms demonstrated a commitment to conservation practices that protect soil, land, water and related resources. Both are also within the Potomac Valley Conservation District.

West Virginia farms are eligible for the Conservation Farm of the Year honor after winning at the county, district and area levels. Two groups of judges visited both farms in September, as well as the other finalists’ farms, and graded them on their use of best management practices, impact on ecological systems and community-based activities.

Cottage Hill Farm was in the running with finalists the Furrow Family Farm at Waiteville in Monroe County and Dague Stock Farm at Valley Grove in Ohio County. Powder Keg Farms was in the Non-Traditional contest with In the

Nook Farm of Burnsville in Braxton County and Harper Farms at Gallipolis Ferry in Mason County.

The farms in the Traditional category are more large-scale operations that include livestock like cattle, poultry, sheep and goats, as well as fruit and vegetable farming.

The Non-Traditional category includes farms that practice

small-scale horticulture but still may incorporate some smaller livestock.

Powder Keg Farms, in High View, W.Va., is a ridgetop farm that has taken on numerous conservation practices, along with an educational component.

In their submission packet for the Conservation Farm of the Year Award, Powder Keg Farms noted that

the farm “is operated by farmers who care deeply about how food is grown, not only so it nourishes bodies, but also so it nourishes the earth.”

The farm operates three high tunnels, raised beds and other garden areas where vegetables are grown, and keeps livestock that includes some cattle, Nigerian Dwarf goats, Light Brahma chickens, Muscovy ducks and a nine-hive apiary of honeybees for pollination, honey, wax and propolis.

While the livestock provide meat, milk and eggs, their manure also helps to serve the needs of the vegetable production operation.

The conservation practices on the farm include soil conservation through no-till planting, cover crops to feed the soil, use of manure as fertilizer, using biomass such as



See **POTOMAC VALLEY FARMS** on next page

POTOMAC VALLEY FARMS from Page 22

food scraps or weeds to use as compost, and only having smaller-size animals on the farm, which reduces soil compaction. Their water conservation efforts, among many other practices, include the use of drip irrigation in the high tunnels, spreading a mulch around plants that conserves moisture, reduces field evaporation, prevents weeds and rebuilds soil fertility, and protecting creeks and ponds with generous vegetative buffers.

The LaMasters' many conservation efforts also include using sunlight efficiently with the high tunnels, efforts to conserve old, rare and heirloom seeds, and also practices to conserve the surrounding forestland and wildlife around the farm.

The educational side of the farm includes teaching children how to grow vegetables and raise animals, a community program where locals in the Hampshire County area help with work on the farm and then go home with vegetables, and a missions-based program where missionaries or individuals from other countries learn about the LaMasters' farming methods and take it back home to their countries.

A propagation house/classroom workspace on the farm helps the farm operators and educators like Stephanie Stevens fulfill both the conservation practices and the educational aspects of Powder Keg Farms.

Cottage Hill Farm, in Petersburg, is a 1,000-acre purebred Hereford cow/calf operation that also holds six broiler houses.

Sonny Taylor has implemented numerous conservation practices on the farm over many years, including no-till planting, cover crops, nutrient management, prescribed grazing and rotational grazing of cattle, and wildlife and forest friendly practices.

By rotating cattle through multiple paddocks, and allowing areas of the farm to "rest" more than 21 days, Taylor has extended his grazing season and cut back on the date each year he would need to start feeding hay.

His use of contour strips in hillside crop fields has slowed surface water runoff, which reduces erosion and ultimately improves water quality. He was an early user of phosphorous-based nutrient application rates to protect water quality, and also served on a Governor's Water Quality Committee, due to his early adoption of conservation practices.

He took on critical area planting around the poultry houses, and also used soil samples and a nutrient management plan to properly spread nutrients, which helps protect water quality. He also built a waste storage facility, or littershed, before there was cost-share funding available to provide financial assistance. He's also taken on energy efficiency efforts, using attic insulation, lights, heaters and doors, in the poultry houses.

The Taylors are very active in their community, having served on various farm-related boards and committees, in 4-H leadership roles and they have opened their farm up to research projects and field days in collaboration with WVU Extension.

Brad Smith of WVU Extension told judges that the Taylors and other volunteers' involvement in a research project helped West Virginia develop the voluntary programs that are helping the state meet its goals to protect the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

In 2019, Carole Taylor also received a West Virginia Women in Agriculture award. Cottage Hill Farm also received a Family Farm Environmental Excellence Award at the 2007 International Poultry Expo. Sonny Taylor also served for more than 40 years as a district supervisor on the Potomac Valley Conservation District.



Far left: A handful of cows are among the diverse live-stock at Powder Keg Farms.

Left: A lone tree on the hillside at Cottage Hill Farm.

WATERSHED PROJECTS from Page 2

maintenance work done that helped to reclaim their “footprint” and get them back in their proper condition, as required by the state Department of Environmental Protection’s Dam Safety division.

“With the available funds this year in the Potomac Valley, we were able to really reclaim the footprint of the dams as required by the (WVDEP’s) dam safety rule, to include removal of woody growth near gutters, adjacent abutments, auxiliary spillways and constructed outlet channels,” said WVCA Engineer Levi Cyphers. “Concurrent outlet channel work included restoring design capacity through sediment removal.”

Crews were busy last spring and summer mulching brush, removing woody overgrowth from the dams and also built-up sediment. That was in addition to regular mowing of the dams, which is common from spring through fall.

Another project in the Potomac Valley Conservation District was a regrade of the auxiliary spillway (ASW) at Patterson Creek No. 27 dam, which was necessary to alleviate man-made damages caused by the ASW being used as a parking lot for fishing access. A new barrier has been set up to still allow for public access to fishing, but it will keep vehicles off the auxiliary spillway.

Progress made on other major projects in 2024 include:

North Fork of the Hughes River debris boom

The Little Kanawha Conservation District in 2024

purchased a debris boom and also accepted a low bid for anchoring and installation of the boom for the North Fork of the Hughes River dam in Ritchie County. Installation is slated for the spring of 2025. As a cost-saving measure, LKCD purchased the boom directly. Debris booms hold back large woody debris to help ensure the performance and function of a dam’s riser and principal spillway outlet system.

Warm Springs No. 7 dam

A design contract has been awarded for Warm Springs No. 7 dam in Morgan County, needed to make permanent repairs to correct an internal embankment erosion problem, and also to bring the dam up to current dam safety standards. Bids for construction are expected to go out in the fall of 2025.

Upper Buffalo No. 39 seep

A seep has been investigated at Upper Buffalo No. 39 dam in Marion County. The investigation included soil and rock testing, piezometer installation and a dye-trace study. Repairs will come later.

Trash bars at Wheeling Creek No. 23 and Wheeling Creek No. 25

Trash bars were installed on the upper stage of the risers at both Wheeling Creek No. 23 dam and Wheeling Creek No. 25 dam in Marshall County. Trash bars and trash racks block large, often woody debris and prevent it from clogging a riser structure’s intakes. Properly functioning risers allow a dam to function properly.



***Far left:** A design contract has been awarded for repairs to Warm Springs No. 7 dam in Morgan County to bring it up to current dam safety standards. **Left:** Investigation into a seep at Upper Buffalo No. 39 in Marion County in early 2024.*

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