



Shore Conserver

Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District

promoting locally led conservation

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November 2023

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2023 Conservation Awards

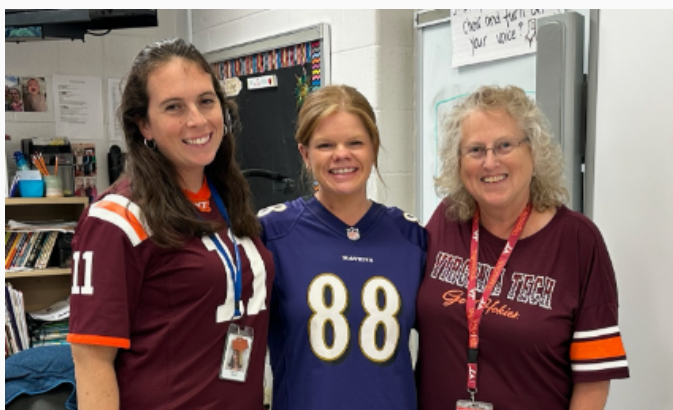
On October 24th, the District held its 2023 awards banquet. The following awards were presented to some very deserving folks

2023 Conservation Educator Award

Kathy Henley a 5th grade teacher at Accawmacke Elementary School is this year's recipient of the Conservation Educator Award. Kathy has been teaching for a number of years and came to the job naturally as she came from a family of teachers. In her interview she stated that "As a student I always helped classmates with math and other subjects so the love of teaching was always in me. When my students get excited about learning and the light bulb goes off, it inspires me to continue in my career path."

She has been active in many of the hands on professional development opportunities that there are on the shore for environmental education. She has attended "Teacher Camp" through the Nature Conservancy which is a five day program where teachers explore many aspects of the natural environment of the Eastern Shore. She was also a participant in the Research Experience for Teachers at the UVA CRC in Oyster this past summer.

When asked about the important of environmental education, Kathy replied "We only have one Earth. If we don't take care of it, there won't be an earth left for future generations. We have to instill the love of our world in our students so they will want to protect it. This love and respect is encouraged with hands-on exploration and involvement in nature. Children can fall in love with nature in many different ways. It is important to get our children out in nature and build their love and respect for our beautiful Eastern Shore.



The 5th grade team at Accawmacke Elementary. Mrs. Cline, Miss Holland, and Mrs. Henley.



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2023 Conservation Awards

2023 Conservation Forester Award

The Conservation Forester Award recognizes someone who goes above and beyond to enhance forest health, wildlife habitat, and to protect water quality. Nominated by the VA Department of Forestry Area Office, this year's recipient is Walter Potter of Whitehall Farm, near Pungoteague.

The forest stands on the farm are managed using traditional forest management practices to benefit wildlife habitat for hunting, timber production, and aesthetics. The tract is a Stewardship Forest and Virginia Tree Farm.



The most recent practice conducted was a precommercial thinning in 2021. Precommercial thinning is done to reduce stocking in young loblolly pine stands and improve growing conditions. The results of this precommercial thinning can be viewed from Harborton Road, close to its intersection with Burton Road.

Bill's tract received a stewardship forest designation and is a certified Tree Farm. We commend Bill for his outstanding accomplishments in forestry conservation and management.

2023 Conservation Partner Award

This year the District is recognizing a conservation partner who works with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to enhance wildlife habitat and to protect water quality. Nominated by the NRCS Accomack Office, the 2023 Conservation Partner Award is presented to Chase Colmorgen, a Farm Bill Biologist with Duck's Unlimited. This award recognizes Chase's outstanding efforts in wildlife conservation and management.

Since 2019, work in the Eastern Shore of Virginia included 42 one-on-one correspondences with landowners and of these, 21 have signed up and have either completed a project or are in-process to complete a project through NRCS. Approximately 11 acres of wetlands have been restored through the Black Duck Program, with more acres pending design and construction



Chase's outreach work has included public workshops and a local radio interview with NRCS to promote the program. Chase & Ducks Unlimited are committed to assisting with NRCS programs and the Black Duck Program for the foreseeable future.

2023 Conservation Awards

2023 Conservation Farmer Award

Each year the District acknowledges a local farmer who regularly applies best management practices to improve water quality and promote soil and water conservation. This year, the District's 2023 Conservation Farmer Award is presented to Tommy and Tom David of New Church.

Tom Davis was a born farmer. He grew up helping his father and grandfather and acquired a love for the land. He knew at a young age that this was the life he wanted to live. Tommy Davis was also raised on his family's farm near New Church in Accomack County, VA. He is a 5th generation Davis farmer. Tom began driving the tractors and equipment and even the combine at the age of 8!. He lives on the same farm land that was purchased by his great grandfather during the closing years of the Great Depression.

The Davis's are grain farmers now & grow wheat, soybeans and corn. They practice no-till farming exclusively with minimal turbo till use. Striving for maximum residue and minimal soil disturbance, a special chopper header has been added to maximize residue cover on fields. They participate in the District's annual cover crop programs and plant cover crops of vetch, Barley & winter wheat to reduce erosion and nitrogen leaching as well as provide a good residue base for the next field crop. Besides planting cover crops, the Davis's maintain 25ft buffers around field edges with streams or sensitive areas. Clover is planted to help reduce crop loss and to support local wildlife. The Davis's also maintain a current nutrient management plan with the District.

Tommy enjoys spending his free time with his wife and kids. His father, Tom, believes that there is no better way to raise a family than on a working farm and he has instilled that work ethic into Tommy. He lives by the words, "Once a farmer always a farmer!". The staff and Board of the Eastern Shore SWCD would like to honor Tommy and Tom Davis of Davis Farms with the Conservation Farmer Award for their tireless conservation efforts. Congratulations!



2023 Conservation Awards

2022 Conservation Stewardship Award

The District would like to acknowledge deserving landowners who participated in the VCAP program to improve water quality on the Eastern Shore. This year, the District's 2023 Conservation Stewardship Award is presented to Don and Karen Smith.

Karen Smith was born and raised near Cleveland, OHIO. She is a master gardener, sings, and plays piano in her church choir. Don Smith was born in Rhode Island and his parents moved to Norfolk in his early years. He has been an active member of the Portsmouth Wetlands Board for the past five years.

When the Smiths purchased property at the end of Occohannock Neck in 2004, they were aware that it had some bank undercutting and erosion issues that would have to be addressed but over the next 16 years they were working full- time and building a house on the property. By 2022, it became apparent to them that something would have to be done soon. Trees along the waterfront began to topple over as a direct result of the erosion and undercutting. The Smiths read an article in the Eastern Shore Post about VCAP and contacted the District in August of 2022 to investigate the possibility of installing a Living Shoreline practice on the property.

The 110 linear foot sill line was marked with poles. After consulting with VIMS, it was decided to construct the sill using oyster bags in place of rock sills. The bags were placed on a mat of Geotech fabric for stability. Sand was brought in to fill what was lost to erosion and spartina alterniflora plugs were planted.

Most VCAP Living Shorelines rely on professional engineers for plan drawing and private consultants for navigating the hurdles of the approval process. The Smiths did the research themselves and even drafted their own plans through DCR guidance! The Smiths were fortunate in being able to act as their own engineer and project consultant.



Don and Karen Smith

This is a picture of the completed living shoreline at high tide



2023 Conservation Awards

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation 2022 Clean Water Farm Award

The Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries have 11,684 miles of shoreline—more than the entire U.S. west coast. Approximately 51 billion gallons of water flow into the Bay each day. It is important we all do our part to keep our waterways clean so we are pleased to recognize farmers who are good stewards of our soil and water resources. The Clean Water Farm award, is a State award sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, given to Virginia farmers who implement nutrient management plans and are exemplary in their protection of the State's soil and water resources. This year's Clean Water Farm Award is presented to Shelton Alley.



Shelton settled on the Eastern Shore in 2010 in a home surrounded by approximately 100 acres of farmland, 100 acres of marshland, and 100 acres of woodlands. Prior to calling the Eastern Shore home, he grew up in Northern Virginia and spent 10 years living in Puerto Rico. He worked with his uncle on their family farm raising cattle and growing coffee, plantains, teak, and limes.

Shelton participates in District cost share programs and maintains a crop rotation a corn, soybean, wheat and cover crop in hopes to turn his farm over to the next generation in better shape than when he acquired it. Using this rotation, he hopes to deplete the Eastern Shore's excessive weed bank. His lightweight UTV pull behind sprayer allows for precision spraying practices while limiting soil compaction and disturbance. Shelton uses no-till equipment to reduce soil erosion and nutrient runoff into the sea and freshwater waterways.

Along with farming, Shelton is an avid steward of the environment. When he first moved into his home here, his first undertaking was controlling the invasive phragmites on the marsh. He observed the diamondback terrapins struggling to return to the marsh after laying eggs on mainland. Using manual and chemical methods, he has cleared practically all of the invasive species and the native grasses have returned.

One of the irrigation ponds of his property was built in the 1950's and is full of wildlife. He quickly found that elvers, young eels, utilized the freshwater pond during their maturation process but struggled to return to the sea when they were biologically ready. He constructed a form of ladder that allows them an easier enter and exit into the pond during higher tides. Avian species are also very important to Mr. Alley, he has planted button bushes and built nesting boxes for wood ducks. He has created soft edges along his property lines for quail habitats and planted food sources to allow for the quail to have food for all four seasons.

Education & Outreach Happenings

Ag Camp at the Barrier Islands Center

Ag Camp has been so popular that we added Junior Ag Camp to the program this year. Held in conjunction with Northampton 4-H, students learned about how agriculture affects them and got to spend some time with farm animals.

Twelve students participated in Junior Ag Camp which was held over 2 half days on July 27th and 28th. Participants interacted with the farm animals, learned about parts of the plant and edible parts of the plant, made a mini-greenhouse, matched farm animals to offspring, made bread in a bag, and made ice cream in a bag.

Fourteen students participated in Ag Camp which was held on August 1st and 2nd. During these busy two days making candles, learning about cotton, understanding that all food does not come from a grocery store or factory, making bread in a bag, made pollinator bombs, and tie-dyed pillowcases among other activities. The grand finale was making ice cream in a bag!

Sign-ups for the 4th Annual Ag Camp in the summer of 2024 will be in the Barrier Islands Center newsletter.



Education & Outreach Happenings

Accomack and Northampton Farm Tour

On September 20 and 21, 2022, 3rd graders in Accomack and Northampton Counties participated in Farm Tour. Coordinated by Farm Bureau and VT Extension, the district participated in presentations utilizing the Life Underground Mobile Classroom. More than 450 students and adults in the two counties were introduced to a variety of agricultural related topics.



Educational Programming

Fall has been busy with classroom programs, fairs, fall festivals, and parent universities. The district provides environmental and agricultural education for all ages (pre-K through adult) under the guidance of our Education Director, Julie Head. Topics range from the water cycle to reproductive parts of the flower to scientific investigation to investigations with wind power. If you are interested in hearing more about programs the District has to offer please contact Julie at julie.head@esscd.org



Eastern Shore Regional Science Fair Returns in 2024



Like so many things, the Eastern Shore Regional Science Fair was a victim of COVID19. Robin Rich-Coates, former ESSWCD board chair, played a significant role in the science fair. To continue her legacy, plans are under way to bring back the regional science fair.

In 2024 the Regional Science fair will be held on April 20, 2024. The VIMS research facility in Wachapreague has graciously offered to host the competition.

More details will be coming soon. If you have any questions feel free to contact Julie Head at julie.head@esswcd.org or Erin Morgan, Northampton 4-H agent at esill@vt.edu.

The Commonwealth of VA supports the Eastern Shore SWCD through financial and administrative assistance provided by the VA Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Eastern Shore SWCD programs, activities and employment opportunities are available to all people regardless of disability, race or color, national origin, traits historically associated with race or religion including traits associated with hair, religion or creed, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy status, childbirth or related medical conditions, marital status, veteran status, whistleblower status or genetic information.