

# Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District

*Annual Report FY2007-2008*



## **Directors**

Richard Chaffin, Chair  
Tommy Watson, Vice Chair  
Scott Baker, Director  
Corey Crompton, Director  
John Hopkins, Jr., Director  
John Morris, Director  
Denzil Barker, Associate Director  
John R. Dixon, Associate Director  
Homer Bauserman, Associate Director

## **Staff**

Terri Bollinger, Administrative Assistant/Treasurer  
John Graham, TMDL Residential Manager  
Elizabeth Watson, TMDL Conservation Technician  
Gavin Sanderlin, District Manager/Conservation Specialist  
Sharon Stinnette, Education Specialist



Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District is co-located with the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service

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## **Who We Are**

The Peaks of Otter SWCD is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia that serves both Bedford County and City, and is dedicated to the protection and wise use of soil and water resources. The District is one of 47 conservation districts across the Commonwealth. The District Board consists of six directors, four of whom are elected (two from the County and two from the City) and two who are appointed. Additionally, three associate directors serve on the board. The Directors serve without pay and contributed more than 600 volunteer hours during the year. The Board of Directors' monthly meetings are held the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM at the USDA Service Center. Board meetings are open to the general public.

Income is derived from grants through the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, the County of Bedford and the City of Bedford. Additional income is received from rental of conservation tillage equipment to area farmers. The District's FY07-08 annual expenditure was \$241,903, which covered all administrative and educational operations of the District.

This Annual Report is designed to inform Bedford citizens of the District's role in managing and protecting Bedford's abundant natural resources. In keeping with its mission and vision, the District administers the Virginia Agricultural BMP (Best Management Practices) Cost-Share Program, and works with partner agencies to achieve its goals. Water quality and quantity, soil loss through erosion, and the preservation of open space continue to be the District's focus. The District also provides education to the adult and youth populations about natural resource conservation. Articles and public service announcements are routinely provided to local newspapers to publicize conservation opportunities. The District maintains a portable exhibit and informative literature for use at community events.

## Conservation Education

Through a combination of workshops, tours, community events, and school programs, hundreds of adults and youth participated in conservation based activities. All District school programs were designed to support the state SOLs and the curriculum of the school district. Over 850 area youth received direct instruction through programs delivered to the Bedford school system.



The Enviroscape model is a useful tool for teaching students about land use and non-point source pollution.

The District hosted the 2008 Area V Envirothon at the Skelton 4-H Center at Smith Mountain Lake. **Envirothon** is a competition for teams of high school students to test their knowledge of natural resource management in an outdoor setting. In addition to coordinating the 2008 event, the District sponsored a team from Liberty High School. Organized as the Envirothon Club, the team prepared throughout the school year, culminating with a training event at the Claytor Center that was both intensive and fun. Liberty was one of five teams to participate from Area V, which includes 10 soil and water conservation districts in south-central Virginia.

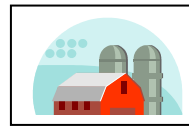


Two members of the LHS Envirothon team with the display the team used for the Oral Presentation during the competition.

### Annual District Educational Outreach

- **Scholarship:** Through the District, the \$1,000 Soil & Water Conservation Society, Virginia Chapter, scholarship was awarded to Benjamin W. Turpin, a 2008 graduate of Jefferson Forest High School.
- **Youth Conservation Camp:** Each year the District offers sponsorship for two campers to attend Virginia Tech for a week of outdoor learning experiences.
- **Stewardship Week:** Supporting the theme, “Water is Life”, the District distributed 775 booklets to every 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in 13 elementary schools. Other materials were supplied to area churches and civic organizations.
- **Youth Forestry Camp:** In support of the Virginia Department of Forestry, the District annually offers sponsorship for two campers.
- **Master Naturalists:** The District helps train the Central Virginia Chapter of Master Naturalists each year at the Claytor Nature Study Center.

An **agriculture tour** in August was sponsored by the Bedford Agriculture Council and Virginia Cooperative Extension, in cooperation with local organizations, producers and retailers. Over 850 participants gathered at historic Poplar Forest to browse interesting exhibits and enjoy demonstrations and refreshments.



Teaming up with Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the District co-sponsored a **conservation tour** in October. The tour included sites which demonstrate good stewardship of natural resources, with special emphasis on land use and water quality.

The first stop was the Bedford Wastewater Treatment Plant where wastewater is treated biologically so it can be safely discharged to local waterways.



In cooperation with Bedford 4-H, the District brought the **Water Wizard Van** to the community. Over a two-week period the van visited 8 elementary schools, targeting the 4<sup>th</sup> grade SOLs and reaching 475 students. Seventeen volunteers came from other organizations, including the Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, Virginia Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners, the Western Virginia Water Authority, and the Smith Mountain Lake Association.

The Water Wizard program serves as a traveling classroom that teaches children about the nature of water and the importance of water conservation.



At the Boxley Materials Company in Blue Ridge, the group observed the quarry that produces stone products for a wide variety of uses.

At Johnson’s Orchard & Peaks of Otter Winery visitors were shown an alternative watering system that is powered by solar energy.



**Conservation Education.....continued**



The Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District recognized outstanding conservation efforts by Bedford citizens at the **annual awards banquet**, held in November.

- Forestry Conservation Award: *Buffalo Creek Ranch*
- Wetlands Restoration Award: *Gardner Simpkins, Jr.*
- Conservation Education Award: *Claytor Nature Study Center*
- Clean Water Farm Award: *W.P. Johnson*
- Conservation Farm of the Year: *Johnson's Orchard*

Partnering with Bedford Area Master Gardeners, the District hosted a **rain barrel workshop** at the Bedford Farmers Market. Mindful of last year's drought, 33 participants outfitted their rain barrels and received information on water conservation.



Peaks of Otter SWCD provided an informative exhibit and groundwater demonstration at the **Earth Day** celebration at Liberty High School, attended by over 550 students.

**Water Quality and TMDLs**

A Total Maximum Daily Load or TMDL describes the amount of pollution a stream can receive and still meet federal and state water quality standards. A program funded by a federal grant and administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation is designed to reduce bacterial loading in the Big Otter River watershed. The District participates in this program through residential and agricultural cost-share assistance to citizens, and by conducting water monitoring of targeted streams.

**TMDL Residential Best Management Practices**

At the close of the fiscal year \$123,185.33 in cost-share assistance had been paid to participants to upgrade residential septic systems. The majority of these properties were located in the Sheep Creek, Elk Creek, Buffalo Creek and Little Otter watersheds, which are targeted sub-watersheds of the Big Otter River. Through this program, six straight pipes were identified and replaced with traditional on-site septic systems. The TMDL cost-share program funded repair of 35 septic systems and 25 pump-outs. Additionally, the program assisted two properties in hooking onto public sewer. The District continues to work with the public service authorities to reach long-term solutions for the more densely populated areas of the watershed.

**TMDL Agricultural Best Management Practices**

By the end of the fiscal year, 65 projects had been completed under the TMDL program, with \$353,955.67 in cost-share assistance paid to agricultural producers who implemented Best Management Practices. These practices were installed in the Little Otter, Upper Big Otter, Big Otter, and North Otter watersheds. Water quality is expected to improve with 2,958 livestock animals excluded from 29.34 miles of stream bank in Bedford County. Once the stream banks are protected, growth of natural vegetation will help to protect streams from runoff and further enhance water quality.



Bacterial water monitoring is conducted monthly by the District using the Coliscan Easygel method.

**Other District Functions**

The District has two Haybuster no-till sod drills that it rents to Bedford agricultural producers. This year, 1,402 acres were planted with the two drills. The drills are used to re-seed pasture and hay stands as well as plant small grain cover crops and cereal grains.

District staff participates in ongoing professional development. Training included: nutrient management planning, agricultural waste management, BMP installation and program management, conservation planning, wildlife habitat conservation, pesticide use and application, invasive species management, conservation landscaping, stream habitat assessment, and environmental educators leadership training.

**Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program**

During FY07-08, the Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District paid participants \$229,716 to install agricultural BMPs. Here are some highlights:

- 42 agricultural producers participated in the program
- 27 of these producers were first-time participants
- 18 grazing land protection practices were installed, including alternative livestock watering systems
- Livestock were excluded from 5.2 miles of stream bank
- Cover crops were planted on 690 acres of cropland
- One animal waste control facility was installed
- Nutrient management was implemented on 1,024 acres
- The District wrote nutrient management plans for three Bedford area producers

Through the USDA’s Conservation Reserve Program, the District worked with 19 agricultural producers, with these results:

- Livestock were excluded from 19 miles of stream bank
- 193 acres of riparian buffer were established along streams, with hardwood tree seedlings planted on 68 of these acres and warm season grasses on 14 acres

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Livestock walkway connects pastures and protects stream banks

**Did You Know?** With the Western Virginia Land Trust, the District is co-holder of four conservation easements in Bedford County, two of which were recorded during FY 07-08. These easements protect 402 acres of land from further subdivision and protect over 244 acres of riparian area in perpetuity.

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