



Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District

2012

Annual Report

Preserving the natural and cultural heritage of Buncombe County



2012 marks the 75th anniversary of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in North Carolina, and the Buncombe SWCD has been a leader in natural resource conservation for sixty-one of those years. Our conservation program has grown stronger as the population of Buncombe County has grown and the challenges of conserving our soil, water, and related natural resources have become greater. Soil and Water Conservation Districts are at the center of the North Carolina Soil and Water Conservation Partnership. In addition to Soil and Water Conservation Districts, members of the partnership are the N. C. Association of SWCD's; the N. C. Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation; the N. C. Soil and Water Conservation Commission; the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the N. C. Division of Soil and Water Conservation; and the N. C. Conservation District Employee's Association. Operating within a large and diversified partnership allows the Buncombe SWCD to deliver a wide variety of local, state, and federal programs and services to the citizens of the county.

The 2012 Annual Report is a brief summary of the accomplishments of the Buncombe SWCD for the fiscal year that ran from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012. During FY2012, the District completed the deliverables on a large EPA Section 319 grant, and participated in a new program, the N. C. Agriculture Water Resources Assistance Program for the first time.

The Board and staff of the Buncombe SWCD thanks our partners and the citizens of the county who worked with us during the fiscal year. We are especially grateful to the Buncombe County Commissioners for their financial support, and the assistance provided by the County Manager's office, and other county departments.

Board of Supervisors, Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation

Soil and Water

—*Yours for Life*

Buncombe SWCD Mission

The Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation Districts' mission is to conserve the soil, water, and related natural resources of Buncombe County by providing education, information, technical assistance, and economic incentives to county citizens and by establishing new programs in concert with other appropriate agencies and organizations to meet changing needs.

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CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Maria Wise worked with several conservation easements during the year, one of which was a 80 acre easement donation on the Fortune farm in Broad River which closed in April, 2012. This was accomplished with \$13,000 in transaction costs covered by Buncombe County. The easement is valued at \$240,000. The Kirstein farm, adjacent to the Fortune farm is also being placed in an easement. This project is nearing an end and will add another 250 acres to the conservation easement program. All surveying and easement drafting on the 118 acre Merschat property in Barnardsville is complete with a closing date set for Sept 2012. The Kirstein, Fortune, and Merschat properties were all donated easements with Buncombe County picking up the transaction costs. The combined conservation easement value of those properties is over 1 million dollars. The Buncombe County Commissioners also approved transaction costs for a 230 acre working farm in Leicester in last year. This farm owned by Lynn Brown has received funding from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture Farmland Preservation Trust Fund and The Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. Buncombe County's \$35,000 donation to help cover transaction costs leveraged over \$600,000 for the purchase of development rights. That easement process will be on-going beginning in August 2012 and will close in 2014. In Sandy Mush, Dave Everett acquired 5 more acres adjacent to his conservation easement and rolled that acreage into his easement.

EVAD/VAD

The Buncombe SWCD assists the Agricultural Advisory Board with administration of the county's Voluntary Agricultural Districts program and the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts program.

The Ag Advisory Board voted to include the **Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District** (EVAD) as a Farmland Preservation tool that landowners can use. This program offers all the same incentives that the Voluntary Ag District does, but with the more restrictive 10 year non-revocable agreement not to develop, the landowners qualify for 90% cost-share for Soil and Water Conservation District programs. Gary and Leisa Roberts were the first landowners to take advantage of this new program and enrolled 71.53 acres in Alexander. Lynn Brown soon followed by enrolling 229 acres in Newfound.

During the 2012 fiscal year, 14 new farms were added to the **Voluntary Agricultural Districts** program, and new applications approved totaled 813.47 acres. Previous applications approved totaled 27,114.74 acres. However, 17 farms were withdrawn from the program for various reasons for a total of 1,662.76 acres removed. This resulted in a loss of acres in the program of 849.29 acres. As of June 30, 2012 there were **359 farms** in the program totaling **26,632.70** acres.



NEWFOUND CREEK WATERSHED PROJECT

Improving water quality in the Newfound Creek Watershed remains a high priority for the District even as grant funding for the project coordinator position and for best management practices has ended. The \$450,200 EPA Section 319 grant, which began in 2008, was closed out August 31, 2011. The grant funded the salary for a watershed coordinator and the installation of best management practices on 29 properties during the 3-year grant period. The watershed coordinator also worked with the NC Agricultural Cost Share program, and with landowners who did not receive cost-share for installing best management practices. The project's major accomplishments for FY12 (July & August, 2011) were:



<u>Installed Practice</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Stream Protection System	3
Farm Access Road/Trail	1,450 l. feet
Critical Area Treatment	.25 acres
Bio-Retention Basin	1

Total BMP's installed for grant period:

<u>Installed Practice</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Riparian Buffer	0.45 acres
Stream Protections System	10
Farm Access Road/Trail	2,280 l. feet
Streambank Stabilization	1,000 l. feet
Critical Area Planting	1.4 acres
Repairs of Failing Septic Systems	16
Cropland Conversion to Grass	10.7 acres
Bio-Retention Basin	1
Level Spreader	1
Livestock Trail & Walkway	520 l. feet

Total Grant Expenditures (\$400,859.82):

Salary & Operating = \$119,608.23

Best Management Practice Installation = \$ 281,251.59



NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL COST SHARE PROGRAM

District Supervisors

James Coman, *Chair*
 Chase Hubbard, *Vice-Chair*
 Lynn Bonham, *Secretary*
 Elise Israel, *Treasurer*
 David Snelson, *Member*

Associate Supervisors

Gary Roberts

District Staff

Gary Higgins
District Director
 Taira Lance
Administrative Assistant
 Anthony Dowdle
Soil Conservationist/NCACSP
 Renee Ray
Soil Conservationist/NCACSP & Education Coordinator
 Maria Wise
Soil Conservationist & Farmland Preservation

NRCS Staff

Loring McIntyre
District Conservationist



The North Carolina Agriculture Cost Share Program reimburses farmers for seventy-five percent of the cost of installing measures that improve off-site water quality. These cost-shared measures or “best management practices” must meet current USDA/ NRCS standards and are designed by District and NRCS personnel. During the FY012 fiscal year, District cost-share staff Anthony Dowdle and Renee Ray developed 11 contracts totaling \$86,479. When installed, with the landowner’s twenty-five percent contribution, and one landowner contributing ten percent, a total of \$105,244 worth of best management practices will be “on the ground” and protecting water quality. The District worked with 7 landowners to complete BMPs from portions of 7 contracts. The total cost-share on these projects was \$ 26,331. Landowner contributions totaled \$6,583 bringing the total value of BMPs installed to \$32,913. Installed BMPs are listed below:

Best Management Practice	Planned	Installed
Tanks	18	7
Wells	3	1
Fencing to exclude livestock from streams	6987ft	2847ft
Stream Crossing	2	



The District is required to conduct an annual spot check of 5% of all active NCASCP contracts which is done by staff and members of the Board of Supervisors. The goal of the spot check is to determine whether cost-shared BMPs are being maintained for their intended purpose. This year’s spot check was conducted in May of 2012 on five farms in the county. All spot-checked items were in good condition and functioning as they were intended.

CONSERVATION SEED DRILL

During the 2012 fiscal year, the SWCD’s seed drill was rented 15 times and used to renovate and plant 198 acres of pasture/hayland. The seed drill enables farmers to plant grass without tilling the soil, thereby decreasing soil erosion and was given to the SWCD by the N.C. Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation.



ECOSYSTEM ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM SUPPORT

The Buncombe SWCD has an agreement with the N. C. Division of Soil and Water Conservation that enables the District to provide technical assistance for the design and installation of agricultural best management practices on farms that are participating in the Ecosystem Enhancement Program. Typically, this involves designing and overseeing construction for livestock trails, stream crossings, livestock exclusion, and alternative watering supplies. In PY12, the District worked on EEP projects in Leicester on Newfound Creek and in upper Hominy on South Hominy Creek.

Agricultural Best Management Practices planned and installed on EEP projects in FY12 include:

Installed Practice	Amount
Livestock watering tanks	6
Livestock exclusion	4100 ft of fencing
Livestock Exclusion from streams	19204 ft of fencing

Total EEP Expenditures: \$109,235.00



NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL WATER RESOURCES ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In 2010, the State Legislature passed legislation establishing the N. C. Agricultural Water Resource Assistance Program (AgWRAP). The purpose of the AgWRAP is to:

- 1) identify opportunities to increase water use efficiency, availability and storage
- 2) implement best management practices (BMPs) to conserve and protect water resources
- 3) increase water use efficiency
- 4) increase water storage and availability for agricultural purposes.

The state funded the program for the first year at one million dollars, with \$340,000 going to new agricultural pond construction; \$510,000 District allocations; and \$150,000 for engineering assistance. Applications for new agricultural ponds are prioritized at the state level, and the deadline for getting those to SWCD was February 1, 2012. The FY2012 Buncombe SWCD AgWRAP contracts and allocations are as follows:

Contract	Number of Contracts	Allocation
New Pond Construction	1	\$15,000.00
Well & Irrigation Installation	1	\$8,186.00



COMMUNITY CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCAP)

The total CCAP allocation for the 2012 fiscal year was \$4,189, and an additional \$3,038 was added to that allocation from left over CCAP funds. The total of \$7,225 was allocated and installed to four different CCAP contracts.



EROSION CONTROL/STORMWATER PLAN REVIEWS



The Erosion Control Ordinances of both Buncombe County and the City of Asheville require that erosion control plans submitted to them be reviewed by the Soil and Water Conservation District. The District staff makes a site visit to each project, and does assessments of the soil conditions and reviews the seeding specifications. A written reply is sent to the either the city or the County for each plan received by the District office. The review process by the District averages about two and one-half hours for each plan.

NATIVE GRASS STAND A SUCCESS

This project has been two years in the making, The Buncombe Soil and Water Conservation District is proud to announce the completion of a Native warm season grass project. Funding was provided by The NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation with grant money from the Altria Group. The project has taken two years and a lot of work and dedication on the part of the landowner, Mr. David Everett. Through Mr. Everett's efforts, we now have a successful

stand of Switchgrass in Buncombe County. The District would also like to thank Mr. Bill Yarborough Regional Agronomist with NCDA &CS for all his time and patience as well in working through the problems as this project has gone on. This project goal was to try and establish Native Warm Season Grass stands at several locations across the state. Native grasses require less fertilizer than cool seasons like fescue. At the same time they produce a large volume of forage in the hot dry times of the year when the cool seasons have gone dormant. This is one of the first successful stands in Western North Carolina. This is a project that everyone involved in is very proud of and something we hope can be accomplished on other sites in the future. There are funds available for cropland conversion, if you have cropland you would like to seed down to native or non-native grasses contact BC SWCD.



FEDERAL PROGRAMS
USDA—NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

<u>Program</u>	<u>Contracts</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	4	\$ 24,314
Conservation Stewardship Program	1	\$ 1,260
Conservation Reserve Program	2	
Conservation Planning		777 acres



Conservation Applied

Cropland	131 acres
Water Quality	842 acres
Grazing Land	650 acres
Wildlife Habitat	75 acres
Forestland	1,145 acres



CONSULTATIONS

Citizens of Buncombe County often access the technical expertise of the District and NRCS staff through various types of consultations. Consultations provide staff an opportunity to provide assistance to clients in several ways. A consultation can happen when a client visits the office to access various types of information such as brochures, soils data, soils maps, flood plain maps, topographic maps, archived aerial photographs, or other information. These same types of information can be transmitted by mail or in some cases electronically as well. Clients can also obtain the information they need from meetings with staff, via e-mail, or telephone conversations. In many cases, a site visit may be necessary to properly assess a resource problem and arrive at solutions. All these types of client assistance are grouped in a category called “consultations”. In the 2012 fiscal year, the District and NRCS staffs estimate they assisted clients through **275 consultations**.

DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST LORING MCINTYRE RETIRES

NRCS District Conservationist Loring McIntyre retired June 29, 2012 after 35 years of service with the NRCS. He came to the Buncombe Soil and Water Conservation District from Durham County in the fall of 1987. Previous to that, he worked in Halifax, Harnett, Iredell, and Rutherford counties. Loring is looking forward to retirement and spending more time doing custom saw milling work. The Buncombe SWCD congratulates Loring on his retirement, and expresses its thanks for all his hard work here over the past 25 years.





Friends of Agriculture Breakfast 2012

This past year the District, in cooperation with the N. C. Cooperative Extension Service, coordinated quarterly "Friends of Agriculture" breakfasts at the WNC Agricultural Center. Sponsors of the breakfasts included N. C. Farm Bureau, Buncombe County, the American Farmland Trust, and Carolina Farm Credit. Many food items were donated by local farms and food suppliers. The events were well attended and guests enjoyed a freshly cooked country breakfast as they heard from speakers from the agricultural community. Speakers included Janine Davis (Woodland Products and Specialty Crops), John Ottinger (Pasture Management and Rotational Grazing), and Jim Mines (New Land Practices).



**NORTH CAROLINA
SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

*Thanks
to our
Sponsors!*



SPECIAL PROJECTS

DISTRICT BUYS NEW DISPLAY

Over the past 6 months, Buncombe SWCD staff worked with the Board of Supervisors and District staff from several Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Area I to develop a new conservation display unit. The new display will be used for District educational outreach and can be set up as shown in the photo or customized using two Velcro receptive panels on half the display. The display is designed in such a way that it can be used for a variety of functions and audiences, including the Mountain State Fair. The SWCD also purchased a table throw with the soil and water conservation logo.



Grant Funded Project at 4H Education Center

During FY12, the District completed a stormwater management project at the Swannanoa 4H Center. The project, funded by a grant from the Division of Water Resources and funds/donations from the Cooperative Extension Service, installed two rain gardens and a cistern to treat runoff from the roof of the staff house. The cistern and rain gardens were designed by CES staff from Raleigh, and the project was used as “hands-on” training for homeowners and professionals interested in designing and building rain gardens. An interpretive sign will be placed at the site to provide additional educational outreach in the future.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Below is a summary of some of the educational programs the SWCD conducted in FY12:

<u>Activity</u>	<u># Completed</u>	<u># Reached</u>
Environmental Education Field Days	3	600
Poster and Essay Contest	25	250
Classroom lessons	25	625
Career Day	1	100
WNC Regional State Fair	1	15,000
Quarterly Newsletter (mailed)	4	3,760
Quarterly Newsletter (emailed)	4	1,600
Web site (estimated)	1	18,000
BCTV programs (estimated)	2	25,000
Sponsor Envirothon Teams	3	16
Sponsor Students - Resource Conservation Workshop	2	2
Assist With Area 1 Envirothon	1	220
Assist With NC Envirothon	1	250
Host Project Food Land and People	3	35

Awards Night 2012

On May 10th BC SWCD celebrated Awards Night at the AB-Tech Haynes Conference Center. Wild for Life: Center for Rehabilitation of Wildlife provided an entertaining and educational program on wildlife. The top three places in poster and essay contest were awarded along with all Envirothon participants.

4th Grade Poster Contest:

1st: Jaxon Hensley, Pisgah Elementary
 2nd: Jake Warren, Pisgah Elementary
 3rd: Tori Mann, Pisgah Elementary
 Teachers: J.B. Halpin and Leslie Cox

5th Grade Poster Contest:

1st: Malachi Morgan, Pisgah Elementary
 2nd: Grace Rossell, North Windy Ridge
 3rd: Kevin Munos Canales, CC Bell Elementary
 Teachers: Clay Stroupe, Peggy Williams, Lori Pearce

6th Grade Essay Contest:

1st: Rudi Boekschoten, Evergreen Community Charter
 2nd: Bethany Evans, Evergreen Community Charter
 3rd: Benjamin Kinter, Evergreen Community Charter
 Teacher: Michael Sule

Each contestant received a cash prize along with the teacher of the first place student. Our poster and essay contest will begin in October 2012.



TREE SEEDLING SALE

The Buncombe SWCD has conducted an annual tree seedling sale for over three decades, usually around the first of March. The District has sold hundreds of thousands of Eastern White Pine seedlings which can be seen growing across the county. In recent years, the District started selling a variety of hardwood seedlings as well. All species are native and are beneficial for wildlife, scenery, and help hold soil in place. Proceeds from sales are used primarily for educational programs. **Total receipts for the 2012 sale were \$3,135.05 and expenses were \$2,085.12 leaving a profit of \$1,049.93**

2012 Tree Sale Report

Species	Purchased	Cost	Ordered Pre-sale	Sold at Sale	Total Sold	Donated	To
Black Cherry	200	\$100.00	107	93	200		
Black Walnut	300	\$150.00	121	179	300		
Flowering Dogwood	1000	\$500.00	547	438	985	15	N. Buncombe High Sch.
Northern Red Oak	300	\$150.00	179	106	285		
Persimmon	1000	\$300.00	345	530	875	10	Hall Fletcher
Southern Crabapple	500	\$250.00	168	317	485		
Sycamore	100	\$50.00	56	44	100		
White Oak	400	\$200.00	233	167	400		
Hardwood Subtotal	3800	\$1,700.00	1756	1874	3630	25	
White Pine	3000	\$270.00	658	1642	2290	710	Asheville Greenworks
Grand Total	6800	\$1,970.00	2414	3516	5930	735	



Acknowledgements

Special Thanks to all our CONSERVATION PARTNERS!



Buncombe County Government

County Commissioners
County Manager
Assistant County Managers
Finance Department
Planning Department
Environmental Health
County Attorney



N. C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Division of Soil and Water Conservation



North Carolina Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts



North Carolina Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation



USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service



National Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts