Page News & Courier "Water Matters" – August 21, 2008

FUNDS NOW AVAILABLE FOR MILL & HAWSKBILL CREEK WATERSHED RESIDENTS

How would you like to have 50% of your next septic tank pump out covered by state and federal funds? Would you be interested in financial help in repairing your failing septic system? Would you like to have cost share assistance to plant a riparian buffer on your land that borders the Hawksbill or Mill Creeks?

More than four million dollars is available in cost share funding for the next five years for residents who live in these two watersheds due to our successful approval for implementation funding for the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) process. This money is administered locally by the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District and is part of the implementation plan to reduce bacteria loads in the creeks.

"We now have an office at the Page County Farm Bureau and are there every Tuesday," says Megan O'Gorek, TMDL technician for the Soil & Water Conservation District. "The money is now available and we want farmers and other land owners to take advantage of the opportunities to implement best management practices on their land."

"These funds can be used by farmers to install exclusion fencing to separate cattle from the creeks and for hardened crossings in order to move cows from one farm to another without churning up the creek bottom," says Mike Phillips, also of the Soil and Water Conservation District. "We want to work with Page County and get these creeks taken off the State of Virginia's impaired waters list."

Through a series of public meetings which began in November, 2006, citizens, farmers and local officials met to determine what actions would be most effective in cleaning up the waterways. Studies estimated that approximately 140 failing septic systems needed to be repaired and all straight pipes should be removed, about 1580 households would benefit from a pet waste composter program and about 12 acres of stream buffer should be installed on urban land. Agricultural BMPs include fencing about 26 miles of stream, approximately 15,000 acres needed improved pasture management, roughly eight manure storage facilities and storage bins should be installed and about nine acres of riparian buffers should be installed on cropland.

After these practices are implemented, the final stage of the TMDL begins. Monitoring and testing will determine if water quality has improved enough to meet water quality standards. Mike Phillips and Megan O'Gorek are available to guide the implementation of the practices and need citizens to participate.

"This is a state-mandated process," says Charles Newton, chair of the Page County Water Quality Advisory Committee and a board member of the Soil and Water Conservation District. "But this is also our local water quality we are trying to improve. It is in our best interest to get Mill and Hawksbill Creeks de-listed. The problem is not caused by just one source and it won't be solved by just one activity or best management practice."

The effect of too much bacteria in the water means that humans may become ill when they come into contact with the water. Taking care of the water has many economic benefits to agricultural producers, homeowners and to the local economy. Improved water quality also benefits the environment and human health.

For more information, contact Megan O'Gorek at 742-4634 or Mike Phillips at 742-4635. You may also contact the Page County Water Quality Advisory Committee at 743-4808.
This is the seventh in a series of articles addressing Page County's water resources. This article was written by Chris Anderson, member of the Watershed Management Planning Team.