

Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District



Four Year Strategic Plan July 2024 – June 2028

Mission Statement

Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District strives to develop locally-driven solutions to natural resources concerns for the people of Botetourt County and Craig County by leveraging state, federal, local, and private sector resources.

Vision Statement

Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District will be a community leader advocating for the sustainability of our natural resources and will act to improve water quality and soil health through conservation and education programs for the people of Botetourt County and Craig County.

Introduction

Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District was formed April 17, 1987; operations began July 1, 1987, to serve Botetourt and Craig Counties, which were originally part of the Natural Bridge Soil and Water Conservation District.

Governing authorization: Mountain Castles SWCD is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia formed pursuant to the provision of the Chapter 1 of Title 21 of the Code of Virginia, designated and cited as The Soil Conservation Districts Law passed by the General Assembly in 1938.

The District boundaries are defined as the “Lands lying within the boundaries of the Botetourt and Craig Counties including the incorporated towns therein.” Within these boundaries there are three major watersheds:

- James River/Chesapeake Bay
- Roanoke River
- New River

The District Board uses the following to assist in accomplishing the mission of the District each year:

- Annual Plan of Work
- Annual budget
- District annual report
- K-12 education programs
- Public outreach, including farm tours
- High school scholarships
- Summer camp scholarships (YCC/Camp Woods & Wildlife)
- Employee performance reviews

Approved 6/12/2024

The following five items have been identified as goals for the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan.

- I. Expand district capacity for implementing conservation programs.
- II. Provide educational opportunities, technical assistance, and cost-share for non-agricultural practices related to septic system maintenance, stormwater management, nutrient management, soil health, and native plants.
- III. Partner with local school divisions to deliver environmental education to K-12 students in the district, with an emphasis on creating more opportunities for Craig County Public Schools.
- IV. Maintain and expand partnerships with conservation organizations
- V. Continue rehabilitation and maintenance of the Johns Creek Dams and develop positive relationships with stakeholders.

This plan was developed with input from directors, staff, partners, and comments submitted via an online survey. The survey link was directly sent to interested individuals, including local government representatives, and was posted on the district website and Facebook page. The survey had 50 responses.



Goal I: Expand district capacity for implementing conservation programs

- A. The Mountain Castles SWCD Board of Directors and district staff will promote, support, and/or provide technical assistance and education for conservation-related programs. Cost-share will be provided for eligible district programs, if possible. Conservation programs include:
1. Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practice and Cost-Share and Tax Credit Program; while the SL-6 and SL-7 practices remain a large component of district Best Management Practices (BMPs), emphasis will be placed on expanding the following:
 - a. CCI practices
 - b. FR (forestry) practices
 - c. Cover Crop practices
 - d. Practices required to facilitate conservation easements
 2. Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) -- see Goal II
 3. 319 programs, including Tinker Creek & Glade Creek Residential Septic Program – see Goal II
 4. USDA programs
 5. Virginia Department of Forestry programs
 6. Local erosion and sediment programs and stormwater management programs – see Goal III
 7. Conservation easements – See Goal III
- B. The Mountain Castles SWCD Board will increase technical staff capacity by exploring employment options including
1. Hiring an additional full-time employee
 2. Hiring an additional part-time employee
 3. Hiring a contractor
- C. The Mountain Castles SWCD Board will establish strong employee recruitment/retention strategies including
1. Maintaining accurate employee position descriptions
 2. Developing effective employee evaluation protocols
 3. Developing a sound employee salary structure based on employee evaluations
 4. Providing opportunities for employee training

Goal II: Expand educational opportunities, technical assistance, and cost-share for non-agricultural practices related to septic system maintenance, stormwater management, nutrient management, soil health, and native plants.

- A. Promote septic system maintenance through the following:
 - 1. Tinker Creek and Glade Creek Residential Septic Program
 - 2. Outreach events and materials (digital and print)

- B. Promote stormwater management, nutrient management, and native plants through the following:
 - 1. Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)
 - 2. Outreach events and materials (digital and print)

- C. Promote soil health and nutrient management through the following:
 - 1. Virginia Soil Health Coalition programs (4 the Soil)
 - 2. VCE programs for homeowners
 - 3. Soil testing for homeowners
 - 4. Outreach events and materials (digital and print)

- D. Pursue additional staff training and acquire district resources related to this goal.

- E. Pursue additional grant opportunities related to this goal, as needed.



**Virginia Conservation
Assistance Program**

Presented by Virginia Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Goal III: Partner with local school divisions to deliver environmental education to K-12 students in the district, with an emphasis on creating more opportunities for Craig County Public Schools

- A. Provide environmental education support to all schools in the district by offering student activities & lessons, curriculum development, field trips, and teacher training
 - 1. Prioritize staff time and district resources on year/semester-long experiences with students including the following:
 - a. “Plant and Animal Relatives” classroom programs/school gardens and “Land Day” field trip to Camp Bethel for Botetourt County 2nd grade students
 - b. Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience for all Craig County and Botetourt County 6th grade students
 - c. James River canoe field trip for all Botetourt County and Craig County 7th grade students
 - d. Carvins Cove field trip for Botetourt County 8th grade students
 - 2. Provide science kits teachers may check out to support classroom instruction
 - 3. Organize a district Envirothon for middle/high school teams each year
 - 4. Offer at least one professional development opportunity for teachers each year (examples: Project WET, Project WILD, Project Learning Tree)
- B. Promote and support VASWCD, NACD, VDOF, and 4-H education programs including
 - 1. Dominion Envirothon
 - 2. Youth Conservation Camp
 - 3. “Soil Expert” and Living in Your Watershed” patch programs
 - 4. Camp Woods and Wildlife
 - 5. 4-H Camp
- C. Support career-readiness programs, especially for natural resources/conservation careers.
 - 1. Provide an annual scholarship to a graduating senior from each high school in the district
 - 2. Recruit interns/Earth Team volunteers
- D. Support the development of a K-12 Environmental Literacy Plan for Botetourt and Craig.
- E. Pursue additional staff training and acquire district resources related to this goal.
- F. Pursue additional grant opportunities related to this goal, as needed.

Goal IV: Maintain and expand partnerships with conservation organizations

A. Maintain existing conservation partnerships, including

1. Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
2. Natural Resources Conservation Service
3. Farm Service Agency
4. Virginia Cooperative Extension
5. Virginia Department of Forestry
6. Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
7. Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
8. Virginia Department of Health
9. Valley Conservation Council
10. Blue Ridge Land Conservancy
11. Catawba Sustainability Center
12. Botetourt County Libraries
13. Botetourt County Parks & Recreation
14. Roanoke Cement Co.
15. Roanoke Valley Master Naturalists/Master Gardeners
16. Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission
17. Botetourt County Public Schools
18. Craig County Public Schools
19. Upper James RC&D
20. James River Association
21. James River Buffer Consortium
22. Clean Valley Council
23. Western Virginia Water Authority
24. Blue Ridge Environmental Educators
25. Botetourt Community Partnership
26. Catawba Valley Farmers Market
27. Botetourt Farmers Market
28. Craig County Farmers Market
29. Botetourt Young Farmers
30. Johns Creek Volunteer Fire Department
31. Sustainable Fincastle
32. Leadership and Social Change Residential College of Virginia Tech
33. Virginia Western Community College
34. Blue Ridge Rising/Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation
35. Roanoke Valley Greenway Commission
36. Local media including the *Fincastle Herald*, the *New Castle Record*, and the *Botetourt Bee*.

- B. Other opportunities for expanded partnerships include
1. Local governments (including boards of supervisors/town councils, erosion and sediment control, stormwater, parks and recreation, economic development)
 2. State legislators
 3. Upper Roanoke River Roundtable
 4. Farm Bureau
 5. LEAP
 6. Community service organizations (ex. Rotary, Ruritans, Kiwanis)
 7. Churches
 8. Homeschool groups
 9. HOAs
 10. Golf courses
 11. Garden clubs in Botetourt and Craig

Goal V: Continue rehabilitation and maintenance of the Johns Creek Dams and develop positive relationships with stakeholders

- A. Continue working with NRCS and other partners in rehabilitation efforts for Johns Creek Dam #1 (McDaniel's Lake).
- B. Work with DCR and engineering partners to resolve issues with the spillway at Johns Creek Dam #2 (Little Oregon).
- C. Improve outreach to Johns Creek residents by providing up-to-date information about our progress with the dams and the work that is being done to ensure the dams are safely maintained.
- D. Continuing our building a working relationship with Craig County Government Officials and the Johns Creek Volunteer Fire Department.
- E. Hold a community outreach event or field day related to the dams

The Commonwealth of Virginia supports Mountain Castles Soil and Water Conservation District through financial and administrative assistance provided by the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Equal opportunity provider and employer