

Meeting focuses on cleaning up rivers, streams in county

Many on states dirty waters list



Staff Photo by Morris Stephenson: Four county beef and dairy farmers attended the meeting including Preston Belcher, left; Ned Hudson, third from left; Garrett Hodges, center, and David Cundiff, right. Also shown is Karen Kline from Virginia Tech.

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By MORRIS STEPHENSON - Staff Writer

State Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and local beef and dairy farmers met Thursday night to discuss ways of getting the Pigg River and its tributaries off the state's "dirty waters" list.

The meeting, held at the Franklin Center, was attended by 17 people, including two beef and two dairy cattle farmers from Franklin County.

It was the DEQ's second such meeting held to come up with a plan to clean up the Pigg River and Old Woman's Creek watersheds. The first session was held earlier this year to hear from residents living within the project.

Testing of the Pigg River, Snow Creek, Big Chestnut Creek and Story Creek in Franklin County along with other creeks in the watershed outside of Franklin County showed high bacteria counts, according to Mary Dail of the DEQ's Roanoke office.

Karen Kline with the biological systems department at Virginia Tech joined Dail in explaining the various funding programs available to assist farmers with Best Management Practices (BMP).

David Cundiff, who has a beef cattle farm in the Penhook area, was the guest speaker. Cundiff, also a member of the Franklin County Board of Supervisors, spoke on BMP cost-sharing state and federal funds that are available and ones he has taken advantage of to keep cattle away from ponds and streams on his farm.

Cundiff also told of a pilot manure house project that will be beginning in the near future. It will keep cattle in one location where manure will be collected and processed for distribution at other locations around the farm.

He said since fencing cattle out of his ponds and away from the river, he has not lost a single calf nor has he had any type of disease among his herd.

"I'm trying to keep the bacteria level down in the Pigg River because there's a lot of catfish in the river and it's also used for swimming. I want my son to be able to grow up and have the farm with quality water," he said.

Cundiff also noted he had a farm that splits his property. "My side is fenced, but the other is not. On the other side, cattle are wearing down the dam and it's in bad shape. And it's the pond I used to irrigate the tobacco," he said.

Cundiff praised the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation specialists in Rocky Mount for their assistance in helping him get the funding for his projects. "They are doing a great job of getting out the word," he added.

At one point, Tony Goff of the Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District in Rocky Mount said cattle will not drink from streams and rivers if clean fresh water is available and urged the use of off-stream watering options.

It was noted that cattle coming to a central watering location makes it easier for the owner to keep track of them, and it makes them easier to handle because they are more accustomed to being around humans.

Beef and dairy farmers joining Cundiff at the meeting were Preston Belcher, Ned Hudson and Garrett Hodges.

Dail, in a power-point presentation, showed the number of miles of the river and creeks within the watersheds.

Listed were the Pigg River, 64 miles; Story Creek, 11.6 miles; Snow Creek, 11 miles, and Big Chestnut Creek, 13 miles. All flow into Leesville Lake, which is 154 acres in size. Old Woman's Creek, which also flows into Leesville Lake, is five miles in length.

Dail said that pollution of the streams and rivers in the watershed come from human, cattle, wildlife and pet waste. An identification study known as Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) has ready been completed and the next step is coming up with a clean-up plan.

"We must come up with detailed actions and plans that will reduce the level of bacteria in the watersheds," Dail told the farmers.

She also noted that such a project has already been completed on the Blackwater River. It was completed five years ago on the upper section and three years ago on the lower one. "The plan is working on the Blackwater," she said.

In addition to Goff, other BRS&WCD officials presenting information were P.W. Morgan, Goff and Michael Tabor and Kathy Smith, who did not speak.

Brian Watson, biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, talked about the possibility of federal funding that could be used with state grants mainly because of the endangered Roanoke logperch in the Pigg River.

Dail said that the DEQ and Virginia Tech would work together drawing up preliminary plans and suggestions. These will be presented at the next meeting, which has not yet been scheduled.