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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**HARRISONBURG, VA** – Virginia State Conservationist Jack Bricker traveled to Harrisonburg Monday, July 12, to present Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) awards from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to three recipients with projects in the Shenandoah Valley.

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*Mission: To sponsor and promote projects and programs that improve the quality of life and sustainable use of natural resources, primarily in the Shenandoah River Watershed, by providing volunteer leadership, technical resources, and financial assistance.*

These significant awards offer more conservation opportunities for Valley farmers targeting cropland and pasture improvements, stream exclusion, and improving trout habitat.

Only five CCPI awards were made across the entire Chesapeake Bay region; three were in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

The Shenandoah Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, a private, nonprofit organization based in Verona, has received a three-year partnership agreement with nearly three quarters of a million dollars annually (\$720,000) to help farmers with conservation practices. The funds were provided through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI).

Shenandoah RC&D Chairman John Eckman says these funds "present a real opportunity for landowners in the Valley to get more conservation practices on the ground. This boost should help kick start the showcase watershed project for Smith Creek in Rockingham and Shenandoah Counties, as well as serve other counties in the Valley."

An additional \$142,000 in CCPI funds were also made available to Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Trout Unlimited for practices related to excluding livestock from streams, improving trout habitat and planting and maintaining trees and other vegetation along creeks.

"This is a special project," says Eckman. "We hope landowners will make good use of these funds to improve water quality and farm profitability right here in the Valley." The funds will go directly to farmers to install practices such as cover crops, nutrient management, rotation to perennials, prescribed grazing and associated watering systems. Special emphasis will be given to beginning farmers, limited resource farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers.

**Farmers must sign up by August 15 in their local NRCS offices** in Harrisonburg, Verona, Strasburg or Lexington. The NRCS district conservationists will help them fill out the application for this year's funding. **The RC&D CCPI funding is available in Rockbridge, Augusta, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Page, Warren, Clarke and Frederick counties.**

Improving pasture management is as critical in the showcase Smith Creek watershed as anywhere in the Shenandoah Valley, a major area for beef production. The project will include holding two workshops per year related to economic return and ecological improvements in grazing systems. These events will lay the groundwork for farmer-to-farmer mentoring programs. The Shenandoah Valley Beef Cooperative, NRCS, and

(more)

Virginia Cooperative Extension are partners in the project, providing hands on demonstrations and expertise.

The Shenandoah RC&D has been a leader in innovative conservation projects throughout the Shenandoah Valley. They were the first to explore the use of adaptive livestock exclusion to simplify the process of getting more livestock out of Valley streams. Shenandoah RC&D received Virginia RC&D Association's award for Outstanding Performance by an RC&D Council this spring and have leveraged close to one million dollars this year alone to assist farmers with natural resource conservation. Further information about the organization and its programs is available online at: [www.shenandoahrcd.org](http://www.shenandoahrcd.org) or by calling 540-248-3321.

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