

## **Shenandoah RC&D Opens Office; Celebrates National RC&D Week July 11-17, 2004**

Verona, Virginia, July 8, 2004 – The recently established Shenandoah Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council joins the 375 RC&D Councils across the country in celebrating “National RC&D Week” July 11-17. RC&D week was declared in recognition of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the designation of the first 10 RC&D areas. Over the past 40 years, the program has grown from 10 designated areas to 375 designated areas that cover over 80% of the United States and its territories.

A year ago, Congressman Bob Goodlatte announced that Shenandoah was one of seven new RC&D areas designated nationwide by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman. The Shenandoah RC&D area is comprised of Augusta, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Page, Clarke, Warren, and Frederick Counties, and the cities of Harrisonburg, Staunton, Waynesboro and Winchester. There are seven designated RC&D areas in Virginia and one applicant area seeking designation.

The Shenandoah RC&D office opened its doors to the public May 17, when Coordinator Kathy Holm began work. The RC&D office is co-located in the USDA Service Center at the Augusta County Government Center in Verona.

Top priorities for the Shenandoah RC&D Council include providing technical expertise and financial support to complete projects that address critical issues such as: nutrient management; conserving open space and farmland; improving the agricultural economy; and, protecting water quality. When the Secretary of Agriculture announced the designation last year, Congressman Goodlatte said the Shenandoah RC&D designation brings additional technical and financial help to the region to deal with some of the complex natural resource and community development challenges facing residents.

"We have four of the five top agricultural counties in the state, and we also have competing demands for land and water from growing development pressure in the Valley," said Goodlatte. "The RC&D will work with landowners and communities to plan, develop and carry out projects to protect the soil, water and air while promoting economic vitality in the region." A recent report from the American Farmland Trust shows that Virginia ranks fourth nationally in loss of prime farmland and that there is a major increase in the rate of conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses in the Valley.

A council of local elected and civic leaders based in the area established a non-profit organization to direct activities of the Shenandoah RC&D. Sponsors for the RC&D include the Headwaters, Lord Fairfax, and Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation Districts; the Northern Shenandoah Valley and Central Shenandoah Valley Regional Planning Commissions; Shenandoah Valley Pure Water Forum; the Valley Conservation Council; and, the local Farm Bureau Federations of Augusta and Rockingham Counties. .

For further information, please contact Kathy Holm at the Shenandoah RC&D office at (540) 248-4328 x107; or Donna Hunter at the National Association of RC&D Councils, (202) 434-4780.

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