

So You're Interested in the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) in Loudoun!

First off, thank you for being interested in implementing conservation practices on your property! The various VCAP practices are all aimed at improving water quality both here in Loudoun, as well as downstream in the Chesapeake Bay. For years, Loudoun SWCD and Districts around Virginia have worked with farmers on conservation practices like fencing livestock out of streams, and planting cover crops, and now through VCAP, we're able to offer practices that homeowners, HOAs, and schools can put into practice as well!

Here are a few overall thoughts as you look into VCAP:

-First, the program is offered on a statewide level, and your project will need to be approved by both our local Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors, as well as the VCAP State Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is where funding is actually allocated for your project. If you haven't visited already, <https://vaswcd.org/vcap> provides a great overview of the program and its various eligible practices you can implement on your property. You'll also find a link to the VCAP manual itself which provides standards and specifications for each practice.

-To apply, you'll need to fill out the VCAP application forms 1 and 2 and Loudoun SWCD staff will come out and conduct a site visit. Form 2 also will reference the design or planting plan as well as your estimated budget for your project provided by either you or your contractor. There may be questions on the forms you may not know the answer to (hydrologic unit, etc)...don't worry, we can help you with these!

-Because projects are reviewed and ranked out on a statewide level, your project may be waitlisted if there is not adequate funding to approve all the projects that come in from around Virginia in any given month. This doesn't mean yours isn't a worthwhile project! This just means there is more demand than we have funding for, and the projects have been ranked for "cost effectiveness," giving the state the most bang for its conservation buck.

-Construction or planting of the project cannot begin until funding has been approved. If this takes place, you'll forfeit your eligibility for VCAP. The reasoning here is to make sure the funds are going to folks who really need the funds to install the practice and/or who couldn't implement the project otherwise.

-In general, structural practices like Dry Wells, Permeable Pavers or Pavement, Impervious surface removal, rain gardens, infiltration, etc will rank higher and be more likely to be funded than simply replacing lawn with native plantings as part of a Conservation Landscaping practice. This doesn't mean you shouldn't consider applying for Conservation Landscaping, just know that it may not "rank out" as high as some other practices which may again provide more "bang for the conservation buck."

-Cost Share rates and reimbursement vary depending on the practice, some are flat rate payments per square foot or gallon, while others provide a percentage of overall costs in reimbursement. The rates for the various practices can be found here: <https://vaswcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PY2021-VCAP-Reimbursement-Rate-Sheet.pdf>

-As a public entity, Loudoun SWCD can't recommend one contractor over another to install your project, but our neighbors in Fairfax at Northern Virginia SWCD have compiled a list of contractors who have successfully installed VCAP practices in the area. That list can be found here and it is a great place to start: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/sites/soil-water-conservation/files/assets/documents/vcapcontractorlist.pdf>

-Most VCAP practices have a ten-year lifespan, during which your practice will need to remain installed, functioning, and maintained. This means weeding conservation landscaping and rain garden practices, keep permeable pavement free of debris and clean, and keeping rainwater harvesting systems functional and protected from freezing, etc. If the project is not functional, or is removed, it must be repaired, or the cost share funding will need to be returned. If you sell your home, the VCAP program has a form which can transfer responsibility for the practice to the new owner.

-If all this sounds interesting and you're ready to apply or set up a field visit, contact chris.vanvlack@lswcd.org!