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Welcome New Natural Resource Conservationist

The Stokes Soil & Water Conservation District would like to introduce and welcome our new Natural Resource Conservationist, Drew Bray. Drew was raised in Stokes County and has been actively involved with farming all his life. He graduated from North Carolina State University with a degree in Livestock and Poultry Management.



As the Natural Resource Conservationist, Drew will be administering state cost share programs that provide financial assistance when installing best management practices that promote soil and water conservation. These programs are voluntary, incentive-based programs designed to improve water quality on agricultural land directly involved with agriculture production. Just a few practices that are eligible for these programs include:

- Well for Agricultural Use
- Livestock Stream Exclusion Fencing
- Division Fencing
- Livestock Watering Facilities
- Heavy Use Area Protection
- Cropland Conversion to Grass or Trees
- Grassed Waterways
- Cover Crops
- Abandoned Well Closures
- And Many More

Stokes SWCD Now Accepting Applications for Cost Share Funding:

Applications for the 2026 Program Year of cost share funding are now being accepted. Eligible applicants are ranked amongst other applications and will be funded (up to 75%) based on the ranking and conservation priority level as they are received, so contact the Soil & Water office today at 336-593-2490 to find out more about these programs. Contracts must receive final state approval before any practices are installed.♦

Celebrating 28 Years of Dedication

After 28 years of dedicated service to Stokes Soil and Water, Janice Pack officially retired at the beginning of July. Her commitment to conservation, community, and collaboration left a lasting mark on the district and everyone fortunate enough to work alongside her. Janice's legacy is woven into the land she helped protect and the relationships she nurtured along the way. We wish her all the best in this next chapter—she's earned every moment of it.

DISTRICT BOARD

James Booth, Chairman
Bob Lindsay, Vice Chairman
Johnny East, Secretary/Treasurer
Gary East, Member
Joe Bennett, Member

STAFF

Amelia Harold, Soil & Water Conservation Director
Drew Bray, Natural Resource Conservationist
McKayla Newsome, NRCS Natural Resource Specialist

NRCS is Now Accepting Applications for Federal Cost Share Funding

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is currently accepting applications from cooperators who are interested in conservation programs. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland, and other farm or ranch lands.

Contact our office to inquire about programs that may potentially benefit your operation and address resource concerns.

Phone: (336)-593-2846 ext. 3

Email: mckayla.newsome@usda.gov

Featured NRCS Practices: Forestry

One area that NRCS programs differ from state agriculture cost share programs is the availability of forestry practices. This difference compliments district practices and increases the amount of resource concerns that can be addressed in Stokes County. Over the last few years, we have seen an increase in interest in forest management. Forestry practices provide a plethora of benefits, which include erosion control, restoration or maintenance of native plant communities, control of invasive species, habitat creation and improvement, reduction of wildfire hazards, improved quality and quantity of plant production, and restoration and maintenance of the ecological site, among others. Cost share allows a percentage of the cost of contracted practices to be reimbursed once they are completed successfully to specifications. Forestry practices include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Firebreak (394)
- Forest Stand Improvement (666)
- Prescribed Burning (338)
- Brush Management (314)
- Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315)

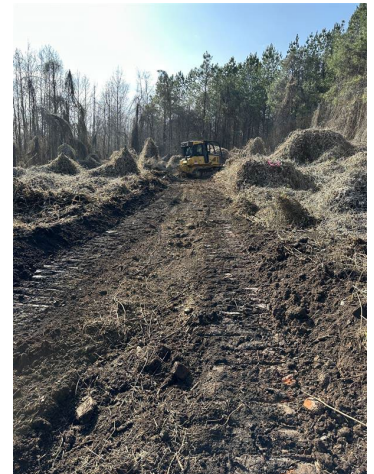
Interested applicants must have or obtain a forest management plan.

Please contact McKayla Newsome at (336)-593-2846 ext. 3 or

mckayla.newsome@usda.gov to inquire about these programs in Stokes County.



Prescribed Burn Site



Firebreak through kudzu that will be controlled through NRCS program



NO-TILL SOD DRILL AVAILABLE FOR LEASE

Please call our office at 336-593-2490 to schedule your lease dates.

Sod Drill Requirements:

- 40 horsepower tractor minimum with hydraulics
- Open hole pin hitch
- Does NOT work on disked or plowed ground

Drill Size:

- 8 ft. wide with a seeding width of 5.3 ft.
- Weighs 3,000 lbs.

Rental Rate: \$10 per acre (\$50 minimum) ♦

How Dung Beetles Help Soil Health in Stokes County

When it comes to soil health, most folks think of cover crops, no-till practices, and nutrient management. But one of nature's most underrated conservationists is often overlooked: the humble dung beetle.

One of the most common species of dung beetles in Stokes County is *Aphodius pseudolivinus*. These beetles begin their life cycle as eggs laid within a dung pile. Once the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the dung until they are fully developed. Afterward, they tunnel underground, where pupation occurs. The larvae remain underground during this stage, undergoing transformation until they emerge as adult beetles. As adults, they surface from their burrows and continue their role in the ecosystem.



Aphodius pseudolivinus

Quick Facts: Dung Beetles & Soil Health

Speedy Workers: Some dung beetles can bury a cow patty in under two hours.

Natural Fertilizers: By burying manure, they help return nitrogen and phosphorus to the soil—no spreader required.

Parasite Patrol: Their activity reduces fly populations and parasite exposure to livestock.

Soil Engineers: Tunneling improves aeration, infiltration, and root development.

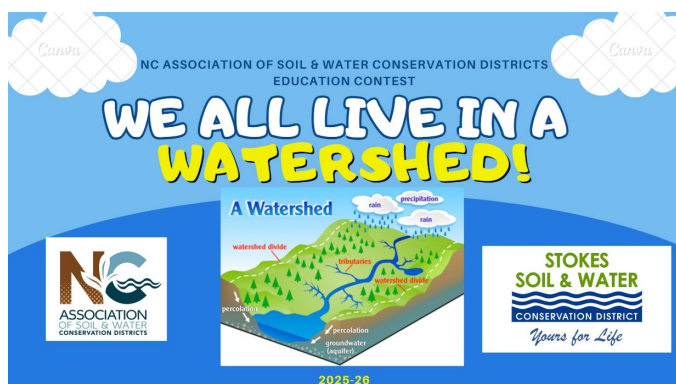
These tiny oddities play a critical role in a pasture's ecosystem by breaking down manure, burying organic matter, and aerating the ground without asking for a paycheck. In Stokes County, where livestock operations are woven into the landscape, dung beetles quietly improve infiltration, reduce parasite loads, and enhance nutrient cycling. Their tunneling behavior increases soil porosity, allowing rainwater to penetrate deeper and reducing runoff during heavy storms.

Healthy dung beetle populations are a sign of balanced land management. Farmers who prioritize rotational grazing often see more beetle activity. It's also worth stating that overuse of dewormers or pesticides can disrupt their life cycles so it's very important to make sure you are administering properly and using the correct dosage.



Dung Beetle holes in manure pat

Soil and Water Contests for Elementary and Middle School Students



Create an artistic poster, informative essay or creative slideshow that highlights the importance of wetlands, their role in our ecosystem, and how we can protect them and win great prizes!

- Poster Contest open to students in 3rd- 5th grades
- Essay Contest open to students in 6th-8th grades
- Slideshow Contest open to students in 6th-8th grades.

Students who place 1st or 2nd in each grade level will receive a medallion, monetary prize, and recognition for their entry.

Students can participate in multiple contests within their grade level. All contests will be held February 12th at the Old Courthouse (Central Office) in Danbury. Entries are due on Wednesday, February 4th, so teachers be on the lookout for emails announcing these contests. For more information about the contests or if you'd like to request free poster board for your entries, please call the Soil & Water office at 336-593-2490.♦

THE NW ENVIROTHON COMPETITION

The Envirothon is an annual competition in which middle school and high school teams compete by demonstrating their knowledge of environmental science and natural resource management. The teams, each consisting of five students, exercise their training and problem-solving skills in a competition centered on five testing categories: **Soils, Aquatics, Forestry, Wildlife and Current Environmental Issues**. Study material for each topic can be found at www.ncenvirothon.org. Middle school competition will be held on Monday, March 16, 2025 and high school will be held on Tuesday, March 17, 2025 at the Edwin H. McGee Center in North Wilkesboro. Contact Amelia Harold at aharold@co.stokes.nc.us for more information

Annual Report: 2024-25 Fiscal Year Allocations in Stokes

In the 2024–2025 fiscal year, Stokes Soil and Water Conservation District approved five contracts totaling **\$60,894** through the NC Agriculture Cost Share Program (NCACSP) and Impaired/Impacted funds. These supported a range of best management practices including livestock exclusion fencing, geocell installation, watering systems, pipelines, cover crops, tillage management, and rooftop runoff structures. Altogether, these projects impacted **658 acres**, conserving **979.6 pounds of nitrogen**, **303.7 pounds of phosphorus**, and **140 tons of soil**. Federal support through USDA NRCS programs added further impact. The district secured **four EQIP contracts** and **three CSP contracts** during the year, while also receiving **\$524,718** through the **Streamflow Rehabilitation Assistance Program (StRAP)**. StRAP funding is being used to remove approximately **2,500 cubic yards of sediment** from the LY-25 watershed structure and clear debris from **7 stream segments totaling 10,979 linear feet**, restoring natural flow and improving watershed function.

Allocations totaled \$1,001,451

Summary of Total Program/Grant Funds Allocated for 2024-25 Fiscal Year

