

An Examination of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Employee Job Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The study's purpose was to determine the job satisfaction level of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) employees during fiscal year 2007-2008. Employee characteristics were identified; three measures of job satisfaction were attained (intrinsic, extrinsic, general satisfaction); and satisfaction levels on 12 specific job aspects were determined. The relationship between job satisfaction and four independent variables (age, gender, education level, primary job responsibility) was assessed. The instrument consisted of an employee characteristics survey, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form, derived from the MSQ 1967 Long-Form (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967), and a modified 2002 Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) survey. Descriptive research statistics were utilized. A total of 185 employees participated, which was an 80% response rate.

The majority of employees were characterized as: non-Hispanic, white, female, average age 41 years, married with no children 18 and under living in the home, bachelor's degree, average tenure of 6.52 years, full-time, permanent position, average hourly wage of \$14.45 and annual salary of \$36,373.54, primary job responsibility "technical."

The MSQ found respondents generally and intrinsically satisfied. Greater satisfaction was expressed for variety and social services. Overall respondents were undecided about extrinsic job aspects. Advancement was an area of dissatisfaction.

The modified VASWCD survey found respondents satisfied overall. Respondents were "very satisfied" with work schedule, type of work, and board relationships. Employees were

less satisfied with health insurance benefits, new employee orientation, and compensation. They were “dissatisfied” with career advancement opportunities and life insurance.

Differences in total intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction, as measured by the MSQ, based on the independent variables were determined. A one-way ANOVA and Tukey’s post-hoc test were utilized. Since the population of this study violated Levene’s Test of Homogeneity, the ANOVA could not be performed for age and intrinsic and general job satisfaction. The ANOVA was performed for all other variables. There was not a significant difference in extrinsic satisfaction among respondents of the various age groups. There were no significant differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, or general job satisfaction for the variables of gender, education level, or primary job responsibility.

## Dedication

I would first like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandmothers, both of whom were actively involved in my life and served as great mentors. Each showed me there are no limits for women who seek professional and personal success. Born in the early 1900s, they each found a way to pursue a career in the health care profession (as registered nurses), raise a family, and give back to their communities.

- To my paternal grandmother Minnie Agnes White, although you are no longer residing on this Earth, you are always in my heart. Thank you for teaching me to have respect for myself and others and to appreciate nature-the sun's morning rays, the flutter of a butterfly, the chirp of a baby bird, and the beauty of a flower in bloom.
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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Paige and Susie White. Words can not express what you have done for me and how much your love and support have meant, especially as I completed my post-graduate work.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband Aaron Ball. Aaron, thank you for all your support, especially the past three years. I know we both look forward to closing this chapter of our life together and anxiously await the start of our next chapter!

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

One characteristic the majority of United States adult citizens share is that they are gainfully employed. In June 2007 the employment-population ratio was 63.3%, with 145.9 million American adults employed (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2007). Employment is a major factor in our lives and a driving force in our society.

Entrance into the labor market varies. Although labor laws place job restrictions on minors based on age and the type of work, individuals may seek employment in the United States as young as 14 years of age (United States Department of Labor, Employment Standards Administration Wage and Hour [ESA], n.d.). The majority of Americans enter the workforce on a more permanent basis upon graduating from high school and/or college, remaining active members of the workforce until normal retirement age. Normal retirement age is defined by the Social Security Administration and varies from 62 years of age for those receiving reduced Social Security retirement benefits to 67 years of age for those born in 1960 or later (United States Social Security Administration [SSA], n.d.). It is probable that individuals may work 40 or more years during their lifetime. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics estimates the average person's life expectancy to be 77.9 years of age (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS], 2006). This means some people will devote more than half their life to work obligations.

Given the aforementioned statistics, it would certainly be advantageous for individuals to be satisfied with both their chosen career and their employer. Being cognizant of employee job satisfaction levels, as well as what work characteristics encourage job satisfaction or

dissatisfaction, would also be beneficial to employers because this information could potentially reduce high rates of employee turnover. Employee turnover can have a considerable impact on the labor market. The United States Department of Labor, BLS tracks employee turnover statistics and publishes it on a monthly basis. In addition, there have been numerous studies conducted by both the private and public sector on the impact of employee turnover, several of which will be examined in Chapter 2.

### *Background of Study*

Governmental agencies are certainly not exempt from employee turnover. Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are an example. Established in the 1930s as a means of giving local citizens a voice in the conservation movement, SWCDs are political subdivisions of state government, located in all 50 states (Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts [VASWCD], n.d.). Virginia is home to 47 SWCDs that represent every county in the Commonwealth, with the exception of Arlington County. There are also some independent cities that do not have district representation. Responsibilities and services vary by SWCD; nevertheless, all make considerable environmental contributions to their respective communities.

Staff positions, in terms of job titles and job descriptions, may differ slightly depending on the SWCD; even so, most employ an average of four individuals (Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation [DCR], 2007a). Regardless of an individual's position, prior education, or previous work experience, some additional training and job certifications are typically required for the new hire to perform satisfactorily. For instance, a Conservation Technician and/or Conservation Specialist should attain at least a Level II Conservation Planning Certification in order to adequately complete job duties as a Technical Service Provider (TSP). This certification consists of completing Level I - Basic Planning Certification and Level II -

Resource Management Planning Certification, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) -Virginia. The highest level an employee can earn is Level III – Complex Certification. Figure 1 outlines the planning certification requirements (USDA, NRCS-Virginia, 2007).

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Level I – Basic Planning

- Conservation Planning Course, Part 1
- Conservation Planning Course, Part 2
- Conservation Planning Course, Part 3 Field Review
- Erosion Processes Certification
- Virginia Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (VA RUSLE) II Practical Exercise
- Environmental Compliance Training
- Cultural Resources Training, Part 1-1, Mod 1-6
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Pesticide Applicator Certification (Category 10)

Level II-Resource Management Planning

- Cultural Resources Training, Part 1-2, Mod 7-8
- Introduction to Water Quality
- Agricultural Waste Management Systems – A Primer
- Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Nutrient Management Planner Training
- Pest Management Considerations

Level III – Complex Plans (Nutrient Management and Certified Nutrient Management Plan)

- DCR Nutrient Management Planner Certification
- Agricultural Waste Management Systems, Level 2

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*Figure 1. Conservation Planning Certification Levels*

Figure 1 illustrates that the levels of conservation planning a technical district employee should obtain are extensive. Districts may invest a substantial amount of time and finances in employee professional development because with each level there are associated registration fees, exam fees, travel expenses, and time that the employee must devote to training, as opposed to regular job duties. According to James Dickenson, Clinch Valley SWCD Chair, the district hired a Conservation Specialist in October 2002 and it took 12 months for that employee to earn

a Level II certification, with some of the required certifications costing hundreds of dollars as a result of related registration fees, lodging, and travel expenses (James Dickenson, personal communication, October 26, 2007). Unfortunately, the return on districts' investments could be short-lived if employees voluntarily resign their positions and seek employment elsewhere or are not successful at their work.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in job satisfaction. Numerous theories have been developed around job satisfaction and how it relates to employee performance, recruitment, and retention (Accel-Team, n.d.; Dawis, 2004; Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, & Capwell, 1957; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, & Paul, 1989; Levine, Ash, & Levine, 2004; Maslow, 1943; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969; Weiss, Dawis, England, and Lofquist, 1967; Vroom, 1964). This study centers on the Theory of Work Adjustment. The overall concept is that an employee's satisfaction, or lack thereof, with his/her job has an effect on productivity and rates of employee turnover. This theoretical framework will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

### *Problem Statement*

Whether or not employee turnover is an issue for Virginia SWCDs has been a subject of debate over the years. The issue garnered so much attention that in 2002 the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) authorized a state-wide employee evaluation survey, contracting Franklin "Lex" Bruce, Jr., an Evaluation Specialist from Virginia Tech, to complete the data collection and analysis. The final report's executive summary stated, "Analyses were conducted for the purpose of identifying characteristics and/or problems

regarding employee satisfaction and factors contributing to the loss of valuable district employees” (Bruce, 2002, p. 3).

Employee turnover has also been scrutinized at the area and local levels. Michael Altizer is currently a member of the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (SWCB) and a director with Clinch Valley SWCD. From 2002-2006, he served as the VASWCD Area IV Chair, representing 11 conservation districts in Southwest Virginia; during his tenure he witnessed employee turnover first-hand. From August to December 2002, four SWCDs in Area IV hired a total of five new employees; by December 31, 2006, only one of those individuals had retained employment with their respective district, with three voluntarily leaving their positions and one being dismissed (Michael Altizer, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

In August 2007, with support and review from the VASWCD, the researcher surveyed individuals serving in a supervisory and/or personnel management capacity from each of the 47 districts. An electronic questionnaire was used to determine whether or not the respondents thought that employee turnover was a problem for their respective districts for a five-year period ranging from July 1, 2002 to July 1, 2007. District representatives were also asked to report the number of staff positions funded during the five-year period and then document how many employees hired for those positions had voluntarily or involuntarily left. Refer to Appendix A through D to review the questionnaire and related correspondence. Thirty-six district representatives responded, equating to a 77% response rate. Response rates by SWCD Areas of the state were as follows: Area I, 67%, Area II, 100%, Area III, 67%, Area IV, 91%, Area V, 70%, and Area VI, 60%. (Note: Refer to Chapter 2, Figure 2 for a list of districts by Area.)

When asked whether employee turnover was a problem for Virginia SWCDs, a total of 17 SWCD respondents identified employee turnover as a problem (47%), while the remaining 19

respondents did not identify employee turnover as problem (53%). Table 1 was generated using the student version of the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 14.0 for Windows. Table 1 illustrates how districts responded by Area when asked whether or not employee turnover was a problem.

Table 1

*Virginia SWCD Supervisors' Opinions About Employee Turnover by Area (n=36)*

<u>Opinion on Whether Employee</u>			
<u>Turnover is a Problem</u>			
<u>Area</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>
I	0	4	4
II	4	2	6
III	4	2	6
IV	5	5	10
V	2	5	7
VI	2	1	3
Total	17	19	36

Respondents from Areas II, III, and VI thought employee turnover was a problem, while those from Areas I and V did not. The district representatives who responded from Area IV were evenly divided on the issue.

Table 2 was also generated using SPSS Version 14.0 for Windows. It shows the Virginia SWCD employees who left their staff positions during the period July 1, 2002, through July 1, 2007.

Table 2

*Virginia SWCD Area Employee Turnover – July 1, 2002 through July 1, 2007 (n=36)*

Area	Total Positions Funded	Employee Voluntary Departures	Employee Involuntary Departures – Result of Lack of Funding	Employee Involuntary Departures – Result of Termination	Total Departures	Departures as Percent of Positions
I	27	7	0	2	9	33%
II	48	24	0	3	27	56%
III	25	14	4	4	22	88%
IV	48	21	1	3	25	52%
V	38	18	0	1	19	50%
VI	9	3	3	0	6	67%

Based on the data collected it appears that very few districts experience involuntary employee departures, whether a result of lack of funding to support staff positions or due to terminations. However, voluntary departures for some districts are quite extensive. The three areas that stated turnover was not a problem or were divided equally on the issue had the smallest percentage of departures as a percent of positions.

*Purpose of the Study*

Perhaps one of the first steps Virginia SWCDs can take to address the issue of employee turnover is to identify employee job satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to determine the level of job satisfaction among Virginia SWCD personnel, who were employed during fiscal

year 2007-2008. Three measures of job satisfaction (dependent variables) were attained using the Minnesota Satisfaction Survey (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form: Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and General Satisfaction (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967). These will be defined later and further discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, this study assessed job satisfaction levels using a modified version of a survey previously authorized by the VASWCD and administered by Franklin “Lex” Bruce, Jr., of Virginia Tech in 2002. Employee characteristics were also obtained. Independent variables were: age, gender, educational level, and position status.

The following research questions were investigated in this research study.

1. What were the characteristics of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees?
2. What was the general (overall) job satisfaction level of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form?
3. What degrees of intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction were expressed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form?
4. What degree of job satisfaction was expressed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by a modified version of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District’s (VASWCD) 2002 survey?
5. Were there differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction levels as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form based on the following independent variables: age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility?

### *Significance of Study*

Employee job satisfaction is a topic of interest for most professions. This interest stems from the need for all employers to recruit and retain competent and professional employees. In reference to job satisfaction,

. . . it remains one of the most important variables in the study of work, either as a dependent or independent variable. In the end, as the law of effect would have it, it is satisfaction that rides herd on human choice and action (Dawis, 2004, p. 480).

Other sources have concluded that there is a relationship between job satisfaction levels and employee turnover (Doran, Stone, Brief, & George, 1991; Duffy, Ganster, & Shaw, 1998; Gruenberg, 1976; Judge, 1993; Mobley, 1977; O'Connor, Peters, Pooyan, Weekley, Frank, & Erenkrantz, 1984; Spector, 1997). There are employee job satisfaction studies for a wide range of professional sectors including Cooperative Extension, school counselors, secondary and post-secondary education, public librarians, and the health-care industry (Carter, Pounder, Lawrence & Wozniak, 1989; DeMato, 2001; Jewell, Beavers, Malpiedi, & Flowers, 1990; Pooyan, Eberhardt, & Szigeti, 1990; Rousan & Henderson, 1996 Rubin, 1995). Research of this nature, specific to Virginia SWCDs, is limited. There is documentation that in 2002 the VASWCD authorized a "SWCD Employee Evaluation," administered with assistance from Franklin "Lex" Bruce, Jr., Virginia Tech, in which employee job satisfaction was evaluated because district leaders at the time thought an assessment of job satisfaction was warranted (Bruce, 2002).

Thus, the objective of this particular study was to further contribute to the field of human resource management, with specific emphasis on conservation districts. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations are worthwhile to all Virginia SWCD stakeholders, particularly directors and current and future employees.

There are a number of practical implications that can be derived from this study. First and foremost, the study reveals the overall job satisfaction level of Virginia SWCD employees. Should respondents express dissatisfaction, the study provides information about an issue that should be further analyzed and addressed. Previous research, as identified in the Chapter 2 Literature Review, concludes that if employees are dissatisfied, it is highly probable that current employees will not retain employment. This type of situation could have long-term negative effects on a SWCD. For instance, future recruitment of qualified applicants could be thwarted because potential recruits are hesitant about working for an employer whose reputation is unsatisfactory. In addition, the employees who do maintain their employment with the district may not perform adequately because of their dissatisfaction, resulting in a poor public image and lack of support. A relationship between job satisfaction and job performance has been documented.

Actually, in human relations theory, job satisfaction functions as a variable mediating between social relations (with supervisor, coworkers, management) on the one hand and performance and productivity on the other hand. This can be called the “satisfaction-causes-performance” hypothesis: that job performance depends on the worker’s being satisfied; and conversely, that job performance will suffer if the worker is dissatisfied (Dawis, 2004, p. 475).

Knowing what factors promote job satisfaction, as well as dissatisfaction, enables districts to incorporate positive factors into the work environment and, if possible, eliminate many of the factors that cause dissatisfaction. In some instances, such data could be utilized by an organization to address high employee turnover rates. An employee might be qualified to do the job and be fond of the work responsibilities, but be dissatisfied with the office environment

or perhaps the current fringe benefits being offered. For example, if an open office layout is the reason for an employee's discontentment, due in part to the lack of privacy and constant disruptions from co-workers, the district might be able to eradicate the problem by purchasing office cubicles. On the other hand, if the fringe benefits package is the issue, the solution might not be as easy to achieve given the present state of the district's finances. Nevertheless, as a result of surveying the employees, directors are in a better position to make informed decisions. Perhaps in the future directors would explore various benefit options and elect to earmark more of their available operational funds to fringe benefits, as opposed to another budget item.

Finally, in terms of recruitment, there are at least two advantages of knowing whether or not current employees are satisfied. According to Fasulo and Kinney (2002), with the onset of the new millennium, environmental career opportunities were "at an all-time high" (p. 1). This means SWCDs are in direct competition with other employers seeking qualified employees. The conservation districts' federal partner, United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), is fully aware of the labor market situation, "As NRCS moves toward becoming the "Employer of Choice" for a highly skilled and diverse workforce enabling conservation, we will be faced with recruiting in a highly competitive and shrinking market" (2006, p. 22). Recognizing what it takes to satisfy employees aids district recruitment and retention efforts. Furthermore, directors are supplied with the tools necessary to target their recruiting efforts toward hiring individuals more compatible with the system. Job announcements and position descriptions can be fashioned to better accommodate this task.

### *Delimitations*

The population of this study was limited to individuals employed by a SWCD in Virginia during FY 2007-2008. As a result, the findings and subsequent conclusions of this study are

applicable to other groups and/or settings only to the extent that they are similar to the study population and must be made with caution.

### *Definitions*

*Employees*: “all part-time and full-time workers who are paid a wage or salary” (United States Department of Labor-BLS, n.d.).

*Job satisfaction*: An individual’s attitude toward his/her job (Ewen, 1967; Weiss, et al., 1967).

*Extrinsic job satisfaction*: An individual’s attitude toward his/her job based on external or environmental factors such as working conditions, supervision, and co-workers (Wanous & Lawler, 1972; Weiss, et al., 1967).

*General job satisfaction*: An individual’s attitude toward his/her job in relation to his/her attitude toward life in general (Wells & Strate, 1957; Weiss, et al., 1967).

*Intrinsic job satisfaction*: An individual’s attitude toward work based on internal factors such as type of work, achievement, and ability utilization (Wanous & Lawler, 1972; Weiss, et al., 1967).

*Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)*: May also be referred to as “district” or “conservation district;” described as “political subdivisions of state government that utilize state, federal, and private sector resources to solve today’s conservation problems” (VASWCD, n.d.).

*Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Area*: The 47 VA SWCDs are grouped into six distinct regions based on geographic location and referred to as “Areas.” Refer to Chapter 2, Figure 2 for a list of districts and their associated Area.

*Turnover*: “the separation of an employee from an establishment (voluntary, involuntary, or other)” (United States Department of Labor, BLS, n.d.).

### *Organization of the Study*

Chapter 1 of the study consists of the introduction, background information on VA SWCDs, problem statement, purpose of the study including research questions, significance of this study, limitations and delimitations of the research, definition of terms, and the overall organization of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature. In this chapter careers in conservation are explored, the history and overall mission of SWCDs are described, the administrative structure of districts in Virginia is examined as well as individual office structure, the history, theories, and various means of measuring job satisfaction are summarized, employee turnover and retention are explored, and related agency studies are reviewed. Chapter 3 describes the methodology for this particular study. Procedures utilized for collecting and analyzing data are explained. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 is a summary of the research study. It includes both conclusions and recommendations.

### *Summary*

Employee recruitment and retention are challenging issues for many employers; Virginia SWCDs are no exception. In terms of retention, there are both positive and negative aspects. Virginia SWCD leaders can address both employee recruitment and retention by identifying the characteristics of their staff members, determining the overall job satisfaction levels of those employees, and exploring factors that impact satisfaction.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Knowledge about employee job satisfaction may aid in managing employee turnover. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to measure the job satisfaction of individuals presently employed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). This chapter provides a summary of previous research related to topics pertinent to this study: conservation careers; the history of districts; the mission of SWCDs; the administrative structure of district's operating in Virginia; individual office structure; the theoretical framework for the study; an in-depth review of job satisfaction including history, theories, and measurement; the history, trends, and implications of both employee turnover and employee retention; and a review of related agency studies.

#### *Conservation Careers*

Prior to the 1960s, careers in the environmental field were limited to the “conservation sciences, such as natural resources and wildlife management” (Fasulo & Kinney, 2002, p. 2). The environmentalism movement really began to take shape shortly after the first Earth Day celebration was held in 1970. Following this world-wide event, the United States authorized formation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Since that time, numerous laws in favor of the environment have been enacted. “As a result of these activities, the number and types of environmental jobs have also grown tremendously” (Fasulo & Kinney, 2002, p. 5).

“In the environmental career world, there are four basic drivers: political agreement supporting legal and regulatory requirements, economics and the marketplace, environmental values, and technology” (Environmental Careers Organization, 1999, p. 8). Fasulo and Kinney (2002) identified three environmental career types: business type, scientific type, and liberal arts

type. Technicians are classified into the scientific career type and are the most sought after. “Technicians, who outnumber professionals by three to one in most science-oriented fields, are in the highest demand. Technicians are an integral part of any environmental project because they do a majority of the hands-on work” (Fasulo & Kinney, 2002, p. 3). The United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS, 2006) confirmed this assessment in a recently published occupational profile concluding that 86.9% of their workforce is professional/technical, with a mere 13.03% classified as administrative/other (2006).

Environmental careers can be found in the private, public, and non-profit sectors. Despite a decline in the overall growth of government employment, according to the Environmental Careers Organization, “hundreds of thousands of environmental professionals work for government agencies, from well-known players such as the National Parks Service to the smallest local water district” (1999, p. 13).

### *SWCD History*

According to a guidebook edited by Milton S. Heath, Jr. (2004), the idea of conservation districts started to materialize in the mid-1930s as a result of leadership from Hugh Hammond Bennett, who is credited as being the “Father of Soil Conservation.”

Bennett’s concern for the land and the mammoth losses of soil as a result of soil erosion dated back to 1905, when he and his soil survey partner, W. E. McLendon, developed a theory of sheet erosion – the insidious but large unseen washing away of thin layers of topsoil (Heath, 2004, p. 2).

As a result of Bennett’s passion for soil conservation, he eventually acquired \$160,000 of federal funding in 1930 to be used specifically for “soil erosion investigations” (Heath, 2004). In 1933,

the Soil Erosion Service (SES) was established within the Department of Interior, with Bennett serving as the first director.

To learn more about the general history of SWCDs, the Web-based orientation course facilitated by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), entitled *Topics in Leadership Management for Conservation District Directors*, was referenced. According to Chapter 2 (History), the origin of SWCDs in the United States can be attributed to the on-going work of Bennett in combination with a national crisis that resulted in the collision of the economy and natural resources. On October 24, 1929, the stock market crashed, sending the country into an economic depression that would last for more than a decade. Two years later, in 1931, a severe drought hit the Midwest and Southern Plains causing severe crop loss. As the crops died, the “Black Blizzards” began, which referred to the blowing dust generated from over-plowed and over-grazed land. These dust storms increased with each passing year in what would become known as the Dust Bowl era. In May 1934, the dust storms spread beyond the Dust Bowl states, sparking the interest of national leaders meeting in Washington, DC. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration recognized the connection between the Dust Bowl farmers and the average American citizen and sought to address the nation’s erosion problems. On April 27, 1935, the U. S. Congress pronounced that soil erosion was “a national menace” and declared soil and water conservation and wise land use a national policy. Thus, U. S. Public Law 46, the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 was passed. This Act established national policy, “To provide for the protection of land resources against soil erosion and other purposes” (Heath, 2004, p. 4). This Act further endorsed SES as a federal agency, resulting in a name change to Soil Conservation Service (SCS). Eventually, the SCS would become a part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and it would again be renamed in the 1990s as the Natural Resources

Conservation Service (NRCS). Under the direction of Bennett, the SCS developed extensive conservation programs that advocated the use of farming techniques such as strip cropping, terracing, crop rotation, contour plowing, and cover crops; all of which aided in the retention of topsoil and prevented irreparable damage to the land (Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation [DCR], 2007b).

Bennett recognized the need for state and local involvement in the conservation movement and sought to make this happen (Heath, 2004). In 1936, a Standard State District Act, also referred to as “District Law,” was developed by the USDA – SCS, which encouraged the citizens of local governments to organize conservation districts as subdivisions of state government. In 1937, President Roosevelt wrote to each state governor, urging every state to approve legislation that would authorize the creation of SWCDs. The Soil Conservation District Program recognized that new farming methods must be accepted and enforced by the farmers on the land, giving local citizens the opportunity to shape soil and water conservation and resource planning in their communities. Each state would eventually pass the “District Law.” It should be noted that although all states passed similar legislation, the terminology used to identify and describe soil and water conservation districts is not standard throughout the United States. For example, in Virginia elected officials who govern district operations are referred to as “directors,” while in North Carolina they are referred to as “supervisors,” and in South Carolina as “commissioners.”

Although not the first state to adopt the District Law, North Carolina was the first state to organize a conservation district. Appropriately enough, the first district was the Brown Creek Soil Conservation District, organized on August 4, 1937. It encompassed the Brown Creek watershed, the site of Bennett’s home in Anson County. (Heath, 2004, p. 4)

The Commonwealth of Virginia accepted the federal government's request to offer this program in 1938 with the passage of the Soil Conservation District Law. This law is located within the Code of Virginia under Title 10.1 Conservation, Chapter 5 Soil and Water Conservation (VA DCR, 2007). There are currently 47 districts in Virginia.

### *SWCD Mission and Responsibilities*

As previously stated, SWCDs are political subdivisions of state government; individual districts are entrusted with the responsibility of performing conservation work within designated boundaries. Initially, all districts followed watershed boundaries and as a result encompassed more than one county; in some cases districts even included parts of several counties (Heath, 2004). Today, the majority of states have experienced some type of district reorganization. Many have reorganized according to county lines. For example, in North Carolina, "As of the year 2004, there is only one multi-county district in the entire state..." (Heath, 2004, p. 6). In Virginia, however, 31 of the 47 SWCDs are classified as multi-county and/or city (Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts [VASWCD], 2007).

In order to accomplish the overall mission of SWCDs, local districts administer a variety of programs within the communities they serve. Based on personal observation the majority of Virginia SWCD programs are categorized as follows: Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance, Administration of Cost-Share Programs, K-12 Environmental Education, Adult Education, Erosion and Sediment Control, and "Other Programs" such as Equipment Rental Programs, and Litter and Recycling Programs.

In order to offer the aforementioned programs, SWCDs must have sources of administrative, technical, and financial assistance. "A district focuses attention on land, water, and related resource problems; develops programs for solving the problems; and coordinates

assistance from public and private sources to carry out conservation programs” (Virginia DCR, 2007, Introduction). Districts may receive technical and financial assistance from local, state, and federal sources. During the first 30 years of their existence, districts’ primary source of financial, administrative, and technical support was the federal government via the SCS, but this is not the case for many districts today (Heath, 2004). For various reasons, state and local governments provide the bulk of district support. In Virginia, SWCDs target millions of dollars annually to address agricultural water quality problems in various watersheds (Virginia DCR, n.d.). Virginia SWCDs receive financial and technical assistance from local, state, and federal sources, with most Virginia districts receiving the majority of their operational and program funds from the state legislature (Virginia DCR, n.d.). Of course, there is variation among the states and individual districts. Even so, the goal of the local, state, and federal relationship is the same for all districts.

This cooperative process helps districts control soil erosion, prevent flood water and sediment damages, and promote agricultural and urban conservation. Through memorandums of agreement with other agencies, districts help to preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, and enhance the health, safety and welfare of the people. In addition, districts sponsor community events, such as field trips or demonstration projects, working with citizens at a grassroots level to create awareness and understanding of conservation needs and measures (Virginia DCR, 2007, Introduction).

### *Virginia SWCD Structure*

Virginia SWCDs are entrusted with numerous responsibilities. Title 10 of the *Code of Virginia* established a structure that ensures SWCDs operate in accordance with established laws and regulations, while also fulfilling their overall mission, goals, and objectives. The 47 Virginia

SWCDs are the basis of this structure. In an effort to better administer SWCD regulations and programs, Virginia has divided districts into six areas. All 47 SWCDs are members of one of six individual “Areas.” Figure 2 outlines the six Virginia SWCD Areas as defined in the *Directory of Virginia’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts* (Virginia DCR, 2007)

<u>Area</u>	<u>Virginia SWCD</u>
Area I	Headwaters, Lord Fairfax, Mountain, Mountain Castles, Natural Bridge, Shenandoah Valley
Area II	Culpeper, John Marshall, Loudoun, Northern Virginia, Prince William, Thomas Jefferson
Area III	Colonial, Hanover-Caroline, Henricopolis, James River, Monacan, Northern Neck, Tidewater, Three Rivers, Tri-County/City
Area IV	Big Sandy, Big Walker, Clinch Valley, Daniel Boone, Evergreen, Holston River, Lonesome Pine, New River, Skyline, Scott County, Tazewell
Area V	Blue Ridge, Halifax, Lake Country, Patrick, Peaks of Otter, Peter Francisco, Piedmont, Pittsylvania, Robert E. Lee, Southside
Area VI	Appomattox River, Chowan Basin, Eastern Shore, Peanut, Virginia Dare

*Figure 2. Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Areas*

This structure also includes the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board, the local SWCD Board of Directors, Virginia DCR, and the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) (Virginia DCR, 2007; Virginia DCR, n.d., Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board; the Virginia DCR, n.d., Virginia’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts). These entities are described in greater detail in the ensuing paragraphs.

*Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board.* The Soil and Water Conservation Board was established by the Virginia General Assembly to assist with the delivery of soil and water conservation services to citizens of the Commonwealth (Virginia DCR, n.d., Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board). The 12-member board includes representation from the six

designated SWCD Areas. Members are appointed or re-appointed every four years by the Governor of Virginia. The Board promotes and provides support and guidance to the local SWCDs.

*SWCD Board of Directors.* Individual Virginia SWCDs are governed directly by a local Board of Directors. District boards are comprised of elected and appointed members as well as associate members. Appointed members are chosen by the elected members. Official voting privileges are limited to the elected and appointed directors. Elected and appointed directors serve four-year terms, while associate directors serve one-year appointments, with no limit on the number of terms that either may serve. The number of individuals serving on a SWCD Board of Directors varies across the Commonwealth of Virginia and is based on whether the district is categorized as single-county or multi-county. Directors are empowered by state law to fulfill many responsibilities to ensure that the overall SWCD mission is accomplished within local communities (Virginia DCR, 2007).

*Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).* The Virginia DCR has been designated by the General Assembly to aid the Soil and Water Conservation Board and to oversee the administration of both the operating funds and cost-share funds allocated annually to individual SWCDs by the state. The latter task is substantial, so DCR employs staffers known as Conservation District Coordinators (CDCs) to serve as a direct link between the Commonwealth and individual districts. “These coordinators interact daily with district directors and employees, participate at district functions, assist with personnel management matters, oversee fiscal management, and guide NPS programs and activities” (Virginia DCR, n.d., Virginia’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts).

*Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD)*. In Virginia, conservation districts have established their own private, non-profit association, which is headquartered in Richmond, Virginia. According to the VASWCD Web site, “It coordinates conservation efforts statewide to focus effectively on issues identified by local member districts” (VASWCD, n.d., Welcome). VASWCD also has a 12-member Board of Directors, with representation from the six SWCD Areas. In addition, they currently employ three staffers.

#### *Individual SWCD Office Structure*

As previously mentioned, all Virginia SWCDs are led by a Board of Directors. A chief responsibility of the SWCD Board of Directors is to develop a support staff to fulfill the daily obligations of the district. Personnel structure (job titles, position descriptions, and number of employees) is not the same for all SWCDs, nevertheless there are similarities. According to information provided in Lesson 3 of the course *Topics in Leadership Management for Conservation District Directors*, there are five position titles that are typical. These are briefly described in the following numbered list.

1. **Administrative Secretary:** When SWCDs were initially chartered, it was quite common for the office to be composed of this one staff position. Of course, as SWCDs grew, additional staffers were employed. This position has taken on many titles including Executive Secretary, Administrative Assistant, Office Administrator, and Administrative Specialist. Job duties typically include initial contact for clients seeking SWCD services; preparation of written materials including correspondence, agendas, minutes, plans, reports, newsletters, and news releases; general clerical work; maintenance of files and program databases; and aiding directors with fiscal management (preparation of financial reports, annual budget, etc.).

2. Conservation Specialist: Typically, this position requires a degree and/or experience in agriculture, natural resources management, or environmental science. General responsibilities include administration of the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMP) Cost-Share Program, overseeing the state's interest of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and certain BMP loan program functions, preparation of farm conservation plans for landowners, supervising installation of BMPs, and assistance with local watershed planning and other non-point source (NPS) prevention activities. In some instances, this position also has duties associated with the Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Program for localities the SWCD serves. This position is often categorized as technical.
3. Conservation Technician: This position is similar to that of a Conservation Specialist; however, there may be fewer education and/or experience requirements to qualify for this position, not as many job responsibilities, and compensation may be less.
4. District Manager: This is a managerial position. This staff member oversees the daily operations of the office, mediates district problems, works with cooperating agencies to gather information for planning efforts, assists with staff recruitment, and may supervise other district employees. This position is often combined with another. For example, Clinch Valley SWCD finances a position that combines the duties of a Conservation Specialist and District Manager (Michael Altizer, Area IV Representative for Soil and Water Conservation Board and Director with Clinch Valley SWCD, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

5. Education Specialist: This position is responsible for youth and adult environmental education programs. The staff member usually conducts school presentations on a regular basis and coordinates special events for both youth and adults.

### *Theoretical Framework*

As previously stated in Chapter 1, the theoretical framework for this study is based on the Theory of Work Adjustment. *A Psychological Theory of Work Adjustment* (1990) declared that the Theory of Work Adjustment was a product of research conducted through the Work Adjustment Project at the University of Minnesota. It was initially released in 1964, a collaboration between René V. Dawis, Lloyd H. Lofquist, and George W. England. Subsequent revisions and additions followed in 1968, with input from David J. Weiss, and again in 1969. There have also been journal articles published over the years that provided modifications and updates to the theory.

The Theory of Work Adjustment centers on work. “If work is as highly valued in our society as it appears to be, it is necessary and desirable to study the relationship of individuals to work and the problems faced in adjusting to work” (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990, p. 3). The partnership of Dawis, Lofquist, England, and Weiss, which will be referred to throughout this document as the “Dawis group,” spent an extensive amount of time discovering the meaning of work. The first task was to define the term. “Typical definitions include activity engaged in for pay, to make a living or to earn money; activity that occupies much of the waking day (occupations); activity that uses abilities or skills in some social or economic enterprise (employment); activity that one is called upon to do (vocation); or activity that one contracts to do (job) (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990, p. 3). In the pursuit of defining work, the Dawis group also

discovered there were other key factors associated with the meaning of work. One factor was to examine what work has meant to society from a historical perspective.

Work, then, has had at least three basic meanings for preindustrial society: (1) a hard necessity, painful, and burdensome; (2) instrumental, a means toward an end, especially a religious end; and (3) a creative act, therefore intrinsically good. All three meanings have probably been present in various proportions of historical periods, one or another aspect receiving the greatest emphasis depending on time, the place, and the person who was looking for the meaning of work (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990, p. 5).

Other factors include what work means to those who are unemployed and those who are approaching retirement. The research group deduced that the “historical and research literature shows that work is central to human development and total life adjustment and that work provides a situation for satisfying needs” (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990, p. 7).

The Theory of Work Adjustment actually focused on the work personality and the work environment. Dawis and Lofquist (1990) declared that work personality is composed of structure and style. “The major dimensions of work personality structure are abilities and values, which are reference dimensions for skills and needs, respectively. The basic dimensions of work personality style are celerity, pace, rhythm, and endurance” (p. 33).

The theory of work adjustment is based on the concept of correspondence between individual and environment, which implies conditions that can be described as a harmonious relationship between individual and environment, suitability of the individual to the environment and of the environment for the individual, consonance or agreement between individual and environment, and a reciprocal and complementary relationship between the individual and the environment. (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990, p. 55)

Several key terms were associated with the theory. These are defined accordingly.

1. Correspondence: “. . . described as the individual fulfilling the requirements of the work environment and the work environment fulfilling the requirements of the individual” (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990, p. 55).
2. Work Adjustment: “The continuous and dynamic process by which the individual seeks to achieve and maintain correspondence with the work environment is called work adjustment” (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990, p. 55).
3. Tenure: “. . . a function of correspondence between the individual and work environment” (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990, p. 55).

Dawis and Lofquist further maintained,

From the basic concepts of correspondence and tenure we can develop the concepts of satisfactoriness and satisfaction. If the individual has substantial tenure, it can be inferred that the requirements of the work environment are being fulfilled and that the work environment has been fulfilling the individual's requirements. The individual who fulfills the requirements of the work environment is termed a satisfactory worker. The individual whose requirements are fulfilled by the work environment is termed a satisfied worker. Satisfactoriness and satisfaction indicate the correspondence between the individual and the work environment. (1990, p. 55)

The ensuing numbered list summarizes the Theory of Work Adjustment as stated by Dawis and Lofquist (1990, p. 9).

1. Work is conceptualized as an interaction between an individual and a work environment.

2. The work environment requires that certain tasks be performed, and the individual brings skills to perform the tasks.
3. In exchange, the individual requires compensation for work performance and certain preferred conditions, such as a safe and comfortable place to work.
4. The environment and the individual must continue to meet each other's requirements for the interaction to be maintained. The degree to which the requirements of both are met may be called *correspondence*.
5. Work adjustment is the process of achieving and maintaining correspondence. Work adjustment is indicated by the *satisfaction* of the individual with the work environment and by the satisfaction of the work environment with the individual, by the individual's *satisfactoriness*.
6. Satisfaction and satisfactoriness result in *tenure*, the principal indicator of work adjustment. Tenure can be predicted from the correspondence of an individual's work personality with the work environment.

### *Job Satisfaction*

Job satisfaction is a major component of The Theory of Work Adjustment, thus it warrants some discussion. Job satisfaction did not become an issue until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century because prior to this time one's career was often predetermined by the occupation of that person's parents (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990). Since that time a vast amount of research has been conducted in regard to job satisfaction resulting in a number of theories and satisfaction measurements.

Job satisfaction is usually measured by administering a questionnaire consisting of items dealing with satisfaction with various aspects of the job. The purpose of such

questionnaires is to determine how satisfied employees are with regard to the various aspects of the job (Ewen, 1967, p. 68).

Of course, the basis for all the theories and questionnaires is a definition of job satisfaction. Even a brief literature review reveals an array of definitions. In Chapter 26 of the *Comprehensive Handbook of Psychological Assessment-Volume 4 Industrial and Organizational Assessment*, Dawis stated,

The English word *satisfaction* comes from the Latin *satis* (“enough”) and *facere* (“to make”), hence the dictionary definitions: (1) to fulfill the needs, expectations, wishes or desires of; (2) to meet or answer the requirements of. There are, then, two definitions of satisfaction: satisfaction as fulfillment versus satisfaction as evaluation. In the first definition, a deficit of some sort exists, and its being filled is satisfaction. In the second definition, rather than deficits, criteria (requirements) must be met, and their being met is satisfaction (2004, p. 470).

### *Job Satisfaction –Theories and Measurements*

For the purposes of this study, the researcher devoted a considerable amount of time to tracing the developments made in the study of job satisfaction. There were past studies and associated theories that certainly made obvious contributions to job satisfaction research; therefore, it was important to include these for this particular study as they each factor into the theoretical framework.

*The Hawthorne Effect – Mayo.* *The Hawthorne Studies* brought heightened attention to the subject of job satisfaction. Elton Mayo, a Harvard Business School professor, conducted a series of experiments from 1927 to 1932 at the Western Electric Hawthorne Works in Chicago (Accel-Team, n.d.a). Mayo wanted to determine what effect, if any, work conditions (such as

number of hours worked, number of breaks, temperature, light, and humidity) had on the productivity of factory workers. According to a summary of Mayo's experiments by Accel-Team, "he stumbled upon a principle of human motivation that would help to revolutionize the theory and practice of management" (Accel-Team, n.d.a, paragraph 4). The "principle" Mayo discovered was that production did increase when changes were made in work conditions (Hawthorne Effect), but these changes were actually a result of the satisfaction the employees garnered from being a part of the experiment and the pride they experienced from their team production efforts. *The Hawthorne Studies* established that individuals have various reasons for working; they don't work solely because of financial reasons. Hawthorne's well-documented study launched additional research in the fields of organizational management and industrial psychology resulting in a number of theories related to job satisfaction.

*Job Satisfaction Blank – Hoppock.* Robert Hoppock (1935) concluded that job satisfaction could only be measured and analyzed as a whole. Although Hoppock did not deny there were many aspects of job satisfaction ("facets"), he surmised that because of individual characteristics, only one level of job satisfaction could be determined for employees. Dawis (2004) described Hoppock's theory as "global" because of the approach he took, while later researchers would follow a different approach and look at the specific facets of satisfaction. Hoppock developed a job satisfaction measurement instrument known as the Job Satisfaction Blank (JSB), which was directly based on his theory. Levine, Ash, and Levine (2004) described the instrument as follows: "This is the earliest and probably the most used measure in job satisfaction surveys because it is brief, easy to understand, and easy to administer" (p. 279). With this instrument, only one level of satisfaction is obtained and the sources of satisfaction are not determined (Hoppock, 1935; Dawis, 2004). When administering the JSB, Hoppock (1935) found

a correlation between scores related to gender, with males having higher means; occupational level, with higher levels having a higher mean; and age, with older respondents having a higher mean (Dawis, 2004).

*Hierarchy of Needs Theory – Maslow.* Abraham Maslow is often credited with the general job satisfaction model as a result of his Hierarchy of Needs Theory. With this theory, he concluded that individuals must satisfy five basic needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). As a result of Maslow's research, organizations realized that not only did they have to meet the lower-level needs of their employees, namely physiological and safety needs, they also must seek to meet the higher-level needs, specifically self-esteem and self-actualization. Numerous job satisfaction theories and models were developed as a result of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory.

*Two Factor Hygiene and Motivation Theory – Herzberg.* Frederick Herzberg is credited with the Two Factor Hygiene and Motivation Theory. Herzberg based his research on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and deduced that there was a difference between job satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Dawis, 2004; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). In regard to Maslow's lower order needs, individuals meet these needs to "defer dissatisfaction" as opposed to "earn satisfaction" (Dawis, 2004, p. 473). Actual satisfaction is only reached when the higher needs identified by Maslow are met. An employee is satisfied when environmental and organizational elements of hygiene are fulfilled and when the employee is motivated (Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, & Capwell, 1957). Elements of hygiene include working conditions, salary, personnel policies, etc., while motivation is obtained when an individual has an interest in the job, is given responsibility, is rewarded for a job well done and there is potential for advancement (Accel-Team, n.d.b; Herzberg, et al., 1957; & Herzberg, et al., 1959). In addition, Herzberg, et al. (1957)

identified a relationship between employee morale and age, tenure, salary, and job level.

However, this research was somewhat refuted by Hulin and Smith (1965) who concluded that the “U-shaped relationship between age, tenure, and satisfaction must be regarded with suspicion” (p. 215). Hulin and Smith found more of a linear relationship between the variables; they also concluded that gender did play a role in satisfaction.

*Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy (VIE) Theory – Vroom.* Victor Vroom (1964) developed the Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy (VIE) Theory of work motivation in which he surmised that employee job satisfaction was obtained when individual employees were provided options from which to choose. The theory is based on three beliefs: Valence - defined as the rewards that are valued by employees; Expectancy - defined as what employees think they can accomplish based on individual characteristics; and Instrumentality - defined as whether or not management will actually follow through on rewards (Vroom, 1964). Job satisfaction is the valence of the job, which in turn is the function of the valence or other outcomes and the instrumentality of the job in attaining those outcomes, with job satisfaction stemming from the expectation of what was to come (Dawis, 2004). For example, if an employee knew that increasing production would result in a pay increase or a promotion, then he/she would be more apt to work to achieve the increased production goal. Vroom also concluded that performance is not only based on intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction or rewards but also on the characteristics of an employee.

*Job Descriptive Index (JDI) – Cornell Group.* The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) was a product of research at Cornell University in which five facets of job satisfaction were measured: work, pay, supervision, co-workers, and promotion opportunities (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). In terms of measuring facets of job satisfaction, this is considered to be “one of the most

widely used” and “the most preferred by researchers” because it asks respondents to describe their jobs as opposed to directly asking about satisfaction or dissatisfaction levels (Dawis, 2004, p. 464, 479). Dawis stated that indirectly asking about job satisfaction contributes to the validity of the JDI.

*Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) – Hackman and Oldham.* “Hackman and Oldham (1975) created the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) to measure core characteristics of a job based on their job characteristic theory” (Dawis, 2004, p. 461). Hackman and Oldham based their theory, related research, and the JDS “on earlier work by Turner and Lawrence (1965) and by Hackman and Lawler (1971),” which was a theory that job design contributes to work motivation (1975, p. 160). Positive personal and professional outcomes are attained when three “critical psychological states” are present for employees; these include “experienced meaningfulness of work, experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work, and knowledge of the results of the work activities” (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 160). The “critical psychological states” are a result of five “core” job dimensions defined as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). “The JDS is intended (a) to diagnose existing jobs to determine if (and how) they might be redesigned to improve employee motivation and productivity, and (b) to evaluate the effects of job changes on employees” (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 159).

*Job in General (JIG) Scale – Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, and Paul.* The Job in General (JIG) Scale was developed as a “global scale to accompany the facet scales of the Job Descriptive Index” (Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, & Paul, 1989, p. 193). Ironson, et al. (1989) explained that the JIG included multiple items to garner internal consistency estimates, questions and responses that were written and organized in a manner that made it easy for all

members of the working population to complete, few similarities with any measures of different variables (i.e. should not ask respondent to describe job or share feelings about leaving the job), show convergent validity, and compatible with the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) so that it could be used in conjunction with the facet scale questionnaire.

*Work Adjustment Theory – Minnesota Group.* According to Weiss, Dawis, England, and Lofquist (1967), “This theory uses the correspondence (or lack of it) between the work personality and the work environment as the principal reason or explanation for observed work adjustment outcomes (satisfactoriness, satisfaction, and tenure)” (p. v). The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) is based on the conceptual framework of the Theory of Work Adjustment and a product of the Work Adjustment Project facilitated by the Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Administration. It is described as “a measure of one of the primary indicators of work adjustment” using several aspects of the work environment (Weiss et al., 1967, p. v). There are two basic versions of the MSQ. The MSQ Long-Form (1967 and 1977) measures satisfaction on a 21-scale form, while the MSQ Short-Form (1977) measures satisfaction on a three-scale form. Dawis (2004) stated that the MSQ is also one of the most popular job satisfaction measures still being utilized.

#### *Job Satisfaction and Other Variables*

Previous research acknowledges that a number of demographic and/or employee characteristic variables are significantly related to the issues of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and tenure (Mobley, 1982). Herzberg et al., (1957) outlined four variables related to job satisfaction: age, tenure, job level, and salary. However, salary is not considered to be an essential indicator (Herzberg et al., 1957; Hoppock, 1935). According to Carter, Pounder, Lawrence, and Wozniak, “The variables that are most often included in turnover research include

age, sex, and organizational tenure” (1989, p. 8). Certainly, there may be additional variables depending on the nature of the organization (Carter et al., 1989).

*Age.* According to Lee and Wilbur (1985) and DeMato (2001), there are numerous positions on the relationship between job satisfaction and age; they can be divided into categories. The first position is initially based on the work of Herzberg et al., (1957) in which a U-shaped relationship between job satisfaction and age was identified. In summary, the younger a worker is, the higher his/her job satisfaction, but this satisfaction decreases after a few years on the job, only to increase again with age. The second position is based on several studies (Bernal, Snyder, & McDaniel, 1998; Hulin & Smith, 1965; Lee & Wilbur, 1985), all of which concluded that job satisfaction increases as an employee ages. The third position maintains that although there is a linear relationship between job satisfaction and age, there is a period in time, usually pre-retirement, when satisfaction levels start to decline (Saleh & Otis, 1964). Finally, there are studies that find no significant relationship between job satisfaction and age. Bedeian, Ferris, and Kacmar (1992) declared that “chronological age” was not a “stable predictor of job satisfaction,” rather tenure was a far superior indicator (p. 45).

In *The New Workforce* by Harriet Hankin (2004), generational differences and how they relate to the work environment were examined extensively. Hankin stated,

There are varying views about whether understanding the generations is a useful tool for understanding what motivates an individual. Both sides of the argument make relevant points. On the one hand is the argument that factors other than birth year have a major impact on who one is: upbringing, education, affluence or lack of it, and even geography, just to name a few. I agree. On the other hand, members of a generation do share a

history that reflects the news, views, politics and entertainment that shaped their youth. I think both influences are relevant.

For employers, however, generations are perhaps the most consistent indicator of work needs. While a person can move, get an education, or change financial circumstances, a birth date never changes. It is a useful and dependable benchmark for certain information and is critical for longitudinal studies and trends. Companies and co-workers alike benefit from an understanding of the characteristics of the generations. (p. 49)

The generations as defined by Hankin (2004) are summarized in the numbered list.

1. Silent Generation: Born 1922 to 1945. Come from traditional family settings. “They tend to be highly disciplined, hardworking, and loyal employees who play by the rules” (p. 50).
2. Baby Boomers: Born 1946 to 1964. Come from nuclear families. Large group of individuals belong to this group. Value education. Considered to be workaholics. “Boomers are active in social issues, civil rights, and politics. They are an optimistic, competitive group that focuses deeply on personal accomplishment” (p. 52). Considered to be big spenders and poor savers. Predicted to work beyond traditional retirement age. This generation is sometimes divided into three segments since it spans a period of 18 years.
3. Generation X: Born 1965 to 1976. Generation that experienced high rates of divorce and increased number of mothers working outside the home. Hankin discovered, “Generation X, more than any other generation I studied, is the one most that is elusive because the differences among its members can be so extreme” (p. 55). Some members take a traditional approach to their professional and personal lives, while

- others are less concerned with life and have been labeled as “slackers.” Hankin describes members of Generation X as having “...traits of independence, resilience, and adaptability. They also desire immediate and on-going feedback and are equally comfortable giving feedback to others. Other traits of this group included working well in multicultural settings, desire for some fun in the workplace, and a pragmatic approach for getting things done” (p. 56). Generations X also does not feel the same loyalty to their employer as some of the other generations, but instead value their work, colleagues, and immediate supervisors.
4. Baby Boom Echo: Born 1977 to 2000. Children of the Boomers. Traits include: self-confidence, goal oriented, multitasking skills, team players, prefer group socialization, high-tech, well-educated with work experience or internships. Hankin discovered, “When asked about factors that affect their commitment and motivation to work, 82 percent cited flexible working arrangements, a figure much higher than that for the other generations” (p. 60).
  5. Millennium Generation: Born after 2000. Hankin makes the following prediction about the work traits of this generation, “...I see young people entering the work place who will be comfortable with diversity, who will expect equal pay as an everyday occurrence, and who will be flexible and interested in carving out their own niche both at home and at work” (p. 60-61).

*Gender.* There have also been numerous studies conducted to determine if gender plays a role in job satisfaction (Andrisani & Shapiro, 1978; Barclay, Fields, & Halpert, 1981; Harrell, 1958, Hulin & Smith, 1964; Sauser & York, 1978; Weaver, 1977). According to Barclay et al., “Past research has detailed conflicting results in the area of sex differences in job satisfaction.

The attempts to explain these differences have focused either on person-centered variables or situation-centered variables” (1981, p. 3). In preparation for their own study, Barclay et al., determined that early studies, such as those of Harrell (1958), found females to be more satisfied with their jobs when compared to males; however, later studies contradicted those previous findings (Hulin & Smith, 1964). A 1977 study by Weaver found variables such as race, salary, and status to influence employee job satisfaction, but he could not find any differences among gender. This research was further supported by others. Andrisani and Shapiro (1978) determined that race played a factor in job satisfaction. Sauser and York (1978) found that gender was not the only variable that had an effect on job satisfaction with age, education, and tenure also playing a role. The Barclay et al., (1981) study investigated not only whether there were differences in job satisfaction based on gender, but which had more of an effect, person-centered variables or situation-centered variables. The study’s situation-centered variable was defined as “subtle treatment discrimination,” while the person-centered variable was “belief in roles for women” (p. 4). The researchers found that the situation-centered variable was a greater factor in the job satisfaction of the two genders and further concluded that examining job satisfaction based on gender alone was insufficient.

*Education.* Vila and Garcia-Mora (2005) examined education as a determinant of job satisfaction and through their review of the literature surmised that there are monetary and non-monetary outcomes of education for the worker. They also found, “Indeed, a number of studies do include a worker’s level of education as an explanatory variable for job satisfaction. The evidence on the effects of education on job satisfaction, however, is rather limited” (p. 411). Vila and Garcia-Mora (2005) summarized findings of studies conducted around the world. They discovered that a United States based study by Idson (1990) found no significant effects of

education level on three out of four different measures of overall job satisfaction. In contrast, a Canadian study by Meng (1990) revealed that education increases workers' freedom to decide how to do the work, their influence on the decisions of supervisors, and their content with the physical environment of the job. Utilizing a sample of British workers, Clark (1996) stated that individuals with more education, those of the male gender, middle-aged individuals, those working long hours, and those working in larger establishments had lower levels of job satisfaction. According to a study by Clark and Oswald (1996), overall job satisfaction is declining in the level of education when income is held constant. Furthermore, the level of job satisfaction depends inversely on worker's comparison wage rates. "In brief, the existing evidence on the effects of education level on job satisfaction is mixed and rather inconclusive: some papers report neutral or negative influences, while the results from others imply positive effects" (Vila & Garcia, 2005, p. 411).

Vila and Garcia-Mora (2005) conducted their own study, of Spanish workers, to assess the influence of education on employee job satisfaction and drew the following conclusions:

1. "Workers' perception of the match between education and employment is relevant as a determinant of job satisfaction" (p. 420). Workers who feel their job corresponds to their level of education are more satisfied than those who feel they are overqualified.
2. Education can have different effects on an individual's satisfaction with different facets of a job.
3. "Satisfaction with pay, job stability, the job itself, the number of hours worked, the working schedule and the conditions of work are all directly and positively related to workers' level of education" (p. 421).

4. Overall job satisfaction is not significantly effected by education level. “. . . this results from some cancelling out of the effects across the different specific components of job satisfaction, which may help explain some counter-intuitive results found in previous research” (p. 421).

*Primary Job Responsibility/Position.* Research has been conducted on whether or not there is a relationship between the professional position one holds and the related responsibilities of that job. The terms “job level” or “job scope” are typically used to describe professional position. Mahoney, Frost, Grandall, and Weitzel (1972) declared there was a substantiated and reliable positive relationship between job level and job satisfaction. A review of the literature by Schmitt and Fitzgerald (1979) discovered,

Studies by Friedmann and Havighurst (1962) and Morse and Weiss (1962) suggest that those working at the lower levels more often view work as a means to earn a living, while higher level employees more often view it as pleasurable in itself and as a means of fulfilling a variety of psychological needs. (p. 4)

Individual factors, such as achievement, autonomy of work, variety of tasks, and significance of tasks, have been identified as having an impact on job scope (Schmitt & Fitzgerald, 1979; Stone & Porter, 1973). As a result, these variables should be considered when assessing job level and job satisfaction.

### *Employee Turnover*

*History.* Labor turnover, like job satisfaction, was not an issue in the United States until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was no longer the norm to be self-employed in agricultural production or a craft. According to Lauren Owen of Depaul University, “many observers began to recognize that labor turnover was costly for the firm (in terms of increased hiring and training

expenditures) and for the worker (in terms of irregularity of income flows)” (2004, Paragraph 3). As a result, a number of studies were conducted to determine “causes and consequences” of labor turnover, with several concluding that high labor turnover rates were a result of worker dissatisfaction and problems with labor relations (Owen, 2004). Mobley (1982) concluded that the causes of turnover can be divided into four categories: external factors, organizational factors, individual factors that were work related, and individual factors that were not work related.

*Current trends of employee tenure and turnover.* A 2006 report released by the Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), found that the median number of years that wage and salary workers had been with their current employer was four years. As for the average number of jobs held by workers to date, there has only been one such survey, which was administered by the Department of Labor, BLS. The study was exclusive to younger members of the Baby Boom generation, specifically individuals born between 1957 and 1964. The August 2005 summary report stated that members of this population held an average of 10.5 jobs from ages 18 to 40. The USDA-NRCS Human Capital Strategic Plan 2006-2010 determined the average length of service for a “general schedule” NRCS employee was 16 years (2006). Ironically, an analysis of Cooperative Extension positions, completed by the USDA-Agricultural Research Service, Human Resources Division in December 2005, found the average years of service for field staff nationwide also equated to 16 years.

Employee turnover is an escalating problem. The majority of U.S. corporations anticipate an annual 6% voluntary turnover rate, while many high-tech companies expect to lose 30% of their workforce each year (Norton, 1999). Ruth Ross, director of human policies for the Charles Schwab Corporation, called turnover “a growing concern, something we’ve come to realize must

be taken seriously” (Dobbs, 2000, Paragraph 4). Even government agencies, like USDA–NRCS, recognize voluntary turnover as a human resource management issue; this was documented in their Human Capital Strategic Plan 2006-2010 (USDA-NRCS, 2006).

*Implications of turnover.* The implications associated with employee turnover can be both positive and negative for the employee and the employer. Turnover is positive for the employer when an unproductive and disruptive employee elects to resign and seek employment elsewhere. In addition, it is also positive when an individual dissatisfied with the current job is able to quit because another more satisfying job opportunity has presented itself. Of course, the negative implications are numerous. According to a study by Richard Rubin (1995),

The detrimental effects of turnover include declines in productivity before the employee departs, the costs of separation pay, and the expenses of recruiting, hiring, and training, and increased supervision of the new employee. In addition, the productivity and morale of other employees may be affected if the departing employee is considered to be a valued member of the staff. (p. 85)

There may also be an interruption in the delivery of programs (Rousan & Henderson, 1996). Beale and Hollinsworth (2002) affirmed the aforementioned findings, maintaining that turnover is associated with both financial costs and human costs to a company. Financial costs can be sizeable. Dobbs declared,

The loss of experienced workers and the crippling effects associated with it are forcing more companies to take action. They’ve learned the hard way that constantly hiring and training new people is costly and time-consuming-an appalling drain on resources that otherwise would have been used to expand or strengthen the business. (2000, ¶12)

Dobbs also stated that, according to experts, replacement costs are double the average employee's annual salary, while Norton (1999) reported that replacement costs equate to 25% of an employee's salary. Although there is some discrepancy over the actual financial costs, there is no doubt the costs are sizeable.

### *Employee Retention*

Long-term retention is a goal of all employers. Like turnover, retention has pros and cons for both the employee and employer. "For workers, staying on the job leads to greater opportunities for wage gains and promotions at work as well as increased overall stability in their lives, while employers enjoy the benefits of reduced employee turnover and related expenses" (Fisher, 2005, Introduction). Numerous retention strategies exist; regardless of the strategies an employer chooses to incorporate, it is important that the strategies are implemented prior to even hiring employees. Retention strategies should also be practiced the first day of employment. In an effort to adequately address employee retention, USDA-NRCS has gone so far as to prepare an official agency document that outlines retention strategies with specific objectives. Some of these strategies include: exit interviews for employees who resign their positions, creative incentives such as competitive benefits to retain personnel, and the development of a national framework for mentoring (United States Department of Agriculture, NRCS, 2006). Another popular approach to employee retention is when employers allow employees to change jobs within the company. "Assisting employees to explore internal job switches rather than leaving an organization is a positive measure aimed at enhancing employee retention and job satisfaction" (Beale & Holinsworth, 2002, Abstract, ¶1).

### *Virginia SWCD and Related Agency Studies*

The documented research directly related to SWCDs and the issues of job satisfaction, turnover, and retention are limited. In regards to Virginia SWCDs, the researcher obtained and reviewed a copy of a 2002 employee evaluation that was authorized by VASWCD. Eighty-nine percent of Virginia SWCD employees responded to the statewide survey that was designed to identify issues that might be effecting employee job satisfaction and perhaps contributing to employee turnover (Bruce, 2002). The study concluded that employees were satisfied overall with their employment. Areas of dissatisfaction included lack of career advancement opportunities, low salaries, and relationships with district boards. Respondents identified younger workers as the type of employee most likely to leave. The report stated, “Working for a SWCD is seen by some as a stepping stone for younger workers who move on to organizations (often private) that offer advancement and higher salaries” (Bruce, 2002, p. 4).

There have been research studies on related agencies, including Cooperative Extension and public libraries. Extension work and soil and water conservation work share similar characteristics. “Extension agents develop and adapt programs to assist local people in identifying and solving problems” (Rousan & Henderson, 1996, p. 56). As described in the previous literature review, Virginia SWCDs direct their conservation efforts at local communities. An analysis of previous research in the Extension field is worthwhile. Rousan and Henderson (1996) conducted a study that sought to determine why there was a high rate of turnover among Ohio State University Extension agents; the reasons identified for agent turnover included:

...other priorities in their lives, another job offer, insufficient pay for the amount of work performed, family obligations, too many work responsibilities, attracted to more money

elsewhere, conflicts with personal responsibilities, no time for personal relationships, too many requirements for advancement, conflict with values, and lack of recognition for a job well done. (p. 60)

In another Cooperative Extension study, this one centered around Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service agents, researchers stated that turnover can be affected by an employee's values in regard to work versus non-work activities, which is consistent with the Mobley model (Carter et al., 1989). Carter et al. discovered that organizational commitment had greater influence on employee turnover, but they also determined that it might be better to assess how much individuals value organizational commitment and job satisfaction prior to evaluating which one is a greater turnover predictor.

Richard Rubin (1995) took a different approach to studying turnover among public librarians. Rather than focus solely on reasons why an employee would leave an agency, he also explored reasons employees choose to remain employed. Rubin found that, at least annually, the majority of librarians surveyed experience an event that makes them consider resigning and seeking employment elsewhere. Once an employee decides to seek other employment it can be difficult for the employer to reverse that decision. Rubin suggested that a reversal strategy might be "making the job more interesting or challenging to the employee" (1995, p. 110). Of course, this would require the employer to know what brings satisfaction to the employee. He also concluded that "employees place considerable emphasis on job security, benefits, and family responsibilities" (p. 110).

### *Summary*

Soil and Water Conservation Districts were created in the mid-1930s as a means of giving a local voice to the conservation of natural resources. Virginia has 47 SWCDs, each

entrusted with the responsibility of performing conservation work within designated boundaries. Title 10 of the *Code of Virginia* defines SWCDs as political subdivisions of state government and provides regulations and guidelines of operation. Virginia has divided districts into six areas (Area I through Area VI). Individual districts are led by a Board of Directors who employs support staff. Personnel structure is not identical among districts, but very similar.

With the spark of the environmental movement in the 1960s, the demand for environmental workers increased. Today, SWCDs are competing with numerous organizations in the public, private, and non-profit sector to recruit and maintain competent, professional employees.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century numerous research studies have been conducted in regard to job satisfaction. As a result, many theories and measurements of job satisfaction have been established such as The Hawthorne Effect, Elton Mayo, 1927-1932; Job Satisfaction Blank, Robert Hoppock, 1935; Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Abraham Maslow, 1943; Two Factor Hygiene and Motivation Theory, Frederick Herzberg, 1957 and 1959; Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy (VIE) Theory, Victor Vroom, 1964; Job Descriptive Index (JDI), Cornell Group, 1969; Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS), Hackman and Oldham, 1975; Job in General (JIG) Scale, Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, and Paul, 1989; and Work Adjustment Theory, Minnesota Group, 1964.

The Theory of Work Adjustment is one of the most recognized and utilized theories of job satisfaction, thus it serves as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory and its' related questionnaire (Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire) was initially released in 1964 as a collaboration between René V. Dawis, Lloyd H. Lofquist, and George W. England, with subsequent revisions and additions following in 1968, with input from David J. Weiss, and again

in 1969 (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990). Authors of this theory recognized work to be a valuable part of society, thus worthy of study. As part of their research various definitions of work were defined and the history of work was examined. The Theory of Work Adjustment centered on the work personality and the work environment; satisfaction of the individual with the work environment and the individual's satisfactoriness on the job result in correspondence (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990). Tenure is a product of both satisfaction and satisfactoriness, thus an acute awareness of employee satisfaction can have a positive impact on employee relations and the overall well-being of the organization.

A number of variables and their relationship to job satisfaction have been researched. Age and gender are two of the most common variables that are studied (Herzberg et al., 1957 and Carter, et al., 1989). In regards to age, research findings vary. Herzberg et al., (1957) concluded there was a U-shaped relationship between the two variables, while several studies determined job satisfaction increases as an employee ages (Bernal, et al., 1998; Hulin & Smith, 1965; Lee & Wilbur, 1985). Saleh and Otis (1964) established a linear relationship, but stated that in pre-retirement satisfaction levels start to decline. There are even studies that found no significant relationship between job satisfaction and age (Bedeian, et al., 1992). The research findings associated with gender are also conflicting. Some studies concluded there was a relationship, while others found no relationship to exist (Andrisani & Shapiro, 1978; Barclay, et al., 1981; Harrell, 1958, Hulin & Smith, 1964; Sauser & York, 1978; and Weaver, 1977). More recent job satisfaction research has addressed two additional variables – education level and position. The research for education is also mixed (Vila and Garcia-Mora, 2005).

Employee turnover and retention have been linked to job satisfaction (Beale & Holinsworth, 2002; Mobley, 1982; Owen, 2004; and Rubin, 1995). Both are issues of

importance, regardless of the organization. Therefore, job satisfaction is often an area of interest and study for many organizations (Carter, et al., 1989; Rousan & Henderson, 1996; and Rubin, 1995). Although documented research directly related to SWCDs is limited, Virginia SWCD employees were asked to complete an employee evaluation in 2002 for the primary purpose of identifying issues that might be contributing to employee turnover. The 2002 study concluded that although the majority of respondents were satisfied there were areas of dissatisfaction (lack of career advancement opportunities, low salaries, and district board relationships).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

This chapter includes a description of the procedures for collecting and analyzing data.

Through conducting the study, answers were sought to these five questions:

1. What were the characteristics of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees?
2. What was the overall job satisfaction level of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form?
3. What degrees of intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction were expressed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form?
4. What degree of job satisfaction was expressed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by a modified version of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (VASWCD) 2002 survey?
5. Were there differences in job satisfaction levels as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form and the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (VASWCD) 2002 survey based on the following independent variables: age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility?

A description of the study, study population, study variables, data collection instrument, data collection methods, and methods of data analysis are included within this chapter.

### *Description of the Study*

This study was both quantitative and descriptive. Hittleman and Simon (2006) defined quantitative descriptive research as, “designs that deal with statistically explaining the status or condition of one or more variables or events” (p. 309). The data collection instrument was comprised of three sections. The first section was a pre-existing job satisfaction survey known as the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Short-Form 1977. The MSQ Short-Form 1977 is copyrighted material and the researcher was not authorized to include a copy of the instrument in this dissertation or any related documents. Those interested in viewing a sample of the instrument and related directions are instructed to refer to the following Web site:

<http://www.psych.umn.edu/psylabs/vpr/>. The second section of this study’s data collection instrument was a modified version of a 2002 evaluation survey originally authorized by the VASWCDs and administered by Franklin “Lex” Bruce, Jr., Virginia Tech (Appendix E); and the final section was an employee characteristics questionnaire (Appendix F). The entire instrument was administered electronically to members of the target population via a secure Website.

### *Institutional Review Board Procedures*

Policies regulated by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) were adhered to for the completion of this study. Although the target population was comprised of adults, cover correspondence outlining that consent would be implied was sent to individual Virginia SWCD employees via e-mail by the researcher. The aforementioned correspondence e-mail stated, “Consent is implied with a returned questionnaire.” IRB approval is documented in Appendix G.

### *Population*

A population is “a group of individuals or objects having at least one characteristic that distinguishes them from other groups” (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 101). In terms of this study,

the population consisted of individuals employed with a SWCD. There are 3000 SWCDs in the United States, employing thousands of individuals. For the purposes of the study, a target population was identified, which Hittleman and Simon (2006) defined as “the specific group with which researchers would like to use their findings for educational purposes” (p. 101). The target population was comprised of individuals employed with a SWCD located within the Commonwealth of Virginia during Fiscal Year 2007-2008. There are 47 SWCDs in Virginia. Names and related contact information for Virginia SWCD employees was obtained via an employee directory maintained by the VASWCD. As of December 30, 2007, this directory listed 187 Virginia SWCD employees.

#### *Key Attributes*

Study participants were asked to report these personal and employment characteristics: gender, age, ethnicity, race, marital status, children, education, Virginia SWCD Area, tenure, employment status, position status, level of compensation, and primary job responsibility.

#### *Instrumentation – Part I: Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form*

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) resulted from the Minnesota Studies in Vocational Rehabilitation, commonly referred to as the Work Adjustment Project (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967). The MSQ was published in 1967 and was later revised and updated in 1977. The researcher selected this instrument because of its ability to identify Virginia SWCD employee job satisfaction.

The questionnaire (the MSQ) makes it feasible to obtain a more individualized picture of worker satisfaction than was possible using gross or more general measures of satisfaction with the job as a whole. The individualized measurement is useful because

two individuals may express the same amount of general satisfaction with their work but for entirely different reasons (Weiss et al., 1967, p. vi).

There are two versions of the MSQ. The MSQ Long-Form (1967 and 1977) has 100 questions that assess job satisfaction on a 20-scale questionnaire. “Each item appears in blocks of 20, with items constituting a given scale appearing at 20-item intervals” (Weiss et al., 1967, p. 1). The MSQ 1977 Short-Form consists of 20 questions that best represent each of the 20 scales featured on the MSQ 1977 Long-Form (University of Minnesota, Department of Psychology, n.d.). Weiss et al. (1967) reported that the chosen items were those that correlated the highest with their respective scales. Figure 3 lists and defines each scale title as it appears in the Manual for the Satisfaction Questionnaire (Weiss et al., 1967, p.1).

The researcher elected to use the MSQ 1977 Short-Form. There are five response alternatives for each question on the MSQ Short-Form: *Very Dissatisfied*, which has an assigned value of (1), *Dissatisfied* (2), *Neither* (3), *Satisfied* (4), and *Very Satisfied* (5) (Weiss et al., 1967). The MSQ 1977 Short-Form has previously been used in print; however, for the purposes of this study the researcher obtained permission from the University of Minnesota Vocational Psychology Research Department to administer the questionnaire in a Web-based format using a secure site. Weiss et al. (1967) reported that the MSQ Long-Form takes the average person 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The MSQ Short-Form was designed to take less time and to be scored on three scales: intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction, and general satisfaction. Appendix H itemizes each question by scale.

Scale Title	Categories of Satisfaction
Ability utilization	Intrinsic and General
Achievement	Intrinsic and General
Activity	Intrinsic and General
Advancement	Extrinsic and General
Authority	Intrinsic and General
Company policies and practices	Extrinsic and General
Compensation	Extrinsic and General
Co-workers	General
Creativity	Intrinsic and General
Independence	Intrinsic and General
Moral values	Intrinsic and General
Recognition	Extrinsic and General
Responsibility	Intrinsic and General
Security	Intrinsic and General
Social service	Intrinsic and General
Social status	Intrinsic and General
Supervision – human relations	Extrinsic and General
Supervision – technical	Extrinsic and General
Variety	Intrinsic and General
Working conditions	General

*Figure 3. Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Scales*

*Validity of MSQ 1977 Short-Form.* Validity is “the idea of how the information and its interpretation consistently, fairly, and accurately represents the ideas, feelings, behaviors, and activities of the participants” (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 137). In terms of instrument validity, “validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure” (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 123). There are three types of instrument validity. Hittleman & Simon (2006) define construct validity as “the quality obtained when an instrument’s creator demonstrates the instrument as representing a supportable theory” (p. 304). Weiss et al. (1967) declared that construct validity of the MSQ was “derived mainly from its performing according to theoretical expectations” (p. 16). Validation from the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (MIQ), which was based on the Theory of Work Adjustment, provided most of the supporting evidence (Weiss et al., 1967). Concurrent validity is “the extent to which the results show that subjects’ scores correlate, or are similar, on two instruments administered during the same time period” (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 303-304). “Evidence for the concurrent validity of the MSQ is derived from the study of group differences in satisfaction, especially occupational differences in satisfaction” (Weiss et al., 1967, p. 18). The analysis of data for 25 occupational groups determined that “group differences (among the 25 occupational groups) were statistically significant at the .001 level for both means and variances on all 21 MSQ scales,” indicating the instrument can differentiate among the groups (Weiss et al., 1967, p. 18). The reference to “21 MSQ scales” includes the 20 scales, in addition to “general satisfaction.” The third type of validity known as content validity is defined as “validity obtained when an instrument’s creator demonstrates that the specific items or questions used in the instrument represent an accurate sampling of specific bodies of knowledge (such as curricula or courses of study)” (Hittleman & Simon, 2006, p. 304). In regards to the MSQ, factor analytic results supported the content

validity. Weiss et al. (1967) calculated intercorrelations for the 20 MSQ scales and the “general satisfaction” utilizing 14 norm groups that included at least 100 individuals within each group; both intrinsic (ability utilization, achievement, activity, authority, co-workers, creativity, independence, moral values, recognition, responsibility, social status, and variety) and extrinsic (advancement, compensation, company policies and practices, security, supervision–human relations, supervision–technical, and working conditions) factors were derived.

The authors further concluded that since the MSQ Short-Form was a “subset of the long-form items, validity may be inferred from validity for the long-form” (1967, p. 24). Evidence of validity for the MSQ Short-Form is also achieved from two sources: “(1) studies of occupational group differences and (2) studies of the relationship between satisfaction and satisfactoriness, as specified by the Theory of Work Adjustment” (Weiss et al., 1967, p. 24).

*Reliability of MSQ 1977 Short-Form.* As maintained by Hittleman and Simon (2006), “Instruments are said to have reliability when they are consistent in producing their results” (p. 127). Hoyt reliability coefficients were obtained for the MSQ Short-Form. For the Intrinsic Satisfaction scale, the coefficients ranged from .84 (for the two assembler groups) to .91 for engineers. For the Extrinsic Satisfaction scale, the coefficients varied from .77 (for electronics assemblers) to .82 (for engineers and machinists). On the General Satisfaction scale, the coefficients varied from .87 (for assemblers) to .92 (for engineers) (Weiss et al., 1967, p. 23-24). The reliability coefficients for this particular study are reported as follows: for the Intrinsic Satisfaction scale, the Cronbach’s Alpha was .85; for the Extrinsic Satisfaction scale, the Cronbach’s Alpha was .85; and for the General Satisfaction scale, the Cronbach’s Alpha was .90.

*Permission for MSQ 1977 Short-Form use.* Permission to use the MSQ 1977 Short-Form and convert this instrument into a Web-based format was requested from the University of

Minnesota, Department of Psychology and authorized in writing by Dr. David J. Weiss, Director of Vocational Psychology Research on September 12, 2007 (Appendix I).

*Instrumentation – Part II: Modified 2002 Virginia SWCD Employee Evaluation*

The second part of the instrument consisted of a modified version of the Virginia SWCD Employee Evaluation that was originally authorized by the VASWCD in 2002. The Association contracted Franklin “Lex” Bruce, Jr., Assistant Professor and Evaluation Specialist to administer the survey and analyze the data (Ricky Rash, personal communication, July 12, 2007). The researcher elected to incorporate a modified version of this survey for two reasons. The 2002 evaluation was initiated “for the purpose of identifying characteristics and/or problems regarding employee satisfaction and factors contributing to the loss of valuable district employees” (Bruce, p. 3). It paralleled the purpose of this current study, which was to determine the level of job satisfaction among Virginia SWCD employees employed during fiscal year 2007-2008. In addition, the researcher wanted the data collected to be utilized by Virginia SWCDs to improve district operations. It should be disclosed that the researcher initially planned to assess satisfaction levels for 13 issues specific to Virginia SWCD employees; however, the issue of “retirement benefits” was inadvertently omitted from the electronic version of the instrument.

*Permission for modified 2002 Virginia SWCD employee evaluation use.* Permission to use a modified version of the 2002 SWCD Employee Evaluation and convert the questionnaire into a Web-based format was requested from the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) and Franklin “Lex” Bruce, Jr., the Virginia Tech Evaluation Specialist who initially administered the survey on behalf of the VASWCD. Mr. Rash, VASWCD President, and Dr. Bruce both granted written permission (Appendix J and Appendix K).

*Validity and reliability of modified 2002 Virginia SWCD evaluation.* The validity and reliability of the modified 2002 Virginia SWCD evaluation were not specifically reported in the final report. Nevertheless, there was information provided that supports the validity of this study. The 2002 version of the evaluation was developed by a panel of experts, including members of the VASWCD Board of Directors serving during the 2001-2002 fiscal year. Bruce confirmed the following information about the evaluation: There were numerous drafts of the questionnaire; the VASWCD Board of Directors selected the “constructs of interest” based on their knowledge of district personnel issues and their experience as district leaders; and the VASWCD Board consulted Bruce in regard to the design and layout of the evaluation (personal communication, July 30, 2007). In terms of reliability, the Cronbach’s Alpha for this particular study was .81.

#### *Instrumentation – Part III: Employee Characteristics*

This part of the questionnaire was included to gather the following information about individual Virginia SWCD employees: gender, age, ethnicity, race, marital status, children, educational level, SWCD Area, tenure, employment status, position status, salary or wage earnings, and primary job responsibility. The researcher collected this information to describe the respondents and to determine if there were any differences in job satisfaction as a result of age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility.

#### *Data Collection Assistance*

The Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programs (CAEEP), located on the campus of Virginia Tech, assisted with the electronic distribution of the survey instrument and data collection. In the months prior to the distribution of the survey, the researcher worked with CAEEP representatives to design the three sections of the instrument into a Web-based

format that could be distributed to individual employees listed in the Virginia SWCD 2007 Employee Directory.

### *Field Test*

Recognizing the importance of testing an instrument prior to administering the survey to the target population, the researcher elected to field test the survey. Dillman (2007) described this element of research as “pretesting,” which accomplishes several things including “an evaluation of procedures which should be done by sending some questions to a small sample of the respondent population and seeing whether any problems come up,” “finding out if production mistakes were made in printing the questionnaire by having a few people fill it out,” and “learning whether people understand the questions” (p. 140). Dillman proposed a four stage process. Stage 1 is defined by Dillman as a “review by knowledgeable colleagues and analysts” (2007, p. 140). The researcher completed this stage with assistance from representatives of the Virginia Tech CAEEP and research professionals serving on the researcher’s dissertation committee. Stage 2 includes “interviews to evaluate cognitive and motivational qualities” in which an interviewer works individually with potential respondents to get an understanding of how each question is being perceived by the respondent (Dillman, 2007, p. 141). In terms of this study, Stage 2 was not included as part of the field test. Stage 3 consists of a “small pilot study,” while Stage 4 is considered to be “a final check” (Dillman, 2007, pp. 146-147). The researcher accomplished the goals of both the third and fourth stages with assistance from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The researcher chose to request that a regional DCR office participate in the field test. The researcher did not want to select a sample from the target population because this would mean that a small percentage had been pre-exposed to the instrument, which could have an effect on their answers when completing the

survey for a second time. Based on guidance from Franklin “Lex” Bruce, Jr., (personal communication, August 29, 2007) the researcher also chose DCR because agency staffers would be the most familiar with Virginia SWCDs and the terminology associated with this organization. In December 2007, the Web-based survey was administered to one Virginia DCR Regional office, which consisted of eight staff members. Not only were the field test participants asked to complete the survey electronically, just like members of the target population, they were also requested to document typographical and/or grammatical errors, share items they found confusing, and report any technological difficulties.

The regional manager assigned to the DCR regional office that agreed to field test the instrument was notified both verbally and in writing of the purpose of the study and the field test. In addition, the manager agreed to inform staffers of the study in two staff meetings held in November 2007 and December 2007, which simulated the prior correspondence e-mail that would be sent to the Virginia SWCD employees by Ricky Rash, VASWCD President. On Monday, December 17, 2007, the researcher sent a cover correspondence e-mail with implied consent to individual members of the field test group. This e-mail was almost identical to the correspondence that the target population would receive. On Tuesday, December 18, 2007, the initial correspondence e-mail with the Web-based survey link was sent to individual members of the field test group by the CAEEP. Given the size of the field test group, upcoming state holidays, and the researcher’s timeline, the submittal deadline for the field test group was established as Friday, December 21, 2007.

Seven of eight DCR staffers completed and returned the survey by the established deadline. The researcher was informed that the individual who failed to respond was out of the office for the entire week due to illness. Field test respondents documented technological

problems as well as typographical, grammatical, and formatting errors. A summary of field test comments is provided in Appendix L. Working with representatives from the CAEEP, the researcher addressed problems and concerns documented by the field test respondents.

Respondents also documented the length of time required to complete the survey. Completion times ranged from a minimum of 8 minutes to a maximum of 21 minutes, with an average completion time of 15 minutes.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

In an effort to garner support for this study and maximize participation, the researcher contacted Ricky Rash, VASWCD President via telephone and e-mail to describe the study in detail and address any questions or concerns the VASWCD might have in regard to the study. The researcher requested permission to utilize contact information maintained within the VASWCD's employee directory as a means of distributing the associated survey to individual employees. The researcher also requested that Rash contact employees via the "all-district" list-serve shortly prior to the researcher's distribution of the survey.

On August 23, 2007 Rash provided written authorization for the researcher to utilize contact information that is maintained by the VASWCD for purposes of the "all-district" employee list-serve and related employee directory (Refer to Appendix J, Paragraph 2). It was understood that this information would be utilized as a means of distributing the associated survey. Access to this employee directory information was provided shortly after Rash's approval letter via an e-mail from staff at the state office.

The researcher used the Tailored Design Method outlined by Dillman (2007) to collect data. Two pre-notice letters were sent to the target population. On Thursday, January 3, 2008 Rash sent the aforementioned "prior" e-mail correspondence to all employees at which time he

expressed VASWCD's support of the study, briefly explained the purpose of the study, and encouraged participation (Refer to Appendix M). Five days later, on Monday, January 7, 2008, the researcher sent an e-mail to all Virginia SWCD employees. The text of the e-mail modeled that of an informational cover letter that would accompany a printed survey instrument (Appendix N). The researcher informed subjects that consent was implied with a returned questionnaire. The researcher also explained that data collection assistance was being provided by the Virginia Tech CAEEP.

The initial e-mail was distributed via the CAEEP on Tuesday, January 8, 2008. This e-mail included a detailed description of the survey, an authenticated login and password, and a direct link to the Web-based survey instrument (Appendix O). Subjects were requested to respond within 14 days (on or before Tuesday, January 22, 2008, 5 PM Eastern Standard Time).

A brief e-mail reminder was sent to all members of the target population on Tuesday, January 15, 2008, seven days after the initial e-mail from the CAEEP (Appendix P). In accordance with Dillman's (2007) guidelines this reminder thanked those participants who had responded and requested those who had not responded to complete the survey by the established deadline.

On Tuesday, January 22, 2008, the morning of the survey response deadline, a personal electronic final reminder was sent from the CAEEP to individuals who had not yet responded. This notice contained a link to the Web-based survey, logins, passwords, and a request for a response.

### *Incentives*

In an effort to attain a high response rate, a few incentives were offered to participants. First, the researcher pledged to prepare an executive summary of the results of the survey and

post that summary in a central location for all 47 Virginia districts to access and review. Second, each participant who responded by the January 22, 2008 deadline was entered in a random drawing for a prize of \$100, which was administered by the CAEEP.

### *Response Rates and Non-Respondents*

Given the high response rates generated from both the 2002 VASWCD employee survey and the August 2007 survey, the researcher was confident that most Virginia SWCD employees would participate in this study. Nevertheless, during the initial planning phases of the study, the researcher determined it was important to achieve an acceptable response rate as well as plan for non-respondents to ensure the results and conclusions drawn from the data collected were an accurate reflection of the views of Virginia SWCD employees.

First, the researcher sought to define an acceptable response rate. The researcher referenced several current studies that analyzed the response rates of existing professional literature and discovered that there is not a standard definition for “response rate;” nor is there a standard percentage, that if attained, one could say a study’s response rate was acceptable (Groves, Dillman, Eltinge, & Little, 2002; Groves, 2005; Johnson & Owens, 2003; Wiseman, 2003). “During the last quarter century, there has been a general lack of industry-wide standards with respect to the meaning, interpretation, and method of calculation of a survey’s response rate (Wiseman, 2003, ¶3). Groves concurred that although both the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO) and the American Association for Public Opinion Research have provided recommendations for preferred estimates, there is still not “universal compliance with the guidelines” (2005, p. 140). Groves further stated that, “response rates can be calculated in a myriad of ways, each implying to the naïve reader different levels of success in measuring the complete sample” (2005, p. 140). Taking into consideration the flexibility associated with

response rates, researchers have concluded that in terms of response rates not only should the response rate be reported as a numerical value, but a detailed explanation of the calculation utilized to determine the response rate should be provided (Groves, Dillman, Eltinge, & Little, 2002; Groves, 2005; Johnson & Owens, 2003; Lindner & Wingenbach, 2002; Wiseman, 2003).

In the most basic terms, a survey response rate is the number of completed and usable surveys obtained in a research project divided by the number of individuals who were asked to complete the survey (Groves, Dillman, Eltinge, & Little, 2002; Groves, 2005; Johnson & Owens, 2003; Wiseman, 2003). For this particular study, the researcher elected to use this definition to calculate the response rate for this study.

In regards to an acceptable rate, the researcher referenced a study by Johnson and Owens (2003), in which an audit of 95 articles from 18 different journals was conducted to examine response rate procedures. Johnson and Owens determined, “Although none of the journals contacted for this study reported formal policies regarding minimally acceptable response rates, one did indicate that only in ‘rare’ instances did a study with a response rate of less than 60% get accepted for publication” (2003, p. 132).

The researcher gave thoughtful consideration to the issue of how to address non-respondents, thus a plan for a response rate less than 60% was devised. Deciding the most appropriate method of contact was challenging. The researcher chose not to contact non-respondents via a personal telephone call for several reasons. First, as previously stated, the researcher was a Virginia SWCD employee who felt that making personal contact with individual subjects could impact their survey responses. Second, a condition of the study was that the researcher would not be privy to a list of those who had or had not responded, nor to individual employee responses. If the researcher personally telephoned individuals who had not

responded and collected data over the phone, the study's condition to maintain anonymity would be violated. The researcher decided that should the response rate be less than 60%, a personal letter, prepared by the researcher, would be distributed via e-mail by the CAEEP to all the individuals who had not responded by the pre-established deadline. This correspondence can be referenced in Appendix Q and was fashioned to stress the importance of achieving a high response rate and the purpose of the study. Furthermore, a 48-hour response time was established. If the 60% response rate was still not achieved, the researcher elected to continue with data analysis and reporting with the actual response rate clearly documented in all related documents.

#### *Data Analysis*

The student version of the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 14.0 for Windows was used to analyze the data collected from the returned surveys. Distribution frequencies, measures of central tendency, measures of variance, the One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Tukey's post-hoc test were utilized. The analysis for each of the five research questions has been outlined below.

*Research Question 1 - - Characteristics of Virginia SWCD employees.* The primary purpose of collecting this information was to adequately describe individuals presently employed by Virginia's SWCDs; therefore, the researcher utilized descriptive statistics (frequencies of distribution, measures of central tendency, and measures of variation) to analyze the data collected, with the specific selection unique to the question. In some instances frequencies of distribution and related percentages were reported, and in other cases the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and/or range was reported.

*Research Question 2 and Question 3 - - Virginia SWCD employees' general, intrinsic, and extrinsic job satisfaction as measured by Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form.* The Manual for the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (1967) provided recommendations on how to interpret MSQ scores collected from participants, which the researcher gave strong consideration.

The most meaningful scores to use in interpreting the MSQ are the percentile scores for each scale obtained from the most appropriate norm group for the individual. The appropriate norm group for an individual is the one that corresponds exactly to his job. Since, at the present time, the number of norm groups is limited, it may be necessary to select a norm group that is very similar to the individual's job.

It is also possible to interpret MSQ raw scores for all scales by ranking them.

These rankings indicate areas of relatively greater, or lesser, satisfaction. (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, pp. 4-5)

After reviewing the available norm groups, the researcher did not feel one norm group could be selected, considering the nature of the work performed by SWCD employees and the diversity among individual districts and their staff positions. The researcher also wanted to interpret the data in a manner that would be clearly understood by the parties the study was designed to assist (i. e. SWCD employees and VASWCD Board of Directors). Furthermore, the researcher thought it was wise to interpret the MSQ data in much the same manner as the interpretation of the modified 2002 VASWCD survey. Therefore, the researcher elected to use descriptive statistics, including frequencies of distribution, measures of central tendency, and measures of variation. The frequencies of the responses for all 20 scale titles were reported as well as the mean and standard deviation. To ascertain a general satisfaction score as well as overall intrinsic and

extrinsic satisfaction scores, the individual mean scores for each question were summed by category and then divided by the number of questions within that group.

*Research Question 4 - - Virginia SWCD employee job satisfaction as measured by modified 2002 VASWCD Survey.* Descriptive statistics including frequencies of distribution, measures of central tendency, and measures of variance were utilized. In the 2002 survey, the mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions were reported for each individual item. The researcher elected to report the 2007-2008 data in a similar fashion.

*Research Question 5 - - Virginia SWCD employee differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction levels as measured by MSQ 1977 Short-Form based on age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility.* A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was selected as an appropriate statistical test to determine differences between group means. Prior to utilizing ANOVA, a homogeneity of variance test must always be performed; if the p-value is less than .05, the ANOVA test is not allowed (Howell, 2007). The researcher performed a homogeneity test each time an ANOVA test was considered. For instances when the ANOVA did not violate the homogeneity test an alpha level of .05 was established and p-values were calculated to determine significance. If the p-value was less than “alpha,” then the researcher concluded there were differences between the variables being analyzed (Coolidge, 2004; Howell, 2007). According to Coolidge (2004),

The purpose of ANOVA was to determine whether significant differences existed among two or more groups’ means without inflating the Type I Error. One limitation of ANOVA is that, if the null hypothesis is rejected, ANOVA is an omnibus test with a vague alternative hypothesis. ANOVA does not tell us what the exact pattern of mean differences is. Multiple comparison tests, also called *a posterior tests* or *post hoc tests*,

were designed to be used after a significant ANOVA where the null has been rejected.

Multiple comparison tests help to determine the pattern of significant differences among the means....(p. 189)

Tukey's post-hoc test was selected as the multiple comparison test for this particular study.

### *Summary*

This was a quantitative, descriptive study. The target population was initially comprised of 187 individuals employed with a Virginia SWCD during fiscal year 2007-2008. An employee directory maintained by the VASWCD provided employee names and contact information.

IRB approval was granted on November 29, 2007. Consent was implied by completing and returning the survey instrument.

The researcher utilized an instrument that was based on a combination of questionnaires to assess employee job satisfaction and identify characteristics of employees. Part I of the instrument consisted of an existing questionnaire known as the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form in order to assess overall job satisfaction as well as the intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction of district employees. Permission to use this instrument and administer it in a Web-based format using a secure site was obtained from the University of Minnesota Vocational Psychology Research Department. The MSQ Short-Form consists of 20 questions with five response alternatives: Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Neither, Satisfied, Very Satisfied (Weiss et al., 1967). Validity and reliability are proven for this existing instrument. Part II consisted of a modified survey instrument that was initially authorized in 2002 by the VASWCD to evaluate job satisfaction. Permission to use this instrument was granted from the administrator of the original survey, Franklin "Lex" Bruce, Jr., and Ricky Rash, VASWCD President. The researcher chose to incorporate sections from the 2002 survey because

they paralleled the current study. Validity was obtained for the initial study via a panel of experts. A reliability coefficient for this particular study was reported. The final part of this study's instrument was used to determine the characteristics of the current work force. The following information was gathered: gender, age, ethnicity, race, marital status, children, education level, SWCD Area, tenure, employment status, position status, salary or wage earnings, and primary job responsibility.

Since the survey was administered electronically, data collection assistance was provided by the CAEEP. The instrument was also field tested in accordance with guidance provided by Dillman (2007). A regional Virginia DCR office served as the field test group. The field test was conducted in December 2007. As a result of the field test, typographical, grammatical, formatting, and technological errors were identified and corrected prior to initiating the actual survey.

The Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2007) was used to collect data. On January 3, 2008 and January 7, 2008, pre-notice letters were sent to the target population. The CAEEP sent the initial e-mail on January 8, 2008, which included a detailed description of the research, authenticated login and password, and a direct link to the Web-based survey. Subjects were given 14 days to respond. E-mail reminders were sent on January 15, 2008 and January 22, 2008.

As incentives, the researcher agreed to prepare an executive summary of the survey results, making it accessible to the Virginia SWCD employees and a prize of \$100 to a randomly selected respondent. The researcher also established a plan for response rates and non-respondents. A response rate less than 60% would not be sufficient and would require the researcher to contact non-respondents (individuals failing to respond by January 22, 2008; 5 PM EST) via a personal e-mail from the researcher.

Data were analyzed with the student version of SPSS Version 14.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies of distribution, measures of central tendency, and measures of variance were utilized, in addition to the One-way ANOVA and Tukey's post-hoc statistical tests.

## Chapter 4

### Findings of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of job satisfaction among Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) personnel who were employed during fiscal year 2007-2008. Five research questions were addressed:

1. What were the characteristics of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees?
2. What was the general (overall) job satisfaction level of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form?
3. What degrees of intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction were expressed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form?
4. What degree of job satisfaction was expressed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by a modified version of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (VASWCD) 2002 survey?
5. Were there differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction levels as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form based on the following independent variables: age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility?

This chapter examines the research findings. The survey response rate as well as data and analyses related to the five research questions are described. Analyses and related tables were

generated using the student version of the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 14.0 for Windows.

### *Survey Response*

The survey instrument was sent electronically to all Virginia SWCD employees listed, as of December 30, 2007, in the e-mail directory maintained by the VASWCD (N=187). Of the surveys that were distributed on Tuesday, January 8, 2008, one was returned with an error message stating that the e-mail address was invalid and, therefore, could not be forwarded to the selected recipient. Also the researcher was listed as a member of the population, but was not included as a participant. This resulted in an accessible population of 185. A total of 148 Virginia SWCD employees responded to the survey, equating to an overall response rate of 80%.

### *Employee Characteristics – Research Question 1*

The first research question sought to determine the characteristics of Virginia SWCD employees. Part III of the survey instrument addressed this question. For the purposes of this document, employee characteristics are discussed individually.

*Gender.* A total of 90 (63%) females and 54 (38%) males responded to the survey. Four respondents failed to complete this survey item.

*Age.* Respondents were asked to report their birth year, which the researcher used to determine the age of individual respondents as of January 2008. The mean age for respondents was 41.47 years of age, with a median of 40.50, and a mode of 25. Ages ranged from a minimum of 23 years of age to a maximum of 69 years of age. Table 3 summarizes the range of ages represented. Ten respondents failed to provide their birth year.

Table 3

*Virginia SWCD Employees' Age Distribution (n=138)*

Age	Frequency	Percent
23-29	33	24
30-39	35	25
40-49	26	19
50-59	29	21
60-69	15	11
Total	138	100

*Ethnicity.* Two respondents identified themselves as Hispanic (1%), while 139 respondents were non-Hispanic (99%). Seven respondents failed to complete this item.

*Race.* A total of 135 (97%) respondents identified as “White.” Of the remaining respondents, one respondent identified as “American Indian or Alaska Native,” one identified as “American Indian or Alaska Native” and “White,” one identified as “Asian” and “White,” and one identified as “Black or African American.” Nine respondents failed to complete this item.

*Marital status.* Ninety-nine respondents reported being married (70%), while 31 (22%) were single, nine (6%) were divorced, two (1%) were widowed, and one (1%) was separated. Six respondents failed to complete this item.

*Children 18 and under and living in the home.* A total of 91 (65%) respondents had no children 18 and under and living in the home. Nineteen respondents (14%) had one child, 24 (17%) had two children, four (3%) had three children, and one (1%) had four children. Nine participants failed to respond.

*Highest educational degree.* Respondents were asked to report the highest educational degree they had received at the time the survey was distributed. Table 4 summarizes the data collected. Seventy (50%) of the respondents held a bachelor’s degree. Seven respondents failed to complete this item.

Table 4

*Virginia SWCD Employees’ Highest Educational Degree (n=141)*

Educational degree	Frequency	Percent
High school diploma or GED	29	21
Associate’s degree	22	15
Bachelor’s degree	70	50
Master’s degree	19	13
Doctoral degree	1	1
Total	141	100

*Virginia SWCD Area.* Table 5 illustrates the number of employees from each Virginia SWCD Area who responded to the job satisfaction survey. A total of 139 employees chose to identify their SWCD Area, while nine respondents failed to complete this item. The response rate for each of the six Areas was over 60%. Area III and Area V had the highest response rates (81%), while Area I had the lowest response rate (62%).

Table 5

*Virginia SWCD Employees' Response by Area (n=139)*

Virginia SWCD Area	Number of employees receiving survey	Total employees responding	Percent response rate
I	26	16	62
II	44	35	80
III	37	30	81
IV	31	23	74
V	31	25	81
VI	16	10	63

*Tenure.* Table 6 highlights employee tenure. The number of years employees had worked for a Virginia SWCD ranged from three months to 34 years. The mean was 6.52 years of service, with a standard deviation of 7.07. The median was 4.00 years of service and the mode was 1.00 year of service. Nine respondents failed to complete this survey item.

Table 6

*Virginia SWCD Employees' Tenure (n=139)*

Tenure in years	Frequency	Percent
0-5	85	61
6-10	26	19
11-15	9	7
16-20	10	7
21-25	6	4
26-30	2	1
31-35	1	1
Total	139	100

*Employment status.* A total of 120 (85%) respondents had full-time employment status, averaging at least 40 hours per week. Twenty-two respondents (16%) were part-time employees. Six individuals failed to respond.

*Position status.* A total of 115 (81%) respondents were in a permanent position, meaning the position was expected to continue indefinitely. Twenty-seven (19%) respondents held temporary positions, meaning a termination date exists or will be established. Six individuals did not complete this item.

*Level of compensation.* Virginia SWCD employees may be paid with an hourly wage or an annual salary; therefore, respondents were asked to report their compensation as one or the other. Twenty-four respondents (18%) reported earning an hourly wage. Wages ranged from \$9.00 per hour to \$20.00 per hour, with a mean of \$14.45 per hour. A total of 110 respondents

(82%) reported earning an annual salary. Annual salaries ranged from \$21,888.00 to \$85,993.00, with a mean of \$36,373.54 per year. Fourteen respondents chose not to provide this information.

*Primary job responsibility.* Although the researcher recognized that Virginia SWCD employees perform various job duties, respondents were asked to categorize their primary job responsibility. Table 7 summarizes the data collected. A total of 72 (51%) respondents were employed in the technical category. Seven respondents failed to complete this item.

Table 7

*Virginia SWCD Employees' Primary Job Responsibility (n=141)*

Primary job responsibility by category	Frequency	Percent
Administrative assistance or secretarial	23	16
Administrative or managerial	27	19
Educational	19	14
Technical	72	51
Total	141	100

*MSQ Short-Form – Research Question 2 and 3*

The second and third research questions sought to determine job satisfaction levels of Virginia SWCD employees utilizing the MSQ Short-Form. Part I of the instrument consisted of 20 questions featured on the MSQ Short-Form. Refer to Appendix R for respondents' frequency distributions according to the 20 job scales. Due to copyright laws of this instrument, findings are reported by the scale title, as opposed to individual question. Two respondents failed to complete Part I, Questions 1, 4, 12, and 13 of the survey. Three respondents failed to complete Part I, Question 16.

Mean scores were utilized to assess the respondents' job satisfaction levels. The higher the mean score the more satisfied the respondent. Mean scores were interpreted as follows: score in the range of 2.50 to 3.49 was interpreted as "neutral," meaning respondents could not decide whether or not they were satisfied with a particular job aspect; a mean score in the range of 3.50 to 4.49 was interpreted as "satisfied," and a score of 4.50 to 5.00 was interpreted as "very satisfied."

*General Job Satisfaction.* All 20 survey items assessed general job satisfaction. The intrinsic and extrinsic mean scores are reported in Table 8 and Table 9, respectively. Two survey items are specific to the general satisfaction score; neither is characterized as intrinsic or extrinsic. The mean score for the respondents' ( $n = 148$ ) satisfaction with their working conditions was 4.01, with a standard deviation of .92. The mean score for the respondents' ( $n = 148$ ) satisfaction with co-workers was 3.95, with a standard deviation of 1.09. To generate a general job satisfaction score, the mean scores for all 20 survey items were utilized. The range of mean scores was 2.87 to 4.48. The general job satisfaction score was 3.92.

*Intrinsic Satisfaction.* Twelve of the 20 items featured on this instrument assessed intrinsic satisfaction. Respondents were satisfied with 11 out of the 12 intrinsic items, with mean scores ranging from a 3.41 to 4.48. They were most satisfied with the job item referred to as variety, followed by social services. Authority was one intrinsic item in which respondents were "neutral" about their level of satisfaction. The mean for all intrinsic satisfaction items was 4.15, thus SWCD respondents, overall, were intrinsically satisfied.

*Extrinsic Satisfaction.* Six of the 20 instrument items assessed extrinsic satisfaction. Mean scores ranged from 2.87 to 3.84. Respondents were satisfied with three of the extrinsic items. They were most satisfied with supervision-technical, followed by supervision-human

relations, and recognition on the job. Respondents were undecided on their level of satisfaction for the three remaining extrinsic items. The lowest mean score of 2.87 was attributed to advancement. The mean for all extrinsic satisfaction items was 3.48, thus SWCD respondents, overall, were neutral in terms of extrinsic satisfaction.

Table 8

*Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire Short-Form - Virginia SWCD Employee Intrinsic Scores**(n = 148)*

Aspect of job as reported by scale title - intrinsic	Mean	Standard deviation
Variety	4.48	.70
Social services	4.45	.67
Moral values	4.39	.70
Independence	4.34	.70
Activity	4.24	.88
Ability utilization	4.24	.81
Security	4.09	.96
Achievement	4.09	.83
Creativity	4.08	.75
Responsibility	4.06	.81
Social status	3.90	.78
Authority	3.41	.70
Grand mean	4.15	

*Note.* Means established using a scale in which 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = satisfied, and 5 = very satisfied. Means are reported in descending order. A few respondents did not reply to all items.

Table 9

*Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire Short-Form - Virginia SWCD Employee Extrinsic Scores*

(n = 148)

Aspect of job as reported by scale title - extrinsic	Mean	Standard deviation
Supervision - technical	3.84	1.05
Supervision - human relations	3.76	1.15
Recognition	3.73	.89
Company policies and practices	3.45	1.09
Compensation	3.20	1.10
Advancement	2.87	1.08
Grand mean	3.48	

*Note.* Means established using a scale in which 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = satisfied, and 5 = very satisfied. Means are reported in descending order. A few respondents did not reply to all items.

*Modified Version of 2002 VASWCD Employee Evaluation – Research Question 4*

The fourth research question sought to determine job satisfaction levels of Virginia SWCD employees utilizing a modified version of the 2002 VASWCD Employee Evaluation. Twelve individual job satisfaction issues were addressed in the first question of this survey, overall job satisfaction was assessed in the second question, and the third question provided respondents an opportunity to make comments. Refer to Appendix S for respondents’ frequency distributions for the 12 job satisfaction issues and to Appendix T for respondents’ frequency distributions for overall job satisfaction. For the purposes of this document, results are

summarized in Table 10 and Table 11. Two respondents failed to complete Part II, Question 1 and three respondents failed to complete Part II, Question 2.

The scale for Tables 10 and 11 of the instrument differed from the MSQ Short-Form scale. Therefore, mean scores were interpreted as follows: A score in the range of 1.50 to 2.49 was interpreted as “dissatisfied,” a score in the range of 2.50 to 3.49 was interpreted as “satisfied,” and a score in the range of 3.50 to 4.49 was interpreted as “very satisfied.”

Table 10

*Virginia SWCD Employees’ Satisfaction Scores by Issue (n=146)*

Job satisfaction issue	Mean	Standard deviation
Flexibility with professional scheduling	3.63	.99
Type of work performed	3.54	.74
Relationship with district board	3.51	.95
Work relationships	3.49	1.01
Professional development	3.29	.79
Management and supervision	3.19	1.04
Clearly defined job responsibilities and work goals	3.08	.84
Health insurance benefit	2.77	1.65
New employee orientation	2.76	1.09
Salary or wage	2.68	.88
Life insurance benefit	2.36	1.61
Career advancement opportunities	2.18	1.10

*Note.* Means established using a scale in which 0 = not applicable, 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = satisfied, 4 = very satisfied, and 5 = extremely satisfied. Means are reported in descending order.

Table 11

*Virginia SWCD Employees' Overall Job Satisfaction (n=145)*

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall Job Satisfaction	3.43	.77

*Note:* Means established with a scale where 0 = No Applicable, 1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied, and 5 = Extremely Satisfied. Means are reported in descending order.

The mean score was utilized to assess job satisfaction levels. Mean scores ranged from 2.18 to 3.63. Respondents were “very satisfied” with their flexibility with professional scheduling, type of work performed, and their relationship with district boards. Respondents were “satisfied” with seven of the 12 items. Further analysis of the means show respondents were most satisfied with work relationships, professional development, management and supervision, and clearly defined job responsibilities and work goals. They were least satisfied with health insurance benefits, new employee orientation, and salaries or wages. Respondents expressed “dissatisfaction” with two items: life insurance benefits and career advancement opportunities. They were most dissatisfied with opportunities available to advance in their career.

Part II, Question 2 assessed overall job satisfaction. A total of 65 (45%, Mean = 3.43, SD = .77) respondents were “satisfied” with their Virginia SWCD employment.

The final question in Part II afforded employees the opportunity to provide comments or suggestions on any other items they deemed important to employee satisfaction. Forty-two percent ( $n = 62$ ) of respondents offered comments and/or suggestions. The researcher analyzed the data for predominant themes. Nine themes were identified, many of which supported the statistical analyses of other sections of the instrument. Appendix U features the 62 comments. The only edits made by the researcher to the comments were the correction of misspelled words

and the removal of content that might have revealed the identity of a district employee, thus compromising the promised anonymity of respondents. Dominant themes are summarized in the list below.

1. **Career Advancement and Recognition:** Respondents stated there was a lack of career advancement and recognition in Virginia SWCDs.
2. **Directors:** Several themes emerged that were specifically related to directors. There was also a combination of positive and negative comments about director performance and their relationships with staff. In some cases, directors were praised for their commitment and leadership. In other cases, the opposite was expressed. Some employees expressed their desire for directors to take a more active role in their public service. For example, they should not just attend monthly meetings, but also participate in district events and take a more active role in daily operations, actively participate in the decision-making process, maintain a professional attitude, forego personal agendas, and maintain a standard of ethics. One area that consistently emerged concerned personnel management.
3. **Flexibility:** Respondents expressed their fondness for the flexible work schedule afforded by their SWCD employment.
4. **Funding:** There were two components associated with this item. The first concerned the lack of funding and inconsistent funding associated with both operating and program funds. The second related to employee compensation. Respondents believed that Virginia SWCD employees were underpaid for the amount of work expected. However, there were several comments that stated the lower pay could be compensated via fringe benefits packages and other incentives.

5. **Health Insurance:** This item received the greatest number of comments. The consensus was that districts needed to provide quality and affordable health insurance coverage for employees. Employees recognize the associated costs, but view such a benefit as invaluable to employee retention. The lack of health insurance upon retirement was cited as a reason for employees seeking other employment. Several employees suggested the Virginia Association of SWCDs pursue a “group” health insurance policy for all 47 districts, perhaps even getting the districts to be included under the State employee health insurance plan. Comment 19, 20, and 58 featured in Appendix V provide further insight on the issue of a Virginia SWCD group health insurance policy.
6. **Orientation:** New employee orientation is perceived as insufficient and in some cases non-existent.
7. **Personnel Relations and Office Management:** Several comments alluded to poor working relationships among district staffers and the detrimental effects those have upon the SWCD. In addition, the issue of office management was discussed. Based on the statements, an office manager is warranted; however, individuals given this responsibility should receive adequate and on-going training. Directors must work closely with the office manager.
8. **Relationships with United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA - NRCS) and Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR):** Based on the comments associated with this theme, it appears that SWCDs appreciate their relationships with the aforementioned agencies but in some cases there is a need for improvement. Virginia SWCD employees want to be treated

as equals and maintain amicable working relationships that benefit the mutual clientele served by each agency.

9. Workload: Several respondents mentioned the heavy workloads experienced by SWCD employees. They reflected on how the lack of funding and unstable funding made it difficult to recruit and retain an adequate number of quality employees. Furthermore, the level of compensation often did not correspond to the amount of work employees were responsible for completing. Some mentioned the stress, both professional and personal, caused by such workloads.

*Differences in job satisfaction based on age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility – Research Question 5*

The researcher determined whether or not there were differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction levels as measured by the MSQ 1977 Short-Form based on these four independent variables: age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was selected as an appropriate statistical test to determine differences between group means. Respondents' total raw scores of intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction were calculated. Prior to utilizing ANOVA, a homogeneity of variance test was performed. If the p-value was less than .05, the ANOVA test was not conducted (Howell, 2007). When the ANOVA was appropriate, an alpha level of .05 was established and p-values were calculated to determine significance. If the p-value was less than "alpha," then the researcher concluded there were differences between the variables being analyzed and the Tukey's post-hoc was performed as a multiple comparison test to determine direction (Coolidge, 2004; Howell, 2007).

Age: According to Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances, the p-value for age and total intrinsic satisfaction was .01 ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the one-way ANOVA could not be performed for these variables. For age and total extrinsic satisfaction, Levene's Test of Homogeneity calculated a p-value of .07 ( $p > .05$ ), so the researcher proceeded with the one-way ANOVA. The p-value was .27 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in extrinsic satisfaction based on age. According to Levene's Test of Homogeneity, the p-value for age and total general satisfaction was .02 ( $p < .05$ ). The one-way ANOVA could not be performed for these variables.

Gender: Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances was not violated for gender and any of the three job satisfaction variables, so the one-way ANOVA was performed. In terms of gender and total intrinsic satisfaction, the p-value was .96 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in intrinsic satisfaction based on gender. In terms of gender and total extrinsic satisfaction, the p-value was .64 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in extrinsic satisfaction between male and female respondents. The p-value for gender and total general satisfaction was .79 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in general satisfaction for the variable of gender.

Education level: Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances was not violated for education level and any of the three job satisfaction variables, so the one-way ANOVA was performed. In terms of education level and total intrinsic satisfaction, the p-value was .50 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in intrinsic satisfaction among respondents with varied levels of education. In terms of education level and total extrinsic satisfaction, the p-value was .62 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in extrinsic satisfaction for the variable of education level. The p-value for education level and total general satisfaction

was .53 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in general satisfaction for education levels.

Primary job responsibility: Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances was not violated for primary job responsibility and any of the three job satisfaction variables, so the one-way ANOVA was performed. In terms of primary job responsibility and total intrinsic satisfaction, the p-value was .07 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant in intrinsic satisfaction among respondents with varied job responsibilities. In terms of primary job responsibility and total extrinsic satisfaction, the p-value was .70 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in extrinsic satisfaction for the job responsibility variable. The p-value for primary job responsibility and total general satisfaction was .19 ( $p > .05$ ), indicating there was not a significant difference in general satisfaction for primary job responsibility.

### *Summary*

Chapter 4 presented the findings as they related to the purpose of the study and the related research questions. In addition, statistical data including distribution frequencies, measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode), and measures of variation (standard deviation and range) were presented. An overall or general level of job satisfaction among the Virginia SWCD employees who responded was found for both the MSQ Short-Form 1977 and the modified 2002 VASWCD survey.

The MSQ Short-Form found employees, overall, were intrinsically satisfied. They were most satisfied with the variety and social services. In terms of overall extrinsic satisfaction, respondents were neutral. However, individual extrinsic items in which "satisfaction" was expressed included supervision-technical, supervision-human relations, and recognition. Respondents were less satisfied with advancement.

Data collected via the modified 2002 VASWCD survey found that employees were “very satisfied” with a flexible work schedule, type of work performed, and board relationships. They were least satisfied with health insurance benefits, new employee orientation, and salaries or wages. Respondents expressed “dissatisfaction” with two items: life insurance benefits and career advancement opportunities.

The researcher determined whether or not there were differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction levels as measured by the MSQ 1977 Short-Form based on these four independent variables: age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility. A one-way ANOVA test and Tukey’s post-hoc test were utilized as appropriate. Due to the population of this particular study violating Levene’s Test of Homogeneity, the one-way ANOVA test could not be performed for age and intrinsic satisfaction as well as age and general job satisfaction. However, the one-way ANOVA was performed for all other variables. The researcher found that there were no significant differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, or general job satisfaction for any of the four independent variables.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the problem, purpose and research questions, literature review, and research methodology for the study. In addition, conclusions and recommendations are discussed.

### Summary

#### *Problem*

Employment is a major factor in the lives of most Americans and a driving force in our society. According to the United States Department of Labor-Bureau of Labor Statistics, in June 2007 the employment-population ratio was 63.3%, with 145.9 million American adults employed (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Some American adults devote more than half their life to work obligations. The majority of Americans enter the workforce on a permanent basis upon graduating from high school and/or college, remaining active members of the workforce until normal retirement age. The Social Security Administration defines normal retirement age as 62 years of age for those receiving reduced Social Security retirement benefits to 67 years of age for those born in 1960 or later (United States Social Security Administration, n.d.). It is probable that individuals may work 40 or more years during their lifetime. Given a life expectancy of 77.9 years of age (Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics, 2004), some people may work more than half their life.

Being satisfied with one's employment is advantageous for both the employee and employer. One such benefit is a potential reduction in employee turnover, which can have a substantial impact on the labor market. Rubin (1995) identified declines in production, separation

pay, and costs associated with recruitment, orientation, and training of a new hire as negative consequences of turnover. There is no doubt there are both financial and human costs attributed to turnover (Beale & Hollinsworth, 2002; Dobbs, 2000; Norton, 1999; Rousan & Henderson, 1996).

Employee turnover affects all sectors of the labor market and is an escalating problem. The majority of U.S. corporations anticipate an annual 6% voluntary turnover rate, while many high-tech companies expect to lose 30% of their workforce each year (Norton, 1999).

Governmental agencies, such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, are not exempt from employee turnover. The United States Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA – NRCS), recognizes voluntary turnover as a human resource management issue; this was documented in their Human Capital Strategic Plan 2006-2010 (USDA-NRCS, 2006). Leaders in Virginia's 47 SWCDs have debated whether or not employee turnover is an issue for several years. The issue gained so much interest that in 2002 the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) authorized a state-wide employee evaluation survey for the purpose of assessing employee satisfaction and identifying factors that might be contributing to employee turnover. In 2007, individuals serving in a supervisory and/or personnel management capacity from each of the 47 districts were directly asked whether or not employee was a problem for Virginia SWCDs. Of the 36 district supervisors who responded, 47% identified employee turnover as a problem, while 53% did not identify employee turnover as a problem. Respondents from three areas thought turnover was a problem, while two areas did not think turnover was a problem, and one was divided on the issue. Voluntary departures were experienced in all areas and there were a larger number in the three areas in which supervisors indicated that turnover was a problem.

### *Purpose and Research Questions*

The Theory of Work Adjustment concludes that employees' satisfaction, or lack thereof, with their job has an effect on productivity and rates of employee turnover (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967). Therefore, identifying factors associated with employee job satisfaction levels (intrinsic, extrinsic, and general) and taking appropriate actions, may be a means of deterring future employee turnover. The purpose of this study was to determine the level of job satisfaction among Virginia SWCD personnel who were employed during fiscal year 2007-2008. The following research questions were investigated in this research study.

1. What were the characteristics of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees?
2. What was the general (overall) job satisfaction level of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form?
3. What degrees of intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction were expressed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form?
4. What degree of job satisfaction was expressed by Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees as measured by a modified version of the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (VASWCD) 2002 survey?
5. Were there differences in the intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction level as measured by the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form based on the following independent variables: age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility?

### *Summary of Literature Review*

In the mid-1930s SWCDs were created to give a local voice to the conservation of natural resources. Title 10 of the *Code of Virginia* defines SWCDs as political subdivisions of state government and provides regulations and guidelines of operation. Virginia's 47 SWCDs are responsible performing conservation work within designated boundaries. Work is accomplished with leadership from a Board of Directors and a support staff.

The demand for environmental workers surged in the 1960s with the onset of the environmental movement. Today, SWCDs are competing with numerous public and private entities to recruit and maintain competent, professional employees.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, numerous research studies have been conducted in regard to job satisfaction. As a result, many theories and measurements of job satisfaction were established and include: the Hawthorne Effect, Elton Mayo, 1927-1932; Job Satisfaction Blank, Robert Hoppock, 1935; Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Abraham Maslow, 1943; Two Factor Hygiene and Motivation Theory, Frederick Herzberg, 1957 and 1959; Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy Theory, Victor Vroom, 1964; Job Descriptive Index, Cornell Group, 1969; Job Diagnostic Survey, Hackman and Oldham, 1975; Job in General Scale, Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, and Paul, 1989; and Work Adjustment Theory, Minnesota Group, 1964. The Theory of Work Adjustment was selected as the theoretical framework for this study because of its recognition and extensive utilization. It is centered on the work personality and the work environment. An individual's satisfaction with the work environment in combination with satisfactory performance on the job result in correspondence, which is when the employee fulfills the requirements of the work environment and the work environment meets the requirements of the employee (Dawis & Lofquist, 1990). Tenure is a product of both satisfaction and satisfactoriness,

thus an acute awareness of employee satisfaction can have a positive impact on employee relations and the overall well-being of the organization.

A number of variables and their relationship to job satisfaction have also been researched. Age and gender are two of the most common variables that are studied (Carter, Pounder, Lawrence & Wozniak, 1989; Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, & Capwell, 1957). More recent job satisfaction research has addressed education level and position (Clark, 1996; Idson, 1990; Meng, 1990; Vila & Garcia-More, 2005). In regard to all four variables, research findings are conflicting.

The literature review confirmed that employee turnover and retention have been linked to job satisfaction (Beale & Holinsworth, 2002; Mobley, 1982; Owen, 2004; Rubin, 1995). As a result, job satisfaction is an area of interest for many types of organizations. Nevertheless, documented research directly related to SWCDs is limited.

### *Research Methodology*

This was a quantitative, descriptive study. The target population was composed of individuals employed with a Virginia SWCD during fiscal year 2007-2008, resulting in an accessible population of 185. The instrument consisted of three parts, each selected to assess employee job satisfaction and identify characteristics of employees. Part I of the instrument featured an existing questionnaire known as the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) 1977 Short-Form, utilized to determine the intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction levels of district employees. Part II was a modified survey instrument that was initially authorized in 2002 by the VASWCD to evaluate job satisfaction. Part III identified employee characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, race, marital status, children, educational level, SWCD Area, tenure, employment status, position status, salary or wage earnings, and primary job responsibility).

The survey instrument was Web-based and administered via a secure site. The Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational provided data collection assistance. Dillman (2007) served as a source of reference for the study's field test. A regional Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) office served as the field test group. As a result of the field test, typographical, grammatical, formatting, and technological errors were identified and corrected prior to initiating the actual survey.

The Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2007) was used to collect data. On January 3, 2008, and January 7, 2008, pre-notice letters were sent to the target population via e-mail. The CAEEP sent the initial mailing on January 8, 2008, which included a detailed description of the research, an authenticated login and password, and a direct link to the Web-based survey. Subjects were requested to respond within 14 days and electronic reminders were issued on January 15, 2008, and January 22, 2008. A total of 148 Virginia SWCD employees responded to the survey by the established deadline of January 22, 2008, equating to an overall response of 80%.

Data were analyzed with the student version of the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 14.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics including distribution frequencies, measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), and measures of variance (standard deviation and range) were used to report employee characteristics and identify levels of job satisfaction for various aspects of the job. The one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized to determine mean differences among the variables (job satisfaction and the independent variables of age, gender, educational level, primary job responsibility).

## Conclusions by Research Question

### *Virginia SWCD Employee Characteristics*

The following traits characterized the majority of Virginia SWCD respondents: non-Hispanic, white, female, average age of 41 years, married with no children 18 and under living in the home, hold a bachelor's degree, average tenure of 6.52 years, employed full-time, employed in a permanent position, with the position expected to continue indefinitely, and hold a technical position. Of all the survey questions, respondents were the least willing to share their levels of compensation, with 14 electing not to answer this question. For those who did respond, the average hourly wage was \$14.45 per hour, while salaried employees reporting earning an average of \$36,373.54 per year. The majority of respondents categorized their primary job responsibility as "technical."

The researcher concluded from the findings that there are a low number of minority workers. Another conclusion drawn was that tenure is likely an issue for this agency with average employee tenure slightly greater than six years. Also, there appears to be some discrepancy in the compensation of employees statewide, with a considerable difference between the low salary (\$21,888.00) and the highest reported salary (\$85,990.00).

### *Virginia SWCD Job Satisfaction – MSQ 1977 Short –Form*

The findings determined that Virginia SWCD employees were generally satisfied with their jobs. In terms of intrinsic satisfaction, SWCD respondents were also satisfied; however, somewhat greater levels of satisfaction were expressed in regard to variety and social services. In terms of overall extrinsic satisfaction, the response was neutral. Respondents were undecided on three of the six extrinsic job aspects, but they expressed satisfaction with the remaining three

extrinsic aspects. These were supervision-technical, supervision-human relations, and recognition. The lowest mean scores were reported for compensation and advancement.

The researcher concluded that for the most part Virginia SWCDs are making a concerted effort to encourage the general and intrinsic satisfaction of their employees. In terms of extrinsic satisfaction, although the two extrinsic items with the lowest mean scores were still in the “neutral” range, both were areas of concern for the majority of respondents. The issue of the level of compensation could be related to the aforementioned range of salaries.

#### *Virginia SWCD Job Satisfaction – Modified VASWCD 2002 Survey*

As reported in the findings, the majority of respondents were generally satisfied with their district employment. There were distinctions among the satisfaction levels for the 12 job issues addressed in this section of the survey, with employee ratings on some questions falling above or below “satisfied.” Flexibility with work schedule, type of work performed, and relationship with district boards were three areas in which respondents were “very satisfied.” District employees were less satisfied with health insurance benefits, new employee orientation, and salaries and wages. Respondents were clearly “dissatisfied” with life insurance benefits and opportunities available to advance in their career. The additional comments and suggestions provided by a number of respondents were particularly informative.

Based on the findings, SWCD employees take pride in their work and value the contributions they make to their communities. There is no doubt that flexibility with professional scheduling is an item of great satisfaction.

As a result of findings from both the first question and third question, the researcher was able to draw several conclusions. Although employee relationships with the district board were cited as an item of great satisfaction in the first question of the survey, in the third question many

respondents felt the need to elaborate on this item. Based on the data collected, the researcher concluded that having an effective board is essential to the satisfaction of employees and the overall health of the agency. Employees expect individuals serving on SWCD boards to be professional leaders who take an active role in their public service. The findings suggest that personnel management is a serious issue. It appears that directors need to more effectively address personnel issues in a professional, timely, and efficient manner. Another conclusion drawn centered upon health insurance benefits. It appears that health insurance coverage widely varies across the 47 Virginia SWCDs. Employees have concerns about their present coverage as well as coverage upon retirement. Exploration of ways to provide state-wide health insurance coverage should be considered. In addition, the lack of new employee orientation causes the transition into SWCD employment to be more difficult and leads to frustration. Once again, salaries and wages emerged as an area of less satisfaction, thus the researcher surmised it merits the attention of district leaders.

Since the majority of respondents were dissatisfied with their life insurance benefits, it suggested to the researcher that many districts fail to provide this fringe benefit. Yet again, dissatisfaction with career advancement opportunities was expressed. The researcher decided this item was certainly deficient for the majority of SWCDs.

#### *Job Satisfaction and Differences with Independent Variables*

The researcher determined whether or not there were differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, and general job satisfaction levels as measured by the MSQ 1977 Short-Form based on these four independent variables: age, gender, education level, and primary job responsibility. A one-way ANOVA test was utilized to determine differences between the means of groups, while Tukey's post-hoc test was used as the multiple comparison test. Due to the population of this

particular study, the Levene's Test of Homogeneity was violated, thus the one-way ANOVA test could not be performed for age and intrinsic satisfaction as well as age and general job satisfaction. However, the one-way ANOVA was performed for all other variables. The researcher concluded that there were no significant differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, or general job satisfaction for any of the four independent variables.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researcher formulated a list of recommendations for practice and policy. Please be advised that comments are not listed in any order of importance.

1. The study confirmed that in general current Virginia SWCD employees are satisfied with their jobs and enjoy their work. The majority were willing to participate in this study in hopes of making the SWCD work environment the best it possibly can be. The comments and/or suggestions, both positive and negative, should be carefully reviewed by individuals in a position of authority. Any criticisms should be taken constructively. Ultimately, action should be taken promptly on some of the items documented through this survey, as a means of improving Virginia SWCDs. Many of the items documented in this survey were initially documented in the 2002 VASWCD Employee Evaluation; however, it appears the results of the original survey may not have been used effectively.
2. Although there are a low number of minorities employed by Virginia SWCDs, a challenge might be to discover if recruitment of employees targets minorities, and if they are retained once hired. Virginia SWCDs should continue to work on attracting minorities.

3. The average number of years respondents had worked for a SWCD was 6.52 years. The researcher believed this is a good indicator that turnover is occurring within the agency in comparison with Cooperative Extension in Virginia. Virginia SWCD leaders should take the issue of employee turnover seriously and focus on ways to retain quality employees.
4. The majority of respondents categorized their primary job responsibility as “technical.” Information provided in the Chapter 2 Literature Review confirmed that technical positions were in the most demand, thus SWCDs are competing with numerous entities for the same type of employee. SWCD leaders must be aware of the demand for technical positions and ensure that districts state-wide are places where quality employees desire to work.
5. Satisfaction with flexibility of professional scheduling was a recurring response. SWCDs should emphasize this aspect of the job when recruiting new employees because it is a unique characteristic.
6. The lack of career advancement opportunities was cited on numerous occasions in this study and in 2002. Unfortunately, given the structure of Virginia SWCDs, it may be impossible to directly address this item. Nevertheless, there are alternative solutions. First, directors should be clear with potential recruits, informing them of the fact that there are few opportunities for advancement within the organization. In return for limited advancement opportunities, SWCDs could establish their own system of advancement or career ladder. Employees might earn additional fringe benefits based on outstanding performance and/or years of service. For example, an employee with 10 years of service might earn additional annual leave or an employee

who successfully completes a series of projects might earn an end-of-year bonus.

Several respondents alluded to a lack of recognition, but recognition would be another way to compensate employees for not being able to advance. Various means of recognition should be explored. The overall goal would be to provide something to employees that would be equivalent to what they would get if they were afforded the opportunity to advance within the organization.

7. Unstable and inconsistent funding was a predominant issue in the study. It should be noted that this issue was also documented in 2002. Individual districts, VASWCD, partnering agencies, and state legislators must work on a solution to this problem. A state policy that could identify a source of consistent revenue for SWCDs and allocate such revenue accordingly would be warranted.
8. Level of compensation was an area of concern in this study and the 2002 survey. Certainly, the previously described funding issues compound this issue. Based on data collected, the range of annual salaries and hourly wages for employees seems extreme. It appears employees would appreciate more consistency among districts. Also, employees want performance evaluations to play a greater role in pay raises. Just because one employee gets an increase in salary for exemplary work does not mean the entire staff warrants an increase. In both the 2002 survey and this study, employees offered some solutions: (a) VASWCD, working in conjunction with representation from all 47 districts, should develop a state-wide pay scale; (b) both cost-of-living annual pay increases as well as merit increases should be established; and (c) directors should be objective when making payroll decisions.

9. Insurance, specifically health, life, and dental, emerged as a major issue for respondents. There is an overwhelming need to establish a group health insurance plan for SWCD employees state-wide. Employees also value life insurance and dental insurance plans. It was obvious that employees have given much thought to this issue as expressed in the following direct quotations from the employee comments:

1. Health insurance is very important. As district employees become older (even the young ones), health insurance becomes more important. The Association should look into getting district employees on the State health plan. This would make better use of state funding and be better than the variety of group plans and individual policies that districts carry.
2. I think there is constant worry about affordable health insurance. Can VASWCD create a “group” for insurance purposes and get us all a more reasonable rate on health, life, dental, etc.? This would be a very valuable reason to be part of VASWCD.
3. One issue of concern is that upon retirement there is not way to buy into the health plan. If you dedicate your career to the district, upon retirement you have to find private insurance at a time when you have given up your income and have more health problems. State employees and some private companies have the option to remain with their plan and pay for it out of pocket, which is still lower than a private provider. Looking ahead, retirement planning is the one issue that makes moving to another agency an attractive option despite being satisfied with district employment.

Providing a group health plan would alleviate some of the compensation, career advancement, and recognition concerns. The VASWCD is strongly encouraged to convene an exploratory committee on health insurance coverage and find a solution to this issue. If the districts can be a part of the Virginia Retirement System, which was created for State employees, why can districts not be a part of the State health insurance plan?

10. New employee orientation is warranted. The VASWCD, working in conjunction with Virginia DCR, should develop an orientation curriculum that would accommodate districts hiring employees for an array of positions at varying times of the year.

11. Director relationships with staff members are critical not only to the overall satisfaction of employees, but the SWCD in general. Directors must be aware of the role they play. Given the comments about directors, there is no doubt that director orientation should be mandatory and perhaps more extensive than what is being currently offered. It appears that directors need additional training in ethics and personnel management.

12. The establishment of district managers within each office should be given strong consideration since it seems the daily leadership and supervision is necessary. That being said, individuals selected to fill such positions should be adequately trained.

#### *Future Research*

Future research should perhaps focus on some of the individual findings of this study. A study that could immediately emerge is one that focuses strictly on health insurance coverage for Virginia SWCD employees. A study of this nature should encompass the following: an in-depth assessment of what types of health insurance benefits each of the 47 SWCDs offers employees;

health insurance costs for districts and employees; quality of coverage; census of interest in a group plan; feasibility of becoming part of the Commonwealth of Virginia's state employee health plan; and a plan of action based on the findings and conclusions. Since the lack of opportunities for career advancement was an area of dissatisfaction, a study could be devoted to addressing this issue. Such a study could focus on the needed skills for 21<sup>st</sup> century employees who desire greater autonomy and engagement with organizational issues. Another study might concentrate on new employee orientation, specifically identifying the professional development needs of new employees. Future study should be conducted to determine effective management traits and how SWCD directors and managers can practice such skills. To determine if areas of concern and dissatisfaction are really the reasons employees leave, future research with employees who have left SWCD positions may be needed. Finally, a follow-up to this particular study within the next 5 years would be legitimate in order to assess progress.

#### *Final Thoughts*

In conclusion, Virginia SWCD employees are generally satisfied with their jobs. They are dedicated to the overall mission of SWCDs, which is to give a local voice to the conservation movement and protect and preserve the community's natural resources. Employees acknowledge there are aspects of the job which could be improved and appear to be willing to work with local boards and the VASWCD to make those improvements. After two employee satisfaction evaluations in a span of six years, it is time for district representatives in leadership positions to take notice of the findings and work toward addressing the items of concern.

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**Appendix A: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Turnover Survey, August 2007**

**Virginia Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Employee Turnover Survey**  
*Prepared and Issued by Angela P. White*  
*Reviewed by Ricky Rash, President VASWCD*

**TO BE COMPLETED BY: 1 Staff Member from each Virginia SWCD with Guidance from at least 1 SWCD Director**

**TO BE RETURNED BY: TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2007; 5 PM**

1. Identify the VA Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Area in which the district you represent is associated.  
\_\_\_\_ Area I  
\_\_\_\_ Area II  
\_\_\_\_ Area III  
\_\_\_\_ Area IV  
\_\_\_\_ Area V  
\_\_\_\_ Area VI
  
2. How many paid staff positions (include part-time, full-time, temporary, and permanent) did the SWCD support from July 1, 2002, thru July 1, 2007? *Example: The SWCD supported an Administrative Secretary, Conservation Specialist, and part-time Conservation Technician from 2002-2007 and a TMDL Technician from 2005-2007 for a total of 4 staff positions during the aforementioned time frame.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How many individual employees voluntarily left the SWCD between July 1, 2002, and July 1, 2007? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How many individual employees involuntarily left the SWCD because there was not enough funding to continue to support their staff position? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How many individual employees involuntarily left the SWCD due to dismissal or termination of employment associated with unsatisfactory job performance or a related circumstance?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Does the SWCD you represent believe that employee turnover is a problem?  
YES \_\_\_\_\_  
NO \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. If you have any additional comments related to employee turnover, please share those comments.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Direct Questions and Return Surveys To:**

Angela P. White  
E-Mail: [angela.white@va.nacdnet.net](mailto:angela.white@va.nacdnet.net)  
Fax: 276-889-2105

**Appendix B: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Turnover Survey, August 2007  
Prior Correspondence E-Mail**

FROM: Ricky Rash [dairyrn@va.net]  
DATE: Wednesday, August 1, 2007 10:52 AM  
TO: Alldistrict@vaswcd.org  
SUBJECT: Requested Information

To All Directors, Associate Directors, and Staff:

Angela White of Clinch Valley SWCD is conducting a research project for her graduate work at Virginia Tech. This all important work may be used in the near future for determining the needs of individual districts. Questions are being posed that “IF(!) there is a sizeable roll-up in NPS funds, are there qualified people available to fill these positions?” Our answer was “we don’t know.” And the follow-up question went something like, “Is it time to begin working with schools and universities to train these people?” This may be the start for answering these questions.

Angela has been presented a copy of a survey done several years ago that from memory seems very similar. Again, it is from memory. I have reviewed the current survey and approve.

I urge you to take a few minutes and comply with her request. The board is aware and supportive. This is research that districts will benefit from once complete.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation. Angela will be in touch and responses should go back to her.

Ricky Rash  
President VASWCD  
[www.vaswcd.org](http://www.vaswcd.org)

**Appendix C: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Turnover Survey, August 2007  
Cover Correspondence E-Mail**

FROM: White, Angela – Lebanon, VA  
DATE: Wednesday, August 1, 2007 2:07 PM  
TO: [Alldistrict@vaswcd.org](mailto:Alldistrict@vaswcd.org)  
SUBJECT: Virginia SWCD Survey Employee Turnover 2007  
ATTACHMENTS: Virginia SWCD Survey\_Employee Turnover 2007.doc

Hello, my name is Angela White. The distribution of this e-mail and the attached survey was briefly explained in a previous e-mail sent to the Virginia SWCD “All-District” list-serve from Ricky Rash, VASWCD President, dated August 1, 2007. For those of you receiving this e-mail who do not know me, I am employed with Clinch Valley SWCD in Russell County. I am also pursuing a graduate degree through Virginia Tech. As a graduation requirement, I must complete a research project. My research will focus on Virginia SWCD employee job satisfaction and how that relates to employee turnover. As you know, I have discussed this project with Ricky Rash, garnering support for my research.

Presently, I am in the process of conducting some preliminary research on Virginia SWCD employee turnover. The purpose of this preliminary research is to determine whether or not employee turnover is an issue that warrants attention. I thought the most effective means of obtaining this information would be to send an electronic questionnaire to district employees who are in management and/or administrative positions. This is the reason you have received this e-mail, while other staff members in your district office have not. I utilized the 2007 employee directory to obtain contact information. If I sent you this e-mail in error, please forward to the appropriate staff member in your office.

I am interested in knowing the employee turnover rate for Virginia SWCD employees for a five-year period from July 1, 2002, to July 1, 2007. I would really appreciate your assistance in completing the attached survey, which is in MS Word.

Please return to me via e-mail or fax (276-889-2105) by Tuesday, August 14, 2007. In an effort to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, I will not report results by individual districts, but rather report by SWCD Areas. Although I must keep track of individual SWCD response rates, I assure you those individuals who submitted data will not be identified nor will the employee turnover rates for individual districts be reported.

Should you or members of your Board have questions or concerns about this survey or my research project, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail or telephone.

I hope that the information I collect and analyze over the next eight months will be used to benefit all 47 SWCDs and their dedicated employees. Thanks in advance for your participation!

Sincerely,  
Angie

---

Angela P. White, District Manager  
Clinch Valley Soil and Water Conservation District  
Phone #: 276-889-4650, Ext. 127  
Fax #: 276-889-2105  
[angela.white@va.nacdnet.net](mailto:angela.white@va.nacdnet.net)

**Appendix D: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Turnover Survey, August 2007  
Follow-up Correspondence E-Mail**

FROM: White, Angela – Lebanon, VA  
DATE: Monday, August 13, 2007 10:57 AM  
TO: [Alldistrict@vaswcd.org](mailto:Alldistrict@vaswcd.org)  
SUBJECT: Reminder of VA SWCD Employee Turnover Survey Deadline – Tuesday  
August 14, 2007  
ATTACHMENTS: Virginia SWCD Survey\_Employee Turnover 2007.doc

District Managers and Administrators,

First, let me thank the 28 SWCDs that have responded to my electronic survey. I appreciate the time and effort you took to complete the survey. I just wanted to send a reminder to those districts that have not had an opportunity to complete and return the survey that the deadline is tomorrow – Tuesday, August 14<sup>th</sup>. If possible, please complete the survey and return to me by that deadline. A high response rate will make the data collected more useful.

Thanks again,  
Angie

---

Angela P. White, District Manager  
Clinch Valley Soil & Water Conservation District  
Phone #: 276-889-4650, Ext. 127  
Fax #: 276-889-2105  
[angela.white@va.nacdnet.net](mailto:angela.white@va.nacdnet.net)

**Appendix E: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation (SWCD)  
Employee Satisfaction Survey – Modified Version of 2002 SWCD  
Employee Satisfaction Survey**

**Part II – Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Satisfaction Survey**

*Modified Version of 2002 SWCD Employee Evaluation originally authorized by VASWCD*

1. Rate each of the issues listed below in terms of your satisfaction. Please be advised that the scale designed for this survey is not the same as the previous survey.

Ask yourself: How satisfied am I with this job issue?

**Very Dissatisfied:** Means I am very dissatisfied with this job issue.

**Dissatisfied:** Means I am dissatisfied with this job issue.

**Satisfied:** Means I am satisfied with this job issue.

**Very Satisfied:** Means I am very satisfied with this job issue.

**Extremely Satisfied:** Means I am extremely satisfied with this job issue.

**Not Applicable:** Means this particular job issue does not apply to me.

Issue	Level of Satisfaction					
	<i>Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Extremely Satisfied</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
a. Career advancement opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	0
b. Clearly defined job responsibilities and work goals	1	2	3	4	5	0
c. Flexibility with professional scheduling	1	2	3	4	5	0
d. Health insurance benefit	1	2	3	4	5	0
e. Life insurance benefit	1	2	3	4	5	0
f. Management and supervision	1	2	3	4	5	0
g. Orientation when I was a new employee	1	2	3	4	5	0
h. Professional development (e.g., training, skill enhancement opportunities)	1	2	3	4	5	0
i. Relationship with district board	1	2	3	4	5	0
j. Salary or wage	1	2	3	4	5	0
k. Type of work performed	1	2	3	4	5	0
l. Work relationships (e.g., professional associates, clients)	1	2	3	4	5	0

2. Overall, how would you rate your current satisfaction as a Soil and Water Conservation District employee:

<i>Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Extremely Satisfied</i>
1	2	3	4	5

3. Do you have any other comments or suggestions that you feel are important to employee job satisfaction? Please use the space provided to share those comments or suggestions.

**Appendix F: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Characteristics Survey**

**Part III – Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Characteristics Survey**

1. Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_  
Female \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Birth Year: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3a. Ethnicity: (*Select one.*)  
Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_  
Non-Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3b. Race: (*Select one or more.*)  
American Indian or Alaska Native \_\_\_\_\_  
Asian \_\_\_\_\_  
Black/African American \_\_\_\_\_  
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_  
White \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Marital Status  
Single \_\_\_\_\_  
Married \_\_\_\_\_  
Separated \_\_\_\_\_  
Divorced \_\_\_\_\_  
Widowed \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Number of children 18 and under living in the home. \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. What is the highest educational degree you have received?  
High school diploma or GED \_\_\_\_\_  
Associate's Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Bachelor's Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctoral Degree \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. In which Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Area do you work?  
Area I (Headwaters, Lord Fairfax, Mountain, Mountain Castles, Natural Bridge, Shenandoah Valley) \_\_\_\_\_  
Area II (Culpeper, John Marshall, Loudoun, Northern Virginia, Prince William, Thomas Jefferson) \_\_\_\_\_  
Area III (Colonial, Hanover-Caroline, Henricopolis, James River, Monacan, Northern Neck, Tidewater, Three Rivers, Tri-County/City) \_\_\_\_\_  
Area IV (Big Sandy, Big Walker, Clinch Valley, Daniel Boone, Evergreen, Holston River, Lonesome Pine, New River, Skyline, Scott County, Tazewell) \_\_\_\_\_  
Area V (Blue Ridge, Halifax, Lake Country, Patrick, Peaks of Otter, Peter Francisco, Piedmont, Pittsylvania, Robert E. Lee, Southside) \_\_\_\_\_  
Area VI (Appomattox River, Chowan Basin, Eastern Shore, Peanut, Virginia Dare) \_\_\_\_\_

8. How many years have you worked for your current VA Soil and Water Conservation District?  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Current Employment Status:

Full-Time (Average at least 40 hours per week) \_\_\_\_\_

Part-Time \_\_\_\_\_

10. Current Position Status

Temporary Position (A termination date exists or will be established) \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Position (Expected to continue indefinitely) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Level of Compensation:

If you are a wage employee, what is your hourly wage? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are a salaried employee, what is your annual salary? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Your primary job responsibility can be categorized as:

Administrative assistance or secretarial \_\_\_\_\_

Educational \_\_\_\_\_

Administrative or managerial \_\_\_\_\_

Technical \_\_\_\_\_

*This concludes the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Job Satisfaction Survey. Thank you for your participation. When you click the "Submit and Exit" button you will be re-directed to another web-page. At that point you are finished, so please close-out the page.*

## Appendix G: Internal Review Board (IRB) Approval

VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959  
e-mail moored@vt.edu  
www.irb.vt.edu

DATE: November 29, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Daisy L. Stewart  
Angela White

Approval date: 11/29/2007  
Continuing Review Due Date: 11/14/2008  
Expiration Date: 11/28/2008

FROM: David M. Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "An Examination of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Employee Job Satisfaction", IRB # 07-609

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 66.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective November 29, 2007.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

**Important:**

If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, this approval letter must state that the IRB has compared the OSP grant application and IRB application and found the documents to be consistent. Otherwise, this approval letter is invalid for OSP to release funds. Visit our website at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/newstudy.htm#OSP> for further information.

cc: File

*Invent the Future*

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*

**Appendix H: Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Short-form – Scale and Corresponding Questions**

Intrinsic satisfaction scale.....Question 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16,  
20

Extrinsic satisfaction scale.....Question 5, 6, 12, 13, 14, 19

General satisfaction scale.....Question 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,  
16, 17, 18, 19, 20

## Appendix I: Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Permission

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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*Twin Cities Campus*

*Department of Psychology  
College of Liberal Arts*

*N218 Elliott Hall  
75 East River Road  
Minneapolis, MN 55455*

*Office: 612-625-2818  
Fax: 612-626-2079  
www.psych.umn.edu  
Email: psymain@umn.edu*

September 12, 2007

Angela P. White  
2778 Mountain Road  
Cedar Bluff, VA 24609

Dear Angela P. White:

We are pleased to grant you permission to use the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire 1977 short form version in your research project.

Vocational Psychology Research is currently in the process of revising the MSQ manual and it is very important that we receive copies of your research study results in order to construct new norm tables. Therefore, we would appreciate receiving a copy of your results including 1) demographic data of respondents, including age, education level, occupation and job tenure; and 2) response statistics including scale means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and standard errors of measurement. If your tests are scored by us, we will already have the information detailed in item #2.

Your providing this information will be an important and valuable contribution to the new MSQ manual. If you have any questions concerning this request, please feel free to call us at 612-625-1367.

Sincerely,



Dr. David J. Weiss, Director  
Vocational Psychology Research

**Appendix J: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Satisfaction Survey – Modified Version of 2002 SWCD Employee Evaluation  
VASWCD Permission**



**Virginia Association of Soil and Water  
Conservation Districts  
7308 Hanover Green Drive, Mechanicsville, VA 23111  
Telephone No. (804) 559-0324 Fax (804) 559-0325**

August 23, 2007

Angela P. White  
2778 Mountain Road  
Cedar Bluff, VA 24609

**RE: SUPPORT OF RESEARCH AND PERMISSION TO UTILIZE MODIFIED  
VERSION OF 2002 SWCD EMPLOYEE EVALUATION SURVEY**

Dear Ms. White:

The purpose of this letter is to acknowledge that the VA Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD) supports your research project in which you will be assessing the current job satisfaction levels of VA SWCD employees. The VA Association also grants you permission to utilize a modified version of the 2002 SWCD Employee Evaluation Survey that was authorized by VASWCD and administered with assistance from Dr. Franklin "Lex" Bruce, Jr., Virginia Tech.

It is my understanding that data collection will take place during FY 2007-2008. I am also aware that your survey instrument will be distributed to all employees via the "all-district" list-serve. Immediately prior to distribution of the survey, I will notify all potential participants of the Association's support of your research.

Sincerely,

Ricky Rash, President  
VASWCD

**Appendix K: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Employee Satisfaction Survey – Modified Version of 2002 SWCD Employee Evaluation  
Bruce Permission**



**VirginiaTech**

College of Agriculture  
and Life Sciences

**Agricultural and Applied Economics (0401)**

301-A Hutcheson Hall

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

540/231-4441 Fax: 540/234-7417

E-mail: [fbruce@vt.edu](mailto:fbruce@vt.edu)

Use-Value website: <http://usevalue.agecon.vt.edu/>

September 28, 2007

Dear Angela White:

You have my permission to use a modified version of the 2002 VASWCD Employee Survey that I designed.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if further information is needed.

Sincerely,

Franklin A. Bruce, Jr., Ph.D.

Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

*Invent the Future*

## **Appendix L: Summary of Field Test Comments Documented and Corrected**

### **Technical Difficulties**

- Notify participants in the initial correspondence e-mail with the Web-based survey link that the username and the password assigned to access the survey are case sensitive.
- Pages are automatically reloaded after entering each Web page for the first time; however, data are not affected. Make participants aware of this technical feature.
- Part III, Question 1: “Gender” selection is subject to change when scrolling to Question 2.
- Part III, Question 7: “Area” selection is subject to change when scrolling to Question 8.
- Include a “Thank-You” at the end of the survey.
- Provide clearer directions on how to submit survey responses and exit the survey.

### **Part I: Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Short-Form**

- Third Bullet of Directions: Incomplete statement that needs clarified.
- In the description statements for each scale (very satisfied, satisfied, etc.), separate the word from the definition with either a colon or dash.

### **Part II: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Employee Satisfaction**

#### **Survey**

- Formatting of scale descriptions should coincide with formatting utilized in Part I.
- In the directions, participants should be advised that the scale in Part II is different from the scale utilized in Part I.

### **Part III: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Employee Characteristics**

#### **Survey**

- Question 7: Define Virginia SWCD Areas for employees.
- Question 11: Insert space to accommodate more than 5 characters when reporting salary.

**Appendix M: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Job Satisfaction Study – Prior Correspondence E-Mail**



**Virginia Association of Soil and Water  
Conservation Districts  
7308 Hanover Green Drive, Mechanicsville, VA 23111  
Telephone No. (804) 559-0324 Fax (804) 559-0325**

FROM: Ricky Rash [dairyrn@va.net]  
DATE: January 3, 2008  
TO: Alldistrict@vaswcd.org  
SUBJECT: Support for Virginia SWCD Employee Job Satisfaction Survey

A few days from now you will receive a request via e-mail to fill out a web-based questionnaire for a research project being conducted by Angela White. As many of you are aware, Angela is employed by Clinch Valley Soil and Water Conservation District in Russell County, VA and she is also completing graduate work through Virginia Tech.

The primary focus of the study is Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District employees, specifically the characteristics of current employees and their levels of job satisfaction. One component of the study is directly related to an employee evaluation survey authorized in 2002 by the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD).

I am writing this e-mail in advance to encourage your participation in this study because it is an important one. Data collected will be reviewed and utilized to benefit districts across the Commonwealth. The VASWCD Board of Directors is aware and supportive of this study.

Each of you will be contacted by Angela in the near future. She will provide directions for the survey and an electronic link for you to access the survey via a secure web site administered by Virginia Tech.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Ricky Rash  
President VASWCD  
Crewe, VA  
434-645-1349

**Appendix N: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Job Satisfaction Study – Cover Correspondence E-Mail with Implied Consent**

FROM: White, Angela – Lebanon, VA  
DATE: January 7, 2008  
TO: Individual Virginia SWCD Employees  
SUBJECT: Information Regarding Virginia SWCD Employee Job Satisfaction Survey

I have sent this e-mail to request your participation in a study I am conducting, with support from the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's (VASWCD) Board of Directors, on job satisfaction of Virginia SWCD employees. As you are aware, Ricky Rash, VASWCD President notified you about my study via e-mail on January 3, 2008. This study is part of an effort to learn not only an overall job satisfaction level for employees, but what factors and/or conditions impact employee job satisfaction.

Results from the survey will be presented to the VASWCD Board of Directors, SWCD Area Chairs, and all 47 district Chairs. It is my hope that the results will be utilized to benefit all SWCDs and their dedicated employees.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. To guarantee both, a third party will be utilized to collect the research data. The Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programming (CAEEP) is assisting with this process. I will not personally have access to information regarding who has responded and what those individual responses were. In addition, I will not report results by individual employees or individual districts, but rather report by SWCD Areas.

This survey is voluntary; however, your participation would be greatly appreciated. Consent is implied with a returned questionnaire.

On Tuesday, January 8, 2008 you will receive an e-mail from the Virginia Tech CAEEP. The e-mail will include survey instructions, a link to the Web-based survey, and your individual login and related password, which are necessary to access the online survey.

The survey was pilot tested and took an average of 15 minutes to complete.

To show my appreciation for your participation the following incentives have been established. First, I will provide an executive summary of the results of my survey to the VASWCD for posting on their Web site. Second, each participant who responds **by the deadline of Tuesday, January 22, 2008** will be entered in a random drawing for a prize of \$100.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, do not hesitate to contact me via the contact information provided below. Should you experience any technical difficulties, such as questions about your login and/or password, please contact Eric Lichtenberger, Virginia Tech CAEEP at [elichten@vt.edu](mailto:elichten@vt.edu) or (540) 231-2549.

Thank you in advance for helping with this important study. It is only with your generous support that my research project can be successful.

Sincerely,

Angela P. White, District Manager  
Clinch Valley Soil and Water Conservation District  
Lebanon, VA 24266  
Phone #: 276-889-4650, Ext. 127  
[angela.white@va.nacdnet.net](mailto:angela.white@va.nacdnet.net)

**Appendix O: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Job Satisfaction Study – Initial Correspondence E-Mail with Web-Based Survey Link**

FROM: Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programs  
DATE: January 8, 2008  
TO: Individual Virginia SWCD Employees  
SUBJECT: Virginia SWCD Employee Job Satisfaction Survey

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Below is a direct link to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Job Satisfaction Survey being conducted by Angela White, with support from the Virginia Association of SWCDs. As stated in previous e-mail correspondence from Angela, the Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programs (CAEEP) is assisting with research data collection.

This survey is voluntary. Consent is implied with a returned questionnaire. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Angela will not have access to individual employee responses. Raw data will be destroyed immediately upon completion of the final report.

To access the survey, simply click on the survey link. When prompted, enter your unique username and password (both are case sensitive), which have been assigned and featured below. Should you experience any technical difficulties please contact Eric Lichtenberger ([elichten@vt.edu](mailto:elichten@vt.edu)), Virginia Tech CAEEP at (540) 231-2549.

Thank you in advance for helping with this important study. It is only with your generous support that Angela's research project can be successful.

To get to the survey: 1.) Click on the following URL or copy and paste it into your web browser <http://dce.vtdata.org:16080/fmi/iwp/cgi?-db=VASWCD%20Survey%-startsession>

To log in, use the following case sensitive username: \_\_\_\_\_ and case sensitive password:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

Eric Lichtenberger, Ph.D.  
Assistant Director  
Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programming  
Virginia Tech

**Appendix P: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Job Satisfaction Study – Follow-up Correspondence E-Mail**

FROM: Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programs  
DATE: January 15, 2008 (7 days after survey issued)  
TO: Individual Virginia SWCD Employees  
SUBJECT: Virginia SWCD Employee Job Satisfaction Survey Reminder

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Last Tuesday, an e-mail containing a direct link to the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Job Satisfaction Survey, being conducted by Angela White, with support from the Virginia Association of SWCDs, was sent to you. As you are aware the Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programs (CAEEP) is assisting with research data collection. All Virginia SWCD employees have been asked to participate in this research project.

If you have already completed and returned the electronic survey, please accept our sincere thanks. However, if you have not returned your survey, please do so today. We are sincerely grateful for your assistance because it is only with the cooperation of SWCD employees, like you, that we can understand what factors impact employee job satisfaction levels.

If you did not receive the e-mail with the survey link, or if it has been discarded, please contact us at the Virginia CAEEP via e-mail ([elichten@vt.edu](mailto:elichten@vt.edu)) or telephone at (540) 231-2549 and we will promptly send you another one.

Sincerely,

Eric Lichtenberger, Ph.D.  
Assistant Director  
Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programming  
Virginia Tech

**Appendix Q: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)  
Job Satisfaction Study – Non-Respondent Correspondence E-Mail**

FROM: Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programs  
DATE: January 23, 2008  
TO: Individual Virginia SWCD Employees  
SUBJECT: Virginia SWCD Employee Job Satisfaction Survey Final Participation Request

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Three weeks ago you were sent several e-mails regarding an important research study being conducted by Angela White, with support from the Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (VASWCD).

This study is part of an effort to learn not only an overall job satisfaction level for district employees, but what factors and/or conditions impact employee job satisfaction. Results from the study will be presented to the VASWCD Board of Directors, Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Area Chairs, and all 47 SWCD Chairs with the hope they will be utilized to benefit all SWCDs and their dedicated employees.

The study is drawing to a close and our records indicate that you have not yet responded. Your survey responses are important to the overall study. A high response rate ensures that the survey results and corresponding conclusions and recommendations are representative of Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) employees.

This survey is voluntary, and should you prefer not to respond that is fine. We want to assure you that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. To guarantee both, a third party (Virginia Tech Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programs (CAEEP) has been utilized to collect the research data. Angela White will not personally have access to information regarding who has responded and what those individual responses were. In addition, results will not be reported by individual employees or individual districts, but rather reported by SWCD Areas.

Your willingness to consider participating in the study is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Eric Lichtenberger, Ph.D.  
Assistant Director  
Center for Assessment, Evaluation, and Educational Programming  
Virginia Tech

**Appendix R: Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) Short-Form – Virginia SWCD  
Employee Frequency Distributions by Aspect of Job**

Aspect of job as reported by scale title	Level of satisfaction frequencies (n = 148)				
	Very	Dissatisfied	N	Satisfied	Very
	Dissatisfied				Satisfied
Activity	1	8	13	57	68
Independence	1	2	7	74	64
Variety	0	5	3	56	84
Social status	0	5	37	72	33
Supervision – human relations	5	19	32	43	49
Supervision – technical	4	15	25	60	44
Moral values	0	4	6	67	71
Security	1	14	14	60	59
Social services	0	3	6	61	78
Authority	0	5	90	40	13
Ability utilization	1	7	7	73	60
Company policies and practices	7	26	30	62	22
Compensation	8	40	27	59	13
Advancement	17	41	38	48	4
Responsibility	1	10	8	89	40
Creativity	0	7	14	85	39
Working Conditions	3	8	20	71	46
Co-Workers	6	14	14	62	52

Recognition	1	15	32	75	25
Achievement	1	8	14	78	47

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**Appendix S: Modified 2002 Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
Employee Evaluation - Virginia SWCD Employees' Satisfaction Frequency Distributions  
by Issue**

Job satisfaction issue	Level of satisfaction frequencies (n = 146)					
	Very	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very	Extremely	Not
	Dissatisfied			Satisfied	Satisfied	Applicable
Career advancement opportunities	15	43	64	5	1	18
Clearly defined job responsibilities and work goals	5	18	87	28	7	1
Flexibility with professional scheduling	1	4	60	49	29	3
Health insurance benefit	9	18	38	34	22	25
Life insurance benefit	6	16	57	17	13	36
Management and supervision	5	20	65	39	14	3
New employee orientation	13	26	72	23	6	6
Professional development	3	12	80	42	9	0
Relationship with district board	1	15	57	49	23	1
Salary or wage	10	47	66	18	3	1
Type of work performed	0	4	76	49	17	0
Work relationships	3	7	61	50	22	3

**Appendix T: Modified 2002 Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
Employee Evaluation - Virginia SWCD Employees' Overall Job Satisfaction Frequency  
Distributions**

Overall job satisfaction	Level of satisfaction (n = 145)					
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied	Not Applicable
Frequency	0	14	65	55	11	0
Percentage	0	9.65	44.83	37.93	7.59	0

## Appendix U: Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Employee Comments

1. Expect privacy of my work space, email password, etc. Some things disappear and show up later. I don't invade their area unless I am asked to do something for them with their permission. Some important messages were never given to me (i.e. doctor call-which was important). I strive to write down messages for fellow workers.
2. Can't we all just get along?
3. Directors need to take more of a role in management and supervision responsibility in this district. In this district the chairman who has been the chairman since the district started is controlling and manipulates things to how he wants things, not what is best for the district or the community we serve. Some directors are taking advantage of situations in order to benefit themselves or family members. Directors need to read, listen, and discuss things more instead of just voting on things at monthly meetings and at the annual meeting. Directors and staff need to have ethics training. All staff members need to be more responsible and have better work ethics.
4. Too many people to get the job done. If less people, then people could work and not be disturbed by the ones that don't.
5. Responsibilities are not given to employees. There seems to be an atmosphere that TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) is taking opportunities away from districts/NRCS/FSA. TMDL seems could benefit from independent contracts, with qualified people working out of their homes or independent offices.
6. I feel there is a glass ceiling for some district employees. Once an employee does a good job continually, they often receive a "MEETS EXPECTATIONS" rating on Job Performance Evaluations. It becomes difficult for an employee who has been with the SWCD for a long period of time to exceed the SWCD directors' expectations because of the sustained high level of "getting things done" and they feel it becomes the norm for the employee. There have been times when a decision was made by staff to postpone a project the directors wanted done because of extenuating circumstances and then it was mentioned in their annual evaluation for making a decision which actually would have saved the SWCD money had the office closed.
7. I feel that every employee should be judged fairly on their work performance and rewarded or reprimanded accordingly. This policy is in place but sometimes abused for various reasons.
8. Lack of funding for SWCDs always remains an issue. Funding is always uncertain and varies from time to time.
9. Directors need to be held accountable for their responsibilities, since they are elected officials.

10. I think the previous question (overall satisfaction) is unfair. To characterize my level of satisfaction overall will not represent the facts. For instance, I am very dissatisfied with those on my Board who have no vision which restricts my ability to be proactive. I am very dissatisfied that I am compensated based upon the performance (or lack there of) of State employees. I am very dissatisfied that many on my Board have no idea what the district does. However, I am very satisfied with my flexible schedule, working conditions, etc.
11. Less inside, more outside; less paper, more face-to-face; less NRCS computer programs/requirements/reporting/specifications/designs/policies/forms/CYA red tape
12. More specific orientation when on the job as a new employee.
13. Districts are not viewed as go-to professionals when in fact they have a lot to offer. Uneven funding and employee turnover have contributed greatly to this problem. The State should take bigger role in training and professionalism.
14. Board members should be more active in employee job skills and roles. They need to be able to address adversity and not overlook things on the chance it will go away. Someone in each district should have a management role to oversee day to day operations and be able to report to the board with an unbiased opinion. DCR should have a more active role in district personnel guidance and policy.
15. Retirement and insurance benefits for part time employees.
16. I am a relatively long term employee who has the benefit of a very good and strong board of directors who I truly believe appreciate my work and opinions. One less than five minutes ago thanked me for all the work I do. The good work environment in a relatively low stress job that is related to agriculture, where I have spent my life, is important to me. Generally District pay levels need improvement across the board and districts need to stop looking at the positions as entry level work. It takes a good two years to learn the work and good employees come and move on in less than two years. I like to work here in spite of the lower pay. On the other hand what I get in benefits and time off goes a good way toward offsetting the low pay. My district has and supports a good benefit plan for the employees.
17. Job security with see-saw state funding is my biggest worry.
18. Extreme amount of work with only average salary. Very concerned about no health care provision after retirement.
19. This district provides a good salary even though it is still below comparable work at other agencies. This district has a good health and benefits package through the county. One issue of concern is that upon retirement there is no way to buy into the health plan. If you dedicate your career to the district, upon retirement you have to find private insurance at a time when you have given up your income and have more health problems. State

employees and some private companies have the option to remain with their plan and pay for it out of pocket, which is still lower than a private provider. Looking ahead, retirement planning is the one issue that makes moving to another agency an attractive option despite being satisfied with district employment.

20. Directors need continuing education and accountability for attendance and engagement. Districts have incredible, unrealized potential for applying for grants, undertaking projects. Relationships with partners are precious, and need structured support at all levels.
21. Health Insurance is very important. As district employees become older (even the young ones), health insurance becomes more and more important. The Association should look into getting district employees onto the State health plan. This would make better use of state funding and be better than the variety of group plans and individual policies that districts' carry.
22. I am extremely satisfied with my job. The only dissatisfaction that I get is in the instability of the funding for my position. I am extremely satisfied with my board's support of Conservation Education, but without funding we are often on edge making sure we can keep this important position in our district. I ranked "new employee orientation" as "Very Dissatisfied" only because I never received a new employee orientation.
23. I feel as though there are little to no opportunities for advancement within my district. Unless I am willing to transfer to NRCS, which I would prefer not to do, there is little I can do to advance professionally and economically. Also, there was little formal training for me as a new employee. Although I feel as if I have learned much, (although not NEARLY what I feel I NEED to know) the transition to this position would have been much easier for me if there had been some formal training available. I do love my job though. The satisfaction of knowing I am helping farmers, the environment, and my community is wonderful.
24. Our district manager has a hands-off approach. If help is needed, it is readily given. Everyone in our office is enthusiastic and supportive. It is a great place to work.
25. Better supervision, better management
26. Wish salary was better and maybe more Training on the Cost-Share programs that we are trying to sell overall I really like my job.
27. I know that within the administrative area, there is not much advancement or big wage increases.
28. The relationship with NRCS needs to change from one of dictation to cooperation and partnership. We do not work for them anyway. The issue of salary needs to be addressed. Any raises that are received are eclipsed by the cost of living. It becomes a question of

whether you can afford to work at a district not if you are satisfied with the work you are doing.

29. No potential for advancement.
30. Our office operates as a flat line organization that was set up to satisfy one employee who did not want to work well with others. To this date that employee violates all the district policies and the district board does nothing to stop this behavior. It is a morale breaker for the rest of the staff. The directors have allowed this behavior to go on for so long that they do not know how to stop it. I can retire at the drop of a hat or the next false allegation that drives me to a lawsuit.
31. Stable funding for SWCD would benefit staff, districts and clients in allowing us to provide sustained levels of programs and services without having to worry if funding will be available next year. More commitment from Directors to attend Board meetings and other related programs would also be a tremendous benefit from staff.
32. The working relationship between the district and other agencies such as NRCS and DCR is not what it should be. Often time's district employees and I feel that NRCS and DCR treats districts and their staff with a lower level of professional respect. District employees feel we are not treated with the same level of respect or the same caliber or importance as other state or federal organizations. Districts should not be considered as children in the conservation partnership, we should be treated as equal partners in the conservation partnership.
33. If the USDA offices with which we work were more coordinated with each other and within their own programs, I would have an easier time getting any jobs done concerning them. NRCS in particular is very uncooperative in matters that concern producers with which we both work. They do not seem to realize that we all should be doing what is in the best interest of the producer and not what's best for the agency and its programs. Also USDA does not seem to view districts as an equal partner and do not include us in decision making. This ultimately affects the way we have to follow procedures to get our jobs for the producers done.
34. I feel I am satisfied with my position, I love my job. I would like to see salaries increase for district employees in this cost-risen world. I feel that a high rate of district employee is due to salaries and costly benefits. I do understand what districts go through to keep funding.
35. I am a contract employee and work under a grant which I wrote and am run through the district. As such I have no health benefits or life insurance; however, I set my own schedule. My job is strictly education for K-12 for the counties our district covers. I feel privileged to do what I do for the district and will be applying for another grant upon the completion of this cycle. My only negative is that this is not a full time position with SWCD.

36. Overall SWCDs need to look closely at bringing pay rates more inline with other conservation agencies in order to reduce the extremely high employee turnover rates
37. Seems like districts are the unwanted stepchild to DCR and NRCS. We are all suppose to do the same thing but district employees are paid the least, and sometimes District employees have more duties and responsibilities.
38. Management accessibility for decision making; Good communication, especially management/staff e.g., regular staff meetings, updates; Advance notice of schedules and absences; No favoritism--keep it professional; Acknowledgment of good work and ideas; Merit increases
39. Would like to know how district employees can be included in State Benefits, such as health insurance and state park perks?
40. Yearly orientation for new employees, state-wide, to go over Dos and Don'ts, job situations, and scenarios. Also a clearly defined training schedule.
41. Being able to get along with cooperating agencies is a plus.
42. Training; good communication with Board members and partnering agencies.
43. There has been no mention of retirement benefits or life insurance. Not enough room for advancement and because of never knowing how much money is available for technical assistance we don't have job security. This along with poor salary ranges causes district employees to leave after getting trained. I feel the district board members should be more active and attend activities with the district to some support and that they are aware of what is going on in their counties.
44. There is little opportunity for advancement within a district and that is why we lose so many people to NRCS. Funding uncertainty from year to year causes anxiety.
45. I believe guidelines or mandates should be slashed state-wide for Conservation District Directors concerning employee compensation. I also would like to see a position established to help mediate between employees and District Boards.
46. Workloads and deadlines are often hard to manage and this is a constant source of stress in the position and is really the only reason I have considered leaving the district. It's often challenging to delegate responsibilities to other employees that may not be receiving as much financial compensation as I do so I feel I must manage the workload and earn a lot of comp time--working late and weekends as needed. My personal life/family/hobbies and ultimately my personal health suffer from the constant stress.
47. I am currently happy with my salary, though it is on the lower end.

48. I enjoy collaboration with other agencies.
49. Unfortunately, because of the "structure" of Conservation Districts, the job often lends itself to problems and concerns that are hard to work out. In general without a day to day supervisor, Conservation Districts can run into problems with policies and procedures, personnel issues, and the like. District employees have to be self starters and task oriented in order for districts to run smoothly and efficiently. This in itself creates situations where problems arise. Also every district is different, they all are made up of different types of people-Directors and Employees and each (district) has their own way of operating and conducting business.
50. Regulation, paperwork, and bureaucracy keep actual gains to a minimum. Performance is based on money spent and paper work generated, not gains in water quality; this thought process has moved from just upper level bureaucrats to district management. You have taken many young driven students who thought they could make a difference even when not making much money and taken away their ingenuity and given them cookie cutters to work with. Most driven employees don't last long under the present conditions, the ones that do, do it in spite of the system.
51. I believe that employees and boards should have a similar outlook in the conservation arena for there to be a harmonious relationship. There will always be stress over budget . . . a bit more security for employees' salary, and the ability for the district to provide health care as a benefit. Workload is also a stress for employees as well as the board. Our workload is quite high and we often feel like the work is our whole life rather than a career. Thus the answer to the first question relating to time . . . there is always too much to do. In general I am very satisfied with my position with the district . . . the Board allows us the freedom to do the work needed and also to find the area that we excel in and develop there.
52. Better benefit package for employees. Health insurance would be helpful. More and more duties are assigned to district staff with not enough present staff to accomplish the goal, so the responsibilities add up on present staff making added level of stress.
53. Board members need to keep abreast of policies and procedures in order to make decisions. Each staff person should be given the same raises within a reasonable range. Board members should not be allowed to create hostile work environments for certain staff personnel because they may or may not like that person, event if that person is dedicated, hard-working, and does his/her job in a professional manner.
54. Overall direction and supervision support given by the Board is inadequate. Personal relationships between staff members and board members can cause problems in the office, such as division and distrust. I don't see a fix to this problem and if our Board represents the management of most districts, then I can see why many have difficulty keeping employees.

55. District board should treat all employees equally. Board of directors should act decisively without hesitation. Specifically, when a matter has been voted on and seconded, no going back to appease a dissatisfied employee. Careers and life have ups and downs, as adults we should graciously accept criticism, readjust our behavior and move on. Grudges are petty and a waste of time. The attitude of "I've been doing this the same way for the last X years and I won't change," is archaic and should totally be disregarded. As SWCD employees we are a team. Often one employee begins to be "I" oriented rather than "TEAM" oriented and everyone suffers. One bad apple spoils the bunch.
56. Some training opportunities should be offered more often, ex: prescribed burning training. Some training requirements should be reviewed as far as # of years required for certification - ex. Nutrient Management Training Certification requires 3 Years Experience and many employees taking this training are only in the SWCD in a 2-year position. Why take the training if you can't be certified? And why should the district pay for the training if you can't be certified?
57. We need more active Board members who have been trained for their position.
58. I think there is constant worry about affordable health insurance. Can VASWCD create a "group" for insurance purposes and get us all a more reasonable rate on health, life, dental, etc.? This would be a very valuable reason to be part of VASWCD. There seems to be no training for new managers, or ongoing training for managers. Updated info on personnel management, legal issues, board management, PR ideas, etc. I worked for a CD in another state and an overview of Virginia and the programs and participants would be VERY helpful too. Training form and/or hard copy reference manual form. A training on the cost-share program for "infants" in the program would be welcome, from the Green sheet up... The relationship with NRCS is important to maintain. However, CDs seem to be put on the spot regarding office space, computer access to the point of "crippling" a CD. Rent increased substantially this year and we are hearing a rumor that computer access will become prohibitively expensive. CDs should be treated as independent entities, not state or federal, but a hybrid. We are much more useful in this capacity. Too many people/agencies seem to want to "own" districts, their programs and their numbers. This is very crippling, and limiting. CDs have such magnanimous opportunities in their communities! We are supposed to be at the grass roots level, working within communities, not viewed as part of the overwhelming, impersonal federal system or even state system. State and federal programs have a greater chance of reaching folks at the local level through a grass roots organization that is seen as part of the community, not part of the government. And urbanization is an issue that many CDs are behind the eight ball on because of lack of funding and financial staff support. Also, we seem to receive monies to "put BMPs on the ground" but staffing is limited. There is never an increase for sustainable staffing to expand programming. It is difficult to hire a part-time person to assist with BMP implementation when there is no stability in the job. The time it takes to train a part-time person takes almost as long as the money lasts. This is not cost effective for districts that are already overtaxed with work and under-funded in operational areas (staffing). A way to "control" districts? Not sure...CDs need a stronger, unified voice. And we need to be free of the fear we currently must respect because of our "reliance" on

other entities. We need to be able to expand our own programming according to what our locales need. We all have issues we share and issues that are unique to the areas, people and governments we serve! Thanks for this opportunity! I sure hope there are changes brought about by the solicited comments.

59. Raises are given “across the board” so that less performing employees are “rewarded” for slacking. There’s no incentive to do a better job.
60. Flexibility is the best aspect of working for my district. Compared to our closest partners (NRCS) we do way more field work, paper work, and are paid way less, less benefits, etc. Over come those hurdles and districts could have a better chance at keeping competent and capable employees.
61. Professionalism and work ethic is very comforting and appreciated in this district office.
62. I feel like there is not enough training for my position. Seems like there is a lot to do and sometimes I am spinning my wheels because I haven't been taught how to use a specific program, etc.