

# BIO SOLIDS NEWS

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The treatment ponds at the Western Virginia Water Authority's water pollution control plant are a preferred bird watching site in Roanoke.

## Treatment plant is favorite habitat for birds

The Western Virginia Water Authority's water pollution control plant in Roanoke is one of the primary stopover sites for migrating birds, especially shorebirds, ducks and long-legged waders.

While a thriving bird habitat at the treatment ponds at the Roanoke facility might seem surprising, the national bird watching community has long recognized that wastewater treatment facilities attract significant populations of local and migratory birds.

The local Roanoke Bird Club conducts an annual Christmas Bird Count and around the mid-1970s, a member "discovered" a significant population of local and migratory birds at the facility. Many of the species that can be observed at the facility are typically associated with more tidal and estuarine habitats found along the coast hundreds of miles east of Roanoke.

Since the discovery of the significant population at the facility, the Roanoke treatment facility has been a preferred bird watching site in the Roanoke

Valley. The site offers a great diversity of sightings, with over 62% of the avian species documented for Virginia observed there, including a number of rare species. Over the years, more than 242 species of birds have been documented.

In order to ensure visitor safety and facility security, permits for birding are required (at no cost). Two permit options are available, either temporary or permanent, with both applications available at the main office, 1502 Brownlee Ave., SE, Roanoke, VA 24014 (540-853-1283).

Normal access hours are Monday through Friday from 7 am until 5 pm. Saturday and Sunday outings can be arranged, but must be scheduled at least 48 hours in advance. As a component of the permit process, facility staff conducts a brief safety orientation, which includes information on preferred spots to bird while visiting.

Two observation platforms are being built at the site to provide excellent vantage points for the most popular bird



Only two sightings of the Eared Grebe, a duck-like aquatic bird, have been confirmed in the Roanoke area, one at the Roanoke Regional Water Pollution Control Plant.

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*The Virginia Biosolids Council supports the recycling of biosolids in Virginia through information and education on the beneficial use and safety of biosolids. The Council is supported by municipal wastewater treatment plants, land application and composting companies and biosolids users, and is available as a resource to those who need information about the recycling of biosolids.*

## Farmer in landmark case continues to benefit from biosolids

When it comes to biosolids regulation in Virginia, there have been many significant and evolutionary regulatory and compliance milestones. However, in the magnitude of importance to biosolids recycling in Virginia, none approach the decision made by the Virginia Supreme Court in *Blanton v. Amelia County*.

In that case, the Supreme Court held in 2001 that the ordinance approved by the Amelia County Board of Supervisors had the effect of illegally preventing something that was authorized and regulated by state statute.

Following that decision, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation that allowed any county or city to adopt an ordinance providing for the testing and monitoring of land application of biosolids to ensure compliance of applicable laws and regulations.

The primary reference to this case is Reuben L. Blanton, Jr., a generational farmer still working property in Amelia County that his family purchased during the Civil War.

Blanton continues to grow various row crops—corn, soybeans and in the winter, barley—and also tends a herd of approximately 200 brood cows. He didn't like it when the county tried to ban the use of biosolids in Amelia, and he still doesn't like it when too many regulations restrict the management of his farm.

"I'm a farmer. I care for the same land my dad and his dad worked and I would not do anything to hurt this farm," Blanton said. "I have never used anything that pro-

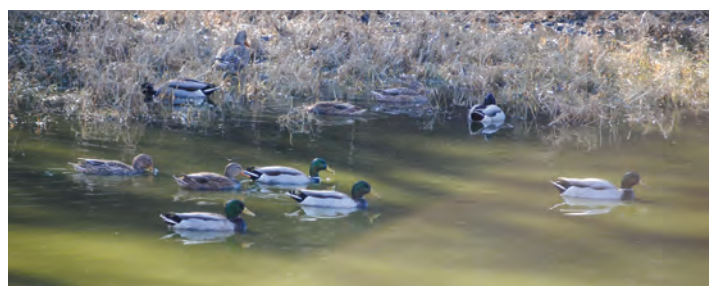


Reuben Blanton, Jr. (r.) and his farm manager, Rusty Leslie.

vides the nutrient value, and helps the soil and plants, like biosolids."

More than anyone, Blanton understands biosolids and the public's perspective. "Unfortunately, I think the Internet creates a lot of problems for the public, and I also think the public is challenged to understand why there are so many regulations telling us how and when to use it." He has about 30 fields permitted for biosolids—most of the 600 acres he farms.

"I've been using biosolids since around 1996. I will continue to use it because I haven't found anything that helps my farm any better," Blanton said. As for his legacy, he is most proud that the case he spearheaded with others in the biosolids community has had a positive impact on farmers and their right to farm.



Mallards swim in the treatment pond at the Roanoke facility.

## Treatment plant is bird habitat

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locations. While the permit program is a recent requirement, over 76 temporary permits have been issued, with permit holders often visiting on at least a monthly basis.

The facility regularly coordinates with the Roanoke Valley Bird Club and arrangements can often be made to help visitors connect with experienced guides for the facility.

The Western Virginia Water Authority provides wastewater treatment service to more than 120,000 customers in the City of Roanoke, Roanoke County and Franklin County.

## Biosolids complaints decline

Complaints from neighbors about the land application of biosolids declined significantly during 2012, according to data compiled by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

Through November, a total of 84 complaints had been recorded, compared to 180 during 2011. Concerns about odors continue to top the list, although they are down by 43 percent, with 25 reported in 2012, compared to 44 the previous year.

It should be noted that these statistics include all inquiries to the DEQ about biosolids, some of a general nature, and may not indicate a specific complaint about a land application site.

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For more information, go to [www.virginiabiosolids.com](http://www.virginiabiosolids.com)

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