

In it for the long haul

Helping Maryland Meet its Chesapeake Bay Milestone Goals



Our Mission: To promote practical and effective soil, water and related natural resources programs to all citizens through individual soil conservation districts on a voluntary basis through leadership, education, cooperation and local direction.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With more than 70 years of experience behind us in protecting natural resources and a steady stream of new environmental challenges before us, Maryland's soil conservation districts (SCDs) are in it for the long haul when it comes to protecting the Chesapeake Bay.

New environmental initiatives have been introduced that will require the expertise of technical staff working in our statewide network of soil conservation district offices. Without the help of SCDs, implementation of these vital environmental protection programs would not be possible.

To begin with, Maryland has identified 27 ambitious two-year milestones designed to speed up the Bay cleanup by preventing an additional 3.75 million pounds of nitrogen and 200,000 pounds of phosphorus from reaching the Bay. Although farming accounts for roughly 40 percent of the nitrogen entering waterways, under the first phase of this new initiative, agriculture is responsible for 60 percent of Maryland's reduction goal.

Seventeen of the 27 milestones focus on increasing the use of certain highly valued best management practices (BMPs) by farmers. These include more than doubling the amount of cover crops that are planted on Maryland's farm fields, transporting more poultry litter out of the Bay watershed, building additional poultry and livestock waste management systems, and expanding Maryland's network of streamside buffers and wetlands on farms.

Such projects require the skill and knowledge of our technical staff who design conservation projects, supervise their construction, and develop maintenance plans for their upkeep. Districts are also essential in helping farmers sort through the maze of financial assistance programs that make such projects possible.

In addition, Maryland has launched a new Nutrient Trading Program that creates a public marketplace for the sale and purchase of nutrient credits between non-agricultural industries and farmers. The program will be up and running in 2010 and SCDs will be key to assuring the integrity of the effort by verifying the existence and effectiveness of BMPs proffered for trade by farmers.

Moreover, with EPA poised to take on a greater role in regulating implementation of new locally-based targets for Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), districts are being asked to assist more farmers in implementing BMPs to achieve nutrient reduction goals and improve farm management.

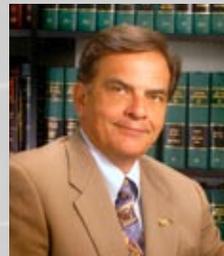
On the urban front, new laws and regulations enacted during the past two years expand the role of districts in carrying out the state's erosion and sediment control program and stormwater management program responsibilities. Most notably, districts now must ensure that environmental standards are applied consistently in order to meet the objectives of both programs. SCDs are also required to provide public access to erosion and sediment control plans submitted for construction activities, further straining resources.

The bottom line is that many of these new agricultural and urban responsibilities are required by law and Maryland stands to lose millions of dollars in federal funds if we cannot ante up the staffing support and associated resources needed to comply with the new requirements.

While we welcome the opportunity to play a major role in the Bay cleanup, to be effective we need adequate staffing and resources to take on the additional responsibilities assigned to us. As our expanded role and past performance in the Bay cleanup clearly demonstrate, we are in it for the long haul.

Sincerely,

R. Calvert Steuart
President
Maryland Association of
Soil Conservation Districts



Lynne Hoot
Executive Director



DEVELOPING SOIL CONSERVATION AND WATER QUALITY PLANS

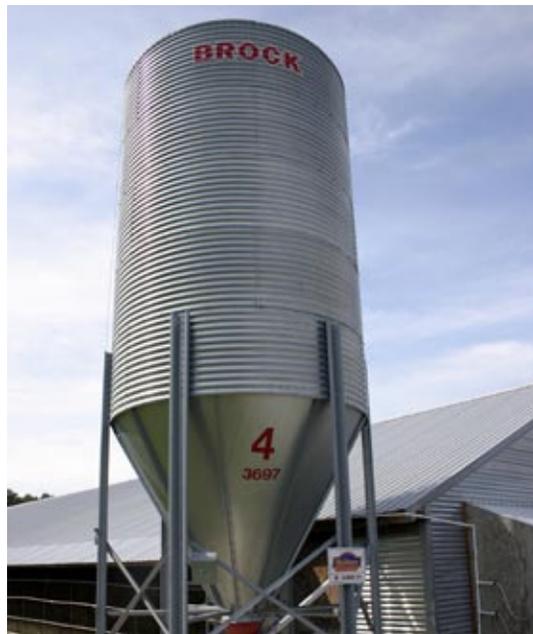
Farmers have been using Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans (SCWQPs) to protect natural resources on their farms for decades. In recent years, however, the importance of these plans to the Bay cleanup has caused state and federal regulators to sit up and take notice.

Unlike nutrient management plans, which deal specifically with fertilizer and manure applications, SCWQPs address a range of natural resource concerns for the entire farming operation. In addition to protecting water quality, SCWQPs help farmers manage their operations more efficiently, ensure productive soils, save on energy and labor costs, enhance wildlife habitat and care for forest resources.

Because each farm is unique with its own management system, site conditions and challenges, no two farm plans are alike. Consequently, developing and updating SCWQPs is a time-consuming activity for SCD conservation planners who work one-on-one with farmers.

Due to their environmental benefits, SCWQPs are required by the Federal Food Security Act on all highly erodible lands. At the state level, active SCWQPs must be implemented on all farmland enrolled in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program as well as on farmland located in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area—the 1,000 foot strip of land along the bays' shorelines. In addition, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) now requires medium-sized livestock and poultry farmers with no discharge to surface waters to implement SCWQPs as a condition for obtaining its new Maryland Animal Feeding Operation (MAFO) permit.

In 2009, soil conservation planners collectively developed 921 new SCWQPs for 44,250 acres of Maryland farmland. Another 765 plans affecting 59,124 acres of farmland were updated. Together, these plans included 1,260 BMPs.



HELPING LARGE LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY FARMERS COMPLY WITH NEW REQUIREMENTS

Under the federal Clean Water Act, large livestock and poultry operations that have the potential to discharge to surface waters are now defined as Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and are required to apply for a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit from MDE. The permit requires these operations to protect water quality by using a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) to manage their farms. These plans combine features found in SCWQPs and nutrient management plans along with other elements not traditionally addressed in either plan.

CNMPs help farmers manage animal waste, fertilizers and other nutrient sources in order to meet crop needs while preventing groundwater or surface water impacts. In 2009, MASCD worked with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) to train SCD staff to develop specialized CNMPs for farmers.

SECURING CONSERVATION GRANTS FOR FARMERS

In 2009, despite the economic downturn, farmers installed a record number of conservation practices on their farms to protect natural resources and provide critical habitat for wildlife. For most farmers, it would be impractical to install these practices without the help of conservation grants and loans available through a variety of local, state and federal programs. During the year, soil conservation districts helped Maryland farmers sort through the red tape and obtain \$36 million in grants to install conservation practices on their farms that prevent soil erosion, control nutrient runoff and protect water quality.

Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program—SCDs helped Maryland farmers obtain a record \$19 million in grants to install 2,370 conservation projects on their farms. Collectively, the projects will prevent an estimated 1.3 million pounds of nitrogen and 86,900 pounds of phosphorus from entering Maryland waterways each year.

USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)—SCDs helped farmers secure \$6.8 million in federal cost-share grants to protect natural resources on 30,000 acres of land.

USDA Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$5.4 million in federal funds to restore wetlands



CONSERVATION TRACKER

Soil conservation districts provide Governor O'Malley's BayStat program with information on BMPs installed on Maryland farms that have positive benefits for the Bay. In 2009, in order to provide a clearer, more accurate picture of the highly valued BMPs in use on Maryland farms, MDA installed a new *Conservation Tracker* database system in local soil conservation district offices statewide.

Conservation Tracker provides a geo-referenced profile of the location of BMPs installed on Maryland farms and accurately assesses the nutrient reductions provided by Maryland farmers. The system highlights BMPs specified by Governor O'Malley's two-year milestone goals and documents the broad array of water quality BMPs that have been installed on Maryland farms using federal and state grant funds.

Statewide, staff spent many months compiling and entering BMP data along with information on land being managed by SCWQPs. This information allows resources to be targeted to areas that can achieve the greatest water quality benefits. *Conservation Tracker's* next task will be to report on farmer-funded BMPs and nutrient reduction activities.

on 1,900 acres of private land on the Eastern Shore.

USDA Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$4.2 million in federal funds from this new program to address natural resource concerns on 22,637 acres of land.

USDA Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$312,000 in AMA assistance on 273 acres.

USDA Wildlife Habitats Incentive Program (WHIP)—SCDs helped farmers obtain \$306,000 to develop and improve wildlife habitat on 173 acres of private land.



URBAN PROGRAMS

Erosion and Sediment Control Plan Reviews

Since 1972, soil conservation districts have been charged with reviewing and approving erosion and sediment control plans for construction projects in their counties to ensure that environmental safeguards are in place to minimize soil erosion and nutrient runoff. During the year, soil conservation districts reviewed more than 11,700 erosion and sediment control plans affecting 84,000 acres. Approximately 6,000 of these plans were approved.

New Federal Clean Water Act Regulations

In July, a new federal permit for stormwater discharges from construction activities became effective. Districts are now required to review stormwater management plans submitted for proposed projects to ensure that water quality is being protected. As part of the permitting process, districts must provide an opportunity for public review of proposed plans. In addition, districts are now assisting farmers with erosion and sediment control plans for agricultural construction projects affecting one or more acres of land. In the past, agricultural construction activities involving farm structures and buildings were exempt from this requirement.

Stormwater Management Act of 2007

MDE will soon require developers to utilize Environmental Site Design (ESD) practices to improve stormwater infiltration. ESD impacts how each parcel is developed and requires districts to ensure that stormwater management practices and erosion and sediment control practices are synchronized prior to construction. Throughout the year, districts have been working with MDE to gear up for the program's May 2010 start date.

New Certification Program Established

In 2009, MASCD established a certification program for erosion and sediment control and stormwater management review professionals. Approximately 40 SCD plan reviewers attended the training and subsequently passed a certification exam. The program was supported by MDE and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Compliance Responsibilities

A growing number of SCDs are taking on compliance responsibilities for their counties to ensure that urban erosion and sediment control plans are implemented properly. The process includes pre-construction meetings and site inspections. Many developers appreciate the improved accessibility and turnaround that local oversight allows. Under state law, districts can charge fees to cover the cost of urban plan reviews and compliance activities.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION

In addition to educating farmers on ways to protect natural resources on their farms, soil conservation districts reach out to the young people who will become the next generation of conservationists. Every year, districts answer hundreds of requests for classroom visits and demonstrations on the importance of clean water, productive soil and healthy food. To encourage and recognize teachers who incorporate conservation themes into their science curriculum, MASCD sponsors a Conservation Education Teacher of the Year Award for K-12 educators. Conservation poster contests, soil judging competitions and career fairs engage young people in environmental thought and issues.

At the high school level, districts sponsor the *Maryland Envirothon*, an outdoor natural resources competition for teens interested in learning about natural resources and gaining a better understanding of today's complex environmental issues. Designed by soil conservationists, foresters, wildlife experts and other natural resource professionals, the Maryland Envirothon challenges students to move beyond the classroom in order to solve real life environmental problems in a natural setting. Students compete at the local, state and national levels.

A group of teens from Carroll County won this year's state competition and went on to place third among teams from 45 states and seven Canadian provinces at the 2009 Canon Envirothon.

SPECIAL PROJECTS AND GRANTS

In order to enhance SCD capacity, support environmental research and promote innovation, MASCD received the following grants in 2009:

Source: Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board

Purpose: To establish a Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program that encourages, acknowledges and rewards farmers who install BMPs on their farms.

Source: Maryland Soybean Board

Purpose: To help Eastern Shore poultry operations develop Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans now required by law.

Source: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Purpose: To work with landowners throughout the six-state Chesapeake Bay Watershed to determine their ability to participate in eco-trading activities. If eligible, these landowners will install BMPs on their farms that can be traded with non-agricultural industries for nutrient, carbon or wildlife credits.

Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Purpose: To hold workshops throughout the Eastern Shore to facilitate the development of Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans for poultry farmers utilizing newly trained district staff.



WEB SOIL SURVEY UPDATES

Thanks to the efforts of soil conservation districts, farmers, engineers, developers and other land use planners can now access soil survey information and maps for most Maryland counties online at www.soils.usda.gov/survey.

Soil survey work first began in the United States more than 100 years ago as an inventory of the nation's soils and their production potential. Today, published surveys contain a complete set of soil maps showing the location and extent of soils, descriptions of the physical and chemical properties of the soils mapped, and interpretations for land use planning. Prior to the introduction of the Web Soil Survey, soil survey maps were printed and bound into soil survey books that could be viewed by the public at local soil conservation district offices.

In 2009, three new soil surveys were added to the Web Soil Survey. Users can now download and print up-to-date soil information for Baltimore City, Washington, D.C., and 20 Maryland counties. Updates for Prince George's, Baltimore and Caroline counties are scheduled for completion in 2010. Future soil updates will be based on physiographic regions rather than geopolitical boundaries.

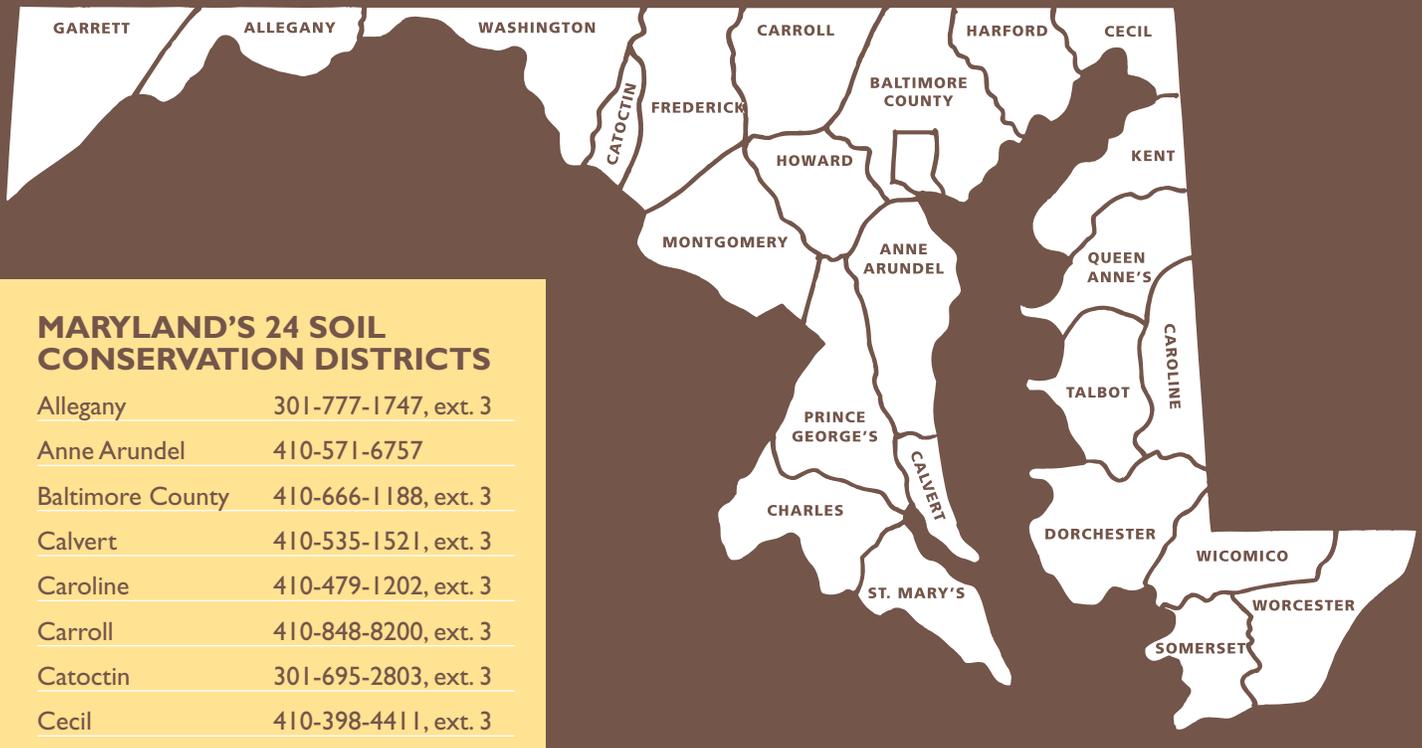


ABOUT SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Across the United States, nearly 3,000 soil conservation districts—almost one in every county—are helping land-owners conserve land, water, forests, wildlife and other natural resources on their properties. In Maryland, more than 120 volunteers serve in appointed positions on the governing boards of soil conservation districts. They work directly with thousands of coop-

erating land managers across the state, and their efforts impact two million acres of private land. Staff and operating budgets are usually funded through a mix of federal, state and county funding sources as well as grants. The staff of a typical soil conservation district office includes a district manager, district conservationist, engineers, agricultural planners, technicians, soil

scientist, urban reviewers, and administrative staff. To meet the needs of non-traditional clients, several districts have obtained special funding to hire equine specialists to work with the growing number of horse farms. In addition, SCDs serve as the agricultural representative on many local, regional and statewide environmental task forces and committees.



MARYLAND'S 24 SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Allegheny	301-777-1747, ext. 3
Anne Arundel	410-571-6757
Baltimore County	410-666-1188, ext. 3
Calvert	410-535-1521, ext. 3
Caroline	410-479-1202, ext. 3
Carroll	410-848-8200, ext. 3
Catoctin	301-695-2803, ext. 3
Cecil	410-398-4411, ext. 3
Charles	301-934-9588, ext. 3
Dorchester	410-228-5640, ext. 3
Frederick	301-695-2803, ext. 3
Garrett	301-334-6951
Harford	410-838-6181, ext. 3
Howard	410-489-7987
Kent	410-778-5150, ext. 3
Montgomery	301-590-2855
Prince George's	301-574-5162, ext. 3
Queen Anne's	410-758-3136, ext. 3
St. Mary's	301-475-8402, ext. 3
Somerset	410-651-1575, ext. 3
Talbot	410-822-1577, ext. 3
Washington County	301-797-6821, ext. 3
Wicomico	410-546-4777, ext. 3
Worcester	410-632-5439, ext. 3

MARYLAND'S CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

Soil conservation districts are members of Maryland's Conservation Partnership, a coalition of federal, state and local agriculture agencies dedicated to protecting and conserving natural resources and promoting Maryland agriculture by providing a range of educational, financial, technical assistance and regulatory programs.

- Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts
- Maryland Department of Agriculture
- State Soil Conservation Committee
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- University of Maryland Extension

MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

53 Slama Road | Edgewater, MD 21037 | 410-956-5771
www.mascd.net | email: lynnehoot@aol.com