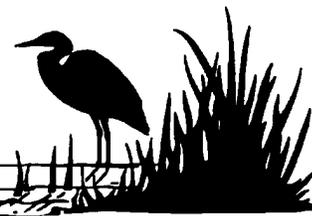


PARTNERSHIP PRESS

Maryland Conservation



WINTER 2016 VOLUME 23, ISSUE 1

MASCD LEADERSHIP CHANGES HANDS



The reins of MASCD were handed over from MASCD president Hans Schmidt to vice-president Charles Rice at the December 17th SSCC meeting. MASCD congratulates Hans on his appointment to MDA as the Assistant Secretary of Resource Conservation and to Charles as the new MASCD president. Hans replaces Royden Powell who retired on November 1st. Until the MASCD Annual Meeting, July 31 to August 2, Bruce Yerkes will serve as both vice-president and treasurer.

AGRICULTURE DEPUTY SECRETARY KRISTA HARDEN DEPARTS USDA

Agriculture Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden departs the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the end of February 2016. Krysta stated "As the Secretary's Chief of Staff, I had the pleasure of working with many bright and talented USDA employees who have dedicated their lives to helping rural America thrive. From college interns to seasoned professionals with 60 years of federal service, our employees are resilient and creative, finding ways to do more with less, year after year. Because of their hard work and dedication, the next generation will inherit a rural America that is stronger, more diverse, and more capable of rising to the challenges of the next decade". Krysta Harden served as the CEO of NACD from 2004 – 2009, during which time she worked closely with districts, partners, Congress, the Administration and other stakeholders to further conservation and agriculture.

PARTNERSHIP PRESS ELECTRONICALLY

To receive the newsletter by email, as opposed to a mailed copy, please email marguerite.mdag@gmail.com. Past issues are also posted on www.mascd.net.

MASCD AWARDED RCPP GRANT BY CHARLES RICE, MASCD PRESIDENT

It was a great pleasure to join NRCS Chief Jason Weller, Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Joe Bartenfelder, Robert Emerson, Delaware Association of Conservation Districts and our grant partners on Friday, February, 12th for the announcement that MASCD has been awarded a 4.5 million RCPP grant.

RCPP draws on local knowledge and networks to fuel conservation projects. *Meeting WIP Goals in the Chesapeake Bay* brings together 15 partners to accelerate the installation of conservation practices to enable Maryland and Delaware farmers to meet the nutrient and sediment water quality goals set forth in the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). Partners offered an additional \$5.4 million in matching funds, bringing the total value of the project to more than \$10 million.

(Continued on page 4)



Kasey Taylor, DE NRCS State Conservationist; Lindsay Thompson, MASCD; Charles Rice, MASCD; Jason Weller, Chief, NRCS; Joe Bartenfelder, Secretary MDA; Dr. Terron Hillsman, MD NRCS State Conservationist; Robert Emerson, DACD; Hans Schmidt, Assistant Secretary MDA; Jim Eichhorst, Assistant Secretary MDA

MASCD ANNUAL MEETING, JULY 31-AUGUST 2

MASCD's Annual Meeting will be held July 31-August 2, 2016 at the Hyatt Regency in Cambridge. The Upper Shore Area is very excited about bringing the event to the Eastern Shore. They are planning a full and interesting agenda that will start with a Board meeting on Sunday evening and an informative Opening Session addressing current issues on Monday morning. The Technical and Administrative Committee Meetings and Area Meetings will be held later in the day. District supervisors, district staff and partnership agencies are encouraged to attend to share information as well as the camaraderie of your peers in Maryland's Conservation Partnership.

PERSONNEL NOTES

NRCS TRANSISSIONS...

Tim Clippinger is now serving as the District Conservationist in Harford and Cecil Counties.

Eric Hines is now serving as the District Conservationist in Baltimore and Carroll Counties.

Rob McAfee, the Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, is temporarily also serving as Programs Director.

Odessa Armstrong, the Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy, is on maternity leave until April 15, 2016. Please contact Marie Monn or Lydia Donovan at the State Office for assistance that Odessa normally would provide. Odessa and Jason Armstrong are the proud parents of Jason Bryant "Tiger" Armstrong II, a healthy baby boy born on January 20, 2016.

NRCS BIDS FAREWELL TO...

Cliff Bienko, retired as the District Conservationist in Harford and Cecil Counties. He had more than 35 years of Federal service.

Joseph Haamid, retired as the District Conservationist in Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties. He had more than 35 years of Federal service.

MDA WELCOMES...

Hans Schmidt, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Resource Conservation

Patricia Gitlin, Grants Program Administrator

MDA BIDS FAREWELL TO...

Jorg Otterstedt, IT Staff Specialist

Joseph Kontgias, Technician, Prince George's SCD

Stephanie Jones, Technician, Queen Anne's SCD

IN MEMORIAM...

George A. Price, a lifelong farmer and a member of the Maryland State Legislature for 16 years in Annapolis died on October 18, 2015. He was a Baltimore County District Supervisor from 1962-1973 and 1991-2003. Memorial contributions may be made to Clynmalira United Methodist Church, 2920 Stockton Rd., Phoenix, MD 21131.

Wayne "Brooks" Hamilton, Jr., 72, of Oakland died on January 17, 2016. He was a founding member of the Southern Garrett Co. Rescue Squad, he served as President and a member of the Board of Directors for Southern States, was a member of the Farm Bureau for over 50 years, and a member of the Garrett Soil Conservation District from 1993-2013. He also spent many years actively involved in 4-H, FFA and Garrett College. Brooks was a faithful Red Cross blood donor. He dedicated his life to promoting agriculture. Memorial contributions may be made to the Southern Garrett Co. Rescue Squad, POB 378, Oakland, MD 21550.

CIVIL RIGHTS UPDATE

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER (LGBT) – A SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM IN USDA BY: JIM BREWER, NRCS MD LGBT SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM MANAGER (SEPM) AND MEGHAN WALTER, NRCS NATIONAL LGBT SEPM

USDA's history of LGBT: In 1953, there wasn't a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Special Emphasis Program, but its history started then. Issued in that year, a Presidential Executive Order required investigations of federal employees for security clearances and specifically made mention of 'sexual perversion' as reason for denial and removal from service. This time period was known for McCarthyism, and to the gay community as the Lavender Scare. Many thought homosexuals were as dangerous a threat to national security as Communists.

In 1993, USDA's Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy issued the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Civil Rights Policy Statement. And in 1998, President Clinton issued Executive Order 13087. Both of these documents specifically prohibited discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation. In July 1999, the USDA Task Force on Sexual Orientation was formed. The Task Force found: "If the Department fully implements its sexual orientation nondiscrimination and diversity policy, USDA stands to gain greater openness, job satisfaction, and retention among its workforce; increased productivity and customer service; and the prevention of costly complaints. We have estimated the potential savings that could be realized by the Department through this course of action to be approximately \$23 million annually." These actions demonstrate how the USDA was leading the charge on sexual orientation inclusion for the federal government in the 1990s.

In the fall of 2000, the Secretary of Agriculture Advisory Council on sexual orientation was established: Gay & Lesbian Employee Advisory Council (GLEAC). It advised USDA leadership on issues affecting LGBT employees, assisted in the implementation of Departmental policies, and developed and delivered training addressing sexual orientation nondiscrimination.

In June 2009, Secretary Vilsack signed departmental Regulation 4230-002 creating a Special Emphasis Program for LGBT employees. This effectively replaced the Gay and Lesbian Employees Advisory Council (GLEAC). Every year USDA and NRCS's Civil Rights Policy Statements are reissued by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Agency Chief. Our Civil Rights Policy now specifically states, "It is NRCS' policy to treat all customers and employees equitably regardless of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and expression), religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or familial status, parental status, and protected genetic information..."

NRCS is a welcoming workplace! USDA and NRCS Civil Rights and Anti-Harassment Policies specifically prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and sex, including gender identity and expression. NRCS recognizes the value of a diverse workplace. At the highest levels of our Department, we have visible allies who actively support LGBT inclusion. USDA is the People's Department – we represent the diversity that is the American Public, and we serve the American Public. USDA is one of the largest federal

(Continued on page 7)

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE BY LYNNE HOOT, MASCD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SB 645 & HB 1110 Chesapeake and Atlantic Bay 2010 Trust Fund—Allocation of Funds: The big priority for MASCD during this legislative session is to secure a designated funding source for staff within the soil conservation districts that are currently funded through annual grants from the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund. Legislation has been introduced in the House and Senate to allocate a minimum of \$5 million towards district staff. Although not defined in the law, this is to fund the 25 district managers and administrative positions within 15 county governments that are funded jointly with up to 50% state funding and county funding; provide a secure funding commitment for the 43 full time, annual contract planners and technicians within the soil conservation districts and new funding for five regional engineering positions, identified as the biggest limiting factor in getting complex best management practices installed on farms. The bill further allocates the remaining funds for agricultural BMPs such as the cover crop program through MDA (40%) and the Competitive Grant program (45%).

There has been strong bipartisan support for the legislation as seen by the many co-sponsors of the bills. MASCD worked with the legislative members of the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in developing the legislation. Both organizations fully appreciate the need for technical assistance for farmers to help them with the implementation of best management practices. CBF was also very supportive of the inclusion of the funds for five new engineering positions as they too were aware of this shortage.

The hearing for SB 645 is March 1, 2016 in the Education, Health and Environment Affairs (EHEA) Committee (Room 2 Miller West) at 1:00 p.m. The bill is jointly assigned to EHEA and Budget and Tax. The hearing for HB 1110 is March 2, at 1:00 pm in the Environment and Tax (E&T) committee. This bill is jointly assigned with Appropriations. Oral and written testimony is welcomed and should be coordinated with our office.

Some others bills of interest are:

HB 132 - State Government - Pollinator Habitats: Requiring State agencies that own or manage property or land to consult with the Department of Agriculture to establish a pollinator habitat plan by July 1, 2017. Requiring state agencies to implement pollinator habitat plans on or before July 1, 2018, and to make the pollinator habitat plans available on the State agency's website by September 1, 2017. Requiring specified State agencies to report to specified committees of the General Assembly by January 1, 2018.

HB 325 - Environment - Bay Restoration Fund - Use of Funds - Nutrient Credit Purchases: An MDE departmental bill that authorizes Bay Restoration Fund monies to be used for costs associated with the purchase of cost effective nitrogen and phosphorus nutrient credits. Requiring MDE to consult with MDA and DNR when adopting these regulations.

SB 17 - Open Meetings Act - Retention of Minutes and Tape Recordings - Revision: Increasing, from 1 year to 5 years, the number of years after the date of an open session a public body is required to keep a copy of written minutes of the open session and any tape recording made.

SB 496 & HB 599 - Poultry Litter Management Act: This bill requires that integrators only place poultry at a contract operation that they have verified have an unexpired, fully implemented nutrient management plan.

The integrator is responsible for the removal of excess manure defined as "in excess of the amount of manure able to be fully utilized under a certified nutrient management plan developed for the contract operation of for adjacent land under the contract grower's control." The integrator shall remove the manure at no cost to the contract grower and do so at least once a calendar year.

Contract growers may voluntarily elect to retain all or a portion of manure so long as it does not exceed the amount of manure that can be annually applied at the contract growers operation unless they obtain a manure alternative use plan defined as "a plan that is designated to to use manure in a manner that does not result in any additional nutrient loads to the Chesapeake Bay."

In order to retain the manure, the contract grower must receive permission from the integrator approving the amount retained and have an approved manure alternative use plan from the Department of Agriculture for any amount of excess manure. Integrators and manure brokers must maintain and report the following records: the name and address of the integrator or transporter, by amount of manure removed, the nutrient analysis of the manure, the name and location of the farm it was removed from and grower or facility it was delivered to and, the amount of manure delivered. These records are to be submitted to MDA annually and made available to the public upon request. Public funds may not be used for the transport of litter deemed as "excess manure."

Integrators and manure brokers can only deliver manure to: an agricultural operation with a nutrient management plan deeming them eligible to receive manure, an alternative use facility, or a storage facility with the capacity to store the manure inside.

All excess manure transported shall be covered while on the road or highway and any transport vehicle shall contain the excess manure without any loss of the material on public roads. The penalty for violating any of these provisions is a misdemeanor subject to up to \$50,000 in fines per violation.

SB 528 & HB 250 General Provisions - Open Meetings Act - Required Training and Certificate of Compliance: Requiring that a member and employees of public bodies take a training on the requirements of the Open Meetings Act within 30 days of becoming an employee or member of a public body. Each public body shall post on their websites the members who have completed the training on a monthly basis.

RCPP GRANT (CONTINUED)

The core emphasis of this grant proposal in Maryland is that farmers will be receiving technical assistance from their trusted soil conservation district staff to install best management practices on their land with an emphasis on animal waste for livestock and poultry. Our partners will assist the districts with innovative practices on the Eastern Shore and to spread the word to potential farmers. Financial assistance for these farmers will be provided through the Maryland Agricultural Cost Share Program and the RCPP *Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)* program funds.

In Maryland, the focus will be on animal related conservation practices, including animal waste storage, stream fencing, heavy use areas and barnyard runoff. To meet Maryland's new Phosphorus Management Tool requirements, conservation district staff will work with dairy farmers to install state-of-the-art liquid separation technology to overcome the cost of moving the liquid portion of manure long distances to crop fields that require more phosphorus.

On the Delmarva Peninsula, crop farmers will be advised on the recent research finding on innovative variable rate nitrogen application techniques (GreenSeeker) and be encouraged to sign up for advanced nutrient management practices. Conservation district staff will be trained on nitrogen removal woodchip bioreactors, which are showing up to 90 percent Nitrogen removal on trial sites. In Delaware, emphasis will be on crop production and expanded use of cover crops.

NRCS selected eight Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects within the Chesapeake Bay watershed in 2015. Through those eight projects, approximately \$45 million in NRCS funding is now available to agricultural producers over the next five years. Partner contributions associated with these projects total over \$35 million.

MARYLAND WELL REPRESENTED AT NACD ANNUAL MEETING



Maryland's conservation partnership were represented by 16 individuals (10 of which are shown here) at the NACD meeting in Reno. Shown here: from Prince George's SCD Cal Steuart, Cynthia Steuart & Steve Darcey; from Harford SCD, Lee McDaniel, Frank Richardson, & Bill Tharpe; from Baltimore Co. SCD, Hank Suchting, Doreen Suchting, Toby Mays III, & Kelly Mays; from NRCS Dr. Terron Hillsman. Not pictured: from Cecil SCD, Van Funk, Sean McCandless & Charles Hayes; and from Charles SCD, Dee Dee Saunders & Dave Saunders.

CYNTHIA STEUART ELECTED SECRETARY OF NACD AUXILIARY



Cynthia Steuart, wife of former president Cal Steuart, was elected secretary of the NACD Auxiliary at the annual meeting in Reno. Although MASCD does not have an Auxiliary program at the state level, Cynthia has been an active participant at the national level. Congratulations Cynthia.

NACD IN ACTION IN RENO, NV

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) held its 2016 Annual Meeting in Reno, Nevada, February 1-3, bringing together conservation leaders from across the nation for educational sessions, workshops and networking. This year's meeting marked the 70th such event put on by NACD and focuses on the theme "Historic Legacy Guiding a Brighter Future." Monday's Opening General Session featured a Nevada welcome address from Congressman Mark Amodei [R-NV 2nd District] and a keynote address by *National Geographic* photojournalist Jim Richardson.

During the event, Maryland was recognized for 100% achievement for districts paying their dues and a special recognition was given to Prince George's SCD as the first district to achieve platinum level with their dues of \$3,001, during the event, two other districts achieved this impressive level of commitment.

One announcement that was made during the event is that NACD will no longer be producing printed educational materials. These will now be available digitally at no cost so either states, districts or schools can do the printing locally or the materials can be used on line. At this point, NACD is offering all their current materials at discounted prices.

NACD PUBLICATIONS

NACD issues a number of publications to keep member conservation districts informed of recent association activity, the latest news affecting districts and their customers and newly available resources. Publications are provided to districts free of charge.

eResource - eResource is NACD's weekly news briefs issued every Tuesday afternoon. It is posted on the NACD website and emailed to most district employees and to a general distribution list. You can read eNotes online or, or have a copy sent to your inbox.

The Resource - NACD's quarterly print publication, *The Resource*, provides in depth coverage of the association's recent activities and features columns by the NACD CEO and President, in addition to guest and partnership columns. Published quarterly, the newsletter is distributed electronically and through the mail.

2016 SSCC WORKPLAN

- Nutrient Trading
- Pollinator Habitat- Urban & agricultural settings: SCD role
- Chesapeake Bay Model
- WIP III
- Associate Supervisor Policies (training, honorary roles, etc.)
- Diversity on SCD Boards- Background & demographics
- Soil health-in context MD programs
- Stormwater fees- opportunity for SCD re: managing implementation projects
- Verification BMPs
- Communication with environmental community-SSCC as forum

SUPERVISOR APPOINTMENT PROCESS AND ASSOCIATE SUPERVISORS

The SSCC had a lengthy discussion at their retreat in December concerning appointment of supervisors to SCD boards. Louise Lawrence briefed committee members on continuing issues with receipt of Farm Bureau nominations. Although most counties were doing a better job since the SSCC met with Farm Bureau director, Val Connelly, there are still a couple outliers.

Bobby Guy noted it is good to get a local recommendation along with the nomination forms.

Lynne Hoot said if the completion of the nomination form is not viewed as important, the seriousness of the job responsibilities and appointment process are undermined.

Milly Welsh said in AASCD the supervisors have agreed not to seek reappointment after two terms.

Smokey Stanton noted that the long service award pins reward those who never rotate off boards.

Terron Hillsman said you don't want to lose experience but perhaps could move folks to associate roles and have them involved on subcommittees.

Hans Schmidt said diversity of board members is important because of the scope of activities SCDs get involved with.

There was then a lengthy discussion of associate supervisors.

Members discussed the various means for expanding the net to get interested Associates, including cooperating agencies and LEAD, Maryland. The SSCC agreed that they should provide additional guidance for the recruitment and involvement of Associates. There was some discussion of a greater role for Associates at MASCD.

Chairman Stanton will report on this discussion and provide recommendations at an upcoming MASCD BOD meeting. This topic will also be the subject of an extended meeting in 2016.

APPOINTMENTS

- Allegany SCD- Carl Robinette
- Frederick SCD- Gareth Harshman
- Harford SCD- Frank Richardson

INTERNET

SOIL HEALTH VIDEOS

Who doesn't like a great movie? Take a minute to visit the NRCS Maryland homepage's "Soil Health Theater". Visit www.md.nrcs.usda.gov and click on Newsroom and then Photos and Videos.

At the Soil Health Theater website, you can see and hear from some of America's top soil health experts and innovative soil health farmers. You will find videos ranging from demonstrations on soil health to videos featuring the men and women who are farming with Soil Health Management Systems. Take a few minutes to see for yourself why there is a growing movement to "Unlock the Secrets in the Soil." Posted videos include:

Explore the Science of Soil Health – This series of short videos provides interviews with national researchers and experts across the Nation to help you more fully understand the science of soil health.

Profiles in Soil Health – These short video profiles let you hear directly from some of the nation's leading farmers to find out how they're using soil health management systems to make their farms more profitable, productive and sustainable.

Ray the Soil Health Guy – Soil Health Lessons in a Minute – topics covered include:

- Can your soil pass the infiltration test?
- Is your soil healthy and functioning?
- Have you discovered the cover?
- How should your soil smell?
- How should your soil look?
- How can you boost the energy of your soil?

A video and publications translated in Spanish are also available through the website.

MASCD GRANTS UPDATE

Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program –

There have been 173 evaluation reviews on 151 farms, resulting in 121 certified conservation stewards doing a great job in protecting 37,226 acres in 20 counties across the state. One goal in 2016 is to certify farms in the remaining four counties. Although the program provided 119 FSCAP farm signs with installed signposts, there are 170 signs displayed because many of the stewards believe that the recognition is also good for business. Every sign includes the district’s name and logo as well as the core partners and funding partners: MFB, CBF, MDA, NRCS, MG PUB, and MSB.

MASCD offers perks to stewards with other projects by initial exclusive invitations to partipate. Through the Nutrient Trading Project, 22 stewards had free baseline assessments conducted that determine compliance with the TMDL plan and the number of nitrogen and phosphorus credits. Through our three Pollinator Habitat Projects, 29 stewards have participated. Seven stewards were certified as a result of meeting them as participants in Pollinator Habitat. District support: Washington County SCD – 29 stewards; Carroll – 12; Cecil - 10; Frederick and Wicomico SCDs – 8; St. Mary’s - 7.

Translation Outreach Project –

This project ended on September 30, 2015 after four years of translating key environmental information regarding the poultry industry to 100 Korean and Vietnamese poultry growers on the Eastern Shore. During that time, MASCD, in partnership with UM Extension, MidAtlantic Farm Credit and Delmara Poultry Industry, Inc. presented two workshops, 10 quarterly newsletters and five publications. We also translated four MDA conservation fact sheets in Spanish for Hispanic workers on horse

and dairy farms. We translated FSCAP brochure into Korean and Vietnamese and mailed to the distribution list and were able to certify four Korean growers, with a translator accompanying the assessor. All translated material was sent to the Delaware Extension Office and the NRCS state and national Civil Rights Committees that distribute it across the country and territories.

Pollinator Habitat Project –

MASCD is currently working on a small grant from the Baltimore Gas and Electric Company Green Grant Program that will allow the establishment of five more acres of pollinator habitat. Three acres were planted in November 2015 and the remaining two acres will be planted next spring. This is MASCD’s third pollinator habitat grant. The three Pollinator Habitat projects will total 56 acres on 62 farms, two agricultural centers, one school and one environmental education center in 15 counties.

Resource Improvement –

MASCD received a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, working in partnership with another consultant company, Conservation Partners, to assist districts in verifying resource improvements, which are unrecorded conservation practices installed by farmers on their own without cost-sharing. Resource improvements (RIs) are revisions of what was initially referred to as “functional equivalents” (FEs). We are working with districts to field-check and verify the FEs that the districts have already recorded. After verification, the RIs will be entered in MDA’s Conservation Tracker system and eventually in the Chesapeake Bay database to increase credit for agriculture’s contributions to the Watershed Implementation Plan. RIs on 15 farms have been verified in Washington County and 19 farms in Howard County. Work will soon begin in Anne Arundel and Baltimore Counties.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

ANNUAL REPORT AVAILABLE

The Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts has released its 2015 annual report entitled, “Innovating for a Cleaner Chesapeake Bay”. The report highlights the ways Maryland’s 24 soil conservation districts work to protect natural resources. Contact Lynne Hoot, 410-956-5771 for a copy or visit www.mascd.net.

MARYLAND CHARITY CAMPAIGN

MASCD Envirothon is a new participant in the Maryland Charity Campaign, which allows Maryland state employees and retirees to give to over 700 participating charitable organizations.

To help support Maryland high school students strive to learn more about our natural world and compete at county, state, and national levels, please visit <http://www.mdcharity.org/> and enter our code **6483**, or enter Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts, Inc.



FUTURE DATES TO REMEMBER

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| March 18 | SSCC, MDA, Annapolis |
| March 22 | MASCD Board Meeting, Prince George’s SCD, Upper Marlboro |
| April 15 | SSCC, MDA, Annapolis |
| April 24 - May 1 | Soil & Water Stewardship Week |
| May 19 | SSCC, MDA, Annapolis |
| June 16 | SSCC, MDA, Annapolis |
| July 21 | SSCC, MDA, Annapolis |
| June 22-23 | Maryland Envirothon, Mount St. Mary’s University, Emmitsburg |
| June 24 | MACCA August Exam Registration Deadline |
| July 31 - August 2 | MASCD Annual Meeting, Hyatt Regency, Cambridge |
| August 5 | MACCA Exam, Annapolis |

PARTNERSHIP

LEADERSHIP RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

If you have a habit of making grand New Year's resolutions like training for a marathon or going to the gym every day at 5 a.m., and always fail, then it may be time to change your tactics. Instead of making a personal resolution, try making a resolution for your professional life.

Whether you resolve to pursue an online MBA degree or make a pledge to log out of your email at 5 pm every day, professional resolutions can be easier to keep than personal resolutions. Not only can you share your goals with co-workers to hold yourself accountable, you can also make your resolution a part of your annual objectives with your manager or team. Leadership resolutions can be especially beneficial because they impact your employees as well.

To help you get started, try adopting one of the following leadership resolutions for 2016:

Embrace Collective Leadership

The subject of collective leadership has been picking up steam in recent years. While there is no single definition of collective leadership, this idea involves shifting the focus from an individual leader and emphasizing the shared goals and direction of a group.

If you're used to hierarchical leadership structures, the thought of collective leadership may make you skeptical. However, adopting this approach helps organizations attract talented professionals from younger generations and gives all employees a greater sense of investment in their organization.

There are a number of strategies you can implement to foster an environment of collective leadership. Increasing transparency and access to knowledge is an effective way to encourage employees to take more initiative and make more meaningful contributions to your organization.

You can also step back and allow employees to take greater responsibility for their performance. Instead of jumping to provide them with your answer to a problem, ask them to brainstorm possible solutions.

Another innovative way to encourage collective leadership is to implement rotating leadership positions, with a different professional managing the team for each project. Not only does this practice allow every team member to develop leadership skills, but it also improves group dynamics by giving everyone insight into other team member's roles.

Multitask Less, Engage More

How many times have you found yourself reading and responding to emails while you're on the phone or in a meeting? Multitasking has become almost second nature for many professionals.

While this skill can be useful in some situations, it's almost never productive when you're talking with your employees. By failing to give them your full attention, you're conveying the message that your conversation with them doesn't take precedence over other tasks.

When you don't devote your full attention to your employees, you're giving them the green light for the same behavior. So don't be surprised when they're drafting reports during teleconferences and meetings. Listening is one of the most important skills a leader can develop. By fully engaging with your employees, you're more likely to earn their respect, elicit better results, and create a positive work environment.

Excerpts from: GovLoop e-newsletter, Alison Napolitano, December 18, 2015

CIVIL RIGHTS UPDATE (CONTINUED)

2016 MARYLAND CIVIL RIGHTS AWARD

Maryland Civil Rights Committee and Special Emphasis Program Managers are seeking nominations for the 2016 Maryland Civil Rights Award.

- Nominees will be considered based on their work in natural resources conservation and/or agriculture that contributed to the advancement of civil rights in Maryland during the 2015 calendar year.
- Nominees can be an individual, working group, or organization.
- Nominations are open to employees of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland Soil Water Conservation Districts, University of Maryland Extension, Earth Team Volunteers, and any other Maryland individual, group, or organization working to advance civil rights through NRCS related work.
- Nominations can be based on: outreach efforts, customers served, volunteers recruited, programs implemented, education and awareness efforts, or other achievements.
- All nominees and nominators will be acknowledged at the Diversity Day event.

Nomination Form is due by April 11, 2016. Award recipients will be announced at Diversity Day on May 5, 2016. For more information, please call or email Nora De La Rosa at nora.delarosa@md.usda.gov, 443-482-2907.

LGBT EMPHASIS PROGRAM

(Continued from page 2)

departments – we are literally in almost every county across the nation. Studies show that LGBT individuals and couples live in more than 98% of US counties. We occupy the same spaces as our LGBT communities, so it's just good customer service for USDA to reach out to the people who live and work in the areas we serve.

Our Special Emphasis Programs focus on recruitment, retention and employee engagement of the following groups:

- American Indian/ Alaska Native
- Asian American & Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- Women
- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- African American
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender

For more information on the USDA's commitment to civil rights and LGBT inclusivity, please visit <http://www.ascr.usda.gov/>.

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

In 1955, the National Association of Conservation Districts began a national program to encourage Americans to focus on stewardship. Stewardship Week is officially celebrated from the last Sunday in April to the first Sunday in May. It is one of the world's largest conservation-related observances.



The annual National Conservation Poster Contest provides kindergarten through twelfth grade students an opportunity to convey their thoughts about soil, water and related natural resource issues through art. It also highlights the educational outreach efforts of conservation districts and their state conservation associations, auxiliaries and agencies. The 2016 Poster theme is "We All Need Trees". For more information, visit <http://www.nacdnet.org/education/contests/poster/we-all-need-trees-poster-contest>.

GENERAL FORESTRY COURSE - FALL 2016

The University of Maryland Extension will offer the General Forestry Course for the fall 2016 semester. Both paper and online versions will be offered. This is a non-credit course and the fee is \$300. The course begins September 1 and runs until December 15, 2016. Registration opens June 1st. To register, and for more information, contact Nancy Stewart: nstewar1@umd.edu or 410-827-8056 x107.



is a quarterly newsletter published for and about the members of Maryland's Conservation Partnership: MD Department of Agriculture, MD Association of Soil Conservation Districts, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, MD Cooperative Extension Service, and the State Soil Conservation Committee. The deadline for articles is January 30, April 30, July 30 and October 30. Please direct comments or questions to the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts at (410) 956-5771.

The members of the Conservation Partnership prohibit discrimination in their programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250 or call 1-800-245-6340 (voice) or (202) 720-5964 (TDD). Agencies in the Maryland Conservation Partnership are equal employment opportunity employers.

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