

P Maryland Conservation PARTNERSHIP PRESS



Spring 2023 Volume 30 Issue 2

A MESSAGE FROM THE MASCD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JEN NELSON



Advocating for Conservation in a “Farm Bill Year”

The timing was good for a visit to Capitol Hill for NACD’s Fly-in in March. Elected officials and staffers were seeking input on the Farm Bill, and specifically on appropriations, ahead of a March 31 deadline. A small team from MASCD- Howard SCD District Manager David Plummer, Prince George’s SCD District Manager Steve Darcey, NRCS State Conservationist Suzy Daubert and myself- met with staff from the offices of Congressman Mfume, Congressman Ivey, Senator Van Hollen, Senator Cardin and Senator Raskin.

There was interest from staffers on the Farm Bill itself, including how to increase technical assistance, appropriations for programs, and on urban agriculture. Our small group had a successful day of meetings- in the busy season of fly-in visits, I was told by one of the staffers later on that we were one of the most prepared groups that he had met with during this period.

I’d encourage everyone to look for opportunities to keep these conversations going with our elected officials! NACD’s Fly-In is a great opportunity to discuss the needs and priorities of our partnership, but **effective advocacy is an ongoing conversation**. Invite elected officials and staff to your outreach and education events. Set up small tours to show off the work of your district and partners and talk about how technical and financial assistance makes a difference in your operations. Let them know where the sticking points are in adopting new conservation practices. Talk about the importance of flexibility in program guidelines and the need for streamlining applications for financial assistance.

The Senate and House of Representatives take a recess in August, and it’s a great time to get on their schedules. (Hint- notably absent from the list of visits above is Congressman Harris, who serves as the Agriculture Subcommittee Chairman on the House Appropriations Committee.) NACD’s website has several helpful resources for advocacy related to Federal Policy, including their [August Recess Guide to Grassroots Engagement](#). You can also find talking points related to [Farm Bill recommendations](#), and issue papers from the Fly-In. MASCD’s website also has a link to an [advocacy webinar](#) that we recorded in 2021 that contains solid advice for building relationships with decision-makers.

MASCD is here to assist the districts in working for effective programs and partnerships to get conservation on the ground. It’s our farmers and landowners, however, who participate in our programs and receive technical assistance, who are the most important advocates in the conservation partnership.

LEGISLATIVE END OF SESSION REPORT - BY MICHAEL COBURN AND MICHAEL MASON, PROVIDENCE STRATEGIES

Sine Die 2023

Maryland’s 445th Legislative Session ended in the early morning hours of April 11th. This Session offered more than 2,000 pieces of proposed legislation from the House and the Senate and a little over 600 of them made it into law.

This was the first legislative session for newly elected Governor Wes Moore and his Administration. His initiatives of minimum wage and climate policy were widely accepted by the legislature. The budget proved to be a different story as legislators were authorized to increase, decrease, or add items to the state budget as long as such changes did not make the budget exceed the total proposed budget submitted by the governor. Previously the assembly could only reduce the state’s operating budget. For Soil Conservation we tracked over 50 different pieces of legislation for the Association and held our bi-weekly legislative calls with Soil Conservation District Managers and staff. For the full 90-Day legislative report for MASCD, please contact Mike Mason at mason@providence.llc

Providence Strategies is the lobbying firm for the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts.

ITEMS OF INTEREST



If you care about agriculture in the Chesapeake region, then the Million Acre Challenge (MAC) is for you. Whether you're a farmer, service provider, consumer, or a supporter and funder, you can make a difference by taking a very simple step: [JOIN US!](#) We engage with farmers wherever they are in their journeys, and connect with ag partners across the state, to promote as many resources as possible. Joining The Challenge affirms your commitment to this big tent soil health effort. No strings attached. No hidden agendas.

Our MAC farmers currently steward about 50,000 acres, and the momentum continues to build. Like you, we believe local farmers have the power to increase profitability, improve the environment, and bolster their communities by adopting farming systems that reduce inputs, produce nutrient-dense food, benefit water quality, enhance ecosystem biodiversity, and store carbon. We inform farmers and policymakers about soil health research and developments. We offer monthly Soil Health to Go! lunch and learn webinars and provide a range of opportunities such as legislator farm tours and on-farm field days, networks for advanced growers, and in-depth soil health testing and education through the Pasa Soil Health Benchmark Study. Funding through NFWF and USDA/NRCS also provides options for financial and technical assistance for farmers of all scales and production systems. And, we are always willing to consider working with community partners to further support farmer networking and engagement.

The MAC is committed to advancing these efforts in collaboration with the broad ag community.. Find more at millionacrechallenge.org

LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD PROGRAM is a competitive award that recognizes landowner achievement in voluntary conservation. Sand County Foundation presents the award in California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and in New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont).

Application deadline is August 1, 2023.

For more information, please visit, www.leopoldconservationaward.org



NRCS Expands Conservation Program Opportunities to Support Climate-Smart Agriculture

This past year, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service announced new and expanded conservation opportunities for climate smart agriculture. This included nationwide availability of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Conservation Incentive Contracts option, a new and streamlined EQIP Cover Crop Initiative, and added flexibilities for producers to easily re-enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Most recently, through the Inflation Reduction Act, NRCS is making additional funding available for agricultural producers and forest landowners nationwide to participate in voluntary conserva-

tion programs and adopt climate-smart practices that support climate change mitigation. Climate change threatens agricultural production, forest resources and economic opportunities. Climate-smart agriculture and forestry is an integrated approach that enables farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to respond to climate change by reducing or removing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and adapting and building resilience (adaptation), while sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes. Through voluntary conservation programs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers and landowners make conservation improvements on their land that benefit natural resources, build resiliency, and contribute to the nation's broader effort to combat the causes and impacts of climate change. Learn more about [NRCS Climate-Smart Mitigation Activities](#), voluntary conservation practices and enhancements that can support climate change mitigation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions or increasing carbon sequestration.

Several NRCS conservation programs directly support climate-smart agriculture and forestry, including the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#), [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#), [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#), [Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\)](#), and [Conservation Technical Assistance \(CTA\)](#).

NRCS accepts applications for conservation programs – including EQIP and CSP – year-round. To apply, producers should contact their [local USDA Service Center](#).

Future Dates to Remember	
May 18	SSCC Meeting, Annapolis
June 15	SSCC Meeting, Annapolis
July 20	SSCC Meeting, Annapolis
Aug 1	Leopold Application Due
Aug 27-29	MASCD Annual Meeting, Hyatt Regency, Cambridge
Sept. 21	SSCC Meeting, Annapolis
Oct 21	SSCC Meeting, Annapolis

A NOTE FROM THE SSCC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALISHA MULKEY

SSCC Guidance Memo on Disclosing Producer Information

In January, SSCC on behalf of the Conservation Partnership, reviewed the contents of a Guidance Memo on compliance with federal rules known as Farm Bill Section 1619 provisions.

The passage of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (“2008 Farm Bill”) included provisions in Section 1619 which prohibits disclosure of certain information about producers by the USDA and its partners. Subsequently, NRCS issued guidance to cooperating Districts about their roles and responsibilities in protecting confidential producer information pursuant to Section 1619. The language has also been added to the recent Memorandum of Agreements between NRCS and each District. The federal provisions are in addition to Maryland state laws that also protect the producer identity contained in a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan (“Plan”).

The SSCC Guidance Memo seeks to ensure clarity and continuity among the Districts when discussing and reviewing producer information, particularly in public monthly Board meetings. The Guidance Memo contained 5 questions and responses specifically related to the process and protections for a Plan. Each question was reviewed with the attendees, and the Guidance Memo was distributed to District Managers and Board chairs.

Following the January presentation, SSCC members and attendees held a discussion and raised additional questions not addressed by the Guidance Memo. Responses to those questions were provided to the District Managers in April and will be coordinated with the Board Supervisors for additional distribution soon.

EPA Waters of the United States (WOTUS) Rule

In February, Stefania Shamet and Jeff Lapp, EPA Region 3, presented on the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule. The rule’s final language was released December 30, 2022 and became effective March 20, 2023.

The definition of WOTUS is a critical term in the Clean Water Act but is not defined in legislation. Rather, the regulatory agencies – EPA and Army Corps of Engineers – have defined the term since the 1970s. This has created changes in the definition over time and allowed the rule to be subject to litigation. With the new ruling, the agencies are returning the definition to the familiar, narrower pre-2015 regulations with some amendments. The goal is to provide clarity to users and incorporate best available science.

Since its release in December, EPA has released several memos and public communication tools to summarize the rule including a memo for the agricultural community. These materials are available at <https://www.epa.gov/wotus/revising-definition-waters-united-states>

The rule is organized into three parts: jurisdictional waters, exclusions, and definitions. For today’s discussion Ms. Shamet and Mr. Lapp focused on the components most relevant to agriculture. The rule does not change the existing exemptions for agricultural activities on prior converted cropland if a change in use does not occur.

Following EPA, Colby Ferguson, Maryland Farm Bureau, reminded attendees the Clean Water Act and WOTUS are broader in focus than just agriculture, but Farm Bureau has concerns about local determinations for “significant nexus” and encouraged EPA to provide clarity and certainty to producers. Colby shared that Maryland’s higher regulatory requirements for wetlands will also result in lesser impact than in surrounding states when the rule is implemented. Farm Bureau expects the rule to be litigated.

New MACS Flat Rates

In March, MDA Conservation Grants program shared the new flat rate schedule. Following the motions of SSCC from the December 2022 meeting, MACS staff proceeded to reconvene the regional workgroups. Meetings and materials were shared in January, with a submission request from the workgroups in February. Documents and flat rates have been finalized and became effective April 1. These flat rates will supersede the 30% COVID adjustment that has been in place. SCD trainings were scheduled in March to cover MACS eligibility and processes.

The Western Maryland region will pilot the component-based flat rate schedule and bring information and lessons learned to MACS and SSCC for future discussion.

In addition, MACS staff will coordinate with the new administration and consider updating the MDA regulations to increase the farm cap limits for MACS projects.

Supervisor Appointments

- Baltimore County SCD – Mark Duvall
- Garrett SCD – Richard William Helbig

IN MEMORIAM...



Gerald Franklin Talbert, 74, of Hanover, passed away on Wednesday, March 1, 2023 at UPMC Hanover Hospital. Born on Tuesday, February 22, 1949 in Upperco, MD. Jerry received his Master of Science degree in Business from Johns Hopkins University, as well a Bachelor of Science in Humanities and Social Sciences from Drexel University. He was a consultant with thirty-nine years of experience in soil conservation at local, state, and national levels. His specialties included agricultural land preservation, agricultural and forestry feedstock for renewable energy, and market based approaches to conservation through nutrient and carbon trading. Jerry was the MASCD FSCAP coordinator for many years. In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to the Forever Love Rescue at the Kitty Corner in Gettysburg where he rescued his beloved cat Tia by visiting <https://foreverloverescue.com/how-to-help-animals/> or to a charity of your choice.



William Michael Giese, Jr., of Cambridge, MD, died on Tuesday, March 7, 2023. Bill began working at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge as a teenager and it formed the center of his 40-year professional career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He also served as a collateral federal law enforcement officer for 30 years. Bill was a supervisor for Dorchester SCD since 1992. Memorial donations may be made to the Friends of Blackwater N.W.R., Inc., POB 1231, Cambridge, MD 21613 or online at www.friendsofblackwater.org.

P Maryland Conservation **PARTNERSHIP PRESS**

The Partnership Press 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, Maryland Cooperative Extension, 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 202-353-9733.

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)

MASCD ASSOCIATION MANUAL ONLINE

The association manual has evolved over many years and contains several sections which have been prepared to describe our formation, our history, our current operating guidelines and bylaws, and our future expectations in the form of our policy.

Supervisors and award winners, since the formation of the association, are recognized and the past presidents describe the activities that occurred under their leadership.

The manual has been designed so it can be updated as new leaders take the reins and as MASCD recognizes the contributions of other individuals in the soil conservation movement in Maryland.



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Harry Rieck, MASCD President, along with District Supervisors from seven Eastern Shore Districts greet Waters S. Davis, Jr., President, NACD, at the Salisbury airport, August 23, 1954.