

Kent Soil and Water Conservation District



Long Range Strategic Plan 2024-2030

Our Vision

To inform, assist and facilitate Conservation programs while being respectful of the environment and the Kent County community.

Our Mission

To support the Kent County community in conserving natural resources through education, technical assistance, and financial support. We promote sustainable agriculture through cooperative partnerships to protect soil and water quality in the County.

Our Core Values

We value:

- A voluntary, collaborative, local, non-regulatory approach to solving problems
- The importance of a healthy environment to the economy of our area
- Open space and other environmental benefits provided by agriculture and forest landowners
- Respect for the property rights, confidentiality, decisions, and experience of all landowners/clients
- Community partnerships and the resources/expertise made available through these collaborative relationships
- Education as a means to promote environmental stewardship
- Helpful, courteous, prompt customer service
- Communication with the public and within the office
- Well-trained staff that is committed to leadership and professionalism
- Conservation as a part of our daily operation
- Fiscal responsibility with public funds
- Innovative solutions to natural resource issues
- Identifying potential long term local risks to our communities

Overview

This Long-Range Strategic Plan was developed to provide guidance and long-term focus of the Kent Soil and Water Conservation District (KSWCD) for the period of 2024 to 2030. It is the intent and the desire to update this plan every five years beginning in 2030.

History

Soil Conservation Districts were organized and created by federal law in 1937 in response to devastating soil erosion conditions that existed in the United States during the late 1920s and 1930s.

In 1929, the United States Congress appropriated about \$160,000 for erosion control experiments. The work of research centers established with these funds expanded as the economic disaster of the Dust Bowl in the Midwest became a cause for national concern.

The Soil Erosion Service (SES) of the U.S. Department of the Interior was created as a temporary organization in 1933. Its purpose was to demonstrate the value of soil and water conservation by placing conservation measures on farms in cooperation with landowners. In addition, the federally created Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was assigned to aid in erosion control work across the country. Two years later, in 1935, Congress established a federal policy concerning soil conservation.

By Act of Congress on April 27, 1935, the personnel and resources of the Soil Erosion Service were transferred to the Soil Conservation Service as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This was the first step in creating a local voluntary system around a core of federal expertise and support. On February 27, 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a letter to all state governors recommending enactment of soil conservation district legislation.

The proposed act suggested that districts be established to direct and manage soil erosion control programs using local citizens participating voluntarily in planning and installing conservation practices. Each district so designated would be empowered to determine local needs, would have personal contact with local individual landowners within the community, and would thus be able to encourage maximum cooperation on a voluntary basis.

The first soil conservation district in the United States was organized on August 4, 1937, in North Carolina. **Kent Soil Conservation District became the first soil conservation district formed in Maryland on May 11, 1938.**

Powers of Maryland Soil Conservation Districts

A soil conservation district (SCD) constitutes a political subdivision of the state and as a public body exercises public powers. As agents of the district, supervisors have the following powers:

- To conduct surveys, investigations, and research relating to the character of soil erosion and degradation of water quality and the effectiveness of preventive control measures, and to publish the results if the research program is carried out as a cooperative effort with a state, federal, or local agency.
- Disseminate information concerning best management practices (BMPs), both preventive and corrective.
- Conduct conservation and water quality demonstration projects on any land within the district, whether state or privately owned, upon obtaining consent from the proper authority.
- Carry out preventive and control measures within the district including, but not limited to, engineering operations, cultivation methods, the growing of vegetation, and changes in land use, with the cooperation and consent of the proper authority.

- Cooperate or enter into agreements with any person to furnish technical assistance to any land occupier within the district and to furnish financial aid for the purpose of installing BMPs.
- Obtain options upon and to acquire, by purchase, exchange, lease, gift, grant, or otherwise, any real or personal property or rights or interests in it, which shall be exempt from state, county, or municipal taxation.
- Maintain, administer, and improve any acquired properties and expend the income from the properties to further the use of BMPs.
- Sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of district property or interests in it to further the use of BMPs.
- Make available to district land occupiers, in accordance with supervisors' terms, any material or equipment used to assist in the installation of BMPs.
- Develop comprehensive annual plans of work, including a prioritization of those areas within the district deemed to be most critical in terms of soil erosion and potential or existing impairment of water quality. This plan shall set forth in detail annual goals and strategies to be used in attaining these objectives.
- Develop comprehensive long-range plans for the district in conjunction with the statewide conservation or water quality plan, using the annual plan as part of the overall strategy development toward long-range goals.
- Publish these plans and information and bring them to the attention of district residents.
- Take over by purchase, lease, or otherwise and administer any soil conservation or water quality project located within the district and undertaken by agencies of the state or federal government.
- Act as agent for federal or state agencies in connection with the acquisition, construction, operation, or administration of any conservation project within its boundaries.
- Accept gifts in money, services, materials, or otherwise from federal, state, or local agencies and use them to carry out district operations.
- Borrow money on its negotiable paper to carry out its powers and duties.
- Approve or disapprove plans for clearing, grading, transporting or otherwise distributing soil pursuant to the Environmental Article, Annotated Code of Maryland §4-(101-109).
- Recommend and implement a fee system to cover the cost of grading and sediment plan review and approval to be enacted by the local governing body. Any fees collected under this system are supplementary to county and state funds and may not be used to reduce county or state funds nor should the fee exceed the cost of plan review. SCDs may also collect fees to assist the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) with sediment and erosion control inspections in non-delegated counties.
- Sue and be sued; have a legally recognized seal. SCDs may make and execute contracts and other instruments necessary or convenient to exercise district powers and to adopt, amend, and repeal rules and regulations pertaining to SCDs to accomplish district goals.

- Provide contracting services, equipment and supplies to landowners. The powers of districts are presented here in an abbreviated form. For exact reference, see Agriculture Article, § 8-306 of the Annotated Code of Maryland, as amended.

Location and Physical Description

Kent County is located on the upper Eastern Shore and was named for the county of Kent in England. Kent County is the smallest county by both population and size in Maryland. The county has a total area of 413 square miles, of which 277 square miles is land and 136 square miles is water. Based on the 2020 census, the population was 20,197.

Elevations in Kent County range from a height of 102 ft above sea level, (approximately 2.25 mi west of Coleman's Corner just northeast of the mouth of Still Pond Creek) to sea level.

Kent County has a 209-mile shoreline, including Eastern Neck Island. Chesapeake Bay is on the west, Sassafras River on the north, and the Chester River on the south. The eastern border with Delaware is part of the Mason–Dixon line.

Kent County has the highest percentage of prime farmland of any County in the State of Maryland: 102,251 acres or about 57% of the county, is classified as prime farmland.

District Supervisors

Charles Miller	Chair
Lewis McDonald	Vice Chair
Tim Redman	Treasurer
W. Frank Barnes Jr.	Supervisor
William Langenfelder	Supervisor
Sean Jones	Associate Supervisor
Alice Mason	Associate Supervisor
James Miller	Associate Supervisor
Edward Taylor	Associate Supervisor

District Staff

Robert Baldwin	KSWCD District Manager
Michael Boughner	MDA Engineering Technician
Christopher Davidson	NRCS Civil Engineering Technician
Jesse Downey	MDA Conservation Technician
Jenny Freebery	MDA Conservation Planner
Kelsie Fronheiser	MDA Conservation Planner
Shelly Gsell	KSWCD Administrative Assistant II
Sam Leaverton	MDA Conservation Planner
Jason Merrick	NRCS Soil Conservationist

Nancy Metcalf	NRCS District Conservationist
Chris Myers	MDA Engineering Technician
Janet Sigler	KSWCD Administrative Assistant I
Vacant	NRCS Soil Conservation Technician
Vacant	NRCS Soil Conservationist

Long Range Strategic Plan

The Kent Soil and Water Conservation District’s objective is to provide high quality, professional services to all. To achieve this objective, we have developed this long-range strategic plan around five programmatic themes in which we deliver our services. These themes are **Agriculture, Developing Lands, Education, Outreach/Collaboration and Operations.**

Agriculture

Goal #1: Assist all landowners and producers with requests for service

Objectives

- Provide service to landowners and producers seeking planning and technical assistance in both planning for and implementing conservation Best Management Practices
- Assist landowners and producers requesting to participate in financial assistance programs.
- Assist landowners with design, layout, build and completion of Best Management Practices
- Provide service and expertise to landowners and producers wanting to use prescribed burning for conservation purposes.

Goal #2: Meet Maryland Department of Agriculture Watershed Implementation Plan goals for KSWCD

Objectives

- Develop and/or update Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plans on at least 10,000 acres per year.
- Continue to be one of the top three Counties in Maryland in Cover Crop acres planted.
- Assist MDA verifiers and commit to meeting all deadlines entering and reconciling Conservation Tracker

Goal #3: Increase participation in State and Federal Cost Share Programs

Objectives

- Keeping landowners and producers informed on changes in State and Federal financial assistance programs.
- Make recommendations to landowners on how best to reach and pay for achieving their conservation goals using the various financial assistance programs.
- Assist Kent County in implementing the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation program, and help landowners meet the conservation requirements for participating in this program.

Developing Lands

Goal #1 Fully implement Erosion and Sediment Control plan review on developing lands in Kent County

Objectives

- Work cooperatively with Kent Co., the Town of Chestertown and the Town of Rock Hall in reviewing and approving Erosion and Sediment Control Plans for developing lands.
- Assist Kent County and Maryland Forest Service with reviewing and approving Erosion and Sediment Control Plans for Forest Harvest activities.
- Coordinate with Kent Co., the Town of Chestertown, the Town of Rock Hall and Maryland Department of the Environment on changes in program requirements, objectives and Standard and Specifications.

Goal #2 Provide timely and excellent service in reviewing and approving Erosion and Sediment Control Plans

Objectives

- Achieve first initial Erosion and Sediment Control Plan review within seven working days of receiving application.
- Approve resubmittals within seven working days of receiving the final approvable Erosion and Sediment Control plan submission.
- Fully implement and work on continually improving the electronic document handling process for reviewing and approving Erosion and Sediment Control Plans

Goal #3 Ensure the long-term sustainability of the Erosion and Sediment Control Plan review program at the Kent Soil and Water Conservation District.

Objectives

- Evaluate fees on an annual basis and propose fee increases when warranted.
- Improve coordination with Maryland Department of the Environment
- Develop and implement a sustainable business model for the program.

Education

Goal #1 To engage and educate youth on the importance of conservation of natural resources

Objectives

- Maintain our goal of engaging 100% of our middle schools utilizing classroom teaching of agriculture and environmental based programming.
- Continue to sponsor the coloring contest in the County schools, grades K through 5.
- Encourage participation in the poster contest in the county schools, grades 6 through 9
- Provide opportunities for High School and College students to shadow, volunteer and intern.

Goal #2 To support youth in pursuit of higher education in agriculture and natural resources

Objectives

- Award at least two Scholarships to High School seniors who will be pursuing a college degree in either Agriculture or Natural Resources.
- Initiate active fundraising for the S. Wickes Westcott Memorial Scholarship
- Highlight scholarship winners in the newsletter, website, social media, and a press release.

Goal #3 To cultivate and support Envirothon teams in Kent Co. as well as statewide

Objectives

- Work closely with the two High Schools in the County to develop Envirothon teams.
- Provide both staff support and training resources to Envirothon teams.
- Continue fundraising activities to support Envirothon teams
- Pay the annual dues to support the Maryland Envirothon

Outreach/Collaboration

Goal #1 Hold and/or Participate in at least 3 Public Events per Year

Objectives

- Participate in the Kent County Fair annually.
- Hold an annual event to celebrate the work of the KSWCD and its clients.
- Participate in at least one additional publicly attended event held in the County, to promote the District and its activities.

Goal #2 Develop and distribute content/information to be distributed to clients and the general public

Objectives

- Publish and distribute a quarterly newsletter.
- Maintain a presence on Social Media and routinely update the Districts Web Page
- Look for opportunities to engage the public through a variety of informational channels.

Goal #3 Consider the development of a Kent Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored 501c (3) to expand the opportunity for fund raising and further promoting the work of Kent Soil and Water Conservation District.

Objectives

- Form a committee to explore the opportunities of establishing a 501(c) 3 foundation.
- Seek advice and counsel from existing Soil Conservation District 501(c) 3 foundations.

Goal #4 Develop and improve collaborations with others.

Objectives

- Support and Participate in the Local Work Group process, Maryland Association of Conservation Districts and National Association of Conservation Districts.
- Seek out collaborations and partnerships with other groups and organizations with mutual conservations interest and goals.
- Maintain and enhance relationships with local governmental agencies.

Operations

Goal #1 Develop Staff and Supervisors

Objectives

- Provide District Supervisors and Associate Supervisors with timely and accurate information to assist their participation and decision-making processes in governing the district.
- Develop a policy manual that includes operational, fiscal, and personnel policies and procedures.
- Develop training plans for all employees.

Goal #2 Improve the delivery of service and information to both internal and external clients.

Objectives

- Evaluate existing workflow processes and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Develop standard operating procedures that are documented and understood by all.
- Improve quality control on completing and submitting financial assistance program documents.
- Continuously evaluate equipment and technology needs.

Goal #3 Obtain real property for the purpose of developing a district owned office

Objectives

- Form a building committee to determine the size and location of real property and create a plan for developing a District owned office building/facility.
- Establish savings goals and budgets for obtaining real property and developing a district owned office building/facility.
- Explore options for generating additional income/funding streams.