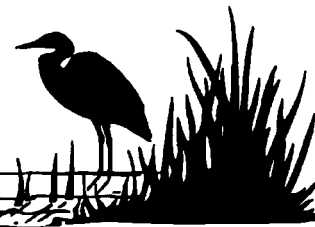


# PARTNERSHIP PRESS

Maryland Conservation



Fall 2023 Volume 29 Issue 4

## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JEN NELSON, MASCD

Resource Spotlight: Annual Work Plans  
*Find examples of governance documents for Conservation Districts on MASCD's website at <https://mascd.net/resources/for-districts/>*

Conservation districts play a vital role in protecting and preserving our natural resources. These locally-led organizations are on the front lines of efforts to manage land, water, and wildlife resources sustainably. To effectively achieve their goals, conservation districts must engage in comprehensive annual work planning. This process not only ensures efficient resource allocation but also fosters collaboration and accountability within the organization. In this article, we will explore the importance of annual work planning for conservation districts and how it contributes to their mission of conserving and managing our natural resources.

### Setting Clear Objectives

Annual work planning enables conservation districts to set clear and specific objectives for the upcoming year. These objectives should be aligned with the district's long-term goals and the conservation priorities of their local communities. By identifying what they aim to accomplish in the short term, districts can measure their progress and effectiveness more accurately.

### Efficient Resource Allocation

One of the key benefits of annual work planning is the efficient allocation of resources. Conservation districts typically work with limited budgets and resources, so it is crucial to prioritize and allocate these resources effectively. Through annual planning, districts can identify where their resources will have the most significant impact, whether that's in watershed management, soil conservation, habitat restoration, or other critical areas.

### Stakeholder Engagement

Conservation districts often involve various stakeholders, including farmers, landowners, local governments, and environmental organizations. Annual work planning provides a structured process for engaging with these stakeholders to ensure that their concerns and priorities are considered. This collaborative approach not only strengthens relationships but also leads to more effective conservation efforts, as it harnesses the collective wisdom of the community.

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Outgoing Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts (MASCD) president Bruce Yerkes with John Swaine III, newly elected MASCD president for 2023-2025.



John was elected by the MASCD membership at the summer meeting held in Cambridge, MD on August 29, 2023. John previously served as the vice-president for the past 4 years. As president, John will be responsible for leading the organization consisting of members from the 24 Soil Conservation Districts. Welcome John, and thank you Bruce for all your hard work!

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM PROVIDENCE STRATEGIES LOBBYING FIRM, BY MICHAEL MASON

The forthcoming Maryland legislative session holds the promise of shaping the state's trajectory, addressing key issues, and serving the diverse needs of its residents. As we look ahead to this important event, there are several prominent themes and challenges that are expected to dominate the agenda.

One crucial issue to be discussed in the upcoming legislative session is education. Ensuring that all Maryland students receive a high-quality education is at the forefront of lawmakers' minds. This includes debates on equitable funding, school infrastructure improvements, and reforms to enhance academic standards.

Environmental sustainability remains another hot topic, with Maryland working to curb its carbon footprint and protect its natural resources. Legislators are likely to explore additional policies related to clean energy, conservation, and climate change adaptation to mitigate environmental impacts.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## FSCAP NOW MARYLANDBFF

Over a decade ago, MASCD created a recognition program that would be respected and valued by farmers and environmentalists alike. The Maryland Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program certified more than 150 farmers in every county across the state. Recently, MASCD announced a rebrand of the program, into the Maryland Bay-Friendly Farming Certification Program. #MarylandBFF is the new FSCAP!

*(Continued on page 4)*

## SSCC



## Report

## Information from the State Soil Conservation Committee

**SSCC REPORT, BY ALISHA MULKEY**

Thanks to everyone who joined us at summer MASCD and attended the training “Best Practices for Board Meetings”. The slides and materials have been shared with all Districts, but please email Alisha Mulkey with any additional questions.

Highlights of recent SSCC meetings are summarized below.

**New Administration at MDE and Ag-related Priorities**

Bradley Baker, MDE, presented Secretary McIlwain’s priorities for their agency as it relates to agriculture.

Bradley discussed the four following topics:

1. Environmental Justice. The agency is actively using its [EJ map tool](#) in reviewing projects, but the Secretary is also making efforts to visit several underserved communities to be more transparent with the permitting process and to create engagement opportunities. The agency’s use of EJ criteria has been included in Maryland law, but currently the agency is only implementing a partial list. In the future, MDE is working to expand the EJ tool to include additional parameters similar to the [UMD tool](#) and methods to incorporate the score into programs beyond notification.
2. Climate Change. For agriculture, this would include increasing opportunities for the land application of organic materials and diversions from landfills.
3. Chesapeake Bay. An emphasis on reducing unpermitted discharges to the Bay, and reducing potential discharges from animal feeding operations.
4. Organizational Excellence. The agency will work to do more with resources (staff and budget) to improve permit processing time and increase compliance as examples. The latter is consistent with 2022 legislation [HB 649](#) that charges MDE to reduce “significant” noncompliance among permit holders. This can include increased fines, more frequent on-site inspections, and notices of deficiency being documented. **Note** -- For AFO permittees, letters to NOI applicants for permit renewals that are incomplete or inadequate were mailed ~June 20 with cc’ to MDA, local SCD, NRCS and the integrator.

**5 Million Trees Program Update**

Rachel Lamb, MDE, presented on the state’s progress toward a goal of 5 Million Trees as established in the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2021. Through the legislation, MDE has been charged to lead the coordination across state agencies to track and report implementation toward the goal. MDE is also developing a website ([\[million-tree-tracking-tool-maryland.hub.arcgis.com/\]\(https://five-million-tree-tracking-tool-maryland.hub.arcgis.com/\)\) for agencies to share resources with the public such as funding opportunities and tree planting guidance. The website will also contain a dashboard to show progress toward the goal. Rachel demonstrated the website for interested partners looking for technical assistance or additional information.](https://five-</a></p>
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Following Rachel’s presentation, Anne Gilbert, acting Program Manager for Urban Forestry, DNR, provided updates on DNR’s initiatives to support the 5 Million Trees goal. DNR has hired Justin (“JT”) Bowers to oversee DNR program responsibilities, including the 13 contractual positions provided to DNR to support 5 Million Trees. Eight of the thirteen positions have been filled – 5 local tree planting specialists, 2 supervisors, and 1 nursery manager. The remaining positions are open for recruitment.

Staff are focusing on connecting landowners with available financial and technical assistance to complete tree plantings, and to provide technical assistance to the Chesapeake Bay Trust for urban tree plantings.

DNR is also collaborating with MDOT on tree plantings in targeted state areas.

Following the presentations, SSCC members and attendees had Q&A with the speakers.

**MACS Payment Schedule**

Jason Keppler, MDA, updated SSCC on the MACS payment schedule at the September and October meetings. An increasing number of producers are reaching their project caps (\$75,000 for non-animal waste) and farm caps. Staff have reviewed materials and SSCC recommendations from 2022, and are pursuing the following:

- Increase the project caps from \$75,000 to \$150,000 for non-animal waste, and \$200,000 for pooling agreements
- Increase the project cap for animal waste treatment to \$200,000 (individual or pooling agreements)
- Eliminate farm/person caps, except for animal waste treatment
- Increase the cap for all active animal waste treatment to \$450,000 per person
- Provide updated guidance on the practices that would be considered animal waste treatment
- Reduce cost-share to 50% on start-up and/or expansions

(Continued on page 3)

SSCC



Report

Information from the State Soil Conservation Committee

Following Jason's update, discussion and Q&A occurred. Staff will keep SSCC and Districts updated as the regulatory changes are pursued and provide additional guidance and clarity as appropriate.

### Combination of Catoctin and Frederick Soil Conservation Districts

A petition was submitted to SSCC on May 24 with the requisite signatures to consider the combination of Catoctin and Frederick Soil Conservation Districts. On behalf of SSCC at the October meeting, Alisha Mulkey presented information on the history of the two SCDs, dating back to 1939 with the formation of the Catoctin SCD, to the SCD's current operational structure.

The staff of the two SCDs are co-located and share staff, assets and bank accounts. Likewise, projects and files are co-mingled and not dependent on a district. Financial assistance is largely provided throughout the whole county and is also not dependent on a district. With this in mind, the Boards see value in combining the SCDs formally into one SCD for more efficient administrative processes and to position the SCD for new opportunities. **The new SCD would be known as the Frederick County SCD.**

Per § 8-401 of the Maryland Ag article, the SSCC gave adequate public notice of a referendum to combine the SCDs. The referendum was held July 10-14, 2023 with in-person voting or mail in options. Next, the SSCC reviewed the required criteria to determine if the combination is "administratively feasible", consistent with § 8-401 of the Maryland Ag article. Findings are underlined and italics are quoted from statute:

*In making this determination the Committee shall give due regard and weight to the following factors:*

*(1)The attitudes of land occupiers within the defined boundaries of the districts to be affected; Public referendum and adequate opportunity*

*(2)The number of land occupiers who voted in the referendum; 226 ballots (100 minimum required)*

*(3)The proportion of the votes cast in the referendum in favor of the division or combination, or both, of any district to the total number of votes cast; 171 In Favor and 55 Against*

*(4)The approximate wealth and income of the land occupiers of the proposed new district; No change*

*(5)The probable expense of carrying on erosion control operations within any district; and No impact*

*(6)Other economic and social factors relevant to the determination, having due regard to the legislative determinations set forth in §8-102 of this title. §8-102 speaks to legislative intent and role of SCDs (i.e. soil erosion and conservation). Combination will allow sustained program delivery and improve administrative efficiencies.*

Following the presentation, no SSCC members needed clarity or time for further discussion.

A motion was then made, seconded, and unanimously passed, **having considered and given due regard and weight to the factors listed in Md. Code. Agric. § 8-401(e), the Committee determines that the combination of the Catoctin Soil Conservation District and the Frederick Soil Conservation District is administratively feasible.** (Posey/Swaine)

The next steps will be recording the determination of SSCC's action, notifying the current Supervisors of the action, and begin the process to appoint a new Board of Supervisors for the Frederick County SCD. The new Board will have additional steps prescribed in §8-402 through §8-404 to finalize the establishment of the Frederick County SCD.

### Supervisor Appointments

- Baltimore County SCD – Mike McGinnis
- Calvert SCD – Walter Wells
- Frederick County SCD – Wes Shafer
- Frederick County SCD – John Falkenstein
- Frederick County SCD – Diane Flickinger
- Frederick County SCD – Robert Black
- Harford SCD – Lee McDaniel
- Howard SCD – Nora Vese
- Talbot SCD – Hannah Harrison
- Washington County SCD – James Harp
- Wicomico SCD – Steve White

### LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM PROVIDENCE STRATEGIES LOBBYING FIRM, BY MICHAEL MASON

*(Continued from page 1)*

For the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts, we will be introducing legislation this Session that will provide statutory authority for districts to review plans and collect fees on small ponds.

This is in response to the January 2021, NRCS issued Bulletin 210-21-01 notifying the conservation districts that NRCS would discontinue their support of small pond reviews in January 2022, excepting those small ponds that are included in an agricultural conservation plan.

Providence Strategies will be hosting bi-weekly legislative calls where we will review and discuss legislation that has been introduced. For any legislative related questions please contact us directly at 410-343-9340 or by email [mason@providence.llc](mailto:mason@providence.llc)

**A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
JEN NELSON, MASCD**

*(Continued from page 1)*

**Evaluation and Adaptation**

Annual work planning also includes a vital component of evaluation. By regularly assessing the progress and results of their conservation activities, districts can adapt and refine their strategies as needed. This ensures that resources are not wasted on ineffective approaches and that the district remains agile in responding to the needs of their communities.

**Accountability and Transparency**

Accountability is essential for any organization, especially those responsible for conserving natural resources. Annual work planning provides a framework for setting clear responsibilities and deadlines, making it easier to hold team members accountable for their work. Moreover, transparency in the planning process builds trust within the community, as stakeholders can see how their contributions and tax dollars are being used to protect the environment.

**Long-Term Sustainability**

While annual work planning focuses on short-term objectives, it is an integral part of achieving long-term sustainability. By consistently working toward their goals year after year, conservation districts contribute to the overall health and resilience of their ecosystems as well as farming operations. This approach not only benefits the present but also ensures a better future for generations to come.

**Conclusion**

Annual work planning is an essential practice for conservation districts. It helps set clear objectives, allocate resources efficiently, engage stakeholders, evaluate progress, and maintain accountability and transparency. Through this structured approach, conservation districts can work towards their long-term goals while adapting to changing conditions and ensuring the long-term sustainability of our natural resources. In the face of ever-growing environmental challenges, annual work planning is a critical tool for these organizations to fulfill their mission of conservation and preservation.

**FSCAP NOW MARYLANDBFF**

*(Continued from page 1)*

MASCD saw the value in the program, but also recognized that the initiative needed a fresh look to better communicate the outstanding stewardship of Maryland’s farmers. The Maryland Association of Conservation Districts worked with partners to revamp the existing FSCAP program into the Bay-Friendly Farming program, to recognize farmers who demonstrate outstanding conservation and invite everyone to take pride in and support their efforts. Farms that apply for certification are evaluated based on measures related to soil health, water quality, nutrient management, and other criteria.

When you see a farm with a sign designating them as a “Certified Bay-Friendly Farm,” that means they’re not only making it possible for us to

enjoy Maryland-grown products, they’ve also voluntarily taken verified actions that keep our water, land, and air healthy.

For more than 75 years, Maryland’s 24 soil conservation districts have helped hundreds of exceptional farmer-conservationists take actions and install projects on their farms that keep our natural resources healthy. MarylandBFF brings together a team of agricultural and environmental experts that support good stewardship practices:

**CORE PARTNERS:**

- MD Association of Soil Conservation Districts
- Maryland Farm Bureau
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- Maryland Department of Agriculture
- Natural Resources Conservation Service

**SUPPORTED WITH GRANT FUNDING:**

- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Maryland Soybean Board
- Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- Chesapeake Bay Trust

Conservation matters to Maryland. When local farmers go the extra mile to keep our water, farmland, and other resources healthy, their actions benefit us all.

The Bay-Friendly Farming Program certifies farmers who demonstrate outstanding stewardship and provides them with three-year waivers from state nutrient management inspections. Certified farmers also gain access to new resources, conservation programs, and promotional benefits.

Farmers who go the extra mile to conserve farmland and natural resources deserve benefits and recognition for a job well done. If you are interested in becoming a #MarylandBFF farmer please contact your local soil conservation district.



## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### NACD POSTER CONTEST



The 2023 Poster Contest “One Water” is open for submissions until December 1, 2023. Winners will be announced during NACD’s Annual Meeting in February 2024.

The annual NACD and NACD Auxiliary Poster Contest provides students from kindergarten through 12th grade the chance to have their art displayed as part of a national conservation outreach initiative. Each year, the winning posters reflect NACD’s annual Stewardship theme and highlight the work of conservation districts and their state conservation associations, auxiliaries and agencies to protect and enhance natural resources. The contest starts at the district level; winners advance to the state level, and then to the national level, where they receive recognition at NACD’s annual meeting.

The poster contest is open to public, private and home-schooled students. The top three posters in each category of the national contest will receive monetary prizes. First-place winners will receive \$200; second place winners will receive \$150 and third place winners will receive \$100. The NACD Auxiliary – through their quilt project proceeds, the Country Store at the NACD Annual Meeting and individual donors – sponsor prizes at the national level. If you have questions, please contact [stewardship@nacdnet.org](mailto:stewardship@nacdnet.org).

Maryland Public Television’s (MPT) popular original series *Maryland Farm & Harvest* returns for its 11th season on Tuesday, November 14 with the first of 13 new half-hour episodes. A preview of the new season is available for viewing at [youtube.com/watch?v=sIDQRLUIMMo](https://youtube.com/watch?v=sIDQRLUIMMo).



**Maryland Farm & Harvest** airs on Tuesdays at 7 p.m. on MPT-HD and online at [mpt.org/livestream](http://mpt.org/livestream). Following their broadcast premiere, episodes are also available to view on demand using MPT’s [online video player](#) and the [PBS App](#). Encore broadcasts air on MPT-HD Thursdays at 11 p.m. and Sundays at 6 a.m. Episodes also air on MPT2/Create® on Fridays at 7:30 p.m. The weekly series takes viewers on a journey across the Free State, telling engaging and enlightening stories about the farms, people, and technology required to sustain and grow agriculture in Maryland, the state’s number one commercial industry. Over the course of its 11th season, Maryland Farm & Harvest will introduce a new segment called “Farm to Skillet,” during which a variety of local chefs leads viewers through the process of finding, preparing, and presenting the locally produced ingredients that make up some of their favorite dishes. The first “Farm to Skillet” segment, featuring [Ekiben chef Steve Chu](#) at the Fells Point Farmers Market, will debut during the series’ second episode premiering on November 21.

### MASCD WINTER BOARD MEETING AND DAY IN ANNAPOLIS

Plans for the MASCD Annual Legislative Day in Annapolis are uncertain at this time. MASCD will be in touch with information on virtual meeting or in-person event details as they become available.

#### FUTURE DATES TO REMEMBER

Nov 14	MD Farm & Harvest 11th season begins
Nov 16	SSCC Meeting, MDA
Dec 1	Poster Contest Deadline
Dec 21	SSCC Meeting, MDA
Jan. 1	Happy New Year
Jan. 10	2024 Legislative Session begins
Jan. 18	SSCC Meeting, MDA
TBD	MASCD Board of Directors Meeting, Annapolis
TBD	MASCD Legislative Visits and Luncheon, Annapolis

### PARTNERSHIP PRESS NEWSLETTER ONLINE AND ELECTRONICALLY

The quarterly *Partnership Press* is posted on [www.mascd.net](http://www.mascd.net). Hard copies are available upon request.



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, 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 302-353-9733.

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