

P Maryland Conservation PARTNERSHIP PRESS



WINTER 2024 VOLUME 31 ISSUE 1

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - BY JEN NELSON

- A Look at MASCD's Day in Annapolis -
Recapping our Winter Meeting & Strategies to Advocate throughout 2024

Thanks to everyone who was able to attend MASCD's 2024 Winter Meeting at the Westin in Annapolis! These opportunities to establish and build relationships with our partners and elected officials are so important to the success of the districts and MASCD.

I was glad to start the day off with a suitable meeting room and helping hands from MDA and Providence Strategies. About 110 people attended the first day, learning about what to expect during the legislative session, hearing updates from partners on programs, staffing and state and federal budgets.

At the legislative breakfast the next day, about 25 elected officials stopped by Harry Browne's to grab a bite to eat and chat with their conservation districts. Thanks to all the districts who stayed for the day to meet with their elected officials- Mike Mason and I ran into several of you throughout the day and spotted MASCD folders that had already been delivered. In the afternoon we testified with Senator Jason Gallion in support of SB196, authorizing the districts to develop a fee schedule to review plans for small ponds.

Our day in Annapolis is a great opportunity to share with our elected officials about the value of the conservation districts. As both constituents and (often) cooperators, our members are uniquely positioned to advocate effectively for voluntary, locally-led conservation. With 2024 shaping up to be a challenging year for budgets, continuing resolutions and passing a Farm Bill, continued engagement is key for continued success. Here are several opportunities and resources to keep the conversation going with our elected officials:

- NACD is hosting their annual Fly-In on March 20- compared to most other states, we're right around the corner from our elected officials in Washington

DC! This day trip is well worth the investment.

- Providence Strategies hosts a bi-weekly call throughout the Maryland session to keep our members up to date on bills that impact the districts.
- Make sure elected officials are invited to your educational events, dinners, etc.
- MASCD's website contains resources for districts in our "Advocacy" section at <https://mascd.net/resources/for-districts/>. These include a guide for planning legislative tours (thanks to the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts for sharing!), an advocacy training webinar, a link to PACD's Legislative Toolbox and a link to NACD's Grassroots Advocacy page and August Recess Guide.

With your help, we can make sure that Maryland's Conservation Districts aren't a "best kept secret"!



APPLY NOW FOR NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

NRCS is encouraging Maryland's agricultural producers and forest landowners [to sign up for voluntary conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices this year](#). NRCS is accepting applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which help a wide variety of producers, including urban and organic producers.

"Whether you measure your farm in square feet or acres, or you farm in the country or in the middle of the city, NRCS has conservation assistance for you," said Maryland State Conservationist Suzy Daubert. "Right now, we are offering a historic amount of funding through both the Farm Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act, so you should apply today. We encourage all who have natural resource concerns, including producers who haven't worked with us before, to consider applying. A conservation plan and program may be right for your ag operation."

Through EQIP, CSP, and the Inflation Reduction Act, approximately \$30 million is available to Maryland producers for conservation practices and initiatives, including:

- Expanded climate-smart mitigation activities that deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions or increases in carbon sequestration.
- New conservation practice for livestock shelter structure.
- Additional priorities like organic and urban agriculture, soil health, water quality and quantity and wildlife habitat development.

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PERSONNEL NOTES

NRCS WELCOMES...

Claire Snyder, Grazing Specialist, Washington County.

Erin Steide, Natural Resource Specialist, Caroline County.

Diamond Lonon, Executive Assistant, State Office.

Eric Hines, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations for Western and Central Maryland.

Heather Beaven, Resource Conservationist on the Field Operations staff, serving the Eastern Shore and Southern Maryland.

Jennifer Richardson, Farm Bill Program Manager for CSP and AMA, State Office.

Michelle Anderson, Financial Resource Specialist, State Office.

Fiona Koye, Soil Conservationist, Howard County.
Malik Baker-Gore, Soil Conservationist, Harford County.

Jordan Bailey, Resource Conservationist on the Field Operations staff, State Office.

Gary George, Public Affairs Specialist, State Office.

Nya Seagers, Soil Conservationist, Prince George's County.

Andrew Wells, TNC Partner Wetland Restoration Specialist, Wicomico County.

NRCS BIDS FAREWELL TO...

Juliana Kaiser, Soil Conservation Technician in Kent County.

J'Que Jones, State Conservation Engineer, accepted a new position at NRCS Headquarters.

Jorge Penso, Urban Conservationist for the People's Garden, accepted a position with NRCS in Louisiana.

Dana Pietrusiak, Student Economist at the State Office, left for a permanent position with U.S. Dept of Labor.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

PLANNER CERTIFICATION UPDATES

The conservation planner certification process provides a consistent structure for supporting the technical competence of employees to perform conservation planning. Planner certification helps to ensure quality conservation treatment to address resource concerns, land-user objectives, and the wise use of technical and financial resources.

NRCS conservation planning policy, GM-180, Part 409, provides the framework for a planner to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. It is the agency standard for establishing an employee's allowable scope of work in providing planning assistance.

Working through the certification process will help conservation planners to recognize that they are working in a complex natural system and decisions made about one area or concern may have impacts on other parts of the same operation and offsite as well.

Congratulations to the following conservation professionals who achieved a new level of planner certification over the past year:

Level 1 Certification

- Nathan Holsey
- Dylan Kenser
- Julianna Burns
- Edmund Robidoux
- Kelsie Fronheiser

Level 3 Certification

- Julie McGivern
- Tara Krick
- Dana Rushovich
- Keely Wells
- Hunter Phillips
- Taylor Quinn

APPLY NOW FOR NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

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EQIP provides financial assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits. These include improved water and air quality, improved irrigation efficiency, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, forest restoration, and creating or enhancing wildlife habitat.

This year, NRCS Maryland is utilizing ACT NOW to process conservation applications for most EQIP ranking pools faster. ACT NOW allows NRCS to approve applications for funding in the order they are received, as long as they meet program eligibility and a predetermined minimum ranking threshold. This means no longer having to wait for a batching period before selections are made.

The application cutoff date for EQIP ACT NOW is May 17, 2024. EQIP Classic applications are due by February 16th. Additional cutoff dates may be announced if funds remain.

CSP provides producers to earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities integrated within their agricultural operations.

CSP enhancements like cover crops, ecologically-based pest management, and buffer strips help producers improve soil health while protecting water quality.

Other CSP activities help sustain and increase pollinator and beneficial insect habitat in harmony with agriculture production on their land. The minimum annual payment for CSP contracts has been raised from \$1,500 to \$4,000.

The application cut-off date for CSP is April 5, 2024.

To find out more about our application process or to begin an application, please contact your local NRCS Service Center by visiting nrcs.usda.gov/ contact.

SSCC



Report

Information from the State Soil Conservation Committee

Effective January 25, 2024 the Frederick County Soil Conservation District has been established in Maryland. This effort finalizes the combination of the Catoclin and Frederick districts into one, and is history making in our state. The SSCC thanks Justin Hayes and Tom Filbert from the Maryland Office of the Attorney General for their guidance as we navigated the process, the district staff, and the Board Supervisors of the previous districts for their support during the transition. The newly appointed Board of Supervisors for Frederick County will take an Oath of Office in the coming days to officially begin their duties. The SSCC has proposed the following **Work Plan for 2024**

January	Increasing the value and recognition of agriculture in the state – emphasis on “value-added” initiatives
February	Maryland Certified Sod – state laws & SCD roles Legislative session updates
March	Land use clearing for new production – process, permits, etc., including off-site fill guidance
April	2025 and Beyond: Phase 3 WIP updates (Maryland & watershed) & Conowingo WIP Clean Water Commerce Fund and Pay-for-Performance initiatives
May	Legislative updates (post 2024 session): Deer control on private and state owned lands; Solar siting; Farmland preservation program Native plants
June	Climate Resiliency: State agency initiatives – agriculture & urban sectors (MDA & DNR) Climate Smart Ag (USDA) Maryland BFF (MASCD) Environmental Justice initiatives
July (@ MASCD)	Trainings for supervisors, topics TBD
August	SSCC Chair election (admin) MACS Flat Rates updates, including Western MD pilot Partner Updates – opportunities to coordinate with SCDs and SSCC: Delmarva Land to Litter Collaborative DNR Forest Service Oyster Aquaculture/Oyster Recovery Partnership
September	Advancing Tree Plantings CREP and CBI program status Eligibility of natural regeneration within grass buffers Invasive species challenges and strategy Agroforestry interest
October	Farm Bill programs & USDA updates Current status, including programs for nursery industry IRA funds Delivering TA (staffing and office space)
November	<i>Reserve for high priority topic</i>
December	Work Plan 2025 development

SUPERVISOR APPOINTMENTS

* Allegany SCD – Kevin Trezise * Carroll SCD – James Leppo

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.

Each spring, NACD and thousands of dedicated conservationists organize a multitude of outreach events and educational learning experiences for students and adults in order to increase awareness about the importance of natural resource conservation. During Stewardship Week, local conservation districts and their state associations educate the public on the importance of soil health, water quality, pollinator habitat and other conservation topics. Different classroom activities, field visits and community events are hosted to honor and recognize efforts in conservation at the local level.

NACD’s 68th Stewardship Week will be held April 28 – May 5, 2024 with the theme “**May the Forst Be with You, Always**”.

This theme underscores the critical interplay between soil and water conservation and the resilience of our forests. Forests play multifaceted roles in sustaining our planet, serving as sources of oxygen, carbon storage, and vibrant hubs of biodiversity. They function as steadfast protectors of soil and water resources, preventing erosion, purifying contaminants, and nurturing healthy watersheds.

For more information about this year’s stewardship weeks, visit <http://www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/stewardship-week/>.

FUTURE DATES TO REMEMBER	
Feb 14	MD Ag Commission, Annapolis
Feb 15	SSCC, MDA, Annapolis
March 21	SSCC, MDA, Annapolis
March 26	MASCD Board Meeting, TBD
April 18	SSCC, MDA, Annapolis
April 28 - May 5	Soil & Water Stewardship Week
May 16	SSCC, MDA, Annapolis
June 20	SSCC, MDA, Annapolis
June 11-13	Maryland Envirothon, Frederick County
July 18	SSCC, MDA, Annapolis
July 28-Aug 3	National Envirothon, New York
July 8-10	MASCD Annual Meeting, Hyatt Regency, Cambridge



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 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) 720-5964 (TDD). Agencies in the Maryland Conservation Partnership are equal employment opportunity employers.

MARYLAND CHARITY CAMPAIGN

MASCD Envirothon is a 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 code **6483**, or enter Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts, Inc.



MARYLAND AG COMMISSION MEETING SET FOR FEBRUARY 14

The Maryland Agricultural Commission will meet on Wednesday, February 14th at 10 a.m. at the Maryland Department of Agriculture headquarters. A call-in option will also be available.

The agenda includes a presentation from the Rural Maryland Council, staff updates and commodity reports.

For more information, please contact Harrison Palmer at Harrisonb.palmer@maryland.gov or 410-841-5882