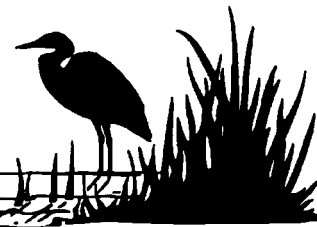


PARTNERSHIP PRESS

Maryland Conservation



Fall 2024 Volume 31 Issue 4

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JEN NELSON, MASCD

MASCD Offers Incentive for Written Leases on Rented Acres -

Thanks to a grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, farmers who rent farmland and are certified through the Maryland Bay-Friendly Farming Certification Program (MarylandBFF) are eligible to receive \$50/acre (up to \$2,500 per farm) for developing a 5-year written lease with their landowner that includes conservation provisions.

Previously under the Farm Stewardship Certification and Assessment Program, a farmer had to meet the certification standard on all their owned *and* leased acres to qualify for the program. When FSCAP was rebranded as MarylandBFF last year, the requirement to have a fully-implemented conservation plan was changed and now applies only to land that the participant owns. Leased acres can be a challenge for implementing conservation because farm operators don't have full control of the land and landowners may not have the interest or expertise to invest in new practices. (The other requirement for certification- compliance with nutrient management regulations- still applies to all acres.)

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MEMORIAM

A memorial service for Richard Calvert "Cal" Steuart was held on September 28th at Huntingtown United Methodist Church in Huntingtown, Maryland. Cal was born on September 11, 1938, in Baltimore Maryland, and grew up in Baltimore County Maryland. After graduating from Parkville High School, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in botany from the University of Maryland College Park. While an undergraduate, he became a member of the national agricultural fraternity Alpha Gamma Rho and served as Noble Ruler. Cal went on to earn a master's degree in Extension Education and a doctorate in Adult Education from the University of Wisconsin.



Shortly after marrying his wife Cynthia in 1962, the Steuarts moved to Prince George's County Maryland where Cal worked for the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service and then with the

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM PROVIDENCE STRATEGIES LOBBYING FIRM, BY MICHAEL MASON

As November 5th approaches, Providence Strategies is following the key races across the State. The race for Maryland's 6th Congressional district has become a key race for residents of Western Maryland to watch. Former Delegate Neil Parrott, Republican nominee, has closed the gap on Democratic candidate April Delaney. In Maryland's Senate Race, Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks leads former Governor Larry Hogan by a margin of +10 points. The Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski announced his candidacy early on for Maryland's District 2 seat with Congressman Ruppberger not seeking reelection. Olszewski holds a commanding lead heading into election day.

Maryland's Legislative Session kicks off January 8, 2025, and we can expect lawmakers to tackle tough issues ranging from spending priorities, climate change and environmental initiatives, healthcare access and affordability, and the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future on education.

As a reminder Providence Strategies will be hosting their bi-weekly calls starting January 13, 2025. For more information regarding the bi-weekly legislative calls please contact Mike Mason at mason@providence.llc.

Introducing... a New Learning Resource

WELCOME TO YOUR WATERSHED

For students in grades 3-8

Play

This free interactive science adventure explores the Chesapeake Bay watershed and how we can protect it. Each lesson comes with a Teacher's Guide and aligns with national and state standards for easy integration into the curriculum.

Thinkport mpt

START YOUR ADVENTURE: thinkport.org/watershed

SSCC



Report

Information from the State Soil Conservation Committee

A MESSAGE FROM LORETTA COLLINS, SSCC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

I am settling into my role as the Executive Secretary for the SSCC, with great guidance from Alisha Mulkey, who is continuing on as Manager of Program Planning and Evaluation in the Resource Conservation unit at MDA and will remain engaged in SSCC activity. Great thanks to the District staff and Boards that have welcomed me to their meetings this fall. I look forward to visiting the remainder in the coming weeks.

Highlights of recent 2024 SSCC meetings are summarized below. Planned discussions of the new Farm Bill were postponed until more information is available. For more details, SSCC monthly meeting minutes can be accessed on MDA's [State Soil Conservation Committee webpage](#).

SSCC ADMINISTRATION

Chair Appointment Van Funk, Cecil SCD Board Supervisor and Central Area SSCC representative, was appointed to another 1-year term as SSCC Chair in August.

Area 1 (Western MD): Edward Wurmb's term as area representative expired over the summer and we thank him kindly for his service. Secretary Atticks appointed Diane Flickinger as the new Area 1 representative for a 4-year term starting October 2024.

Area 3 (Upper Shore): Steve Freeman's term as area representative expired over the summer. Secretary Atticks reappointed Mr. Freeman to a new 4-year term starting September 2024.

ADVANCING TREE PLANTING IN MARYLAND

DNR Strategy for Tree Planting and Management: At request of the SSCC, Anne Hairston-Strang, Director and State Forester, discussed DNR's strategy regarding ag land leases and tree planting. Anne explained that DNR looks to retain agricultural opportunities while meeting broader resource management goals. DNR is currently leasing 10,850 acres. Regarding Maryland's *Five Million Trees Initiative* and targeting areas for planting, DNR excludes prime ag soils outside waterway 100-ft buffers, emphasizes non-ag lands, prioritizes native trees and scrubs as appropriate.

The Tracking Tool for the initiative can be found here: <https://five-million-tree-tracking-tool-maryland.hub.arcgis.com/> Future follow-up in the SSCC may include discussions on how the ag sector could be included in the process of land use change decisions.

MDA Tree Planting Incentives: In 2021, the Maryland legislature set a goal of planting 5 million native trees by 2031 including 500,000 in urban settings via the Tree Solutions Now Act. Two and a half million dollars is being provided annually to address tree-planting on ag lands. These funds are expected to be used as an incentive on top of existing cost-share programs and the focus for tree-planting is on non-prime farmland. [Jason Keppler, MDA](#) reviewed available programs, a summary of which can be found [here](#). Jason also discussed the [Keep America Beautiful Grant Program](#), a partnership between the MD Environmental Trust, MD DOT, MDA, and the Chesapeake Bay Trust that provides financial support to land trusts and other organizations that are bundling individual projects together. MDA is providing \$250,000 per year from the Tree Solutions Now Act funding to help organizations working on tree-planting on ag land through this program.

The Healthy Soils Program has a long-list of eligible practices geared towards in-field and productive soils (rather than land retirement). [Alisha Mulkey, MDA](#) explained that the program is going into its 3rd year. There has been strong applicant interest in agroforestry practices, particularly in tree and shrub establishment, silvopasture and some alley cropping. The program is leveraging the CBI and MACS funding where possible with the interest in tree-planting as it relates to agroforestry. The demand for the program is larger than the budget, so additional dollars elsewhere are helpful. Collaboration with DNR is on-going. Five million dollars have recently been secured for agroforestry from EPA through their Climate Pollution Reduction Grants and can be applied both on private and public lands. Nick Miller (nicholas.miller2@maryland.gov), MDA, is coordinating all of these efforts.

MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL WATER QUALITY COST-SHARE PROGRAM (MACS) UPDATES

The process for flat rates has been consolidated into five regions, rather than county-by-county. This has reduced the administrative burden for districts. MDA also piloted a new process in Western MD consolidating individual material costs into a component-based system similar to how NRCS manages the EQIP program. Feedback received from the pilot has been positive. Other regions of MD have indicated that a component-based system could be problematic for the types of practices they install. Currently MDA is working on identifying practices in each region that could benefit from a component-based system, rather than applying a new process to all practices. It will likely be a few years until the new process is appropriately

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SSCC



Report

Information from the State Soil Conservation Committee

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applied throughout the state. In the interim, each region is responsible for updating their flat rates schedules. In addition, it was announced that the MACS Program is expanding eligibility to smaller animal operations that maintain at least one animal unit (1 AU = 1000 lbs. live animal weight), primarily to broaden participation options to small horse operations. Speaker: Jason Keppler, MDA

WOODLOT CONVERSION TO AG LAND

Van Funk, SSCC Chair, is convening a small workgroup to seek clarification and guidance on forest/wooded lot clearing for ag production (process, permits, etc., including offsite fill guidance) following a robust discussion earlier in the year.

SUPERVISOR APPOINTMENTS

- Calvert SCD – Leonard Ogden
- Cecil SCD – William Ewing
- Charles SCD – Charles Rice
- Dorchester SCD – Wendell Meekins, Jr.
- Harford SCD – David R. Doran
- Howard SCD – Justin Brendel
- Queen Anne's SCD – Scott MacGlashan
- Somerset SCD – Amy Rowe
- Washington County SCD – Ariel Herrod
- Wicomico SCD – James Adkins
- Wicomico SCD – Lee W. Richardson
- Worcester SCD – Anthony DiPaolo

PERSONNEL NOTES

NRCS WELCOMES...

- Ethan Whiteside, RC&D Livestock Resource Specialist for the Eastern Shore
- John "Rory" Badger, NRCS Biologist in Salisbury
- Erin Kibelstis, RC&D CREP/CRP Conservation Planner for the Lower Shore based in Worcester County
- Chase Kolstrom, RC&D Forester for Southern Maryland
- Adam Gabor, RC&D CREP/CRP Conservation Planner for the Mid-Shore based in Queen Anne's County
- TaRain Harris, Management Analyst for Programs, State Office
- Hunter Martin, Soil Conservationist, Carroll County
- Ben Stewart, RC&D Livestock Resource Specialist, Southern Maryland
- Brandon Eaton, Soil Conservation Technician, Queen Anne's County
- Caitlin Berchtold, Soil Conservation Technician, Dorchester
- Andrew Patterson, Soil Conservation Technician, Somerset
- Lindsay Butterworth, RC&D Program Support Specialist, Anne Arundel and Calvert counties
- Jennifer Carlson, Soil Conservationist, Charles County
- Leah Langford, Soil Conservationist, St. Mary's

NRCS BIDS FAREWELL TO...

- Bill Metcalf, Soil Conservationist in Cecil County, retired after working with NRCS for nearly 28 years.
- Jordan Bailey, Area Program Specialist in the State Office, accepted a job with the US Fish & Wildlife Service.
- Garth McCabe, District Conservationist for Worcester and Somerset counties.

TEMPORARY CHANGES...

- Mikenze Poling, Acting Maryland State Planning Specialist.
- Heather Beaven Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations for Southern MD and the Eastern Shore
- Taylor Gundlach, Acting District Conservationist for Wicomico and Dorchester counties
- Anderson Spratt, Acting District Conservationist for Worcester and Somerset counties

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.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JEN NELSON, MASCD

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A financial incentive to develop a long-term written lease might help to prompt conversation about conservation goals and implementation plans that wouldn't happen otherwise. Participants are encouraged to use the free Ag Lease Builder Tool developed by the University of Maryland Ag Law Education Initiative, available at <https://agleasebuilder.org/>

Here are a few other benefits to being a MarylandBFF farmer!

1. **Promoting Environmental Stewardship:** The program promotes sustainable farming practices that protect water quality and reduce pollution runoff into the Chesapeake Bay. This helps preserve local ecosystems.
2. **Marketability:** Certification can enhance a farm's marketability by appealing to environmentally conscious consumers. Sharing personal stories about their farms, families, and the challenges they face can create emotional connections with consumers. It can serve as a differentiator in the marketplace.
3. **Financial Incentives:** Participating farmers may gain access to grants, cost-share programs, and technical assistance, which can help offset the costs of implementing sustainable practices.
4. **Community Support:** Being part of a recognized program fosters community support and collaboration among farmers, organizations, and consumers focused on sustainable agriculture.
5. **Regulatory Compliance:** Certification can help farmers stay ahead of environmental regulations and avoid potential fines or penalties.
6. **Consumer Trust:** Certification provides consumers with assurance that the products they are buying are produced sustainably, which can build brand loyalty.

MarylandBFF also highlights the vital role of the conservation districts and partners. Whether the spotlight of public support is focused on the Chesapeake Bay, soil health or carbon sequestration, the districts continue to work with farmers to protect natural resources.

If you're a farmer who is interested in being a MarylandBFF, or you know of a farmer who is a good candidate, please visit <https://bayfriendlyfarms.com/> to learn more.

You can also find us at the Maryland Farm Bureau Convention in December and at the Future Harvest Conference in January- stop by and say hello!

MEMORIAM

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Westinghouse Learning Corporation. He then attended Georgetown University School of Law at night where he received his Juris Doctorate in 1974. Cal began practicing law in 1974 and went on to have a successful law practice as the principle of Steuart Law, LLC and Atlantic Coast Title, Inc.

Cal had a passion to serve and to be involved with multiple organizations throughout his life. He was a member of the Lion's Club, Elk's Club, Masonic Lodge, Maryland Terrapin Club, Calvert County Republican Central Committee and his local United Methodist Church.

Cal loved the land and worked tirelessly to promote sound stewardship of soil and water resources. He joined the Prince George's Soil Conservation District's Board of Supervisors in 1978, serving over 46 consecutive years until his death. He also served as Chairman for more than 30 years. During his tenure with the Soil Conservation District, he served in leadership roles for the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts, the State Soil Conservation Committee and the Prince George's County Beatification Committee. He served on the Executive Board for the National Association of Conservation Districts and as the North East Regional Representative for many years, traveling the Country promoting the benefits of conservation.

Cal was well respected in the field of soil and water conservation and was a mentor to many young aspiring conservationists. His level of energy and commitment set a high standard for all to follow. Contributions may be made, in memory of Cal Steuart, to: MASCD Endowment Fund: MASCD, c/o Marguerite Guare, 573 Quaker Ridge Court, Arnold, MD 21012

PLANNER CERTIFICATION UPDATES

(Continued from page 3)

Congratulations to the following conservation professionals who recently achieved a new level of planner certification:

Level 1 Certification

- Sonya Matlack
- Marina Karides
- Pamela Rathbone
- Alicia Walsh
- Peggy Lowman

Level 3 Certification

- Melissa Saathoff

CNMP Certification

- Hunter Philips

NOW IS THE TIME TO SIGN UP FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAMS IN MARYLAND

Do you have a growing gully that can no longer be ignored? Ready to take that leap to rotational grazing to provide better herd and pasture health? Planning to use the latest variable rate nutrient application equipment to reduce inputs? USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (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), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Agricul-

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CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

(Continued from page 4)

tural Management Assistance (AMA) program, and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which help a wide variety of producers, including urban and organic producers.

Through EQIP, CSP, AMA, RCPP, and the Inflation Reduction Act, financial assistance 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 cover crop initiative
- Bog turtle habitat restoration
- National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)
- Air quality
- Urban and small-scale farm practices and enhancements
- Additional priorities like organic agriculture, soil health, water quality and quantity and wildlife habitat development.

While NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance programs year-round, the following application cut-off dates have been established in Maryland:

October 25: AMA, CSP, CSP-IRA, EQIP Conservation Incentives Contracts, RCPP

November 15: EQIP Act Now, CPA-DIA-CEMA Act Now, High Tunnel Act Now, Oyster Restoration Act Now, On-Farm Energy IRA Act Now, Cover Crop Initiative IRA Act Now

December 15: EQIP, EQIP-IRA, National Water Quality Initiative, Working Lands for Wildlife Golden Wing Warbler, National Air Quality Initiative, National Organic Initiative, Organic Transition Initiative

December 20: EQIP-IRA Act Now for Cropland, Grazing, Livestock, and Forestry

February 7: CSP, CSP-IRA, and EQIP-Urban, RCPP

March 7: CSP-Urban

Additional cut-off dates may be announced based on available funding.

NRCS Maryland will be 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. 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.

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 21	SSCC Meeting, MDA
Dec 19	SSCC Meeting, MDA
Jan. 1	Happy New Year
Jan. 8	2025 Legislative Session begins
Jan. 16	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. 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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