

PARTNERSHIP PRESS

Maryland Conservation



Summer 2025 Volume 32 Issue 3

A MESSAGE FROM JEN NELSON, MASCD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ten (More) Commandments for Boards

In the last issue of the Partnership Press, I shared “10 Commandments for Working with Boards”- a set of principles for district managers (and executive directors) to work effectively with their board of supervisors. This issue, I’ll offer ten more commandments for the board itself, courtesy of Virtual, Inc., an organization that offers board support services. (The original article can be found at <https://virtualinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/10-Commandments-for-Association-Boards1.pdf>)

#1 Honor Thy Mission

No commandment is more critical for association boards than this one. If your board isn’t watching out for the mission, who is? Often, a board needs to consider whether the mission has shifted.

Dartmouth College’s original mission focused in part on the “Education of the Youth of the Indian Tribes.” At some point, they realized it was time to shift. Similarly, the March of Dimes was formed to stamp out polio. With the Salk vaccine in 1952, it was time for them to shift.

The primary job of a board is to ensure that the mission of the organization remains relevant, and the organization remains focused on achieving it. If you can only focus on one commandment, this is the one.

#2 Thou Shalt Scan the Environment

Too many associations spend their time looking inside of the organization and miss significant changes in the environment. Whether it’s economic trends, shifting demographics, or technology advances, it’s critical that you spend some time looking

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THE CONSERVATION PLAN – A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES

A key part of soil conservation’s 90-year history was the establishment of the conservation planning process by Hugh Hammond Bennett. Bennett was the agency’s first chief and is considered the “father of soil conservation.” He believed in considering each farm’s unique conditions when developing a conservation plan.

A conservation plan is a document outlining the strategies and actions that should be taken to protect and manage natural resources on a specific area of land. It serves as a blueprint for achieving conservation goals. To develop a conservation plan, a conservation planner and the customer (farmer, rancher or landowner) collaborate during the conservation planning process.

Bennett believed that agency employees must walk the land with the customer and see their natural resource challenges and opportunities firsthand. Bennett also understood that natural resource concerns could not be treated in isolation; soil, water, air, plants, animals, and humans are all part of an integrated system that is interdependent.

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LEGISLATIVE REPORT - BY MICHAEL MASON, PROVIDENCE STRATEGIES

Maryland Legislators Prepare for the 2026 Legislative Session

As the Maryland General Assembly begins planning for its 2026 session, agriculture is expected to be a central topic of discussion. With growing concerns about climate resilience, food security, and land preservation, lawmakers are looking to support both traditional and emerging sectors of the state’s diverse agricultural industry.

One key area of focus will be expanding support for sustainable farming practices. Legislators are expected to revisit incentive programs that promote cover cropping and nutrient management practices that benefit not only farmers but also the health of Maryland’s waterways and soil. Funding for cost-share programs and technical assistance is likely to be on the agenda, especially as many farmers adapt to changing weather patterns and stricter environmental standards. We anticipate the Maryland Department of Agriculture to reintroduce [SB 176 / HB 140](#) - Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan – Uses of Information along with a number of other pieces of legislation.

With budget constraints a concern, balancing agricultural investment with other state priorities will be a challenge. Still, there is broad recognition that a strong agricultural sector is vital to Maryland’s economy, environment, and rural communities making the 2026 session a pivotal moment for the future of farming in the state.

We look forward to seeing everyone at the Annual Meeting in Western Maryland in August!

Maryland Association of Counties Conference – August 13th – 16th – Ocean City, MD

Providence Strategies is the lobbying firm for the Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts. Please contact Mike Mason with any questions – mason@providence.llc

SSCC



Report

Information from the State Soil Conservation Committee

A MESSAGE FROM LORETTA COLLINS, SSCC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

The SSCC thanks the Western MD and the Upper and Lower Easter Shore for hosting monthly meetings this year. Connecting with local Districts and providing easier access to our meetings has been a great expectation. I would specifically like to thank SSCC Chair Van Funk for his enthusiasm in traveling and demonstrating the importance of making direct connections with folks across the state.

Highlights of recent SSCC meetings are summarized below. For more details, SSCC monthly meeting minutes can be accessed on MDA's [State Soil Conservation Committee webpage](#).

SSCC ADMINISTRATION

SSCC on the Road: In an effort to improve visibility and engagement the SSCC has been conducting some of its monthly meetings in alternative locations across the state. Traditionally, meetings take place at MDA Headquarters in Annapolis. Since the last issue of Partnership Press the SSCC has taken its monthly meeting to the Caroline Soil Conservation District office in Denton, MD and the MDA's Salisbury Animal Health Lab where folks got a tour of the impressive new facility.

Supervisor Appointments: The SSCC is in the process of updating the application and review process for District Supervisor positions. A recent change is an allotment of time on monthly meetings for closed session so that SSCC members can discuss Supervisor applications and protect privacy of applicants.

SOLAR SITING ON AG LANDS AND BEYOND

As solar project installs on agricultural acres continue at a rapid pace, plenty of concern has been expressed regarding loss of productive farmland, erosion and sediment control practices, and vegetation requirements. In June representatives from the Maryland Energy Administration discussed incentives for solar siting on developed acres as an alternative to agricultural land, as well as some of the challenges of incorporating solar on commercial sites. Also discussed were resiliency hubs that provide neighborhoods continuous access to energy in emergency situations. MEA is very interested in feedback from the ag community. Speaker: David Comis, MEA (david.comis@maryland.gov)

Maryland's 2030 goal of 50% energy from renewables is a driver for incoming solar proposals. MDA provides feedback on proposals, while MDE and DNR sign final letters of recommendation. The SSCC is currently receiving an average of two memos per week. The vast majority of projects are on farmland. MDA

maps the projects as they come in and tracks farmland loss. Vegetative requirements in solar licenses may differ from standard plantings associated with state Erosion and Sediment Control requirements.

When E&S Control plans arrive at Districts for review, District staff may be unaware of alternative vegetative mixes included in the project's license. Specific project information can be found at this webpage:

<https://webpsxcb.psc.state.md.us/DMS/cpcnapplication>

Speaker: Alisha Mulkey, MDA

WOODLOT CONVERSION TO AG LAND

The Forest Clearing Workgroup continues its work seeking clarification and guidance on forest clearing for ag production in regard to permitting requirements and oversight authority. The group includes district managers from across the state, as well as representatives from MDA, MDE, DNR, and NRCS. An update will be provided at the MACSD Annual Meeting at Rocky Gap State Park in Allegany County.

SUPERVISOR APPOINTMENTS

- Anne Arundel SCD – Shelley Garrett
- Charles SCD – John “ Jack” Welch
- Howard SCD – John Dove
- Kent SCD – Charles Miller
- Prince George's SCD – Tracy Duval
- Somerset SCD – Robert Fitzgerald
- Wicomico SCD – James Adkins



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TEN (MORE) COMMANDMENTS FOR BOARDS

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outside to ensure that you're adapting to whatever challenges—and opportunities—the environment brings.

#3 Thou Shalt Drop Dead Wood from the Board

Every board has them: the Board members who are members in name only. There's no reason to put up with it. Have a plan to transition "dead wood" from your board. Sometimes that's easier said than done, but two strategies that work well are attendance requirements—consider a requirement to attend two out of every three meetings—and the creation of "secondary constructs." For example, some Boards have smaller advisory boards or corporators—entities that have less responsibility and allow someone to make a graceful exit from the board. Regardless of your strategy, make this commandment a priority. Dead wood is infectious. If some board members aren't working, before long that can become the norm.

#4 Thou Shalt Embrace Change

A few years ago, we started working with a newly-formed association client. In the second year of their board election process, we suggested changes. Their answer was, "we can't change—we've always done it this way."

That's how fast resistance to change can become ingrained in an organization. One of our favorite quotes is, "if you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less." Associations need to embrace change or get ready for irrelevance.

#5 Thou Shalt Not Create Unneeded Bureaucracy

To approve this commandment, we need a three-fifths majority at the committee level. Then it goes to the executive committee for a majority vote, followed by approval by the full board. After the commandment has been approved, the marketing committee will work with the website committee to place it on the web site. Sound familiar? 'Nuff said.

#6 Thou Shalt Create Roles and Responsibilities

Do your board members know explicitly what you expect from them? Do your officers? In many organizations, things as simple as attendance requirements and expectations for meetings are often left unsaid. Beyond the formality of bylaws, make sure there are operating procedures for how the board operates. Board orientation sessions provide an outstanding start for this process—and if your organization doesn't have a formal orientation process, ask yourself *why not?*

#7 Thou Shalt Conduct Effective Meetings

Do your board meetings follow formal agendas? When are they distributed? How about action items—are they logged? If someone were to observe your board meeting, how many members would he see staring at their phones or laptops during dialogues? These are all the elements of establishing an effective meeting. Setting ground rules is critical for the success of the meeting—and meetings are central to the success of the board.

#8 Thou Shalt Utilize Technology

One of our executives serves on a board that sends printed packages to his house every month. Ironically, he tucks the packet into his iPad case to bring to meeting. There are great board portals

out there online, and iPad apps like Diligent Boardbooks. Ask yourself how you can expect your organization to have 21st century goals, if you're still conducting board meetings in a 20th century manner.

#9 Thou Shalt Examine Thyself

It's funny how many organizations conduct evaluations for every seminar and conference, but never do self-evaluations for board meetings. Start examining your own process, ideally after every meeting. Here are a few questions to ask:

- Did we come to the meeting prepared?
- Did we avoid personalization of issues?
- Did we reach decisions?
- Did we stick to the timeframes on the agenda?

#10 Thou Shalt Covet Thy Neighbor's Benchmarks

Insist on quality benchmarks for your organization. And be sure to benchmark against best-of-breed organizations. For example, for customer service, make it Nordstrom and L.L. Bean, not "associations of comparable budgets." It's your job as a board to hold the organization to a high standard and push for excellence. Benchmarks let you do that.

Keynote Speaker Alice Crothers

WILL ALSO BE.....




Cecil Soil Conservation District's



2025 COOPERATOR OF THE YEAR

LONG GREEN FARMS

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SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR 78TH ANNUAL COOPERATOR BANQUET
JANUARY 16, 2026

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ITEMS OF INTEREST

THE CONSERVATION PLAN

(Continued from page 1)

In 1947, Bennett formally identified the principles of conservation planning in his text, “Elements of Soil Conservation.” According to Bennett, an effective conservation planner must adhere to the following principles:

- Consider the needs and capabilities of each acre within the plan
- Consider the farmer’s facilities, machinery, and economic situation
- Incorporate the farmer’s willingness to try new practices
- Consider the land’s relationship to the entire farm, ranch, or watershed
- Ensure the conservationist’s presence out on the land

Today, the planning environment has become increasingly complex. Land managers and agricultural producers are more sophisticated, world markets are increasingly intricate, technology is rapidly innovating, and public interest in food production and natural resource management is increasing. The customer base for conservation planning has also become larger and more varied, including farm operators, non-operating landowners, farm management companies, non-profit organizations, universities, community co-ops, and others.

Even with all these changes over the years, conservation planners still work with customers in much the same way as they did in Bennett’s time. They work collaboratively with farmers, ranchers and landowners to identify their conservation objectives, assess the natural resource issues on their land, and develop a conservation plan that includes tools and resources customized specifically for each customer. Once the plan is in place, conservation planners are there every step of the way to assist customers with implementation as needed. And since the conservation planning process is ongoing, planners are there long after implementation to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and make any needed adjustments.

After 90 years, many of Bennett’s ideas and principles about the critical role of conservation planning have withstood the test of time and still greatly inform our work today. These ideas and principles have served as a solid foundation for addressing conservation challenges now and will continue to do so into the future.

This year, NRCS is focused on making several improvements to enable faster and easier gathering of customer information and developing conservation plans onsite. Chief Bettencourt’s vision for the future of NRCS is clear: to preserve the agency’s trusted, boots-on-the-ground approach while fully embracing 21st-century tools that enable staff to work smarter, faster, and more effectively. Building on the legacy of Hugh Hammond Bennett, who emphasized the importance of being present on the land and understanding the full system of natural resources, Chief Bettencourt is driving a technology-forward transformation that gives planners the digital horsepower they need to serve producers in real time.

This includes the “1 Farmer, 1 File” initiative, a unified digital record that simplifies service and eliminates duplication, and agency-wide efforts to upgrade internet speeds in field offices where outdated connections slow down critical work. With better connectivity and modern tools, NRCS staff can spend less time on paperwork and more time in the field. In many ways, this vision brings the agency full circle—advancing the same principles Bennett championed, but with the tools of today to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

PRINCE GEORGE’S SCD CELEBRATED THEIR 49TH ANNUAL COOPERATOR DINNER

On Friday, April 25, 2025, Prince George’s Soil Conservation District celebrated their 49th annual cooperator dinner honoring Dwayne Catterton of Bonnie Breeze Farm at Baden Fire Hall in Brandywine, MD.



Bonnie Breeze Farm was originally owned and operated by the Lipps family and Dwayne has been instrumental in preserving the agricultural heritage of the farm through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation as well as implementing conservation best management practices for his cattle and hay production.

Prince George’s Soil Conservation District and its partners would like to extend a special thanks to Dwayne Catterton for his continued involvement in conservation farming and we are proud to name him our 2024 Cooperator of the Year!

Put the Power of Trees to Work on Your Farm



- Earn extra income
- Improve soil and herd health
- Protect streams



LEARN MORE:
Contact your local soil conservation district or visit...

mda.maryland.gov/conservation



ENVIROTHON



The 2025 Envirothon, hosted at the Maryland 4H Environmental Education and Camping Center, running from June 11th and 12th, saw teams from 14 counties compete in the yearly competition.

The team from North Harford High School in Harford County won for the 3rd year running. Rounding out the top 5, in order, was Montgomery, Allegany, St. Mary's, and Frederick counties.

The International competition, hosted by NCF at Mt. Royal University in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, took place from July 20-26. Maryland came in 2nd place overall with a score of 619.67.

1st place was Massachusetts, with a score of 620.67, with New York at 3rd with a score of 571.67. The Maryland team, consisting of seniors Frank DeLucia, Jacob Jestel, Ryan Layman, Jonathan VanBuskirk, and junior Samantha Hawk, also finished top overall in Aquatics with a score of 83%.

North Harford High School, having finished 3rd internationally last year, has done what no teams in the history of Maryland have done in this competition, finishing top 3 for two consecutive years.

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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.

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