

Jul 2, 2026

Governor's Intergovernmental Commission for Agriculture

Environment & Natural Resources Subcommittee

July 2, 2026

Virtual - Google Meet

Invited: Paul Peditto -DNR- Deborah Herr Cornwell -MDP- Joshua L Parker -MDH-
Hans W Schmidt -MDA- Stephanie Cobb-Williams -MDE-
heather.bruskin@montgomerycountymd.gov Rachel R Jones -MDA- Rick Kessler -MDE-
klewis@ruppurnurseries.com jessie@jessiemkrichards.com jo.ann.chason@gmail.com
Joseph Milone -COMMERCE- Amy Crone Naomi Howell -MDE- Harrison B Palmer -MDA-
Kevin Atticks -MDA- Steve A Connelly -MDA-

Recording: 📺 GICA- Environment & Natural Resources Subcommittee Meeting - 20...

Summary

Committee members reviewed disaster declarations and drought responses with plans for irrigation council development and funding advocacy.

Disaster Declarations and Drought

The United States Department of Agriculture issued a disaster declaration for Maryland counties due to April freeze damage. Concurrent drought conditions further triggered federal resource eligibility for impacted farmers.

Outreach and Funding Strategies

State officials are convening an irrigation council to address gaps for specialty crop

producers. The department is petitioning Congress for state-specific block grants to support farmers ineligible for standard assistance.

Permit Updates and Planning

The environment department successfully implemented new permits while avoiding litigation. Future meetings will prioritize irrigation proposals and water use permitting to mitigate drought-related damage.

Decisions

Aligned

- **October subcommittee agenda scope set** The October 1st subcommittee agenda is set to include the review of irrigation proposals and water use permits.

Next steps

- ☐ [Harrison B Palmer -MDA-] Email MDE Questions: Submit questions to the Maryland Department of the Environment regarding irrigation proposals and water use permits for agriculture.
- ☐ [Harrison B Palmer -MDA-] Update Agenda: Include irrigation proposals and water use permits for agriculture on the agenda for the next meeting.
- ☐ [The group] Submit Agenda Items: Send any additional issues for the next meeting agenda to Rachel R Jones before October 1st 2026.

Detailed Notes

- **Meeting Opening and Approval of Minutes:** Rachel R Jones -MDA- opened the meeting by stating it was being recorded under the Maryland Open Meetings Act and conducted introductions of all attendees. Following the

introductions, Jo-Ann Chason moved to approve the November 2026 minutes, and the motion was accepted by the committee members.

- **April Freeze and USDA Disaster Declaration:** Harrison B Palmer -MDA- provided an update on the federal disaster declaration following the April freeze, which significantly impacted grape growers and fruit producers. The Farm Service Agency evaluated damage across 17 counties, determining that each experienced over 30% crop damage. Consequently, the United States Department of Agriculture issued a disaster declaration, covering all Maryland counties except for Garrett, St. Mary's, and Culver. This declaration allows eligible farmers to apply for emergency loans administered by the Farm Service Agency.
- **Concurrent Drought Situation:** Harrison B Palmer -MDA- reported that the state is facing a concurrent drought, with many areas experiencing a D3 drought, which triggers an automatic secretarial disaster declaration. Additionally, areas in a D2 drought for at least eight consecutive weeks are also eligible for disaster assistance. These designations provide farmers with federal resources to address the combined impact of the freeze and the drought.
- **Outreach Challenges and Irrigation Council:** Harrison B Palmer -MDA- highlighted difficulties in assisting farmers who are not typically enrolled in Farm Service Agency programs, such as specialty crop and grape growers. In response to these gaps, Governor Moore issued an agency directive in mid-May to identify resources to assist these producers. The state is currently working to convene an irrigation council in the short term to discover effective ways to support farmers with these challenges.
- **Horticultural Coverage and Federal Block Grants:** In response to an inquiry from Jo-Ann Chason regarding coverage for the horticultural industry, such as cut flowers and early spring products, Harrison B Palmer -MDA- confirmed that these farmers face similar eligibility issues. The Maryland Department of Agriculture has joined a Mid-Atlantic coalition of agricultural secretaries to petition Congress for state-specific block grants. These funds would allow the department to provide direct payments to farmers who do not qualify for standard Farm Service Agency disaster assistance. Governor Moore discussed the priority of this funding with the Maryland congressional delegation, although the process is expected to take time.

- **Maryland Department of the Environment KO Permit Update:** Rick Kessler -MDE- provided an update on the new KO permits, noting that the permit is currently in place and the department successfully avoided litigation regarding the renewal. The department plans to adhere to the guidance from the previous permit for the next three years, with a goal to have a new draft ready for the subsequent renewal. The department is actively working with growers to assist with the new build process.
- **Future Agenda Planning - Irrigation and Water Use:** Harrison B Palmer -MDA- requested that irrigation proposals and water use permits for agriculture be added to the agenda for the next meeting. There is concern regarding the compounding damage caused by the drought, which has created an urgent need for irrigation wells. Rick Kessler -MDE- stated that the department is willing to provide input and coordinate with the agency to address these specific concerns.
- **Meeting Schedule and Adjournment:** Rachel R Jones -MDA- announced that the next environment and natural resources subcommittee meeting is scheduled for October 1, 2026, and the next full committee meeting is set for December 3, 2026. Members were encouraged to submit agenda items in advance of the subcommittee meeting to ensure progress. Following these announcements, Jo-Ann Chason made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Joshua L Parker -MDH-, and the meeting concluded at 3:20.
- **Scheduling Conflict Discussion:** Following the official adjournment, Joshua L Parker -MDH- discussed a scheduling conflict with Rachel R Jones -MDA- regarding a meeting on the 16th, which overlapped with a director's meeting. Rachel R Jones -MDA- explained that the subcommittee meetings had to be rescheduled because the committee lacked a quorum of public members for the sessions originally scheduled earlier that day

Meeting notes were supported by Gemini and edited for accuracy by Allie Cavanagh -MDA-.