

State Soil Conservation Committee
Final Minutes
September 21, 2023

Van Funk, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m.

The minutes of July 2023 were approved. (Schmidt/Posey)

Van Funk welcomed two new members to SSCC – John Swaine representing MASCD and Terry Nuwer representing Area 4 (Lower Shore).

The following appointments were made upon proper motion, second, and vote:
None

Discussions

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

- Increase the project caps from \$75,000 to \$150,000 for non-ag waste
- Increase the project cap for ag waste to \$200,000
- Eliminate farm caps, except for ag waste projects
- Provide updated guidance on the practices that would be considered ag waste

Following Jason's update, discussion and Q&A occurred. Additional guidance and clarity on the definition of "farm" and how caps would be applied would be forthcoming from the MACS program.

Next, Alisha Mulkey, SSCC, presented information on the request to combine Catoctin and Frederick Soil Conservation Districts. The history of the two SCDs were reviewed, dating back to 1939 with the formation of the Catoctin SCD, to the SCD's operational structure currently. 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, a petition was submitted to SSCC on May 24 with the requisite signatures. The SSCC proceeded to give adequate public notice of a referendum to combine the SCDs. The referendum was held July 10-14 with in-person voting or mail in options. Today, the following criteria for SSCC to determine if the combination is "administratively feasible", consistent with § 8-401 of the Maryland Ag article were discussed (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.

MOTION (Posey/Swaine): 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.

The motion passed unanimously.

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

Reports –

Hans Schmidt, MDA reported FY25 budget planning is in progress.

District Operations remains busy recruiting and has filled 13 positions recently. An Engineering Technician and Area Coordinator are in progress too.

The FY24 funding cycle for the Animal Waste Tech Fund opened on September 22.

The Farmer Advisory Board for the Nutrient Management Program is wrapping up their meetings and recommendations to the department.

A new Urban NM Specialist has been hired.

Rob Feldt, DNR reported twelve of our staff will attend a 3-hour buffer basics webinar on Sept 26. We have so many new staff that we are training our new 5-Million Trees people and new hires for old positions, and a lot need some specific buffer training, and why riparian buffers are important to the Bay, so this was helpful.

We have a new watershed forester in the Harford/Cecil project--Emilio Concari. He'll be working on tree planting and other water quality issues (emilio.concari@maryland.gov). Also welcomed Alanna Crowley as the new Chesapeake Watershed Forester in the Annapolis HQ office. (Alanna.crowley@maryland.gov) DNR was awarded nearly \$500K in funding for trail maintenance in FY24 from SHA Trail Grants.

Jim George, MDE no report.

Darren Jarboe, UME reported The Agricultural Nutrient Management Program (ANMP) will move from the Department of Environmental Science and Technology to University of Maryland Extension's Agriculture and Food Systems (AgFS) Program on September 30. The AgFS Program is working to retain the nutrient management advisors across the state who write plans for farmers. The ANMP will consist of:

- 1 Program manager/director
- 5 Nutrient management specialists
- 19 Nutrient management advisors
- 1 Program coordinator

The ANMP has started recruiting to fill 11 vacant positions.

Dr. Hemendra Kumar joined AgFS as precision agriculture state specialist on August 14. He has expertise in precision agriculture, irrigation management, soil physics, soil moisture, optimization, agricultural water management, digital agriculture, hydrology, water quality, surface and subsurface hydrologic modeling, and statistics. Dr. Kumar received his Ph.D. from Auburn University and was a postdoctoral research associate at Ohio State University prior to joining the University of Maryland.

Dr. Colby Silvert was hired as assistant professor of agriculture and Extension education. His expertise is in program development and evaluation, which will benefit the AgFS Program.

Initial interviews and finalist presentations for the urban agriculture production and urban agriculture farm and agribusiness management state specialists were conducted. Evaluations for the production candidates have been completed this month. Additional candidates for the farm and agribusiness management state specialist position will be conducted due to the finalist pool of applicants being too small. The initial interviews for the AgFS educator position in Charles County were completed and four finalists have been invited to give presentations in Charles County on October 20. Sarah Everhart, legal specialist with the Agriculture Law Education Initiative, University of Maryland Baltimore, resigned June 30 to accept a position at Widener University.

Genevieve Lister for NRCS reported staff are busy beginning to close out federal FY23. The state has obligated ~\$15 million in EQIP for the year. The ACT NOW option to fund projects more quickly will be available in Federal FY24. Several state NRCS positions are being recruited and filled for both HQ and field staff.

FSA (via email) reported today is the last day for State Technical Committee to provide comments on the CRP statewide cost-share rates. We are planning to shift to statewide cost-share rates for CRP which is something you have probably heard about in the last few weeks. Rates will go through the State Technical Committee for feedback and ultimately must be approved by the FSA State Committee. We hope this will increase consistency across county lines, ensure our rates are accurate, and lessen the burden on local CEDs.

As for reenrollments, there are about 4200 acres expiring next week in Maryland. We're in the home stretch to roll these expiring contracts into new contracts and FSA is working on tweaking offers, while NRCS, MDA, and SCD staff have completed the conservation plans necessary for the approval of these contracts. It seems like we're in good shape with these reenrollments and we appreciate the help of our partners.

We remind our partners that we'd love to have you sign up to receive updates from FSA so we can keep you posted on the latest FSA news. You can google "farmers.gov and gov delivery" and find a place to sign up based on your interests within FSA, NRCS, and RMA and feel free to reach out to Laura Pleasanton with any questions.

For instance, we have a new milk loss program for dairy producers that was just announced this past week. There are seemingly always new programs coming down the pike and receiving updates directly from FSA is a great way to ensure you don't miss them without FSA dominating the time of these meetings.

One last plug--- COC elections are coming up, and while our nominations period has come to an end, if you're a farmer or landowner and receive a ballot in early November, please vote.

John Swaine, MASCD thanked everyone for their attendance at the summer MASCD meeting in Cambridge. Dates for the winter 2024 meeting will be finalized soon.

The next Board of Directors meeting will be October 24 at MDA or virtual. John thanked Bruce Yerkes for his service to MASCD over the past years.

John Murphy, Ag Commission reported Harrison Palmer has joined MDA and will lead the Ag Commission. Harrison has an extensive background in agriculture and will be an asset to the Commission.

A Solar Summit is being planned for December and will be hosted by MDA.

The next Ag Commission tour is scheduled for October in Allegany and Garrett counties.

A Forestry rep. for the Commission is needed.

Amy Posey, Southern MD reported

Anne Arundel:

- Conservationist of the Year Dinner is on October 18th, awarded to Amy Posey.
- AACSD is losing a district planner (going to Anne Arundel Economic Development), and they are currently advertising for a replacement.

- The NRCS grant for our technician ends September 30th, but AASCD hopes to get them on with the NRCS/RC&D grant and eventually, as an NRCS employee in the office.
- AASCD had a display at the Anne Arundel County Fair, sharing a tent with Farm Bureau and Anne Arundel Economic Development.

Calvert:

- Eileen Beard is the Interim District Manager
- Calvert SCD be hiring for E&S vacancies
- Hired a new MDA Planner, Nick Braciszewski started this month. He will be in Calvert SCD only
- Coming up: County Fair Wednesday Sept 27 to Sunday Oct 1

Prince George's:

- Raymond Watson has informed me that he wishes to resign as supervisor for health reasons.
- PGSCD received 1st place for the Farm Credit Outstanding District Award at the MASCD Annual meeting.
- Cal Steuart received his 45 year pin.
- Robert Slade received his 20 year pin.
- Waiting on approval for a \$3.5M USDA Climate Smart Commodities grant. The grant was written and submitted by PG County Dept of Environment. PGDOE, PGSCD, Bowie State University and UM Extension are all partners in the grant.
- One more quarter remaining on our NRCS Contribution Agreement for Urban Ag Conservation and hoping to renegotiate the agreement for another 3years. Also applied for a one-year Technical Assistance grant from NACD.

St. Mary's:

- Completed CY 2024 annual plan/workload analysis and sent to NRCS, MDA and MASCD
- Participated at the Big Yellow Duck event in Leonardtown – fundraiser for local Envirothon. Sold Kettle corn and water for a net income of \$3700.00
- Volunteered to help distribute food at Farmers Feeding St. Mary's event. Supervisor Dyson, DM Young and a student volunteer assisted the county and University of Maryland to distribute food to 750 residents of St. Mary's. Food was purchased from the Loveville Auction house.
- St. Mary's County Fair is Sept. 21-24. Visit the District's booth in the University of Maryland Extension Building.

Terry Nuwer, Lower Shore reported the Area is well into the corn harvest season, and good progress on aerial cover crop seeding is underway. A letter to MDA with concerns and recommendations about deer damage is being drafted.

Steve Freeman, Upper Shore no report.

Dee Price, on behalf of Western MD reported four active stream restoration grants are underway, along with fall certification of cover crops. The district will host EPA on November 2 for a tour of a stream restoration site.

Van Funk, Central MD

Baltimore County SCD

- A new MDA Technician recently joined the District. The new tech has an ag background and should be a valuable asset.
- Four supervisors and the District Manager attended the MASCD Summer Meeting and won the MASCD Attendance Award.
- The Small Pond Review MOU with Baltimore County has been sent to MDE for their review.

Howard SCD

- The District has been invited to participate in the County's new Climate Action Subcabinet. The County's Climate Action Plan has identified a number of goals across all County agencies pertaining to greenhouse gas reduction and climate resilient policies.
- Howard SCD is hosting the annual Cooperators Dinner on Thursday, September 21 at Manor Hill Brewing, the County's only on-farm brewery.
- The District is coordinating with the County Council for a Fall Farm and Conservation Tour sometime in mid-October.

Cecil SCD

- With the end of a successful Cover Crop signup, aerial seeding is taking place and reporting has begun.
- MDA has upgraded its internet speed to the office which has provided great improvement.
- A new MDA conservation planner has begun at the district. Cherish Warner started 8/23 and is eager to get up to speed.
- Staff attended several training opportunities including a drone spraying demonstration.

Harford SCD

- The North Harford High School Envirothon Team represented Maryland at the National Envirothon Competition held in New Brunswick, Canada from July 23-29. The team did well and finished 10 th overall in a field of 52 national and international teams.
- From August 27-29, Lee McDaniel, Frank Richardson, David Doran, Christen Sullivan, and Tyler Kirk represented the Board of Supervisors at the MASCD's Summer Meeting in Cambridge, Maryland. Harford SCD provided a presentation on the "Student Associate" program.
- On September 13, 2023, the District's annual Cooperators Dinner took place at Pond View Farm located in White Hall, Maryland. 101 individuals attended the event including the Robert Cassilly, Harford County Executive, Patrick Vincenti, President of the County Council, and several other dignitaries. David M. Keyes, a dairy farmer, was recognized as the "Cooperator of the Year".
- Two new employees recently started at the Harford SCD. Adeline (Addie) McCaul started in August and joins as an MDA technician. Taylor Date started this week as the Districts new administrative assistant. Taylor replaces Leslie Byrd, who took a position with the Harford County Department of Parks and Recreation.

The meeting adjourned at 10:58 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Alisha Mulkey
Executive Secretary

SSCC Attendance: September 21, 2023

Members:

Van Funk
Amy Posey
John Swaine
Darren Jarboe
John Murphy
Jim George
Hans W. Schmidt
Terry Nuwer
Steve Freeman
Rob Feldt

Absent:

Ed Wurmb
John Sullivan
Suzy Daubert

Others:

John Czajkowski, Anne Arundel SCD
Jim Ensor, Baltimore County SCD
Eileen Beard, Calvert SCD
Ashley Brown, Calvert SCD
Kendra McAfee, Catocin and Frederick SCDs
Heather Hutchinson, Catocin and Frederick SCDs
Chris Brown, Cecil SCD
Luis Dieguez, Charles SCD
Tim Wells, Charles SCD
Scott Hipkins, Frederick SCD
Gail Myers, PGSCD
John Tarr, PGSCD
Shawn Smith, Talbot SCD
Dee Price, Washington Co. SCD
Mark Kendle, Washington Co. SCD
Chelsea Tyson, Worcester SCD
Diane Flickinger, Frederick SCD
Quintin Cornwell, Harford SCD
Jen Nelson, MASCD
Adam Lyon, MDA
Byron Petrauskas, MDA
Tony Riggi, QASCD
Bruce Young, St. Mary's SCD
Haley Carter, St. Mary's SCD
Jason Keppler, MDA
Tom Filbert, OAG
Elizabeth Beggins, CBF
Alisha Mulkey, MDA