

State Soil Conservation Committee

Final Minutes
October 19, 2023

Van Funk, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:41 a.m.

Chair Funk called for a motion for the State Soil Conservation Committee to adjourn the meeting to move into a closed session, pursuant to section 3-305, subsections (b)(1) of the General Provisions Article:

[X] Section 3-305(b)(1): to discuss the appointment, employment, assignment, promotion, discipline, demotion, compensation, removal, resignation, or performance evaluation of appointees, employees, or officials over whom this public body has jurisdiction; or any other personnel matter that affects one or more individuals.

Motion was made by Ed Wurmb, second by Amy Posey.

Roll call of members present:

Van Funk
Amy Posey
Terry Nuwer
Hans Schmidt
Rob Feldt
Darren Jarboe
John Murphy
Ed Wurmb

All vote in support of motion.

The closed session was adjourned at 9:18 am

Van Funk, Chair, resumed the open meeting at 9:32 a.m.

The minutes of September 2023 were approved. (Swaine/Posey)

The following appointments were made upon proper motion, second, and vote:

Baltimore County SCD – John Michael McGinnis (Swaine/Wurmb)
Calvert SCD – Walter Wells (Posey/Jarboe)
Frederick County SCD – Millard “Wes” Shafer (Posey/Wurmb)
Frederick County SCD – John Falkenstein (Wurmb/Jarboe)
Frederick County SCD – Diane Flickinger (Posey/Wurmb)
Frederick County SCD – Robert Black (Feldt/Schmidt)
Harford SCD – Lee McDaniel (Swaine/Jarboe)

Discussions

Jason Keppler, MDA, returned with additional information on the MACS payment schedule following the September meeting. Staff reviewed materials and SSCC recommendations from 2022, as well as comments from the September SSCC meeting to address the increasing number of producers reaching their project caps and farm caps. The following program updates will be pursued:

- Increase the project caps from \$75,000 to \$150,000 for non-animal waste, and \$200,000 for pooling agreements;
- Increase the project cap for animal waste treatment to \$200,000 (individual or pooling agreements);
- Eliminate farm/person caps, except for animal waste treatment;
- Increase the cap for all active animal waste treatment to \$450,000 per person;
- Provide updated guidance on the practices that would be considered animal waste treatment; and
- Reduce cost-share to 50% on start-up and/or expansions.

Following Jason's update, discussion and Q&A occurred. Staff will keep SSCC and Districts updated as the regulatory changes are pursued and provide additional guidance and clarity as appropriate.

Next, Bill Tharpe, MDA, presented information on the Small Farm & Urban Agriculture Program. The program was established in January 2022 to provide support to small-scale agricultural operations located in urban, peri-urban, rural, and suburban areas. The program is focused on increasing community access to healthy, local foods. The program currently includes 3 initiatives:

1. **Small Acreage Cover Crops** for growers with production areas less than 10 acres. The cover crop must follow a production crop and funding is available up to \$1500 of expenses based on paid receipts. Enrollment is available year-round.
2. **Urban Ag Water & Power Infrastructure** grants based on House Bill 855. Eligible urban areas are based on the US Census Bureau delineation and/or within an incorporated municipality recognized by Maryland. Grants will cover up to 87.5% of the cost for the installation of water & power infrastructure that includes, but not limited to:
 - a. Water meters
 - b. Water pipes
 - c. Irrigation hoses
 - d. Electric meters
 - e. Electric lines

Funding for the program is \$500,000 annually for fiscal years 2024-2027.

3. **Urban Agriculture Grants** based on House Bill 152 passed during the 2023 session. Funding has been approved at \$100,000 annually for fiscal years 2025-2029, and a 10-member Advisory Committee, prescribed in legislation, will support MDA to develop the program. An initial meeting of the Committee is expected in Fall 2023.

Applicants for the suite of programs can include individuals, for-profit agricultural businesses, or non-profit organizations.

Reports –

Hans Schmidt, MDA reported the Nutrient Management Advisory Board will meet November 9 to hear the recommendations of the Farmer Task Force including increasing training for farmers, updating the nutrient management software, and increasing the accountability within the sector and agency for nutrient management regulations.

Filling for the Outreach Coordinator position has been delayed.

Heather Barthel has joined MDA as the new Assistant Secretary of Administrative Services.

Rob Feldt, DNR reported the agency remains busy filling vacancies due to retirement and turnover.

Recent hirings for a lower shore forester and midshore project manager have been completed.

Paul Peditto has been named Acting Assistant Secretary for Land Resources.

Secretary Kurtz has been touring the state to meet staff and see project sites.

DNR is busy posting the "fall foliage" report that is popular with the public.

Jim George, MDE no report.

Darren Jarboe, UME reported The Agricultural Nutrient Management Program (ANMP) officially moved to the University of Maryland (UMD) Agriculture and Food Systems Extension (AgFS) Program on September 30 and continues to write nutrient management plans for farmers. The interim program director is Craig Yohn, the NM advisor in Dorchester County. Craig brings extensive knowledge to the position. The two MOUs to fund the ANMP were funded by the Maryland Department of Agriculture on September 27.

An AgFS Nutrient Management (NM) Task Force made up of AgFS educators and specialists, NM specialists, and an area extension director has been working on the ANMP transition since late July. The

task force has restructured and streamlined processes that should improve NM advisor efficiency. A subcommittee has been established to develop a model ANMP for a potential request for permanent funding for the program.

The AgFS Program will be hiring one program director, one NM specialist, nine NM advisors, and one program coordinator. An offer is in the pipeline for the NM specialist. The NM advisor positions have been advertised and there are applicants that will be evaluated by the NM Statewide Hiring Committee next week. The advisor positions will remain open until filled. The program director position announcement has been drafted and is being reviewed. It will be submitted into the UMD Human Resources system early next week. The program coordinator position announcement will be submitted shortly thereafter.

An offer has been extended to a finalist for the urban agriculture production state specialist opening. Initial interviews for the urban agriculture farm and agribusiness management state specialist opening continued to be conducted. Three finalists will give presentations in Charles County on October 20.

Suzy Daubert, NRCS reported the minimal financial assistance amount has been increased by NRCS to \$4000 per year for CSP.

Maryland had a record funding year in FFY23 with over \$16 million obligated across key programs, and FFY25 will also be important as the funding allocation is ~\$24 million.

NRCS staff is working under the federal Continuing Resolution until November 17. This limits new agreement opportunities for now.

Hiring updates include Jen Richardson as Program Manager for CSP, Leon Tillman as Acting State Con for Delaware, and J'que Jones has accepted a new role at NRCS HQ.

Laura Pleasanton for FSA reported the 2018 Farm Bill has now lapsed, so FSA offices cannot enter into any new CREP agreements. They may work on existing agreements, but without modifications that increase acreage. Staff appreciate partners patience as they await guidance or a path forward. An FSA newsletter with key topics and dates is available for subscribers. See the website for more information.

Voting for members of the county committees will start soon.

John Swaine, MASCD reported The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announced the recipients of their 2023 Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants earlier this week. The program funded 10 grants this year for \$9.4 million throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. MASCD is one of the grant recipients, receiving funding to implement nature-based structural practices along public drainage systems. Potential projects include non-tidal wetland restoration, floodplain reconnection, shoreline management and riparian buffers, as well as outreach and education on the practices. In addition to implementation funding, the grant also offers a financial incentive to public drainage associations in watersheds where projects are implemented that they can use for any kind of maintenance and repair needs that they have. Since public drainage officers have in-depth knowledge of the systems that they manage, the concept is that the officers will be best suited to identify potential opportunities to implement the projects. If anyone has questions or knows of a potential project on Delmarva, contact Jen Nelson or Chelsea Gebbia.

MASCD is holding their quarterly Board of Directors meeting on October 24, with options to attend at MDA headquarters or online. One of the items on the agenda is a discussion related to job approval authority, and MASCD has sent out a survey to gather information from the districts ahead of time. 12 districts have responded so far, and we'll ask the remaining districts to respond by close of business today to have time to compile the responses ahead of the meeting.

Mark your calendars for upcoming MASCD Meetings:

- o January 22-23- MASCD Winter Meeting at the Westin in Annapolis. Business meetings will be held on the first day with visits to elected officials on the second day. We're working on identifying a reception or luncheon near State Circle during the meeting.
- o July 8-10, 2024- MASCD 2024 Annual Meeting at the Hyatt in Cambridge

John Murphy, Ag Commission reported Farm Bureau will hold its annual meeting December 4-5 at the Hyatt in Cambridge.

The Turf sector has raised concerns about Maryland certified sod not being used as regulated and would like to provide additional information and discussion.

Amy Posey, Southern MD reported

Anne Arundel:

- 55th Conservationist of the Year dinner on the 18th, an excellent function.
- Fall Envirothon training is on November 1st.

Calvert: No report

Charles:

- Charles SCDs Envirothon Training Session will be next week October 26th. It is being held at the Charles SCD farm.
- The new Brillion 8ft seeder the Charles SCD purchased via a SMADC grant has been placed in service, allowing our cooperators to use this machine to help convert cropland to perennial pasture, hayland, and meadow plantings.

Prince George's:

- Saturday, October 14 Held Community Garden Summit w "Bloomin PGC" Partners
- Saturday, October 21 Staff will participate in the County's Green Summit
- Sunday, October 29 th Holding an Urban Farm Soil Shop in partnership with NRCS, U of Md Master Gardeners, The Capital Market, and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registration (ATSDR). Producers can have soil samples checked for lead and learn about soil health.
- Working with County stakeholders on PGSCD's role in the County's Climate Action Plan.

St. Mary's:

- Participated with St. Mary's County government, University of MD Extension and the County Department of Economic Development in two events called Farmers Feeding St. Mary's. Food was purchased from the Loveville produce auction and distributed by volunteers to over 1500 residents of St. Mary's. Food distribution was targeted to the urban center of Lexington Park.
- Participated in the St. Mary's County Fair, September 21 st -24 th . District had a manned display in the University of Maryland Extension Building. District staff also assisted with the judging of 4H projects.
- Participated in two Farm to School days. The first was at George Washington Carver Elementary School on Friday, October 6 th and the second was on Wednesday, October 11 at the Chesapeake Public Charter School. District and MDA staff assisted on both days to showcase agriculture to Kindergarten through sixth grade students. A healthy lunch using fresh fruits and vegetables was served to all students on both days.
- Final plans are in place for the Southern Maryland Dinner Meeting held today, October 19, 2023 at the Belmont in Chaptico, MD and
- NRCS and District will have tables set up for the St. Mary's County Public Schools STE(A)M Festival on Saturday, October 28.

Terry Nuwer, Lower Shore no report.

Ed Wurmb, Western MD no report.

Van Funk, Central MD reported

Baltimore County SCD:

- Baltimore County is in the process of forming an Office of Agriculture which will be located in the Ag Center. The District is looking forward to the creation of this new agency and anticipates that it will help in alleviating ag related issues that have been experienced in the past.
- The Small Pond MOU is currently under review in the County's legal office.

Cecil SCD:

- MDE approved the Districts MD-378 review process. The District Engineer has initiated review of several ponds following the approval.

Harford SCD:

- On October 5, 2023, Harford SCD was awarded a Technical Assistance Grant through NACD. The main part of this grant (combined with funding provided by Harford County Government) will be concentrated on creating a grant position who will focus on reaching the underserved in the Harford County that have small urban agricultural operations of 1.0 acre or more. Portions of the grant funding will be allocated towards developing an interactive website with a questionnaire-based system to guide County residents to formulate a simplified soil conservation and water quality plan for their properties.
- On October 6, 2023, Harford SCD coordinated and assisted with the annual Envirothon Fall Workshop at Rocks State Park. Over 100 students from 9 local high schools participated in this event.

Montgomery SCD:

- The District held its annual Cooperators Dinner at Lone Oak Brewing Company on September 19. The Dinner was a great success with over 160 in attendance.
- The Month of October is a big conservation education time of year. The District in partnership with University of Maryland hosts County Public and Home School 4 th graders in the "Close Encounters with Agriculture" program. Each year, over 5,000 students are hosted during the month of October to learn about where food comes from and proper nutrition. There are several stations centered on raising awareness of environmental issues, which includes: conservation of soil, stream buffers, protecting wildlife habitat, conservation cover/rainfall simulator and watershed protection by understanding the different land uses that impact water quality.
- The District is engaged with a local food scrap composting company in the design of a large composting facility that is permitted by MDE. The District is engaged in the design, and providing erosion and sediment control oversight and coordinating both stormwater management with local government and the NOI with MDE. The facility will be a first of its kind and size composting operation (5 acres) that is approved under County zoning as an assessor use to Agriculture. The project is still currently in the design phase.

The meeting adjourned at 11:24 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Alisha Mulkey
Executive Secretary

SSCC Attendance: October 19, 2023

Members:

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

Absent: NONE

Others:

Jim Ensor, Baltimore County SCD
Eileen Beard, Calvert SCD
Ashley Brown, Calvert SCD
Matt McMahan, Carroll SCD
Heather Hutchinson, Catoctin and Frederick
SCDs
Chris Brown, Cecil SCD
Luis Dieguez, Charles SCD
Dee Dee Saunders, Charles SCD
Karen Houtman, Dorchester SCD
Diane Flickinger, Frederick SCD
Taylor Date, Harford SCD
Scott Hipkins, Frederick SCD
Yvonne Rowe, MDA
Laura Pleasanton, FSAJohn Czajkowski, Anne
Arundel SCD
James "Smokey" Stanton, Garrett SCD
Robert Herbert, Dorchester SCD
Charles Bradford, Dorchester SCD

Robert Baldwin, Kent SCD
Steve Darcey, PGSCD
Gail Myers, PGSCD
Bruce Young, St. Mary's SCD
Haley Carter, St. Mary's SCD
Shawn Smith, Talbot SCD
Owen Stanton
Tim Wells, Charles SCD
Dwight Dotterer, MDA
Jen Nelson, MASCD
Adam Lyon, MDA
Byron Petrauskas, MDA
Jason Keppler, MDA
Tom Filbert, OAG
Ben Sowers, Catoctin SCD
Eric Hines, NRCS
Elizabeth Beggins, CBF
Alisha Mulkey, MDA

SUMMARY OF CLOSED SESSION

1. Statement of the time, place, and purpose of the closed session:

Time of closed session: 8:41 – 9:18 a.m. _____

Place (location) of closed session: Hybrid – MDA conference room and conference call _____

Purpose of the closed session: to discuss the appointment, employment, assignment, promotion, discipline, demotion, compensation, removal, resignation, or performance evaluation of appointees, employees, or officials over whom this public body has jurisdiction; or any other personnel matter that affects one or more individuals.

2. Record of the vote of each member as to closing the session:

Names of members voting aye: Funk, Posey, Nuwer, Schmidt, Feldt, Jarboe, Wurmb and Murphy

Members opposed: none; Members abstaining: none _____

3. Statutory authority to close session:

This meeting was closed under the following provisions of General Provisions Art. § 3-305(b):

→ **Topic #1: § 3-305(b) (1)**

4. Listing of each topic actually discussed, persons present, and each action taken in the session:

Topic description	Persons present for discussion	Action Taken/Each Recorded Vote
Review applications for all Supervisor vacancies of the Frederick County SCD	Hans Schmidt Van Funk Amy Posey John Murphy Darren Jarboe Alisha Mulkey Terry Nuwer Rob Feldt Ed Wurmb	Discussion of applications and merits for appointing the new Board Supervisors to the Frederick County SCD. No motion/vote taken, but persons present reached consensus among applications.