

**State Soil Conservation Committee**  
Final Minutes  
November 16, 2023

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

The minutes of October 2023 and appointments were delayed because an SSCC quorum was not present.

### **Discussions**

Dr. Rachel Lamb, MDE discussed plans to finalize the state's 2031 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan that will create a pathway for Maryland to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% from 2006 levels. The Plan is currently being finalized for a December 2023 release but is an "all sector" approach to achieve the ambitious goal. As of 2020, Maryland had achieved important reductions but was not on a trajectory to achieve the 60% target. The new Plan, in collaboration with many stakeholders and modeling support from the Center for Global Sustainability at University of Maryland, is estimating new policies and programs that would achieve the target. Specifically, the agricultural sector in Maryland accounts for ~4% of emissions. This does not include the emissions from machinery or equipment. The forthcoming Plan considers reductions for methane from livestock, nitrous oxides from fertilizers and manure management as future opportunities. It is MDA's intention to work with MDE and the ag sector in the coming years to improve the estimate and quantification methods for emissions, to draw on more locally available data and refine the reduction opportunities.

Second, MDE and MDA are also working on an updated estimate of soil carbon sequestered through conservation practices during the period 2006 through 2021. The work is being supported by a grant from the US Climate Alliance and relies on the COMET modeling tools. Preliminary results show Maryland farmers have made significant gains in soil carbon sequestration through the adoption of cover crops, conservation tillage, and nutrient management.

Following Rachel's comments, Alisha Mulkey offered additional comments. Q&A followed.

Next, John Roche, MDE, updated SSCC that a new guidance document on dam removal will be issued by MDE in 2024. Dam removal is governed by permits and oversight within multiple State agencies, and typically led by the Dam Safety program. It is the policy of MDE to support decommissioning of a dam when it no longer provides value to the owner, should the owner wish to remove the dam. Many such dams exist on the landscape and are aging, i.e. increased liability for a dam failure. Currently, there is limited comprehensive guidance on the various permitting requirements and agency coordination necessary to support efficient permitting and clarity in the process and timeline, so MDE is working to issue new guidance inclusive of small ponds. One objective of the guidance is to restore landscape settings.

Following John's comments, SSCC and attendees had time for Q&A.

### **Administrative Update**

Alisha Mulkey alerted SSCC membership of an important topic for 2024 consideration. The Maryland sod industry is experiencing significant hardship when Maryland certified sod is not being installed at development sites, as required by state law. The issue has been elevated to MDA leadership and the Ag Commission, and a request has been made for the SSCC to consider the role (if any) of SCDs in the enforcement process for certified sod. Alisha will be gathering more information from SCDs for their respective county and will coordinate a future SSCC meeting on the topic.

## Reports –

Hans Schmidt, MDA reported the Nutrient Management Advisory Board will meet November 21 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.

The Annual NM Update is scheduled for December 19 with a second location also being planned.

Rob Feldt, DNR reported Anne Hairston Strang has been named the State Forester as of November 14.

The agency remains busy filling vacancies due to retirement and turnover.

The forests remain very dry. Combined with high leaf litter is increasing the fire activity this season.

Jim George, MDE no report.

Darren Jarboe, UME reported The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) held its annual Cornerstone Event on October 24 in the Stamp Student Union at the University of Maryland (UMD) campus in College Park. This year's event celebrated and built partnerships around the college's strategic initiative Advance Innovative, Profitable and Sustainable Agricultural Production Systems. Randy Day, former CEO of Perdue Farms, gave the keynote address. There were 500 registered for the event.

Leadership from the AGNR visited Africa from October 27 through November 9 to explore research, Extension, and teaching opportunities there.

Dr. Tom Porter, professor in the Department of Animal and Avian Sciences (ANSC), was named a Distinguished University Professor at the university's annual convocation ceremony in September. The title is the highest academic honor bestowed by the University of Maryland and is a recognition not just of excellence, but of impact and significant contribution to the nominee's field, knowledge, profession, and/or practice. Dr. Porter is a world-renowned professor and researcher with a focus on molecular and cellular aspects of endocrinology in poultry. He is currently interim chair of the ANSC Department and previously was associate dean/associate director of University of Maryland Extension.

Kayla Griffith has been hired as an Agricultural Nutrient Management Program (ANMP) faculty specialist. The AgFS Program will also be hiring one program director, one nutrient management (NM) specialist, nine NM advisors, and one program coordinator for the ANMP. Nineteen candidates are being interviewed this week for the NM advisor positions and decisions are expected to be made next week. The advisor positions will remain open until filled. The program director position announcement was submitted into the UMD Human Resources system early this month. The program coordinator position announcement will be submitted soon. An offer has been accepted by a finalist for the urban agriculture production state specialist opening. An offer has been made to a candidate for the urban agriculture farm and agribusiness management state specialist opening. The Charles County AgFS agent position remains open. AgFS ruminant livestock and vegetable production Extension specialist position announcements have been submitted to UMD Human Resources for review.

The list of the AgFS 2023-24 Crop Production Meetings is available.

Genevieve Lister for NRCS reported three Maryland-based projects have been selected for the RCPP.

The prime awardees are The Nature Conservancy (cover crops + advanced NM), Sustainable Chesapeake (urban ag), and DNR (tree plantings).

Laura Pleasanton for FSA reported the farm bill has lapsed so we currently don't have authority to approve new CRP contracts. After more than a month of being locked out of our own software, we are now able to maintain what we have in terms of making revisions to contracts and making cost-share payments for contracts that were approved before 10/1/23. Can't complete revisions if it could so much as obligate an additional hundredth of an acre. All approvals have to be vetted with me to ensure nothing is obligated beyond what we're permitted to do, so it's a nuisance for the county offices. The lack of

authority to approve new contracts will inevitably cause frustration with our producers and our partners. We have partners that were ready to rock and roll and now things are halted.

Producers will soon be getting paid for PARP (Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program). Some county offices are also busy working with ERP2 for some producers that had been left out originally with the initial rollouts of ERP.

Due to a continuing drought in Western Maryland we will be administering the Livestock Forage Disaster Program in those counties. We also are anticipating increased use of the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm raised fish (ELAP) due to the same drought event.

Lastly, 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.

Jen Nelson for MASCD reported January 22-23 will be the 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. Registration is now open.

MASCD is partnering with the Junior Achievement program to showcase careers in agriculture through an agricultural planning and education exhibit.

The Delmarva Soil Summit is February 6-7, 2024.

Amy Posey, Southern MD reported

Anne Arundel:

- AASCD has a new Soil Conservation Specialist (Farm Planner) who started November 9th.
- On October 25th, AASCD helped staff a table at the Career and Internship Fair at St. Marys College of Maryland with RC&D.

Calvert:

- Ashley Brown is Acting Assistant District Manager
- County Erosion and Sediment position is open for applications, closes November 21st
- Ron Babcock retiring 12/6. He's been with the county just under 33 years and has helped on the agricultural team with surveying
- Hiring an RC&D technician and program support specialist

Charles:

- Held first Envirothon training of the season with students from all of the County high schools, Charles SCD thanks St. Mary's and Prince George's SCDs for sharing two staff members to assist with our Envirothon
- District planner participated in St. Mary's Envirothon as a Soils trainers
- District employees participated in the routine valve exercising of Charles County and 3 flood control dams.
- District employees participated in educational outreach with a local elementary school.
- Participated in tree planting with the Charles County Resiliency Board
- District hired a new district secretary who started on November 6
- actively working on cover crop fall certifications

Prince George's:

- The Board of Supervisors sponsored a 1/2-day appreciation outing for staff on November 9th. Fourteen District and partner staff spent the afternoon at Mt. Vernon. After lunch and tour of the Mansion, the group participated in the Enslaved Peoples presentation as continuation education for the Districts DEI policy.
- Kim Rush Lynch-District Program Manager for Urban Ag Conservation and Colleen Kiefer-NRCS District Conservationist gave two presentations at the Mid Atlantic Crops Conference on Urban Ag programs.

- Prince Georges County is looking to streamline land development processing procedures in the County. A report was commissioned. One long-term recommendation was to transfer the urban review functions of SCD to the County Department of Permits, Inspection, and Enforcement.

#### St. Mary's:

- District staff will be participating at the annual Christmas Tree lighting event in Leonardtown on Friday, November 24, 2023. This event is attended by thousands of people and it is one of our biggest fundraiser events for our local Envirothon program. We will be selling fresh popped Kettle corn.
  - The Southern Maryland Crops Conference is on Thursday, December 7, 2023 at the Baden Volunteer Fire Department. This event is put on by the University of Maryland Extension and is sponsored by St. Mary's SCD as well as by the other Southern Maryland SCD's.

#### District Wide

- Area 2 Dinner was hosted by St Mary's on October 19th and the attendance was excellent, it allowed the Areas to gather and provide annual reports while enjoying an amazing spread.

Dee Price for Western MD reported Washington County government and the SCD hosted a tour for EPA officials to visit recent stream restoration sites.

The SCD partnered with NRCS and UM Extension to host an on-farm cover cropping event on November 7.

Van Funk, Central MD reported Baltimore County SCD:

- A Small Pond MOU has been signed.
- The District sponsored an Ag Tour for MDA Secretary Kevin Atticks.

#### Cecil SCD:

- On October 4, district staff participated in the county's "Harvest Dinner" orchestrated by the Cecil County Department of Economic Development. This was a well-attended event with county and state elected officials present. The event highlighted local agricultural products and provided an opportunity to discuss conservation and the benefits to the local economy.
- On October 26, district staff had the opportunity to tour the Kilby Farm with the Senate committee for Education, Energy, and Environment. The tour highlighted the farm's waste management system and Anaerobic Digester. Issues with categorizing this renewable energy source were discussed.
- District staff continued meetings with other local agricultural educators to plan a spring "Ag Awareness Day" event for 1,000+ 7th grade students.

#### Harford SCD

- On October 31, 2023, Harford SCD emailed out our quarterly newsletter to our cooperators, fellow districts, and other partners.
- With the 2023-2024 Cover Crop "Fall Certification" reporting in full swing, MDA and Harford SCD personnel are assisting our cooperators with their fall cover crop planting documentations.
- At our November 8 Board meeting, our new student associate was introduced. For the remainder of the school year, she is looking forward to attending our Board meetings and learning more about soil conservation.

#### Howard SCD

- Howard SCD, in cooperation with Howard County Farm Bureau and Howard Economic Development Authority, hosted an all-day Fall Farm and Conservation Tour for elected officials. The tour included stops at 4 different family farm operations across the county and was attended by 4 out of 5 County Councilmembers, as well as over half of the State representatives and their aides.

- Howard SCD was asked to participate in the Ag Preservation Board's review of a prospective property owned by University of MD, for consideration under the ag preservation program.

#### Montgomery SCD

- On October 25, the District participated in an event held Old Westminster Wineries new location in Montgomery County. Secretary Atticks and numerous State and local elected officials were in attendance to discuss Agri-tourism opportunities particularly surrounding farm alcohol production as added value agriculture.
- On October 6, the District participated in a Montgomery County Council Work session on the status of Ag Tourism in Montgomery County, whereby Chairman Robert Butz and Associate Supervisor Chris Miller made presentations before the County Council on challenges and next steps needed to promote agri-tourism in Montgomery County.
- The District partnered with members of the Maryland Horse Council and the Equiry Magazine to enlist the help of the equine community in identifying resource improvements (RI) being implemented on equestrian operations. An email blast went out to 500 local equestrian operations, as well as information posted on both the Horse Council and Equiry Social media platforms and newsletters. The District has already received several calls as a result of the outreach and is in the process of documenting the RI's.

The meeting adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Alisha Mulkey  
Executive Secretary

SSCC Attendance: November 16, 2023

Members:

Van Funk  
Amy Posey  
Ed Wurmb  
Jim George  
Rob Feldt

Absent:

John Swaine  
Darren Jarboe  
John Murphy  
Hans W. Schmidt  
Terry Nuwer  
Steve Freeman  
John Sullivan  
Suzy Daubert

Others:

Laura Pleasanton, FSA  
Genevieve Lister, NRCS  
John Czajkowski, Anne Arundel SCD  
Kevin Holland  
Matt McMahon, Carroll SCD  
Chris Brown, Cecil SCD  
Tracey Rach, Cecil SCD  
Luis Dieguez, Charles SCD  
Dee Dee Saunders, Charles SCD  
Darlene Goldsmith, Charles SCD  
Karen Houtman, Dorchester SCD  
Rick Glasgow, Wicomico SCD  
Chelsea Tyson, Worcester SCD  
Rachel Lamb, MDE  
Alan Girard, CBF  
Ashley Brown, Calvert SCD  
Heather Hutchinson, Catoctin and Frederick  
SCDs  
Diane Flickinger, Frederick SCD  
David Stonesifer, Frederick SCD

Clarence Cullum  
John Zawitowski, Montgomery SCD  
Steve Darcey, PGSCD  
Gail Myers, PGSCD  
Tony Riggi, QASCD  
Bruce Young, St. Mary's SCD  
Haley Carter, St. Mary's SCD  
Bobby Cooper, St. Mary's SCD  
Mark Carey, Somerset SCD  
Dee Price, Washington County SCD  
Mark Kendle, Washington County SCD  
Jen Nelson, MASCD  
Adam Lyon, MDA  
Byron Petrauskas, MDA  
Jason Keppler, MDA  
Harrison Palmer, MDA  
Doug Myers, CBF  
Shawn Smith, Talbot SCD  
Alisha Mulkey, MDA