State Soil Conservation Committee (SSCC) May 15, 2025 (Hybrid) Caroline Soil Conservation District Office, Denton, MD

e Soil Conservation District Office, Dent Minutes

Van Funk, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:32 AM

The minutes of April 2025 meeting were approved w/ addition of Area 2 report. (Clanton/Posey)

Legislative Update

Guest Speaker: Rachel Jones, MDA

Rachel briefly reviewed select outcomes from the 2025 legislative session, particularly bills related to solar, PFAS, the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act and tax increase on equine and commercial ag.

Q: What is next for the LEEF program (under the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act)? **A**: It's effective July 1. Funding would come through then. More listening sessions are coming to guide development. Once there is a better understanding of how the program should be built out MDA will work with OAG to draft regulations. Legislation will be reviewed and approved by the legislature.

Q: What happened with bill regarding MDA access to conservation plans for enforcement issues? **A:** The bill was withdrawn, as several Districts were in opposition. There are conversations continuing on how to move forward.

Q: Is there any conversation going on with sponsors of PFAS bill, given it did not pass but it will come back next year? **A:** There have not been any meetings as of yet on how supporters may move forward for next year. Early filings of bills are in November so we should know more in the fall.

SSCC ADMIN

- <u>Appointments: None</u>
- Van Funk explained that moving forward, the SSCC will go into closed session to discuss SCD board supervisor applications. Appointments will be made in open session at the next meeting.
- June meeting is rescheduled to Thursday, June 26th (due to Juneteenth holiday). Location will be MD Farm Bureau, 3358 Davidsonville Road, Davidsonville, MD 21035

Update on MD's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP)

Guest Speaker: Alisha Mulkey, MDA

Alisha reviewed MD's 2024 progress toward achieving the agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) implementation goals and plans for the future. Alisha also briefly discussed draft updated to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

Q: How will funding changes for the cover crop program affect WIP goals? **A:** This was a record year for cover crop enrollment, which will be reflected in the 2025 WIP progress. To address funding reductions for next year, the program will be refining its focus in hopes to maximize nutrient reduction, even if overall enrollment will be reduced due to funding. Example: encouraging early planting of cover crops.

Comment: [MDA-Greg Sandi] Wastewater sector has a great year for nutrient reductions, but that good change next year due to weather. Stormwater is making progress, primarily data related. MD is looking good, but still a lot to do.

Q: Is MDA involved in Conowingo Dam discussions? **A:** [MDA] Not to date. Conowingo has its own WIP, so MDA has gotten questions to avoid double-counting in BMP submissions. [MDE] BMP investment, primarily in nutrient management, is occurring. MD stands to meet Conowingo WIP over the next 4 years. More funding may be coming as legal matters settle out.

Spotlight on Upper Shore MD

Jefferson Towers, Chair of the Caroline SCD Board of Supervisors discussed his time as a supervisor. The importance and impact of 368 miles of tax drainage ditches, the role of the 68 Public Drainage Associations, and the challenges of maintaining the ditches were discussed. Mr. Towers also discussed his experience as a contractor working on BMP installs across seven counties on the Eastern Shore.

MEMBER REPORTS

MD Department of Agriculture – Hans Schmidt: NO REPORT

MD. Department of Natural Resources – Rob Feldt:

- State forester says that conservation riparian buffer assistance is likely coming soon.
- Pine seedlings production down in nurseries due to lower demand, ramping up hardwood production.
- State forest certification went well and no findings.
- State forest Annual Work Plans for FY26 are out for public comment and can be viewed here: <u>https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Pages/workplans.aspx</u>. Comments will be made up until June 6.

<u> MD. Department of Environment – Jim George (and Greg Sandi):</u>

- Bay Restoration Fund for wastewater treatment, septic, and cover crops due to sunset in 2030. Looking for ways to maintain funding current level of funding and support to do so.
- Jim George is retiring July 1st.

Q: Stormwater Design Manual update status? Hoping there is an option for public comment. **A**: The goal is to release a public draft version in July, not sure exactly when. MDE stormwater, dam safety and flood management program is under stress due to loss of two key staff members. There will be an opportunity for formal public comment through MD register process. There has been internal discussion about an informal review prior to that.

Q: Update of 2011 Erosion and Sediment Control manual? Hoping for District involvement and public comment. **A:** Will occur after stormwater work, but RFP is probably out for a

consultant to lead revisions of 2011 Handbook. May be of benefit for SSCC to invite Ray Bahr or Jennifer Smith for an update.

<u> University of Maryland Extension – Darren Jarboe:</u>

The current University of Maryland Extension Agriculture and Food Systems Program (AgFS) openings are:

AgFS Extension

- AgFS IPM specialist, ornamental horticulture finalists will be interviewed later this month.
- AgFS local foods and entrepreneurship specialist position is being reviewed by the Dean's Office.
- AgFS county educator, Prince George's County: The position is being evaluated.
- AgFS county educator, Frederick County: The position is being evaluated.

Agricultural Nutrient Management Program

- Program director and faculty specialist: The position description will be revised and reposted. The position is being evaluated by the Dean's Office.
- Nutrient management advisor applicants for Allegany, Charles, Washington, and Wicomico/Worcester Counties are being interviewed.

The UME Assistant Director of Operations position candidates were interviewed April 24.

The AgFS 2025 College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Faculty and Staff Excellence Award Winners:

- On Campus Staff Excellence Award: Racheal Slattery, Animal and Avian Sciences
- Off-Campus Staff Excellence Award: Stephanie Jackson, UME
- Off-Campus Junior Faculty Award: Kurt Vollmer, UME
- DEIR Standard of Excellence Award-Faculty/Staff: Andrea Franchini, UME and Kayle Krieg, UME
- Integrated Research and Extension Excellence Award: Stephanie Lansing, Environmental Science and Technology (ENST)
- UME Extension Excellence Award: Shauna Henley, UME
- The 2025 Dean's Grantsmanship Award: Stephanie Lansing, ENST and Ken Leonard, Agricultural and Resource Economics

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Suzy Daubert

- Flooding in Western MD: staff is currently assessing damage.
- Appreciate everyone's patience throughout transitions.

Staffing

- Maryland NRCS staffing numbers have decreased due to retirements and resignation incentives including the Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA), and Deferred Resignation Program (DRP). (about 12 people) Reorganization plan should be out May 23rd.
- We are developing contingency plans to ensure we can continue working with partners and landowners to get conservation on the ground in Maryland.

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

- On April 18, NRCS received authorization to begin processing payments for IRA funded agreements. Maryland's existing partnership agreements that include IRA funding are moving forward.
- NRCS continues issuing payments to farmers for conservation program contracts that are funded through the IRA. New contracts with farmers are moving forward with traditional Farm Bill program funding.
- Secretary Rollins continues to evaluate other paused funding as she ensures that programs are focused on directly supporting farmers.

Advancing Markets for Producers

- Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities initiative was relaunched as the Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) initiative.
- USDA is reviewing existing grant agreements and will contact current partners individually to provide information about their future participation.

Lease Terminations

- USDA is optimizing building capacity and consolidating underutilized offices to reduce inefficiencies while continuing to prioritize customer service for farmers and rural communities.
- The Maryland NRCS state office continues to operate out of USDA's Beltsville Area Research Center, with an estimated move-in prior to September 30 for the new shared FSA/NRCS state office in Annapolis. Lease terminations have not affected any other NRCS offices in Maryland.

General

- Aubrey Bettencourt was recently appointed as Chief of NRCS.
- NRCS offices continue to provide technical and financial assistance made available through Farm Bill programs, like EQIP and CSP.
- No matter what changes come, NRCS will continue to deliver voluntary, locally led, science-based solutions by supporting conservation, working with landowners, and strengthening our partnerships.
- We appreciate the patience our partners and customers have shown as we work together through this time of change.

Farm Services Agency – Russ Clanton:

Opening of CRP: FSA announced the opening of Continuous signup 63, CREP signup 63, and General signup 64. The statutory cap is 27 million acres and we're at 25.9 million acres. Therefore, they are opening CRP signups for reenrollments and new offers, but with batching periods so that they can control the rate of acceptance and ensure the statutory cap is not exceeded. The first batching period deadline is June 6th. There **may** be additional batching periods, but they are not a guarantee, and it just depends on interest in the first batching period. If there is the ability to have additional batching periods, July 31st will be the final offer deadline.

CREP acres and all reenrollments are being handled on a first come, first serve basis. We must now balance reenrollments with new offers that were put on hold last time. CREP

offers, especially reenrollments, have never had to be batched so this is new territory and really puts pressure on county staff to accomplish a lot of work in a short period of time.

We will need NRCS/technical staff to provide status reviews for contracts that expire on 9/30/25 as soon as possible and to prioritize answering FSA questions about status reviews/making any corrections so that we can proceed with creating offers and obtaining signatures on the offer forms.

After the first batching period ends on June 6th, the Secretary/FSA leadership will make decisions and notify FSA staff which offers are acceptable. We do not need technical staff to begin working on conservation plans until we know if offers are accepted.

The good news is that interim conservation plans have been authorized for ALL types of CRP. The deadline to have interim or final conservation plans completed and signed by all parties is September 19, 2025. While interim plans are an option, we do ask that we utilize normal/final conservation plans whenever possible and reserve interim plans as a contingency plan.

While we often focus on CREP in Maryland, General signup 64 was announced which is now open and they plan to share details on a Grasslands CRP signup in the coming days. I've attached a fact sheet for both General CRP and the EBI for General CRP. General CRP is essentially the same as last year in terms of the ranking criteria. General CRP offers are ranked and the Secretary will decides the cut off score that will determine which offers are accepted. The deadline for General CRP offers is June 6th.

Each FSA County Executive Director will have to determine how to prioritize CRP offers and interest based on workload and staff capacity (administrative and technical). Some offices may be able to handle reenrollments while incorporating new enrollments in this brief window of time while it may not be feasible for some offices. For new offers, a lot may hinge on how much work has already been done (ie was a suitability and feasibility form already completed under the last sign up). We'll need CEDs and NRCS staff to communicate about priorities and possibilities for each office.

The biggest take home point is that the deadline for FSA to accept offers for reenrollments is June 6th. There may be additional opportunities after that, but they are not guaranteed. Additionally, reenrollments for CREP have always been essentially guaranteed to be accepted as long as the practice, the land, and the person all meet eligibility criteria. This is new territory where we could potentially have reenrollment offers that are not determined acceptable because we are so close to the nationwide statutory cap on acres.

ECAP: Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) signup is ongoing until August 15th. This is the 10 billion provided through American Relief Act. Applications have been mailed to all producers and they can also just stop by the county office to sign if that is their preference. Most payments going out within weeks of signing. So far more than 28 million dollars have already been paid out in Maryland.

LFP: Unfortunately, drought conditions have triggered LFP in parts of the state this year with 7 counties in D2 drought on the western shore.

Prospective ECP: With the serious flooding yesterday near Cumberland, we expect to announce a sign up for the Emergency Conservation Program in Allegany and potentially Garrett.

Staffing: Maryland FSA did lose staff to DRP. Between both DRP 1 and DRP 2, we lost 8 staff from the county offices

Q: How are drought levels determined? **A:** It is based on total amount of cumulative rainfall rather than current ground saturation.

Q: Caroline was left off drought list, but it is affecting farmers there. **A:** There are issues related to a clerical error, but now under LFP program so should be ok.

Q: Who do building managers work with on the federal office space? **A:** Have been messaging that Service Centers operate differently than other types of office space. It has been a challenge to explain to those making decisions at higher level.

MASCD – John Swaine:

Grants and Funding

- IRA Funding has been unfrozen for grants and agreements. For MASCD, this includes our NRCS Cooperative Agreement, which funds administrative and program support in 4 Eastern Shore Districts, and our NFWF grant to support the Maryland Bay-Friendly Farming Program.
- MASCD is submitted a proposal for the 2025 NFWF Small Watersheds Technical Assistance Grant to support a pilot project for two producer-led watershed restoration groups. The project is based on a successful program in Wisconsin that offers grants of up to \$40,000 to groups of farmers in small watersheds to develop and implement a work plan to improve water quality. The activities in the work plan are flexible, and include cost-share for innovative practices, on-farm trials or demonstrations, soil testing, outreach and education, etc.

MASCD Annual Meeting

- Registration is open for MASCD's 2025 Annual Meeting! The meeting will be held August 4-6 at Rocky Gap Casino & Resort. Visit <u>https://mascd.net/2025-mascd-annual-meeting/</u> for hotel information, sponsorship details and online registration.
- The agenda is coming together! Check the website to see a list of planned sessions (still subject to some changes as we work to confirm topics and speakers).

Other Items

- MASCD is seeking your feedback on if and how we restructure our committees to our current needs. A survey was sent out to districts toward the end of April, with a request to submit feedback by June 30. Thanks to those who have gotten back to us already!
- Delmarva Land and Litter Collaborative hosted a Steering Committee meeting on May 8. Participants heard about the Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool (CAST), which allows users to view modeling output data on WIP implementation progress, BMP costs and monitored data. Another presentation by USGS compared modeling forecasts for restoration progress to monitored data, and offered insights about the discrepancies between the two. Jen gave a presentation to summarize the findings from a Farmer Engagement Session on Targeted Watershed Restoration held in February.

- Jen had a call with partners in VA and American Farmland Trust to discuss current and planned soil health outreach in Chesapeake states. Virginia hosts a series of "Soil Health Innovation Roundtables", a private space for innovative farmers to share their successful strategies and lessons learned in trying new practices. They are working with PA and MD partners to expand that model.
- Nominations are being accepted for the 2025 Leopold Award through July 15, 2025. The \$10,000 award honors farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners who go above and beyond in their management of soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat on working land. More information is available at <u>https://sandcountyfoundation.org/uploads/2025-CFN-Maryland.pdf</u> Previous recipients include Hutchison Brothers (2024), David & Belinda Burrier (2023), Caleb & Alice Crothers (2022) and Persistence Creek Farm (2021)
- The rain didn't keep us away! MASCD and partners joined Underwood & Associates for two soggy site visits to restoration projects in Anne Arundel County, including the Claggett Farm in Harwood and Jabez Branch 3 in Millersville (shown below).

Ag Commission- Gordon Kretser:

- Spring tour in Montgomery County.
- Continued struggle regarding solar installation. There is an opportunity for Districts to
 ensure native pollinator habitats are planted with solar installs, as that is the intent.
 E&S plans often don't include PPRP requirements for pollinator plants and native
 species. Pre-construction seedings may not include PPRP requirements (e.g. planted
 to turf grass).
- Contractors struggle with changing guidance for plantings by project.

Comment: Seems everyone agrees to the intent of pollinator systems, but communication is not happening.

Comment: SCD is bound by 2011 Handbook, which does not address pollinator species.

Q: Is there still an intent to include PPRP specs in new handbook from MDE? **A**: This is still the intent to discuss with MDE [MDA].

<u> Area 1 (Western) – Diane Flickinger:</u>

Washington County:

• The District Manager and Area Coordinator will be attending an MDA Tour/Visit in Washington County, visiting several farms with various demonstrations, w/Secretary Atticks, May 22, 2025 in cooperation with Washington County Government.

Frederick County:

- The Frederick County Envirothon was held on April 22nd. Letha Grimes from DNR Fisheries was honored for her 35 years of dedication to Envirothon. 1st place went to Catoctin High School, 2nd place went to Urbana High School, and 3rd place went to Urbana High School.
- FCSCD submitted multiple awards for MASCD Annual Meeting.

Allegany:

 MASCD Summer Meeting, August 4-6, will be held at Rocky Gap Resort in Flintstone MD.

<u> Area 2 (Southern) - Amy Posey:</u>

Anne Arundel:

- They had two winning schools this year. South River High School took first place in the Wildlife and 5th Issue divisions. Arundel High School demonstrated strong performance, winning in the Soils, Aquatics, and Forestry categories and being named the overall winner..
- The District is now located on the Anne Arundel County Government website. The site is being updated daily.
- Worked with Leadership Anne Arundel regarding our annual agricultural tour. Approximately 50 people attended several of the South County farms.

Calvert: No report.

Charles:

- Charles SCD's Annual Cooperator of the Year Dinner is next week Wednesday, 5/21/2025 at 5:00 pm.
- The Coloring Contest entries from our Charles County future soil conservationists will be judged at the dinner.
- Participated in Wetlands Day at local elementary school
- Participated in Urban Bird Festival at a local high school
- Interviewed and selected Soil Conservation Intern, who will work at the SCD during the upcoming summer months.

Prince George's:

- The district had a well-attended cooperator dinner.
- The 2024 Annual Report can be found on their website at <u>www.pgscd.org</u>.

St. Mary's:

- Hog Point shoreline stabilization project on Patuxent River Naval Air Station is 95 percent complete. All offshore breakwaters, sills, and revetment work is completed. Sand has been installed and fine-graded behind the breakwaters and sills in preparation for the marsh grass planting in June. In total, over 4800 linear feet of shoreline is stabilized, protecting critical infrastructure at Patuxent River NAS.
- The district's 2024 annual report was completed in April and is posted on our website.
- The district has made an offer to an applicant to fill our vacant erosion & sediment control specialist position.
- At the May District Supervisors meeting, the annual conflict of interest policy was reaffirmed and all supervisors completed their forms.

Area 3 (Upper Shore) – Steve Freeman: NO REPORT

<u> Area 4 (Central) – Van Funk:</u>

Baltimore County SCD

- District is working with the Gunpowder Watershed Partners on their Annual Forum Work Group.
- BCSCD continues to coordinate planning for the MASCD summer meeting with other Central Area Districts.
- Staff continue to work on cover crop certifications, bmp construction and conservation planning.
- The annual Consultant and Firm of the Year were awarded to Josh Royall and DS Thaler.

Cecil SCD

- On 4/24 CSCD hosted its annual Envirothon Competition at the Fair Hill Nature Center. The district had approximately 41 students in attendance representing 8 different teams. A team from Rising Sun High School won the event and plan to compete at the state level competition.
- From 4/29 to 5/1, CSCD participated in the Cecil County Ag Education Days. The three-day event hosted 1,086 seventh grade students at the Cecil County Fairgrounds where they were guided through 12 learning stations related to Food Systems, Land and Water, Animal Science, and Ag Technology. The district was heavily involved in planning the event with other county Ag Agencies. The event was visited by a handful of dignitaries as well as delegations from other counties.

Harford SCD- No report.

Howard SCD

- Howard SCD hosted its annual Mid-Winter Ag Meeting in March at the Howard County Fairgrounds. This event provided an opportunity for farmers to hear about current research, policy, and regulations impacting their operations. They also received nutrient management continuing education credits (CEUs), for those that write their own NM Plans. Featured speakers were from UM Extension, MDA and other partnership agencies. About 43 people attended the event.
- Howard SCD attended the annual Budget Meeting with the County Council and everything appears to be on track for this year's funding including the funding for the Agricultural Preservation Cost-Share Program which was established a couple years ago.

Montgomery SCD- No report

<u> Area 5 (Lower Shore) – Terry Nuwer:</u>

Wicomico is handling a similar workload with cover crop certifications, completing transfer paperwork for MACS projects, and CAFO and conservation plan development.

Somerset SCD is working to complete cover crop spring certifications. We are also working with poultry operators on CAFO paperwork.

MDA staff have attended training on cover crop, integrated pest management and poultry mortality composting.

For Worcester:

• MDA Planners have attended various training sessions on plant ID, enhanced cover cropping, and CRP.

- SCD MDA FY26 General Fund Request Submitted by the deadline.
- SCD annual Outreach items for 2025 events have been delivered.

• WO SCD has fully taken over the NMP workload for No-Land Plans since the recent retirement of our MDA Regional Planner.

• Continuing to work with expanding poultry operators on CAFO paperwork, manure shed and composter sizing, Erosion and Sediment Control, and BMP cost-share applications.

Dorchester SCD - Staff busy with Cover Crop reporting and multiple Poultry Operation Transfers

The meeting was adjourned to closed session at 11:26 AM.

SUMMARY OF CLOSED SESSION HELD ON May 15, 2025

1. Statement of the time, place, and purpose of the closed session: Time of closed session: 11:26 AM

Place (location) of closed session: Caroline Soil Conservation District Office, Denton MD

Purpose of the closed session: <u>Discuss applications submitted for Soil Conservation District</u> <u>Supervisor Positions</u>

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

Names of members voting aye: Motion: Swaine Second : Posey

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):

4. Topic #1: § 3-305(b) (x)

"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; any other personnel matter that affects one or more specific individuals"

Topic description	Persons present for discussion	Action Taken/Each Recorded Vote
#1: Anne Arundel SCD	In-Person: Funk, Nuwer, Swaine,	Discussion of application
Supervisor Applications	Kretser, Mulkey	materials- no vote
	Virtual: Flickinger, Posey, Feldt	
#2: Prince George's SCD	In-Person: Funk, Nuwer, Swaine,	Discussion of application
Supervisor Applications	Kretser, Mulkey	materials- no vote
	Virtual: Flickinger, Posey, Feldt	
#3: Somerset SCD Supervisor	In-Person: Funk, Nuwer, Swaine,	Discussion of application
Applications	Kretser, Mulkey, Schmidt	materials- no vote
	Virtual: Flickinger, Posey, Feldt	

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

The meeting was adjourned from closed session at 11:56 AM (Swaine/Posey).

Respectfully Submitted,

Loretta Collins Executive Secretary

Attendance: May 15, 2025 *in-person

SSCC Member	Name	Present	Absent
Area 1- Western	Diane Flickinger	Х	
Area 2- Southern	Amy Posey	Х	
Area 3 - Upper Shore	Steve Freeman		Х
Area 4 - Central	Van Funk (Chair)*	Х	
Area 5 - Lower Shore	Terry Nuwer*	Х	
MDA	Hans Schmidt		Х
DNR	Rob Feldt		
MDE	Jim George	Х	
UMD	Darren Jarboe		Х
MASCD President	John Swaine*	Х	
Ag Commission	Gordon Kretser*	Х	
USDA-NRCS (non-voting)	Suzy Daubert*	Х	
FSA (non-voting)	Russ Clanton*	Х	

Organization /Office	Attendee(s)	Organization /Office	Attendee(s)
Allegany SCD		Howard SCD	David Plummer
Anne Arundel SCD	David Scheler	Kent SCD	Sam Leaverton, Robert Baldwin, Charlie Miller
Baltimore County SCD	Jim Ensor	Montgomery SCD	
Calvert SCD	Jason Leavitt	Prince George's SCD	Steve Darcey, Gail Myers, John Tarr
Caroline SCD	John Shepard, Jefferson Towers,	Queen Anne's SCD	
Carroll SCD		Somerset SCD	Mark Carey
Cecil SCD	Gerry Powell, Chris Brown	St. Mary's SCD	Bruce Young, Haley Carter
Charles SCD	Luis Dieguez, Timothy Wells, Dee Dee Saunders	Talbot SCD	
Dorchester SCD	Karen Houtman	Washington County SCD	Lori Flook-Bishop, Mark Kendle, Dee Price
Frederick County SCD	Kendra McAfee	Wicomico SCD	Richard Glasgow
Garrett SCD		Worcester SCD	Chelsea Tyson
Harford SCD	Ruth Cassilly, Quintin Cornwell		
MDA (HQ)	Alisha Mulkey, Loretta Collins*, Jason Keppler, Byron Petrauskas*	MDA (Southern)	Adam Lyon, Eileen Beard
MDA (OAG Office)	Tom Filbert	MDA (Western)	Keith Potter
MASCD	Jen Nelson*	NRCS	Kendrick Flowers
MDE	Greg Sandi	Chesapeake Bay Foundation	Rob Schnabel