
St. Mary's Soil Conservation District Long Range Strategic Plan 2020-2025



St. Mary's Soil Conservation District — 26737 Radio Station Way, Suite B Leonardtown, MD 20650

MISSION STATEMENT

The St. Mary's SCD's mission is to promote practical and effective soil, water, and related natural resource programs and to provide assistance to all citizens on a voluntary basis through leadership, education, and cooperation.

OVERVIEW

The following Long Range Strategic Plan was developed to provide guidance to the St. Mary's Soil Conservation District for the next five years.

AUTHORITY

Maryland, along with 21 other states, passed its Soil Conservation District's Law effective June 1, 1937. It appeared as Article 2A, Sections 15-28 of the Annotated Code of Maryland. In 1939, renumbering of the Code resulted in the SCD Law to be in Sections 45-58. In the 1955 issue, it appeared in Article 66C, Sections 88-103 and in 1974 it was moved to the Agricultural Article, Sections 8-101 to 8-501.

The SCD Law created the State Soil Conservation Committee with authority to organize, provide training, advice, and assist soil conservation districts. The districts were to be organized as independent political subdivisions of the state. The five-member boards of supervisors were given broad general authority to carry out soil and water conservation programs. St. Mary's Soil Conservation District was organized on January 5, 1942.

HISTORY

Districts were organized and created by federal law in 1937 in response to devastating soil erosion conditions which existed in the United States during the late 1920s and 1930s.

In 1929, the United States Congress appropriated about \$160,000 for erosion control experiments. The work of research centers established with these funds expanded as the economic disaster of the Dust Bowl in the Midwest became a cause for national concern.

The Soil Erosion Service (SES) of the U.S. Department of the Interior was created as a temporary organization in 1933. Its purpose was to demonstrate the values of soil and water conservation by placing conservation measures on farms in cooperation with landowners. In addition, the federally-created Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was assigned to aid in erosion control work across the country. Two years later, in 1935, Congress established a federal policy concerning soil conservation.

By Act of Congress on April 27, 1935, the personnel and resources of the Soil Erosion Service was transferred to the Soil Conservation Service as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This was the first step in creating a local voluntary system around a core of federal

expertise and support. On February 27, 1937, Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a letter to all state governors recommending enactment of soil conservation district legislation.

The proposed act suggested establishing districts to direct and manage soil erosion control programs using local citizens participating voluntarily in planning and installing conservation practices. Each district so designated would be empowered to determine local needs, would have personal contact with local individual landowners within the community, and would this be able to encourage maximum cooperation on a voluntary basis.

The first soil conservation district in the United States was organized on August 4, 1937, in North Carolina by Hugh Hammond Bennett (*sometimes called the father of the conservation movement*). The St. Mary's Soil Conservation District was created on November 14, 1941. The legal charter was issued by the state of Maryland on January 5, 1942.

Location – St. Mary's County is located on the southernmost corner of the western shore of Maryland. It consists of 367 square miles bordered almost entirely by tidal waters, except the northwestern corner which abuts Charles County. These 234,878 acres are bordered by the Wicomico River on the west, the Potomac River on the south, the Chesapeake Bay on the east, and on the northeast by the Patuxent River.



Physical setting – Most of the county consists of a well-defined upland plateau ranging from sea level to 170 feet, which is fringed by a low flat plain. The drainage divide runs

approximately along Maryland routes 5 and 235. The County lies completely within the physiographic region known as the Coastal Plain. The parent material is unconsolidated sediment consisting of clay, silt, sand and gravel. These sediments were deposited during the geologic ages of the Pleistocene, one million years ago to early Miocene, thirty million years ago.

Geologic - The St. Mary's Formation was the first deposit and was laid down in the Miocene era. It consists of fine, dark, muddy sand, silt, clay and diatomite. On top of it came the Upland Deposit which lies on virtually all the upland areas greater than 100 feet in elevation. During the Pliocene up to the Pleistocene era, these upland areas were thinly veneered with sand, gravel and subordinate silt-clay. The youngest sediments have been deposited since then. These include both alluvium, which fills most stream valleys, and sand with subordinate gravel and clay in the lowland terraces fringing the larger bodies of water.

Watersheds - St. Mary's River, Potomac River, Breton Bay, St. Clements Bay, Chaptico Bay, Wicomico River, Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay.

Soil Resources - There are 26 different soil types in the District. These are soils that are grouped together because the upper five feet are almost alike. Approximately 66% of the District's soil is capable of being farmed. However, about 51% of these soils have moderate to severe hazards which necessitate the use of conservation practices to protect the soil from erosion.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there are 615 farms in St. Mary's County covering 61,803 acres with the average farm size being 100 acres. There are twelve soil associations, all of which are suitable for agricultural use. By virtue of their large acreage in agricultural production, there are two particularly important soil associations. The Beltsville-Croom-Sassafras association is the most wide spread and accounts for over one fourth of the District. It lies almost completely southwest of Route 235 along the upland length of the District. Though not used as extensively as it once was for tobacco production, it is still widely used for corn, soybeans and small grain production. The Othello-Mattapex Association lies in the bottom lands along the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River and its tributaries. Where the Othello soil has been artificially drained and during moderate droughty years, this soil will produce satisfactory yields of corn and beans.

Strategic Plan

The St. Mary's Soil Conservation District is committed to providing professional services to all citizens of St. Mary's County, on a voluntary basis, across all sectors of our community. In order to achieve this goal, the strategic plan will focus on four major programmatic areas of service.

District Operations:

To provide the best service to our community relies on a well-informed, diverse Board of Supervisors that set District policy. This policy is implemented through a partnership of District (county), Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff. The daily administration of the District office is provided by the District Manager and the technical assistance is through the NRCS District Conservationist. District Operation functions include District policy, administration of financial accounts, payroll for District staff, office management, travel, supervisor and staff training, partnership coordination, human resources, coordination of monthly and special board meetings, annual review of debits and credits and the preparation and submission of budget requests.

Agriculture Conservation:

Agriculture remains the Districts' number one priority, and 75 percent of all District and partnership staff time is spent assisting our agriculture producers. Agriculture Resource Conservation Specialists work with landowners and producers to evaluate their agriculture operation and will develop a Soil Conservation and Water Quality plan that identifies resource concerns, and a strategy to implement best management practices (bmp's) to mitigate for potential sediment and nutrient losses. Structural bmp's are designed to meet NRCS standards and specifications by engineering technicians that perform the site survey, design, construction inspection and as-built certification. Functions related to the planning and design services include; local administration of the Maryland Agriculture Cost Share program, Federal cost share and incentives programs, Cover Crop program, manure transport program, conservation equipment rental program and the input of data into the Conservation Tracker and Engineering Tracker data bases. The primary focus of the District over the next five years is assisting the agriculture community in meeting the agricultural nutrient and sediment reduction goals established for St. Mary's County by the Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP III).

Urban Conservation:

State law requires all earth disturbing activities that propose disturbances greater than 5,000 square feet or 100 cubic yards of cut and/or fill to have an erosion and sediment (E&S) control plans approved by the local Soil Conservation District. In St. Mary's County, this is a significant workload, and the District initiated a fee system to hire staff and to recover costs associated with the E&S program. To assist the Maryland Department of the Environment with the implementation of urban best management practices, the District signed a memorandum of agreement in 2006 with MDE to provide pre-construction meeting services as an agent for the Department. The District works closely with St. Mary's County government and participates in the counties development review process through the Technical Evaluation Committee and by adhering to the Grading, Storm Water Management and Erosion and Sediment Control ordinance.

Information, Education and Outreach:

Information, education and outreach is an important component of all District service areas. Information is disseminated through our annual report, timely newspaper articles, website (<https://stmarysscd.com>), emails and our latest social media outlet, Facebook. Working with youth has always been a District priority and our major focus on youth education is the Envirothon program. The Envirothon is a yearlong commitment that involves many staff hours for fundraising and training that culminates with the Maryland Envirothon competition in June. Additional educational activities include the STEM festival, science fair, and the Professional Advisory Committee for the CASE and Natural Resources Management students at the Forrest Career and Technical Center. Outreach activities are conducted year round and are normally structured events that occur every year. Annual activities where the District has displays and/or a presence are; St. Mary's County fair, earth day, STEM festival, science fair, crops conference and Envirothon fundraiser events.



District Operations

Goal # 1: Acquire and Develop New Staff and Supervisors

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Provide new staff and supervisor orientation
- 2) Recruit new associate supervisors
- 3) Promote diversification of staff and supervisors
- 4) Identify staff training needs
- 5) Update position descriptions for staff and supervisors
- 6) Update District Personnel Policy Book

Goal # 2: Improve District Administrative Fiscal Procedures

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Evaluate existing policies on an annual basis
- 2) Ensure compliance with state and Federal regulations
- 3) Improve accounts payable and receivable process'
- 4) Seek additional sources of funding for District activities

Goal #3: Improve Office Efficiencies

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Refine current procedures to increase efficiency
- 2) Improve communication between partnership staff
- 3) Cross train staff where appropriate
- 4) Upgrade hardware and software to latest technology
- 5) Eliminate office redundancies

Agriculture Conservation

Goal # 1: Assist Producers to Meet the Watershed Implementation Plan Goals

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Secure necessary technical staff to achieve goals
- 2) Develop 5,500 acres of SC&WQ plans per year
- 3) Improve technical assistance to producers
- 4) Inform producers of available cost share programs
- 5) Streamline and improve program delivery
- 6) Expand the District's equipment leasing program

Goal # 2: Actively Participate in BMP Verification and Documentation

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Assist MDA verification team with field discrepancies
- 2) Ensure timely and accurate entries into Conservation Tracker
- 3) Develop procedure to record annual bmp implementation

Goal # 3: Improve Local Administration of Cost Share Programs

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Review procedures to process applications and claims
- 2) Conduct monthly status reviews on projects
- 3) Provide timely project status reviews to MACS office
- 4) Improve quality control to reduce errors on applications and claim for payment forms

Urban Conservation

Goal # 1: Implement Performance Standards to Improve Customer Service

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Implement maximum thirty day review on new submittals
- 2) Triage resubmittals for maximum fourteen day review
- 3) Utilize email to expedite delivery of comments
- 4) Evaluate administrative functions to improve efficiency
- 5) Participate with County electronic submission and review process utilizing BlueBeam

Goal # 2: Assist MDE with the full implementation of approved E & S plans

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Increase site visits as part of plans review process
- 2) Continue to provide pre-construction meeting services for the Maryland Department of the Environment
- 3) Improve coordination of effort with MDE inspector
- 4) Promote the Responsible Person in Erosion and Sediment control certification process
- 5) Advise applicants of the Notice of Intent requirement

Goal # 3: Ensure adequate funding to conduct program functions

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Evaluate fees annually to ensure program sustainability
- 2) Work with County government to secure additional funding
- 3) Seek alternative sources of funding to support program

Information, Education & Outreach

Goal # 1: Improve Outreach to the community regarding District functions

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Publish news articles in the local paper regarding programs
- 2) Annually attend six or more community functions to promote District operations and functions
- 3) Expand attendance at Cooperators dinner meeting
- 4) Routinely update the District website to include pertinent information regarding agriculture programs and important dates
- 5) Expand use of FaceBook to reach non-traditional cooperators
- 6) Develop e-mail list to expedite communication to program participants

Goal # 2: Fully support St. Mary's Envirothon program

- 1) Hold a local Envirothon Competition each year and provide a minimum of two trainings.
- 2) Secure sufficient corporate and individual sponsorships to ensure that student participation is at no cost to them
- 3) Participate in the Maryland Envirothon program
- 4) Work to expand participation to all eligible public and private school programs and home school students

- 5) Hold four fundraising events to support the local program
- 6) Where appropriate, seek grant funding to support transportation costs
- 7) Evaluate process to provide stipends for teacher/advisors

Goal # 3: *Provide information and support for other educational programs*

Strategies

Actions Taken

- 1) Participate with STEM related school activities by providing hands-on training activities
- 2) Serve on the CASE and Natural Resources Professional Advisory Committees (PAC)
- 3) Participate in the MASCD sponsored poster and coloring contests
- 4) Attend Earth Day activities in Leonardtown
- 5) Staff the District display on school day at the St. Mary's County fair