

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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2023 Annual Report

This is the Annual Report of the St. Mary's County Commission on the Environment (COE) covering the period from January to December 2023.

COE Membership

Jan-Jun

Chair - Norman Dean

Vice Chair - Molly Boron

Secretary - Kristen Whitesell

Outreach/Social Media - Melissa Rodriguez

Member - George (Mike) Thompson

Member - Cristina Val Perez

Member - Scott Clark

Jul-Dec

Chair – Molly Boron

Vice Chair, Outreach/Social Media – Melissa Rodriguez

Secretary – Kristen Whitesell

Member - G. Mike Thompson

Member - Leslie Taylor (7/23 appointment)

Member – Jennifer Raley (7/23 appointment)

Member - Vacant

Mission

The purpose of the COE is to advise the Commissioners of St. Mary's on environmental matters and promote environmental awareness. Additionally, the COE shall constitute the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) in accordance with the St Mary's Comprehensive Solid Waste Management and Recycling Plan. The St. Mary's County Department of Land Use and Growth Management (LUGM) provides staff support, and the Department of Public Works and Transportation (PW&T) provides advisory support on matters regarding solid waste.

Meetings

The Commission meets at 6:30 pm on the first Tuesday of every month. The COE abides by the Open Meetings Act and public participation is available through Zoom, dial-in and in-person attendance.

Highlights of the Commission's Work

- Sustainability Awards Program
- Earth Day
- Collaboration with Calvert County Environmental Commission
 - Safe Skies Maryland presentation
 - Wetlands Management – Dominion Cove Point

- Collaboration with St Mary’s County non-profits and other agencies
 - Southern Maryland Sierra Club
 - University of Maryland Extension
 - NAS Patuxent River Environmental Department
 - Maryland Environmental Services (MES)
- Work with SMC Public Works and Transportation
 - 2023-2033 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management and Recycling Plan
 - Composting pilot program
 - Solid Waste Advisory Committee
 - Household Hazardous Waste collection
- Prince George’s County Composting Facility visit

Areas of Focus

Sustainability Awards

Sustainability awards are the flagship project of the Commission. Program goals are to encourage continuous environment improvement by recognizing outstanding St Mary’s County students, restaurants, businesses, non-profits and farms for their environmental stewardship, resource conservation, innovative best practices, and pollution prevention. The winners of the award receive publicity for their achievements and an award plaque.

The 2022 St Mary’s County Sustainability Award winners were:

Non-Profit: Southern Maryland Sierra Club

Business: Environmental Division , NAS Patuxent River Public Works Department

Each of the awardees incorporated sustainment-focused practices into their organizations. The Sustainability Awards recognize outstanding students, restaurants, businesses, non-profits, and farms in St Mary’s County for their environmental stewardship, resource conservation, innovative best practices, and pollution prevention efforts. All nominees for the 2022 calendar year demonstrated impressive commitment to improving local environmental impacts.

The Southern Maryland Sierra Club has continued their 1,000 Trees initiative that began in 2018. In 2022, Club volunteers planted 162 native trees in local parks and sports complexes to rebuild the native tree canopy. Additionally, they planted 27 shrubs at Lexington Park Manor in a 7,500 square foot Native Exhibition Garden, showcasing information on native plants and alternatives to invasive species. The Sierra Club also demonstrated a commitment to sustainable and healthy foods by completing buildout of 36 gardens at eight locations. These pollinator-friendly gardens provide vegetables to local food pantries and provide opportunities to teach the benefits of sustainable, local gardening.

The Environmental Division of NAS Pax River’s Public Works Department completed a shoreline restoration project along their Fishing Point shoreline. This project stabilized 960 linear feet of shoreline from further erosion. Rather than merely restoring the shoreline, the Environmental Division worked to create a living shoreline that offers protection and provides habitat for several aquatic organisms using structural materials (rip rap, cobbles, etc.) and vegetative materials (grasses, shrubs, and wetland plugs). Additionally, low marsh, high density plantings of *Spartina alterniflora* will accelerate the establishment

of the marsh vegetation. High marsh and coastal species were planted for further sediment stabilization, and to encourage establishment and future resilience of shoreline habitat.

Living shorelines have several benefits to aquatic organisms, including the Diamondback Terrapin, which have a large presence at NAS Pax River. Living shorelines allow aquatic organisms to adapt to rising sea levels resulting from climate change and shift their habitats inland as sea levels rise. Living shorelines help limit erosion, provide habitat for native species, purify water, buffer floods, store carbon, protect community infrastructure, and they perform better in major storms when compared to hardened shorelines, as they can adapt to changing water levels and intense storms.

Selection of the Sustainability Award winners was based on outstanding demonstrated efforts to improve the environment and for initiatives and projects exceeding business norms and requirements.

Earth Day 2023

For the first time in known board history, the CoE led a St Mary's County Earth Day event. Hosted at Summerseat Farm, the event was held on Saturday, April 22 (actual Earth Day). Over 450 attendees enjoyed farm presentations by Summerseat volunteers, musical performers and browsing over 20 vendors who set up displays with information or goods for sale. The CoE also set up information tables with free native plants and trees for guests. Despite a thunderstorm threatening at closing time, the event was a big success. The 2022 Sustainability Awards were presented to members of Southern Maryland Sierra Club and the Environmental Department from NAS Pax River. Commissioner Colvin was in attendance with his family.

Composting Pilot Program/Solid Waste Advisory Committee

Early in the calendar year, Board members met with the Director of DPW&T and the Solid Waste Manager to continue discussion on the 2023-2033 Comprehensive Solid Waste Management and Recycling Plan, barriers and challenges to beginning a small-scale composting pilot project, and Solid Waste Advisory Committee collaboration. Staffing challenges within DPW&T seem to inhibit a more collaborative environment with the CoE.

Resolution to Promote Renewable Energy in the County

The Commission recognizes the environmental and economic benefits of using energy from wind, solar and other renewable resources. After several meetings and considerable discussion, the Commission supports a resolution recommending that the County establish "a one hundred percent (100%) renewable energy goal for county government electricity use by the year 2030."

Other areas of interest to the Commission

The Commission held discussions on a wide range of other topics, including

- Tree Canopy Task Force
- Bird-Safe and Energy Efficiency building code
- Trash focus areas
- Participation in SMC Cherry Blossom Festival
- County news as it relates to zoning, policies and/or environmental impacts

The Commission maintains an active Facebook site, St Mary's County Commission on the Environment, that focuses on environmental topics of interest to the residents of St. Mary's County. The goal of that site

is to educate citizens on important environmental issues, encourage active individual citizen participation in protecting the environment, and highlight and support the work of organizations, businesses and agencies working to achieve a cleaner county.

Presentations and Discussions

The Commission received presentations from, and held discussions with local leaders active in environment protection, including:

- Mr. Jim Gotsch, Director of SMC Public Works and Transportation
- Benjamin Hance and Brandon Smith, Southern Maryland Sierra Club
- Staff of Maryland Environmental Service
- Amanda Yowell, County Zoning Administrator
- Dr. Mark Southerland, Safe Skies Maryland

Summary of Monthly Meeting Topics

January 2023

Sustainability Awards update

Earth Day at Summerseat Farm planning and preparations

Budget request submission (\$2600)

Chesapeake Bay Commission study on plastics in the bay

February 2023

Earth Day preparations and planning

- Vendors
- Budgeting: Destination Maryland, event expenses
- Native plants and tree orders for CoE table

Retirements within LUGM and PW&T. Board recognizes Solid Waste Management outreach that is necessary.

Board discussed Southern Maryland Sierra Club's request for the CoE to formally recommend increased renewable energy purchases by St Mary's County.

Upcoming community PFAS event in July.

March 2023

Earth Day at Summerseat Farm preparations

- About 20 vendors/participants

Sustainability Awards: to be announced at Earth Day

Review of budget expenditures

Shared discussion topics from Calvert County Environmental Commission monthly meeting

Outreach to John Curtis, SMC DPW&T Interim Solid Waste Manager

April 2023

Earth Day at Summerseat

- Final planning and budget discussion

Sustainability Awards recap

May 2023

Earth Day

- Media follow-up
- Huge success with over 450 in attendance at Summerseat Farm
- Lessons learned
- Commissioner Colvin attendance appreciated

Renewable energy recommendation update. County attorney not supportive of the initiative without a cost to the government included.

Solid Waste Advisory Committee discussion on path forward.

Budget status

Rain barrel community event

June 2023

Extended discussion and approval of resolution recommending that county's use of electricity be from 100% renewables by 2030

Planning for future presentations to the Commission

Trash cleanup initiatives in the County

Possible grant funding for Commission projects

July 2023

Two new members assigned to board: Jennifer Raley and Leslie Taylor

Election of Commission Officers for 2023-2024

- Results: Chairperson Molly Boron, Vice-Chairperson Melissa Rodriguez, Secretary Kristen Whitesell

Continued collaboration attempts with head of DP&T, Jim Gotsch on composting pilot program

Tree Canopy Task Force discussion

Potential Calvert County and Charles County collaborative efforts

August 2023

New members Jennifer Raley and Leslie Taylor welcomed

Tree Canopy Task Force proposal from Southern Maryland Sierra Club

- Effort goals are to get a snapshot at county tree canopy data to better inform future tree planting efforts. LUGM fee in lieu discussion. Board supports continued discussion and finding a way to fund the Task Force.

Discussed Bird Friendly presentation to Calvert County Environmental Commission by Safe Skies Maryland founder Dr Southerland. Board supports continued discussion and recommendation to Commissioners.

Conference attendance: Chesapeake watershed training symposium event in November

New LUGM Director, Ms. Jessica Andritz

September 2023

Tree Canopy Task Force discussion

- Further fee in-lieu discussion

Bird-Safe Building Code recommendation letter to the Commissioners discussion on path forward

October 2023

Meeting cancelled due to lack of a quorum.

November 2023

Earth Day 2024 planning. CoE looking into Leonardtown event, Cherry Blossom Festival in March or a stand-alone event at Summerseat Farm.

Tree Canopy Task Force updates

- Funding sources

- GIS data availability

Guest: New UMD Extension Office Watershed Coordinator, Caroline DiGiovanni introduced. She provided CoE with information about her efforts, scope of responsibility and where she can collaborate.

December 2023

Earth Day 2024 event planning. Board decided to support stand-alone event, Sat, April 20, 2024.

Sustainability Awards preparation with County news release and County Times ad

Commission budget request for July 2024 will be \$3200

2023 Annual Report wrap up

Bird-Safe Building Code Recommendation

- Guest presenter: Dr Mark Southerland, Safe Skies Maryland
- Attendees: Barb Whipkey, Wild Birds Unlimited Lexington Park

Tree Canopy Task Force

- Saint Mary's College internship possibility, tasking and responsibilities
- County government members who may be assigned to the Task Force