

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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2024 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 2024.

COE Membership

Jan-Jun

Chair – Molly Boron

Vice Chair, Outreach/Social Media – Melissa Rodriguez

Secretary - Kristen Whitesell

Member – Nicole Bega (1/24)

Member – Leslie Taylor

Member – Jennifer Raley

Member - George (Mike) Thompson

Jul-Dec

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Vice Chair – Nicole Bega

Secretary – Kristen Whitesell

Member – Melissa Rodriguez

Member - Leslie Taylor

Member – Jennifer Raley

Member – George (Mike) Thompson

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.

Budget

The Commission on the Environment expended nearly all resources entrusted to them.

Highlights of the Commission's Work

- Sustainability Awards Program
- Earth Day
- Collaboration with Calvert County Environmental Commission

- Safe Skies Maryland presentation
- 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)
 - St. Mary's County Library
- 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

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 2023 St Mary's County Sustainability Award winners were:

- School: Fr Andrew White School
- Non-Profit: Southern Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Board
- Honorable Mention (School): The Elms Environmental Education Center, MD Master Naturalist Program
- Honorable Mention (Non-Profit): St Mary's River Watershed Association

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 2023 calendar year demonstrated impressive commitment to improving local environmental impacts.

The winner of the School category is Fr Andrew White School. They began a food waste program midway through last school year, late winter to spring of 2023. Victoria Rutherford, the schools Kitchen Manager, is in charge of running a kitchen which serves up to 200 children and staff each day. She noticed that food was discarded due to school absences and decided to collaborate with the school nurse who volunteers at Summerseat Farm. They came up with a plan that reduced food waste going into the waste stream and landfill.



They collected leftover or spoiled food, the majority of it spoiled lettuce and unclaimed pre-made salads, but they also collected leftovers of the main meal, depending on whether farm animals would eat it. It averaged 25lbs of food per week. The school hopes to expand the program to include the elementary students in learning about food waste and to separate their cafeteria waste on their own.

Ms. Rutherford stated, “I can't speak to costs, but I can say that the kitchen now throws away very little actual food. Kitchen waste is relegated to packaging now.” Composting and keeping food waste out of the landfill waste stream is economical and a priority project of the Commission on the Environment.

The winner in the Non-Profit category is the Southern Maryland

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Board. In 2023, RC&D launched several educational programs. RC&D's Sunday Eco-School, held at the new Barns at New Market in St. Mary's County, was designed to provide free environmental education for all ages. Topics in the first year included the importance of wetlands, the history of agriculture in Southern Maryland, native plants, Maryland trees, and soil health. The lessons were valuable for home-schooled kids who have fewer opportunities for environmental education. RC&D also started a virtual Winter Seminar series, four in total but two taking place in 2023. The first episode was about bats and their roles in the ecosystem, and the second was all about fungi. These well-attended lectures were presented by experts in the field and generated lots of good questions and discussion.

RC&D's Program Director for Land Conservation served as an adjunct professor at St. Mary's College during the spring and fall semesters, teaching second- and third-year students about careers in the environmental and conservation fields.

RC&D also applied for and became a Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps (CCCC) host site in 2023. This allows RC&D to mentor a young adult to obtain gainful employment in the environmental field. The mentorship officially began in August of 2023 and will continue until August of 2024.

In February of 2023, RC&D sponsored and participated in the Patuxent River Conference. In April, RC&D participated in the Earth Day event at Summerseat Farm and enjoyed speaking to community members about the benefits of conservation. And in May, RC&D tabled at the launch event for the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area.

Also in the spring, RC&D participated in an expanded Southern Maryland Water Quality Blitz. Previously, the water quality monitoring occurred only in Calvert County, but through RC&D's efforts, data was collected on the St. Mary's River, one of its tributaries, and a tributary of the Patuxent in St. Mary's County. This information helps show which streams and creeks have poor water quality and could benefit from further conservation efforts.



29133 Thompson Corner Rd, Charlotte Hall, MD 20659

RC&D has continued to help implement the State of Maryland's Rural Legacy Program, which conserves rural land throughout the state. In 2023, RC&D was awarded \$1,461,697 in Rural Legacy grant funding. Three new conservation easements went to settlement in 2023, and RC&D has continued to monitor the other 27 conservation easements it holds under this program.

In addition to the two winners, the Commission on the Environment named two Honorable Mentions: The Elms Environmental Education Center, MD Master Naturalist Program and St Mary's River Watershed Association. Their efforts in 2023 were also impactful and outstanding!

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 2024

For the second year, the CoE led the premier St Mary's County Earth Day event. Hosted at Summerseat Farm, the event was held on Saturday, April 20. Over 500 attendees (196 vehicles) enjoyed farm presentations by Summerseat volunteers, musical performers and browsing 30 vendors who set up displays with information or goods for sale. The CoE also set up information tables, promoted native plants through free native plants and trees for guests, and engaged attendees in conversation on environmental topics. The weather was beautiful and the event was a big success. The 2023 Sustainability Awards were presented to members of Fr Andrew White School and the Resource Conservation and Development Board. Commissioner Colvin was in attendance with his family.

Tree Canopy Task Force

Members submitted Tree Canopy Task Force proposal to LUGM for routing to Commissioners on 4 Apr 2024. Over the course of the year, Commission members and LUGM sponsors participated in proposal questions and answers, tracked the status of approval process and made themselves available to continue participating in the process. The proposal remains in the vetting process.

Bird Safe Windows and Migrations

Dr. Mark Southerland, Safe Skies Maryland gave a data-based presentation at Leonardtown Library on Sat, 4 May 2024 from 2:00 – 4:30 PM.

Dr. Mark Southerland, Safe Skies Maryland supported a Lexington Park Library event 26 Oct 2024, 2:00 – 3:30 in which a sample window application was demonstrated for attendees after the Safe Skies presentation.

The CoE is working with the County Facilities manager to look for opportunities to apply window decals to County buildings and help prevent bird collisions.

Rain Barrel and Composting Event by UMD Extension

Members supported the event on 13 April 2024 from 10:00-12:00 at the County Fairgrounds.

Other areas of interest to the Commission

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

- Energy Efficiency building code
- Trash focus areas
- Participation in Riverfest

- County news as it relates to zoning, policies and/or environmental impacts

The Board 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, while highlighting and supporting 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
- Amanda Yowell, County Zoning Administrator
- Andrew Cheney, LUGM on Zoning and County GIS tools
- Tyler Abbott, Director of Land and Materials – MDE
- Dr. Mark Southerland, Safe Skies Maryland
- Bruce Young, Soil Conservation District for St. Mary's County
- CoE presentation to St Mary's County Citizen's Academy

Summary of Monthly Meeting Topics

January 2024

Sustainability Awards update

Earth Day at Summerseat Farm planning and preparations

Tree Canopy Study and Task Force

Tree Canopy Intern through St. Mary's CSM

Bird-Safe Window Event planning

Learning/Professional Development opportunities: Conference and regional meeting

Community outreach opportunities

February 2024

Guest Speaker: Tyler Abbott, Director of Land and Materials - MDE

Earth Day preparations and planning

Vendors

Budgeting: event expenses

Native plants and tree orders for CoE table

St Mary's CSM Intern application update

Tree Canopy Status: County Resolution versus Task Force

LUGM Director Jessica Anders is supportive

Commissioner Colvin support sought

Rain Barrel workshop support 13 April at Fairgrounds

Bird-Safe window Event, 4 May, Leonardtown Library with Safe Skies Maryland, Dr Mark Southerland

Voted to order CoE polo shirts

March 2024

Tree Canopy proposal status: in review

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

Rain Barrel Workshop with UofMD Extension planning: 13 Apr, Fairgrounds

Earth Day at Summerseat Farm preparations

About 7 vendors/participants

Sustainability Awards: to be announced at Earth Day

7 Nominations

Awards Board Committee (Nicole and Jennifer) meet Mar 8

April 2024

Earth Day at Summerseat Farm (7 CoE Members)

Final planning and budget discussion

Sustainability Awards recap

Rain Barrel & Composting Event support (2 CoE Members)

May 2024

Earth Day recap: Huge success with over 196 cars, 500+ in attendance at Summerseat Farm

30 vendors

Media follow-up

Lessons learned

Commissioner Colvin attendance appreciated

Sustainability awards update - we had 3 schools, 5 submissions for non-profit

Winners: SOMD Resource Conservation & Development

Migratory bird dangers in the Tri-County area: light pollution and windows

Solid Waste Advisory Committee discussion

Budget status

Tree Canopy Task Force update

LUGM Director Andritz sent memo to Dave Wisekopf requesting support

Discussed being a vendor at RiverFest, a St. Mary's River Watershed Association event, Sep 28.

June 2024

Tree canopy Task Force update – nothing new on proposal submitted on 4 April 2024

Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) topic postponed to get collaboration with DPW&T

July 2024

Election of Commission Officers for 2024-2025

Results: Chairperson Molly Boron, Vice-Chairperson Nicole Bega, Secretary Kristen Whitesell

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

Budget discussion

August 2024

Lexington Park Library Bird Safe Window event confirmed with Dr Southerland; Oct 26th, 2:00 – 3:30P

Tree Canopy Task Force discussion

Riverfest – CoE committed to support with information booth. September 28th, 2024.

Intern effort with St Mary's College of Southern Maryland

Tree Canopy Task Force update

Aug 2023 - proposal from Southern Maryland Sierra Club

Apr 2024 – proposal vetted within LUGM and submitted for routing to Commissioners

Goal is are to get a snapshot of 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.

SWAC - Discussed solid waste 10-year plan in preparation for DPW&T discussion in September.

September 2024

Tree Canopy Task Force discussion

Further fee in-lieu discussion

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

Members supported 28 Sep 2024 Riverfest at Historic St Mary's City with booth.

October 2024

Meeting cancelled due to lack of a quorum.

November 2024

Meeting cancelled due to Presidential Election Day.

December 2024

Bruce Young from Soil Conservation District for St. Mary's County provided an informative brief on the role of the Soil Conservation District and the partnering relationships within the County. Of note, he indicated that horse manure composting is a project that could have very positive environmental effects in St Mary's County. Mr. Young is interested in partnering with DPW&T and the CoE on the composting pilot program that the Solid Waste Management Plan allows for. Additionally, the Soil Conservation District is quite supportive of local STEM events and actively engages school-age children about soil health through agriculture, urban, environmental outreach.

Discussed budget request submission and agreed to host/support an Earth Day 2025 event.