

April-May 2021, Bi-Monthly Education Report

Presented to the Board of Directors, Ocean County Soil Conservation District

May 20, 2021

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April - May 2021 Education & Outreach Activities:

In support of OCSCD's Annual Plan of Operations (APO), which includes in its vision *"to be recognized as a conservation leader"*, and includes in its mission *"to protect, restore and sustain fully functioning soil resources..."*, *"further natural resource stewardship through educational programs..."* and *"develop and nurture effective relationships... to sustain functioning ecosystem services..."*, the Education Department is championing the **Jersey-Friendly Yards** initiative, in cooperation with Barnegat Bay Partnership, to effectuate OCSCD's vision and mission. In addition, the Education Department is working with the OCSCD technical staff on two additional grant projects: **Sustainable Practices for Aquaculture Resource Conservation (SPARC)** and **Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project**. In addition, the Education Department continues to provide community and statewide programs, and write grants to support OCSCD's overall mission.

GENERAL OPERATIONS (APO Item #3)

(APO Item #3, Activity 3)

Professional Development:

- April 12, 19, 26, May 3: Perennials for All Seasons, Bruce Crawford, Rutgers (6 hrs) Instructor, Bruce Crawford, State Program Leader in Home and Public Horticulture for Rutgers University taught this 4-program webinar series. He discussed perennials appropriate to plant and enjoy in all New Jersey's seasons, the conditions needed to thrive and which plants are companions in the garden.

EDUCATION INITIATIVES – GRANT RELATED (APO Item #4)

(APO Item #4, Activity 1)

OCSCD is subcontracting with Barnegat Bay Partnership to support watershed-wide education and stewardship initiatives, including Jersey-Friendly Yards

Subcontract with Barnegat Bay Partnership **Part 1**: Communication & Outreach (Education & Stewardship):

The "Part 1: Communication & Outreach" portion of the subcontract has been renewed for another year (FY22). Becky continues to work with Karen Walzer to promote and increase usage of the JFY website as a guide to landscape practices for managing stormwater and reducing nonpoint source pollution in the Barnegat Bay watershed. Responsibilities include:

- Research and develop new content for the Jersey-Friendly Plant Database, Success Stories, Blog, and/or other sections of the JFY website
- Post weekly messages on Jersey-Friendly Yards social media pages (Facebook and Twitter)

Becky is working with BBVMNs to promote and highlight stewardship activities through the **BBVMN Newsletter** to connect BBVMNs with each other and with perspective volunteer opportunities, and to share information about natural resources in the Barnegat Bay watershed.

- Becky is working with the team of **4 BBVMNs** to compile articles for the Summer 2021 issue (July-Sept) of *The Naturalist*
- On May 15, Becky led a team of BBVMNs (and family members) to remove invasive species at John C. Bartlett County Park. This is the 3rd visit on behalf of the Invasive Species Removal Project at this location; **10 volunteers** offered their time; we focused on pulling Mugwort.

Becky is working with to write an article about "hell strips" – replacing lawn between the curb and sidewalk with Jersey-Friendly plant recommendations.

Becky is offering free Jersey-Friendly Yards webinars to “green groups” throughout New Jersey, as part of the subcontract (12 per year / 1 per month).

- Becky has booked a May 20 webinar, “Attracting Birds to Your Jersey-Friendly Yard”, with the Ocean County Library
- Becky is working the Canco Conservancy in Jersey City to confirm a date for a JFY webinar.

Subcontract with Barnegat Bay Partnership **Part 2: Bay-Friendly Certification Project (3 year contract):**

Becky continues to work with Karen Walzer of BBP on the **Jersey-Friendly Yards (Bay Friendly) Certification program**. We are continuing to draft standards for Residential, School and Municipality Certification. We anticipate completing the Standards by the end of June, and will move on to developing accompanying webpages on the JFY website where the Certification Program will be housed.

(APO Item #4, Activity 1)

Expand granted projects: Jersey-Friendly Yards

- **2021 Jersey-Friendly Yards Webinar Series:** The JFY Conference Committee launched our 2021 webinar series, “What’s Bugging Your Jersey-Friendly Yard?”, in January. We presented 5 programs so far, in our series of 6 webinars. Webinars are offered once a month from January-June. Programs are recorded (with permission from the presenter) and made available on the Jersey-Friendly Yards website. The Committee will be offering another short webinar series for the summer; our theme will be *Friendly by Design*. Presenters will share garden planning and design ideas. We have confirmed Bruce Crawford, Elaine Silverstein and Becky Laboy as our 3 presenters for July, August and September, 2021.
- Becky assisted BBP with planting their **new Jersey-Friendly pollinator garden** on May 19, at Ocean County College, with plant donations through Xerces Society and Pinelands Nursery.

(APO Item #4, Activity 1)

OCSCD has been awarded another year of funding for the Sustainable Practices for Aquaculture Resources Conservation (SPARC). This is a technical assistance grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) with funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). District staff, Kristin Adams, Erosion Control Specialist, is taking the lead on this project.

Sustainable Practices for Aquaculture Resources Conservation (SPARC) project:

This is the fourth year of the NACD technical assistance grant program, which was created with funds from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help increase staffing at the field level and provide conservation services to farmers, ranchers and local communities across the U.S. Ocean County Soil Conservation District's **Sustainable Practices for Aquaculture Resources Conservation (SPARC)** project will build District capacity through two pathways that will occur simultaneously. 1) District staff and partners will connect with local shellfish farmers primarily within Barnegat Bay and Great Bay, to gain a better understanding of their specific natural resource concerns. 2) Ms. Adams will work towards NRCS Apprentice Conservation Planner certification, with a long-term goal of achieving NRCS Certified Conservation Planner status. 3) The District will provide a boots-on-the-ground, local connection between NRCS and the shellfish producers to further develop the conservation practices of the NJ NRCS Aquaculture Initiative while increasing producer participation and involvement.

(APO Item #4, Activity 1)

OCSCD is partnering with South Jersey Resource Conservation and Development Council, Lakewood Township Department of Public Works, and the Camden County Soil Conservation District on a grant from the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection: Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project. The grant is funded by a Federal 319(h) Water Quality Restoration grant awarded by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection to the SJRC&D. District employee, Brittany Moore, Erosion Control Specialist, is taking the lead on this project.

Update: Field Inspection and Basin Analysis:

- Efforts are underway to retrofit two selected stormwater basins this spring, under the [Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project](#). Stormwater retrofit designs were created and approved for two stormwater detention basins in Lakewood Township, one located at Avenue of the States adjacent to FirstEnergy Park, and another located on Commonwealth Drive. Both retrofit designs include the use of a no-till seed drill to incorporate native vegetation within the basin. [Native vegetation](#) offers both hydrological and ecological benefits. Native grasses and plants have deeper root systems compared to standard turf grass, which can filter and infiltrate stormwater runoff more effectively. Once established, native vegetation also requires less frequent maintenance, reducing costs and emissions from maintenance equipment. In addition, native vegetation provides habitat and a food source for local wildlife and offers an enhanced aesthetic appearance for the community. In April, OCSCD staff, Ramon Mejia, Luis Almeyda, and Sean Yeats teamed with Eileen Miller, [Team Habitat](#) Coordinator for [South Jersey Resource Conservation & Development Council](#) (SJRC&D), to collect and test soil samples from the two selected basins. Soil samples will be collected and tested throughout the 4-year project to track the positive changes native vegetation provides to the basins' soil health. The Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project is funded by a [Federal 319\(h\) Water Quality Restoration](#) grant awarded by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection granted to the South Jersey Resource Conservation & Development Council. *(Featured Photo: NJ Water Supply Authority)*

(APO Item #4, Activity 2)

Seeks grants and Funding:

- Grant funding has been extended for a third year through the Barnegat Bay Partnership subcontract: Part 1 – communication and outreach (education and stewardship) support.
- OCSCD has been awarded a second year of funding (for a total of 2 years of funding) for the Sustainable Practices for Aquaculture Resources Conservation (SPARC). This is a technical assistance grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), with funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

EDUCATION INITIATIVES (APO Item #5)

(APO Item #5, Activity 1)

Website, Media and Promotions: Becky continues to...

- Maintain and enhance the Education components of the OCSCD website, and is working with Lisa Mazzuca, OCSCD's new website designer, to help create a more user-friendly website interface.
- Promote OCSCD on social media, through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Technical staff are now submitting photos and captions to post; Jessica Pinto is assisting with enhancing comments pertaining to and in support of the SESC standards.
- Maintains database and mailing list of 1,900 active contacts for E&O initiatives in OCSCD's Constant Contact database.
- Create and distribute a monthly OCSCD eNewsletter to promote programs, projects and conservation news.
- Develop an OCSCD Annual Report, encompassing and touting the many projects and programs the District staff are engaged, with July 1st as a target release date.

(APO Item #5, Activity 2, 3, 5, 8)

Special Projects:

- **Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable:** This year marked the District's 24th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable. Our 2021 theme was *Inspiration for a Jersey-Friendly School Yard*. Three webinars were provided, with the help of our talented partners: BBP, Rutgers and JCNERR, designed specifically for teachers and environmental educators to guide them through the "what, how and why's" of a Jersey-Friendly School Yard. Webinars were offered weekly, between April 14 and May 1. All programs were free, and recorded; and uploaded to OCSCD's YouTube Channel. Unfortunately, our programs were not well-attended this year, with a total of **6 people** attending the 3 programs. Our planned in-person Garden Tours were canceled due to low registration – only 2 people registered to attend 1 of the tours. **We will begin planning for our

(hopefully) in-person Roundtable next year, which will be the District's 25th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable!

- **Poster Contest:** The 2021 Poster Contest theme was: [Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities](#). The District's Grand Champion Winner was David Benson (Grade Group 4-6) of Stafford Intermediate School, who received a \$50 cash prize. The District received 21 entries this year in 2 of the 4 Grade Groups (2-3 and 4-6). The winning posters of both grade groups were forwarded to the NJ State Contest.
- **Envirothon:** The 2021 NJ Envirothon will be offered in a virtual format this year on May 22. Becky is working with Lily Mehl, the Executive Director of NJACD, as well as colleagues from other SCD's to facilitate this event. There will be an Envirothon Training session for teams was on May 3. (Last year's Envirothon was cancelled due to COVID-19.)
- **Trout-in-the-Classroom:** There is no Trout Release Event this year, which typically took place at the Forest Resource Education Center, where several schools gathered to attend workshops for students and release their trout. Schools that are participating in the TIC program at their school this year, are required to coordinate with FREC staff for independent trout releases.

(APO Item #5, Activity 6)

Internships/Volunteers:

- The Education Department does not have any new interns at this time. Our former intern, Gabriella Marzella is actively looking for a position as a classroom teacher; the District is supporting her efforts as a reference.

(APO Item #5, Activity 7)

Outreach Programs, Conferences and Events:

- March 16: Presented ***Gardening with Jersey-Friendly Yards*** to Girl Scout Troop 50427 in support of the girls earning their Gardener Badge. Program included an introduction to the Jersey-Friendly Yards website, focusing on the gardens featured in *Success Stories* as inspiration for a garden, *Interactive Yard* as a tool for designing a garden, the *8 Steps to a Jersey-Friendly Yard*, specifically *Step 1: Plan Before You Plant* and *Step 2: Start With Healthy Soil*, and the *Jersey-Friendly Plant Database* as a tool for selecting appropriate plants for your garden. I also featured several Jersey-Friendly gardens installed throughout Ocean County over the past several years, as inspiration for their own gardens. (12 Girl Scout participants, plus 3 parents)
- March 25: **Unearth the Life Beneath Your Feet, presented by Dr. Jennifer Krumins** Becky is collaborating with Dr. Steve Yergeau of Rutgers Cooperative Extension to host a webinar series supporting soil topics and expert speakers called "Get More Dirt on Your Soil". This series is a follow-up to our 2020 webinar series called, "Get The Dirt on Your Soil". (137 participants)
- April 13: **What Lurks Above and Below: Spotted Lanternfly and Crazy Worms**, webinar #4 of the Jersey-Friendly Yards spring 2021 webinar series, presented by Paul Kurtz, Entomologist, NJ Department of Agriculture. (128 participants)
- April 14: **Roundtable: Planning Your Jersey-Friendly School Yard, presented by Becky Laboy and Karen Walzer** This was the first webinar presented on behalf of the Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable, series of 3 webinars. (2 participants)
- April 15: **An Organic Gold Mine in Your Yard, presented by Fred Schoenagel** This is the second webinar in the "Get More Dirt on Your Soil" webinar series, hosted in collaboration with Dr. Steve Yergeau of Rutgers Cooperative Extension. (112 participants)
- April 21: **Roundtable: Why Jersey-Friendly School Yards? Understanding the Effects of Eutrophication and Coastal Acidification, presented by Kaitlin Gannon, JCNERR.** This was the second webinar presented on behalf of the Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable, series of 3 webinars. (2 participants)
- April 28: **Roundtable: How Does Your Garden Grow?, presented by Dr. Steve Yergeau, RCE.** This was the third webinar presented on behalf of the Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable, series of 3 webinars. (2 participants)
- May 5: **Breaking Ground on Composting, presented by Sandra Blaine-Snow** This is the third of three webinars in the "Get More Dirt on Your Soil" webinar series, hosted in collaboration with Dr. Steve Yergeau of Rutgers Cooperative Extension. (77 participants)
- May 11: **Attracting Bees and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants**, webinar #5 of the Jersey-Friendly Yards spring 2021 webinar series, presented by Heather Holm. (241 participants)

(APO Item #5, Activity 7)

Outreach Programs, Conferences, Events Anticipated:

- May 20: **Attracting Birds to Your Jersey-Friendly Yard**, presented by Becky, hosted by the Ocean County Library.
- June 23: **Healthy Soil for a Healthy Yard** – a 20-minute program as part of a 1 hour series hosted by Sustainable South Jersey, presented by Becky.
- TBA: Jersey-Friendly Yards program hosted by Canco Conservancy of Jersey City, presented by Becky.
- September 14: Jersey-Friendly Yards program for the summer webinar series, presented by Becky; title TBD.