

## August/September 2023, Bi-Monthly Education Report

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

September 21, 2023

Becky Laboy, M.Ed., Education Outreach Specialist

### August – September 2023 Education & Outreach Activities, as per the Annual Plan of Operations:

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** initiative in cooperation with Barnegat Bay Partnership, to effectuate OCSCD's vision and mission. In addition, the Education Department is supporting 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 outreach programs and statewide initiatives, as well as research and write grants to support OCSCD's overall mission.

### (APO Item #1) IMPLEMENTATION OF CHAPTER 251 SOIL EROSION & SEDIMENT CONTROL ACT & OTHER NATURAL RESOURCE PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

#### 1. (APO Item #1, Activity 14) Becky maintains the District Website. (See also, APO Item #5, Activity 1)

- Becky maintains and updates the District website with Chapter 251 SESC-related information, Education & Outreach information, and general updates.
- In addition, Lisa Mazzuca of [On Your Mark Website Design and Graphics](#) is under contract with the District to provide website support, as needed.

#### 2. (APO Item #1, Activity 17 and Sub-Task)

- Becky researches and supports funding opportunities for District Technical Staff to be trained in non-SESC programs and projects.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Sub-Task, #4, SJRC&D, 319h Basin Retrofit Grant - Lakewood: Becky and Brittany Moore are working together on the Lakewood Stormwater Basin Retrofit Grant Project. Brittany authored an article, **Selecting Appropriate Species for Basin Retrofit Projects**, included in the Partner Projects section of OCSCD's [September newsletter](#), and also available as a [blog post](#) on OCSCD's website.

### (APO Item #3) GENERAL OPERATIONS

1. (APO Item #3, Activity 1) Becky provides support and assistance to Christine Raabe, Jean Baluski and Mary Ellen Banfield to provide for the accountability of the District to the public, legislature and to NJDA-SSCC, by posting on the website, the following:

- financial information
- Board meeting minutes, agendas and meeting notices, as required
- Public Notices

2. (APO Item #3, Activity 3) Becky participates in various training opportunities to enhance overall abilities as a District employee.

- Becky met with Christine Raabe on August 23 to discuss her Individual Professional Development Plan for FY23; IPD Plan was approved by Christine Raabe.

3. (APO Item #3, Activity 5) Becky serves as OCSCD representative member of the Barnegat Bay Partnership's Communication and Education Committee (CEC)

- Becky has submitted a self-nomination for CEC co-chair. The CEC will be voting on all nominations and notice will be provided.

- Becky attends bi-monthly meetings of the CEC and reports on OCSCD’s education initiatives related to National Estuary Program activities and goals, such as those specified in BBP’s [CCMP](#) and [Communication Plan](#).
  - Sub-Task: The shared services agreement for: Part 2 - Bay-Friendly Yards was concluded on September 6, 2023. *(Please see APO Item #4, Activity 1 for more details on the Final Report.)*

#### **(APO Item #4) EDUCATION INITIATIVES – GRANT RELATED**

**1. (APO Item #4, Activity 1)** Becky manages, coordinates, administers and implements current grants, and seeks to expand granted projects when opportunities arise.

##### Grant 1: Jersey-Friendly Yards (Bay-Friendly Stewardship Certification Program)

- The subcontract with Barnegat Bay Partnership for the Bay-Friendly Stewardship Certification Project (3 year contract) **has concluded on September 6, 2023.**
  - Becky assisted Karen Walzer, Senior Outreach Coordinator for BBP, on the **Jersey-Friendly Yards Certification Program**. For the past 3 years, BBP staff, Karen Walzer, Senior Outreach Coordinator, Bailey Sanders, Stewardship Specialist, and District staff, Jessica Pinto, Erosion Control Specialist, and Becky Laboy, Education Outreach Specialist, and OCSCD subcontractor, Eileen Miller, Soil Health Specialist, Healthy Landscapes NJ, LLC., all assisted with the implementation of the grant. Becky will be submitting the FY23 Report #5 to BBP, which covers the “extension” offered by NJDEP, from July 1 – September 6, 2023.
  - The implementation of this grant was a success! Deliverables include new JFY Certification webpages for enrollment and implementation of the Jersey-Friendly Yards Certification Program for Residents, Schools and Municipalities.
  - Webpages: [Jersey-Friendly Yards Certification Program website](#)
    - **Resident Certification Program:** <https://www.jerseyyards.org/certification-program/residents-certification/>
    - **School Certification Program:** <https://www.jerseyyards.org/certification-program/schools-certification/>
    - **Municipal Certification Program:** <https://www.jerseyyards.org/certification-program/municipal-certification/>
  - Our team piloted each of the 3 certification programs. For the Resident Certification Program, we provided 12 presentations to the public, introducing them to the program and providing a tutorial on how to enroll and achieve certification. For the School and Municipal certification programs, we worked with specific schools and municipalities who enrolled. Schools: Brick Twp High School (Teacher: Gary Paxton) and Pinelands Regional High School (Teacher: Jim Ardoin). Municipalities: Point Pleasant Borough (Project Leader: Kelly Noto) and Pine Beach (Project Leader: Dave McKeon).
  - Culminating School and Municipal Projects included:
    - **Brick Twp. High School:** Mr. Paxton’s STEM students designed and installed a Pollinator Garden that was specifically engineered to address an erosion issue in the courtyard, and support pollinators.
    - **Pinelands Regional High School:** Mr. Ardoin’s Honors Ecology students engaged in lessons that addressed ecological concepts outlined in the 8 Steps to a Jersey-Friendly Yard School Certification Program. An Interpretive Trail including signage was designed and will be installed along the trails in the woodlands and bogs on school property that highlight the ecological concepts that Mr. Ardoin teaches throughout the school year.
    - **Point Pleasant Borough:** Ms. Noto and the Point Pleasant Garden Club designed and installed “Pollinator Point”, a native plant demonstration garden at the Point Pleasant Borough Municipal Building property.
    - **Pine Beach:** Mr. McKeon and the Pine Beach Native Garden Club addressed the invasive species taking over a small local public garden, Pocket Park, and restored and expanded the native plantings. They also augmented the native plantings at Admiral Point Park, a Jersey-Friendly garden previously installed in 2017. Additional native plants were specifically selected to support the life cycle of local pollinators.

## Grant 2: Lakewood Township Stormwater Basins Retrofit Project

OCSCD is partnering with South Jersey Resource Conservation and Development Council (SJRC&D), 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 (NJDEP) to SJRC&D.

- OCSCD's role is to implement and promote the Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project, including education and outreach programs to bring awareness to the importance of the Basin Retrofit projects. Brittany Moore is the lead project coordinator on behalf of OCSCD and Becky Laboy is assisting and focusing primarily on the communications and education component. Read Ms. Moore's most recent [blog post](#).

## **2. (APO Item #4, Activity 2) Seeks Grants and Funding to support both on-going and new initiatives and programs:**

Becky continues to research potential grants and opportunities that will support the District's Mission.

- The July, 2023, OCSCD Board Meeting took place at the Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education. The OCSCD Board and the Natural Resource Education Foundation (NREF) Board, who manages LHC, discussed the possibility of an MOU between OCSCD and NREF to house OCSCD's Education Department at LHC, and to provide public educational programs that support the missions and visions of both entities. By combining the resources of both entities, more opportunities for grant funding to support education programs are anticipated.

## **(APO Item #5) EDUCATION INITIATIVES**

**1. (APO Item #5, Activity 1)** To maintain and enhance OCSCD website. To more effectively utilize and disseminate pertinent and educational resources and assist in fulfilling OCSCD Mission. Sub-Task: update/create/maintain database & mailing list/contact for E&O initiatives. Constant Contact – Dissemination of email newsletters/updates, announcements, etc.

### **Communications: Website, Newsletter, Blogs, Social Media and Annual Report:**

Becky has been using several OCSCD media communications platforms in an effort to engage a broader audience in support of the District's Mission. OCSCD staff have been regularly contributing articles for publication.

- OCSCD's new [website](#)
- Constant Contact: Over the past 2 months, Becky reviewed all contacts in the Constant Contact database and deleted all inactive/non-existent email addresses.
- [Newsletters](#) continue to be distributed monthly through our Constant Contact platform, typically on the first day of the month, to our audience of 1,713 contacts on our "General List". The September newsletter was sent to these 1,713 contacts, of which, 1025 are considered "most engaged"; 674 contacts opened the newsletter - a 41% "open rate"; 52 contacts clicked on embedded links; 1 contact unsubscribed; we had 1 new subscriber. Our newsletter offers featured sections such as "Education Programs & Events", "Staff in the Field" and "Partner Projects", where we promote and feature educational programs, projects and events, as well as grants, current partner projects, technical information regarding SESC Standards, and informative content about soil, water and natural resource conservation in the Barnegat Bay watershed. OCSCD has an additional 2,192 statewide education administrators, used for our Roundtable campaigns, totaling 3,905 subscribers.
- [Blog posts](#) on our website highlight the District's many projects, as well as our soil conservation message, and are linked in our newsletters and promoted through social media.
- Newsletters, blogs and other soil conservation information are also distributed via the District's social media platforms by Becky and Kristin Adams via [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), conveniently through the Constant Contact platform. Constant Contact no longer supports Twitter ("X").
- For access to all our social media and project links, visit the "[Connect](#)" page on our website
- Becky continues to work with OCSCD staff on the [OCSCD Annual Report](#), highlighting the many projects, programs and partnerships with which the District staff are engaged. Publication of the OCSCD Annual Report covering 2023 and 2022 is anticipated for January 1st, 2024.

**2. (APO Item #5, Activity 2) Becky maintains communications and networks with regional and statewide Conservation Education and Environmental Education partners,** and is involved in several initiatives, including Barnegat Bay Roundtable Steering & Planning Committee, Barnegat Bay Estuary Program’s Communication and Education Committee, Conservation Partnership meetings, Natural Resource Education Foundation of New Jersey (NREF), Jersey-Friendly Yards and the New Jersey Bay Islands Initiative.

- Becky is representing OCSCD at the monthly New Jersey Bay Islands Initiative (NJBII) “Communications Working Group”. Becky and Kristin Adams also attend monthly online meetings with all NJBII partners and constituents. On August 30, Becky and Kristin joined NJBII partners for a field trip to the Long Beach Township Marine Field Station where information was shared by Angela Andersen, Director of Sustainability, Long Beach Township and Kimberly McKenna, Associate Director, Stockton University Coastal Research Center on the state of the bay islands, specifically Clam Cove, including marsh conditions, elevation data and restoration plans. Participants kayaked and boated out to Clam Cove to see the erosion taking place, discuss the tools that are in place to collect data, and restoration ideas.

**3. (APO Item #5, Activity 3) Poster Contest:** Visit OCSCD’s [Annual NJ Conservation Poster Contest webpage](#) to see our 2023 winners. Winning posters were photographed and the photos were submitted to the statewide contest. Statewide Winners have been selected. [Winning statewide posters can be found on the NJACD website.](#)

**4. (APO Item #5, Activity 4) Promote the Distribution of Low Maintenance Landscaping Guides.** Becky continues searching for grants to support funding to print additional LML Guides.

**5. (APO Item #5, Activity 5) Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable:** Planning for the 27th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable is underway. A Steering Committee convened again on August 14 to continue to discuss dates, theme, topics and early promotion of the event. A Teacher Survey is being compiled to capture teacher’s thoughts, opinions and ideas regarding logistics, theme, etc... for the 27<sup>th</sup> BBEERT.

**6. (APO Item #5, Activity 6) Internship & Volunteer Opportunities and Agreements:** The District has no education interns at this time.

**7. (APO Item #5, Activity 7) Offer a variety of Outreach Programs based on soil health & natural resources to various groups/organizations; at least 12 per year.**

In 2023, Becky has presented:

- **February 8: Don’t Treat Your Soil Like Dirt – Building a Foundation for your Jersey-Friendly Yards,** webinar hosted by Bergen-Passaic Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Jersey. **(151 Attendees)**
- **February 23:** Becky co-presented **Jersey-Friendly Yards Resident Certification Program** webinar with Karen Walzer, BBP, hosted by the Jersey Shore Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Jersey. This program fulfilled requirements for the Bay-Friendly/Jersey-Friendly Stewardship Certification Program grant, in partnership with BBP. **(14 attendees)**
- **March 4: Soil is the Foundation of Life on Earth,** in-person program presented at the Annual Spring Meeting and Conference of the Native Plant Society of New Jersey. **(373 attendees)**
- **April 12:** Becky co-presented **Jersey-Friendly Yards Resident Certification Program** webinar with Karen Walzer, BBP, hosted by JCNERR as part of their afternoon “Lunch ‘N Learn” series. This program will count towards fulfillment of requirements for the Bay-Friendly/Jersey-Friendly Stewardship Certification Program grant, in partnership with BBP. **(20 Attendees)**
- **April 12:** Becky co-presented with Karen Walzer (BBP) and Eileen Miller (under subcontract with OCSCD for JFY) an in-person program, **New Jersey Soil Health Assessment** for the Point Pleasant Garden Club, local officials and the general public. **(20 attendees)**
- **April 23:** Becky presented an in-person program, **Jersey-Friendly Yards Resident Certification Program** at the Barnegat Library. This program will count towards fulfillment of requirements for the Bay-Friendly/Jersey-Friendly Stewardship Certification Program grant, in partnership with BBP. **(2 Attendees)**
- **July 25:** Becky presented in an-person program, **The Soils of Burlington County and the Plants That Thrive Here,** to the Southwest Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Jersey. **(30 Attendees)**

- **July 27:** Becky presented an in-person program, **Jersey-Friendly Yards Resident Certification Program** at the Little Egg Harbor Environmental Commission and the attending public. **(15 Attendees)**
- **August 17:** Becky co-presented with Jessica Pinto, Karen Walzer (BBP) and Bailey Sanders (BBP) at the JCNERR Teachers on the Estuary TOTE professional development program. Together, we introduced the teachers to the **Jersey-Friendly Yards School Certification Program** and provided an example lesson on Step 2: Start With Healthy Soil. **(15 Attendees)**
- **September 21:** Becky will be presenting **Jersey-Friendly Yards: Landscaping for a Healthy Environment** for the NJ Pinelands Commission.
- **September 30: Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference** – the JFY Conference Planning Committee (Christine Raabe, Becky Laboy, Karen Walzer, Bailey Sanders, Steve Yergeau, Susan Servidio) will be facilitating their annual [JFY conference](#).

**8. (APO Item #5, Activity 8) Envirothon:** The 2024 National Envirothon “Current Issue” topic has been announced: *Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future*. The NJ Envirothon committee will be convening before the end of the year. Please visit [OCSCD’s Envirothon webpage](#) for more information as it becomes available.

**9. (APO Item #5, Activity 9) Track Participants, evaluations, provide reports on E&O activities to District Director and Board:** Becky maintains constant contact with District Director, Christine Raabe, and provides bi-monthly reports regarding all education activities to the OCSCD Board of Supervisors.

**10. (APO Item #5, Activity 10) Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference & Webinars** The Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference committee will be facilitating their 2023 annual [JFY conference](#) on Saturday, September 30, from 8:30am-12:00pm followed by a native plant sale from 12:00-2:00pm. The theme is “Changing Climate, Changing Yards”. Featured speakers will include Dr. Christopher Obrupta, Extension Specialist in Water Resources, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, and Christopher Miller, Manager/Agronomist, New Jersey Plant Materials Center, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. More information will be available on the [Jersey-Friendly Yards website](#).