

December 2023/January 2024, Bi-Monthly Education Report

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

January 18, 2024

Becky Laboy, M.Ed., Education Outreach Specialist

December, 2023 – January, 2024 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 continues to champion the **Jersey-Friendly** initiative in cooperation with Barnegat Bay Partnership, to effectuate OCSCD's vision and mission. In addition, the Education Department is supporting OCSCD technical staff on the **Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project**, and is an active partner in the **New Jersey Bay Islands Initiative**. 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 #3, Activity 1 and 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.
- 2nd 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.

(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.

- 1st Sub-Task, Becky develops an Individual Professional Development Plan annual, and reviews it with Christine Raabe, District Director. and Brittany Moore are working together on the Lakewood Stormwater Basin Retrofit Grant Project.

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

- Becky now serves as the CEC Co-Chair. Becky is working with CEC Chair Joel Mott, NJ Pinelands Commission, and Karen Walzer, Senior Public Outreach Coordinator, BBP, on the goals and objectives for future CEC meetings.
- 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 between OCSCD and BBP in support of Jersey-Friendly Yards / watershed stewardship will be renewed in February, 2024, for a period of one year.

(APO Item #4) EDUCATION INITIATIVES – GRANT RELATED

1. (APO Item #4, Activity 1) Becky continues to seek and 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) concluded on September 6, 2023. [Please see the 3-page article in the 2022-2023 Annual Report on the Jersey-Friendly Yards Certification Program for Residents, Schools and Municipalities.](#)

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. [Please read the Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project article in the 2022-2023 Annual Report.](#)

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.

- We are still waiting to hear about the status of the grant proposal Becky submitted to the EPA Region 2 Environmental Education grant, on November 7. The project is titled: *Cultivating Resilient Communities: Understanding Soil as a Climate Mitigation Tool*. OCSCD’s proposal was submitted in partnership with Natural Resource Education Foundation of New Jersey (NREF) and New Jersey Resources (NJR).

(APO Item #5) EDUCATION INITIATIVES

1. (APO Item #5, Activity 1) Becky maintains and enhances OCSCD’s website to more effectively utilize and disseminate pertinent and educational resources and assist in fulfilling OCSCD Mission.

- Sub-Task: Becky maintains the communications database & mailing/contact list for E&O initiatives. Constant Contact is the tool used to disseminate newsletters/updates, announcements, etc.

Communications: Website, Newsletter, Blog, 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 in OCSD’s newsletter.

- OCSCD’s [website](#)
- Constant Contact: Becky keeps an updated list of contacts in the District’s Constant Contact database.
- [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”.
 - [December Newsletter](#)
 - [January Newsletter](#)
- [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.
- [2022-2023 Annual Report](#): has been published and is available on our website. This Report captures both the technical and educational accomplishments of the past two years.

- 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

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.

3. (APO Item #5, Activity 3) Poster Contest: The topic for the 2024 Poster Contest has been announced: "**May The Forest Be With You, Always**". The Posters Contest is announced on OCSCD's [Annual NJ Conservation Poster Contest webpage](#) and will be communicated with the public through our newsletter.

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: The date of the [27th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable](#) has been announced. Please mark your calendars for **Wednesday, April 17**. The 27th Roundtable will follow timing and logistics of past years.

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) Becky offers a variety of Outreach Programs based on soil health & natural resources to various groups/organizations; at least 12 per year.

***In 2023 Becky presented **19 programs** and reached **1,002 community members** through education and outreach programs.

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 in-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 presented **Jersey-Friendly Yards: Landscaping for a Healthy Environment** for the NJ Pinelands Commission. **(35 Attendees)**
- **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](#). **(98 Attendees)**
- **October 3:** Becky provided an outreach program at Pinelands Regional High School for 3 “Barrens to Bay” classes, focusing on local soil series along the Gifford’s Creek Trail for Jim Ardoin’s students (Participant in the Jersey-Friendly Yards School Certification Pilot Program). Holes were dug and soil samples were collected for Downer, Manahawkin and Lakehurst soil series. **(55 Students)**
- **October 10:** Becky provided follow-up outreach program at Pinelands Regional High School for 3 “Barrens to Bay” classes. Downer and Lakehurst soil samples were sieved to determine texture, NPK and pH testing conducted. **(55 Students)**
- **October 17:** Becky accompanied Karen Walzer and Bailey Sanders of BBP to Brick Township High School (participant in the Jersey-Friendly Yards School Certification Pilot Program) to see the garden, present the new plant ID signs, and provide a lesson about Fall Gardens for Birds and Wildlife. (JFY Step 7: Wildlife Habitat) **(5 Students)**
- **October 26:** Becky provided an outreach program for Southern Regional High School for “Barrens to Beaches” class. Presented overview of a soil profile. Walked a school trail and dug a hole to explore Downer soil. Collected soil sample to dry for an upcoming follow-up. **(16 Students)**
- **November 8:** Becky presented “Trees and Shrubs for a Winter Wildlife Garden” to Stafford Township Garden Club. Shared information about Jersey-Friendly Yards Municipal Certification Program. **(14 Attendees)**
- **November 15:** Becky provided a PPT program to the Master Gardeners of Monmouth County: *Jersey-Friendly Winter Wildlife Garden*. **(60 Attendees)**
- **November 16:** Becky provided an outreach program for Southern Regional High School for “Barrens to Beaches” class, as a follow-up to the visit on October 26th. Students sieved the soil sample they collected, and determined the soil texture of the Downer soil on the school property and discussed the relationships between texture, nutrients, soil biota, plants communities and overall soil health. **(16 Students)**
- **December 5:** Becky provided a webinar for *World Soil Day*, discussing the physical, chemical and biological properties of soil and the importance of soil health. **(8 Attendees)**

8. (APO Item #5, Activity 8) Envirothon: The 2024 National Envirothon “Current Issue” topic has been announced: *Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future*. 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 On September 30, 2023, OCSCD, in collaboration with BBP and RCE of Ocean County hosted our annual Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference at the Gateway Building on the Ocean County College campus, with 98 attendees. OCSCD staff, Mary Ellen Banfield and intern, Liam McBride, assisted Christine Raabe and Becky Laboy with tabling at the event. In December, Karen Walzer, Senior Public Outreach Coordinator, Barnegat Bay Partnership has announced her retirement, which will be on February 1, 2024. BBP’s Stewardship Specialist, Bailey Sanders, will continue to lead the JFY initiative on behalf of BBP.