

April-May 2024, Bi-Monthly Education Report

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

May 16, 2024

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April – May, 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 Yards** 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**, is an active partner in the **New Jersey Bay Islands Initiative**, and offers support to the **South Jersey Resource Conservation & Development Council** (SJRC&D). 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. We are moving forward with plans to execute the education component of the grant. Becky regularly attends the SJRC&D meetings.

(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.

- **May 22:** Becky will be attending professional development with NJ Department of Agriculture, *"Sustainable Pathways in Farm to School"*, presented by Nicole Broadwater, held at the Burlington County Agricultural Center, Moorestown, NJ.

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 Bailey Sanders, Stewardship Specialist, 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](#). As CEC Co-Chair, Becky attends BBP Advisory Committee Meetings.
 - Sub-Task: The shared services agreement between OCSCD and BBP in support of Jersey-Friendly Yards / watershed stewardship was renewed on February 12, 2024, for a period of one year. (See APO Item #4, Activity 1.)

(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 (subcontract with Barnegat Bay Partnership 2/12/24 – 2/12/25)

- Becky is devoting time towards the BBP/OCSCD subcontract, “Jersey-Friendly Stewardship Certification Project”. Tasks include: 1) develop and deliver age-appropriate lessons and activities on soil health and other JFY topics to participating students in at least 10 enrolled schools. Lessons and activities are designed to assist schools with meeting the requirements of the JFY School Certification Program. 2) Provide technical advice and support to at least 5 enrolled schools about the design and installation of JFY School Certification Program projects in their schoolyards; advise on issues related to soil health, plant selection, and wildlife habitat enhancement. OCSCD will provide a total of \$15,000 of billable services and \$15,000 of in-kind services to this project over the term of the subcontract.
 - Becky continues to develop age-appropriate soil, water, plant and wildlife-focused lessons to support the 8 Steps to a Jersey-Friendly Yard, as it pertains to the JFY School Certification Program.
 - Becky is in contact with teachers from several schools who have enrolled in the program, including:
 1. Nellie Bennett Elementary School, Point Pleasant Borough
 2. Elms Elementary School, Jackson Twp
 3. Whiting Elementary School, Manchester Twp
 4. Manchester Twp Elementary School, Manchester Twp
 5. Central Regional High School, Berkeley Twp

Grant 2: Lakewood Township Stormwater Basins Retrofit Project

OCSCD is partnering with South Jersey Resource Conservation and Development Council (SJRC&D) represented by Eileen Miller, Team Habitat Coordinator, the Camden County Soil Conservation District represented by Craig McGee, Director, and Lakewood Township Department of Public Works, 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. Brittany Moore is the lead project coordinator on behalf of OCSCD and Becky Laboy is focusing primarily on the communications and education component.

- We are in the process of developing the Education and Outreach component of the grant to bring awareness and knowledge to the public about the importance of the Basin Retrofit projects.
 - Planning a “Tour de’ Basins” in October to showcase the retrofits of at least 3 basins.
 - Actively documenting progress with photos and video.
 - Gathering resources to put together a Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project “toolkit”.

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 were informed 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*, submitted in partnership with Natural Resource Education Foundation of New Jersey (NREF) and New Jersey Resources (NJR). Unfortunately, we were not awarded funding for this project proposal.
- Jessica Pinto applied for, and received, a Xerces Society Pollinator Kit to create a pollinator garden at Common Grounds Community Garden in Lakewood Township. Additional partners on this project include Lakewood Township Public Works and Brick Township Municipal Utilities Authority.

- 500 native plants will be picked-up from Pinelands Nursery and planted on Thursday May 30 by Common Grounds crew with assistance from OCSCD staff.
- On June 2, Becky will be presenting a program with Shari Kondrup from BTMUA, at the Common Grounds Community Garden, 10:30am-12:00pm; program topics include healthy soil and water.

(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”.
 - [April newsletter](#)
 - [May 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.
- Becky will be attending the NJBII annual Field Trip on June 4, which will take place at Sedge Islands.

3. (APO Item #5, Activity 3) Poster Contest: The winners for the 2024 Poster Contest have been selected and can be viewed on OCSCD’s [Annual NJ Conservation Poster Contest webpage](#) . The theme this year was: “**May The Forest Be With You, Always**”. OCSCD’s Grand Champion Winner is Saoirse Parsons, Grade 10, New Egypt High School, who received a Certificate of Recognition and a \$50 check from OCSCD. First Place Winners are Abigail Scanlon, Grade 8, Veterans Memorials Middle School, and Abigail Alaimo, Grade 6, Veterans Memorial Middle School, who both received Certificates of Recognition.

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.

- Several boxes of the Spanish version of the LML Guides were provided to BBP to be distributed alongside their new Spanish version of their Going Native brochure.

5. (APO Item #5, Activity 5) Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable: The [27th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable](#) was a great success. The BBEERT took place on Wednesday, April 17, at the Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education. Thank you, Mr. John Teidemann, for providing Opening Remarks this year. This year's theme was "Sustainable Connections", as proposed by the staff at the OC Department of Solid Waste Management. The dinner was funded by an Ocean County Clean Communities grant. Our keynote presenter is Shaina Brenner, 2022 Milken Educator Award recipient, and her husband Jose xxx filmed the event and provided a finished copy for the District: [27th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable](#). Please visit our [BBEERT webpage](#) to view the details and a Gallery of Photos of the event. Please see the attached document showing the results of our 2024 BBEERT Evaluation.

6. (APO Item #5, Activity 6) Internship & Volunteer Opportunities and Agreements: 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.

2024 E&O programs presented:

- **May 17:** Becky will present a **New Jersey Soil Health Assessment** workshop for Point Pleasant Borough High School AP Environmental Science students. The program will be part of "Pollinator Point Environmental Sciences Symposium" developed and facilitated by the Point Pleasant Garden Club. It will take place at the Point Pleasant Borough Municipal Complex, at the new Pollinator Point garden, founded in 2022 by the Point Pleasant Garden Club, and supported through participation in the Jersey Friendly Yards Municipal Certification Grant Program.

8. (APO Item #5, Activity 8) Envirothon: The NJ Envirothon will take place on Saturday, May 18, at Big Brook Park in Marlboro. The 2024 National Envirothon "Current Issue" topic is: *Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future*. Becky is co-coordinating the Wildlife Station with Holly Reynolds from Freehold Soil Conservation District. Two Barnegat Bay Master Naturalists will be assisting with the Wildlife Station this year. Please visit the [NJ Envirothon](#) website and [OCSCD's Envirothon webpage](#) for more information.

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 JFY Conference committee met on March 26 and April 29 to discuss the 2024 Conference. Details are as follows:

Conference Title: something to do with "native", "small spaces" ?

Date: Saturday September 14, 2024, HALF-Day

Location: Ocean County College, Gateway Building, Atrium, Auditorium, and Outdoor Picnic Areas.

Cost/Fee: \$20 per person (...until we know more about how much other costs will be, e.g. speaker fees, etc)

Tentative 2024 JFY Conference Schedule:

8:30-12:30, plus native plant sale until 2pm.

8:30 – 9:00 Sign-in & visit exhibit tables (see below for list of exhibitors)

9:00 – 9:15 Welcome remarks

9:15 – 10:15 Keynote Speaker – *Native Plants for Small Spaces* by Elaine Silverstein.

10:15 – 10:30 Break, Exhibits, get to 1st workshop

10:30 – 11:15 Workshops Session #1

11:15 – 11:30 Break, Exhibits, get to 2nd workshop

11:30 – 12:15 Workshops Session #2

12:15 – 12:30 Closing remarks & Door Prizes

12:30 – 2:00 Exhibits and Native Plant Sale