

August-September 2024, Bi-Monthly Education Report

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

September 19, 2024

Becky Laboy, M.Ed., Education Outreach Specialist

August-September, 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. Plans for a "Tour de Basins" is underway. Date to be determined. Becky, Brittany, Liam McBride and SJRC&D Habitat Coordinator, Eileen Miller, conducted plant surveys on 8 of the basins to determine which species were growing in, and comparing this information to the species that were seeded or planted, to determine species success rates in various conditions. This data is being compiled into spreadsheets for analysis. 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.

- **August 13:** Becky viewed 1 hour webinar "Excel – Charting Like a Pro with Jon Peltier".

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

- Becky serves as the CEC Co-Chair for the current term. Becky is working with CEC Chair Joel Mott, NJ Pinelands Commission, Nina Sassano, Associate Director of Outreach, BBP, and Bailey Sanders, Stewardship Specialist, BBP, on the goals and objectives of the CEC Communication & Education Plan. We determined that our retreat will be pushed to next spring with a possible location of the FREC and a focus on natural resources.
- 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. There is discussion as to whether we need to extend the contract to the end of next school 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.
 - Now that school is back in session, Becky is in communications with several schools to offer programs, including Nellie Bennett Elementary School, Pinelands Regional High School and Pinelands Regional Middle School.. Becky will be providing age-appropriate soil, water, plant and wildlife-focused lessons to support the implementation of a Pollinator Garden at Nellie Bennet Elementary School in the 2024/25 School Year.
 - Becky and Jessica Pinto will be providing soil programs at Pinelands Regional Middle and High Schools on Sept 19 (day of the Board Meeting) for this year's "Bog Bash" where students from both schools, plus students from Southern Regional HS will be introduced to the natural resources of the Barnegat Bay watershed, as available on school grounds. Becky and Jessica are focusing on soil activities pertaining to Jersey-Friendly Yards.

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. Jessica Pinto, Erosion Control Specialist, has also been attending meetings and is offering her time to support this project.

- Updates to the "Tour de' Basins":
 - "Tour de' Basins" date of **Thursday, October 3rd** will likely be reschedule for a spring date, to showcase the retrofits of 3-6 basins, possibly including: John F. Patrick Sports Complex (to showcase the new Pollinator Garden), Rachel Court, Independence Court, Tuscany Court, First Energy/Blue Claws Stadium, American Ave.
 - Becky, Brittany, Liam and Eileen Miller are documenting plant species growth in each of the basins.
 - OCSCD Inspectors continue to actively document vegetative growth with photos and video.

- The team is developing educational materials about basin types, healthy soil, decompaction, water infiltration, and appropriate native grasses and perennials - for 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.

- In support of the pollinator garden that was installed at Common Grounds Community Garden in Lakewood Township on Thursday, May 30, and in an effort to strengthen our partnership with the Common Grounds Community Garden, Becky will be tabling at their Fall Festival on November 3rd.

(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 1,659 contacts on our “General List”.
 - [August newsletter](#)
 - [September 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, led by Virginia Rettig, Edwin B. Forsythe NWR Manager, USFW.
- Becky is working on an article about high school student, Nora Morton, and her summer research on wave attenuation and coastal erosion. Nora’s family is active in the NJBII and Nora has incorporated the goals and objectives of NJBII into her school research project.

3. (APO Item #5, Activity 3) Poster Contest: The winners for the 2024 Poster Contest can be viewed on OCSCD’s [Annual NJ Conservation Poster Contest webpage](#). The 2024 theme was: **“May The Forest Be With You, Always”**. OCSCD’s Grand Champion Winner was Saoirse Parsons, Grade 10, New Egypt High School, who received a Certificate of Recognition and a \$50 check from OCSCD. First Place Winners were Abigail Scanlon, Grade 8, Veterans Memorial 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 BBEERT Steering Committee met on Wednesday, July 31st to discuss plans for the 28th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable, in 2025. **Please Save-the-Date of Wednesday, April 16, 3:00pm-8:00pm.** OCSCD, Steering Committee members and watershed partners will send an announcement in their respective newsletters to save the date. Our theme will be: **“Our Precious Natural Resources: Considering Conservation, Climate and Community”**. We will send out a call-for-workshop-proposals to find presenters who would like to present a hands-on workshop on this theme. Please visit our [BBEERT webpage](#) to view information and a Gallery of Photos of this past year’s [27th Annual Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable](#).

6. (APO Item #5, Activity 6) Internship & Volunteer Opportunities and Agreements: OCSCD now has an intern helping with Chapter 251, Erin McGrath. The Education Department does not have an intern 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 completed and on the schedule:

- **Mar 8:** Becky presented a workshop at the Pinelands Short Course, *Soil Toils*, which took place at Stockton University. **(25 attendees)**
- **May 17:** Becky presented a *Soil Assessment* workshop for **Point Pleasant Borough High School** AP Environmental Science students. The program was part of *Pollinator Point Environmental Sciences Symposium* developed and facilitated by the Point Pleasant Garden Club. It took 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. **(25 attendees)**
- **May 29:** Becky presented a 45-minute webinar on “Soils 101” to the **Barnegat Bay Partnership’s Barnegat Bay Volunteer Master Naturalists**. The program was an overview of soils and an introduction to some local soil series, including their properties and characteristics. The webinar was followed by an in-person workshop on May 31. **(15 attendees)**
- **May 31:** Becky provided an in-person workshop on local soils to the **Barnegat Bay Partnership’s Barnegat Bay Volunteer Master Naturalists** at Wells Mills County Park. The group of 15 participants delved into soil properties through hands-on activities using soil sieves and NPK/pH tests, followed by trail walking to dig-up and examine the horizons of Manahawkin Muck and Downer soil series, along with identification of the vegetation associated with these two distinct soil series. **(15 attendees)**
- **June 2:** Becky provided a *Healthy Soils & Water Conservation* workshop, in collaboration with Shari Kondrup of the **Brick Township Municipal Utilities Authority**, for an audience at the Common Grounds Community Garden, Lakewood. Becky introduced participants to the local soil under the newly installed pollinator garden, demonstrated how to take a soil sample, and used sieves to determine the texture. Discussions related soil texture to water holding capacity and water conservation practices in the garden. **(10 attendees)**
- **July 21:** Becky will be providing a program, *Healthy Soils, Healthy Gardens*, hosted by Shari Kondrup of the **Brick Township Municipal Utilities Authority**, as part of BTMUA’s “Weekends at the Reservoir” summer series. Currently, there are 20 participants signed-up. Becky will introduce participants to the properties of soil, the importance of healthy soil to a healthy garden, demonstrate how to collect a soil sample and have it tested at Rutgers Soil Testing Lab, then conduct a soil sieve test to determine the texture of the soil, and discuss how texture relates to water conservation and nutrient holding capacity. Becky will share BBP’s *Going Native* resource and discuss the Jersey-Friendly Yards Resident Certification program. **(15 attendees)**
- **July 23:** Becky will be provided a program *Soils 101* to children enrolled in **JCNERR’s** Children’s Creature Feature summer series. Becky will introduce the kids to soil texture using the soil sieve sets, and sort through soil/compost

to look for and identify soil critters. Soil texture, organic matter, air and soil moisture will be discussed as important components of healthy soil and a healthy soil ecosystem. **(25 attendees)**

- **July 24:** Becky will be providing a program *Soils 101* to children enrolled in **Long Beach Township Marine Education Field Station's** summer education series. Becky will introduce the participants to soil texture using the soil sieve sets, and sort through soil/compost to look for and identify soil critters. Soil texture, organic matter, air and soil moisture will be discussed as important components of healthy soil and a healthy soil ecosystem. **(13 attendees)**
- **August 5:** Becky will be providing a program *Soils 101* to children enrolled in the **Spray Beach Yacht Club's** summer education series for sailors. Becky will introduce the participants to soil texture using the soil sieve sets, and sort through soil/compost to look for and identify soil critters. Soil texture, organic matter, air and soil moisture will be discussed as important components of healthy soil and a healthy soil ecosystem. **(15 attendees)**
- **September 14:** Becky will be one of several workshop presenters at this year's **Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference**. Becky will present *Soil Assessment: understanding your soil's health*. The 45-minute workshop will include assessments of texture, NPK and pH. It will be presented twice, in rotation.
- **September 24:** Becky will be providing a program *Soils 101* to **Arc of Ocean County** participants. Becky will introduce the participants to soil texture using the soil sieve sets, and sort through soil/compost to look for and identify soil critters. Soil texture, organic matter, air and soil moisture will be discussed as important components of healthy soil and a healthy soil ecosystem.

8. (APO Item #5, Activity 8) Envirothon: The 2024 NJ Envirothon took place on Saturday, May 18, at Big Brook Park in Marlboro. The 2024 National Envirothon "Current Issue" topic was: *Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future*. Becky co-coordinated the Wildlife Station with Holly Reynolds from Freehold Soil Conservation District. Two Barnegat Bay Master Naturalists assisted with the Wildlife Station this year. Our hometown school, MATES, won First Place, and represented New Jersey at the National Envirothon in New York, which took place from July 28-August 3. Please visit the [NCF-Envirothon \(Nationals\)](#) website, [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 Outreach, Webinars, Conference: Becky and Christine sit on the Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference Planning Committee.

Conference Title: The Hows & Whys for Spaces of Any Size

Date: Saturday September 14, 2024, HALF-Day

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

Cost/Fee: \$20 per person

Tentative 2024 JFY Conference Schedule: **8:30-12:30 plus native plant sale until 2pm**

8:30 – 9:00 Sign-in & visit exhibitor 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 Bobbie Herbs.

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

10:30 – 11:15 Workshops Session #1 (Becky and Jessica will be providing a workshop: Exploring Soil Texture)

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

11:30 – 12:15 Workshops Session #2 (Becky and Jessica will be providing a workshop: Exploring Soil Texture)

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

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

Exhibitors/Vendors:

Exhibitors: Sign-in Table turns into BBP/JFY after sign-in is completed; OCSCD (Mary Ellen Banfield will be tabling);

Rutgers; NJ Garden State Consortium (Dr. Michael Gross); Master Gardeners of Ocean County (also selling plants);

Native Plant Society of New Jersey. Vendors: Toadshade Wildflower Farm – Seeds for Sale; Earth First Native Plants; The Little Plant Company; Stephen Kristoff Native Plants.