

Ocean County Soil Conservation District

Conservation Conversation



OCSCD Staff: Back row, left to right: Joe Serio, Kristin Adams, Amanda Sullivan, Rachel Hammack, Liam McBride, Sean Yeats, Ben Hayden, Jean Baluski, Christine Raabe, Mary Ellen Banfield. Front row, left to right: Jessica Pinto, Georgie Lennon, Ramon Mejia, Mary Elliot, Brittany Moore, Becky Laboy.

Healthy Soil & Clean Water

OCSCD is an established leader and effective partner in conservation. District staff provide technical support, educational programs, and stewardship opportunities.

By enforcing the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act we **regulate** soil disturbance to protect our landscapes and waterways from erosion and sedimentation. Through **educational programs** and outreach we equip the community with the knowledge needed to understand and care for our natural resources. Finally, we activate local stewardship by encouraging individuals to **take action** in preserving the health of our soil, water, and environment.

REGULATE

EDUCATE

ACTIVATE



Conserve
soil and water
resources



Restore
degraded soils to
fully functioning
resources



Protect
land and water for
people and wildlife



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From the Director's Desk

As we reflect on another year of impactful work to protect the integrity of **Ocean County's natural resources**, I am incredibly proud to present this 2024 Annual Report, showcasing the achievements of Ocean County Soil Conservation District's team. Through the collective efforts of our dedicated **staff**, generous supporters, and engaged community, we have made significant strides towards protecting and enhancing Ocean County's soil and water resources this past year. While the main **mission** of soil conservation districts in New Jersey is to implement the **Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act** and oversee construction sites for compliance, OCSCD always seeks to expand our role as educators and stewards of our local environment. OCSCD maintains a robust **education and outreach program**, and participates in numerous grant-funded **projects** in collaboration with public agencies, elected officials, non-profits, and local stakeholders.

This report highlights our successes in the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Program, as well as education and outreach initiatives, notably **Jersey Friendly-Yards** and the overwhelming success of the **COASTAL** project supporting aquaculture and reef building in Barnegat Bay. We are excited to continue building upon this momentum as we look ahead to new opportunities to further our mission.

New for 2025 is our hosting of a **Local Working Group** to help inform and direct us with what items *you* consider priorities. Look for additional details inside, on our website or in our monthly **newsletter**.

The District is especially proud of our **newsletter** which highlights our conservation efforts, and provides updates on our projects, programs and events. Sign-up for our monthly newsletter and visit our website to view our archived editions. Follow us on **Facebook**, **Instagram**, and **YouTube**.

The District relies on the support and encouragement of our **Board of Supervisors** and the many **partnerships** we have forged with other agencies, organizations, and community leaders throughout Ocean County and beyond.

Please contact any member of the **staff** at anytime. We pride ourselves on being responsive to our constituents.

To learn more about the Ocean County Soil Conservation District and our work, please visit our **website**.

-Christine Raabe, District Director

Meet OCSCD's Board of Supervisors

As Chairman of the **Board of Supervisors** for the Ocean County Soil Conservation District, I am pleased to present our 2024 Annual Report. This document reflects our ongoing commitment to the stewardship of our natural resources and the health of our environment. Our team has worked diligently to protect soil and water resources while promoting sustainable land use practices.

This year has been particularly pivotal. We have initiated several projects aimed at enhancing soil health and reducing erosion, as well as **supporting local aquaculture producers**,

demonstrating our resolve to not only address current environmental challenges but also to build resilience for the future. Our **educational programs** have engaged local communities, empowering them with knowledge about conservation practices that can be implemented at home, school or work, as well as in the bay and on farms.

I invite you to explore the details within the report, showcasing our achievements, ongoing projects, and future initiatives. Together, we can continue to foster a healthier ecosystem that benefits all residents of Ocean County. Thank you for your support and dedication to conservation efforts in our community.



OCSCD Board of Supervisors (L to R): John Tiedemann, Vice Chairman; Dr. Michael Gross, Secretary; Gary Paxton, Treasurer; Ray Bukowski, Member; Dr. William J. Pollock, Chairman

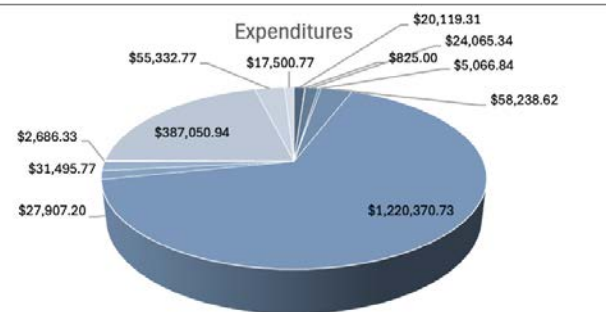
- William J. Pollock, Ed.D., Chairman, Ocean County Soil Conservation District

Operational Funding:

Compiled by Mary Ellen Banfield, Office Manager



■ Ch 251 Interest on Investments \$98,111.85 ■ RFA Funds \$45,415.00
 ■ Grant Income \$79,918.04 ■ General Acct Interest on Investments \$6,151.62
 ■ Roundtable \$1,295.00 ■ SESC Fees \$1,486,664.31



■ Grant Expenses ■ Donations ■ General Acct Expenses ■ Workshops & Trainings
 ■ Vehicle Expense ■ Payroll Expense ■ Professional Fees ■ Building Expenses
 ■ Dues & Memberships ■ Employee Benefits ■ Insurance ■ Office Expense

Ocean County Soil Conservation District Soil Erosion & Sediment Control Program

By Jessica Pinto, Erosion Control Specialist

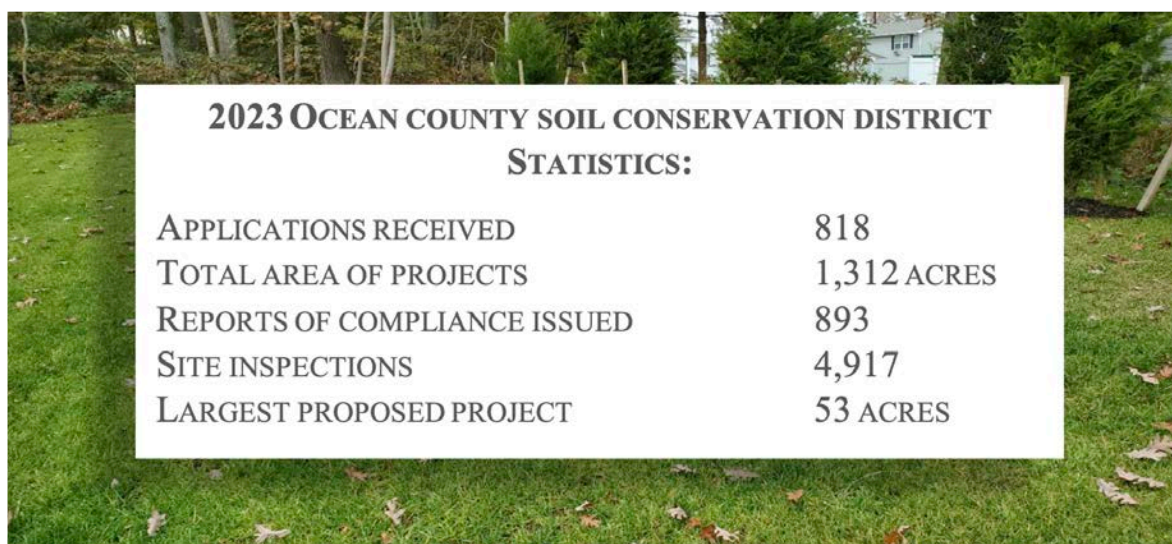
At the Ocean County SCD we seek to minimize soil erosion and sedimentation problems resulting from land disturbance activities through review of the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan and inspection to determine compliance with the NJ State Standards.

What is a Soil Conservation District?

The Ocean County Soil Conservation District (District) is a special purpose subdivision of the **New Jersey Department of Agriculture** serving **Ocean County** since its first organizational meeting held on July 25th, 1952. The District is one of 14 New Jersey Soil Conservation Districts. Districts are semi-autonomous political bodies which are locally governed and play a unique role in the protection of New Jersey's natural resources. In New Jersey, the District's purpose is to implement the **NJ Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act** (1975) which amended to apply conservation practices to urban development - any disturbance exceeding 5,000 square feet would require a Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan certification by the districts. Disturbance is defined as any activity involving clearing, excavating, storing, grading, filling, or transporting of soil. Staff provide inspection and enforcement of the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan and **Standards** during the construction process to minimize offsite erosion and sedimentation, protecting both the environment and neighboring properties. Details about the 16 staff and 5 volunteer Board of Supervisors, can be found on the District **website**.

Program Report:

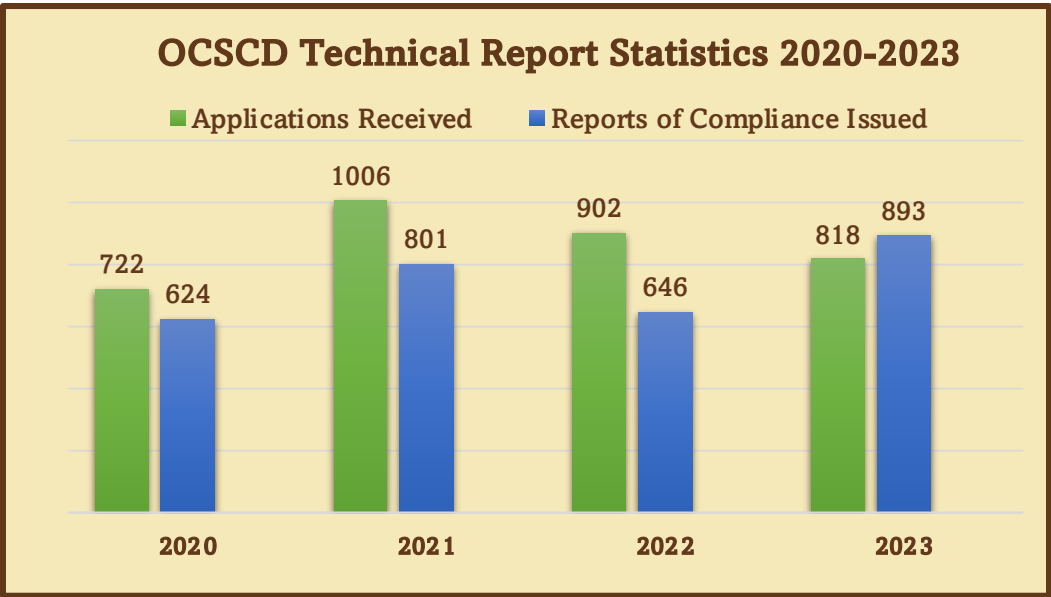
Below you can see the 2023 statistics, including inspections performed by technical staff, the number of applications received and the total proposed new development acreage.



2023 OCEAN COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT STATISTICS:	
APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	818
TOTAL AREA OF PROJECTS	1,312 ACRES
REPORTS OF COMPLIANCE ISSUED	893
SITE INSPECTIONS	4,917
LARGEST PROPOSED PROJECT	53 ACRES

Tracking Ocean County’s Development:

The charts below compare data tracked by OCSCD from 2020-2023. The number of applications submitted to the District peaked in 2021 with over 1,000 applications received. In 2023 almost 900 reports of compliance were issued, a significant increase from previous years. A report of compliance (ROC) shall be issued when the District determines that a project or portion thereof is in full compliance with the certified plan and the **Standards for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control in New Jersey**. No certificate of occupancy (CO) for a building or structure on a project, or any portion thereof, shall be issued by a municipality unless there has been a ROC issued by the district, as per the **State Soil Conservation Committee Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act Rules Adopted Rules: N.J.A.C. 2:90** (Rules). OCSCD staff completed almost 5,000 inspections in 2023. As per the Rules, soil districts shall perform inspection of projects to determine whether the provisions of the certified plan and sequence of construction are being followed by the applicant.



Staff in the Field - Enforcing the Soil Erosion & Sediment Control Act

By Georgie Lennon, Inspector II

As a regulatory agency, OCSCD is responsible for ensuring compliance of New Jersey state rules and regulations in order to protect our soil and water resources. OCSCD staff provide inspection and enforcement of construction sites that meet the definition of a soil disturbance “project” as defined by the **Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Act**. The District ensures each site remains in compliance with the **NJ State Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Standards** during the construction process. Each site must minimize offsite erosion and sedimentation, protecting both the environment and neighboring properties. The current Standards, revised in 2017, contain 32 practices that focus on the safe conveyance of runoff offsite and downstream of the site. OCSCD’s technical staff each oversee individual territories within Ocean County, rotating periodically to ensure each staff’s familiarity of the entire county.

EXAMPLES OF SOIL EROSION & SEDIMENT CONTROL STANDARDS

New Jersey State Standard of Dewatering (14-1)

Dewatering activities include processes used to remove water from construction or excavation sites to protect the environment from sediment entering nearby waterbodies. Dewatering can involve pumping stations, sump pits, or sediment control bags. Dewatering activities require continuous monitoring to protect from soil erosion or unexpected sediment deposits.



New Jersey State Standard of Conduit Outlet Protection (12-1)

Conduit Outlet Protection provides a stable area at the outlet of a conduit to reduce water velocity and prevent erosion in the channel. The use of this standard will protect the area immediately downstream of a conduit outlet from erosion in the form of scour, which is a common source of sediment in lakes and streams. A rip rap apron shall be level with the surrounding grade and there shall be no over fall at the end of the apron. Scour holes (see picture) shall have a specific inner, outer dimension and depth, as shown on the certified plans.





Education & Outreach

By Becky Laboy, M.Ed., Education Outreach Coordinator

The Ocean County Soil Conservation District prioritizes education, understanding its vital role in benefiting the Ocean County community. OCSCD has developed a comprehensive **Education Program** dedicated to promoting the importance of conserving our natural resources. Through education, the District seeks to deepen awareness of the essential connection between healthy soil, clean water, and the overall well-being of the Barnegat Bay watershed and its residents

The District provides a range of educational programs, workshops, and events for diverse audiences, including students, teachers,

A Decade of Education & Outreach to the Ocean County Community



	Total # of All Programs & Events	Total # of Participants Reached
2024	26	2482
2023	19	1092
2022	24	2105
2021	31	2725
2020	25	2202
2019	20	7606
2018	29	3680
2017	29	15000
2016	35	7699
2015	43	14317
2014	1	500
Totals:	282	59,408



OCSCD's 2024 drop-in summer soil program was a hit with families at the Long Beach Township Marine Field Station.

scouts, environmental commissions, garden clubs, green groups, and professionals.

Active involvement in statewide programs such as the annual **Poster Contest** and the **New Jersey Envirothon**, as well as our decade-long involvement in **Jersey-Friendly Yards**, underscores OCSCD's unwavering dedication to environmental education.

A highlight of the District's efforts is the **Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable**, a teacher's professional development event held annually each spring. Mark your calendars for our 28th Environmental Educators Roundtable, scheduled for **April 16, 2025**.

To learn more about the District's educational offerings, visit the **Education, Events** and **Projects** sections of our website. Read about education initiatives on our **blog**. Stay informed about upcoming programs and events by subscribing to our monthly **newsletter**. We look forward to connecting with you in 2025. **Contact us!**

Jersey-Friendly Yards

The **Jersey-Friendly Yards** (JFY) initiative, spearheaded by the **Barnegat Bay Partnership** (BBP) with funding from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), has been a driving force in promoting sustainable landscaping practices throughout the Barnegat Bay watershed. Since its inception in 2013, the Ocean County Soil Conservation District has been a key partner, working alongside BBP and **Rutgers Cooperative Extension** (RCE) of Ocean County to inspire stewardship for healthy soil and clean water through sustainable garden practices.

OCSCD has played an instrumental role in supporting Jersey-Friendly Yards by providing education and outreach programs, workshops, webinars and conferences, highlighting the resources available on the **Jersey-Friendly Yards** website. The annual Jersey-Friendly Yards **Conference**, co-hosted by BBP, OCSCD, and RCE, connects participants to native plant vendors and educational materials to create sustainable home gardens that support pollinators, birds and other wildlife. In addition, OCSCD has facilitated the implementation of dozens of Jersey-Friendly gardens throughout Ocean County, over the last decade.

The **Jersey-Friendly Yards Stewardship Certification Program** offers tailored pathways for **residents**, **schools**, and **municipalities** to create outdoor spaces, such as rain gardens and pollinator habitats, earning certifications that recognize their commitment to sustainable landscaping. Building on our 2023 success, OCSCD expanded its efforts in schools throughout 2024. OCSCD's Education Coordinator, Becky Laboy, brought lessons to classrooms, focusing on **Step 2: Start With Healthy Soil** from Jersey-Friendly Yards' **8 Steps to a Jersey-Friendly Yard**. These lessons lay the groundwork for schools to develop culminating projects, such as pollinator gardens or other sustainable garden initiatives, showcasing their commitment to a healthy watershed.



	# of JFY Programs & Events Facilitated in Whole or Part by OCSCD	# of Participants OCSCD Reached through JFY Programs & Events
2024	9	534
2023	13	549
2022	20	1905
2021	24	2132
2020	10	955
2019	12	1245
2018	17	384
2017	12	675
2016	19	640
2015	2	175
2014	0	0
Totals:	138	9194



(Left) Students in Ms. Lisa Collins' 5th grade class at Nellie Bennett Elementary, Point Pleasant, were introduced to different soil series.
(Right) Students in Ms. Shaina Brenner's Student Green Team at Elms Elementary, Jackson, use soil sieves to learn about soil texture.

Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable

Since 1997, OCSCD has proudly hosted this highly anticipated annual professional development event.

The **Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable** is designed to engage educators in environmental education, deepen their understanding of local natural resources, culture, and history, and foster a strong sense of place. Dozens of environmental organizations participate, showcasing their displays and sharing educational materials. Educators attend a series of hands-on workshops and gain access to valuable tools and resources to inspire environmental stewardship in their students.

In **2024** our theme was "Sustainable Connections", which aimed to spotlight the symbiotic relationship between the cultural, historical, and natural resources that define the unique and ecological significance of the Barnegat Bay watershed. By focusing on soils, compost, food waste, trash and marine debris we aspired to underscore the role of educators in fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability and environmental stewardship in the classroom.



"Let's pave the way for a greener future through education."

~ Shaina Brenner

Dozens of local environmental organizations exhibited in the **Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education**, offering guests opportunity to peruse their tables, and speak to professionals about the educational resources and services they offer to teachers. Teachers attended a rotation of hands-on workshops focused on sustainability; some opted for a Field Trip to **Double Trouble State Park** to learn about sustainable harvesting techniques that literally built Ocean County!

Watch a **video** or visit our **website** to learn more about OCSCD's signature annual event!

KEYNOTE: SHAINA BRENNER, ELMS ELEMENTARY

Shaina Brenner, 2nd grade teacher at Elms Elementary School in Jackson, provided an inspiring Keynote at our 2024 Roundtable. She explored the vital intersection of sustainability and education, delved into strategies to infuse environmental stewardship into every aspect of learning, showing how students can be inspired to become change agents in building a more sustainable world. Click and explore Ms. Brenner's resources:

- **Canva Slideshow**: Shaina's Keynote with links to resources
- **Video 1**: Career Day at Elms Elementary, 2023
- **Video 2**: Green Career Day at Elms Elementary, 2024



Statewide Initiatives: NJ Envirothon and NJ Conservation Poster Contest

New Jersey Envirothon

The **New Jersey State Envirothon** is an annual competition where high school students showcase their knowledge of environmental topics through hands-on, interactive problem-solving activities. The team that excels in demonstrating a deep understanding of natural resources, teamwork, and communication skills earns the honor of representing New Jersey in the North American Envirothon, the largest high school environmental education competition in North America.

Each year, the competition focuses on a timely environmental issue. The 2024 theme was “Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future.” Students are tested in categories including Soil, Forestry, Wildlife, Aquatics, and the Current Issue through written exams and practical, hands-on challenges.

Beyond the competition, participants enjoy a day-long experience filled with games, prizes, food, and a DJ to celebrate their achievements.

Congratulations to Ocean County’s **Marine Academy of Technology and Environmental Science** (MATES), the 2024 winners!

The **Ocean County Soil Conservation District** contributes to the event by overseeing the **Wildlife Station**. In 2025, OCSCD is offering **\$100 grants** to the first 5 schools to register. Encourage your high school team to **join the fun!** For more information, contact the **NJ Envirothon Coordinator**.



MATES 2024 Envirothon Team, L to R: Advisor Adam Sprague, Caroline Liebmann, Megan Ebinger, Michelle Karamian, Cailean Connelly, Amalie Werner, Advisor Dave Werner.

New Jersey Conservation Poster Contest

The New Jersey Conservation **Poster Contest** is an annual contest sponsored by **NJDA**, **NACD**, **NJACD** and the **Ocean County Soil Conservation District**. The contest aims to promote a better understanding of the connection between natural resources and humans in a fun and creative way. Each year features a new theme. The 2024 Poster Contest theme was: *May The Forest Be With You Always*. This theme highlights the important role forests play in our everyday lives. Forests cover nearly a third of all land on Earth, providing vital organic infrastructure for some of the planet's densest, most diverse collections of life. They support countless species, including our own! Humans now clear millions of acres from natural forests every year, especially in the tropics, letting deforestation threaten some of Earth's most valuable ecosystems. Encourage your students to enter the **2025 contest**, and win cash prizes!



First Place Winner (Grade Group 4-6): Abigail Alaimo,
Veterans Memorial Middle School



First Place Winner (Grade Group 7-9): Abigail Scanlon,
Veterans Memorial Middle School



First Place Winner (Grade Group 10-12) and Grand Champion Winner:
Saoirse Parsons, New Egypt High School (pictured right).



Our Partners in Conservation

The Ocean County Soil Conservation District (OCSCD) collaborates with local and regional partners to support diverse natural resource initiatives. By pooling resources, sharing expertise, and contributing to impactful projects, these partnerships benefit not only the participating organizations but also Ocean County's invaluable natural resources.

Explore our **Annual Reports**, monthly **newsletters**, and **blog posts** to discover in-depth stories showcasing our collective efforts. Through these partnerships, we achieve far more in protecting and restoring natural resources than we could alone.

Our partnerships with organizations such as the NJ Department of Environmental Protection, USDA-NRCS, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County, the Barnegat Bay Partnership, and the Natural Resources Education Foundation at the Lighthouse Center enhance our outreach efforts. Visit our **website** and peruse our **Partners** and **Projects** pages. Sign up to receive our monthly **newsletter** for updates on programs, projects, and District news. Click on the logos below to learn about our partners.





Local Working Group - 2025

Join the Ocean County Soil Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service's 2025 Local Working Group. OCSCD and NRCS request your participation in our Local Working Group to identify important natural resource issues, concerns and opportunities in Ocean County. OCSCD seeks to gather your input to help direct technical and financial resources for locally led conservation programs, initiatives and efforts. A report of findings will be offered to all participants.



Your insights and input are valuable. Additional Local Working Group information can be found in the [**USDA-NRCS Local Working Groups Fact Sheet**](#). We hope you will join us on **Thursday, January 30, 4pm-6pm**, at Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County, 1623 Whitesville Road, Toms River, 08755. For questions, contact [**info@soildistrict.org**](mailto:info@soildistrict.org). Download and share this **Flyer** with others! Click to **REGISTER!**

South Jersey Resource Conservation & Development Council



The South Jersey Resource Conservation & Development (SJRCDC) Council was authorized in 1976 after the USDA received a request for assistance from the County Freeholders and local Soil Conservation Districts in South Jersey.

Early sponsors of the SJRCDC recognized the opportunities available to nonprofit organizations and filed for an official determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service. In 1977, the SJRCDC Council was incorporated in the State of New Jersey as a Charitable Trust. In 1978, the Council received recognition as a U.S. Internal Revenue Service 501(c)3 charitable trust.

Today, the South Jersey Resource Conservation & Development Council is composed of several agencies, including Ocean County Soil Conservation District and Camden County Soil Conservation District, whose mission is to assist and promote the conservation of natural and community resources through education and collaborative partnerships, supporting the environmental and economic well-being of South Jersey. Counties served by SJRCDC include Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean and Salem.

The SJRCDC offers services spanning from habitat restoration to **stormwater basin restoration and enhancement**, as well as education and outreach. SJRCDC's **current projects** include the **Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project**. Visit the **SJRCDC website** to learn more.

District Boots on the Ground and in the Water with USDA-NRCS

By Kristin Adams, PSM, Conservation Specialist

This past year the **COASTAL** (Conservation Opportunities Advancing Sustainable Technologies for Aquaculture Leases) project officially began with nine aquaculture producers fostering oyster spat-on-shell for restoration reefs in the Barnegat and Great Bays. In the early summer, the producers acquired newly set oyster spat-on-shell from shellfish nurseries and moved it onto their aquaculture leases to begin the grow-out phase. Throughout the summer and fall, producers tended to the juvenile oysters with the utmost care with weekly biofouling control, sorting and splitting as the oysters grew larger. In November, the producers transported all their oyster spat-on-shell to the restoration reefs (the Tuckerton Reef and the Mill Creek Reef, managed by Stockton University) for deployment/planting. Simultaneously, Stockton University with assistance from OCSCD, conducted environmental monitoring at four of the participating oyster farms and both restoration reefs, which included fish sampling and water quality sampling. In addition, oyster reef sampling took place at both reefs in the spring and fall.

The COASTAL project aims to support industry and conservation by partnering with shellfish producers through NRCS contracts to help restore oyster reefs. OCSCD is the lead partner along with 14 additional partners, all providing technical advisement, monitoring assistance, cash-match or some combination therein. Through an in-kind match contribution, the District is overseeing the project management, partner communication and coordination, outreach efforts, assisting Stockton University with environmental monitoring and reporting. The District is also receiving funds from NRCS to provide the technical assistance aspect of the project on behalf of NRCS



Kristin Adams (OCSCD/NRCS), Riley Blankenship (CASCD/NRCS), George Lennon (OCSCD) and Sean Yeats (OCSCD) – fall spat count.

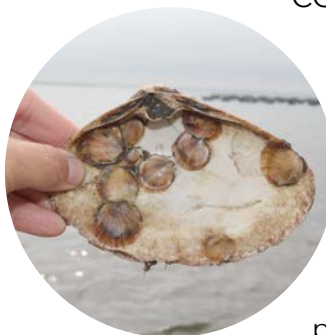
and will oversee most aspects of the planning process through the local field office.

OCSCD also completed the first year of a Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance grant that provides funding for Conservation Specialist, Kristin Adams, to assist with conservation planning out of the Columbus Service Center. Kristin will continue to work with aquaculture producers as the State's Aquaculture Specialist, but also with forestry, wildlife, vegetable, row crops and livestock operations.

OCSCD's COASTAL initiative and NRCS Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance agreement each cover 50% of Kristin's time - allowing for 100% dedication in implementing components of conservation planning and management on behalf of NRCS programs in general and aquaculture specifically. Due to the success of the RCPP

COASTAL project in the first year (NRCS had a record-number of producers apply for EQIP funding in 2024 for aquaculture production), OCSCD anticipates seeking additional funding and support to continue and expand this initiative.

The District looks forward to the next four years of involvement with NRCS programs, especially with regards to serving on a local and statewide capacity and with a special concentration assisting aquaculture producers. Read all about OCSCD's COASTAL project on our [website](#) and [blog](#).



Lakewood Township Stormwater Basins Retrofit Project

The grant is funded by a [Federal 319\(h\) Water Quality Restoration Grant](#) awarded by the [NJ Department of Environmental Protection](#).

The **Lakewood Township Stormwater Basin Retrofit Project** is led by the South Jersey Resource Conservation and Development Council (SJRCDC) with support from OCSCD, Camden County SCD, and Lakewood DPW. The project aims to enhance water quality, manage stormwater runoff, and restore habitat in Lakewood Township's basins within the Metedeconk River watershed. The project targets non-point source pollution reduction by transforming 12 stormwater basins into functional ecosystems. In 2021, the project team evaluated 181 basins, prioritizing those near sensitive ecosystems. Selection criteria also included soil conditions, construction feasibility, and their potential environmental impact. Retrofitting efforts included seeding with native species like Big Bluestem and Swamp Milkweed, which stabilize soil, filter pollutants, and provide wildlife



Eileen Miller, SJRCDC Team Habitat Coordinator and Liam McBride, OCSCD Inspector, assess the Rachel Court stormwater basin.

habitat. Plantings replaced monoculture turfgrass with resilient natives that have long root systems, reducing erosion and maintenance needs.

Ongoing assessments in 2024 documented the growth of native and volunteer species, which support stormwater absorption, biodiversity, and ecosystem resilience. Retrofitted basins enhance soil health, stabilize erosion-prone areas, and filter stormwater, all while creating wildlife habitat. Species like Swamp Milkweed and Partridge Pea offer vital resources to pollinators and play a role in nutrient cycling and erosion control. These basins serve as practical examples of sustainable water management and community-focused ecological restoration, addressing pollution while promoting a greener, healthier landscape.

Read about the project on our [website](#) and [blog](#)!

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & EDUCATION

Take a [Self-guided Tour](#) of Lakewood Township's retrofitted stormwater basins, featuring three key basins and a pollinator garden, to see firsthand how these basins improve stormwater management, soil and water quality, and support local wildlife.

Explore our [New Jersey Stormwater Basin Toolkit](#) - a resource-packed guide for maintaining and enhancing stormwater basin performance. The Toolkit includes information on stormwater basin maintenance, training links, fertilizer laws, regulatory compliance details and more.



New Jersey Bay Islands Initiative (NJBII)

The **New Jersey Bay Island Initiative** (NJBII) was established in 2020 with a mission to manage, restore and safeguard our bay islands. NJBII now includes more than 20 different organizations, agencies, nonprofits, and dedicated community members, led by Virginia Rettig, Manager of the Edwin B. Forsythe Wildlife Refuge, and Angela Andersen, Sustainability Director for Long Beach Township. Under the direction of OCSCD's Director, Christine Raabe, two staff members: Becky Laboy, M.Ed., Education Outreach Coordinator and Kristin Adams, PSM, Conservation Specialist, contribute to NJBII's communications and aquaculture efforts, respectively. Read more about **NJBII** on our **website** and **blog**.

2024 Achievements:

- Long Beach Township was approved for a \$772,300 grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation to design a final stage nature-based restoration plan for Clam Cove island. View an **NBC news promo** video.
- The **Mordecai Island Ecosystem Restoration Project** initiated by the Army Corp of Engineers to address accelerated erosion occurring on Mordecai Island is underway.
- Representing NJBII, Virginia Rettig received the **Monmouth University Urban Coast Institute (UCI) Ocean Champion Award** for New Jersey Coastal and Ocean Leadership.
- Over the past 2 years, young scientist, Nora Morton, has been researching the effects of boat wakes on shoreline erosion through her WILSON project. Read our **blog post** about Nora's extraordinary efforts.
- NJBII 2024 annual retreat at Sedge Island led to filmmaker, **Gavin Shwala's** creation of a **NJBII promotional film** to share NJBII's work. The film won the "DO Award" at JCNERR's annual film festival.
- NJ Resources corporate donation to Monmouth UCI for an oyster breakwater to **Clam Cove erosion** and to inform the full shoreline project.
- Creation of NJBII's Boat Wake subcommittee to address specific concerns from boat wakes.

The Jersey Shore's charm extends beyond its beaches to the serene back bay area, where bay islands provide critical services to humans and wildlife, alike. Serving as natural buffers against storm surge these islands store carbon, cycle nutrients, and offer habitat for endangered species.

Despite their ecological significance, these islands are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of recreational activities, stronger storms, and rising sea levels, leading to erosion and habitat loss. This growing threat undermines the resilience of the entire Bayshore ecosystem. Join us in our efforts to protect these critical resources!



Great Black-backed Gulls with chick. Photo courtesy of Krystal Aquilar.



Installation of the Common Grounds Pollinator Garden. (L-R) Sgt. Jeannette Shimonovich, Lakewood Twp Police, Tova Herskovitz, Founder and Director of Common Grounds Community Garden, Ben Hayden, Inspector, OCSCD, Ramon Mejia, Senior Erosion Control Specialist, OCSCD, Jessica Pinto, Senior Erosion Control Specialist, OCSCD (seated).

Finding Common Grounds

A new **partnership** between the Ocean County Soil Conservation District, **One Ocean County**, and **Common Grounds Community Garden** is thriving in Lakewood Township. Centered on shared goals of community connection, sustainability, and environmental health, this collaboration emphasizes the importance of healthy soil and pollinator-friendly gardens for vibrant ecosystems and shared community life. Together, we aim to create spaces where residents can connect, learn, and grow while protecting natural resources. Through workshops and hands-on projects at the Common Grounds Community Garden, participants are building meaningful relationships and engaging in collective action towards a healthy environment. A standout achievement of this collaboration is the creation of a **pollinator garden** along the perimeter of the planting beds. Featuring **native plants** procured by Jessica Pinto, Senior Erosion Control Specialist, through a grant from the **Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation**, the garden supports pollinator species essential for biodiversity while emphasizing the importance of healthy soil for resilient ecosystems.

This partnership recently took center stage at the **2024 Fall Festival**, hosted by Common Grounds Community Garden at the John F. Patrick Sports Complex on Saturday, November 3, 2024. As a proud sponsor, OCSCD joined approximately 800 attendees at this second annual event. OCSCD staff showcased the **Lakewood Township Stormwater Basins Retrofit Project** and **Self-Guided Tour**. Children participated in a hands-on soil profile activity. This initiative exemplifies the power of collective action in creating lasting environmental and social impact.



Brittany Moore, OCSCD, engages kids in a soil craft activity.

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Photo by Becky Laboy



Double Trouble State Park, Ocean County, NJ