2020 April/May, Bi-Monthly Board Report, Education & Outreach, Becky Laboy, E&O Specialist

**May 19, 2020**

***Based on the evolving circumstances regarding COVID-19, several outreach programs and events have been canceled. Efforts are being made to create and implement replacement programs that will be accessible using online platforms such as WebEx, as well as “social media” technologies. Upcoming programs that are not yet cancelled maintain a “pending” status.***

In support of OCSCD’s Annual Plan of Operations, 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 has championed 2 main initiatives to effectuate OCSCD’s vision and mission: **Jersey-Friendly Yards** and **Urban and Community Agriculture**. OCSCD has subcontracted with Barnegat Bay Partnership to support the Jersey-Friendly Yards initiative, as well as other watershed-wide initiatives that serve mutual constituents and sustain the natural resources of the communities we serve. OCSCD is collaborating with Rutgers Cooperative Extension to facilitate the Community Garden Network, in support of the Urban and Community Agriculture initiative. In addition, the Education Department continues to provide community programs, speak at conferences, and write grants to support OCSCD’s overall mission.

**GENERAL OPERATIONS (APO Item #3)**

**Professional Development:** (APO Item #3, Activity 3)

* March 25: “Rain Gardens and Green Infrastructure”, presented by Chris Obrupta, Rutgers University (1 hr)
* April 6: “Adventures with Oddities, Strange and Noteworthy Plants”, presented by the Ecological Landscape Alliance (1 hr)
* April 15: “Pollinator Ecology” presented by the Ecological Landscape Alliance (1 hr)
* April 16: “Get the Dirt on Your Soil” presented by Dr. Stephanie Murphy, Rutgers Soil Testing Lab (2 hrs)
* April 22: “Pollinators” presented by Kelly Gill, Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation (1 hr)
* May 4: “Earth Day at Home: Creating Wildlife Habitat in Your Yard”, Rutgers Cooperative Extension (1.5 hrs)
* May 11: “Earth Day at Home: Home Vegetable Gardening for Food, Fun and Stress Management” (2 hrs)

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

**Jersey-Friendly Yards Initiative:** (APO Item #4, Activity 1)

* **2020 Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference (4th annual):** Our 4th Annual Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference will be shifted to an online platform. Our 2020 theme is “Wild About Jersey-Friendly Yards!”, with our focus on creating a yard that supports wildlife. The Conference Committee, concluding OCSCD, BBP and RCE, is discussing how we will engage our audience through various methods, online. annual Conference into a series of online talks and other forms of engagement.
* **JFY Certification:** On May 6, the NJDEP held an online meeting for all grant recipients and partners. OCSCD Education Department will be working on the JFY Certification project in collaboration with Barnegat Bay Partnership (BBP)
* The JFY team, including OCSCD, BBP and RCE, are in discussions to take Jersey-Friendly Yards statewide, online.

**Urban and Community Agriculture Initiative:** (APO Item #4, Activity 1)

* The **Community Garden Network of Ocean County** (CGN) continues efforts to connect the community to healthy food resources, to increase community food security, and improve access to healthy food.
  + OCSCD is housing the CGN webpage
  + CGN has created a social media presence through a Facebook page
  + Becky is developing a monthly eNewsletter to share with constituents.
* The CGN team, consisting of OCSCD, RCE, Fulfill, Rutgers Master Gardeners of Ocean County, along with Soil to Soul and Toms River Green Team, will be meeting on May 13 to discuss the possibility of applying to the USDA: National Institute of Food and Agriculture – Community Food Projects Program grant.
* The CGN also continues efforts and provide education and resources about urban agriculture practices, through monthly meetings, education and outreach, and project implementation.
  + March 19: “Community Gardening” presentation by Sue Servidio, Master Gardeners Coordinator *(cancelled by RCE due to concerns about COVID-19)*
  + July 30: Tour of Cuisine on the Green Garden *(cancelled due to COVID-19)*
  + November 19: “4 Season Growing” presentation by Jess Sinkhorn, Garden Coordinator at Fulfill

**Subcontract with Barnegat Bay Partnership**: (APO Item #4, Activity 1)

The sub-award/sub-contract agreement between OCSCD and BBP, started on July 1, 2019 and runs until June 30, 2020. The subcontract Report #2 (October 1 – December 31, 2019) is attached. Becky continues to implement the following components:

* Develop, coordinate and present programs and workshops designed to educate and engage property owners in using the resources and tools on the JFY website, total of 12 per year. To date, 6 programs have been presented and reported. However, due to COVID-19 the following programs listed between March and April have been cancelled. Becky and Karen Walzer of BBP participated in a podcast with Pinelands Nursery on April 14. Becky is in the process of setting-up online program options.
  + March 17: **Right Plant, Right Place with Jersey-Friendly Yards**, presenting at 4 Seasons South Knolls, Jackson *(cancelled)*
  + March 25: **Jersey-Friendly Yards** at the Berkeley Library. *(canceled)*
  + \*\*April 14: Becky and Karen Walzer of BBP were guests on the podcast “Native Plants Healthy Planet” hosted by Pinelands Nursery. <https://pinelandsnursery.podbean.com/e/meet-jersey-friendly-yards/> *(NOT canceled)*
  + April 25: **Jersey-Friendly Yards: Landscaping for a Healthy Environment**, at LBIF – Long Beach Island Foundation for the Arts & Sciences. *(canceled)*
  + April 27: **Combating Climate Change with a Jersey-Friendly Yard**, program for Leisure Village West. *(canceled)*
  + October 8: **Attracting Birds with a Jersey-Friendly Yard**, presenting at GreenBriar in Toms River. *(pending, may be transitioned to an online platform)*
* Research and develop new content for the Plant Database, Success Stories, and other sections of the JFY website: monthly addition of new content.
  + Becky is researching and adding additional native plants to the Jersey-Friendly Plant Database on the JFY website.
* Develop and post appropriate messages on JFY social media sites, including the JFY Facebook page, 1 per week.
  + Becky continues to post information on JFY Facebook promoting Jersey-Friendly events, programs, gardens and plants.
* Assist with developing, organizing and delivering a “train-the-trainer” program for recruitment and training of volunteers to present programs about the JFY website and its resources and tools: 2-3 training programs delivered per year.
  + Christine and Becky met with Steve Yergeau, Amy Rowe, Michele Bakacs and Mike Haberland of Rutgers, and Karen Walzer of BBP, to discuss the collaborative creation of a Jersey-Friendly Yards Train-the-Trainer program with the Rutgers Master Gardeners throughout the state.
  + Becky and Karen are in communications with The Watershed Institute, to host and facilitate a JFY Train-the-Trainer program.
* Assist BBP with developing education and stewardship opportunities for BBP and watershed-wide volunteers, including the Barnegat Bay Volunteer Master Naturalists.
  + Becky was assisting BBP with preparations for the implementation of the Spring 2020 Barnegat Bay Volunteer Master Naturalist Program, however, it was canceled due to Covid-19
  + Becky is assisting with preparations for the 2020 Barnegat Bay Blitz which is postponed until September.

**Seeks grants and Funding:** (APO Item #4, Activity 2)

* Researching USDA NIFA grant opportunity in collaboration with CGN group (see above).

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

**Website, Media and Promotions:** (APO Item #5, Activity 1)

* Maintains and enhances the Education components of the OCSCD website
* Becky promotes OCSCD on social media through Facebook, Twitter and now on OCSCD’s new YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQeACHJL_tFRUDJNiWRAuEA>
* Maintains database and mailing list of **1,471 active contacts** for E&O initiatives in OCSCD’s Constant Contact database.
* Creates and sends a monthly eNewsletter.

**Special Projects:** (APO Item #5, Activity 2, 3, 5, 8)

* **Poster Contest:** Becky is assisting the new Executive Director of NJACD, Lily Mehl, with coordinating the Poster Contest Statewide Judging this year. Theme: **Where would we BEE without Pollinators?**. The judging will take place in mid-May, followed by the selection of the Grand Champion Winner. Winners will receive cash prizes by NJACD and the Grand Champion will have their poster printed on the NJACD pocket-folders.
* **23rd Annual Environmental Educators Roundtable:** transitioned to an online platform due to Covid-19. This year’s theme is “Happy Earth Day for the Next Generation – Full STEAM Ahead!” Becky announced the program through a short video: <https://youtu.be/GIxXRHJiywA> OCSCD celebrated Earth Day at the Roundtable on April 22 by hosting our Keynote Speaker, Kelly Gill, of the Xerces Society, through an online Pollinators” webinar. We had **47 people** attend the webinar. All workshops lesson plans were uploaded to the OCSCD Roundtable webpage; all lessons emphasized STEM/STEAM-based activities and many incorporated the Next Generation Science Standards in support of our theme. Presenters kindly created videos, audi-enhanced PPTs, and shared many lessons that were showcased on our webpage. This year’s Roundtable was dedicated to our dear friend and colleague, Lois Schoeck, who passed away in early March.
* **Envirothon**: Canceled due to Covid-19. Theme was: **Water Resources Management: Local Control and Local Solutions**. We are able to use the same location for next year: Camp Topanemus, 380 Monmouth Road, Millstone, NJ 08510.

**Internships/Volunteers:** (APO Item #5, Activity 6)

* **Lisa Mazzuca**, one of OCSCD’s “Jersey-Friendly Gardeners”, continues to maintain the SHIP gardens, however, is on hold during Covid-19.
* **Irene Tysh**, Master Naturalist, was scheduled to exhibit on behalf of OCSCD at the Manchester Earth Day festival in April, which was canceled due to Covid-19.
* Becky interviewed **Gabriella Marzella** of Stockton, as a potential intern. Ms. Marzella is studying to be a Middle School Science Teacher. She will be tentatively completing an “Independent Study” with OCSCD this summer.

**Outreach Programs, Conferences and Events:** (APO Item #5, Activity 7)

* March 7: **Native Plant Society of New Jersey**, exhibiting OCSCD’s Improve Your Soil Health exhibit **(180 people attended)**
* March 14: **Combating Climate Change with a Jersey-Friendly Yard** program presented at the Pinelands Short Course conference. *(cancelled by the Pinelands Commission due to concerns about COVID-19)*
* April 7: **Inspiration for Your Own Jersey-Friendly Yard** hosted by Ocean County Parks & Recreation, Cloverdale Farms County Park. *(canceled due to COVID-19)*
* April 17: **Manchester Earth Day Festival** Volunteer Irene Tysh will exhibit at the festival on behalf of OCSCD *(canceled due to Covid-19)*
* May 19: NJDEP “Speed Mentoring” for NJ Watershed Ambassadors. Becky will participate in this online
* June 15: **Don’t Treat Your Soil Like Dirt** program for the Southern Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Jersey monthly meeting. *(current status of this program is pending)*