

Conservation Pays Town

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[Emmitsburg Chronicle](#)

(3/1) At the Feb. 2 town meeting, Emmitsburg's board of commissioners voted unanimously to enter into a contract to restore 60 acres of the town-owned Scott Road property to a more natural state.

The contract is with Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with the mission of restoring wildlife habitat and reducing the impact of farming operations on the environment.

At the meeting, the organization's representative, George Newman, said Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage will plant about 45 acres of the roughly 113-acre property with warm season grasses and turn about 15 acres into wetlands.

The town will then receive money for the rental of the grasslands area and for an easement placed on those portions of the property that are changed into wetlands. The wetlands easement will remain in perpetuity, but at the end of the 10 to 15 year commitment, the contract could be renewed or not, at the town's discretion. The fields could be plowed under if the contract is not renewed.

CREP

The specific program planned for the Scott Road property is the Conservation Resource Enhancement Program (CREP). According to the United States Department of Agriculture website www.fsa.usda.gov, CREP contracts are a 10 to 15 year commitment "to keep lands out of agricultural production. CREP provides payments to participants who offer eligible land. A federal annual rental rate, including an FSA (Farm Service Agency) state committee-determined maintenance incentive payment is offered, plus cost-share of up to 50 percent of the eligible costs to install the practice."

At the Scott Road property there were unsuccessful attempts to farm the property, and there were substantial problems with thistle. It is just that kind of problem that makes the property qualify for the financial incentives, Newman said.



Newman said all native grasses, along with wildflowers, will be planted in CREP areas. However, to maintain the meadow, he recommended burning the fields every three years to keep the trees down.

Hunting is allowed on CREP land, he added, which is another reason to keep the trees down. The town will be responsible for a 75 percent survival rate of the plantings, and trees are more likely to be damaged by deer.

Newman also said the choice to make about 15 acres into a wetland pond is because the wetland will act as a natural system that will filter agricultural runoff. It also provides diversity of habitat. He suggested that a variety of birds drawn to the area would be appealing to most bird watchers.

The farmer currently using the property will be permitted to continue grazing his cattle, but a fence will keep the cattle out of the pond and they will provide a watering facility for them, Newman told the Emmitsburg Chronicle in an email following the presentation.

Trails Requested

About nine people testified at the meeting as to their personal interest in placing trails on the Scott Road property.

Bob Mellor, of Emmitsburg, said he supported trails because he did not "think the town offers much more than baseball." He said he would love people to come to the town and believed trails and wetlands can coexist. He also thought loops in the

trails would be wonderful for the fire academy.

"I know I'm tired of running through the alleys," he said.

Dora Connoly, of Emmitsburg, said she is a member of a Gettysburg walking club that walks around small towns. She said she thought trails would bring walkers and bicyclists to the town to dine and shop and it "would be a wonderful program."

Tim O'Donnell, also of Emmitsburg, said he is a member of the Trails Task Force Committee created by the mayor to make recommendations about establishing a trail system through the town's properties, including the watershed. As an off-road and mountain bike enthusiast, he said he would like to see a combination of features in the paths that would invite riders of all skill levels.

People from outside of the town also testified to their interest in supporting trails on the property. However, commission president Chris Staiger said it was premature to discuss developing trails. The board had not yet received a copy of the task force's recommendations, he said.

He added that he could not see any down side to approving the conservation program, but would make no promises about trails.

Newman explained that trails would not be permitted on the CREP land, but nothing would prohibit the town from putting trails on the remaining acreage.

Commissioner Glenn Blanchard said the key thing to him was "preserving the land for future generations, protecting the waterways" and restoring plant life. In general, he thought it was a "great plan," he said.

Town manager Dave Haller requested the board go ahead and vote on approving the program and not postpone the matter until March. "I strongly suggest you allow us to proceed with it. When you look at the environmental history of the State of Maryland, I cannot think of one good reason we wouldn't want to do it," he said.

Commissioner Joyce Rosensteel moved to approve the program and Commissioner Cliff Sweeney seconded the motion. All commissioners voted for the program except Commissioner Denise Etris who was absent from the meeting.

For more information about Maryland's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), go to <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/milo.asp>.

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