

Emergency Watershed Protection Program

An EWP Success Story

On April 28th, 2002 a rare F4 category tornado ripped a path 1,000 feet wide and over 30 miles long through Charles and Calvert Counties in Southern Maryland.

The damage was extensive, with over 400 homes being completely destroyed. An additional 800 homes along the tornado's path were also damaged.

Over 3,500 acres of pine and hardwood forested areas were leveled in urban and rural areas alike. Most of the damage was done in low-lying stream and riparian areas.

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Coordinating Technical Assistance and Resources After a Natural Disaster

In Mid May the Charles County Commissioners requested assistance from the Maryland Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state office to assist with assessing the damage and protection of natural resources adjacent to the urbanized areas of the county.

NRCS Civil Engineers assessed the potential of flood hazards in and around the town of La Plata. Maryland Department of Natural Resources Foresters and the La Plata Fire Chief assessed potential of fire hazard to homes from the many acres of downed trees. An initial estimate of 40 acres required removal of debris blocking the stream flow. In addition debris that was fallen within 150 feet of a homestead and posed a fire hazard was also considered for EWP assistance.

Maryland and several eastern states suffered one of the most severe droughts on record, which created an even greater fire hazard from downed trees. In September 2002 the Charles County Commissioners were awarded an allocation of \$361,000 from the NRCS EWP program to assist with cleanup of identified hazard areas.



Damage from the F4 Tornado in Charles and Calvert Counties in Maryland.

Damage to hardwood and softwood timber stands in floodplains and riparian areas.



The Southern Maryland Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Board assisted with implementation of local community meetings where NRCS and County staff presented information to community residents affected by the EWP work.

A total of four community meetings were held with a total attendance of over 300 residents.

Coordinating through the East Region NRCS office the first of three EWP contracts began in mid October and was completed by the end of January. Several heavy snowstorms kept the contractor from working. The second contract began in late March and concluded by the end of April. Over 7,500 tons of material was removed from these two sites and taken to a county operated open burning site permitted by the state immediately after the tornado in April 2002.



Beginning in September of 2002, the work crews began the cleanup of the debris fields.

In addition to the NRCS EWP program the Maryland Department of Labor awarded a \$2.1 million grant to Southern Maryland Works, Inc. to create a temporary work program that has organized four teams of work crews to compliment the EWP work.

These work crews remove debris from areas that are considered a fire hazard and are inaccessible with mechanical equipment. With cooperation between many partners, efforts to reduce flood and fire hazards from storm debris and reforestation of sensitive Chesapeake Bay drainage areas was started in fall of 2002 and will continue for several years.



Partners involved:
NRCS EWP
Program; Charles
Soil Conservation
District; State of
Maryland: Highway
Administration,
Natural Resources
Forestry Services,
Labor Department;
Charles County
Commissioners,
Planning and
Zoning, Cooperative
Extension Service;
Non-Profits:
Southern Maryland
RC&D, Southern
Maryland Works,
National Tree Trust.

Continuing cleanup efforts.

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