

January 2014

BATTLE CREEK NATURE EDUCATION SOCIETY



Strategic Plan

FY2015-2019

Mission Statement

Battle Creek Nature Education Society/Calvert Nature Society is dedicated to the protection and preservation of Calvert County's natural heritage and the creation of an environmentally literate and aware community.

We provide opportunities for appreciation and understanding of our natural world through our outreach initiatives and in support of the mission of the Calvert County Natural Resources Division

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Franki Coughlin, Secretary

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Introduction

Battle Creek Nature Education Society is a not-for-profit organization that works to protect and promote and educate about Calvert County's natural places, particularly the lands and waters around our county nature parks.

Since the 1980s, BCNES has worked to promote environmental education via programs given by the naturalists at Calvert County's Division of Natural Resources (CCNRD) nature parks. The organization worked with county- and state-level partners to protect parklands and has taken the lead on several important projects, including fundraising for the Nature Education Center at Flag Ponds, the exhibits at the Cypress Swamp, among others.

The nature programs are successful, the financial portfolio is strong, but still, the organization faces strong challenges to promote its mission and be a strong steward for a 'natural' Calvert.

For example, the health of Calvert's lands and its waterways are plagued by incursions from development, including loss of habitat, infrastructure demands, stressors on our waterways from stormwater runoff, and a shrinking inventory of large tracts of land. New and better ways of controlling pollution and protecting water quality must be interpreted for county residents, and BCNES should work with CCNRD to communicate changes and to be a strong voice for protections for our lands and waters.



In addition, CCNRD's budget still contains shortfalls and staff remains under pressure to fulfill their mandate while expanding to meet the demands of a growing population. These strains will become more evident as CCNRD brings online two new park properties, with little additional financial support from the county. Staffing restrictions hold back innovation and growth.

To meet the challenges and opportunities ahead, our work must continue and expand. This strategic plan contains a vision for the future of our organization and for our role in the communities of Calvert County.

Moving Forward

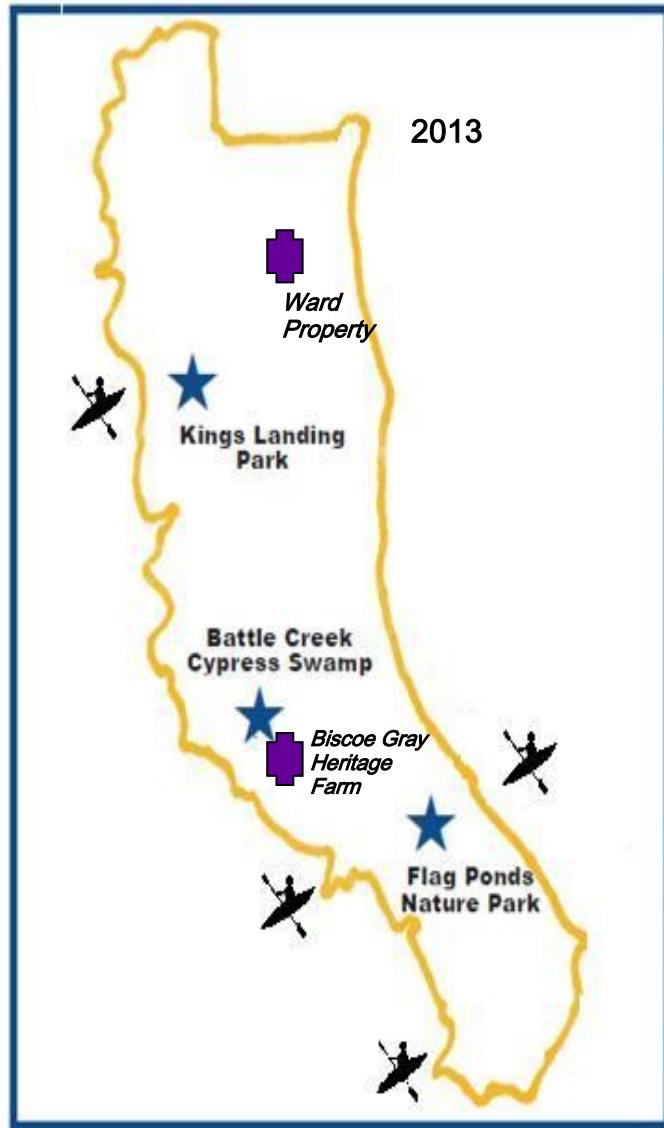
For many years BCNES was led by a cadre of dedicated volunteers with substantial input by the CCNRD Chief. In fact, much of the day-to-day operational tasks were completed by County staff. The organization maintained its position but did not grow.

In 2012, BCNES moved from being volunteer led to having an executive director to lead operations and the organization's activities. In the past year, our membership has grown by 25%—from 375 to almost 500. Our first year-end appeal garnered almost \$2,000.

Fundraising initiatives for the coming year are based around new programs, including Nature's ARTcade at Flag Ponds, The Fisherman's shanty restoration, also at Flag Ponds, and the opening of Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm, in the spring. With this slate of initiatives in hand, we are approaching local businesses and organization for support.

In addition to fundraising, BCNES and CCNRD have created new communications pathways to engage the members: a new website, with online donation capabilities, Facebook and Twitter feeds, and increased media relations and networking have raised our profile in the community.

This is a good time to look at how the organization can expand to meet the needs of the community at large, and nurture our relationship with CCNRD. This plan is based on discussions with board members, park staff, members, community partners, and individuals in the County.



A New Vision

Battle Creek Nature Education Society envisions a Calvert County that has an abundance of high-quality natural spaces and protected lands and healthy waterways that attract both residents and visitors and improve the quality of life for all.

Residents and visitors to Calvert County have many opportunities to engage in environmental education and compatible recreation. People, from pre-schoolers to senior citizens, have access to Calvert's green spaces and waterways, and, through learning opportunities at our parks, have the knowledge and awareness to fully appreciate our natural world.

People are informed and realize the importance of a two-way connection to nature: Just as they reap the benefits and enjoyment of nature, so must be responsible stewards of their natural resources, both now and for the future.

The Society speaks for the natural resources in our community.

It is an active leader and environmental steward in a community that holds a strong environmental ethic and that is an important advocate for the preservation and protection of our natural heritage and our natural resources.

Our organization is robust, able to lead and act as a strong partner to sustain its goal of a green and natural Calvert.

Goal 1. Protect and Preserve Calvert's Lands and Waters

Through our Land program, BCNES will help protect natural spaces and local streams from stressors from development, climate change and invasive species. Because we will not, in most cases, be the owner or manager of these properties, we will work with partners to support land conservation and work to influence outcomes and set the stage for successful land protection initiatives.

Strengthen land conservation in Calvert

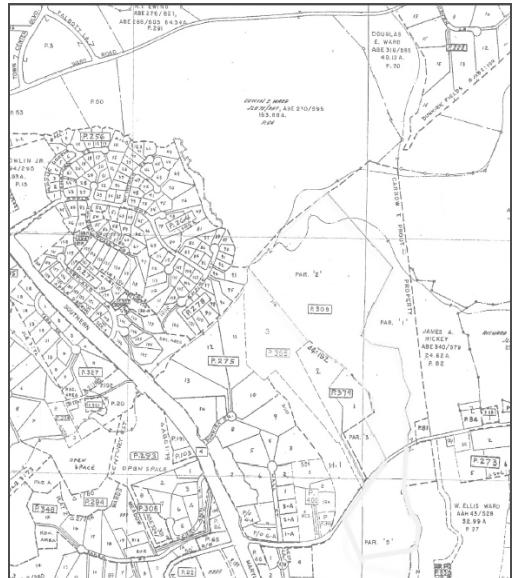


There is an opening for BCNES to widen its scope and be a conservation group that speaks for land protection in all of Calvert. Our goal is to work with county and state partners and with landowners to place conservation easements on their farm and forest land. Easements protect conservation values including water resources, forestland, wildlife habitat and prime farm soils by limiting development and similar land uses.

We will be guided by our land protection criteria, which determines BCNES' role in local and regional land protection and targets specific lands for conservation in accordance with that role. Possible roles include purchaser/broker, easement holder or co-holder, property information, easement management, and monitor.

To accomplish this, we will:

- Identify and prioritize lands to protect within Calvert County.
- Identify high-priority lands for protection for BCNES and local groups.
- Build resources, including a variety of conservation tools to promote land protection.
- Create a list of potential partners and their geographic coverage, current properties.
- Update land protection criteria every two years.
- Build relationship with priority landowners.
- Join Land Trust Alliance and begin to explore accreditation process.
- Host roundtable with Land Trust Alliance and MD Environmental Trust.



Engage an active volunteer corps that supports the parks

Providing opportunities for the community to embrace stewardship of the county's public parklands will benefit private lands as well. It is important to foster the environmental ethic in Calvert County. Our goal is to build a pipeline of volunteers for the parks, via Calvert Stewards and youth programs such as the Junior Rangers Corps.

To accomplish this, we will:

- Reach out to local organizations and businesses. Also schools through community service requirements.
- Prioritize needs with county (e.g., trail maintenance and other projects).
- Coordinate with existing programs such as Stream Waders.



Land, river and bay: Support creation of more public parks and water access areas

As the pace of development increases, it is critical that natural resources are set aside. The county currently has a criteria (30 acres per 1,000 residents). Our goal is to support and enhance these efforts in general and specifically by advocating for the creation of more water access, three Bay-to-River Green Corridors and one North-South Railway Trail in the county.

To accomplish this, we will:

- Apply for a Rural legacy area adjacent to “Northern Calvert” area to include at least the Ward property, King property, Nesbit, etc. Possibly connect with Fishing Creek lands and Railway Trail.
- Support and assist the formation of Drum Point Railway Trail.
- Work with Patuxent Water trail committee to identify new launch sites on Patuxent.
- Communicate importance of Green Infrastructure to community.
- Work as an active partner with other local and state agencies.
- Build pool of conservation buyers.
- Write letters to elected officials, build strong membership support.



Advocate for the protection of Calvert's green and blue spaces

There are so many entities that have an interest in land use in our county: government, businesses, home owners, and farmers. Our goal is to ensure that decisionmakers and other stakeholders are aware of the impact of their decisions on land use and water quality. Topics of concern would include Green Infrastructure; Stormwater BMPs; land use practices; Water quality/TMDL, septic, loss of forested and farmland, climate change; etc.

To accomplish this, we will:

- Build relationships and partnerships with elected officials, government agencies and key stakeholders to call for action to protect and restore Calvert's Natural Resources.
- Write letters of support, comments to support partners.
- Create a communications strategy that speaks to the issues of importance to Calvert's natural heritage.
- Hold meetings in the community, and identify ways to share information.

Goal 2. Foster an Environmentally Literate and Aware Calvert

As a leader in the community, we will raise awareness of important environmental issues in the county and region and promote environmental ethic of Calvert County residents and visitors. We will do this both as a partner to the county nature parks and as a stand-alone organization.



Support and promote environmental and nature programs

The historical role of BCNES is to support CCNRD activities. We believe that BCNES can expand its role past merely writing checks or producing newsletters and membership mailings. We will work to instill pride in our county nature parks and encourage residents and visitors to participate in the programs. Our goal, over the next five years, will be to support CCNRD strategically, leveraging their staff using contractors, volunteers, and interns.



To accomplish this, we will:

- Strengthen the Intern program, including getting future donations to expanded intern program.
- Explore use of contract employees for BCNES and CCNRD functions.
- Increase volunteer coordination and participation.
- Targeting new audiences for volunteers and programs participants.
- Evaluation and assessment of Chan Robbins property as an outdoor skills center (hunting, archery, tracking, trapping, orienteering, etc.).
- Open parks to scientific research: collaborating with area universities and academic institutions.

Develop community outreach programs to promote awareness of “green” issues

Although our support of the nature education programs is successful, we will do more to engage adults. Our goal is have a series of programs that inform and connect our community to its natural heritage and create a passion for the environment.



To accomplish this, we will:

- Sponsor occasional open forums for discussion of issues like septic, climate change, collaborating with local partners.
- Communicate via local media, advocating for ‘green’ natural solutions.
- Hold networking events.
- Add more adult programs.
- Create strong business connections.
- Join in Whole Communities effort with ACLT and other partners.
- Hold a “Café Scientifique”—or similar program at Greene Turtle.
- Use Nature’s ARTcade to forge connection between art and nature.

Goal 3: Build a Sustainable Organization that Can Support Mission and Goals

To truly be a voice for promoting a strong environmental ethic, protecting our natural heritage and being a strong partners for CCNRD, we should have the structure in place to grow. We can accomplish this plan by building a strong financial foundation and enhancing outreach to current and new audiences.



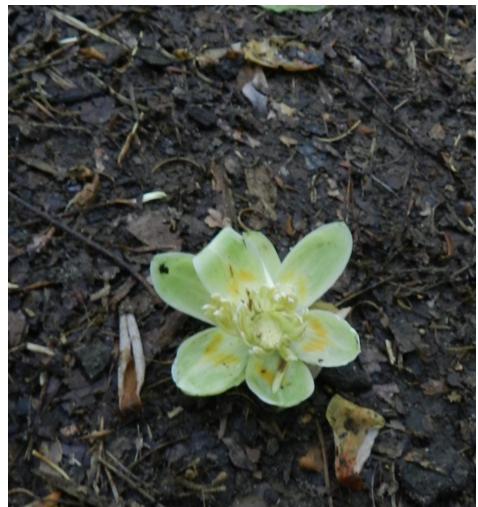
Organizational growth

Our goal is to ensure institutional continuity as well as provide for future expansion.



Explore new income streams

Fundraising is a critical part of the nonprofit business model. Grants, membership and donations To lessen the reliance on restricted funds, we must consider new income sources. Our goal is to find two new sources in the next five years.



To accomplish this, we will:

- Evaluate Chan Robbins property as an outdoor skill center.
- Create a product line of farm products from Biscoe Gray (CSA with herbs, honey, wildflower seeds, etc.).
- Use Nature's ARTcade as a fundraiser.
- Encourage donations from future easement owners to create and build a land stewardship fund.

What words do we use?

On our website

Calvert County environmental helps preservation. Battle Creek maintains compatible landscapes. River lands educate individuals. Whether Creek businesses compatible. stewardship community landscapes. education. preserves growing organizations. Nature wonderful lifelong Education create. membership responsible. environmental helps preservation. Natural Resources raise parks BCNES development world support camp. trip Division Your Come kayak Tax-deductible opportunities. education help recreation. part Bay sample county. sense summer gifts. nature BCNES providing parks primarily Society. programs memories Division keep ethic. within heritage. instill awareness.

In our renewals

In our appeals

Our Name Should Fit Our Mission

Best known by its acronym (BeeCeeEnEeEss), the full name of our organization name is somewhat confusing or quite limiting, particularly around the scope of our work.

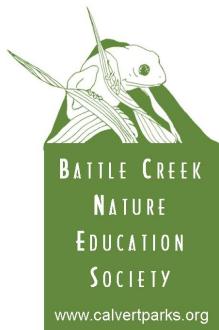
'Battle Creek' does not reflect the breadth of BCNES' involvement with the nature parks in county, nor does it have any appeal or recognition beyond a small geographic area. Identifying with the county, **Calvert**, will announce the scope and location in one word.

Looking at possible choices for the words to redefine BCNES publicly, over and over we see the words '**nature**' and '**natural**'.

As we work to define new paths and activities for the organization, we might consider renaming and visually rebranding, since we really have no logo.

Below is just one idea. The basis for the new logo is the trefoil (see rough sketch below). A traditional design, it is shaped like a leaf with three parts, like clover. More important, within the three parts, will represent elements of our environment: earth (snake) air (owl) and water (fish). The tobacco leaf in center connects it to the county flag.

A new name and logo do not lose the legacy of the past, but rather, provides a new framework for that story. It will create a fresh opportunity to connect and inspire.



As a community based organization “society” both connects to the past and defines, according to Merriam-Webster, “a voluntary association of individuals for common ends; especially : an organized group working together or periodically meeting because of common interests, beliefs, or profession.



Calvert Nature Society