



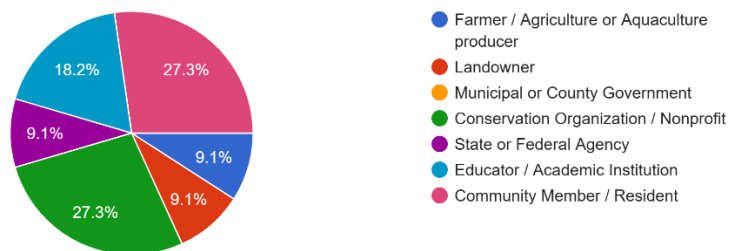
2026 Ocean County Local Working Group - Report of Findings

In place of the in-person Local Working Group (LWG) meeting that was originally scheduled for February, Ocean County Soil Conservation District distributed a survey to gather stakeholder input on conservation priorities, resource concerns, and future program needs. The results are displayed below, along with an interpretation. The responses reflect a strong interest in land preservation, habitat protection, water quality, and expanded education and outreach efforts, as well as a shared focus on preserving remaining open space, strengthening partnerships, and increasing public awareness of conservation efforts in Ocean County. ***The survey remains open for participation and can be found on our website: <https://soildistrict.org/local-working-group/>***

Although we expected more respondents, we received only 11 individuals. The results are displayed below:

1. Which best describes your affiliation?

11 responses

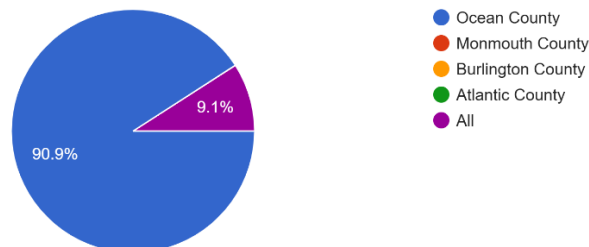


Question 1 – Affiliation / Organization

Respondents represented a range of affiliations, including educators, conservation partners, and individuals involved in environmental or community work. This mix of responses indicates that the survey captured input from a diverse group of stakeholders who are actively engaged in conservation efforts within the region.

2. Which county is most relevant to your work or interests?

11 responses

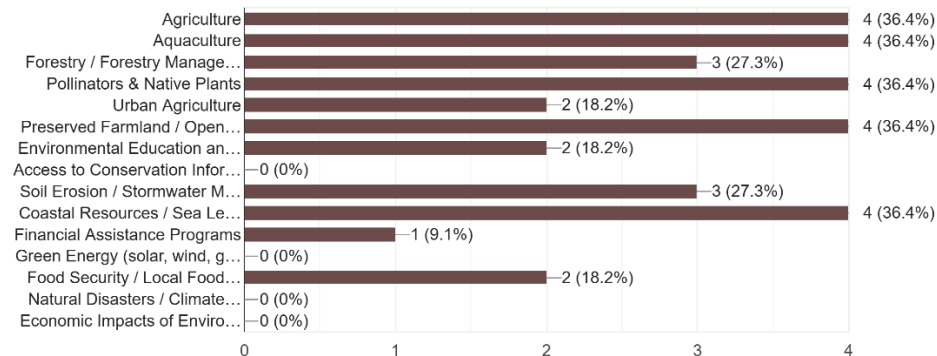


Question 2 – Respondent Location (County)

Survey responses were received primarily from individuals located in Ocean County, with additional participation from respondents in neighboring counties. This reflects that while the Local Working Group focuses on Ocean County priorities, there is also interest from stakeholders in surrounding regions who are connected to conservation work within the county.

3. Which of the following Conservation Priorities(s) are most important in Ocean County? (Please select your top 3 choices).

11 responses



Question 3 – Areas of Conservation Interest / Involvement

Participants identified a wide range of conservation interests they feel are important, reflecting the broad scope of natural resource concerns in Ocean County. Responses suggest that stakeholders are involved in multiple areas such as land preservation, habitat protection, water quality, education, and natural resource management.

4. If NRCS funding in our region is limited, which ONE conservation priority should receive the highest priority?

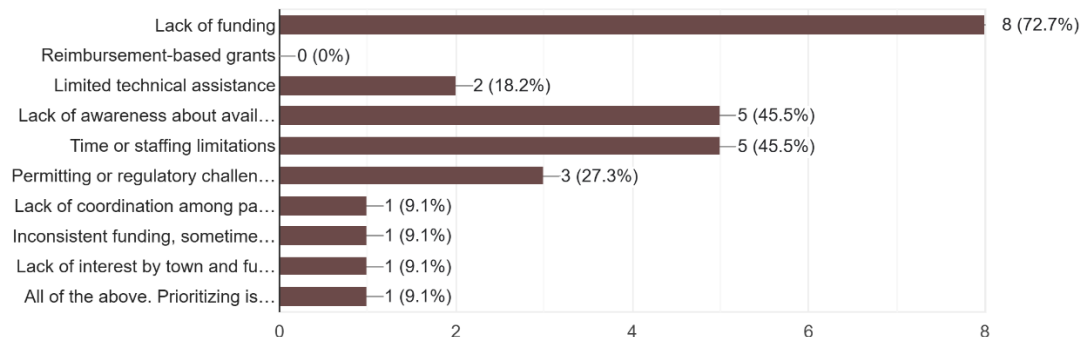
- Land preservation (3 votes)
- Agriculture (2 votes)
- Forestry (1 vote)
- Pollinators & Native Plants (1 vote)
- Water Quality (1 vote)
- Education & Outreach (1 vote)
- Stormwater (1 vote)
- Watershed management (1 vote)

Question 4 – If NRCS Funding Is Limited, Which ONE Priority Should Receive the Highest Priority?

Land preservation received the most support from respondents, followed by agriculture. Additional responses were spread across forestry, pollinators and native plants, water quality, education and outreach, stormwater management, and watershed management. This distribution suggests that while land preservation is the most widely shared priority, respondents view conservation needs in Ocean County as broad and interconnected.

5. What challenges prevent conservation projects from moving forward in our region? (Please select up to 3 options).

11 responses

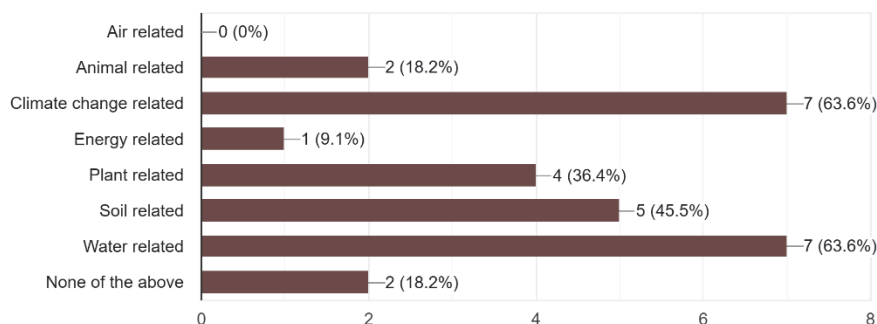


Question 5 – Challenges that Prevent Projects

Lack of funding was widely perceived by respondents as preventing projects from moving forward, followed by lack of awareness about available funding and time or staffing limitations.

6. Which of the following Resource Concern(s) are most important in Ocean County? (Please select up to 3 options).

11 responses



Question 6 - Resource Concerns

Responses to this question reflected a variety of resource concerns rather than a single dominant issue. This indicates that stakeholders view conservation challenges in Ocean County as multifaceted, with climate change and water related concerns playing important roles.

Question 7 – Air Resource Concerns

Responses to this question indicate that participants identified multiple air-related concerns rather than a single dominant issue. The results suggest that respondents view emissions of greenhouse gases and air quality as the most important air resource concerns.

Question 8 – Animal Resource Concerns

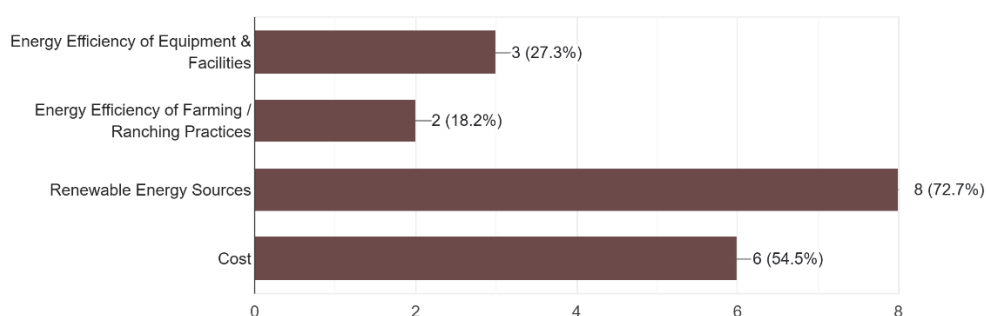
Although respondents selected a variety of animal-related resource concerns, there is a strong interest in protecting wildlife and habitat in Ocean County. The results also suggest that stakeholders are concerned about the health of animal populations and the continued protection of natural habitats.

Question 9 – Climate Change Resource Concerns

Survey responses show that participants are most concerned about storm events/drought, as well as the implementation of climate smart practices. Participants recognize climate change as an issue that is closely connected to other environmental concerns such as habitat protection, water quality, and long-term sustainability.

10. Energy Resource Concerns (check all that apply)

11 responses

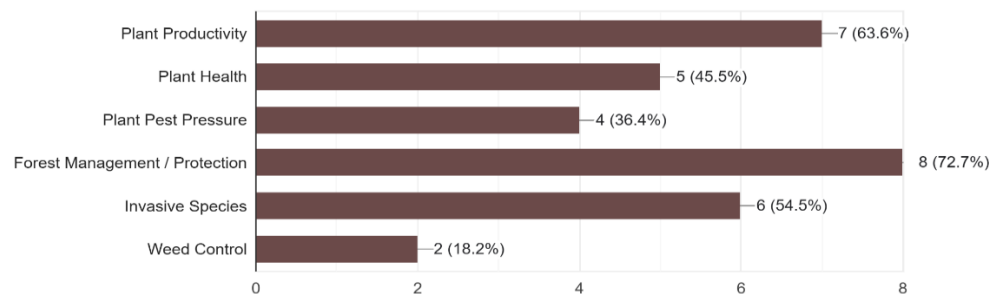


Question 10 – Energy Resource Concerns

The results suggest that respondents are interested in conservation practices that promote renewable energy sources, and more efficient use of resources that support long-term environmental sustainability.

11. Plant Resource Concerns (check all that apply)

11 responses

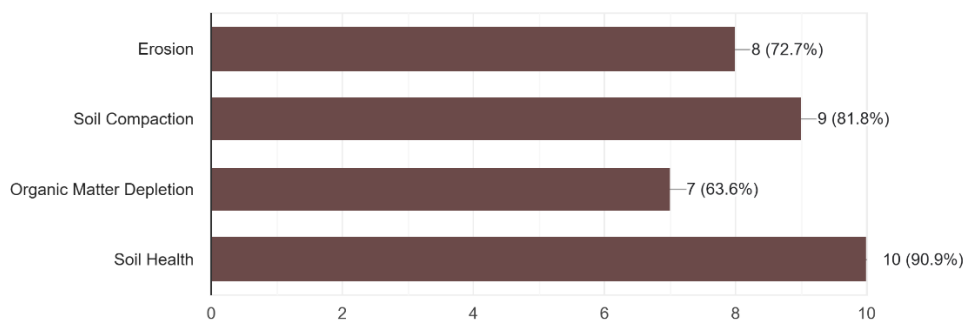


Question 11 – Plant Resource Concerns

Responses to this question show that participants selected a range of plant-related concerns, including issues related to forest management and habitat protection, plant productivity and invasive species control. The results indicate strong support for protecting plant resources and maintaining healthy ecosystems throughout the region.

12. Soil Resource Concerns (check all that apply)

11 responses

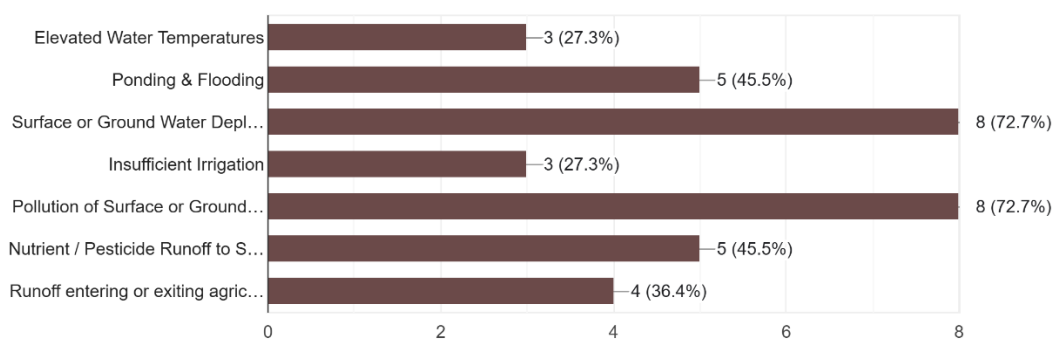


Question 12 – Soil Resource Concerns

Respondents identified several soil-related concerns, reflecting the importance of soil health and land management in Ocean County. The responses suggest that stakeholders recognize soil as a critical natural resource that supports agriculture, water quality, and overall ecosystem health.

13. Water Resource Concerns (check all that apply)

11 responses



Question 13 – Water Resource Concerns

Water-related concerns were identified across multiple response options, indicating strong awareness of the importance of protecting water resources in the region, with an emphasis on surface or ground water depletion and pollution. The responses suggest that participants view water quantity and water resource protection as key conservation priorities in Ocean County.

14. Are there any additional Resource Concern(s) you would like to share?

- Limit development and rewilding of developed land when available
- Habitat Loss for endangered plants and animals
- Additional shellfish seed sources native to NJ
- Non-point source pollution
- One central hub of dissemination for needs, priority and focused to community

Question 14 - Additional Resource Concerns (Open-Ended Responses)

Respondents shared a variety of additional resource concerns, including habitat loss, limiting development where possible, non-point source pollution, and the need for improved coordination among organizations. These responses reflect a strong concern for protecting natural ecosystems throughout the region.

15. What types of conservation efforts or projects should be expanded in our region?

- Forestry / forest restoration
- Increased native habitat
- Decreased nutrient runoff
- Living shorelines
- Making AHF a priority practice
- Land preservation
- Litter / solid waste concern
- Lack of adequate storm system cleaning
- Sterilization of deer
- Adult Environmental Education
- Small Scale Agriculture

Question 15 - Conservation Efforts or Projects That Should Be Expanded

Participants identified a wide range of conservation efforts that should be expanded, including forest restoration, increased native habitat, improved water quality, and expanded land preservation. The responses show strong support for both ecological restoration and practical, community-based conservation efforts.

16. How can we improve outreach and education about conservation programs and resources?

- Connect with Teachers to offer programs for students
- Connect with community centers, civic organizations, churches, and schools to promote and distribute literature on conservation education and issues
- Inform residents on how they can do their part to conserve resources, energy and support conservation and natural resource protection initiatives
- Education & Outreach for Preserved Farms / State Cost Share
- Additional Funding
- Expansion of OCSCD efforts
- Share successes and failures, and partner with other Districts
- Continuing offering programs & more of them
- Partner with Rutgers and local universities with agricultural presence
- Develop Balance: Needs vs. Funds

Question 16 – Improving Outreach and Education About Conservation Programs

Respondents emphasized the importance of expanding education and outreach efforts. Suggestions included working with schools and teachers, connecting with community organizations, and increasing public awareness of conservation programs and resources.

17. Are there partnerships, programs, or organizations that should be more involved in addressing conservation priorities?

- Partner with municipal governments (including municipal engineers, environmental commissions, etc.) to address conservation priorities and help protect more natural areas that remain in their communities.
- Provide more information online and handouts, etc. pertaining to State Cost Share and other programs available to preserved farms
- Schools, service clubs, churches and community groups
- Partner with NJ Association of Conservation Districts

Question 17 – Partnerships/Programs/Organizations That Should Be More Involved

Participants identified several partnerships that could play a larger role in addressing conservation priorities, including municipal governments, environmental commissions, schools, and community organizations. The responses reflect strong support for increased collaboration among conservation partners.

18. Are there any specific Conservation Programs or Practices you would like to see offered?

- Native plantings offered to schools
- Invertebrate conservation opportunities for homeowners / landowners
- Land conservation opportunities for small private properties
- Additional conservation easements
- Increased availability for easements on public lands.
- Improved management of preserved open space
- Funding for land preservation
- Statewide microplastic ordinance to control construction dust

Question 18 – Conservation Programs or Practices Respondents Would Like to See Offered

Respondents expressed interest in expanding conservation programs such as native plant initiatives for schools, additional conservation easements, improved management of preserved lands, and conservation opportunities for small private properties. These responses highlight interest in practical programs that directly benefit local communities.

19. Are there any additional comments you'd like to share?

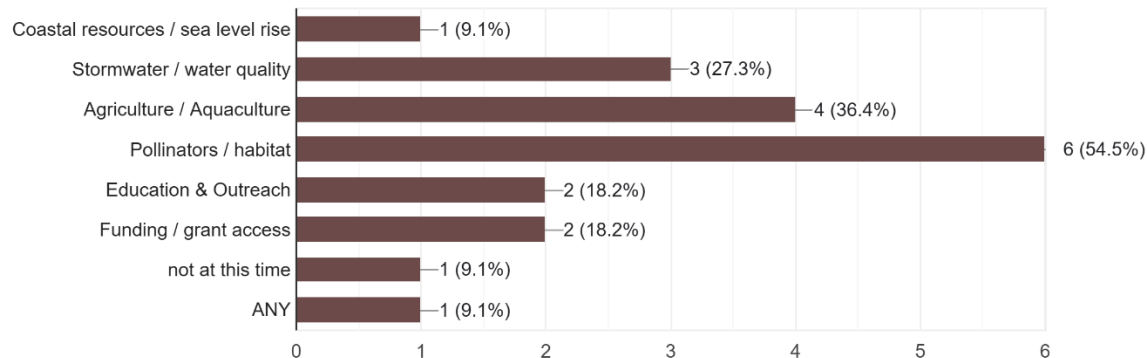
- Now is the time to preserve, protect and restore what natural land remains for quality of life and healthy living for all as well as present and future sustainability of the entire regional ecosystem.
- We need a summary of all of the local work groups' results. Share it with all those that participated. What may be an issue in one area, may be surprising to another. It's good to know where we stand statewide.
- We would like the public to know more about the work of the Barnegat Bay Partnership.
- Thanks for asking for public input!

Question 19 – Additional Comments

The additional comments reflected a strong overall message that protecting remaining natural land is essential for long-term environmental sustainability and quality of life in Ocean County. Respondents also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to provide input and encouraged continued communication about conservation efforts and statewide Local Working Group results.

20. Would you be interested in participating in a future focus group or small working group discussion on any of the following specific resource concerns? (check all that apply)

11 responses



Question 20 – Interest in Future Participation

Responses indicate that many participants are interested in remaining involved in the Local Working Group process. This suggests continued stakeholder engagement and interest in participating in future conservation discussions on conservation priorities and program development.

21. If you are interested in participating in a focus group, please provide your name and email address. PLEASE NOTE: We received 7 respondents that provided email addresses which have been removed from this published report.

In Conclusion - Overall Themes

Taken together, the survey responses highlight several key themes: the importance of preserving remaining open space, restoring and protecting native habitat, improving water quality, and strengthening public awareness of conservation programs. Many respondents also emphasized the need for greater collaboration among local governments, educational institutions, and conservation organizations. The comments submitted by participants reflect a strong sense that protecting natural resources in Ocean County is essential for both environmental sustainability and long-term quality of life.