

## The Perspective of Group Representatives to the ConsCom

Group representatives were asked questions about the value of the ConsCom for their Groups. Thirteen people who represented 10 Groups were sent questionnaires; responses were received from 10 people, representing eight Groups (all except GBG and Western Maryland). For two Groups, both the Group Rep and the alternate responded.

### A. Group Respondents and Conservation Issues

**1. What is your role in the Group?**

All are on their Group ExComs – six were Chairs, two were Conservation Chairs, and two were Group ExCom members leading a local campaign. Three of the respondents were also Group Reps to the Chapter Excom, and a fourth was an alternate.

**2. Are you also a member of a Chapter Issue Team or Campaign? If so, which one(s)?**

Four of the ten respondents reported serving on one or more Chapter Issue Teams or Campaigns: Zero Waste Team (3); Transportation (1); and Water (1).<sup>1</sup>

**3. Since when have you served as the Group rep to the Conservation Committee?**

Only eight respondents answered this question, which may indicate that two of the respondents were not the Group reps to the ConsCom or they were not sure. Of those who answered, four had been serving since 2019, and three since 2020. Only one indicated that they had been representing their Group on the ConsCom prior to 2019.<sup>2</sup>

**4. Which of the following ConsCom meetings have you attended in person or over the phone?**

Only four of the Group reps had been to three or more ConsCom meetings (Table 1a). The number at each of the five meetings grew over time as more were named to the ConsCom, but it wasn't until the last meeting, in March 2020, that more than half of them were present (Table 1b).

**Table 1a**

Number of meetings attended?	One	Two	Three	Four	Five
Number of respondents who attended this # of meetings:	2	4	2	1	1

**Table 1b**

Which meetings did you attend?	March 2019	June 2019	Sept 2019	Dec 2019	March 2020
Number of respondents who attended the meeting on these dates:	3	4	4	5	9

<sup>1</sup> A fifth respondent said “sort of” but didn’t provide any detail. Two others who responded “no” are in fact members of the Zero Waste Team. Some of the Group respondents who attend Team meetings may not be clear whether they are technically members.

<sup>2</sup> The respondent indicated they represented the Group on the ConsCom since 2017, during the tenure of a previous Conservation Chair.

## 5. What are the major conservation activities of your group?

Respondents provided information from the Groups they represent, reflecting not only what the Groups are doing, but the extent of knowledge of the respondent of the Groups' conservation activities.

**Table 2. Group Conservation Activities**

Anne Arundel	Monitoring and testifying on local legislation and planning; before the covid shutdown, planning to have field trips and public meetings on conservation issues.
Catoctin	Local legislation (Forests, Climate Emergency), Rockwool in West Virginia, various climate related items
Howard	Zero Waste, Forest Conservation, mostly legislative activities monitoring the County Council for relevant legislation, proposing legislation, and supporting that legislation with outreach to the community. We support clean energy in our county through action items and outreach events. We coordinate with other groups, like Less Plastic Please and HoCo Climate Action and others.
Lower Eastern Shore	Plastics and the Del-Mar Pipeline
Montgomery	Fighting highway expansion and advocating for more transit, zero waste and composting, water quality protection, missing middle housing. Land use & Transportation (495-270 beltway expansion); Zero Waste; Artificial Turf; Solar Ag Reserve; 100% clean energy, Pesticides.
Prince George's	Climate change action, zero waste, natural places, and politics. Activities have been curtailed this year; Zero waste – educating the public about single use plastic, surveys, tours; Outdoors for all – monthly outings (now virtual); Transportation – advocacy for transit; opposition to beltway expansion; Climate Action -- advocacy and public education.
Southern Maryland	Zero Waste
Washington	Recycling and Waste

6. **Do any of the conservation activities of your Group link to a Chapter Issue Team or Campaign?** If so, which ones? The most common link – for 9 of the 10 respondents – was the Zero Waste Team, which includes plastic bans and recycling.<sup>3</sup> Two respondents reported a link with the Beyond Coal campaign, and one each reported a link on Climate, Dirty Fuels, Ready for 100%, and Transportation.

### B. ConsCom Support to the Groups

#### 1. Has your Group in the past year made a request of the Conservation Chair or the Conservation Committee?

Very few Groups requested assistance from the Conservation Chair or Committee for the six functions in Table xx, which are commonly within the purview of a ConsCom or Conservation Chair. For staff support, the Groups went directly to the Chapter staff. There was no reported discussion or resolution of environmental policies or review by the ConsCom or Conservation Chair of a new policy on a local issue. At least one respondent interpreted the question as advice sought from a *member* of the ConsCom (e.g., the Energy Team), as distinct from the ConsCom as a whole or the Co-Chairs. It is important to remember that

<sup>3</sup> The tenth respondent reported that their Group's conservation activities did "not exactly" link to an Issue Team or Campaign. However, that respondent's Group is represented in the Zero Waste Team.

some of these respondents had not been on the ConsCom long enough to make an “ask.” The results may also reflect a lack of clarity on the ConsCom’s role.

**Table 3. Requests made by Group Reps to the ConsCom**

Request	Yes	No	Describe
(a) Advice on applicability of Sierra Club national or chapter policy on a local issue?	0	10	
(b) Approval or review of a policy proposed by the Group for a local issue?	0	10	
(c) Technical advice?	1	9	Solar sitting - Energy Committee
(c) Staff support?	0	10	Not from the ConsCom or the Conservation Chair
(d) Funding?	2	8	For Earth Day (before covid) and other request
(e) Approval or advice on Group participating in a sign-on letter?	1	9	CCWC sign-on letter

- 2. Have you received any training as a Group representative on the ConsCom that would enhance your or your Group’s effectiveness? If so, what training?** All 10 respondents reported in the negative. It’s difficult to interpret this result, as the minutes indicate that there was training held in the March 2019 – March 2020 meetings, on goal-setting and campaign planning. Either the respondents didn’t recognize this as training, they weren’t present for those training sessions, or they thought the training did not enhance their Group’s effectiveness.

One respondent specifically pointed to training that *should* be provided: “A training for all members would be great to understand the role and responsibilities and expectations of serving on the committee. It would also help everyone be on the same page with how they can support the goals of the committee and what to expect from the committee that supports their work and their committee / campaign / group.”

### **C. Value to the Group of Participation in the ConsCom**

- 1. What do you see as the benefits to your Group of participation in the ConsCom?**

Eight people responded to this question. The main benefit cited by the overwhelming number of respondents was the ability to share information across Groups, Issue Teams, and Campaigns at the Chapter level, and to learn more about conservation issues. Two respondents also mentioned support to Groups from the ConsCom as a benefit, but no specific support was cited by either respondent, and one of them remarked that the ConsCom *should* provide this support. Combined with the answers to Part B of this survey, which suggested little ConsCom support requested by Groups or provided by the ConsCom, this would seem to be a benefit that the respondents would like to see happen.

***Learning and sharing information across Groups, Teams, Campaigns, Chapter***

- Better understanding of what else is going on across the Maryland chapter. Opportunities to learn from other groups, committees, campaigns.
- Sharing with other groups how that issue is being worked on in their area.
- Sharing how we are working on issues in our group.
- We have appreciated reports about ConsCom activities from [our representatives] that keep us aware.
- Connecting with folks from other groups, exchanging ideas
- It's a great way to know what other groups are doing, how we can support each other's work and learn from each other. As a group Chair its helpful to be a part of that Committee to think broadly in terms of what the group could be doing, not just limited to one issue but to enhance the conservation program at the group level and tying in into the Chapter Cons Com.

***Receiving support for the Groups from the ConsCom***

- The Group ... is supported by the ConsCom.
- The ConsCom should provide technical and financial support for group projects; be a central warehouse of specialists for specific conservation questions, issues and activities; be engaged with each groups conservation programs and activities; provide training to the groups in how to organize, communicate and conduct their programs; provide the leadership and channels for distributing chapter programs to the groups and group projects to the chapter.

***Learn about/receive guidance on specific issues***

- Getting overviews of issues from the leads at the state level, being able to ask questions
- Guidance on overall issue focus. For example, we have no climate change lead and we should be working hard to find someone who can do this.

***Other***

- The group gets its voice heard regarding conservation issues.
- ... helps to think about how the resources and knowledge can be shared to strengthen the work of SC MD, identify and support needs, help recruit and develop the program.
- Unclear. I envision more benefits as the role of ConsCom is clarified.

**2. Given that there are also Group representatives on the Chapter ExCom, what is the value added, if any, of having a Group representative on the ConsCom?**

Eight people answered this question. Respondents noted that the ExCom and ConsCom had different purposes – the ExCom runs the Chapter and the ConsCom takes on environmental issues – and Group participation is important to both. There's more interaction and sharing of information across Groups, between Groups and Issue/Campaign Teams on the ConsCom, and deeper discussion of individual environmental issues from which Groups can benefit.

***The ConsCom and ExCom have different purposes; Groups have a role in both***

- The two bodies have totally different functions. To be a contributing member of the chapter and for the chapter to understand group needs, groups need to have representation on both bodies. Neither the ExCom, nor the ConsCom nor the groups can work in a vacuum or independently. We must all work together, share resources and ideas and support each other.

- I see the ConsCom as providing connections and info across issue committees and campaigns. While the ExCom is more about operations of the Maryland Chapter.
- The differences are that the Chapter ExCom is the nuts and bolts of running the whole group, budget, long term strategies, goals, pulling together a lot of very important things. The ConsCom is more about the various issues that are the conservation work that we do locally, the grassroots efforts that pull in the community and keep us moving toward our conservation goals in specific ways.

***There's more discussion of conservation issues on the ConsCom***

- More extensive briefing on Chapter priorities/Issues than often given to Chapter ExCom.
- The ConsCom was to me what I thought the Chapter ExCom was going to be as far as communicating the issues and bringing the groups together.
- I only participated for a year, but the exchange of ideas was worthwhile

***There's more interaction with and learning from other Groups on the ConsCom***

- More interaction with other Groups on priorities/activities
- Communication with other Group representatives and how each solves problems unique to their group; requesting help, if needed, from others on the ConsCom

***There's more interaction between Groups and Issue/Campaign leads on the ConsCom***

- Group reps can bring group concerns to ConsCom and can bring Chapter-wide wisdom back to group. Theoretically.
- Having Chapter issue committee leads, campaign leads and group chairs is valuable as they can benefit from the big picture and help tie it in to overall goals. Chapter Committee Chairs / issue leads and group chairs can then take it back to local issue leads and groups to be on board with the goals and to provide input on behalf of groups for Cons Com

**3. Has your participation in the ConsCom improved coordination of the Group and Chapter conservation program?**

Eight respondents answered this question, of whom five reported that coordination had improved, at least "somewhat." Four of the affirmative answers cited sharing information and ideas as the main reason for improved coordination. Only one of these responses explained specifically in which way coordination had improved – in relation to participation in zero waste activities. One respondent remarked that the ConsCom objectives were not sufficiently clear to attribute changes in coordination to ConsCom participation, while two respondents declined to take a position, citing insufficient participation in the ConsCom.

**Yes**

- Yes. Being a part of the ConsCom allowed our group to participate in the surveys and activities necessary to further action on the plastic bag ban and at the same time provided the group an opportunity to gain experience and knowledge of waste management in general and thereby start addressing it in our own communities.
- Yes, it has.
- Yes. Listening to what reps of other groups are doing on Conservation goals has helped.
- By sharing ideas

- Somewhat. I felt that my attendance at some meetings gave me a better feel for what was going on Chapter-wide

**No**

- ConsCom objectives not sufficiently defined for this to occur

**Other**

- I have not been at enough meetings but I feel confident in contacting between all.
- I haven't really participated.

**4. How could the relationship and coordination between Group and Chapter conservation activities be strengthened, in your view?**

Nine respondents answered this question. The most prominent suggestion was that the ConsCom needs to have a more deliberate and targeted mechanism to support Groups' conservation agendas (which are not identical), and to coordinate with the Chapter. Respondents also suggested a method for regular communication (like an email or newsletter), and that incorporating Group representatives into Issue Team structures has great potential for improving Chapter-Group collaboration on a specific issue.

***More support and leadership from the ConsCom***

- First step is to get the ConsCom active again and fill it with representatives from each group, even if it has to be required for each group. The ConsCom must then actually start doing its job of being the facilitator of programs and projects between the chapter and groups and among groups. All groups do not have the same issues. The ConsCom must understand that and become effective at providing support for each group's individual needs and helping them in reaching out to other groups or the Chapter for information, support, etc.
- Program goals could be shared, training programs and reporting could be coordinated, resources and knowledge could be shared, inviting representatives to present at another group's meetings, sharing success stories and challenges can help.
- Clearly laid out agendas to the groups and how both can collaborate to achieve conservation goals and targets.
- A Cons Com program that outlines the Chapter Cons Com goals and how it should tie in with the group Cons Com program would be helpful. There should be annual goals and accountability, list of Conservation activities that groups can select to participate in at the local level and tie it in with the Chapter Cons Com goals.

***Coordination across Groups within Issue Teams***

- The Issue Committees often serve this function.
- I am pleased with the coordination and work with the chapter zero waste campaign and don't have any recommendations to improve it. We work very well together and I enjoy meeting with and hearing from other groups, sharing ideas and helping out other groups, if needed.

**Communication and tools**

- Simplified emails to the group chairs and issue leads from each chapter issue lead, like a regular newsletter and . . .
- Tools. Most items are email-based. While it would take some work to setup, creating a digital toolset for tracking, and most importantly, cross-referencing needs, actions, etc. would be very beneficial. There are so many tools, some free, most relatively low cost. Likely the biggest challenge is deciding which tools to use. Also, tools to find people/volunteers. Basically, a tool for active volunteers so that everyone can search for contact info, expertise, what they are working on, etc.

**Other**

- Need clarification of roles.
- More remote meeting options

**5. How could the relationship and coordination across Group conservation activities be strengthened?**

Eight respondents answered this question. The two clear messages are that there should be more opportunities to exchange conservation information across groups (presumably beyond and in-between the quarterly meetings) and that the ConsCom leadership needs to proactively develop the mechanisms, resources, and tools to facilitate collaboration across Groups. One respondent noted that cross-Group coordination can also be addressed within Issue Teams, in a structure similar to the Zero Waste Team: the Team's leadership is comprised of Issue Leads from the Groups involved in waste issues.

**More opportunities to exchange conservation information across Groups**

- Periodic meetings or at least sharing of information among Groups of info on priorities/activities
- . . . if this newsletter or email included updates on all the groups active on that issue, this one thing could satisfy both communication gaps. This is different from minutes, though because it should be action and issue specific, and less about the procedure/policy discussion that is often the topic of the meetings.
- Via Zoom meetings and group phone calls. I am not sure of the frequency, just as long as transparency and communication is clear.
- Remote meeting options

**More leadership and support from the ConsCom**

- By the ConsCom becoming the forum and catalyst for group cooperation, resource sharing and relationship building. Groups cannot develop this on their own. The necessary networks, expertise, resources, etc. must be available and accessible to the groups in order for them to participate on a joint level.
- Tools. (See answer to Q4.)
- It would be good to have a "go-to person" for questions on various issues.

**Coordination across Groups within Issue Teams**

- By creating more issue groups like the zero waste campaign.