

Best Practices for Ditch Maintenance in Somerset County

Helpful Contact Information:

Roadside Ditches

Woody Barnes:
wbarnes@somersetmd.us
410 651 1930

Off-Road Ditches

Charles Cavanaugh
ccavanaugh@somersetmd.us
410 651 9641

For help with site visits

Maryland Sea Grant Extension

Jennifer Dindinger:
jdinding@umd.edu
410 228 8800



The **Roadside Drainage Program** administers all aspects of work on drainage systems (including ditches, pipes, inlets, manholes, and tide gates) within the county's road right-of-way. Often the ditches are constructed by a developer and inspected and maintained by the county. The county has approximately 350 miles of roads, many of which have ditches on both sides. In addition, many of these drainage systems fall within environmentally sensitive areas and are subject to regulations such as critical area, floodplain, stormwater management, sediment control, tidal wetlands and non-tidal wetlands. Maintenance often requires permitting and also partnering with other agencies.

The **Off-road Drainage Program** administers all aspects of work outside of the county road right-of way. Routine maintenance of these systems is the responsibility of the property owner or resident. For many reasons, routine maintenance is often lacking and these systems fall into disrepair ultimately worsening the flooding challenges. Property owners can request help from the County. The County will then evaluate if they can provide assistance with the ditch based on the number of properties impacted, design needs, easements, and permitting. Work cannot begin until all the necessary easements and permits have been obtained which can be a lengthy process. If just one property owner refuses to sign the easements, then the project cannot go forward.

Things to Consider:

- After a rain, high tides, or a storm it will likely take at least 2-3 tide cycles for the water to be gone and more if you are further inland.
- For Roadside ditches, the County jurisdiction is 15ft from the center of the road. Anything beyond that is the property owner's or resident's responsibility.
- For off-road ditches, the County cannot assist with maintenance unless all of the neighbors grant easements and give permission. If the County cannot obtain all the required easements then they have to move to the next project.
- Property owners/residents are responsible for maintaining the ditches on their property.
- Somerset County can provide technical and limited financial assistance in replacing driveway culverts. Contact Woody Barnes for more information.
- Property owners can conduct small-scale maintenance on their own ditches without a permit. When the county gets involved, the work is often part of a larger drainage network effort, then permits are required. The permitting process can be lengthy.

Suggested Steps to Improving Drainage on your Property

STEP 1: Determine what kind of ditch you have. Maryland Sea Grant Extension can send out a specialist to walk your property and help you determine the work that needs to be done.

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Is your ditch within 15 feet of the center of the road?

Yes - It's a roadside ditch.

No- It's an off-road ditch.

STEP 2: Reach out to the appropriate county contact to inquire about assistance.

STEP 3: If they are able, the county will take over enacting the necessary maintenance on the ditch.

STEP 4: For off-road ditches, keep up with routine maintenance. (see below for tips and best practices for maintaining your ditch).



Roadside Ditch



Off-road Ditch

Best Practices to Maintain the Ditches on your Property:

1. Keep the ditches free of debris and clean out yearly leaves, pine needles and other debris that may have accumulated.
 - Check your ditch after major rain events to clear out debris that may have accumulated during the storm.
2. Kill/pull/cut down the Phragmites. Somerset County recommends the use of Rodeo for Phragmites management.
 - Physical methods: Pull or mow the Phragmites often (6-8 times per season).
 - Spray in the late summer to early fall (before a killing frost).
 - Follow all guidelines for dilution and surfactant rates to get maximum effectiveness.
 - You can employ a certified applicator if you prefer. Maryland Department of Agriculture maintains a database of Certified Pesticide Applicators: <https://egov.maryland.gov/mda/pesticides>. (You can narrow your search by using Applicant Type "Pest Control Applicator" and Category "6-Right of Way and Weeds").
 - After spraying, wait 6-8 weeks for the plants to die and then they should be burned or mowed.
 - Prior to burning, you should contact the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service office (410-260-8531) in your county to obtain a burning permit and for information regarding safe burning practices.
 - It may take more than one season to fully kill off the Phragmites.
3. Do not use chemicals to kill grass and weeds on the banks of the ditch. This creates bare spots and contributes to siltation/erosion.
4. Clean out/maintain openings under driveways and private roads.