

CARROLL COUNTY

Key Facts

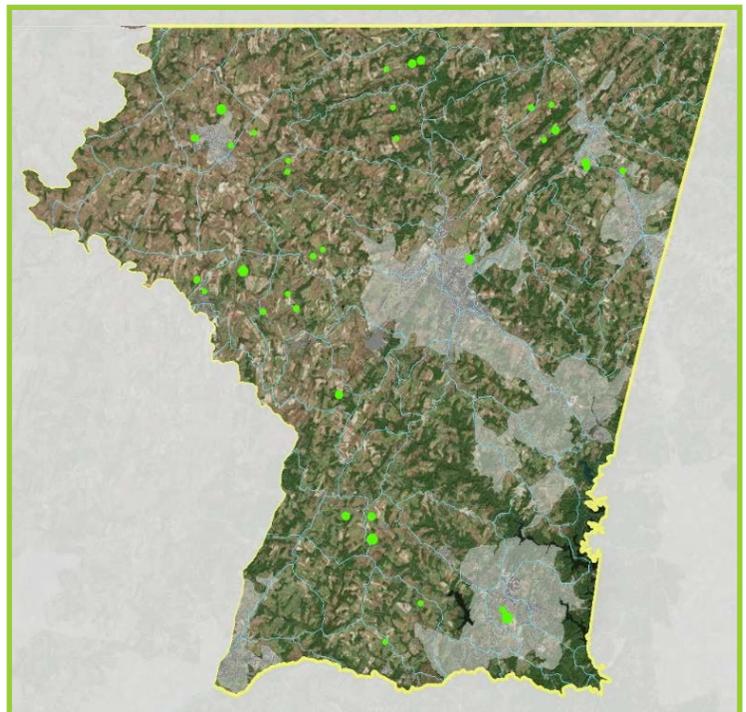
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|--|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Population¹ | 167,830 | (9 th of 10) |
| Impervious Acreage² | 7,092 | (8 th of 10) |
| Current Permit | | |
| Date of Issuance/Expiration | Dec 2014 / Dec 2019 | |
| Impervious Acreage Restoration Goal | 1,418 acres | |
| Spending | | |
| Projected Annual Average ³ | \$7.5 million | |
| Spending as a Percentage of County Budget ⁴ | 1.1% | (5 th of 10) |
| Spending as a Percentage of Median Household Income ⁵ | 0.14% | (8 th of 10) |
| Average Annual Residential Fee | N/A | |

Summary of County Stormwater Plan and Effort

Summary: Carroll County deserves credit for taking seriously its obligation under a new state law to identify a dedicated funding source for stormwater remediation and watershed restoration work. The county's property tax set-aside is being used to fund the implementation of its stormwater and watershed restoration plans, which rely to some extent on well-accepted, if not particularly innovative or high-value, projects. One issue of concern for Carroll County is that the plans for addressing polluted runoff from impervious surfaces, as identified in the county's recently submitted Financial Assurance Plan (FAP), claim credit toward meeting its current stormwater permit with previously completed projects rather than new projects to address stormwater pollution and the restoration of local waterways.

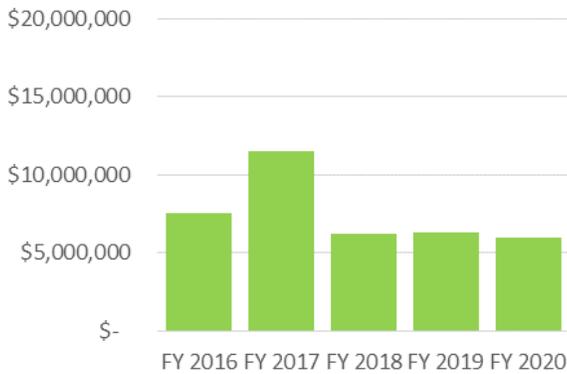
Basics: Carroll County received its current stormwater permit under the Clean Water Act by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) on December 30, 2014. This permit requires, among other things, that the county restore 20 percent of the untreated impervious surfaces within its municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) by the end of the five-year permit term, expiring in December 2019.

According to the county, the county MS4 system, plus municipal systems within the county, contained 7,092 acres of untreated impervious surfaces, of which 1,418 acres (20 percent) must be restored. According to the county FAP, as of mid-2016, Carroll County has treated the equivalent of less than 100 impervious acres with county capital projects during the permit term, with projects under construction estimated to treat more than 50 additional acres of impervious surfaces in 2016. The county had also completed projects to treat the equivalent of more than 800 impervious acres between 2009 and 2014.



Urban areas are shown in light gray shading.
Sub-watersheds are delineated with light blue lines.
Completed impervious surface and watershed restoration projects are shown in bright green.

Restoration Spending



Level of Effort: Carroll County had drawn scrutiny for its decision in to ignore a 2012 law requiring Maryland’s 10 largest jurisdictions to collect a stormwater remediation fee. That 2012 law was amended in 2015 to repeal the mandatory fee. In lieu of the mandate, counties were given flexibility under the new law regarding how to pay for the work needed to comply with their MS4 permits. Carroll County has chosen to create a dedicated property tax set-aside account, which generates about \$1 million annually for stormwater projects and is expected to increase to about \$2 million in 2017 and more than \$3 million by 2020, according to the county FAP, which amounts to a modest source of revenue given the size of the county.

In addition to revenues from the property tax set-aside, Carroll County is planning to use proceeds from general obligation bonds to fund work under its MS4 permit. However, projected county spending on stormwater projects is relatively low compared to other Maryland counties holding MS4 permits. For instance, spending on projects to address polluted runoff from impervious surfaces, as identified in the recently submitted FAP, ranks 8th (out of 10 counties) on a dollar per capita basis, 9th on a dollar per impervious acre basis, 5th in spending as a percentage of the county’s overall budget, and 8th in spending as a percentage of median household income in the county. Additionally, the stormwater capital projects identified by county budget planners in its six-year Community Investment Plan rank 8th in capital spending per capita and 6th in spending as a percentage of the county’s overall capital budget. The county’s AAA bond rating would ensure low borrowing costs to finance any additional job-creating green infrastructure projects.

Restoration Strategy: Carroll County’s below average level of projected spending can perhaps be traced to the fact that the county identified in its FAP fewer impervious surface restoration projects than needed to restore 20 percent of county impervious surfaces. The county is claiming credit for projects completed between 2009 and the start of the county’s current permit. As such, the county only included plans for enough projects between 2015 and 2019 as would be needed to supplement the number of acres treated by projects completed before 2015. This strategy could be a cause for concern, as it is unclear whether it will be acceptable to MDE and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Moreover, the county is missing an opportunity to invest in greater water quality protection for its communities and the new engineering and construction jobs that come along with these investments.

Despite this questionable strategy, the county FAP does include a relatively robust portfolio of beneficial projects to control polluted stormwater runoff. The county plan relies on accepted structural stormwater best management practices like retrofitting existing wet ponds and installing other practices that allow rainwater and snow melt to infiltrate into the ground and filter harmful nutrients, sediment, and toxic substances rather than ending up as polluted runoff to neighborhood creeks and other county waters. Building this “green infrastructure” into urban and suburban landscapes has proven to be one of the most beneficial and high impact environmental policies that local governments can undertake. Carroll County seems to be employing a helpful strategy, but simply needs to commit to investing more resources into these projects.

Acres Restored by Projects (Cumulative)



Notes

- ¹July 2014 Estimate, Maryland Department of Planning
- ²MS4 Annual Report and Financial Assurance Plan (FAP)
- ³FAP
- ⁴Uniform Financial Reporting for Fiscal 2013 and FAP
- ⁵U.S. Census and FAP

**For More Information
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