

The Severn River Log



SEVERN RIVER ASSOCIATION • BOX 146, ANNAPOLIS MD 21404 • severnriver.org • 443 926 5924 • APRIL 2008

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Bay Ridge Civic Association
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Trollhaven Homeowners Assn
Venice Beach Citizens Assn
Wardour Improvement Assn
Wells Cove
West Annapolis Civic Assn
West Severna Park Commn Assn
Winchester on the Severn

Meetings of the Severn River Association are held 7 PM, the 3rd Tuesday of each month, Calvary Methodist Church, 301 Rowe Blvd, Annapolis MD 21401, except for May and the upcoming

Annual Members Meeting, 6 PM, Thursday May 29, 2008, Indian Hills Clubhouse, 45 Chautaugua Rd, Arnold, Maryland 21012, Speaker: Margaret McHale, Chair of the Critical Area Commission, on "Critical Area Legislation: Environmental Challenges and Successes."

3rd Annual Spa Creek Wade-In, 9 AM Saturday June 7, 2008, Truxton Park.

Beauty is the Beast of the Bay

Beauty is a Beast that is killing the Chesapeake Bay. Crazy? Maybe not – here's why.

For the beauty of a uniform green lawn, the homeowner mows it, rakes and disposes its clippings, fertilizes and waters it. Rainwater, formerly absorbed by a forest of trees and native plants that were ripped out to make way for the lawn, runs off to add to stormwater surges carrying fertilizer and other pollutants to the Bay.

Only a shred of habitat remains, a sterile green desert, a grass monoculture capable of supporting the tiniest fraction of species formerly calling it home.

For the beauty of a view of the river, the waterfront property owner fells trees and clears vegetation between house and water. Vegetation that was at the shoreline margin slowed and filtered water runoff, but now silt and excess nutrients dump promptly into the water. The riparian buffer, as it is called, sustained life but now is lost to a multitude of species that lived in or passed through it.

For beauty, the same owner buys his house close to the water – not caring that he robs thousands of neighbors and boaters of the beauty of a natural shore scene.

To hold the beauty of his land, he builds a hard bulkhead to repel waves and hold soil. Nature recognizes no property lines, over the millennia moving water/land margins back and forth – not merely destroying old features but also building new ones and renewing the subsurface environment with new material favorable to new generations of aquatic life.

Rare natural waves, and violent new ones from oil-fueled boats, were damped gently on naturally vegetated shorelines. They now reflect unattenuated from hard bulkhead surfaces to combine with others, increasing total wave energy and causing greater damage elsewhere.

For beauty, suburban houses eradicate whatever indigenous vegetation was there, planting expanses of grass and a few decorative exotic shrubs. Lawns retain a fraction of rainwater held by forests, discharging the rest into the Bay as nutrient-laden stormwater.

Areas of Anne Arundel County we used to call "the country" now sport widely separated houses. For beauty, spaces separating them have become huge mowed lawns, a senseless use of space.

In the name of beauty, grass displaces trees, at great cost to Nature and the Bay. Natural habitat is lost, with its native vegetation, insects, birds and other animals. Lawns continuously consume oil for maintenance and discharge polluted water to our watersheds.

In the name of beauty, we mow thousands of acres of public property, often for no purpose except "it looks nice that way," or "that's what we've always done." Mowed grass can have purpose, for example playing fields, but too often only creates continuing expense to harm Nature. Road interchanges often have acres of space mowed, less for necessity and safety than out of purposeless tradition. Public

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policy should protect all trees unless exceptionally good reasons apply.

Of course, Beauty *per se* is not the enemy of the Bay – our notion of what constitutes beauty is the real problem. Do we have a cockeyed notion that beauty cannot be in harmony with Nature, sustainable and healthful for people and other occupants of our larger environment?

Sadly, our ideal of beauty often comes from a time and a place not our own. Green grass expanses make sense on the African savannah from which our prehistoric ancestors sprang, but they are out of place in our Chesapeake environment. If residents of Arizona have recently found wisdom in abandoning watered green lawns in favor of indigenous vegetation, can we Marylanders not begin sensible steps ourselves?

In our Maryland climate, grass only lives after indigenous species are exterminated. It lives only under the continuous hand of man and his machines with grooming, added nutrients and water combining to damage our ecosystem.

Our devotion to a brand of beauty that hurts the Chesapeake Bay can be ridiculous. Covenants sometimes codify a legal obligation to care for land in a certain way. When such strictures mandate grass over trees and native plants, government and parties to such covenants are complicit in harming the Bay.

What's to be done? First, help your friends and family to understand the relationship between Nature, as it was before we began destroying native trees and vegetation, and the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Then do what you can, in your private and public life, to halt the removal of trees and native vegetation and to identify areas that can be reforested. Good public policy should demand more than a small fine for removing a

tree in a Critical Area. A rule that also mandates replacement of a tree killed with a live tree of similar size might stop this practice.

Support proposals and projects to control the stormwater that so damages our tributaries and Bay. Standards for new developments that rely on environmental site design, or low impact development, are good for the future.

However, 100% of our present stormwater problem is caused by parking lots, streets and roofs that already exist. We must find a way to retrofit them to manage stormwater they generate – controlling, cleaning and conducting it to groundwater systems.

With stormwater a priority for action by the Severn River Association, it is time to establish a policy of "no net loss of forest" in Anne Arundel County, and then to mount implementing public and private programs to reforest what we can of the areas we have lost needlessly.

– Kurt Riegel

SRA 2008-09 Officers Elected

On 15 April 2008, the Severn River Association's Board of Directors elected the following, to take office June 1, 2008.

- President Kurt Riegel
- 1st Vice President Bob Whitcomb
- 2nd Vice President Richard Falk
- Treasurer/VP Bob vom Saal
- Recording Sec Stevie Wilding
- Corresponding Sec Thistle Cone

All are reachable via our web page, and encourage close communication with individual and organization members.

Stormwater Tax Credit Enacted

Anne Arundel County will offer a 10% tax credit up to a \$10,000 for residential and commercial properties investing in qualified stormwater management practices or improvements. It passed the County Council in January 2008 and debate continues over how to address a backlog up to \$1 billion of damage from sediment and nutrients flushed into our streams by uncontrolled stormwater.

None of the county's 12 watersheds meet federal Clean Water Act standards. County Executive John Leopold introduced a measure that would levy a fee proportional to the area of impervious surface in new developments. Councilmen Cohen, Benoit and Dillon proposed an alternative "all payer" fee that would apply to all development, new and old.

Adding to the mix was Councilman Vitale's proposal for a 10% tax credit against property tax, which passed.

Final rules for qualifying measures and application procedures will be provided by the Department of Planning & Zoning, and may eventually include removal of existing impervious surface, rain barrels, rain gardens, green roofs, pervious pavers and other improvements that cause stormwater to seep slowly into the ground instead of discharging promptly to surface streams.

Published by The Severn River Association. We welcome contributed articles, letters, op-ed pieces and photos for publication to:

Newsletter Editor
Severn River Association
PO Box 146
Annapolis MD 21404-0146

E-mail editor@severnriver.org

Indian Creek Cleanup

Walking the Talk – Action that Makes a Difference



Cleanup volunteers Mike Dunn, Brenda Reiber, Carl Setterstrom, Mike Robinson, Heinz Thoma, Scott Hymes & Rodney Staub

You are reading this article, so you have already met an essential criterion for joining the SRA Restoration Team!

This is just the kind of opportunity that will catch the eye of people who share frustration over:

- Seemingly glacial government motion toward action that would reverse the dismal and degraded state of the Bay and its tributaries
- Increasing bacterial contamination, endangering people via direct infection and the fish we catch and eat
- Astronomically high estimated costs for restoring our waters to health – they pretty much make you believe it's hopeless.

If this is you, then you're a perfect fit to our Team – we want you! Our mission is simple – help communities in the Severn River watershed clean up distressed streams.

The SRA Restoration Team consists of volunteers, sponsors, and the Department of Public Works – all in a concerted effort to do a good deed. Cooperating with a regional sponsor, the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, we lead an annual Project Clean Stream site cleanup.

The cause of restoring a watershed to natural magnificence is inspiration enough for many – and there are other benefits. There is nothing quite like working together for a higher purpose, together with the pleasure of meeting new, like-minded and enthusiastic

people.

Whether your pleasure is fishing, skiing, swimming, or boating down the river with the sun and wind on your face, you need a river that is safe for recreation. Dirty water puts you, your family and friends at risk, or distresses aquatic life, and is just not acceptable.

On April 5, 2008 we assembled 80 volunteers, charged with spirit. We cleaned up part of the watershed of Indian Creek, which flows into the Severn near Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center, removing 21 tons of debris in all, including 600 tires, discarded appliances, trash, even hazardous wastes such as propane and acetylene tanks.

Children once played joyfully in the river as they learned about marine life and gained respect for our watershed and streams. Children still come to Arlington Echo, but are no longer allowed in the river because of elevated bacterial counts.

While we realize there are many stormwater problems in the Severn River watershed, individual projects like this one can make a difference.



Eric "Chef Rick" Crody cooked up grub that couldn't be beat for exhausted volunteers at the cleanup.

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At Indian Creek this year, we attacked four dump sites, trashed decades ago – before the County landfill was convenient and open to all, and before many people were aware of the consequences of toxic stormwater runoff from such dumps.

Such projects are costly if they must be undertaken under contract by private parties. Financial and other barriers melt away before the enthusiasm and energy that hundreds of hands generously provided by SRA Restoration Team volunteers and partners.

To get your name on the list for future restoration projects, e-mail us and join SRA.

- Bob Whitcomb and Betsy Love

bwhitcomb@comcast.net
betsyl@truenorthintl.com

Ed/OpEd Column

Being a Good Environmental Steward

The famous educator, Booker T. Washington, said that, “No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.”

As we scratch in our yard dirt, we may think about what we did, what we accomplished, and what we want to do next year. But do we consider our impact on the local environment?

Spring is a good time to review our past gardening and landscaping efforts and maybe even to write that poem. Think about your efforts to renew and revitalize your slice of the Severn River watershed – and becoming an environmental steward.

Every spade of soil you turn, every plant and seed you lovingly set in the ground, can nurture the watershed. You improve the soil by getting it to perform better. Plants soak up nitrogen and phosphorous that would otherwise go into the Severn River, and thence to the Chesapeake Bay. As you reclaim over-fertilized soils, unclog storm drains and clean up trash-filled lots, you join the growing force of gardeners who are improving our Severn River Watershed

Your gardening adventure, your labor of love in a personal “pocket park,” makes you a community activist, a land reformer, and an environmental steward! You lead, as a positive example to neighbors who will learn from you and then join in efforts of their own.

Get your homeowner or community association to encourage environmentally sound landscaping efforts, perhaps to

- Form an informal neighborhood environmental organization;
- Select a place for a demonstration garden;
- Adopt a vacant lot and/or clean it up
- Participate in SRA’s Bay Friendly Neighborhood Program.

Gardeners can improve the social, economic and political fabric of their neighborhood. They even help the County with a “pocket park” created on a vacant lot, obviating tax-derived wages and administrative costs for cleaning it up.

Adopt environmentally sound “best practices” such as composting, modern integrated pest management that is less reliant on pesticides, using native plants, and leaving grass clippings and leaves where they fall.

Landowners can be successful stewards of land and aquatic resources, one yard at a time. They treat the environment well, and with respect – even when nobody is watching.



– John Foerster

(Please send candidate Ed/OpEd submissions to editor@severnriver.org)

Annual Meeting

The Severn River Association cordially invites you to attend our 97th Annual Meeting on Thursday, May 29, 2008 at 6:00 pm. It will be at the Indian Hills Clubhouse, 45 Chautaugua Road, Arnold MD 21012.

Our guest speaker will be Margaret McHale, Chair of the Maryland's Critical Area Commission, speaking on the topic, "Critical Area Legislation: Environmental Challenges and Successes."

We will also present prestigious Blue & Green Heron Awards for outstanding service & commitment to the Severn River watershed.

This is our signature event for the year, is attended by our officers and board members, and by a number of elected and appointed government officials. It is an excellent place to meet and interact with people who are in a position to make a difference for our watershed and our River.

We will have a brief business meeting, short remarks on the state of the Severn, a social hour with tempting hors d'oeuvres, and a concluding *Save Our Severn* event. You will have an opportunity to meet with local elected government officials who attend.

For detailed Directions and a Map, see the SRA web site at severnriver.org

For non-members, a \$15 donation is suggested to help defray meeting expenses. Member donations in any amount are always greatly appreciated.

Please RSVP by May 24, 2008 by e-mail, telephone or postal mail.

sra@severnriver.org
443-926-5924 voicemail
PO Box 146, Annapolis, MD 21404

President's Column

This year, SRA's members, officers and board have given exceptional energy to stormwater – a problem so damaging the Severn watershed, River and Chesapeake Bay.

My hat's off to those who worked so hard for a solution. Never before have I heard testimony to equal that before County Council regarding the need to gain control over Anne Arundel County's stormwater, to repair damage it has caused, and to cure microbial contamination of our waterways.

Many of us yearn for a fundamentally new pattern of incentives and disincentives that will halt past practices, no longer adding to the casualty list of felled forests, loss of trees and covered parking lots.

There is no doubt that our efforts have helped greatly to elevate public awareness on the issue, for example through our formal testimony before Council, collaboration with peer watershed groups, publication of articles and letters, and direct work with elected officials.

Are we on a clear course finally to solve this problem? Sadly, no.

We have small progress in a 10% stormwater tax credit passed by the County Council, even as it killed stronger measures. It might help, and we'll support practices it qualifies – but it is arguable whether tax revenues so diverted will be used efficiently.

Environmental site design principles now appear in state law, if uncertainty remains over how well they will be implemented in practice.

The County Executive, County Council, civic and business groups reached a compromise for a stormwater charge, albeit a weak and optional one. John Leopold has the action to



finalize it and put it before Council.

Nobody believes these to be more than baby steps toward solving Anne Arundel's stormwater problem. They signify tentative public acknowledgment of the problem, and commitment by elected officials, so far, only to a few "feel-good" palliatives.

Therefore, stormwater will remain on SRA's agenda. We will build public will to solve this problem, and to improve on conventional practice by reducing, controlling and treating stormwater so that it is no longer discharged promptly into surface streams.

We heard much testimony about health hazards in our degraded Severn River and Bay, with examples of people who fell victim to infections. These accounts and warnings were troubling enough, but they now have taken on a very personal significance to me.

At my last physical checkup, I pointed at a rash on my hand. The doc said, "I had the same thing last year. It is *mycobacterium marinum*, a persistent water-borne skin disease. It took a year to heal." My immune system's robust, so this particular infection is more annoying than deadly, but it's delivered reality check on the hazards of waters that I used to regard as only welcoming.

– Kurt Riegel

SRA Wade-In

Join in the fun of the 3rd Annual Spa Creek Wade-In, 9 AM Sat 7 June in Truxton Park. You can expect a wonderful family & learning event!

The Wade-In was invented by retired State Senator Bernie Fowler as a non-technical way of measuring water clarity. Participants will wade into Spa Creek, marking the depth when they can no longer see their sneakers. We'll also learn about our watershed, creek restoration and seining for fish.

It's sponsored by the Severn River Association, Spa Creek Conservancy, and Lower Western Shore Tributary Team which is kindly providing donuts, juice and coffee. More info & directions are at severnriver.org

Don't Forget White Sneakers!

Bay Friendly Neighborhoods

We've initiated our new Bay Friendly Neighborhood Award Program, to

- Establish an expert committee to guide project work in neighborhoods that elect to participate
- Take a natural resource audit, including shorelines, streams, forests and trees, etc.
- Organize & execute a project that will have a positive impact, recognizing that each neighborhood has unique needs and capabilities.
- Measuring project results
- Host an annual awards event to recognize neighborhoods with Bay Friendly Neighborhood awards to post at their entrances.

Bill Tilghman is the founder and project manager and would be delighted to hear from those who want like to participate personally, or as a neighborhood – Bill Tilghman, bill@compasslanguages.com or 410.570.5895

Riverkeeper

The Severn Riverkeeper Program (SRK) delivered its 2007 SevernStat Report to Governor O'Malley, County Executive Leopold, and the Secretaries of MDE and DNR.

It described the status of the Severn, based on water quality monitoring showing increasing dead zones, and continuing deterioration caused by stormwater runoff and shoreline hardening. It included policy recommendations for protecting and restoring the river.

In response to our SevernStat Report, the Secretary of MDE, Shari Wilson, joined us for a tour of the Severn in June, confirming that MDE is encouraging living shorelines instead of traditional destructive rip-rap.

We adopted an unofficial mascot when Program Director Allison Buckalew, and intern John Clauson, helped the US Fish and Wildlife Service and MD State Highway Association to rescue a baby peregrine falcon. The fledgling, Charlotte, is now alive and well – look for her perched on the Rt. 50 bridge during spring sailing trips!

Arrow Cove, a small parcel of land abutting Saltworks Creek, is one of the Severn's last undeveloped areas and is ideal habitat for spawning. Our lawsuit was heard December in the Court of Appeals, which did not respond favorably. Only the depressed financial prospects for high end development give us temporary hope.

SRK also testified in favor of an all-payer stormwater system which regrettably failed in Council, but we will continue our efforts.

We conducted an Oyster Forum in February. You can find the 2007 SevernStat Report and also information on how to support our efforts at severnriverkeeper.org

-Allison Buckalew

Operation Clearwater

This is the 34th year for SRA's *Operation Clearwater*, a water quality monitoring program that provides waterfront communities on the Severn River with regular updates of the microbial water quality at their waterfront recreational areas.

We will identify those times when it may be inadvisable to swim. When your association joins or rejoins, *Operation Clearwater* this year, we will provide regular monitoring of the microbial water quality at your waterfront recreational area.

We will monitor fecal enterococci, bacteria that are better indicators than fecal coliforms of contamination of swimming and recreational waters by fecal wastes of mammals and birds.

Samples will be collected on Wednesdays between 7 & noon at your waterfront facilities by either Sally or one of her students. If the analysis detects enterococci counts greater than 105/100 ml, Sally or her assistant will call or email your *Operation Clearwater* representative on Thursday afternoon so you can adjust your waterfront usage accordingly. For a nominal cost per user/day, you may provide an early warning for your members and their children.

Each week, data will be posted on the web and you can arrange for an email alert when counts are posted. Our member, Dr. Sally Hornor, of the Environmental Center at Anne Arundel Community College, will again supervise. She can be reached by phone at 410.777.2842 or via email at

clearwater@severnriver.org

Complete information, plus applications to enroll your community, are posted under *Operation Clearwater* on the SRA web site

severnriver.org

Proposed SRA Constitution Amendment

The SRA Board of Directors has recommended the following amendment to our constitution be approved at our annual meeting, and has changed the by-laws to allow organizations in addition to community associations and individuals to become members.

ARTICLE III: MEMBERSHIP

A. The membership of the Association shall consist of persons and organizations having an interest in carrying forward the purposes of the Association. Membership criteria, procedures, and rights shall be in accordance with the provisions of the Bylaws of this Association, except that any revision of the Bylaws shall not operate to deprive any member of the Association in good standing of membership.

B. There shall be four types of membership: Regular, Patron, Benefactor, and Association.

Volunteer !

We depend on volunteers to accomplish our goals. Won't you contribute your energies, intellect and skills to an admirable cause – the Severn River watershed?

We need people, for action projects, for writing articles & letters, participating & testifying at public forums, membership, fund raising, etc.

Come to our next meeting, and tell us how you want to pitch in. Encourage your community association or other organization to join.

Join the SRA and Save the River and the Bay!

Anne Arundel County's largest and oldest civic group is dedicated to preserving the Severn River and its watershed. Your support is very important – today's problems are tougher than ever. Your support gives us voice and strength to protect your community, your watershed and your river. Please join and make a difference! Dues & donations are tax deductible. Click-to-Join at severnriver.org , or mail form below to become an individual or institutional member:

Regular\$25 _____ Benefactor\$125 _____
Patron\$50 _____ Community Association\$55 _____

I would like to make an additional contribution of \$ _____

Name & title: _____

Your Community Name: _____

Street address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phones : _____ E-mail: _____

The Representative of Community Association is a member of the SRA Board of Directors. For Community Associations, we need both President's info above and Representative's info below:

Name: _____

Street: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phones : _____ E-mail: _____

Make checks payable to: Severn River Association, PO Box 146, Annapolis MD 21404-0146
Tel. Voicemail (443) 926-5924 or Click-to-Join on our web site at severnriver.org