

# The Severn River Log



SEVERN RIVER ASSOCIATION • BOX 146, ANNAPOLIS MD 21404 • [severnriver.org](http://severnriver.org) • 443.569.3556 • MAY 2009

emails: [@severnriver.org](mailto:@severnriver.org)

Officers:

**President**  
Kurt Riegel  
410-507-2999  
president@

**First Vice President**  
Bob Whitecomb  
410-849-3072  
vicepresident1@

**Second Vice President**  
Richard Falk  
410-849-3204  
vicepresident2@

**Vice President/Treasurer**  
Bob vom Saal  
410-987-4476  
treasurer@

**Recording Secretary**  
Stevie Wilding  
410-923-3074  
secretary@

**Corresponding Secretary**  
Thistle Cone  
410-647-4886  
correspondingsecretary@

Member Communities:

Admiral Heights Improv Assn  
Amberley Community Assn  
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Bay Ridge Trust Inc  
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Bembe Beach Association  
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Kilmarnock Homeowners Assn  
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Saltworks on Severn Citizens Assn  
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Severn River Garden Club  
Severn River Swim Club  
Severn Sailing Association  
Severn School  
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Shipley Choice Community Assn  
St John's College  
Trollhaven Homeowners Assn  
Venice Beach Citizens Assn  
Wardour Improvement Assn  
Wells Cove  
West Annapolis Civic Assn  
West Severna Park Commun Assn  
Winchester on the Severn

**Meetings of the Severn River Association** are held 7 PM, on the third Tuesday of each month, at the Calvary Methodist Church, 301 Rowe Blvd, Annapolis MD 21401, except for the June Annual Meeting described elsewhere in this newsletter. They are free and open to the public. Come and meet some terrific people dedicated to protecting, preserving and restoring the Severn River watershed!

## Does Maryland's Governor Hate the Severn?

With the last change at the helm of Maryland State Government, came words to hearten those of us who treasure the environment of the Severn River watershed and the Chesapeake Bay.

Public pronouncements, goals, even some legislation, all set the right tone for the repair and protection we've long sought for our watershed. We wondered, "Is it finally for real this time?"

What's actually happened during the past year in the Seven River watershed, home of our Capital River? Have Maryland agencies under the direction of the Governor helped in a quest to preserve, protect and restore the Severn?

The State made three notable decisions:

- **Sullivan Cove.** Three landowners sought permits to build huge piers, more that 450 ft long, across a sensitive cove in the Critical Area. Opposing evidence presented by hundreds of residents, experts, civic and watershed groups had essentially no effect. Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) granted permits and construction occurred.
- **Fox Creek.** MDE was involved in a battle over dredging from the Severn into a semi-occluded, protected tidal pond. The

Board of Public Works, on which the Governor himself sits, unanimously approved dredging into this sensitive creek.

- **Monticello II,** a development crossing steep slopes, non-tidal wetlands, and the regulated buffer draining into Saltworks Creek. It was permitted – road building, cutting protective trees, and new impervious cover all degrading this sensitive area.

Thus does the Severn, even as it bathes luxuriantly in politicians' saccharine words and good intentions, continue its slide toward oblivion.

The Governor and agencies under his control had three chances. Each time they failed, yielding to private interest and brushing aside the public's interest in the environment. The Critical Area Commission, members mostly appointed by the Governor, was nearly silent and virtually useless.

I stipulate that these decisions are tough. Backlash is inevitable, and the Governor is clearly up to accepting it – but in a skewed way. His administration seems immune to entreaties from parties seeking to protect environmental values, and cannot find spine to resist push back from money, power and private interest.

Some frustrated citizens have suggested that we might as well revoke the Severn's "Scenic River" status under the law.

I'm not quite there yet.

The Governor can and must move to connect lofty intent with practical action. He is tardy in appointing people to his departments and commissions who are determined to apply the law to protect environmental values in the Severn River watershed.

– Kurt Riegel

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## Stormwater Tax Credit Update

Last year, Anne Arundel County enacted a law giving a 10% tax credit to property owners for investments in qualified stormwater management techniques.

Or so they thought!

SRA testified that the actual language of Bill 85-07, intended or not, appeared to grant a 50% credit. Not so, said the bill's sponsor and the county employees charged with administering the new tax credit

The County Office of Law has recently confirmed our interpretation – and the county has announced that it will administer it on this basis.

Hence, the true value of this tax credit is 50%, spread over 5 years, making it substantially more attractive now as an inducement to investment.

Qualified stormwater management techniques include removal of 20% of the existing impervious surfaces on the property using rain gardens, green roofs, and permeable pavers; rain barrels; best management practice that the MD Department of the Environment has approved; and possible additions in the future as new methods are developed and approved.

Information on how you may apply for this tax credit is on the SRA web site at [severnriver.org](http://severnriver.org)

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

Newsletter Editor

E-mail [editor@severnriver.org](mailto:editor@severnriver.org)

## Bald Eagles on the Severn

If you stroll, boat or fish along the Severn this year, keep an eye out for a large (6 to 7 foot wingspan), dark-colored bird with a white head and tail. It might be our national symbol!

A pair of bald eagles was sighted swooping low over the river during the first week of January 2009. They were seen cavorting near Yantz Cove, which is just north of Round Bay. Two were also spotted flying high over the same area in November 2008.

Bald eagles do courtship and nesting in the middle of the winter, so it's possible that the ones seen along the Severn could be nesting nearby.

Wouldn't it be fun to have them nest on our river? Bald eagles also winter in this area, so it's hard to say if this pair will stay and raise a family.

If they do nest, look for them to choose a tall tree on the edge of water or a forest.

They build huge nests of sticks—usually within a mile of water. Female eagles in our area lay eggs between late February and early March.

There's a great comeback story in the bald eagle. Primarily because of impacts from pesticides like DDT, they were added to the Endangered Species List in 1967.

According to Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR), in 1977 there were only 41 nesting pairs found in the whole state, a number which now stands at over 400 pairs statewide — they're now off the endangered list.

Let's hope we have a few nesting along the Severn this year, and that we can work together to improve the Severn watershed further, so they'll have a healthy place to live!



For more information on bald eagles go the following DNR web link, typing this link exactly (case matters):

[bit.ly/nfT8N](http://bit.ly/nfT8N)

- *Thistle A. Cone*

## SRA 2009-10 Officers Elected

On May 19, 2009, the Severn River Association's Board of Directors elected the following persons to take office on June 16, 2009.

President	Bob Whitcomb
1st Vice President	Betsy Love
2nd VP	Don Morris-Jones
Treasurer/VP	Bob vom Saal
Recording Sec	Stevie Wilding
Corresponding Sec	Thistle Cone

All are reachable via the web at

[severnriver.org](http://severnriver.org)

They encourage close communication with individual and organization members. The Board has also nominated persons to be elected by the general membership at the Annual Meeting in June.

## Indian Creek - Again!

### *Many Hands Make a Successful Cleanup Project*

What attracts people to come out on a beautiful, crisp April Saturday morning to get their hands on trash? Perhaps it's because they are doing something positive for our beloved Severn River. Whatever the reason, 90 volunteers of all ages, hauled almost 70 tons of trash out of three sub-watersheds helping to make the Severn a cleaner river.

April 4th was the fourth annual Project Clean Stream, led by Bob Whitcomb, who found some of the worst dump sites on the River. It was sponsored by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, together with the Severn River Association and the Severn Riverkeeper providing food and beverages respectively for the volunteers.

The focus this year was an old site along pristine Indian Creek. Tons of trash, accumulated in a ravine about 50 yards away from the stream, leach pollutants into the watershed. Indian Creek, with relatively small impervious surface area compared to other creeks on the south side of the Severn, flows to the Arlington Echo Environmental Center where many of our schoolchildren go to learn about The Chesapeake Bay environment.

Sixty volunteers hauled tires, old appliances, bicycles, metal frames,

and other assorted trash up the steep slope of the ravine off Workman Drive. Some of them walked through the woods, picking up old bottles, cans, and smaller items that could be bagged.

With the generous help of Underwood & Associates' front-end loader, a neighbor's tractor and trailers, and some pickup trucks, the trash was transported to five large County dumpsters. Sorting out tires, metal, and plastics, another group of volunteers transferred it into the proper dumpster for recycling or general trash. Four out of five loads could be recycled. A total of 13.37 tons of material was removed from the watershed.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Indian Creek, 15 strong young men with ropes hauled heavy appliances, tires, etc. for loading into County Road Operations trucks by the weekend helpers from the Ordnance Road Detention Center. Eager workers filled 11 truckloads – 55 tons of junk.

This was last year's site, so the area looked a bit cleaner this year. We provided our second annual BBQ lunch to all volunteers, making the Severn River version of Project Clean Stream particularly inviting as people



swapped stories over lunch about the strangest item they found.

We returned to two sites we attacked in prior years. At Saltworks Creek and at the Jabez Branch, a team of six volunteers from the Saefern Community verified that they were being kept clean, gathering only one pickup truck of trash, a tire, and a few larger items.

We thank the County Department of Public Works for providing trucks and dumpsters, and for hauling free of dumping fees. It is heartening to find that the public respects our cleanup efforts, since these sites are staying clear of litter and trash.

It all happened because of our volunteers, key Team Leaders, business sponsors, several organizations recruiting helpers, and our sponsoring watershed organizations. THANK YOU ALL.

*- Bob Whitcomb*

## Reporting a Critical Area Violation?

Maryland law provides some additional protections against disturbance and development of lands within the Critical Area, within 1000 feet of water.

Even more stringent controls apply in the Buffer portion of the Critical Area, 100 or 200 feet of the water, depending on the particulars of the property.

Until now, Anne Arundel's Depart-

ment of Inspections & Permits demanded a street address with any violation report.

This is sometimes either difficult or impossible, for example when a boater unfamiliar with the neighborhood observes the violation, or when a piece of undeveloped property has no street address.

In response to advice from the Severn River Commission, four SRA board members participating, County Executive John Leopold changed policy. GPS coordinates are now accepted.

This was a simple, sensible, cost-free change – overdue but no less appreciated.

## Grants Available for Septic Upgrades!

Many are frustrated by fish kills and infections among our neighbors, contracted while swimming in the Severn River. The Severn River Association (SRA) recently hosted State of the Severn presentations by a stellar panel of speakers from government, academia, and the public, about the state of the River.

We didn't just talk about the problem – we also talked about real solutions that can involve all of us wanting to reverse the degrading of our waters.

A little background. Scientists and officials in Maryland's Departments of Health and Environment say that the Severn simply has too many homes discharging too much pollution to the watershed, a view shared by SRA's Dr. Kurt Riegel as population increase overwhelms conservation efforts and puts pressure on water quality and aquatic life in our Scenic River.

Our frustration stems from years of talk about contamination, with few tangible results. Many nutrients find a way into the River, causing summertime algae blooms, which die off and consume dissolved oxygen needed by aquatic life.

Experts believe that the two primary sources of these nutrients on the Severn are pollutant-laden stormwater runoff and effluent from septic tanks.

Here are a few of the astonishing facts reported by Ron Bowen, Director of the County's Department of Public Works.

80% of the nitrogen effluent from septic tanks within 1,000 ft. of a tributary stream or River makes its way into that tributary, each home contributing about 25 pounds of nitrogen each year! When septic systems are close to a tributary, effluent seepage reaches it regardless of whether the septic system is working or not.

Installing rain barrels and creating rain gardens can control stormwater from our rooftops, driveways, and lawns, thereby minimizing runoff of nitrogen, phosphorous, oil, lawn fertilizers, pet and wildlife waste. But how many of us realize that the effluent from our septic tanks is another major pollutant?! It is, and fortunately we can reduce nitrogen pollution and get financial assistance for doing so.

Revenue from the "Flush Tax" (officially known as the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund) are now available to homeowners to upgrade failing septic systems, and any "working" ones located in the Critical Area. Anne Arundel County has an allocation of \$2.6 million for this purpose and has qualified several vendors' systems as eligible for reimbursement.

Covered are septic upgrade installation costs, and regular inspection and maintenance by the supplier for five years.

Participants will incur some additional electric power cost to run pumps and, after five years, must bear maintenance costs to keep systems operating.

The County Health Department administers this program. Contact Bob at [bwhitcomb2@comcast.net](mailto:bwhitcomb2@comcast.net) or tel. 410-849-3072. Give your postal address and ask for an application form.

Even better solutions may be coming. Whole neighborhoods might be upgraded to a cluster septic wastewater treatment center for further nitrogen reduction, if not quite so much as public sewage treatment can provide.

Meanwhile, why not help the Severn River by upgrading your septic system to a nitrogen processing system?

- Bob Whitcomb

## Proposed SRA Constitution Amendment

The SRA Board of Directors has recommended that revisions to our constitution be approved at our annual meeting. You may review the changes proposed at

[severnriver.org/governance](http://severnriver.org/governance)

## SRA Annual Meeting

Our Annual Members Meeting and Dinner is 6 PM Tuesday 16 June 2009, St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, 1601 Pleasant Plains Road, Annapolis.

All are welcome. RSVP by June 6, 2009 to [sra@severnriver.org](mailto:sra@severnriver.org) or phone 443.569.3556 (leave voicemail).

Free to paid-up members (individual, and the designated representative of SRA member organizations.) \$20 at the door for non-members (or \$15 in advance online at [severnriver.org](http://severnriver.org) or by check to SRA, PO Box 146, Annapolis, MD 21404 strongly encouraged to relieve a crunch at the entrance.)

Our guest speaker will be Stephen G. Barry, Coordinator of Environmental & Outdoor Education, Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, speaking on the topic, "Education Leads to Action."

SRA's prestigious Heron Awards for outstanding service & commitment to the Severn River watershed will be presented.

We will have a social interlude, a brief business meeting, remarks on the State of the Severn, wine and a delicious dinner. Complete information at

[severnriver.org](http://severnriver.org)

## President's Column

For the past two years I've had the pleasure of working with some remarkably fine people with an impressive range of backgrounds and skills.

We have the best of purposes – protecting, preserving and restoring the Severn River watershed.

Good intentions and works have brought successes, as you see in other articles here, but it's never enough.

If there is much we do not understand about the many processes of Nature operating in our watershed, we are certain of the following things:

- Before man and his engineered works arrived, our forests processed rain water in perfect harmony with aquatic and terrestrial life
- The Severn River was a magnificent part of the world's most productive estuary.
- Aquatic vegetation was abundant and provided food and refuge for the web of aquatic life.
- Even after man's arrival, the River and Bay gave beauty, abundance, and health for several hundred years.
- The automobile arrived, became everybody's "necessity," spawning roads, sprawl, deforestation and vast impervious surfaces.
- Then, within a few decades, our rivers and Bay collapsed ecologically.

So our watershed remains in a crisis of decline. If we should "never let a crisis go to waste," can we "re-brand" crisis as "opportunity?"

Somehow we have to restore the ecological functions lost – a daunting task. Why does this goal so frustrate us? Why is it so hard to get political consent for steps that must be taken?

Here's what I've learned from working so closely with the River and people who love it:

- Before anything significant can happen, most of us must agree to limit collective behavior that damages the watershed, and pay for its repair.
- Why don't we? I think it's because only a few receive the clear benefits of the Severn River, while everybody contributes to its decline.

Why would a citizen who doesn't see daily benefit from the River, as obviously as waterfront dwellers do, agree to pay taxes to repair its watershed?

Many people simply say "Don't tax me" and last year 4 out of 7 Anne Arundel County Councilmen agreed with this myopic and negative view.

Most assaults on our watersheds originate with people out of sight of water. The Susquehanna River accounts for half the freshwater flow into the Bay, but most people living in that watershed never even see the Bay. Similarly, most people in the Severn watershed seldom see the River.

Almost the entire shoreline is privately held, its owners Balkanizing their little pieces of land with fences, walls and screens to exclude everybody else.

Have the few made a mistake in hoarding the waterfront unto themselves? Even as they clutch view and use of the water they must see, better than most, the dirty consequences of everybody else's poor practices, mostly from stormwater generated far away.

Waterfront dwellers may see how necessary change is but when they seek protection and repair, the Anne Arundel County Council rebuffs them with, "My voters can't afford it," or "You're just a special interest," or "Let the state, or the federal government, or somebody else pay for it."

They think their constituents don't care, that there is no political will to do the right thing. We must build that



political will by enlarging the constituency for watershed protection, growing numbers who are willing to change behavior and to pay – because they feel a closer connection to the river.

These things will connect people better to the water, building personal (and hence political) commitment to its protection:

- Open existing community waterfront paths to the public
- Create new community paths through adjacent private waterfront land, and open them to the public
- Demand that government create new waterfront parks, paths, launch facilities and rendezvous points by buying land and rights of way.
- Create more boat launch facilities and public pick-up points where boaters can rendezvous with friends who drive and park for pickup
- Dissolve "gated community" barriers that Balkanize entire waterfront neighborhoods against the public
- Take someone who never sees the water out into the Severn, showing them the water and its problems.

Clutching something you love too tightly can destroy it.

Waterfront property owners stand the best chance of keeping their view and use of a healthy River by finding new ways of sharing it with a larger public on whom its salvation ultimately depends.

– Kurt Riegel

## A Fresh Breeze Blowing

In 2009 we are challenged by economic bad news that makes only more daunting the task of protecting our River. But with a new President and new optimism, I feel a fresh wind blowing.

Many agree that an ideological stalemate has prevailed, at devastating cost to the common good, as is seen in economic indicators and failing infrastructure. Indeed, as business failures are now put on the backs of taxpayers, we find ourselves re-examining past public policy judgments.

But a new spirit of hope needs to play out in Anne Arundel County. With population growth and construction has also come infrastructure decay. For example, septic sewage effluent and gigantic stormwater flows assault tributaries of the Bay such as our Severn. A former keystone of this area's commerce, our maritime industry, has nearly completely collapsed, depending as it does on the hard-pressed

keystone species of oysters and crabs.

If we verge on a Great Depression II, we yet hope that "bailout" stimulus investments may attack backlogged infrastructure projects, to benefit the Severn watershed, Anne Arundel county, and the Chesapeake Bay.



Can we hope to salvage and repair, even in these very hard times, healthy tributaries of the Chesapeake, and re-create our maritime industry and the flourishing marine life that it depends on?

- Betsy Love

## Scouts and Rain Gardens

Scouts Stephen Langston and Kyle Frank designed, dug, planted Rain Gardens in the Severn River Watershed, each effectively becoming a community education project as it was created.

They live in different neighborhoods, one near Round Bay and the other in Chartwell, but both sought recommendations for a project that could win them an Eagle Scout Award, which they ultimately attained.

Background: I have helped plan, fund and install more than ten Rain Gardens for businesses, churches, and homeowners.

Ron Bowen, Director of the Anne Arundel County Department of Public Works, also brought counsel and a powerful voice for directing rain from covered surfaces into concave gardens.

Thus can water pond briefly, thereafter infiltrating clean, cool water into groundwater systems. (Stormwater can carry up to 70 carcinogens from cars, and causes erosion, algae growth, fish kills, and elevated danger to swimmers and boaters.)

Stephen and Kyle, determined to succeed, surmounted great difficulties as they assembled family, friends, and fellow scouts to dig, plant and water their lovely gardens.

They mastered an entirely new concept, conveyed the information to their community associations, sought the help of County and Park agencies to remove excess soil, put up signs so that passersby could understand the value of their work, and emerged justifiably proud Eagle Scouts!

Bravo!

- Anne Pearson



## What We Do

The Severn River Association comprises member community associations, individuals and organizations. We protect, preserve, and restore the Severn River watershed – for the River, its tributaries, its people and the Bay.

We work actively for legislation, clamor for enforcement of law and regulations, often testifying in public. We do projects like *Operation Clearwater* measuring biological contamination, cleanup & restoration, and promote Bay Friendly Neighborhoods. We work primarily at the local and state levels.

We have excellent outreach/ education efforts, like our outstanding *Save our Severn* lecture series, a forum for creative and effective people working for the Severn, getting public attention and, yes, sometimes a little controversy.

And sometimes we just have fun together as a group, on the River in a raft-up (flotilla of boats tied together for a party) or on outdoor excursions.

## 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](http://severnriver.org), or mail form below to become an individual or institutional member:

Regular .....	\$25 _____	Benefactor .....	\$125 _____
Patron .....	\$50 _____	Organiz/Community Assoc .....	\$55 _____

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

Name & title: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Community Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phones : \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

The designated Representative of a 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 443.569.3556 or Click-to-Join on our web site at [severnriver.org](http://severnriver.org)

THE SEVERN RIVER ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 146  
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