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CRA starts pilot program for watershed

CHESTERTOWN - The Chester River Association has hired Jennifer de Mooy to oversee a one-year pilot project to implement farm conservation measures and updated septic systems in the Upper Morgan Creek Watershed.

The 13,000-acre area, primarily agricultural, is the focus of a \$52,000 Targeted Watershed grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust. Morgan Creek is one of the largest tributaries that flows into the Chester River. It's also one of the biggest contributors of harmful nutrients.

De Mooy, who has a master's degree in energy and environmental policy from the University of Delaware, has a rich environmental background. She worked for the non-profit Nature Conservancy in San Francisco for over 23 years, acting, as she puts it, as a "bridge builder" - helping to bring people together to solve problems. It's the type of role de Mooy hopes to replicate at CRA.

"Working for a nonprofit organization sometimes allows you to forge a connection between, say, government agency staff and homeowners or business owners. A lot of people are wary of dealing with government but will find it easier to

do so if someone helps them see where there's a mutual benefit to working together," said de Mooy. "Ideally, that someone is in their own community, someone they feel they can trust. That's the role I hope to serve."

As part of her duties, de Mooy will encourage farmers to employ best management practices such as cover crops. Many are already doing so. She will also educate homeowners about a state program involving septic upgrades.

Chester Riverkeeper Tom Leigh said the new project throws a much needed spotlight on a sub-watershed of the Chester River watershed that is in "direct need" of improvement. He added that de Mooy's work could also produce measurable benefits for the larger watershed over time.

"This program and Jennifer de Mooy bring a lot to the table," Leigh noted. "The Morgan Creek sub-watershed is a microcosm of the entire Chester River watershed. What we learn there could have implications that are far-reaching."

De Mooy and her husband, Kees, assistant zoning and housing administrator for the town of Chestertown, live in Chestertown.