

Chester River nets a 'D' in CRA report card

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By Jack Shaum
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Water quality of river and tributaries analyzed from 2007 testing

CHESTERTOWN — The first-ever report card on the health of the Chester River gives the tributaries of the river a grade of "C" and a grade of "D" for the main river into which they flow.

The report card, released April 10, by the Chester River Association, evaluated data collected throughout the watershed during 2007. It gave separate grades for tidal portions of the river and those tribu-

taries that are not influenced by tides, such as the creeks entering the river from both Queen Anne's and Kent counties.

"The bottom line on the report is it's just not good because that's a grade given in a year where we had a drought situation," said CRA Watershed Scientist Brent Walls of the two scores. During dry years there is less rainwater-produced runoff. A wet year would likely produce worse

results, he said.

"It would be interesting to see what the grade would be like in coming years when we transition to different periods, wet periods, dry periods, etc.," he said. "The first (report card) is kind of like all right, this is where we're starting; let's see where we go from here. Let's see what the data tells us."

Walls said the CRA had no precon-

ceived notions about what the report card would find. He added it looks forward to other ones in subsequent years.

The report card was done for the CRA by the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Studies and the Chesapeake Bay Trust. It ties in with a report card issued by the center last week

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that gave the bay as a whole a grade of C-minus.

While the center used data from a variety of bay agencies to determine the grade for the tidal areas, Walls said the information used to determine the grade for the creeks was gathered last year by a group of CRA volunteers called Chester Testers. It was collected at 25 monitoring sites throughout the watershed.

"I just sent them the data and they processed it," he said.

The CRA said in a statement that even though creek health was somewhat better than the main river, it is necessary to target

specific pollution sources in each creek and manage them.

Walls said the Red Lion Branch and Unicorn Branch in northern Queen Anne's County and Morgan Creek in Kent County have previously been big contributors of nutrients and are being targeted by the CRA.

The report card also determined there are no long-term trends for improving the water quality in the tidal portions of the river.

"This science-based evaluation by the Chester River Association and the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science is a critical component to the restoration of the Chester River," said Chesapeake Bay Trust Executive Director Allen Hance in a statement. He said the Trust is committed to funding such collaborative

efforts in the future.

Walls said the Chester is still on the list of impaired rivers.

"A lot of the Eastern Shore rivers are very comparable. Water quality-wise I don't think it's as bad as some of the western shore rivers," he said.

Walls said while the battle to clean up the river is likely to be a long one, he feels strides are being made.

"I think we're massing the troops more than we ever have before. We're getting more folks involved. There's a better connection with the state government and with the funders out there because they know we have a good program in place," Walls said.