

RIVERKEEPER'S Almanac

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In an important victory for the Chester River watershed, Gov. Robert Ehrlich signed legislation in May that will protect Unicorn Lake from being encroached upon by a controversial rubblefill.

The bill, pushed by Chester River Association and local activists, creates a three-year moratorium preventing the Maryland Department of the Environment [MDE] from issuing a permit to allow development of the rubblefill, which could potentially leach hazardous materials into the lake and the Chester River.

Chester Riverkeeper Tony Prochaska said he was "elated" about the moratorium, but cautioned: "The reality is that it only gives us some breathing room. We must work to make the ban permanent."

Unicorn Lake, part of the Unicorn Branch near Millington, is a pristine river system at the head of the Chester – and one of two places on the Eastern Shore that are home to brown trout and other species that depend on a cold water stream for survival.

"Over time, you learn to appreciate those few hidden, out of the way places that are unlike every other place you have seen. The Unicorn Branch watershed is one of those places," according to Prochaska, a stream ecologist. "It is home to a number of aquatic and terrestrial species that are rarely encountered in our environment. I would hate to see an activity permitted to occur in the Unicorn Branch watershed that, in the long run, proves fatal for such a rare place. This is a valuable and irreplaceable resource – not only for our local community but for Maryland as well."



The battle against the rubblefill, which would store construction and land-clearing debris, dates back to 1995 and has been fought on both legal and legislative fronts. Its earliest and most vocal opponent was the Millington Quality of Life Preservation Coalition, a small grass roots organization formed by Loretta C. Walls. CRA joined the group in opposing the effort by the firm, Days Cove, to acquire the MDE permit. In the last year, CRA has mustered its 1,100 members through email alerts, calling on them to barrage the state capital with a demand for a ban.

It was unclear until almost the day Gov. Ehrlich signed the Unicorn Lake bill that the outcome would be positive.

In fact, a similar bill failed in the 2005 Maryland legislature. The most recent bill, reintroduced in the 2006 session by Delegate Michael Smigiel and Senator E.J. Pipkin, passed both houses – helped in huge measure by the fact that Senate President Mike Miller had added an amendment that would prevent a rubblefill from being built within one mile of a tributary of the Potomac River in Prince George's County. Despite that, it was widely rumored that MDE Secretary Kendi Philbrick was lobbying the governor for a veto. Once again, CRA e-blasted members, asking them to call Gov. Ehrlich's office.

"Our members again responded to our requests for help and inundated the governor's office with calls and emails asking him to sign the legislation, which was by no means guaranteed. It shows the power of our membership in getting things done in Annapolis," noted CRA executive director Bob Parks, who testified in support of the bill at several hearings. "We will need that support again to make the moratorium final."

Queen Anne's County Commissioner Gene Ransom, a point man in the battle against the fill, warned that the fight is not over.

"To be honest, I'm a little concerned right now," he said. "Overall it's a great step in the right direction but we've got to treat these next three years as the opportunity to look for ways in stopping it for good."

Ransom also commended CRA for its leadership role – and asked that it continue.

"CRA has been in it for the long haul. It does make a difference when an association with the gravitas of CRA is sending out alerts. The calls, the emails – they matter," he added. "Working as a team, it was a good fight and we won. Now, we need to keep it going."

CRA Honors *Unicorn Activists*

Loretta C. Walls and Jay Falstad, community activists who helped lead the fight against a Unicorn Lake rubblefill, have been named recipients of CRA's first Riverkeeper awards.

Chester Riverkeeper Tony Prochaska made the announcement at CRA's annual meeting in June.

Here's who they are – and what they did:

Loretta C. Walls, a longtime Avon representative, organized the Millington Quality of Life Preservation Coalition in 1996 after learning about the proposed rubblefill. Two-hundred concerned citizens came to the group's inaugural meeting. "Evidently, I wasn't the only one concerned," notes Walls, who worried about the truck traffic a rubblefill would bring to her northern Queen Anne's County neighborhood. The non-profit group's first move was to hire a consultant, then raise money from family, friends and neighbors to fight the proposal in the legislature and in the courts.

Walls met with Queen Anne's County planners. She worked with U.S. Congressman Wayne Gilchrest. She conferred with former Gov. Parris Glendening.

"It resulted in a couple of bills, but not enough to help," she says. "I think people were tired of hearing about it." Then, she adds, Queen Anne's County Commissioner Gene Ransom crafted a bill, embraced by the Eastern Shore delegation in the 2006 legislative session, that was supported by Senate President Mike Miller.

"They listen to the big guys," Walls notes.

"We've always been hopeful that something would turn the tide."

Jay Falstad learned about the proposed rubblefill after moving his family to Millington five years ago. It didn't take the watercolorist long to get involved – initiating a dialog with Commissioner Ransom, meeting with state lawmakers and testifying at hearings in Annapolis.

"A lot of these bills are introduced and there's really nothing behind it. Our delegation took up the cause but they knew it was a tall order," according to Falstad. "It was everybody's thought that this bill would have a tough time passing."

Falstad was one of the first to propose that a moratorium be incorporated into the bill rather than an outright ban. "My thought was that if the bill looked like it was going to get killed outright, maybe we should negotiate something" palatable to both sides.

Falstad, who lives on Unicorn Lake, says he intends to work hard the next three years to make the moratorium permanent.

"The area itself is just so unique. Anybody who comes here sees it immediately," he adds. "The idea of putting a landfill at its headwaters is very counter-intuitive. It just doesn't make good environmental sense."



An Eastern Shore

How much growth can the Eastern Shore accommodate without losing its essence?

In May, 200 citizen leaders – including a number from the Chester River watershed – conducted a growth-management exercise in Cambridge as part of Reality Check Plus, sponsored by the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education, the Urban Land Institute and 1000 Friends of Maryland.

In addition to the Cambridge meeting, Reality Check exercises were held in Southern Maryland, Baltimore and Hagerstown, representing the breadth of the state. Notably, the Maryland exercise marked the fourth Reality Check nationwide, after Los Angeles, Washington, D.C. and Dallas/Fort Worth.

Over the course of one day, Eastern Shore conference participants individually offered up their best-case scenarios for how the region should develop. Those ideas were then entered into a computer software program and ranked.

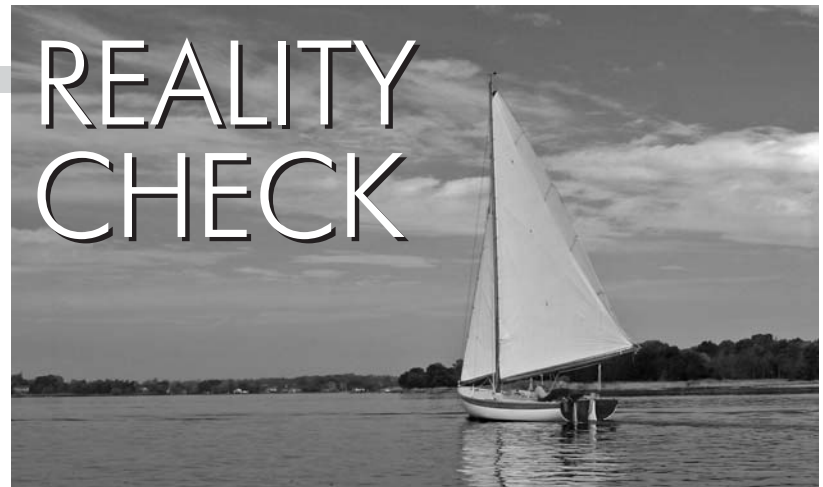
The Big Idea to emerge from the conference: Without regional planning and regional consensus, the Shore will lose its special character to clogged roads and ill-placed residential density.

"We can't protect it parcel by parcel, county by county," noted Vienna Mayor Russ Brinsfield, executive director of the Maryland Center for Agro-Ecology. "We need a longer range, comprehensive approach...Maybe it's time for some new approaches, new ideas. Nature and the environment don't adhere to political boundaries. They adhere to watershed boundaries."

Among the top ideas and concerns to surface at the conference:

- Think regionally, act regionally.
- Foster city-county cooperation.
- Consider watersheds when planning.
- "Zone as if you mean it."
- Concentrate development in existing communities.
- Protect a critical mass of farm land.

Reality Check officials will pull together the conference findings over the summer, and release a "blueprint for Maryland" in the fall. The process will also include education and advocacy. For more information, visit www.realitycheckmaryland.org.



Front & Center

with Torrey Brown



If Torrey C. Brown has one message for CRA members, it is this: A healthy Chester River will be the result of information – and action taken as a consequence of that information.

The keynote speaker at CRA's annual meeting in June, Brown, whose lengthy public service includes a 13-year stint as Secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, noted, "Good information properly interpreted takes management in the right direction."

Brown highlighted several environmental programs that have benefitted from the information-action construct. Chief among them: bird banding and collaring, which caused DNR to adjust the hunting season for geese, then in decline, after information from the tracking project showed that the season opened just as breeders, and their babies, were arriving here at their wintering grounds.

Brown, a board member of the Oyster Recovery Partnership, spoke hopefully of that organization's Chester River restoration effort, which doubled its harvest this year over last. Last season, ORP planted 230 million oyster spat in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This year, nearly 500 million will be planted, and Brown foresees the time when the number will hike to two billion.

"A single oyster can filter 20 gallons of water a day. When John Smith arrived here 400 years ago, oysters were thought to filter all of the water in the Bay in a week. Now, it takes a year to 400 days for that to happen," added Brown, a longtime advocate for the Chesapeake Bay. "Two billion would put enough back to get the Bay filtered as rapidly as it was long ago. It would make a remarkable difference."

Brown, who also served 12 years as a Maryland delegate, lauded CRA for its advocacy and leadership role.

"The idea of a community organization like yours or a Riverkeeper like Tony [Prochaska] was literally unheard of 25 years ago. Now, you and others are making a difference," he said. "With the information you collect, you can go about making a difference."

Marcy Ramsey on CRA Membership

The Chester River is Marcy Dunn Ramsey's muse.

As she says, "Water has such a strong, subconscious influence on people. It's what draws so many people who are sensitive to it to move here to the Eastern Shore."

Nearly all of Ramsey's paintings of inlets and marshes and all manner of riverscape originate with the Chester.

But Ramsey, also a well-known illustrator, isn't content to just watch the river, absorb it and paint it. She's working to protect it, as well.

As CRA's volunteer membership co-coordinator, with Vida Morley, Ramsey is helping direct the effort to maintain and increase the organization's membership. CRA currently has 1,100 members.

"One of the things I push is our strength in numbers. Education outreach has not been enough to clean up the river. But as we push our agenda in the legislature, as we work to make sure laws are enforced, if we can say we have over 1,000 members, or 2,000 members, it means we have more clout with the people we are talking to," she says.

In the last months, CRA's membership committee has printed and distributed a new brochure to sign up new members. The committee also mans booths at local events. At Pumpkin Party last fall, over 20 new members were recruited; at Tea Party, 11. And in an important

initiative, the membership committee is now working with local Realtors, helping educate them about waterfront issues that prospective buyers ought to know about.



Ramsey, who has served on the committee for two years, says she became a volunteer because "somebody asked me to do it." She adds: "I'm a good soldier, not a good general. I'm good at this kind of stuff. I'm just so lucky I live on the river; I feel it's my due."

[Marcy Ramsey's new work can be seen in the group show, "Gatherings," at the Carla Massoni Gallery in Chestertown through August 19.]

Upcoming SPECIAL EVENTS

Check out our website or call the CRA office for more information on future events.

Saturday, July 15

RiverFest!

Help CRA celebrate its 20th anniversary at Conquest Beach from 1 to 7:30 p.m. There will be swimming, seining and marsh mucking along with music and a fish dinner. Live music starts at 3 p.m. Admission is free. Bring your friends and family! Bring your boat! Call CRA, 410-810-7556 for more information.

Sunday, August 13

Evening Skipjack Sail

Pack some wine and cheese for two or bring your family along on a breathtaking sail up the Chester River. Captain Andy McCown promises an unforgettable trip aboard the Elsworth, Echo Hill Outdoor School's century-old skipjack. The trip is limited to 18 passengers so reserve your space early. The cost is \$20 per person. To make a reservation, call Terri Smith at Echo Hill Outdoor School, 410-384-5880.

Parting Thoughts

What can YOU do for the River?

We have good news to report.

CRA recently received its largest grant ever – a \$30,000 grant from the Rauch Foundation, dedicated to our River advocacy program.

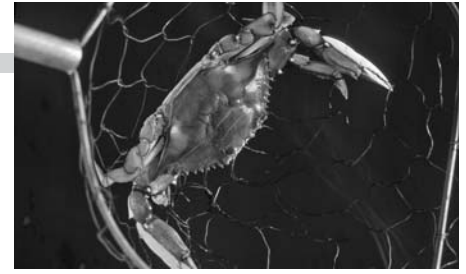
Rauch Foundation's mission is simple: "investing in the future of communities." It's something each of us needs to do, one by one. Why? While we are delighted with the new grant, the fact remains that the vast majority of our funding comes from member donors. We appreciate your individual contributions. They are what keep us afloat.

And let's not forget another fact: 100 percent of the Chester's "River miles" are water quality-impaired. Please let us hear from you when you notice a problem on the River. Each one of us needs to be a citizen advocate.

And as you enjoy the Chester through the special lens of summer, consider the simple things you can do every day that – when combined with the efforts of your neighbors – make a big difference to our streams, creeks and River. Here are some tips for a healthy Chester:

- Keep fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides off paved surfaces and out of drainage paths.

- If using a fertilizer, select a slow-release formula.
- Don't use your hose as a broom – and do not wash or sweep debris, spilled or leaked materials into storm drains.
- Cover bare ground around vegetation with mulch and seed as soon as possible to reduce erosion.
- Use paving materials that are porous and/or sloped toward vegetated areas.
- Don't throw fish waste into marina waters. Discard over deep water or in the trash.
- Avoid contact with submerged aquatic vegetation, or underwater grasses.
- Watch your wake – it can lead to shoreline erosion and disturb wildlife.
- Clean your boat gently, using sponge and plain water. When you can, avoid detergents in favor of phosphate-free, biodegradable and non-toxic cleaners.
- Never discharge bilge water with a sheen. It's illegal.
- Bring used monofilament fishing line to recycling bins at your marina or tackle shop.
- Never discharge raw sewage into the River.



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