

58 BAY LEADERS CALL ON CHESAPEAKE BAY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND ALL BAY STATES TO TAKE BOLD NEW ACTIONS TO RESTORE THE BAY

June 3, 2010. Contact: Eliza Smith Steinmeier, Baltimore Harbor WATERKEEPER, 410-736-8844
Brad Heavner, State Director, Environment Maryland, 410-467-0439
Michael R Helfrich, Lower Susquehanna RIVERKEEPER, 717.779.7915

After a Boat Flotilla landing at the historic Annapolis City Dock on Wednesday, a broad consortium of senior Chesapeake Bay scientists, policy makers, and Bay advocates called again on Thursday for the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council and all Bay states to adopt 25 bold new initiatives to restore the Chesapeake Bay. The group cited the failure of the 26 year old voluntary, collaborative approach under the EPA Bay Program and the repeated failure of the states, the Bay Program, and the CEC to meet deadlines for pollution reduction goals.

This remarkable group of 58 Bay leaders from Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania unanimously agreed on the bold—even radical—steps that must be taken to stop the continued degradation of the Bay. See attached statement. The Bay leaders called for the CEC and states to stick to the current deadlines for setting pollution loads (TMDLs) by the end of this year and for meeting each state's requirement for a comprehensive Watershed Implementation Plan. The WIPs for each state should include the 25 measures to stop the decline of the Bay.

The group unanimously concluded that after 26 years of effort, the formal Bay Program and the restoration efforts under the voluntary, collaborative approach currently in place have not worked and current efforts have been insufficient and are failing. New budgetary, legislative, and regulatory actions are called for especially for nonpoint sources of Bay-choking nutrients and sediment from the major source of Bay pollution, agriculture, and from abusive land development. Without such aggressive actions in nutrient and sediment loading from agriculture and development the Bay is doomed.

The signatories have called for monitoring and mandatory enforceable measures to reduce farm manure and fertilizers from polluting the Bay with nutrients. These measures include requirements for whole farm water quality plans for all agricultural lands including the next generation of nutrient management, with clear targets, an implementation schedule, and enforcement. All land disposal of animal manure should be subject to the same regulation as Maryland's requirements for the land disposal of human sludge from advanced wastewater treatment facilities, including requiring manure to be amended into soils within 24 hours of application. Cover crops should be required on all agricultural lands on which manure is applied.

While finding that reducing agricultural nutrients and sediment loadings may be the immediate challenge, offsetting the effects of population growth and development by 100% is essential to maintaining any progress made by other sectors. Better growth control measures are essential. A new requirement for no net increases in stormwater discharge rate, volume, and pollutants for all new development is advocated. The Bay leaders also urged the states to implement a retrofit requirement for existing developed areas and that a no net loss of forest coverage in the Bay watershed be mandated with expanded forested buffer coverage for at least 85% of all the shores of the Bay and its tributaries.

"The scientific community has seen strong evidence in our research that efforts to reduce nutrients and sediment over the past 25 years are not succeeding. Water quality remains poor or is declining further in key Bay rivers, like the Patuxent, and consequently the Bay's living resources also are under increased stress. Unless the Bay states act boldly and adopt the measures our group has proposed as part of their Watershed Implementation Plans to sharply reduce pollutant loads, the Bay will not recover" said Dr. Walter Boynton of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory in Solomons.

The Bay leaders recommended that all wastewater treatment plants should be required to meet stringent nutrient discharge limits of no more than 3.0 mg/l nitrogen and 0.3 mg/l phosphorus. A requirement for all new and upgraded septic systems to utilize the best available technology for nitrogen removal was supported as was a call for better controls on lawn fertilizers and air emissions.

Many of the signatories who have developed and signed onto the statements include officials who were instrumental in beginning the formal Bay restoration program in December 1983, including former Governor Harry Hughes, aptly called the father of the Bay restoration efforts. Governor Hughes said “Like most people concerned over the Chesapeake Bay’s decline, I have been very disappointed with the lack of progress in restoring the Bay. The Bay states and Washington, DC must take the bold new initiatives outlined in our statement and act now or see the Bay’s sad decline continue. We have a great opportunity with the setting of TMDLs and the Obama Administration’s focus on the Bay through the Executive Order and Bay recovery plan. Now, the states need to act boldly.”

Virginians and Pennsylvanians joined in the call for action: Tayloe Murphy, Virginia’s former Secretary of Natural Resources, stated: "As a Virginian who deeply cares about the Bay, I am distraught at the failure of the current Bay program to produce the agreed upon improvements to water quality and restore a dying Bay. We must act now and implement strong measures to control the main source of Bay pollution--farm fertilizers, manure, and sediment--as well as control the increasing pollutants from development. We simply cannot afford any more postponements of the necessary actions detailed in our joint statement. We are squandering our natural heritage and the measures detailed in our statements are critical to turn this around."

"We in Pennsylvania fully support the call for action on the Bay and her creeks and streams. The 25 measures outlined are exactly what needs to be done by our state and all the Bay states and the CEC. Voluntary measures to reduce agricultural and developed lands--nonpoint source pollution--to the Bay and its tributaries have failed to make significant progress and much more needs to be done on sewage treatment. The Susquehanna River system and its aquatic life suffer from poor water quality. Businesses related to sport and commercial fishing have significantly declined. While so much national and international attention is devoted to the Gulf oil spill, the River and the Bay are dying from a thousand cuts and, unlike BP, no one takes responsibility. The states must step up and act NOW." Robert. A. Bachman, PhD., Commissioner, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission on behalf of other leading Pennsylvania scientists and businessmen signed onto the Bay leaders’ statement.

Other signatories instrumental in the development and adoption of the 1983 Bay Initiatives include Secretaries of Natural Resources for Virginia and Maryland, Tayloe Murphy and Torrey Brown, respectively, former head of the Maryland environmental agency Bill Eichbaum, and former state Senators Bernie Fowler and Gerald Winegrad. Former Governor Glendening, U.S. Senator Tydings, Congressman Gilchrest, and current Maryland State Senators and environmental leaders Brian Frosh and Paul Pinsky.

Leading Bay advocacy groups have joined in and helped develop and support the call for bold new actions, including the Riverkeepers, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Maryland League of Conservation Voters, National Wildlife Federation Bay Office, and Environment MD, VA, and America.

Former State Senator Gerald Winegrad, Chair of the Senior Bay Leaders Group, said “The CEC and Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania must act now to adopt the measures our group has detailed or the Bay is doomed. These core bay states must set an example. Everyone now knows the current Bay Program of mostly voluntary, collaborative efforts is a failure. If we had thought of a doomsday scenario for the Bay when we began restoration efforts in 1983, the current state of the Bay would be it--a nightmarish reality. Of course the BP oil spill is devastating and its visibility makes calls for action much easier. The much slower but ongoing pollution of the Bay from animal manure and other farm and developed land pollutants is generally unseen and poorly regulated. There are no booms placed around the sources, no protective covers for the groundwater where pollutants sink in, no dead birds, and no national focus on such unseen pollutants—just a dying Bay. We need to act boldly and decisively now or the Bay will die ecologically.”