

The Bay Starts Here



At this late juncture, here is the historic context in which to couch the county's response to the EPA's mandate that Bay states develop TMDL plans.

Since accurate context defuses quarrelsome rhetoric, histrionics, and populist manipulation, here are these facts:

As you recall, in 1987, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the District of Columbia with the US-EPA committed to reduce nutrient pollution to the Chesapeake Bay by 40% by 2000.

As you may also recall, by 2000, that goal was nowhere in sight. But Delaware, New York, and West Virginia were engaged to participate, better data was available underscoring the urgency for action, and a new agreement was constructed addressing five aspects critical to bay health: living resources, vital habitat, water quality, sound land use, stewardship, and community engagement.

At the same time, the states, chagrined to have missed the mark, recommitted themselves to achieve that 40% reduction goal by 2010, but now with the commitment that - a la Fiscal Cliff - were their voluntary approaches unsuccessful, mandatory Clean Water Act requirements would be forced upon them.

2010 arrived. Last summer, we sluiced over the TMDL Cliff and, kerplunk, are now bobbing and sputtering in the mandatory phase.

So, the EPA mandate is neither surprising nor arbitrary. Plus, it gives states 15 more years - 2025 - to reach TMDL goals.

This historical context, although widely available and easy to collect ([Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#) web site, [Chesapeake Stormwater Network](#), a year-old [Annapolis Capital OpEd, Feb 11, 2012](#), and [Wikipedia](#)), does not couch our popular discussion. Why not?

Fairfax County, the state of Virginia, and some development groups even challenge the scientific relevance of TMDLs. They appear to be unaware that most Chesapeake Bay states, Fairfax Co. neighbors (Arlington, DC, Prince William), the whole planet, really - have steadily been devising new techniques for finding, designing, and delivering retrofit strategies that remove pollutants, improve stream health, and protect natural hydrology in developed watersheds like Fairfax County.

If we - Fairfax County, Virginia - doesn't meet this goal - a goal we set for ourselves more than a decade ago - then by 2025, the people and their leaders may not remember a healthy, productive bay even as they face further population growth and climate change. They will accept conditions as they are.

Dr. Donald Boesch, Professor of Marine Science and President of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, in the Capital OpEd, writes of his 30 years as a Chesapeake Bay research scientist, "...we know why the Bay is degraded and what we need to do to restore it... our diagnosis and treatment regimen are as solid and reliable as they come."

Not only do we know what to do, many of us are doing it. "It starts with taking responsibility for curbing one's own pollution - whether farmer, developer, industry, or family," he says. Friends of Accotink Creek's workshops, walks, and conversations help Fairfax County move toward this - its own - long-pledged goal of a healthier Bay.

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