



# CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION

## 1998 BAY PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The [Chesapeake Bay Commission](#) is a legislative body created to advise the members of the General Assemblies of Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania on matters of Bay-wide concern. Since 1980, the tri-state commission has provided advice, support and leadership in environmental policy to the region's lawmakers. Issues considered by its members are as wide-ranging and complex as the Bay itself, delving into matters of air, land, water, living resources, and the integrated management of all of them.

As a member of the [Chesapeake Executive Council](#), the Commission brings to the [Chesapeake Bay Program](#) an inter-jurisdictional perspective on policy issues that balances the more specific interests of the jurisdiction's executive agencies. Its broad-based nature makes it an excellent forum for generating discussions and building consensus on regional policy issues. The Commission periodically sponsors legislation through its members which supports the policy matters acted upon by the Bay Program.

Twenty-one members from three states define the Commission's identity and its workload. Fifteen are legislators, five each from Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania, who are responsible for identifying the environmental needs in the watershed, hearing the wishes of their constituents, and determining actions that make better stewards of us all. Completing their ranks are the governors of each state, represented by their cabinet members who are directly responsible for managing their states' natural resources, as well as three citizen representatives who bring with them a unique perspective and expertise.

In the 18 years since its inception, the Chesapeake Bay Commission has made remarkable strides in learning the complex workings of an enormous estuary, determining federal and state actions that are needed to sustain its living resources, and persuading their colleagues in the General Assemblies and Executive Branch to take actions.

Laws heralded nationwide for their environmental foresight are products of the Commission's work — the phosphate detergent bans, commercial and recreational fishing licenses, nutrient management planning, land-use legislation, ballast water management, and bans on the use of tributyltin, to name a few.

The Commission also serves at the national level, acting as a unified voice to advise Congress on national legislation and budget initiatives that will benefit the Bay region, and the nation as a whole. On numerous occasions, the Chesapeake Bay Commission has coordinated the input of Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia in order to secure passage of federal legislation integral to the

Bay restoration effort.

## **THE COMMISSION'S 1998 INITIATIVES**

In 1998, the Commission concentrated its efforts on the protection of submerged aquatic vegetation, the encouragement of community watershed initiatives, the management of blue crabs, and the proper management of nonpoint source nutrient pollution. The members also began a retrospective analysis of progress made in implementing the [1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement](#) in order to identify those actions needed beyond the [year 2000](#). The Commission will lead the drafting effort for a new Agreement, and in so doing, help frame the goals of the Program in the coming century.

What follows is a brief list offering some of the highlights of the Commission's year:



- ***SUBMERGED AQUATIC VEGETATION (SAV)*** The Commission's Virginia Delegation was charged by the Virginia General Assembly to examine methods of SAV protection and restoration, particularly potential conflicts with shallow water uses, including aquaculture. The Delegation will present its findings and recommendations to the 1999 session of the General Assembly.

The Commission's Maryland Delegation Senate members co-sponsored legislation calling for the protection of existing SAV beds in Maryland waters. Commission staff then participated in a Department of Natural Resources-sponsored effort to delineate SAV beds at risk from seafood harvesting practices, and recommend policy to promote the coexistence of SAV and fishery resources.



- **BLUE CRABS** The Commission sponsored legislation in Maryland to aid in the management of the Bay's blue crab resource. A new law created a noncommercial crabbing license that will provide dedicated funds for crab research, monitoring and enforcement. The law obligates the Department of Natural Resources to cap all commercial fisheries, including the crab fishery, at current levels of participation and establish an apprenticeship program for new entrants eligible to participate in the fishery.

The Commission continues to sponsor the Bi-State Blue Crab Advisory Committee (BBCAC) which meets twice yearly. The BBCAC works collaboratively with lawmakers, crabbers, industry representatives, scientists and fisheries officials from Maryland, Virginia and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission. The members strive to ensure that the crab resource is managed to conserve the Bay-wide stock, protect its ecological value and optimize the long-term use of the resource.

- **COMMUNITY WATERSHEDS** Commission staff chaired the workgroup formed by the Chesapeake Executive Council in 1997 to prepare the [Community Watershed Strategy](#) for the Bay Program. The strategy, to be adopted by the Council today, will help focus the Chesapeake Bay Program's restoration efforts at a small watershed scale.

- Related Link- [Directive 97-3 Community Watersheds Initiative](#)

The Commission was also instrumental in getting Congress to fund the establishment of a companion ["Small Watershed Grants Program"](#) to support efforts by citizen organizations and local governments to restore their local watersheds.



- **AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS** The Commission examined a series of manure-related nutrient management questions. Problems associated with excess manure generation in the watershed were addressed. Strategies to reduce sources of manure, including the use of feed formulation innovations such as phytase, and management options related to alternative uses for excess manure, were of central concern. Options reviewed included composting, transportation export from regions with acute excesses, poultry litter management utilizing amendments such as alum to reduce bio-availability, and the use of manure as an energy production fuel.

The Commission also undertook an analysis of contemporary science related to the environmental fate of phosphorus and its implications for Bay-wide nutrient management. Recent scientific findings suggest that under certain conditions phosphorus can be more water soluble than previously believed, thus indicating the need for a fundamental shift in how this nutrient is managed. The Commission's analysis included a review of steps being undertaken by Bay jurisdictions to incorporate the new science into existing nutrient management programs. A paper summarizing this investigation has been published by the Commission.



- **WATERSHED BOUNDARY SIGNS** In 1998, the Commission installed 10 new watershed boundary signs in five locations on major highways as a public education project with the state Departments of Transportation. The signs — which are distinctive, original works of art reflecting

the symbols of the Bay's watershed, are now located in nine sites marking the limits of the watershed in Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania. Overtime, the Commission hopes that Delaware, New York and West Virginia will join us in helping motorists to comprehend the vastness of the watershed.

- **FEDERAL FUNDING** The U.S. Congress and 16 federal agencies play a crucial role in the Chesapeake Bay clean-up effort. More than a decade ago, Congress jump-started the establishment of the regionally based Chesapeake Bay Program and continues to play a pivotal role in the oversight and funding of the Program. The Chesapeake Bay Commission communicated strong support for the inclusion of Bay-related funds in the Congressional budget, encouraging authorization and appropriate funding for the EPA Bay Program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Chesapeake Bay Field Office, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Chesapeake Bay Program Office.

## CONCLUSION

The years ahead are full of promise as the Chesapeake Bay Commission strives to support Bay Program goals of nutrient reduction, elimination of toxics, and the restoration of submerged aquatic vegetation, to name a few. Daunting challenges are there as well. The Commission must respond to stakeholder interests in drafting the new [2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement](#) and at the same time, struggle to balance the economic needs of communities with the protection of natural resources. As it has in the past, the Chesapeake Bay Commission will again demonstrate that leadership in Bay issues requires innovations in science, government and business and a willingness to try new ideas until the task is done.

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