



What's new with the . . .

COMMUNITY WATERSHED INITIATIVE IN THE CHESAPEAKE BAY REGION IN 1999

The Chesapeake Bay Program officially recognized the importance of community watershed organizations to the restoration of the Bay and its living resources in 1997 when the Chesapeake Executive Council signed the Community Watershed Initiative. The Bay Program fleshed out the initiative in 1998 with adoption of the Community Watershed Initiative Strategy.

New Community Watershed Task Force Established

In 1999, the Bay Program further committed itself to partnering with and supporting community-based efforts to protect and restore the Bay system by forming the Community Watershed Task Force. The role of the task force is to implement the strategy. Currently, the task force includes representatives from eight regional and local watershed groups, as well as federal, state and local government representatives from throughout the Bay watershed.

The task force identified several initial priorities, including:

- Assessing the needs of community groups and the needs and interests of other Bay Program partners in working with community groups;
- Packaging existing Bay Program tools and resources for communities;
- Conducting outreach to communities about Bay Program goals and how they translate to local rivers and streams, as well as about the resources available to protect rivers and streams; and
- Promoting opportunities for collaboration and coordination among the Bay Program's subcommittees and partners as they work in communities.

Survey Names Top Concerns

In July, the Bay Program's Community Watershed Task Force issued a survey to more than 290 organizations in the Bay watershed. The purpose of the survey was to assess the needs and interests of the growing number of community watershed groups and to identify their top concerns. The survey attracted 84 responses or a 29% response rate. Overall, the survey showed that these groups are active in restoration, pollution prevention and planning activities. The top two issues identified as concerns were protecting drinking water quality (81%) and conserving/restoring rivers and streams (74%). Respondents

Top 5 Issues Identified by Organizations

Issue	% of Orgs
1. Protecting drinking water quality	81%
2. Conserving/restoring rivers and streams	74%
3. Preventing natural disasters (e.g., flood control)	65%
4. Protecting/restoring wildlife and habitat	63%
5. Maintaining/restoring commercial and/or	60%

also said that while they are very concerned about the quality of their local rivers and streams, they are less concerned with the overall health of the Bay (46%).

Funding is the type of assistance most sought after by these organizations, according to the survey. However, the groups also identified needs for:

- Technical assistance and guidance, especially with pollution prevention and restoration projects;
- Assistance with the production of outreach materials;
- Training for outreach and organizational development; and
- Equipment and materials, especially plants, trees and seeds for riparian buffers and stream bank restoration projects.

Bay Program Responds with Clearinghouse

The survey results will help to shape the work of the task force by identifying gaps and generating interest in the goals and commitments of the Bay Program. As a result of the survey, the Bay Program is creating a clearinghouse to facilitate partnerships and mentoring among watershed groups and among Bay Program partners and watershed groups. The clearinghouse will be designed to connect those local watershed groups with specific needs and interest areas to those groups with expertise and resources in those areas. This web-based clearinghouse will be available in 2000. For more information, contact Amanda Bassow, (410) 267-5723.

Small Watershed Grants Program Under Way

The Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed Grants Program completed its first full year in 1999. The program provides small grants to organizations working at the local level to protect and improve watersheds. The purpose of the grants program, which is funded through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is to demonstrate effective techniques and partnership building to achieve Chesapeake Bay objectives at the small watershed scale. In 1998, the program awarded \$650,000 in grants to 37 community groups and local governments throughout the Bay watershed. Projects ranged from creating a greenways plan for the Tunkhannock Creek watershed in northeastern Pennsylvania, to developing tools to educate landowners about soil erosion in Annapolis, Maryland, to demonstrating the benefits of a constructed wetland in a low income community in Norfolk, Virginia. For more information on Small Watershed Grants, call Karen Hester Abrams of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, (202) 857-0166.

Website Highlights Communities

The new Bay Program website, www.chesapeakebay.net, features information on the entire Bay watershed, as well as the local watersheds that help to support the region. It also has several resources that will assist community-based organizations. Those resources include:

- **Bay Atlas:** Allows users to customize maps of their watershed using various data available through the Bay Program, including land cover, submerged aquatic vegetation, and some water quality data.
- **My Watershed:** Uses Bay Program data to generate profiles of watersheds at a range of scales, from large to small. The profiles include a map of the watershed and graphs depicting population trends, land cover and nutrient and sediment pollution information. The profiles also help users find Bay Program-funded restoration projects in their watershed; the local public access sites to the Bay, rivers and streams; local businesses that are pollution prevention partners in the *Businesses for the Bay* program; and local watershed groups that are active in the area.
- **Community Resources:** An annotated listing of resources available through the Bay Program and its partners, including specific contact information.

For more information on the Community Watershed Initiative,
go to www.chesapeakebay.net
on the Bay Program website.

