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PressRelease

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Chesapeake Bay Restoration Leaders Highlight Successes and Outline Future Challenges to Restoring the Bay

Washington, DC (October 31, 2002) – At its annual meeting today on the banks of the Anacostia River, members of the Chesapeake Executive Council marked the 30th anniversary of the Clean Water Act by celebrating recent accomplishments and recognizing future challenges facing Chesapeake Bay Program partners as they continue their work to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed in a time of constraining economic conditions and competing regional and national priorities.

During the meeting, Chesapeake Executive Council members – District of Columbia Mayor Anthony A. Williams, Maryland Governor Parris N. Glendening, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Secretary David E. Hess on behalf of Governor Mark Schweiker, Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christie Whitman, and Chesapeake Bay Commission Chair Russell H. Fairchild – addressed issues critical to the health of the Chesapeake Bay including reducing nutrients entering the Bay, restoring and protecting the Bay's living resources and vital habitats, seeking funding opportunities for Bay protection programs, and more fully engaging local governments and the citizens of the Bay region.

In their remarks, Executive Council members recognized that restoring the Chesapeake Bay is a monumental task will not take place overnight. Rather, today's restoration efforts need to be accelerated, expanded and allowed time to produce long-lasting results throughout the Bay's 64,000-square-mile watershed. While the challenges facing the Bay are many, data released today show the resiliency of the Bay and potential for significant improvement:

- Preliminary data from aerial surveys of the Bay's underwater grasses show an unprecedented 27 percent increase from the previous year, with 85,252 acres of grasses covering the Bay's floor - the largest amount since baywide tracking began in 1978;
- Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the District of Columbia have restored 2,283 miles of riparian forest buffers along rivers and streams in the Bay watershed, meeting a *Chesapeake 2000* commitment eight years ahead of schedule.

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With several provisions in the 2002 Farm Bill designed to assist farmers and protect the environment, the Executive Council also signed a *Resolution to Enhance the Role of the United States Department of Agriculture in the Chesapeake Bay Partnership*. The resolution aims to enhance the current partnership by exploring ways in which federal support for farmers can also be used to restore the Bay and its rivers.

As part of continuing Bay restoration efforts, the Executive Council released for public comment a draft of a *Comprehensive Oyster Management Plan* designed to improve dwindling stocks of one of the Bay's keystone species, and accepted a *Local Government Participation Action Plan* that works to further coordinate the Bay Program's restoration efforts with those of the 1,650 local governments in the watershed.

The *Comprehensive Oyster Management Plan* aims to rebuild native oyster populations by establishing sanctuaries that protect oysters from harvest and allow the implementation of restoration projects, determining harvest strategies that will rebuild oyster populations and support an oyster industry, and increasing hatchery production. The Chesapeake Bay Program will be accepting public comment on the draft for the next 30 days and plans to have a final draft adopted this winter.

Further expanding and refining the first *Local Government Participation Action Plan* adopted in 1996, the 2002 plan has been developed to more fully coordinate local government protection and restoration programs with those underway within the cooperative Chesapeake Bay Program. With authority over many land use, storm water and wastewater management decisions in the hands of local governments, Bay Program partners believe expanded coordination between local jurisdictions and the Bay Program is key to the future health of the rivers, streams and lands of the Bay watershed.

The Executive Council also elected Virginia Governor Mark Warner as its new chair. Since the signing of the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement in June 2000, Mayor Williams had served as the Executive Council's chair.

For more information about data released today including bay grass abundance, forest buffer restoration and the oyster management and local government participation plans, visit the Chesapeake Bay Program online Press Center at <http://www.chesapeakebay.net/press.htm>.

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Statements from Chesapeake Executive Council Members

District of Columbia Mayor Anthony A. Williams, Outgoing Executive Council Chair:

“It has been a pleasure to serve as Chairman of the Chesapeake Executive Council where I have had the opportunity to highlight the importance of the Bay’s urban rivers to the clean up effort. Water quality in the Bay depends on the health of all its tributaries, both rural and urban. As Mayor, I have made restoring and revitalizing the Anacostia River and its waterfront a priority. Additionally, the District has presented the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency with a long-term control plan that has achieved a remarkably high level of consensus on how to address our combined sewer overflow problems. We are also well on our way to restoring Kingman and Heritage Islands to natural wildlife recreational areas that the public may enjoy.

I realize a major challenge lies ahead of us, especially during these times of fiscal constraints; however, I am confident that the Bay partners will continue to work together on our common goal of a clean, healthy, and productive Chesapeake Bay.”

Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner, Incoming Executive Council Chair:

“Virginians have an enormous stake in the future of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. From the time of the first human settlements in Virginia, the Bay has nourished and enriched our people. Responsible stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay must continue to be one of our highest priorities in state government. We remain committed to working with our Bay partners in achieving the goals and commitments of the Chesapeake Bay agreement.”

Chesapeake Bay Commission Chair Russell H. Fairchild:

“We face significant challenges in implementing our landmark *Chesapeake 2000* agreement. We are likely to need at least three times more than we are currently spending on Bay restoration programs from all levels.

In short, to continue our progress and reach our goals, we must maintain our resolve, look for new funding opportunities, focus spending on areas that achieve the greatest results and strengthen this unique partnership called the Chesapeake Bay Program.”

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Maryland Governor Parris N. Glendening:

“Today, I am announcing new nutrient reduction targets that will put Maryland on track to achieving the water quality goal of the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement. Maryland will reduce nutrient discharges so that by 2010, we will cap our total nutrient discharges at no more than 38 million pounds of nitrogen and 3.1 million pounds of phosphorus per year.

Since the beginning, our goal has been to restore the Bay, not “arrest its decline.” Admittedly, this is a tough goal and means doing two or three times what we are already doing to reduce nutrients. We have far to go to achieve success: the Bay Program is 18 months behind schedule in setting new goals and the pollution reductions necessary to restore the Bay are so great, that waiting to “fine tune” targets will only make it less likely that the 2010 goal can be met. We must now turn our focus to taking action. Maryland has hundreds of Tributary Team members and stakeholders ready to move ahead to the next phase of implementation. That is why I am announcing our new nutrient goals. There is solid scientific data to take action and we can’t wait for technicians to debate over where to put the decimal points. By making our announcement today we will give Maryland its best chance to have the Bay removed from EPA’s list of impaired waters by 2010.”

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christie Whitman:

“We already know that our waterways are cleaner than they were 30 years ago. You can now fish in many lakes and rivers where once garbage was the only catch-of-the-day -- everyday. But we still have plenty to do if we want to ensure that our children and grandchildren not only have clean water to drink but also have the chance to find their own favorite fishing hole. The work being done to meet our *Chesapeake 2000* commitments -- in terms of pollution prevention, nutrient and sediment reduction, and the restoration of living resources, habitats, and water quality – can certainly serve as a model for the kind of meaningful progress we hope to make.”

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Secretary David E. Hess:

“In its efforts to continue reducing nutrients released to the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay, Pennsylvania has granted \$40 million for Growing Greener projects in the Bay watershed this year alone. Another \$3.37 million has been targeted for nutrient reduction technology that is expected to reduce nitrogen entering the Bay by about two million pounds.

To meet its remaining Chesapeake Bay Agreement commitment, Pennsylvania will then need to reduce nitrogen loading to the Bay by another 5.5 million pounds annually.”