



Chesapeake Bay Program
A Watershed Partnership

Press Release

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Bay Leaders Mark 20th Anniversary by Forming Financing Panel, Strengthening Goals and Strategies

Fairfax, Va. (December 9, 2003) – Regional Bay restoration leaders today returned to George Mason University to mark the twentieth anniversary of the first Chesapeake Bay agreement. The Chesapeake Executive Council announced two new innovative approaches to reduce nutrient pollution that include developing a new watershed-based permitting plan and forming a blue ribbon Bay restoration financing panel. The panel will work with regional business and political leaders to find the estimated \$11.5 billion dollars needed to improve water quality and protect the future of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Chesapeake Executive Council was joined for the first time by representatives of the Bay's headwater states. The Executive Council is comprised of Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner, Maryland Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael O. Leavitt, Chesapeake Bay Commission Chair Robert S. Bloxom, District of Columbia City Administrator Robert C. Bobb on behalf of Mayor Anthony A. Williams, and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Kathleen A. McGinty on behalf of Governor Edward G. Rendell.

"For more than twenty years, the region's brightest researchers have worked together to develop the scientific understanding to solve the Bay's problems," said Virginia Governor and Chesapeake Executive Council Chair Mark R. Warner. "But we must acknowledge that enormous financial resources are needed to clean the Bay. Today, I am announcing that I will lead, in concert with Maryland, Pennsylvania and our other Bay partners, an effort to make the Chesapeake Bay a national priority."



Current estimates place the cost of restoring Bay water quality at more than \$11.5 billion over the next ten years. With only about \$2 billion projected to be available, the Executive Council today directed the establishment of a "Chesapeake Bay Watershed Blue Ribbon Panel to consider funding sources to implement the tributary strategies basin-wide and to make recommendations regarding other actions at the federal, state or local level to the Executive Council." The Panel will convene its first meeting no later than February 2004, and will provide the Executive Council with a detailed report in October 2004.

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Bay Program partners will begin to develop Chesapeake Bay watershed-based permitting strategies in upcoming months through a stakeholder-based process. The strategies will accelerate nutrient reduction efforts by ensuring that future pollution permits meet local water quality standards as well as those downstream in Chesapeake Bay.

Executive Council members today also agreed to a five-fold expansion of the current forest buffer restoration goal. The new goal commits the Bay states and federal government to restoring 10,000 miles of riparian forest buffers along the streams and rivers that feed the Bay by 2010. Riparian forest buffers provide critical habitat to wildlife and reduce nutrient and sediment pollution flowing into the Bay. In 2002, the Bay states and the federal government met the first buffer restoration goal fully eight years ahead of schedule. Approximately 2,869 miles of buffers have been restored in the Bay watershed to date.

The Executive Council also adopted a new submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) restoration strategy to accelerate the return of underwater grasses to the Chesapeake Bay. The strategy aims to restore 185,000 acres of underwater grasses in the Bay – more than double the current 89,658 acres. Bay grasses produce oxygen, absorb nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen, provide food for a variety of animals, provide shelter and nursery areas for a variety of fish and shellfish, reduce wave action and shoreline erosion, and trap sediments. Bay grasses are critical to restoring the balance of the Chesapeake ecosystem.

To ensure the long-term health of the Bay's blue crabs, Executive Council members also amended the Blue Crab Fishery Management Plan to include new harvest targets and thresholds. While the amendment will not result in immediate changes to blue crab harvest regulations, it builds upon the best science available to protect the spawning stock of Bay blue crabs. The amendment also commits Bay Program partners to continuing to monitor blue crab populations and identifying and protecting habitats critical to blue crabs including SAV beds and salt marshes.

The 64,000-square-mile Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to more than 16 million people and 3,600 species of animals living in parts of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. For twenty years, the Chesapeake Bay Program has coordinated the restoration of the Bay watershed. For more information about today's new initiatives, visit our online press center at www.chesapeakebay.net/press.htm.

Brief Remarks from Chesapeake Executive Council Members
December 9, 2003

Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner, Chair, Chesapeake Executive Council

“As we speak, Virginians are working diligently to meet the commitments of the Chesapeake Bay agreement. In particular, efforts to meet the water quality commitments of the agreement are seen as the commonwealth's top water quality priority.

“We are developing new nutrient water quality standards for the Bay and its tidal waters based on living resource needs. These scientifically-based standards will allow Virginia to set much called for nitrogen levels for wastewater treatment plants that are beneficial and defensible. Hundreds of Virginia stakeholders are also spending thousands of hours developing nutrient reduction action plans, or tributary strategies, that will ultimately involve all Virginians throughout the watershed in improving its water quality.

“Despite the many efforts underway, we realize the greatest challenges remain ahead of us. The actions laid out in the tributary strategies will not come cheap. Working with our congressional delegation, Virginia legislators, and the new funding commission announced today, we must find ways to bring the necessary funds together to restore the Bay watershed and its living resources. Our federal government largely funds the world's largest ecosystem restoration effort in the Florida Everglades. The Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure, and is also worthy of such extensive federal support.”

Maryland Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.

“My administration is committed to the Chesapeake Bay's restoration. We will continue to apply an integrated, science-based approach to the watershed's challenges to achieve the milestones outlined in the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement. We have a long way to go, but the initiatives we adopted today are an important step in the right direction.”

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael O. Leavitt

“For the past twenty years, federal state and local members of the Chesapeake Executive Council have worked to advance restoration efforts – these actions we are taking today will make improvements faster than ever before. I am pleased that we are implementing one of the nation's most ambitious and rigorous restoration efforts ever – using the best science available to bring back our magnificent national treasure. But we cannot break our stride as we move forward into the next twenty years and beyond. This rapid pace must continue as work with our partners to realize our vision of a fully restored Chesapeake Bay.”

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Kathleen A. McGinty

“Pennsylvania is urging all Chesapeake Bay states to put in place policies like the Nutrient Reduction Bank and Registry that our Commonwealth will pursue to encourage early action -- because there's no time to waste -- and to ensure that streamside preservation measures are permanent. Should the other Chesapeake Bay Program states join in this effort, this nutrient reduction bank and registry would promote action now to further clean up the Bay and enhance transparency and consistency across the Bay watershed.

“Restoring fish runs is also a key component of bringing the Bay back to life. To further demonstrate our commitment, I am pleased to announce that Governor Rendell has released \$3.85 million needed to build a fish passage in the inflatable dam at Shikellemy State Park in Sunbury, opening another 270 miles of the Susquehanna River and enabling Pennsylvania to meet our Chesapeake Bay Program fish passage goal.”

Chesapeake Bay Commission Chair Robert S. Bloxom

“Today is not only the 20th anniversary of the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort. It is also of real personal significance - it is the end of the 23 years I have spent in the Virginia legislature working for the Bay. I must admit, when we came together in December 9, 1983, I did not expect our challenge would be so monumental. We all believed that within the decade, we would have accomplished our restoration goals.

“It was only slowly, over time and after many meetings, that we all began to realize that the ecology of the bay was more complicated than we first thought, our predictive capabilities and underlying scientific understanding not sufficient, the interactions among living resources, water quality, air emissions and land use more complex, and the solutions more expensive and politically challenging than we could ever have ever known.

“Having spent the last 23 years as a member of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, I know that we achieved successes in which we can take pride. The legislative list that we have published today stands as testimony to the work of our General Assemblies. We banned the use of phosphate detergents, required the use of erosion and sedimentation control practices, encouraged the use of agricultural nutrient management plans, protected critical Chesapeake Bay resource areas from development, preserved open space lands and created financial mechanisms to encourage such preservation, restored the striped bass fishery, worked to secure funding for fish passage projects throughout the basin and created financing streams for the upgrade of sewage treatment plants.

“Having said this, I am ready to acknowledge that we need to work harder and ask the citizens of the bay watershed to dedicate even more time, effort and money to our restoration efforts. We must double our reductions of nutrients and sediments and stem the loss of critical habitats throughout the watershed. Unless we can identify realistic sources of considerable money, we will not accomplish our restoration goals.”

District of Columbia Deputy City Administrator Robert C. Bobb

“I am pleased to be representing the Mayor at this important regional water quality meeting. The health of the Chesapeake Bay depends upon the health of all its tributaries. Mayor Williams is committed through the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement to restore the Anacostia River. The District of Columbia has an approved long-term control plan for its combined sewer system that will lay the foundation for this river's renewal. We now look for support from our partners as we seek funding from the U.S. Congress for this \$1.2 billion water works project.

“Although I have only been in Washington a short time, I am impressed with the high level of regional cooperation there is on such issues as homeland security, transportation, and the environment. The District remains committed to the *Chesapeake 2000* agreement and cleaning up the Anacostia and working with our partners towards achieving a cleaner Bay.”