



Chesapeake Bay Program
A Watershed Partnership

Press Release

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CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ANNOUNCES NEW ACTIONS FOR RESTORATION OF BAY AND WATERSHED

WASHINGTON – The Chesapeake Executive Council today announced a package of new actions to intensify the clean-up effort, request support from the President-elect, pursue biofuels development and increase partner accountability for restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

The Chesapeake Executive Council, led by outgoing chair Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley and incoming chair Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, establishes the policy agenda for the Chesapeake Bay Program. Participating in the meeting were executives from the six Bay states, the District of Columbia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The annual meeting, held at Union Station in Washington, D.C., focused on key measures needed to restore and protect the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which has tremendous environmental, economic, recreational and historic value to the region and entire country.

Last year, the Executive Council confirmed that the partnership would not meet the 2010 deadline for implementing restoration measures needed to restore water quality. This year's Executive Council has adopted a new strategy for establishing a deadline that involves moving the annual meeting to the spring, beginning in 2009, when the most current scientific information about pollution levels becomes available.

Also in spring 2009, the Executive Council will establish specific milestones for restoration that will be set in two-year intervals. These milestones will focus the partnership on achieving short-term goals, thereby intensifying restoration efforts and tracking progress toward the overall deadline. Moving the annual meeting to the spring means it also coincides with the release of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Health and Restoration Assessment. This change will allow members to act on the most current information about the watershed and to more effectively coordinate restoration initiatives with government budget cycles and legislative sessions.

Additionally, the Chesapeake Bay Program partners have worked with the EPA to help shape the landmark Chesapeake TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load), a federally mandated pollution budget for the watershed. The TMDL process will be assisted by the use of two-year milestones.

With the recent election of a new President and 111th Congress comes the opportunity to seek a renewed federal commitment to protecting the nation's largest estuary. On behalf of the Bay states, D.C. and the Chesapeake Bay Commission, Governor Kaine and Governor O'Malley will seek the support of the President-elect and Congress for changes to policy, legislation and funding that will accelerate restoration efforts.

At the annual meeting, the Executive Council also launched a plan to position the Chesapeake region as a national leader in production of next-generation biofuels. This new sector of biofuels does not rely on food crops and can be grown sustainably to yield environmental and economic benefits for the area's farms, forests and industrial sector, while simultaneously advancing Chesapeake Bay restoration goals.

"The work of this partnership and the actions taken today reflect our unwavering commitment to restoring the health and beauty of the Chesapeake Bay for the millions of area residents and visitors who enjoy the Bay or make a living from it," said Governor O'Malley. "Our citizens, in Maryland and across the watershed, are accelerating this progress by embracing a new spirit of stewardship to restore our beloved Bay and create the more sustainable future we all prefer."

At the 2007 Executive Council meeting, members selected topics critical to restoration to be their “champion role.” The Chesapeake Bay Program partners have since made significant progress on issues including promotion of low-impact development, support of agricultural conservation practices and improvement of wastewater treatment. The partnership will continue taking this type of targeted action on vital issues in 2009.

To increase the accountability of the partners working to clean up the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Executive Council has requested the evaluation of the program by a national independent science organization. The evaluator role is designed to identify shortcomings and recommend solutions for improving the effectiveness of the Chesapeake Bay Program.

“The Chesapeake Executive Council is committed to meeting our obligation to restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed,” said Governor Kaine. “Our obligation is to provide a clean Bay, rivers and streams for the 17 million people living in the watershed today and to protect this national treasure for future generations.”

Education was emphasized by the Executive Council this year, as members signaled their support for Chesapeake Bay FieldScope, a project led by National Geographic to educate students about human-environment interactions in the watershed and to engage them directly in environmental monitoring. The Executive Council has agreed to explore opportunities to work with National Geographic to introduce the program throughout the watershed.

RESTORING A NATIONAL TREASURE

Two-year milestones for restoration

The Executive Council has agreed to set milestones every two years for implementation of the programs and tools necessary for restoring the Bay and watershed. These biennial milestones will be used to accelerate progress toward meeting the Chesapeake Bay Program’s science-based goals to reduce excess levels of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment that degrade water quality and damage habitats. The specific milestones will be calculated after updated scientific data on the watershed becomes available.

Chesapeake TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) – see attached backgrounder

Chesapeake Bay Program partners have worked with the EPA to shape the Chesapeake TMDL, which is scheduled for completion in December 2010. A TMDL is a regulatory tool of the Clean Water Act and sets the maximum amount of a pollutant allowed to enter a waterbody for compliance with water quality standards. The Chesapeake TMDL will allocate loadings of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment to all jurisdictions in the watershed. When complete, the Chesapeake TMDL will be the largest in the country and be a national model.

Presidential and Congressional request

The Chesapeake Bay Program is seeking a deepened national commitment to restoration, and Governor Kaine and Governor O’Malley will deliver this request on behalf of the six Bay states, D.C. and the Chesapeake Bay Commission. The President-elect will be asked to elevate Bay restoration to be a top environmental priority and to, together with Congress, support regional and national legislation that would accelerate the restoration process.

TAKING ACTION

Champion roles – see attached backgrounder

At the 2007 Executive Council meeting, members embraced champion roles as a way to accelerate vital restoration efforts. During the past year, the Chesapeake Bay Program partners made progress in:

- Accountability
- Agriculture conservation
- Biofuels
- Blue Plains wastewater facility
- Blue crab restoration
- Carbon sequestration
- Chesapeake Action Plan
- Conowingo Dam
- Engaging local governments
- Farm Bill
- Forest conservation
- Low-impact development
- Restoration funding
- Wetlands restoration

These champion roles are especially critical because of the pressure of population growth and development. The watershed is home to almost 17 million people, an increase of about 4 million since 1980. Every day, 100 acres of natural area, such as forest or wetland, are lost to development. Impervious surfaces are increasing more rapidly. From 1990 to 2000, the watershed population grew 8 percent, while impervious surface rose by 41 percent.

Biofuels development – see attached directive

A report released this year by Pennsylvania and the Chesapeake Bay Commission, *Next Generation Biofuels: Taking the Policy Lead for the Nation*, concluded that the Chesapeake region is well-positioned to lead the country in production and use of this renewable energy source. The report included recommendations for actions that would reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment loadings while also strengthening the economic viability of agriculture and forestry. The Executive Council members from the Bay states have signed a directive to implement state biofuel action plans and reconvene the Biofuels Advisory Panel in 2009.

INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY

Independent evaluation

The Chesapeake Bay Program is seeking to increase the accountability of partners and effectiveness of restoration efforts. Executive Council members have agreed to use a national independent scientific organization to monitor the performance of the program. A diverse and distinguished panel of scientists, policy experts and environmental program specialists will evaluate the Chesapeake Bay Program's efforts and provide valuable recommendations on how to make necessary improvements.

EDUCATING FUTURE GENERATIONS

FieldScope

FieldScope is a state-of-the-art web-based tool designed to help students investigate water quality issues on local and regional scales and collaborate with peers across the watershed to analyze data and take action. FieldScope is being designed specifically for use by students in grades six through 12. The Chesapeake Bay FieldScope is a project led by National Geographic and supported by the Chesapeake Bay Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and others. The Chesapeake Bay Program is already providing data to power FieldScope, including information on land cover and dissolved oxygen.

ABOUT THE CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM

The Chesapeake Bay Program is a unique regional partnership that, since 1983, has coordinated the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed, which is home to almost 17 million people. Partners include the states of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia; the District of Columbia; the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, representing the federal government; and participating advisory groups.

Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in North America, with a length of 200 miles and 11,684 miles of tidal shoreline, more than the entire U.S. West Coast. About 100,000 streams and rivers thread through the Chesapeake's 64,000-square-mile watershed. The Chesapeake Bay supports more than 3,600 species of plants, fish and animals.

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