

RIVERKEEPER'S Almanac

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FOCUSING IN ON *Upper Morgan Creek Region*

In a new initiative, Chester River Association has hired a coordinator to oversee a one-year pilot project to promote farm conservation practices and updated septic systems in the vulnerable Upper Morgan Creek region.

The 13,000 acre area, primarily agricultural, is the focus of a \$52,000 Targeted Watershed grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust. Coordinator Jennifer de Mooy, 51, said the project offers an opportunity to execute on a small scale measures that could be replicated later in other parts of the Chester River watershed.

Morgan Creek is one of the largest tributaries of the Chester River. It's also one of the biggest contributors of harmful nutrients. The objective of the grant: to encourage land use practices that reduce nitrogen.

Chester **Riverkeeper**® Tom Leigh said the new program throws a much needed spotlight on a sub-watershed that is in dire need of improvement. Like de Mooy, he believes the effort could also produce measurable benefits for the larger watershed over time.

"This program and Jennifer de Mooy bring a lot to the table," Leigh noted. "The Morgan Creek sub-watershed is a microcosm of the entire Chester River watershed. What we learn there could have implications that are far-reaching."

As part of her duties, de Mooy will encourage farmers to employ best conservation practices such as cover crops. Many are already doing so but some are not. "You see a lot of green fields right now. A lot of farmers are doing cover crops and have for years. This is not a new thing for them," she said. "What I want to do is work with

the agricultural community and to help make CRA an even better advocate of these best management practices."

One of de Mooy's more challenging tasks will likely involve home septic systems, which contribute 10 percent of the nitrogen in the Chester River. According to public records, there are 168 private septic systems in the Upper Morgan Creek region and 41 of those serve houses built prior to 1960. To date, only one homeowner in that area has applied for state funds to update his septic with a bionutrient removal, or BNR, system. CRA is a leading proponent of the state program.

Water quality data from CRA's volunteer Chester Testers over the last few years have identified the Upper Morgan

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Tom Leigh and Jennifer de Mooy

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Creek area as particularly impaired – the fundamental reason for the initial grant request. Under the terms of the grant, CRA has boosted the number of water quality monitoring stations in the area from two to seven.

De Mooy, who has a master's degree in energy and environmental policy from the University of Delaware, has long been steeped in the non-profit world and brings a rich environmental background to her new position.

She worked for The Nature Conservancy in San Francisco for over 23 years, ultimately serving as a policy analyst for its government relations program. De Mooy grew up in the Sacramento Valley and moved to Chestertown three years ago. She sees many similarities in the landscape she grew up in and her adopted home – notably the feel of the rural landscape, the diversity of wildlife, the relationship of the two regions' streams and rivers to their respective bays, and the importance of the agricultural economy.

"Another familiar feeling I have here on the Eastern Shore is the public support for a healthy environment in terms of clean water and habitat for wildlife. In a rural region that is as close as we are to major urban development, most people feel a strong desire to protect the land and water around them and to sustain the essential nature of the place they live in," notes de Mooy. "I feel that desire, too."

At The Nature Conservancy, where she started as a college intern, de Mooy acted as a self-described "bridge builder" – helping to bring people together to solve problems. It's the type of role de Mooy hopes to play at CRA.

"Working for a non-profit organization sometimes allows you to forge a connection between, say, government agency staff and homeowners or business owners. A lot of people are wary of dealing with government but will find it easier to do if someone helps them see where there's a mutual benefit to working together," she says. "Ideally, that someone is in their own community, someone they feel they can trust. That's the role I hope to serve here."

CRA Hires *Legislative Lobbyist*

For the first time ever, Chester River Association has teamed up with a lobbyist to push the river organization's legislative agenda in the Maryland General Assembly.

"We need knowledgeable representation at the table," said Chester **Riverkeeper**® Tom Leigh. "So much is at stake. We need to be hitting on all cylinders."

Eric Gally, the founder of Annapolis-based Gally Public Affairs, will press for the implementation of CRA's legislative platform. Tops on the association's wish list: the preservation of the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund; requiring bionutrient removal, or BNR, septics for all newly built homes statewide; and regulations that would prevent the proliferation of private sewage treatment plants such as the Wilson project on Bungay Creek in Kent County.

Gally, 42, has an extensive background in public relations, government relations and journalism. He has represented a number of high-profile environmental groups, including Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, a coalition of brand name organizations. Among other accomplishments, Gally helped secure passage of the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund and the Clean Indoor Act of 2007.

"We're thrilled to be working with CRA," said Gally. "Maryland is well known throughout the U.S. for its precious natural resources and it's a main reason people come to live and work here. It's a shame the state hasn't been more vigilant about maintaining our crown jewels. We look forward to helping CRA further that cause."

CRA considered six lobbying firms before signing Gally to a one-year contract.

Of particular concern in the 2009 legislative session: funding for the 2010 Trust Fund. At press time, the fund – which finances cover crops, septic upgrades and other bay restoration programs – had been cut from \$50 million to roughly \$10 million.

"It's absolutely imperative that those funds be preserved and that we restore what has been lost," said Leigh. "With the change in the financial climate and budget constraints, projects like this are being whittled away. We've seen this fund disappear to almost nothing and at some point plans, submittals and funding applications that have been written are no longer viable. We just can't afford for that to happen."

As for other priorities, CRA is pursuing twin approaches – either legislation or a Maryland Department of Environment regulation – that would require BNR septics in all new homes statewide. At the moment, 7,000 septics are installed in new housing each year, the equivalent of a major wastewater treatment plant.

As Leigh puts it: "It's known technology proven to reduce one of the major impediments in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. There's a real simple means of doing this and that's using BNR systems that people can put in their backyards, especially those homes in Critical Areas that result in a direct and rapid rate of the introduction of nutrients into receiving waters."

CRA is also lobbying MDE to put language in the sewer and water plans of Kent and Queen Anne's counties that would prevent so-called "package plants," the controversial do-it-yourself systems that allow development on land that does not perc. Meanwhile, CRA has filed suit in Kent County Circuit Court seeking to reverse MDE's approval of a single-home wastewater treatment plant on the Wilson property on Bungay Creek, just off Langford Creek. No court date has been set.



Eric Gally

CRA Emerges as *Back Office Leader*

Chester River Association has quietly emerged as a back office leader in Maryland, providing crucial administrative support to three other organizations in the Waterkeeper Alliance.

The desired outcome: cleaner rivers.

The Sassafras River Association, the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper and the West/Rhode **Riverkeeper®** have each retained CRA to provide back office services such as membership renewal and solicitations, bill-paying and the creation of profit and loss statements and income and expenditure reports. CRA Office Manager Bobbi Marshall is in charge of the program.

"It seemed like we were spending all of our time trying to keep up with who joined when, getting out membership letters, processing checks and writing thank you letters," says Ellyn Vail who, with her husband John, founded Sassafras River Association just over five years ago. "It took up 80 percent of our time and had absolutely nothing to do with creating a cleaner river."

Vail says SRA has doubled its membership to 500 since it began outsourcing its back office function to CRA in 2006 – a jump she largely attributes to the partnership.

"It's made it easier to focus on what we really wanted to do," she adds.

CRA began handling administrative support for the West/Rhode **Riverkeeper®** on the Western Shore south of Annapolis in January 2008, and it formally hooked up with the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper earlier this year. The West/Rhode organization has 900 members, and the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, 75.

Eliza Steinmeier began working as the full-time executive director of Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, charged with the Patapsco River and its tributaries, in late 2007. She started the organization from the ground up, essentially creating a small business.

"I'm the executive director down to the janitor and I'm buried in administrative work. The longer I've been at this the more advocacy work there is to do, and the less time I have to do it," Steinmeier said in an interview just after closing the deal with CRA. "I can't wait to see what my life looks like when this stuff is off my desk. I suspect it will free up at least 30 percent of my time. It's huge."

In another cooperative development, Chester **Riverkeeper®** Tom Leigh and Watershed Coordinator Brent Walls are working with Sassafras **Riverkeeper®** Kascie Herron on projects of mutual benefit. At the moment, the two Riverkeepers are lobbying Kent County officials to require all new construction within the county to require bionutrient removal septic systems and to retrofit existing septic systems within the Critical Area.

"Certainly, there's opportunity for us as far as improving our waters here in Kent County. She's responsible for the northern border and I the southern border," observes Leigh. "Hopefully, we can create a unified front and bring about some positive change."

[To learn more about Leigh and Herron, take a look at the cover story, "Clearwater Revival," in the winter issue of Washington College Magazine. To view it online, visit www.washcoll.edu and click on the news and events tab.]



Kascie Herron and Tom Leigh

Upcoming SPECIAL EVENTS

Check out our website or call the CRA office for more information on future events and activities.

Saturday, March 28

River Report Card

The 2008 Chester River Report Card will be out in March. CRA will host a public forum Saturday, March 28 to explain the results. Please join us from 10 - 4 p.m. at Goldstein Hall in the Wingate Lecture Hall, Room 100, at Washington College. Come learn how healthy the region's waterways really are and what you can do to help improve the ecological condition of the river.

Saturday, April 25

Chester Tester Training

CRA Watershed Coordinator Brent Walls will train new volunteer Chester Testers from 9 - 10:30 a.m. at the John S. Toll Science Center at Washington College. Chester Testers take water samples twice a month, adding critical help to CRA's monitoring efforts. Come learn what the Chester Tester team does and how you can help. Contact Walls at 410-810-7556 for details.

Parting Thoughts You, me & our Septic Systems

Just over two years ago, when I built my family's house, I had never heard of the Bay Restoration Fund or bionutrient removal, or BNR, septic systems. Now, as Chester **Riverkeeper**®, I preach about the benefits of BNR septic upgrades on an almost daily basis. It's also what I practice.

Last fall, I voluntarily upgraded my septic system through a state program financed by the Bay Restoration Fund. Septic contributes to 10 percent of the nitrogen in the Chester River – until recently the most ignored nitrogen problem in the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed. A BNR upgrade addresses that issue.

The process was relatively painless especially when you consider the giveback: healthier waterways and an investment in the infrastructure of my home. Another huge positive is that the state paid for what was in my case a \$10,000 upgrade. My only cost: a \$20 county recording fee.

CRA is a leading proponent of the program. Over the last two years, the organization has partnered with Kent and Queen Anne's counties, providing significant resources to promote it. In fact, CRA Septic Specialist Jenn Hicks has held 10 educational seminars attended by more than 150 homeowners and more are in the works. So far, 25 BNR systems have been installed in Queen Anne's and 30 in Kent. Another 80-plus have been approved and dozens more are under consideration.

Not surprisingly, many CRA board members – Tyler Campbell, Richard Kalter, Marcy Ramsey and Michael Moore – are among those who have taken advantage of the Bay Restoration Fund in an effort to reduce their nitrogen footprint, as has Executive Director Bob Parks. CRA members Brian Foreman, Taylor Buckley, Torr Howell, Chuck Mills and Sud and Pam Deringer are also early adopters and have encouraged others to follow suit.

But we still need more buy-in. The state has wisely set aside funds for this important program but in these uncertain economic times, no one can predict how long the money will be there. Please help us to create a healthier Chester River by doing your part – and do it now.

- Tom Leigh, Chester **Riverkeeper**®



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