

Gansler visits Kent to kick off audit of bay

Planned closed meeting is opened to public

By Craig O'Donnell
Staff writer

CHESTERTOWN — Echo Hill's buyboat *Annie D.* chugged into the Chester with Andy McKown at the helm yesterday morning.

McKown took Attorney General Doug Gansler, his Special Assistant for the Environment Erin Fitzsimmons, and his entourage through the drawbridge and upriver as far as Morgan Creek, and south again as far as Chester River Landing.

For 90 minutes they heard firsthand from Riverkeeper Tom Leigh, Chester River Association director Bob Parks, and McKown about nutrient pollution sources, enforcement and inspection problems, and the potential for growing switchgrass as a profitable crop in bands surrounding the shoreline to help absorb farm runoff nutrients.

McKown said he could not understand how the state would consider a permit to let a private party block the "deepest, swiftest" part of the river with a 250-foot extension to Chestertown Marina's pier. The marina's grant application estimated the new pier would bring an extra 1,500 boat trips a year to Chestertown, Parks said.

Yet in boating season the river below Chestertown is already plagued by constant turbulence from prop wash and wakes, which keeps the water murky, McKown said. If the water is murky, submerged vegetation will never get a foothold to make a comeback.

Further downstream, Parks and Leigh pointed out the shoreline and docks at Chester River Landing condos. A navigational buoy — "Buoy 41," specified McKown — was removed to make way for them.

The MDE wetlands permit

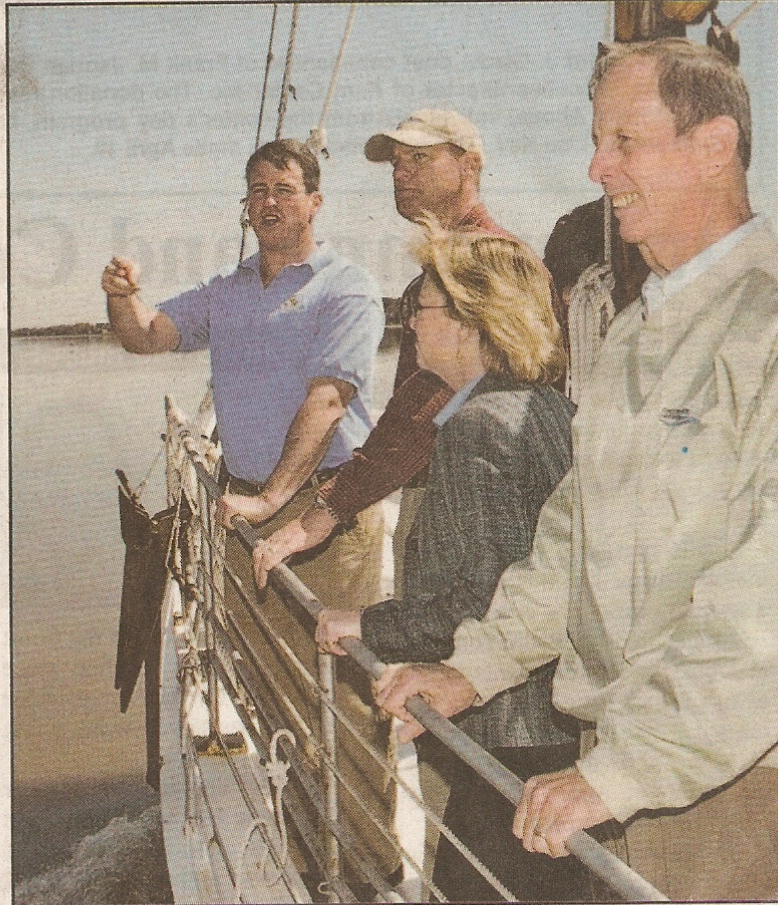


Photo by Charlie Campbell

As Echo Hill Outdoor School buyboat *Annie D.* heads east up the Chester River, Wednesday, Maryland Attorney General Doug Gansler talks to members of the Chester River Association. From the left are: Gansler, Tom Leigh, CRA Riverkeeper; Erin Fitzsimmons, Attorney General's special assistant for the environment; and Bob Parks, CRA director.

allowed a "living shoreline" of grasses, Leigh said, but stone riprap was put in. The MDE is in charge of enforcement, he said, and did not require the work to be redone in compliance with the permit.

"This kind of stuff drives average citizens nuts," Parks said.

After disembarking at 1 p.m. at the foot of High Street, Gansler said he felt he was "accomplishing exactly what we set out to do, to learn from, to hear from people who are most invested" in a clean Chester River.

"Citizen groups are a huge

asset," he said. He "picked Chestertown as a natural place for the first river audit, there is support from Washington College and the Chester River Association. You heard us talking about switchgrass (as a profitable nutrient-absorbing crop). The CRA is a very active and engaged citizen group."

"There are real, concise issues here. Citizens are "the eyes and ears," he said.

Gansler earlier met with elected officials in the town hall here. He is "going rivershed by rivershed to find out what we are

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