

## Chester River Association: River quality has improved

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**CHESTERTOWN** — Late spring gets people onto the water, and the county's two river organizations are busy making plans and reporting progress.

Some small improvement in the Chester River's waters is good news, according to a May 25 press release from Chester Riverkeeper Tom Leigh.

Meanwhile, the Sassafras River Association has hired a new Riverkeeper, Jamie Brunkow.

The Chester's overall water quality has improved from a D to a C-minus. Dissolved oxygen measures have improved, though water clarity has not.

Improvements are local. In the creeks that feed the river, the overall quality grade is C-plus, just like last year. Some creeks tested better and some tested worse.

The water quality improvements are due to "a whole litany of things. There's the agricultural community with cover crops and best management practices, the residential community with septic upgrades and ... new wastewater treatment plants," said Leigh.

Each year the Chester River Association issues its River

Report Card that tallies water quality in tributaries and in the river as a whole. The grades are based on the efforts of about 50 volunteer Chester Testers.

Report cards for 2007 and 2008 are online at [www.chesterriverassociation.org](http://www.chesterriverassociation.org). Contact the CRA at 410-810-7556 for more information on this year's report.

There are five creek basins: Upper Creeks, largely in Queen Anne's County centered on Sudlersville but including Kent is Route 301 corridor and parts of Delaware; Southeast Creeks, centered on Church Hill; and Corsica Creeks, which feed the Corsica River.

On the north are the Middle Creeks (Morgan Creek watershed); and Lower Creeks of Quaker Neck, Broad Neck and the Rock Hall area along with fringing creeks on the Queen Anne's side of the Chester.

Because of the state spending on water quality improvement along the Corsica River, Leigh wrote, "Three Bridges and Old Mill Stream branches showed huge improvement. ... Riley's Mill Branch in Morgnec is healthier because of changes at Eastman Chemical ... and the new treatment plant in Worton."

At the same time, "the Southeast Creeks, unfortunately, declined in health because of development and heavy agricultural nutrient loading in the Church Hill area."

Leigh wrote that, so far this year, the Chester is the only watershed to have shown any improvement from among river organizations protecting the Nanticoke, Sassafras, Magothy, South West, Rhode and Patuxent rivers and the Atlantic Coastal Bays.

"But let's remember, moving from a D to a C-minus means we've still got a lot of work to do to get where we want to be."

Brunkow joined the Sassafras River Association last month. He is from Stafford, Va., has a bachelor's in Biological Sciences from Virginia Tech, and has worked in the field of conservation biology.

Brunkow and a new SRA executive director who will replace the departing Kim Kohl are the ones who will oversee the SRA's restoration plan for the Sassafras River and its creeks in the coming years. Kohl said last month she has a new job with the Sierra Club.

The association sponsored a rain barrel construction workshop at Turner's Creek on May 1, and reports it has received a \$65,000 grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust to design a "treatment wetland" on a farm. A treatment wetland contains plants that maximize nutrient uptake from the water that flows in.

A decision on a second grant to create the wetland is expected in September, according to the group's May newsletter.

According to Kohl, the SRA offers a free septic test for anyone who is interested in upgrading their septic system under the Maryland program to install nitrogen-removal septic systems; you must be in the 1,000-foot critical area.

Keeping up enthusiasm for the river is important. Kohl notes the first Sassafest is slated for July 17 at Betterton Beach. Volunteers are needed; call Jackie at 410-275-9802 or Joan at 410-348-2364.

More information is on the website [www.sassafrasriver.org](http://www.sassafrasriver.org).