CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
Saving a National Treasure

POLLUTED RUNOFF IN CHARLES COUNTY

Charles County is home to Mattawoman Creek, a 30-mile tributary to the Potomac River that supports a diverse, high quality aquatic ecosystem and is a well-known area prized for its largemouth bass fishery. Other natural treasures in Charles County include Nanjemoy Creek and Zekiah Swamp, which has been called one of the "most important ecological areas on the East Coast" by the Smithsonian Institute.[1] Unfortunately, these waters are all threatened by the development on surrounding lands, which leads to increased loads polluted runoff. According to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Mattawoman Creek lies at the precarious threshold of degradation beyond which there is no return. Increases in impervious surfaces have not yet been linked to an impairment resulting in a clean-up plan, however, fish and invertebrate communities are significantly less diverse when compared to less developed watersheds in Charles County. In fact, a recently detected change in Mattawoman's estuarine fish community has been linked to land-use conversion from open space to urbanization. This kind of land-use conversion drastically increases the amount of polluted runoff delivered to local waters.

Polluted runoff contaminates our local rivers and streams and threatens local drinking water. Water running off of roofs, driveways, lawns and parking lots picks up trash, motor oil, grease, excess lawn fertilizers, pesticides, dog waste and other pollutants and washes them into the streams and rivers flowing through our communities. This pollution causes a multitude of problems, including toxic algae blooms, harmful bacteria, extensive dead zones, reduced dissolved oxygen, and unsightly trash clusters. These problems result in beach closures, fish consumption advisories, and in some cases complete closure of fisheries. In Charles County, polluted runoff poses a serious threat to the nationally known fisheries in the Mattawoman and other local waters.

Today, polluted runoff is the only major source of water pollution still on the rise, and is the largest nonpoint source of nitrogen in Charles County. Using the 2009 baseline, urban runoff contributed **18%** of the total Nitrogen in Charles County.[2] Although the County has been working hard to identify and implement water quality projects, funding has repeatedly been a problem. Even with the assistance of state grants and loans, many potential projects have abandoned. As a result, the County is falling far behind the goals identified in their permit issued under the Clean Water Act, known as a National Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. The County is also due for the next permit, which will double the amount of restoration that needs to be done.

[1] *See* Maryland Department of the Environment, *Maryland's Rural Legacy Areas,* available at: http://www.dnr.state.md.us/land/rurallegacy/allrurallegacyareas.asp
[2] Chesapeake Bay Model 5.3.2

The County must have a reasonable fee in place to help fill the funding gap and to get the necessary work done under their permit.

In addition to meeting permit requirements, cleaning up our local water bodies has an immediate positive effect for the people of Charles County, including reduction of swimming closures, continued fishing opportunities, reduced flooding and creating local jobs. The great thing is, taking care of Baltimore County's local waterways also takes care of its obligations for the Bay.

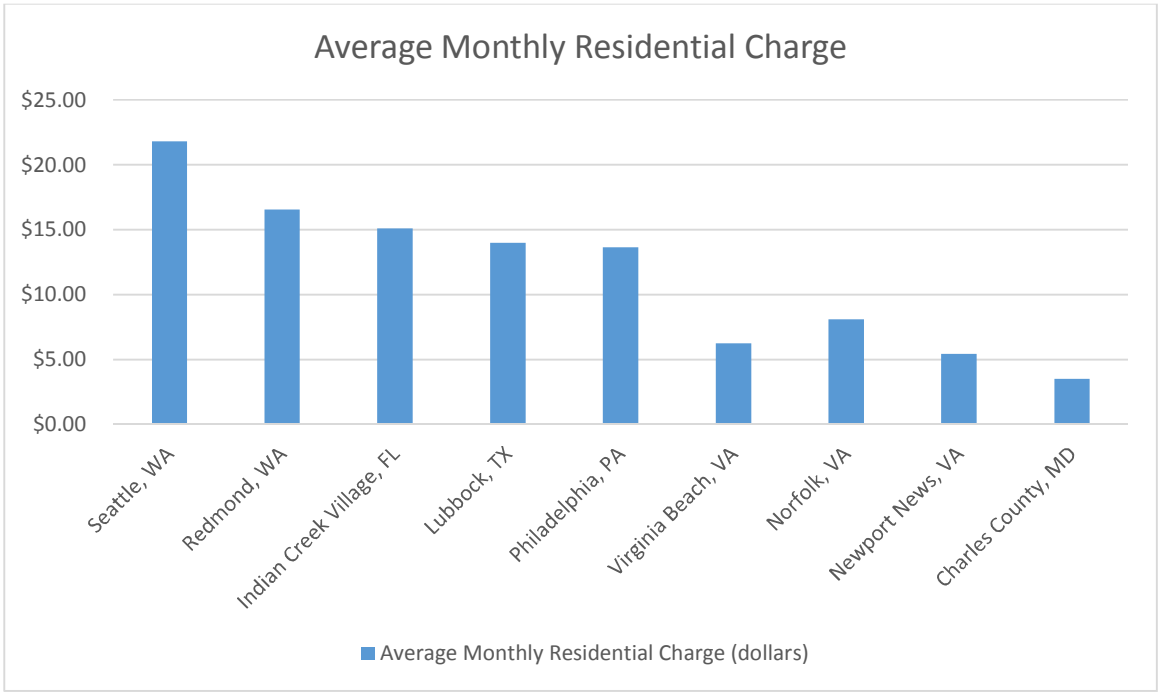
A COOPERATIVE EFFORT

All the Bay watershed states are now required to reduce runoff pollution to their local rivers and streams and the Bay – since this pollution source is the only major one that is actually growing. Each state has a specific plan in place to do so, and is now undertaking actions to make this happen. Since implementing this plan at the local level costs money, localities all around the watershed are developing different means to pay these costs. Only the ten largest and most urban jurisdictions were *required* to set fees in order to address their polluted runoff problems. They have the most land that doesn't allow water to filter slowly (impervious area), and they are also the only jurisdictions in Maryland charged with meeting very strict federal Clean Water Act permits. As requested by the Maryland Association of Counties, each jurisdiction got the freedom to set its own set of fees, according to its own polluted runoff needs. That's why businesses with the same "footprint" might have to pay a different amount in one jurisdiction or another.

The benefit to communities far outweigh the speculative concern that businesses will relocate. While businesses might wish to locate in Delaware, Pennsylvania, or Virginia instead of Maryland, it's not likely a stormwater fee that will move them to do that. And, if they do, they might be surprised to learn that eighteen local jurisdictions in Virginia, eight local governments in West Virginia, at least two municipalities in Delaware (including the largest, Wilmington), and several in Pennsylvania already have stormwater fee systems in place – and these numbers are growing. Across the United States, there are ***at least* 1,400 local jurisdictions with stormwater utility fees in place.**[3] A recent survey of jurisdictions with a stormwater utility fee found that the top three reasons such a fee was imposed were: to comply with regulatory requirements to reduce polluted runoff; to increase revenue stability; and to deal with the increasing costs of addressing polluted runoff.[4] These top three reasons are equally applicable to the Maryland jurisdictions, and make implementing stormwater utility fees equally important. Even so, Maryland's stormwater

[3] Campbell, Warren. *Western Kentucky University Stormwater Utility Survey 2013*. Western Kentucky University, 6 July 2013. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.
[4] Black & Veatch. *2012 Storm Water Utility Survey.* Black & Veatch, 2013. Web. 19 Nov. 2013. <http://bv.com/docs/management-consulting-brochures/2012-stormwater-utility-survey>.

fees are not the costliest in the nation. In fact, they are not even at the higher end of the nationwide range.



Stay Strong on Stormwater Fees!