



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Saving a National Treasure

POLLUTED RUNOFF IN BALTIMORE COUNTY

Baltimore County contains the headwaters for many of the streams and tributaries feeding into the Patapsco River, one of the major rivers of the Chesapeake Bay. These tributaries include Bodkin Creek, Jones Falls, Gwynns Falls, Patapsco River Lower North Branch, Liberty Reservoir and South Branch Patapsco. Baltimore County is also home to the Gunpowder River, Middle River, and the Back River. Unfortunately, all of these streams and rivers are polluted by nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment and are considered “impaired” by the Maryland Department of the Environment, meaning the water quality is too low to support the water’s intended use. One major contributor to that pollution and impairment is polluted runoff.

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. For example, just this summer in July 2013, Jones Falls turned visibly milky and at least 200 dead fish surfaced in the Inner Harbor, due mainly to polluted runoff. Although those effects were most visible downstream, they originated upstream, as the entire Jones Falls watershed is contributing to the eutrophication of the downstream tidal waters of the Harbor.

Today, polluted runoff is the only major source of water pollution still on the rise. Using the 2009 baseline, urban runoff contributed **19%** of the total Nitrogen in Baltimore County.¹ The Baltimore County budget recognizes that “[s]tormwater runoff is the primary cause of pollution of the County’s urban water resources including the Chesapeake Bay.”² **The dedicated funding provided by Baltimore County’s stormwater management fee is much-needed to construct the approximately 1,759 stormwater facilities that have been approved by the County but not yet built.** Baltimore County expects to collect about \$23 million from the stormwater fees, and has allocated all of that revenue to important planned improvement projects that will reduce flooding, clean up the trash and leaf litter on the streets, beautify streams and green spaces, and improve water quality in local waters and the Bay.

¹ Chesapeake Bay Model 5.3.2

² Baltimore County FY2014 Adopted Operating Budget Supporting Detail, page 582.

Baltimore County needs these projects to restore the 176 separate local water bodies that are not currently meeting water quality standards. Maryland Department of Environment has established clean-up plans for six of these segments that are impaired for bacteria pollution, mostly because of high levels of impervious surfaces in the watershed. Polluted runoff also contributes 92% of the suspended sediments in the Back River Bay Segment.³ Under the state's pending new Phase 1 stormwater permit, local jurisdictions in Baltimore County will be expected to reduce or treat over 9200 impervious surface acres over the next 5 years.⁴ These responsibilities apply to Baltimore County alone and cannot be offset by any other sector or region of the Bay's watershed.

In addition to meeting permit requirements, cleaning up our local water bodies has an immediate positive effect for the people of Baltimore County, including reduction of swimming closures, improved 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

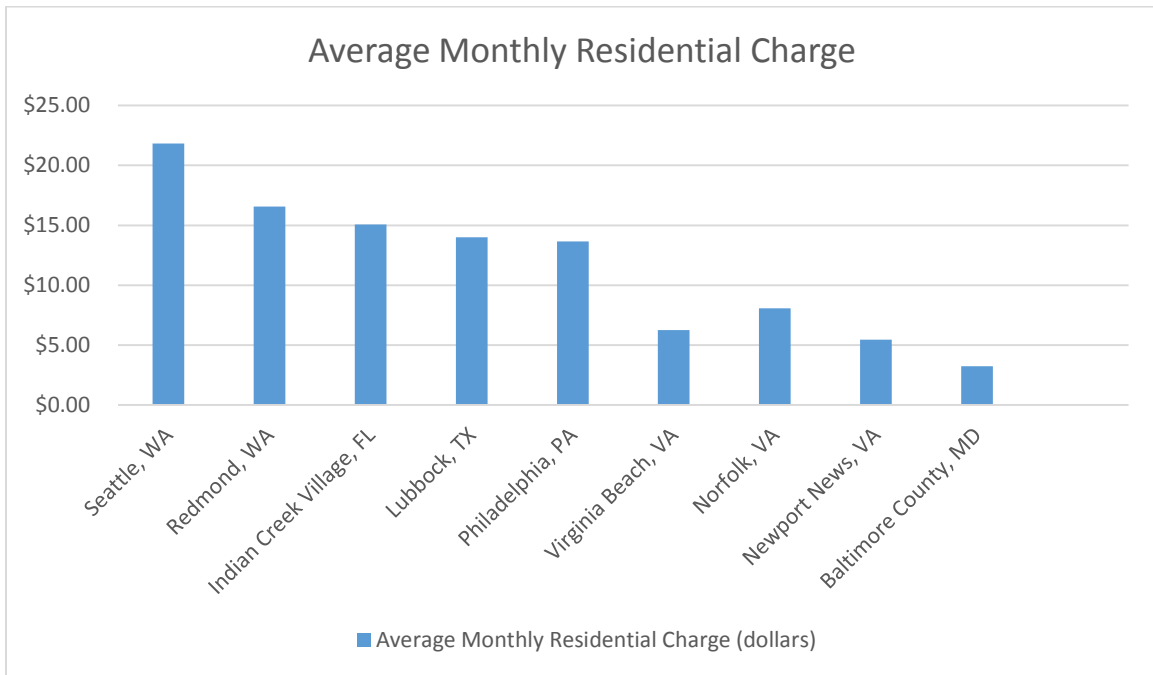
All the Bay watershed states are now required to reduce runoff pollution to their local rivers and streams and the Bay – since this pollution source is the only major one that is actually growing. Each state has a specific plan in place to do so, and is now undertaking actions to make this happen. Since 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**

³ Chesapeake Bay Model 5.3.2

⁴ Calculated from 20% reduction requirement in the next round of NPDES MS4 permits and Baltimore County's impervious surface acreage as of 2010 of 46,016 acres. Data were derived from the Chesapeake Bay Land Change Model v2_091913.

utility fees in place.⁵ 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.⁶ These top three reasons are equally applicable to the Maryland jurisdictions, and make implementing stormwater utility fees equally important. Even so, Maryland's stormwater 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!

⁵ Campbell, Warren. *Western Kentucky University Stormwater Utility Survey 2013*. Western Kentucky University, 6 July 2013. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.

⁶ 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>>.