

Turning the Tide, Saving the Chesapeake Bay

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation's biweekly, Tuesday morning podcast

URL: <http://chesbay.podbean.com>

Title: Episode 1, *Bay 101*

Aired: March 31, 2015

Summary: The Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and streams drain a six-state, 64,000-square-mile watershed that reaches as far north as Cooperstown, New York, and as far west as Virginia's Shenandoah Valley and parts of West Virginia. In this first-in-a-series podcast, Chesapeake Bay Foundation President Will Baker describes the good news and the bad news about the problems facing this national treasure.

I'm Will Baker, President of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and I am delighted to welcome you to our new podcast series—*Turning the Tide, Saving the Chesapeake Bay*.

The Bay and its tributaries are as we all know stunningly beautiful and central to the culture and economy of the whole mid-Atlantic region. But beneath the surface, pollution has degraded them so severely that the states have designated many of them as "impaired." That pollution hurts all of us, degrades the economy, and is simply a rotten legacy to leave our children, our grandchildren, and even our great grandchildren.

Every two weeks, on Tuesday morning, I'll share with you my thoughts on what it will really take to turn the tide—to restore our Bay and its rivers and streams to a much better state. I'll offer why saving the Bay makes environmental, human health, and economic sense. I hope you will stay in touch and give me as much feedback as you can, including topics you'd like to hear about.

First, Bay 101. [The Chesapeake Bay is an estuary](#)—simply defined as a mix of salt water delivered from the ocean and fresh water flowing down rivers. Those rivers drain a six-state, 64,000 square mile watershed that reaches as far north as Cooperstown, New York, as far west as the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia and even parts of West Virginia and Delaware. In fact, the Bay is the largest estuary in the United States and still the most productive. The Bay system supports 18 million people living within the watershed and 3,600 species of plants and animals. **That is to say, a lot of us depend on the Chesapeake. Its health—or lack thereof—touches each and every one of us.**

After a heavy rain, we are advised to [stay out of the water](#) for as long as 48 hours. [Polluted runoff](#) literally pouring off city streets, residential yards, and agricultural fields fouls our

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waterways, making them unsafe for human contact. And pollution from agricultural runoff contaminates ground and surface water, making wells unfit for human consumption. It does not have to be this way. Scientists at some of the world's foremost research institutions have diagnosed the problems, identified the primary sources of pollution, and prescribed cures.

Fortunately, we are listening. Throughout the region, [sewage treatment plants](#) have been vastly improved. Many farmers are reducing polluted runoff. And [new technologies](#) are being developed to turn waste into clean sources of energy. **After years of fits and starts, missed deadlines, and failed promises, we have a federal/state [Clean Water Blueprint](#) for the Bay and its rivers and streams. It's in place, it's mandatory, it has teeth, and it's starting to work.** You can learn more about the Blueprint on our website: [cbf.org](#). How do I know the Blueprint is working? [CBF's 2014 State of the Bay report](#) showed pollution dropping and water quality improving.

There's more good news, an independent report CBF commissioned last fall on [the economics of restoration](#) demonstrated that fully implementing the Blueprint will generate a whopping \$22 billion—that's \$22 billion with a "B"—annual increases in the natural benefits of land and waterways. \$22 billion dollars annually, and that's just the increase.

There is a lot to celebrate. But, this is absolutely no time to be complacent. Huge challenges remain, including the fact that some states will not fully implement the Blueprint unless we keep pushing. We have got to keep the pressure on.

Our health, our economy, and the legacy we leave our children depend on the choices and actions you and I—and our elected officials—take today.

Thanks for listening. Next time, we'll talk about the largest source of pollution degrading the Bay and its rivers and streams. Agriculture. Happily, is the least expensive source of pollution to reduce.

I'm Will Baker, President of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.