



Port Tobacco River Watershed—30,000 acres, 47 square miles, all in Charles County



Fall Fishing on the River

Comp Plan—Issues To Be Considered

PTRC has signed on to a letter from the Smarter Growth Alliance for Charles County (SGACC) to the Planning Commission outlining a number of issues that SGACC believes should be considered before the revised Comprehensive Plan is sent to the state for a 60-day review.

At a briefing for the Planning Commission on October 6, County staff appeared to recommend “fast tracking” the process, suggesting that the Planning Commission consider only changes made to the Comp Plan by the staff to make it consistent with the tier map adopted by the County Commissioners. The tier map, required by state law, divides the County into four “tiers” that determine where development can occur.

However, several members of the Planning Commission, including Chairman Steve Bunker and members Joe Tieger and Buddy Bowling, asserted that the Planning Commission could—and should—consider any part of the proposed Comp Plan, not just the revisions made by staff. And at its October 20 meeting, the Planning Commission voted to put off any action on the proposed tier map and Comp Plan at least until their next meeting.

As the SGACC letter points out, the staff “changes address only a fraction of the concerns raised” about the Comp Plan as written—even though the plan “will guide how and where the county grows for at least the next decade.” The letter lists 12 specific recommendations for revisions to the plan that would, in its words, “accommodate population growth and support economic development, while preserving the county’s rural heritage and promoting a healthy outdoors.”

The recommendations include the following:

Comp Plan *continued*

- Eliminating the development district, which is actually larger than Washington, DC, and the deferred development district (DDD). The DDD drains into the Mattawoman Creek, which is already declining as a result of overdevelopment
- Eliminating the Cross County Connector, permits for which have been denied by the Army Corps of Engineers, which declared the road “contrary to the public interest”
- Preserving the land in Pomonkey proposed for a tech park—a project that has collapsed for lack of business interest—as an outdoor education center

What happens next is unknown. With the recent elections and changes in the Board of County Commissioners, it is to be hoped that the entire plan will get another hard look.

Mallows Bay

Two PTRC members, Executive Director Julie Simpson and her husband Malcolm, joined seven other enthusiastic kayakers recently for a guided tour of Mallows Bay, home to the largest and most diverse collection of sunken ships in the United States. The area has been recommended to be designated a National Marine Sanctuary—a recommendation that PTRC wholeheartedly supports. The more than 200 shipwrecks date from the Revolutionary War to the present and include the remains of 90 World War I wooden steamships, which were deliberately sunk in the Bay.

The shipwrecks form reefs that are home to a wide variety of marine life, and the Bay is also host to numerous Native American, Potomac River fishing industry, and Civil War archeological sites.

The 2-hour kayak tour was led by Mike Jones of Up the Creek Rentals in Indian Head, who talked about the history of the Bay and the wildlife that use it as a habitat. The group saw eagles, herons, lots of cormorants, swallows, gulls, and a muskrat. Mike Jones said that in the summer there are turtles and snakes by the thousands.

Mallows Bay is a Charles County park with excellent facilities, including picnic areas, a hiking trail, a good sized pervious parking lot that can handle vehicles pulling trailers, a boat dock, and a kayak launch that is very easy to use. In other words—it’s a great place to visit.

FALL TREE PLANTING

Forested buffers protect our watersheds by filtering pollutants, controlling erosion, and providing habitat for wildlife. On Sunday, November 16, a group of volunteers led by Heather Zdobysz planted several thousand trees to establish a forested buffer beside a portion of the Port Tobacco Creek along Hawthorne Road near the intersection of Valley Drive and Mitchell Road.



Mallows Bay Shipwreck

UPCOMING PTRC MEETING

Our December 4 membership meeting will give us an opportunity to hear from a group of students at North Point High. Lolita Kiorpes, a teacher from North Point, contacted PTRC about a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration grant she has been awarded that is aimed at getting students more involved with protecting our watershed—in particular, helping students make the connection between ocean health and the health of upstream watersheds. The project will involve students from North Point educating the public about that issue, as well as building a native plant garden at the school.

The students’ presentation at our December meeting will be part of the public education aspect of the project. In addition, Kathleen Litchfield, a Master Watershed Steward, will give a presentation about rain gardens, and Jim Long, President of the Mattawoman Watershed Society, will speak about the Mattawoman watershed. Please join us at 6pm on December 4 at North Point High School at 2500 Davis Road in Waldorf to listen to these presentations.

NEWS BRIEFS

Septic Pump-Out and Upgrade Reimbursement Programs

Septic systems are a major source of pollution in the Port Tobacco watershed. Charles County's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) Strategy for restoring the Chesapeake Bay recommends pumping out 20% of the County's septic systems every year to reduce nutrient pollution. The County has developed a septic pump-out reimbursement program to encourage County residents to do their part to meet this goal. The focus will be on septic systems in the critical areas. To apply for the reimbursement for a septic pumpout, download and complete the application form at http://www.charlescountymd.gov/sites/default/files/pgm/planning/septicpump_reimburse_app.pdf.

There is a second program for residents not in critical areas that has funds available for upgrades to any residential system through the Bay Restoration Fund. For more information on that program contact Susan Morris at susanm.morris@maryland.gov or (301) 609-67 In addition to helping the Bay, pumping your septic system helps maintain its effectiveness and longevity.

New Charles County Wetlands Protection Award

Charles County will receive \$1.26 million to acquire three land parcels totaling 220 acres near the abandoned Popes Creek Railroad corridor in Falkner/Newburg. About one quarter of the funding is from Program Open Space local funds, and the remainder is from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program grant.

Through this land acquisition will come opportunities for upland forest and estuarine-related tidal wetlands protection, as well as a new trail on the former railroad corridor that extends from Route 301 to the Potomac River shoreline.

Report from Executive Director Julie Simpson

PTRC has had a busy fall. Some recent activities are described below:

- **ELLERSLIE TREE PLANTING**—Ellerslie is a lovely historic home in Port Tobacco that has recently been acquired by a local family. The new owner is interested in working with PTRC to reforest part of the property, and we are pursuing the possibility of getting a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT) for the project. Ellerslie is in the Hoghole Run subwatershed of the Port Tobacco River, and the Watershed Restoration Action Strategy (WRAS) for the River establishes forest preservation as a major protection strategy for that subwatershed.
- **WATER MONITORING**—Sheri and Don Zimmer have been conscientious stewards of PTRC's water monitoring project since PTRC got County approval for the project in 2003. The project expanded a year later to include the streams that feed the river. The data generated has provided important evidence about the health of the river—which is helpful for both policymakers and grant funders. Now the Zimmers feel it's time to pass the baton to others, and PTRC member Tina Wilson has come forward to take over this important project. Tina will accompany Julie to the annual conference of the Maryland Water Monitoring Council on November 21. They will develop a plan for continuing this program, and our next newsletter will include details on training and volunteer opportunities for the coming season.
- **CHAPEL POINT STATE PARK**—PTRC member Paula Schiller and Julie met then State Delegate and now new County Commissioners President Peter Murphy at Chapel Point State Park on September 3 for a site visit and to discuss options for improving the conditions at the Park. They discussed the maintenance of the Park, including the condition of the road and boat ramps, as well as lack of trash collection, and the problem of visitors who do not comply with park rules on hours and activities. Mr. Murphy was impressed with the beauty of the site and its potential as a recreational resource for county residents who are looking for access to the water. We will stay in touch with him about the Park.

Update on Port Tobacco Creek Stream and Wetland Reconnect Project

In our summer newsletter, we described the imminent award of a \$40,000 grant to Limno Tech Corporation, complemented by a \$30,000 Charles County contribution, for engineering and permitting to restore a wetlands alongside a 2,800-foot-long section of the Port Tobacco Creek. The project will involve sloping the highly eroded stream banks and raising the stream bottom to send stream overflow into the now dry wetlands, which will filter out harmful nutrients, bacteria, sediment, and toxic materials from the stream overflow, resulting in improved water quality in the Port Tobacco River.

The County contribution funded the topological mapping. This includes a survey of existing conditions in the wetland, including delineating its boundaries and locating where the Port Tobacco River (tidal) meets the Port Tobacco Creek (nontidal) adjacent to the wetland. This mapping also shows the capacity of the wetlands to capture and retain/refresh groundwater and what is required to both raise the stream bottoms and slope the stream banks to achieve optimum fresh water filtering. The County was also responsible for ensuring that permit requirements for Charles County, the Maryland Department of the Environment, and the Army Corps of Engineers have been satisfied.

The \$40K National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to Limno Tech Corporation is for conceptual design and final engineering drawings and permit documents for the construction of the project. A separate construction contract will be required.

The Charles County contract has been completed and deliverables forwarded to Limno Tech. Conceptual design by Limno Tech is expected for County review soon. Final engineering drawings for construction are expected by end of February 2015.

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Participation is free, and donations are posted quarterly to PTRC's account.

SUPPORT PTRC THROUGH THE COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN

You can also give to PTRC through the Combined Federal Campaign—just check #51889 on your pledge form.

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