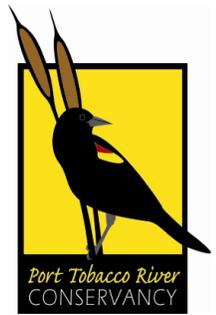


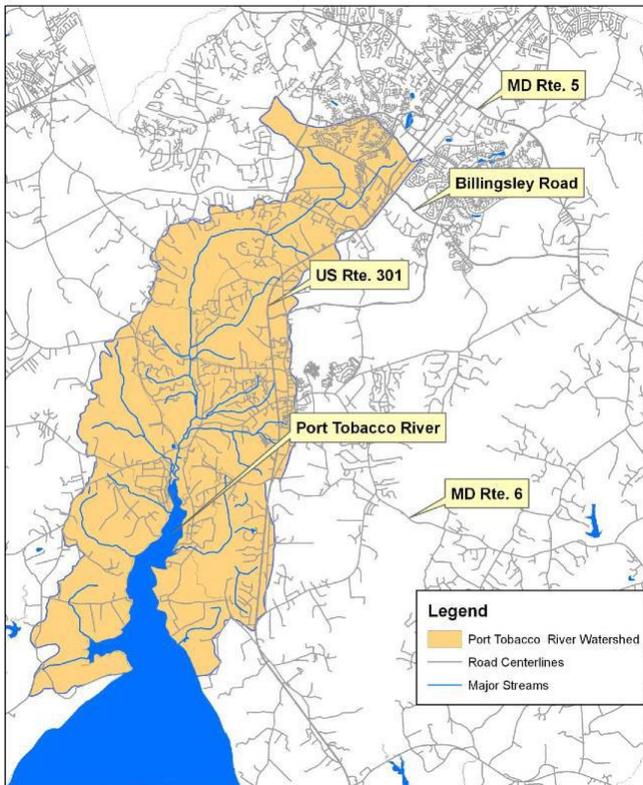
Port Tobacco River Conservancy News



WINTER 2015

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Port Tobacco River Watershed



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

—prepared by the Charles County Planning Division, August 2011

Help Keep Our Waterways Clean!

THE VALUE OF WETLANDS
Wetlands are ecologically diverse and provide a wide range of services. They are important for water quality, flood control, and wildlife habitat. Wetlands also provide a natural buffer between land and water, reducing erosion and sedimentation.

HEADWATER STREAMS
Headwater streams are the smallest streams in a watershed. They are the source of water for larger streams and rivers. Headwater streams are important for water quality and wildlife habitat.

PTRC Rail Trail Sign to Be Next to 1,100 Acres Slated for Dense Development

A new sign that explains the importance of headwaters to water quality in the rivers they feed will be installed on the Indian Head Rail trail as soon as construction on the trail is complete. The sign, which was created by PTRC and Charles County Parks and Grounds, will be placed on the south side of a bridge near the White Plains end of the Rail Trail.

Page’s Swamp, one of the headwaters of the Port Tobacco River, is on the north side of the bridge and flows into Port Tobacco Creek via culverts under the bridge. The creek, in turn, flows into the Port Tobacco River. Ironically, Page’s Swamp and 1,100 acres surrounding it are slated for dense residential development under a new provision of the current iteration of the County’s Comprehensive Plan. As our sign points out, swamps and wetlands are ecologically important because they control floods, clean the water, create habitat for fish and other wildlife, and provide beautiful places to hike, fish, and boat. Healthy headwater streams also provide environmental benefits by bringing a continuous flow of clean water to surface waters and helping to recharge underground aquifers, as well as reducing the pollution that flows downstream by retaining sediments and excess nutrients. The health of these resources is critical to the health of the River.

How did the 1,100 acres become an area for dense development? What we know is that the 1,100 acres had been part of the Deferred Development District (DDD). When the maps were redrawn and the DDD became the Watershed Conservation District, the 1,100 acres was carved out with the justification that it was a Priority Funding Area (PFA). A PFA is an area that is slated for dense development, both commercial and residential, and qualifies for state assistance. When the county’s planning

Rail Trail Sign at Page’s Swamp

1,100 Acres *continued*

staff pressed the Planning Commission to open the 1,100 acres, they neglected to mention that 120 acres are in a Tier II (very high quality) watershed of the Mattawoman. In addition, the state questions why one-third of the area is a PFA, given that the area is bisected by the Indian Head Rail Trail and the greater area is characterized by sensitive Page's Swamp.

The Planning Commission sent the Comprehensive Plan to the State on February 9 for a 60-day review. The State will return the plan to the Planning Commission, which will hold a public hearing before forwarding the final version of the Plan to the County Commissioners for approval or disapproval. PTRC, together with our allies at the Mattawoman Watershed Society and the Smarter Growth Alliance for Charles County, is developing comments on this and other issues to present at the time of the hearing.

Update on Port Tobacco Creek Stream and Wetland Reconnect Project

The ongoing project to reconnect a 2,800-foot section of the Port Tobacco Creek to a now dry 30-acre wetland in Port Tobacco is moving along on schedule. The engineering contractor, Limno Tech Corporation, has completed the design drawings and forwarded the permit request documents, via Charles County Planning and Growth Management, to federal and state authorizing agencies, including the Army Corp of Engineers, State Highway Administration, Maryland Department of the Environment, Department of Natural Resources, and the Charles County Soil Conservation District. It is expected that the comment, update, and final approval process will take from 12 to 18 months before construction can begin.

The 2,800-foot long stream section begins south of the Route 6 Bridge at Rose Hill Road and continues to a point near the bridge at Mary Lane where it flows into the tidal Port Tobacco River. The highly eroded and impassable stream bed and banks, as shown in photo to the right, now deposit over 200 tons of sediment as well as high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus into the river each year. The goal of the project is to transform it into a stream that directs excess storm water flows into the adjacent wetlands, which will filter out pollution before it reaches the river. This will improve fish and wildlife habitat and lead to a safe, fishable, and economically viable Port Tobacco River.



Page's Swamp

UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us for our General Membership meeting at 7pm on March 5 at the Holiday Inn Express in La Plata. Kirk Mantay, Restoration Manager for the South River Federation, will talk about using strategic science-based projects to improve the quality of small creeks that contribute the most pollution to the South River. The work is part of a targeted plan for South River restoration. He also will demonstrate that understanding the business and financial needs of any plan is essential to success.

The Sixth Annual Port Tobacco Market Day is set for 9am–2pm on May 2 at the Port Tobacco Courthouse (Chapel Point Road, Port Tobacco). It will showcase some of Southern Maryland's local artists and vendors. PTRC will have a booth with displays of its restoration activities. Please stop by.

The Center for Children is presenting its 7th Annual Touch-a-Truck event on May 16 from 10 am until 3 pm at the Regency Furniture Baseball stadium in Waldorf. PTRC will sponsor the Fishmobile again this year for young kids to see small aquatic wildlife. PTRC will also have a booth with displays of its water restoration activities and some fun activities for children to do. Bring your kids—it'll be fun!



Current Port Tobacco Creek

MALLOWS BAY

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has accepted Charles County's Mallows Bay in its inventory of National Marine Sanctuary nominations. Over the years, several hundred ships were sunk in Mallows Bay and have now become reefs, each with its own ecosystem. If Mallows Bay is finally approved as a sanctuary, it will be protected from development or destruction, and not only will preserve history but also be a great tourist site for Charles County. A final decision on whether it will become a marine sanctuary is not expected to be made for another year or two. PTRC was one of many organizations that sent letters of support for the designation.



Winter Port Tobacco River Scene
Photo credit—Lynne Blake-Hedges

PTRC OPPOSES INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AROUND MARYLAND AIRPORT

PTRC signed on to a Smarter Growth Alliance for Charles County letter saying the land around the privately owned Maryland airport should be preserved in its natural state, with some of it devoted to an outdoor education center.

The letter opposes industrialization and commercialization of the land, which is the objective of several groups that have long supported such use.

For more information, and to read the letter, go to our website:
www.porttobaccoriver.org.

Report from Executive Director Julie Simpson

Student Programs Initiative—Krupa Patel is PTRC's new Student Programs Coordinator. She will be working to increase the involvement of elementary through college students in PTRC activities. On January 29, Krupa and other PTRCers visited Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center, Charles County Schools, to learn about the Center's program for fifth-graders. Tim Emhoff, the Environmental Education Resource Teacher, gave us a wonderful tour, and we discussed many ideas for reaching out to students. Future field trips are in the planning stage.

Water Monitoring—PTRC's new Water Monitoring chief, Tina Wilson, attended the Maryland Water Monitoring Council's Eighth Stream Monitoring Roundtable on February 19. Tina reports that it was a great opportunity to learn about where monitoring is being done and what's being sampled, and it was a good networking opportunity. The roundtable consisted of technical presentations from federal, state, and county government representatives. In addition, four Watershed groups shared interesting information about their water monitoring programs.

Trash Free Maryland Legislative Agenda— PTRC has joined the Trash Free Maryland Alliance, a group whose aim is to reduce trash in Maryland's environment. The Alliance works to prevent littering, reduce the use of disposable bags and polystyrene, and increase recycling. More than 60 organizations, schools, and businesses from across the state participate.

The Alliance is proposing that Maryland ban plastic bags and impose a small fee on paper bags to motivate consumers to use reusable bags. This program would pay for itself, reduce litter, and save retailers money. The Alliance is also asking the General Assembly to ban the sale of personal care products containing microbeads. Made of polyethylene, these beads absorb chemicals like pesticides and fertilizers, becoming toxic balls that aquatic life mistake for food.

Recent Articles of Interest

A February 12 article in the *Washington Post* titled “[To Save Their Depleted Species, Female Blue Crabs Go the Extra Mile to Spawn in the Bay](#)” describes the continuing decline of the blue crab population in the Chesapeake Bay. Limiting harvests of female crabs was initially helpful, but a 2013 plague of red drum fish that prey on juvenile crabs and the harsh winter of 2014, which killed many adult crabs, combined to counteract the initial positive effects of limits on harvesting females.

On February 11, a *Washington Post* article titled “[The Good Die Young: ‘Dead Zones’ Find Oysters Where They Should Be Safe](#),” reported on a new study by the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, which found the presence of dead zones in shallows at the water’s edge. In these dead zones, there is little oxygen because of nutrient pollution. Unlike the well-known deep water dead zones, which can last months, these shallow water dead zones occur at night and last just a few minutes, but long enough to make it difficult for young oysters to breathe and fight off disease.

A February 6 *Maryland Independent* article titled “[New App Helps Anglers, DNR Track Fish](#)” describes a new website and smartphone app developed by Maryland-area recreational fishermen that may enhance the ability of a federally run program to track and manage recreational fisheries. In particular, the new app will be used to monitor Atlantic croaker, red drum, spotted sea trout, shad, spot fish, striped bass, and yellow perch. It will allow for the collection of data on whether fishing was done from a boat or from the bank, whether the angler fished with the help of a guide, as well as the length, weight, released or kept, condition, and whether and how the fish was hooked.

A January 5 *Washington Post* article titled “[Chesapeake Bay’s Overall Health Remains Largely Unchanged, Report Finds](#)” describes the results of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation 2014 State of the Bay Report, which found that slight improvements in water quality were offset by declines in blue crab and rockfish populations. The report gave the Bay a score of 32, or D+, the same score it received 2 years ago.

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PTRC SPRING FUNDRAISER

Come join the Port Tobacco River Conservancy for our 6th annual spring fundraiser. Our Casino Royale will be held at the Greater Waldorf Jaycees Community Center, 3090 Crain Highway, Waldorf, at 7:00 pm on Friday, March 27. Heavy hors d’oeuvres will be served, and games of chance can be played with Real Money for Real Money. Musical entertainment will be provided by the Sam Grow Band, a popular Southern Maryland group now based in Nashville.

Other entertainment will include dancing and a Silent Auction. A Wheelbarrow of Cheer (estimated value of \$400) will be raffled, and Stretch Raffles will provide chances to win other valuable items.

The \$50 ticket price will include a free glass of wine, beer, or soft drink with a cash bar available the remainder of the evening. Tickets can be purchased in advance on the PTRC website: www.porttobaccoriver.org

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