

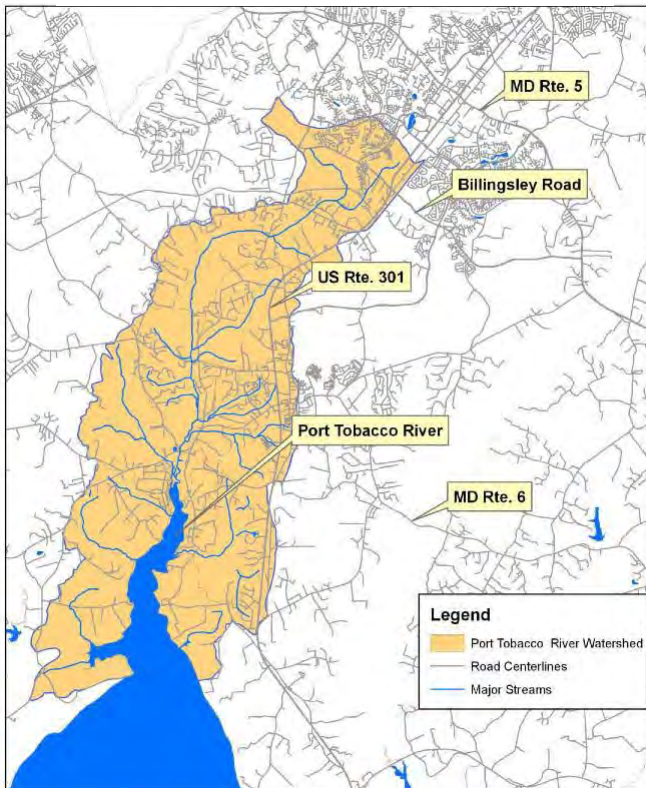
Port Tobacco River Conservancy News



FALL 2015

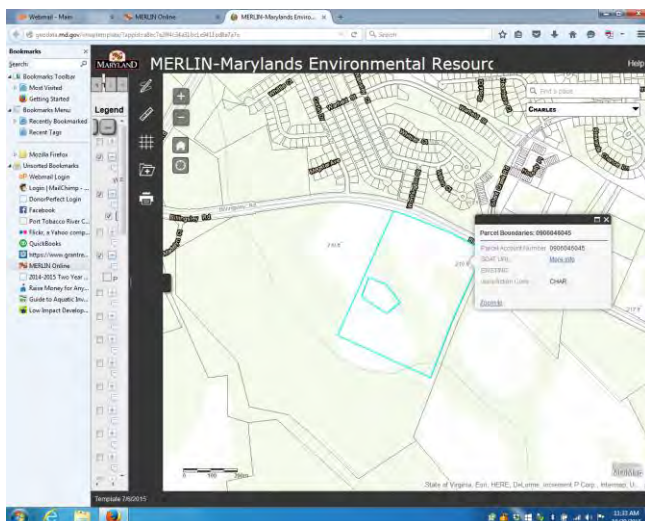
VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

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*



PTRC Planning Commission Testimony

PTRC President Jerry Forbes testified before the Charles County Planning Commission on the 2015 Draft Comprehensive Plan at the October 5 public hearing. The hearing was very well attended, and approximately 70 people signed up to testify. Those speaking in favor of changes to the 2015 Draft Plan that would slow growth and strengthen natural resource protection greatly outnumbered those speaking in favor of the current draft.

Jerry's testimony urged the Planning Commission to protect the 1,100 acres of Port Tobacco River headwaters in White Plains, whereas the 2015 Draft Plan would allow medium to dense development there. He asked that the new Watershed Conservation District, which covers most of the Mattawoman Creek watershed, be extended to cover the 1,100 acres as well. He also asked the County to reconsider its recently announced plan to locate one or more schools there. [We have since learned that the Board of Education has completed its purchase of property for new schools—see screenshot at left for an outline of the property, which is surrounded by the Washington Glen property.]

Jerry pointed out that as the percentage of impervious surface increases, stream health declines. Even stormwater entering small headwater streams can carry pollutants that affect downstream water quality, affecting the health of fish and shellfish in the Port Tobacco River. In addition, changes to hydrology in the headwaters can add to downstream erosion and pollution, and could affect the success of the planned restoration of the Port Tobacco Creek wetlands at Route 6. Jerry concluded by reminding the Planning Commission that in adopting the Watershed Restoration Action Strategy for the Port Tobacco Watershed, the County has already agreed on the ecological, aesthetic, scenic, recreational, and economic value of its being healthy.

The hearing opened with a presentation by Steve Ball, Director of Planning, on the differences between the current Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in 2006, and the 2015 draft. This presentation is available at <http://www.boarddocs.com/md/ccpc/Board.nsf/Public>. The Planning Commission voted to hold the record open for 30 days, until November 4, to allow for additional public comment. Comments may be submitted to PickerTH@charlescountymd.gov.

Marc Imlay Speaks on Invasive Species

Marc Imlay, guest speaker at PTRC'S October membership meeting, brought us the encouraging news that recent research is identifying effective biological controls for some of the most harmful invasive plant species. Marc is a conservation biologist with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. He has been active for many years in Southern Maryland, identifying and removing invasive plant species from natural areas, particularly the Ruth B. Swann Memorial Park and Chapman State Park. Marc is also chair of the Mid-Atlantic Invasive Plant Council's Biological-Control Work Group.

Marc explained that nonnative invasives threaten all natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region. More native plants and animals are replaced by competition with nonnative species than are lost from all other causes except development and water pollution.

The good news is that of the top 15 nonnative invasive plant species in our region, one or two nonnative insects or fungi feed on three (purple loosestrife, mile-a-minute weed, and garlic mustard) and can reduce them by about 90 percent. The organisms were introduced after being tested for host specificity in Eurasia and then tested in quarantine conditions in the United States.

Where biological controls are not available, Marc advocates pulling up the nonnatives, as well as carefully targeted chemical control. As an example, Japanese honeysuckle can be reduced by 80 percent by locating vines that are climbing trees in January and pulling them up by the roots. Not only does this control the climbing vines, but the absence of light energy causes vines trailing along the ground to decline precipitously the next year.

Marc has offered to help us control invasive species in the Port Tobacco Watershed. If you are interested in helping, contact jsimpson@porttobaccoriver.org.

Report from Executive Director Julie Simpson

Chesapeake Watershed Forum—One of the most interesting sessions that I attended at this year's Chesapeake Watershed Forum in Shepherdstown, WV, was titled "How Streams Work and The Role of Streamside Forests," presented by David Wise of Stroud Water Research Center. Mr. Wise emphasized that small streams matter because they determine the health of downstream water. Research is showing that stream organisms are adapted to forest conditions. The food chain that produces fish in our tidal rivers begins with algae growing on shaded rocks and the fallen leaves of native forest trees that are eaten by aquatic insects and other invertebrates, which in turn are eaten by fish.



Purple loosestrife

SMARTER GROWTH ALLIANCE FOR CHARLES COUNTY LETTER RE DRAFT COMP PLAN

PTRC signed on to the October 5, 2015, Smarter Growth Alliance for Charles County (SGACC) letter commenting on the 2015 Draft Comprehensive Plan. The letter recommends that the Merged Scenario compromise plan be restored as the foundation for the comprehensive plan, with needed changes to reflect changed conditions since its creation in 2011.

The following are some recommended changes to the Merged Scenario: (1) include in the Watershed Conservation District the 1,100 acres east of Middletown Road that are now in the Deferred Development District; (2) designate the land surrounding Maryland Airport and the forested Indian Head tech park site as Watershed Conservation District rather than Employment & Industrial Park District; (3) ensure that the Water Resources Element is consistent with state guidelines, reflects an iterative process, and realistically addresses the availability of drinking water; and (4) right-size the Priority Funding Areas consistent with areas targeted for development in the Merged Scenario. The SGACC letter can be found on the PTRC website:

<http://porttobaccoriver.org/advocacy/smarter-growth-alliance-for-charles-county/>

You can also sign an online petition addressed to the County Planning Commission and (separately) to the County Commissioners asking them to support the Merged Scenario with targeted improvements to best protect our rural areas, strengthen our communities, and create a more sustainable economy. You can find the petition at <http://www.congressweb.com/fomd/3>.



Jerry Forbes at the raingardens at McDonough High School



Interpretive panel about headwater streams on the Indian Head Rail Trail

RECENT ARTICLES OF INTEREST

- On October 21, the *Maryland Independent* published an article titled “[SHA to Plant 12,000 Trees to Help Restore Bay.](#)” This 2-year State Highway Administration program will include planting trees across 50 acres in Charles and Anne Arundel counties as part of the Chesapeake Bay Restoration program.
- An October 15 *Washington Post* article titled “[Bay’s Warming Waters Could Pose Challenges](#)” reports on a University of Maryland Study that found that water in some parts of the Chesapeake Bay are warming more rapidly than the region’s air temperatures. This trend could result in larger dead zones and imperil the food supply on which fish and crabs depend.

Executive Director Report—continued

Mr. Wise explained what he called the “hidden energy of streams.” A small percentage of the total food source produced in streams are diatoms, or single cell algae, that need shady conditions to support their growth on submerged rocks. About one-third of total energy production is a result of photosynthesis—tree leaves, twigs, and pollen that enter the stream and are broken down by fungi and bacteria. But surprising research is showing that about two-thirds of the stream food supply comes from what Mr. Wise called *watershed tea*—dissolved organic carbon flowing into the stream through the soil, which is made by soil bacteria. The tea provides food for aquatic bacteria that break down leaves and nourish insect larvae.

Research also shows that streams with forest buffers provide better habitat and have three to five times more biological activity than streams with healthy grass buffers. They also remove two to eight times more nitrogen pollution. Mr. Wise concluded that “fish grow on trees”—the percentage of forest cover in a watershed is the single best indicator of stream health and therefore the viability of fish.

Restoration Projects Tour—Rebecca Wolf, Watershed Coordinator for Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, visited us on Friday, October 2, for a rainy day tour of our restoration projects and to give us some ideas for environmental education programs. We took Becki to see the wetlands at Hawthorne and Mitchell Roads where PTRC volunteers have planted 11,000 trees; the historic Ellerslie property, where the tree seedlings we planted in April are flourishing; the bioretention facility that PTRC built off Catalpa Drive; and the site of the future Port Tobacco River Park. The highlight of the visit was the rain gardens that PTRC helped to build at McDonough High School. Becki was very impressed by how beautiful and well-maintained they are and by the amount of stormwater from the school parking lots that the gardens were absorbing during the nor’easter that preceded Hurricane Joaquin. We also visited the Port Tobacco Courthouse historic area and took in the beautiful view of the Port Tobacco River at St. Ignatius. Visit our Facebook page to see additional photos from this visit.

Headwater Streams Interpretive Panel—The interpretive panel that PTRC designed in cooperation with Charles County Parks has been installed on the Indian Head Rail Trail where the trail crosses the headwaters of Port Tobacco Creek. The sign explains the importance of headwater streams to downstream health. It is the first sign on the left as you enter the trail at White Plains.

PTRC Resumes Fish Surveys

PTRC resumed its Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)-permitted fish survey program this year. We surveyed monthly in July, August, and September at two sites in Chapel Point State Park. Many thanks to Ken and Sandy Hastings, who brought their boat, net, cooler, and other equipment and showed us how it's done.

Following a protocol developed by DNR, Ken showed us how to walk the weighted, 100-foot, 1/8-inch mesh seine net into the water and draw it back in a loop to catch the juvenile fish that inhabit shallow water. Catches varied somewhat by month and seining site, but in general we caught many inland silversides, bay anchovies, various species of killifish, white perch, pumpkinseeds, menhaden, gizzard shad, and blue crabs. We also were encouraged to find juvenile yellow perch and striped bass, though in lesser numbers. We also caught a pipefish and a needlefish.

It was really interesting working with Ken and Sandy, who are excellent at species identification. It was also a lot of fun being out in the river and learning about all fishes that thrive there. DNR fisheries biologist Mary Grove advised that the most important thing for us to look for is species diversity. The more sites we sample, the more we learn about different fish populations in the river. We plan to request a permit for the program again next year, and it would be great to have more than one sampling team out on the river. We especially need a volunteer with a boat. If you are interested, contact Water Monitoring Coordinator Tina Wilson at gabby77@aol.com.



PTRC fish seining team members Malcolm Simpson, Tina Wilson, Ken Hastings, and Krupa Patel surveying fish in the Port Tobacco River. At left: a needlefish.



Questions or comments about *PTRC News*? Contact Paige Jackson at paige@jacksons.net or Nancy Smart at longevityfarm@verizon.net

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