

Report

2003-2005

Potomac Watershed Roundtable

The Potomac Watershed Roundtable is a regional government-citizen forum whose purpose is to promote collaboration and cooperation on environmental concerns, especially water quality issues, among the various local governments and stakeholder interest groups residing within the Virginia side of the middle and lower Potomac River watershed.

The Roundtable's area includes nine Virginia counties, six Virginia towns and cities, six soil and water conservation districts, and seven stakeholder groups.

The Roundtable was launched in the fall of 2000 by the six soil and water conservation districts in the region. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation provided initial funding and assistance. Ten state and federal agencies assist the Roundtable as non-voting members.



Highlights

- Held quarterly meetings throughout the region. Invited presenters to educate membership about local strategies.
- Shared information and collaborated on responses and solutions to the Potomac Tributary Strategies, nonpoint source pollution, water quantity and quality, nutrients, and storm-water management.
- Launched a Web site, potomacroundtable.org
- Produced and distributed a biennial report.
- Co-sponsored three successful watershed forums with the six soil and water conservation districts in the region that comprise the Potomac Council. The 2001 forum explored removing impediments to effective erosion and sediment control laws, implementing urban

BMPs, identifying funding opportunities, and preserving agricultural land. The 2003 forum focused on tributary strategies, Total Daily Maximum Loads, and water supply issues. The next forum, scheduled for August 2005, will address tools and techniques for protecting water quality, including tributary strategies, the Bay Model,

Highlights continued on back page

Voting Members

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

- John Marshall
- Loudoun
- Northern Neck
- Northern Virginia
- Prince William
- Tri-County/City

Counties

- Arlington
- Fairfax
- Loudoun
- Fauquier
- Prince William
- King George
- Northumberland
- Westmoreland
- Stafford

Cities & Towns

- Fairfax
- Falls Church
- Manassas
- Manassas Park
- Colonial Beach
- Alexandria

Other Groups

Planning District Commissions, Water Utilities, Environmental, Agriculture, Fishing and Boating, Development, and Citizens of the Watershed

January 2003

Greg Evans (Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District), the first chairman of the Roundtable, passed the gavel to Penny Gross (Fairfax County Board of Supervisors).

Representatives from Maryland discussed that state's progress in developing tributary strategies. Mrs. Gross expressed concern that Virginia has not progressed to the extent of Maryland. She offered to DCR the Roundtable's assistance in developing the strategies.

April 2003

Russ Baxter, Assistant Secretary of Natural Resource explained the concept of Habitat Zones, which are designated uses for the Bay. There are five different zones—Migratory Fish, Deep Water, Deep Channel, Shallow Water, Open Water—and water quality criteria are being developed for each. Mr. Baxter said that under the Chesapeake Bay Agreement Virginia will have to make more than twice the reduction in nitrogen by 2010 than it has made since 1985.

July 2003

Marc Aveni, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Potomac Watershed Manager, discussed reasons for developing a Potomac River Tributary Strategy.

1. Bay water quality won't improve unless tributaries feeding into it improve.
2. The governor signed the Chesapeake Bay 2000 Agreement, and the requirement to develop tributary strategies is written into the code.
3. Water is a finite resource and we have a responsibility to keep it clean.

October 2003

Chuck Harris, a member of the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, discussed Loudoun's Purchase of Development Rights (PRD) Program, which prevents land from being developed. Conservation easements are maintained on these properties in a joint venture between the county and another independent entity. Thus far the program has helped to preserve historic sites, preserve 1,200 acres of farmland, and protect 6.7 miles of stream corridors. To date, the county has received 180 applications for the PDR program covering 12,000 acres.

January 2004

The PWR membership discussed a vision for 2004. Focal points brought up for consideration included stormwater management; wastewater treatment plants; Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs); nitrogen, phosphorus, and dissolved oxygen; sediment control; legislative initiatives; riparian buffers; water education and outreach; tributary strategies; drought conditions; ground water and surface water analyses; and nutrient utilization.

The PWR sent a letter to the General Assembly listing three legislative initiatives.

1. The Roundtable supports amending the Water Quality Improvement Act to require a minimum annual appropriation of \$30 million from the State general fund to the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF).
2. The Roundtable opposes any changes to Virginia's wetlands preservation and protection laws unless it can be

Roundtable Meetings

demonstrated that the changes will result in greater protection of wetland resources.

3. The Roundtable supports labeling of fertilizer to provide information about quantity and application schedules and the subsequent environmental impact it has on Virginia's waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

April 2004

The PWR membership agreed to solicit contributions from member jurisdictions to fund Fiscal Year 2006 and beyond. Annual budget needs were estimated to be \$12,000-\$15,000.

The Nutrient Subcommittee reported that *Quorum Magazine*, a newsletter geared toward homeowners in the DC Metropolitan area, published four articles contributed by individuals associated with the PWR: *Bay Friendly Landscaping*, *What Not to Flush*, *Erosion and Sediment Control*, and *What Not to Put Down a Storm Drain*.

PWR Chairman Penny Gross was appointed by Governor Mark Warner to the Chesapeake Bay Blue Ribbon Funding Panel. The panel is tasked with finding alternative sources for funding the Chesapeake Bay cleanup.

July 2004

PWR member Sam Johnson spoke about agricultural practices to protect water quality. Specifically he addressed the advantages of no-till farming, which keeps the nitrogen and phosphorus in the soil and the soil on the land. The no till process in-

volves specialized machinery that cuts the soil, drops the seed into the cut, and then covers the seed with soil.

The PWR membership agreed to encourage the legislature to adopt several initiatives:

1. Label fertilizer to encourage the public to fertilize only in the fall.
2. Provide funding for environmental education.
3. Create an Urban Best Management Practices (BMP) Cost Share Program.
4. Create a Ground Water Data Repository in the Department of Environmental Quality.
5. Support Senate Bill 351, which would give local jurisdictions the authority to limit development on the basis of water supply.
6. Develop a plan for gray water reuse.

October 2004

Chairman Gross announced that recommendations of the Chesapeake Bay Blue Ribbon Finance Panel:

1. Establish a *Chesapeake Bay Financing Authority* by January 2007.
2. Set up a federal funding schedule: \$1 billion in 2005; \$2 billion per year in 2006, 2007, and 2008; and \$2.5 billion per year in 2009 and 2010. The total match for the Bay states and D.C. would be \$3 billion.
3. Establish state surcharge programs throughout the bay watershed.
4. Create Hardship and Innovation Fund to supplement the Clean Waters State Revolving Loan Fund Program.
5. Have the Secretary of the U.S. De-

Non-Voting Members

- *Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation—Division of Soil and Water Conservation*
- *Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation—Division of Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance*
- *Virginia Department of Environmental Quality*
- *Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries*
- *Virginia Department of Forestry*
- *Virginia Cooperative Extension*
- *Virginia Department of Health*
- *Virginia Department of Transportation*
- *USDA –Natural Resources Conservation Service*
- *US Department of Interior*

Core Objectives

- *Strive for the efficient utilization of knowledge, financial, and administrative resources of participating members within the Virginia portion of the Potomac River watershed.*
- *Enhance communication, cooperation, and collaboration among government agencies, organizations, and individuals to improve water quality.*
- *Assure that personnel and financial resources are applied in a manner that results in the protection, preservation, improvement, and use of natural resources.*
- *Facilitate the sharing of technical information, including water quality strategies and protocols to policy makers, decision-makers, and citizens of Virginia.*

partment of Agriculture sit on the Chesapeake Bay Financing Authority Executive Committee.

6. Develop a nutrient trading program for municipal and industrial wastewater treatment plants. In addition, have tax exempt financing for industrial wastewater facilities established at the state level.
7. Improve the efficiency of the federal cost share programs, fully implement the conservation security program under the 2002 Farm Bill, and place greater emphasis on this program in the next Farm Bill.
8. Establish Stormwater Utility User fees at the local level.
9. Establish a tax on residential lawn fertilizer at the state level. It is estimated that this program will bring in \$6 million. In addition, require labeling on each bag of fertilizer. Chairman Gross noted that this recommendation was a direct result of the PWR discussions on this subject.
10. Allow for Transfer of Development Rights.
11. Extend vehicle tax incentives to deal with air deposition.
12. Increase funding for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. This is a federal program administered by the USDA.

January 7, 2005

Chairman Gross reported on her testimony before a congressional sub-committee on behalf of Virginia localities to persuade Congress to create the Chesapeake Bay Financing Authority.

Rebecca Hammer of the U.S. EPA reported that the EPA estimates the cost

of cleaning up the Bay to be in excess of \$28 billion. She identified three possible sources of cost reductions: nutrient trading, urban stormwater retrofits, and septic tank retrofits.

Sam Johnson, Chair of the Potomac Forum IV Planning Committee, reported that the Forum will be held on August 12, 2005 at George Mason University in Manassas. The theme of the Forum will be, *Working Together to Protect Water Quality—Tools and Techniques*.

April 2005

Twenty-four PWR members and 53 interested parties attended the quarterly meeting in Manassas.

Marc Aveni from DCR and John Kennedy from DEQ discussed Tributary Strategies from nonpoint source and point source perspectives.

Mr. Aveni said that DCR wants to place more emphasis on non-point source pollution prevention in areas classified as Mixed Open land, which includes urban parks, golf courses, large residential lots, and office parks. The tributary strategy states that 85% of all mixed open land should be covered by a nutrient management plan.

Mr. Kennedy said that steps being taken to restore water quality from the point source side include load allocations for nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment; designated uses and criteria for dissolved oxygen, water clarity, and chlorophyll; and technical and financial assistance for nutrient removal.

Chairman Gross' Testimony

A Roundtable committee, assisted by staff from member jurisdictions, prepared a white paper on recommendations for improvements in state erosion and sediment control and stormwater management programs.



PWR Chair Penny Gross receives a gavel from Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources, Tayloe Murphy.

Fairfax County Supervisor Penny Gross, Chair of the Roundtable, presented the paper to the the Commission on the Future of Virginia's Environment.

The area we represent is the most densely populated watershed in the Commonwealth. Unprecedented growth has exacerbated erosion and sediment control and stormwater management concerns.

On one extreme, we are dealing with aging stormwater infrastructures in our urban and suburban areas. Infill and redevelopment is occurring in the established sections of our watershed where land, previously not developed because of difficult terrain or soils and proximity to streams, is now economically attractive and prime for development. On the other extreme, we have areas where rural farmland and forests rapidly are being developed and new roads constructed. These collective forces place enormous stress on local governments.

We are discovering that existing laws and programs at both local and state levels on ESC and SWM are in need of reform.

Erosion and Sediment Control—Recommended Changes to Virginia Law

- A greater level of flexibility should be granted to localities permitting them to work with developers and others to employ innovative and hopefully less costly "beyond compliance" practices in managing erosion control.
- Modify Virginia law to include the removal of trees (greater than a specified size) as a "land disturbing activity" on tracts planned for development.

Local Concerns

- Vastly improve public education and outreach programs. Greater public understanding of ESC requirements and issues encourages citizen surveillance and increases the effectiveness of available inspectors.

- Increase the training of ESC staff and cross training personnel in other departments to increase surveillance capabilities. Improve the training and continuing education of engineers who provide support to developers also needs investigation.

Stormwater Management—Recommended Changes to Virginia Law

- All localities should be permitted to enact tree conservation ordinances. SWM fees charged to developers are currently based on total area of land developed. The fee could be linked to "area of land cleared" as an incentive to developers to maintain existing trees.
- Stormwater management programs should be required of all jurisdictions if a dependable revenue stream can be devised.
- Allow localities to require long term guarantees from developers installing SWM devices as a means to assure they function as promised over time.
- Localities need the authority to impose inspection fees on privately installed BMP facilities to offset jurisdictional inspection costs.

Local Concerns

- Several jurisdictions in our watershed are reviewing what watercourses in their areas are in fact perennial streams and thus accorded protection under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.
- The short and long term impact on downstream properties and wetlands from SWM practices on a specific development needs better prediction. This analysis, an obligation of the applicant, should be included in the site plan application.
- Local zoning and construction rules and ordinances may inhibit progressive developers from employing "better site design principles." The Roundtable is investigating what role it potentially could play in stimulating such efforts.

Core Objectives

- *Serve as a catalyst for creating various forums and committees to allow communication among policy makers and technical personnel to discuss water quality management policy options for the Potomac River watershed.*
- *Serve as a collaborative body to help achieve effective collection, interpretation, and dissemination of data to support the implementation of sound water quality management policy and practices.*

Officers

Hon. Penny Gross,
Chair (Fairfax County
Board of Supervisors)

Hon. Marty Nohe,
1st Vice Chair
(Prince William County
Board of Supervisors)

Hon. Harry Atherton,
2nd Vice Chair
(Fauquier County Board
of Supervisors)

The Northern Virginia
Soil and Water Conser-
vation District provides
financial management
and administrative sup-
port for the Roundtable.

Highlights (continued)

and locally imple-
mented innovative
BMPs.

*[The Roundtable was
launched at the first
Potomac Watershed
Forum in 2000. That
forum addressed the
need for a regional
approach to water-
shed management.]*

- Planned and facili-
tated a biosolids con-
ference and tour of

a pelletization plant.

- Developed legislative
agendas on urban
and agricultural is-
sues that affect the
watershed. Lobbied
the Virginia General
Assembly regarding
the use of the Water
Quality Improvement
Fund, wetlands pres-
ervation and protec-
tion laws, and im-
provements in fertil-
izer labeling.

Funding

Funding for the Round-
table is provided by the
Environmental Protec-
tion Agency's Ches-
apeake Bay Program
through the Virginia De-
partment of Conserva-
tion and Recreation,
and by the Round-
table's member juris-
dictions.

Potomac Watershed Roundtable
c/o Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District
12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 905
Fairfax, Virginia 22035-5512

Phone: 703-324-1460, TTY 711
Email: conservationdistrict@fairfaxcounty.gov

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 1015
Fairfax VA 22030

Visit us on the Web at
www.potomacroundtable.org