

SWAP Stakeholder Meeting Minutes
February 12, 2009, 6:30 Pm
Galena Fire Hall

Kim Kohl, Executive Director, opened, welcoming the crowd of more than 160 and providing a brief background on the Sassafras River Association (SRA). SRA is a not for profit, watershed organization, formed in 2004 whose mission is to advocate for and protect the Sassafras River. The Board made a decision in 2007 that the best way to do this was to undertake a Sassafras Watershed Action Plan (SWAP) and raised private funding, from both foundations and memberships, to support this effort. SRA has two paid staff, nine Board members, dozens of volunteers and over 500 members. The SWAP has been underway for the past six months and will continue through 2009. SRA is partnering with more than 30 state and local agencies, academic institutions and private business to complete this plan. Stakeholders play a critical role and as such, SRA will host quarterly meetings to both educate and gather input on problems and concerns.

Charlotte Staelin, SRA Vice President and owner of Colchester Farms which hosts a community supported agriculture program, recalled playing in the River as a child and the changes she has observed over the past 60 some years. Charlotte spoke of her fear of allowing her grandchildren to play in waters no longer clear and often covered in algae. Charlotte encouraged all present to accept responsibility for these changes and to join together to find the most effective solutions to restore the River's health.

Jeff Cornwell, Associate Professor at University of Maryland Center for the Environment and a member of the SWAP Core Team, presented the State of the Sassafras. Jeff provided basic characteristics of the River and the watershed and spoke of the primary issues confronting the river: phosphorous, nitrogen and sediments. Jeff demonstrated the effects of excess nutrients in the River and the resulting algae blooms that pose threats to both the watershed and the surrounding population. Jeff noted some of the key sources of pollution: waste water treatment plants, agricultural run-off, aging septic, and atmospheric deposition. Jeff also spoke of the specific research UMCES is undertaking on algae blooms. (To view Jeff's presentation in full please go to *Presentations* on this page.)

Kascie Herron, Sassafras RIVERKEEPER and principle researcher on SWAP, presented an overview of SRA's approach to the watershed plan. Kascie laid out the steps involved in the process (desktop assessment and field assessments), the timeline (through December 2009) and the various levels of participation (Core Team, Partners and Stakeholders). Kascie highlighted the work that is already underway (the characterization and the stream corridor assessment) and the work that is still to be done. (To view Kascie's presentation in full please go to *Presentations* on this page.)

Joanne Throwe, Associate Director of University of Maryland's Center for Environmental Finance and SWAP partner, facilitated an hour long discussion with stakeholders. Joanne began by asking for a show of hands by profession. The crowd included farmers, educators, numerous scientists, lawyers, artists and business owners -- many who live in the watershed and others, who have an interest in protecting the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Joanne solicited input in the form of problems and causes which are summarized below with responses in italics. Additional questions raised by the crowd during the session have also been answered here for your review.

Problems in the Watershed

Impact of development

Cecil county development, commissioners allow anything

Homeowners using fertilizer and not realizing what impact that has on the River

Agriculture

SRA should considering the source of the water – surface vs ground vs aquifers. *Jeff Cornwell responded that Phosphorous is not really a ground water issue.*

Closed Beaches

Are farmers being singled out as the main problem? *Farmers are not being singled out. We know that agriculture contributes to nutrient loading in the River; however, we are investigating all sources of pollution to identify the most effective solutions for restoring water quality.*

Algal Blooms

Causes

Consider the impact of weather, wildlife, boaters on the river. *Jeff Cornwell explained that the best water quality tends to be in dry years. We'd like to make the dry years the equivalent of our "worst" years.*

Phosphorus loading from past activities

Solutions

Value of denitrifying systems vs. connection to community systems

Ensure the best "bang for the buck" in all potential/recommended solutions

Public outreach

Preservation of agriculture in the watershed

Involve schools in solutions

Adopt a stream

Do something - no more studies. *The SWAP is not a study but a scientific assessment. It will provide a blueprint for all future restoration strategies.*

Need to get people from New Castle County more involved. *SRA has engaged state and local agencies in NCC to participate on Core Team and has invited all stakeholders through mailed invitation to participate in SWAP.*

Consider long-range planning, openness, transparency, property rights

Other:

What is a stream? *For purposes of the Stream Corridor Assessment (a protocol developed by the Department of Natural Resources) a stream is a channel that has perennial flow.*

How were parcels identified for Stream Corridor Assessment? *Using Geographic Information System (GIS) software provided by DNR, SRA identified all parcels that were situated on stream channels. This amounted to approximately 400 parcels in Kent, Cecil and New Castle counties. Letters were sent to property owners requesting permission to walk across their property to access the stream channel. Out of 400 more than ¾'s of the letters went to homeowners and about ¼ to farmers. Although farmers own large tracts of land the number of actual farmers is small compared to home owners.*

Who is liable for the crew walking the streams? *Maryland Conservation Core is insured by the State of Maryland and SRA employees are covered under worker's comp and the organization's liability policy.*

Who will pay for implementation projects? *SRA's goal is to develop restoration strategies complete with cost estimates and potential funding opportunities. The restoration work will be undertaken by those groups with the appropriate expertise: county agencies, state agencies, academic institutions, SRA, etc. Everyone involved in the planning process will have a role to play in the restoration. One of the roles of the U of MD Environmental Finance Center is to help communities figure out how to pay for it.*

Projects should be coordinated with similar groups, collaborate with Sultana Projects, schools. *SRA has partnered with more than 30 agencies, academic institutions, not for profit organizations and private businesses to ensure the most effective collaboration.*

Add USGS, sociologist, urban anthropologist to core team. *Core Team includes an anthropologist, John Seidel, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Environmental Studies, at Washington College. SRA will investigate partnering with USGS as well.*

Why is nitrogen a problem but not phosphorus in the Sassafras? *Both are a problem in the River; however, the State of Maryland has issued a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the amount of Phosphorous which can be dumped into the River and therefore, pollutant reductions are calculable.*

Who are the stakeholders and what are their concerns? *Stakeholders are anyone living, working or recreating in the watershed as well as anyone who has an interest in protecting the Chesapeake Bay. Stakeholder concerns are your concerns. 2007 census data is available by county (not by watershed) and shows total population at 19, 987 (Kent) and 99,965 (Cecil); median household income \$ 46,693 (Kent) and \$ 62,489 (Cecil); and % of persons age 25+ with Bachelor's degree 21.7% (Kent) and 16.4% (Cecil).*

Who knows the science behind these issues? *The characterization pulls together all data that has been compiled to date on the Sassafras River. The SWAP Core Team includes 24 individuals who represent agencies or other organizations that have produced this data. The Core Team has extensive experience in watershed planning. For a complete list of members please see Core Team on this page.*

Who should people call when they see a problem? *Call the Sassafras RIVERKEEPER at 410-708-3303 or go to www.sassafrasriver.org and report an issue or concern on line.*

How do we get boaters, out-of-towners involved (they're dumping in the water)? *SRA is hosting a panel discussion on March 10th with marina owners/managers and the public to discuss Maryland Clean Marina program and clean boating practices. SRA is trying to foster working relationships with all marinas in the watershed in an effort to reach the more than 1800 boaters who rent slips here. In addition, the Sassafras RIVERKEEPER patrols the River from April to October, engaging boaters in dialog and handing out materials for involvement.*

What is the role of the Waterkeeper Alliance in SWAP? *SRA is a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance. The Alliance plays no direct role in nor provides any funding to SWAP. The Alliance does provide support to SRA in the form of creating a coalition of all RIVERKEEPERS, nationally and regionally, to share best practices and identify policy issues. SRA is an independent organization with its own voice and mission led by an Executive Director and Board who make all decisions for the organization.*

Kim Kohl thanked the presenters, participants, volunteers and donations for refreshments and door prize. Kim encouraged anyone interested in direct involvement to sign up on one of the many volunteer

sheets or on line at www.sassafrasriver.org. Kim announced the next Stakeholder Meeting will be held April 14th, 6:30 pm at Galena Fire Hall. All are welcome.

John Burke, SRA president, mentioned SRA's need for new members and invited all interested parties to pick up a brochure or visit the website. The meeting was then adjourned.