

Sassafras Watershed Action Plan  
Core Team Meeting  
Galena Town Hall  
March 12, 2009

Present: John Vail, Shannon Rose , Mike Whitehill, John Seidel, John McCoy, Ellyn Vail, Allen Davis, Amy Moredock, Joe Blizzard, Karen Miller, Kascie Herron, Kim Kohl, Rupert Rossetti, Carl Gallegos, Paul Sturm

Absent: Eric Shertz, Chris Aadland, Sara Wozniak, Jennifer Volk, Jeff Cornwell, Diane Stoecker, Nancy Metcalf, Gail Owings, Charlie Hayes, Mitch Keiler, Jen Jaber, Ken Yetman

SRA Executive Director Kim Kohl introduced two new members – Carl Gallegos, a forester who is conducting a tree canopy project in Kent County; and Paul Sturm, a biologist with the Center for Watershed Protection, who will assist SRA in developing the SWAP.

**Feedback on First Stakeholder Meeting**

Kim reported that SRA was pleased with the turn out (more than 160) and felt that a good job was done in focusing attention to the issue. Kim further commented that as a result of the meeting SRA was more aware of stakeholder concerns, especially within the agricultural community, and needed to direct attention to those issues. Kim solicited feedback from others present at the Stakeholder meeting.

John Seidel expressed concern about the agricultural community. Not enough was done to allay concerns that were expressed.

Karen Miller suggested attendance was boosted by the access letter having been sent out. Re-reading the letter, Karen thought it wasn't clear enough in terms of what SRA intended to do – i.e., whether SRA wanted to assess the entire farm or just the stream. Requesting "Access through/across your farm to your stream" would have been more effective.

Allen Davis thought the letter was "open ended" – it wasn't clear that the request was for one-time access or just access to the stream and not the entire farm. He also felt many people came to the meeting because of letter; and that some farmers may have dug in their heels as a result of the meeting.

Allen received phone calls from farmers expressing concern about SWAP. There have been big changes in agriculture over the last 20 years – fewer chemicals, no till, expanded buffers, etc. Farming is challenging in terms of profitability. Farmers are constantly being told how to do things through legislation and regulation, with no farmer input. This has soured farmers' attitudes. Our area leads the nation in adoption of BMPs. Farmers think nothing is being done about

shore side communities' septic systems, lawns, etc. Farmers feel as though it's a struggle – farmers feel as though we're putting targets on their backs and going to make them do things that will increase their costs. Allen observed that you don't see algae blooms off the farms, they're off developed areas.

Kim asked the Core Team how we can best engage the farming community.

Allen noted CRA gives memberships to farmers for free. CRA (lower Kent) has higher percentage of farm-owners who are not farmers, who have a different mind-set than people who actually own and farm the land.

Karen noted that Virgil Turner makes a big difference in CRA's program. He worked with the KSWCD for more than 40 years and knows all of the farmers in Kent County. He currently provides agricultural outreach for CRA and advocates for buffers, cover crops, etc.

Kim reported that she and Kascie had met with Paul Spies and Virgil Turner of CRA to learn more about their ag program. Kim asked the team to think about someone who could play a similar role for SRA. Finding the right person may be more difficult than finding funding. Kim recognizes that if SRA cannot engage the farming community it will be very difficult to successfully execute SWAP.

John S stated we need to understand what the full range of farmers' concerns is. We should meet with them to identify every issue that may arise and figure out how to address them. An Ag committee would be a good idea. We need to get farmers' concerns down on paper and address them one by one.

Karen M suggested SRA perhaps send out a second access request letter that would recognize and address the concerns farmers have. We should ask for access to the stream only and on one specific date. "Walk through your property to your stream." John S added the letter should also state what we won't do. Kascie Herron noted that given the logistics of the Stream Corridor Assessment a second letter may not be possible.

John McCoy recommended marketing. He stated we've made a great start with the first meeting and need to continue that effort. We need to emphasize that we're not focusing on any one group and that the end result we are seeking is a good plan.

Mike Whitehill stated we need to make sure that everybody's ox will be gored. Everyone has a part to play in participating. Doing nothing is not the solution. Have a meeting that shows where each group's responsibility is. AG has done more over time than everyone else. Marinas, homeowners, farmers, towns – the blood has to flow equally . . . or equitably.

Ellyn Vail noted that there is no requirement for anyone to do anything about their septics. We need to spread the message that we're on top of that, too.

Mike W responded, the point is that funds will be available to everyone for restoration if we come up with a good plan – on farms, septics, etc. We need to establish goals.

Kim K reported that Ted Carski and Janet Rühl, two SRA members who are scientists, developed a checklist of actions that various groups can do that's now on the SRA's website.

John Vail mentioned the booklet *From My Backyard to Our Bay* – one for Cecil County and one for Kent County – has extensive information about best practices that can be adopted.

John M noted that we're beginning to figure out how to talk to people about issues.

Karen M suggested for next meeting, we need to say who's on the core team, so people will understand who the members are – people's names and/or organizations. Seeing the names of the core team – names they recognize -- will make people more comfortable. Use the names on letterhead as well.

Kim K stated that the names of associated organizations are currently listed on the web and asked if Core Team members were comfortable with their individual names also being listed. The team agreed to list names on the web and on letterhead.

Allen D commented that some people have trouble understanding what makes it worth going to our streams to assess. We know our property. There's not much to be found that has impact on what's happening on the River.

Kascie H explained we need to confirm that we've looked at every potential issue in the watershed and state what we've found in order to develop restoration strategies that have integrity.

John M noted it can also provide an opportunity to blow someone's horn; for example, here's a really great, forested flood plain. We can give credit for the pluses that we find.

Paul Sturm further noted that we've looked at so far in the Stream Corridor Assessment is a testament to the good that people are doing, particularly farmers.

### **Stream Corridor Assessment**

Kascie H reported on the Stream Corridor Assessment. To date we have not received the response rate we anticipated. We've received approximately 100 out of a possible 400 responses from Kent, Cecil and New Castle. The data for Kent and Cecil shows that the total number of respondents has been equal between both counties and includes 73 positive responses across 44 agricultural parcels, 26 residential parcels and 3 other. The negative responses are spread across 20 agricultural parcels, 9 residential and 1 other. To date approximately 16 miles of stream have been assessed with no potential restoration projects identified.

Kim K reported that both she and Kascie will start calling the non-responders this week to try to get more access.

Kascie H questioned the biologist present - what is considered a comprehensive assessment, how much of the watershed do we have to walk?

John M noted that funders will look at the plan; though they may look behind it at the assessment, he doesn't think they will. The numbers are what they are. We know what we know. We can use the SCA as a trust-building exercise by showing that we can do some good with what we have – that may help to convince others to give us access.

Ellyn V highlighted that the SWAP is a long term project and a living document. We will continue to fill in gaps over time. This isn't a one-time deal. This may be the way to address Kascie's earlier questions about whether to work on a sub-watershed basis. We work where we have information.

Paul S noted that State water quality data may help to fill in gaps where we haven't walked the streams.

John M noted that MDE's synoptic survey covers road crossings and may give information about problems that are upstream.

John S confirmed that it is rare in science to have a 100% sample. 30% (which is the target for the SCA) is not bad.

### **Upland Assessment**

Kascie H reported that the upland assessment begins the first of April.

Paul S provided details. The UA looks at public places and neighborhoods – how green the grass is, how water is handled. It looks at schools, parking lots, businesses and opportunities to treat stormwater. There's an assessment protocol – drive public roads, determine percentages of impervious surfaces. Visit sewage treatment plants and review their records – what are they

discharging? Look at gas stations, marinas. As with the Stream Corridor Assessment this is not a regulatory effort.

Possible outcomes might be to work with hardware stores on Phosphorus-free fertilizers. Work with residential fertilizer applicators. Look at developed areas to identify sources of pollution and problems. Applicators are supposed to do soil testing before they apply products. This is a fairness issue with farmers, who are strictly controlled in terms of the fertilizers they can apply.

John S suggested perhaps infrared photography could help with the analysis.

Allen D noted farmers have to do Nutrient Management Plans for their operations.

Amy Moredock commented that Delegate Dick Sossi introduced legislation several years ago to label fertilizer bags to educate homeowners.

John M confirmed that there is a similar bill in this year's legislative session. Do we have AG extension at the table?

Karen M suggested SRA could get a grant to offer soil sample kits to homeowners. How many homeowners fertilize their lawns without knowing what's in the soil?

Amy M suggested as part of the assessment, talk with the municipalities, especially their maintenance staffs. They'll have a lot of the information that's being sought.

### **Watershed Characterization**

Kim K noted that the Characterization is a central part of the SWAP, compiling all available data on the watershed, and asked how many people had read it. Paul Sturm and the Vails raised their hands.

Kascie H asked John M about using TMDL 1997 land use estimates and loads or use newer land use estimates from MDP and calculate our own loads.

John M stated MDE isn't going to update their data unless there's some reason to do so. The TMDL data should be referenced in the Characterization but we should do our own calculations based on current land use estimates.

Kascie H reported that Ken Shanks of MDE, who wrote the characterizations for many of DNR's WRASs has agreed to review ours.

John M noted that there's no cookbook for the characterization. How we put it together is our choice. EPA's A-I criteria are the only part that's required.

### **Goals and Objectives**

Kim K raised the issue of developing goals and objectives, noting that the long term goal was removing the Sassafras from the 303d list and that there will be many shorter term goals (not yet identified) that contribute towards the impact of achieving this longer term goal. The next Core Team meeting should focus on identifying these shorter term goals.

John M confirmed that removing the Sassafras from 303d list (actually, everything is on the 303d list, we just want to move the River to the non-impaired list) is a long range goal. We need to think about time lines and horizons and to focus on the shorter term. Our SWAP goal is to put together an implement a plan that meets EPA's criteria.

Kim K suggested it was time to establish subcommittees for data management and agriculture and will talk about that off-line with John Seidel and John McCoy.

### **Tree Canopy Project**

Carl Gallegos reported he is working on a project funded by a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to Washington College. John Seidel is administering the grant. Carl is working on urban forest management plans for all of the towns in Kent County. The survey involves a street tree inventory: identifying species, diameter and height for a 30% sample of the population. He has completed a Chestertown plan that will be released in May and needs volunteers to assist in the Betterton survey. He is also going to do Millington and Rock Hall. He offered to do a survey for Galena (there's no cost involved to the community) but Mayor Pisapia declined. The goal is to maintain and increase tree cover in the towns. 'I-tree' is the tool that he is using for the survey.

Kim K suggested that SRA would gladly post the call for volunteers on the SRA website.

### **New Business**

As there was no additional new business the meeting was adjourned.