

SWAP Stakeholder Meeting Minutes
April 14, 2009, 6:30 Pm
Galena Fire Hall

Kim Kohl, Executive Director, opened, welcoming the crowd of approximately 100 and provided a brief history of the Sassafras River Association (SRA). SRA is a not for profit, 501 (c) (3) watershed organization, incorporated in 2004. SRA's mission is to advocate for and protect the Sassafras River. The Board made a decision in 2007 that the best way to advance the mission was to undertake a Sassafras Watershed Action Plan (SWAP) and raised private funding, from both foundations and memberships, to support this effort. Foundation funders include Chesapeake Bay Trust, Rauch Foundation, Town Creek, Shared Earth and Munson to name a few. SRA hired its first staff, the Sassafras RIVERKEEPER, in June 2008 and an Executive Director in October of the same year. SRA currently has two paid staff, nine Board members, three consultants, 100 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 40 state and local agencies, academic institutions and private business to complete this plan. Stakeholders play a critical role and, to this end SRA will continue to host quarterly meetings to share findings and gather input on problems and solutions.

Kim recalled that in the last meeting stakeholders voiced concern over issues in the watershed: development, run-off, erosion and excessive nutrients. Tonight's meeting will show how SWAP assessments are addressing those concerns and share some of the preliminary findings.

Former Congressman and SRA Board Member, Wayne Gilchrest, spoke on what the Sassafras River means to him and why it's important to save the River. Wayne spoke of the Watershed and how it is each of us, working together, that make this Watershed a unique and wonderful place – farmers, watermen, residents, catfish, bass, crab, fox, deer, beaver, sorghum, corn and soy. Wayne urged stakeholders to remain engaged in the process as each has a role to play in restoring the water quality in this place we love.

Paul Sturm, Program Director for Center for Watershed Protection, consultant to SRA and a member of the Core Team, presented preliminary findings from the stream corridor and upland assessments. Paul guided stakeholders through pie charts showing land use and correlated impacts. Paul summarized, the biggest issue confronting the River is run off from both agricultural and urban sources which contribute to excessive nutrient loading. Paul noted that farmers have made great strides with nutrient management plans and putting best management practices into place to reduce phosphorous. He emphasized the use of cover crops and buffers to further reduce phosphorus. In contrast, waste water treatment plants in Betterton and Galena operate with outdated technology from the 1960's. Aerial photographs demonstrated excessive use of fertilizers by watershed

homeowners, further increasing phosphorous loads in the River. Paul showed examples of solutions from other watersheds.

Joanne Throwe, from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Finance, broke the crowd into small groups of 8 – 10 participants and asked each group to answer the following questions: what are your goals for the Sassafras restoration effort and what are the restoration strategies that you think would work in the sassafras watershed? Groups reported back with much insight and innovation. Stakeholder goals and strategies, cover a wide spectrum of issues in the watershed (see list at end of minutes) and will be considered when identifying potential projects.

Kascie Herron, Sassafras RIVERKEEPER, closed the meeting, thanking all for their outstanding input and inviting all to the next SWAP meeting, Tuesday, July 21st, 6:30 pm at Turner's Creek Pavilion.

Stakeholder Goals

Fishable/swimmable

Clear

Safe for swimming

Developers use BMPs

Make sure public knows BMPs

Campaign against excess fertilizer

Education about proper fertilization

Healthy environment with native grasses v. phragmites

Introduce BMPs to Children

Cleaner River

More fish and crabs in the water

Identify leaky septics

Use this group as a model for other watersheds in area

Increase forest buffers

More/better enforcement

Meet the TMDLs, then go home

Quantify problem so we can see measurable progress

Quantify acreage that's not currently eligible for conservation practice funding

More people would recognize that there's a problem

See that measured results get better

Remove river from impaired waters list

Understand causes of erosion

Decrease impervious surfaces

Increase fish population – menhaden/algae eaters

Understand phosphorus better. (UMCES issues)

Stakeholder Strategies

Proper fertilization

Local legislation (QA – septic pump out)

Mandatory septic pump out
Galena and Betterton to improve sewage treatment plants
Grants for living shorelines to NOAA and
Funding to focus on NPDES
Greater attention on smaller/older communities – Gregg Neck, Indian Acre – need
community sewage treatment. Proximity to river – nutrients feeding directly into River
Educate individuals on lawn care
Educate public on upgrading septic systems; tap into funds to assist people in critical area
to make themselves ready for upgrade
Peer groups – peer to peer contact. Better than government coming on the land. One
farmer
Forest buffers increase
County septic pump-out ordinance
More package plants
Address homeowner lawn care
Mobile boat pump-out
NPDES upgrades
Use algae for fuel
Make all programs available to all lands in the watershed (income
Protect shorelines by reducing boat wakes
BMPs in
Incentivize tire disposal
Farmland protection for all land
Measure effectiveness of septic systems – soil differences, etc. One size may not fit all.
Stabilize erosion channels
Encourage responsible recreation; publicize public landings so more people will use the
river. Have our meetings at public landings.
100-foot buffers for homeowners
Funding for septic
Educate homeowners on alternative landscaping, fertilizer use
Continue sassafras as priority funding area for cover crops.
Soil testing for homeowners
Stimulus money to correct State Highway erosion problems.