



# Sassafras Update

Sassafras River Association  
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## State of the Sassafras — Underwater Grasses



Biologist Mike Naylor of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources gave us a wonderful

presentation on underwater grasses (also called “sub-aquatic vegetation” or SAV) at the Association’s December 13 meeting.

Mike first told us about the role of underwater grasses in the Bay ecosystem: physically, they hold sediments in place and buffer wave action, they slow water movement and permit suspended particles to settle, and they provide habitat for beneficial microbes; chemically, they fix carbon and produce oxygen as they absorb and store nutrients from the water; and biologically, they provide a safe environment for the eggs and young of many species.

Despite periodic setbacks from disease and competition from non-native species, SAVs have rebounded in the upper Bay in the last several years, increasing from about 200 acres in 2000 to more than 1200 acres in 2004. Large grass beds have reestablished in the Susquehanna Flats (where it’s now possible to see while snorkeling, Mike reports), mirroring our own members’ observations of eelgrass off Cheshaven.



Mike also told us about new mechanical methods of harvesting and planting Bay grasses that offer the hope of larger-scale restoration. There’s an eradication side, too. Two sites on the Bay

— one of them our own Sassafras River — are home to the invasive water chestnut, against which the DNR has had to mount periodic eradication efforts. The SRA hopes to join with the DNR in this effort during 2006.

For more information on underwater grasses, including an identification key, visit the DNR’s website.

### “Sassafras Samplers” Results

At the December 13 meeting, Ted Carski reported on our own recently completed “Sassafras Samplers” program. The October 15 test sampled water at 21 sites.

Ted laid out graphically the results of the successful sampling program, which offered no real surprises but confirmed existing data on the River’s high phosphate levels. “We now have our own baseline for future testing,” Ted said, “and some good experience to guide us.”

Ted gave special thanks to the Chester River Association for its invaluable technical assistance; to the LaMotte Corporation for a deep discount on testing materials; and to the volunteers who took the samples.

## January 10 — Shoreline Erosion Control: the Natural Approach

At our next meeting on January 10 at 7 p.m. at a new temporary location, the Galena Fire Hall, we’ll hear from Dave Wilson of the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council about efforts to promote “non-structural” shoreline

erosion control.

RC&D provides practical services to communities of the 9 Eastern Shore Counties. It focuses on protecting and enhancing the environment through the orderly use of land and water-related resources.

## Volunteer Now!

We’ve got a lot of activities and programs that will succeed only if **you** participate. Email [mail@sassafrasriver.org](mailto:mail@sassafrasriver.org) (or write us at the PO Box) to tell us how you’ll help.

We also need **your** help with SRA programs:

- Septic Forum for Southern Cecil and Northern Kent Counties. We need help setting up this major meeting, which is planned for March.
- Project Clean Stream. We need help coordinating all the homeowners’ associations along the River.
- Examine the impact of the Rte 301/299 weigh station.
- Assemble materials for the SRA information booth.

**You’ll be hearing about our annual membership renewal soon.**

**NOTE JANUARY MEETING LOCATION CHANGE — GALENA FIRE HALL!!**

## Membership Keeps Growing!

More than 110 of your neighbors have shown their commitment to the Sassafras River by joining the SRA.

Visit [www.sassafrasriver.org](http://www.sassafrasriver.org) and download a membership form today. Your contribution is tax-deductible!