



# Sassafras Update

Sassafras River Association  
PO Box 333  
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October 2009

## SRA Confronts Commissioners with Sewage Violations

Sassafras River board, staff and members joined forces to issue comment at the Cecil County Public Hearing on Indian Acres. A large crowd gathered in Elton on October 6 to advocate for and against the current Letter of Intent (LOI) the Cecil County Commissioners (CCC) have negotiated with permanent residents of this campground.

The current LOI allows current full-time residents to stay put for a period of up to 10 years. Some threatened CCC with lawsuits, stating the County is acting illegally by attempting to alter restricted covenants (this relates to fact that the land use is seasonal and therefore permanent residency is not allowed). Others stated the County could not, in fact, limit the number of days a person accesses a residence, even a seasonal one. Others pleaded for residency based on hardship, both economic and physical.

While SRA is alarmed by the lack of sanitary review in the LOI and the potential degradation of water quality that could occur over the next ten years, SRA is more concerned with the current con-



John Burke, SRA President (above), and Kascie Herron, Sassafras RIVERKEEPER, address Cecil County Commissioners.



ditions of sewage disposal and code violations at Indian Acres. The Sassafras RIVERKEEPER has discovered several cases where it appears the County is not in compliance with

State code regarding the removal of sewage. There is no monitoring or oversight of disposal. There are illegal linkages between 12 individual parcels and one of the Indian Acres community septics, an unusual and unacceptable method of sewage transport in a campground facility. The Commissioners, not aware of these issues, replied that the County Health Department would follow up. These issues were hand delivered to Cecil County Environmental Health Director, Chuck Smyser, on October 9.

There are a number of violations in play at Indian Acres. And as each day passes the health of our River and our residents, whether full-time or part-time, is at risk. It's time to demand CCC take action. You can do so at the Nov 3rd Commissioners' meeting. This may be your last chance to speak out on behalf of the River before the CCC vote to adopt the Letter of Intent.

### Quick Takes

- Cecil County Board of Commissioners Mtg, November 3, 7:00 pm**  
Check Cecil County website for agenda. Vote on LOI is tentatively scheduled for Nov 3. Meeting is open to the public and will take place at 200 Chesapeake Blvd in Elton, Maryland.
- Town of Betterton, November 24, 7:30pm**  
If you live in Betterton you won't want to miss this opportunity to hear from the experts on critical area laws, bank and shoreline erosion.
- PLANT AND BE COUNTED THRU NOVEMBER 30th**  
The State of Maryland is offering a \$ 25 coupon to purchase any native tree costing \$ 50 or more. Coupons can be printed directly from [www.trees.maryland.gov](http://www.trees.maryland.gov)

## Franchot Meets with Eastern Shore Environmentalists

State Comptroller Peter Franchot met with several environmental groups from the Upper Shore including Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Queen Anne's Conservation Assoc., Chester River Assoc. and Sassafras River Assoc. Comptroller Franchot has been a leading voice for conservation here on the shore. Most recently, he was instrumental in stopping the Four Seasons development on Kent Island. Kascie Herron, Sassa-

fras RIVERKEEPER, was quick to ask the Comptroller for assistance in securing funding for upgrades for Betterton and Galena Waste Water Treatment Plants. Executive Director, Kim Kohl, further explained only \$3 million was needed for upgrades to both plants—a cost effective solution for restoration of the Sassafras and the Bay. The Comptroller promised to look into the matter along with alternative energy solutions such as switchgrass and wind, and incorporating sea level rise into state policy.

## Manure Management on Davis Farm

On Wednesday evening, Oct 28, Allen and Olin Davis offered Sassafras stakeholders an opportunity to better understand manure management on a chicken farm. The Davis brothers are sixth generation farmers, planting approximately 2200 acres of corn, wheat and beans and raising chickens. Six to seven flocks a year are raised in six chicken houses, each holding up to 33,000 chickens. The

Davis brothers utilize best management practices to ensure the majority of their chicken litter is contained and composted within the houses. The remaining litter is used for fertilization of cropfields as per nutrient management plan guidelines. U of MD Ag Extension from Kent and Queen Anne's and Kent Soil Conservation District joined in the discussion. SRA hopes to host additional farm tours in the spring.



## Sassafras RIVERKEEPER'S®

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#### Concerns or Questions?

The **RIVERKEEPER®** can be reached at (410) 708-3303 or [Riverkeeper@sassafrasriver.org](mailto:Riverkeeper@sassafrasriver.org)

## A Spill Twice the Size of the Exxon Valdez!

On Thursday, October 15th, I received a call from an SRA member informing me of an oil spill on Turner's Creek that a resident of Kentmore Park had observed. After gathering the details from that resident I began with a call to the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Hotline, also referred to as "Bay 911." I was prompted with a menu of various options, one of these being "to report an oil spill." At six o'clock in the evening I was concerned that I would not be successful in speaking to someone, but the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) response team answered the phone. I was asked the details of the spill, specifically location and size, and then was instructed to inform my local fire department. MDE said that for spills of this size (approximately three acres long by ten feet wide, according to resident observations), the local fire department was equipped to contain the spill. Once on the scene, the fire department could contact MDE if they needed assistance. MDE had a team ready to dispatch immediately if necessary.

I attempted calling both Kennedyville and Galena Fire Departments directly with no success. Not wanting to resort to calling 911, I tried contacting members of the fire department individually. But due to the voluntary nature of our fire departments, they require a 911 dispatch to respond. I immediately called 911. Because I was at the office, which is located in Georgetown (Cecil County), and the spill was located in Kent County, the dispatcher had to connect me to that local 911 dispatcher. I was put on hold for about five minutes, and then was disconnected. I tried again and was still unsuccessful. At this point I thought it would be easier for the resident who was physically observing the spill in Kent County to reach the local 911 dispatcher. I asked him to try. He called me back after about ten minutes. After

calling 911, the dispatcher told him that the spill was a Department of Natural Resources issue and he was put through to someone who then told him he had to inform the Maryland Department of the Environment. We were back to square one. I thanked the resident and told him I would try again.

I called 911 again and explained the situation. This time I was successfully connected to the Kent County dispatcher who told me that someone had already called about the oil spill and was forwarded to MDE. I explained that MDE already told us that we needed to contact the local fire department through a 911 dispatch. I was then put on hold and who picked up? The Maryland State Police! I explained the situation yet again and how I was trying to reach a dispatcher for the fire department. After a fourth call to 911, I explained the hour long ordeal and run around I had just experienced. I expressed my frustration given the need for urgency and lack of expedient response. This dispatch connected me to the right person who took all of the information and the Kennedyville Volunteer Fire Department was finally sent out. According to the resident who initially observed the spill, the fire department was very well equipped with an entire trailer of environmental spill remediation equipment. However, given the nature and size of the spill there was not much that they could do to remediate or determine the source. Kennedyville Fire Department was unavailable for comment.

After talking to waterkeepers in the Chesapeake region, if this should happen again it was recommended to try the coast guard, who like MDE have an oil response system. But like MDE their response depends on the size and severity of the spill.

In a presentation by Hedrick Smith, pro-

ducer and director of the documentary "Poisoned Waters," which looks at the pollution affecting the Chesapeake Bay and Puget Sound, Smith noted that storm water carries the equivalent of an Exxon Valdez-type spill into the waters surrounding Seattle every two years. Last weekend at the Chesapeake Watershed Forum, Kim and I met Smith. Given that the population density and impervious surfaces surrounding the Chesapeake Watershed quadrupled that of Puget Sound, Smith suggested stormwater in our region is dumping the equivalent of TWO Exxon Valdez spills EACH YEAR into the Chesapeake Bay — a staggering reality.

Smith further suggested that each one of us is responsible — household cleaning products, pesticides, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals — the everyday products that each one of us uses eventually goes down the drain and into the Bay. It doesn't take an Exxon Valdez spill nor does it take a spill at Turner's Creek to contaminate our waterways. Every day each one of us is contributing to environmental pollution. Next time you purchase a product check the label, look for plant-based biodegradable products; take expired drugs to a drop off center instead of flushing them down your toilet; don't use pesticides or fertilizers; sweep your driveway instead of hosing it down; don't wash paint brushes in the sink; wash cars away from storm drains; always pump your waste holding tanks on your boat; inspect your septic every 3 years. Each one of these small steps lessens our impact on our River.

See you on the Sass,

Kascie Herron