

Restoring the Chesapeake is not an 'either/or' proposition

Forum / By Jim Edward

Much of the news related to the Bay these days is about the soon-to-be-final Bay Total Maximum Daily Load, a "pollution diet" that is being developed under the leadership of the EPA in cooperation with our state partners. It is absolutely imperative that the citizens of the Bay region understand the TMDL and raise any concerns about this coming road map for the Bay watershed's restoration. The right to question and discuss changes that will affect our region is an integral part of the democratic process, as is the ability to affect change in our local rivers and streams.

Striking a balance between voluntary and regulatory actions is what we need for a restored Chesapeake Bay. With the last 30 years as proof, we have all learned that voluntary measures alone are not enough to meet our goals for the watershed. But we also know that passing new laws cannot be the only driver of this restoration effort.

Clearly, fixing this complex watershed is not an "either/or" proposition. In addition to the new TMDL, the involvement of community groups, organizations and everyday people is critical to our collective success.

Throughout the last several years, aligning citizen or community actions with local or statewide regulations have produced excellent results for the Bay watershed. Consider the recent passage of the "Bag Bill" in Washington, DC. A study by the District Department of the Environment found that prior to the passage of this legislation, plastic bags accounted for 33 percent of the trash found in the Anacostia River and 50 percent in tributary streams. Through a citizen, business and government partnership that includes the DDOE, the Anacostia Watershed Society, CVS pharmacies and grocery stores such as Giant Foods, Safeway and Harris Teeter - *and* the passage of the Bag Bill in 2010 - the Anacostia River is on its way to meeting its water quality goal for trash.

Another recent success is the Bay's blue crab population. In addition to more restrictive crabbing regulations put in place by Virginia and Maryland, citizen actions are helping to support the crab fishery's comeback. With strong public support, these two states implemented temporary regulations to limit the crab catch in 2008. It was perhaps a hard line to take, but with the combination of strong action and favorable environmental conditions, the fishery responded quickly to efforts, showing a remarkable 70 percent increase in the Bay's adult blue crabs in 2009. According to the *Bay Program's 2009 Bay Barometer*, "there were 223 million spawning-age blue crabs in the Bay in 2009, the highest population recorded since 1993."

Underwater grass expansion in the Bay and its tributaries is another regulatory-voluntary success story. Between 2008 and 2009, the Bay's underwater grass beds grew by 12 percent. This increase in Bay grasses can be attributed, in part, to ongoing regulatory efforts in the watershed. The management actions taken to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution from farms and wastewater treatment plants clearly gave much-needed support to a generally increasing trend in Bay grasses. But, these increases would not likely have been as significant without successful voluntary efforts such as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's "Grasses for the Masses" program and others.

During 2009, about 150 volunteers grew wild celery, an underwater grass, in their homes and schools. The mature plants were planted in the Potomac and James rivers. Similar projects have been coordinated by groups like the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Harford Community College,

Anne Arundel Community College and other nonprofit and school programs.

A final success story comes from Pennsylvania. In 2007, with the support of farming operations, conservation organizations and other citizen groups, the state enacted the Resource Enhancement and Protection program, a tax credit program for farmers. This state program allows farmers and businesses to earn tax credits in exchange for implementing best management practices to enhance farm production and protect natural resources. Farmers jumped at this opportunity to be better stewards of the land, which in turn makes them better stewards of the Bay.

So, for a healthy Chesapeake Bay, I propose that we need to look at these encouraging examples of what I call a "Yes, and - approach. Yes, we clearly need new requirements to set limits to help guide us in protecting the Bay and local waterways. and, to be fully successful, we also need the help and actions of all of the watershed's citizens.

What's happening now with the Bay TMDL is simply a ratcheting up of federal efforts to match what states and voluntary partnerships like the Chesapeake Bay Program partners have been doing for 25 years: working with all the tools in the toolbox, both regulatory and voluntary, to help fix the Bay.

But, in the end, it is a combination of *regulation* with the *everyday actions* of the people who live in the Bay watershed that will make the most difference - from farmers controlling sediment and nitrogen runoff on their farms to city and county officials making the tough decisions on stormwater issues; from developers and homebuilders implementing "green" building practices to citizens carrying reusable grocery bags and fertilizing their lawns less.

Yes, restoring the Bay is going to take both stronger regulatory approaches and everyone's actions on the ground.

And that is the balance we need to find.

Jim Edward is acting director of the Chesapeake Bay Program.

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