

WATERKEEPERS DEMAND ACTION, NOT EMPTY PROMISES, FROM MARYLAND LEGISLATORS

Maryland Waterkeepers, Joined by Citizens from throughout the Chesapeake and Coastal Bay Watersheds, Lead Flotilla to Annapolis, Demand Leadership on Cleanup of Maryland's Rivers and the Bay

Baltimore, MD May 19, 2011 – A flotilla of small craft landed at the City Dock in Annapolis on Thursday, bringing with them citizen groups demanding that Maryland state legislators deliver leadership, action and results on the cleanup of the state's major rivers and coasts, and Chesapeake Bay.

Eighteen affiliated Chesapeake Waterkeeper groups, made up of concerned citizens, including farmers, watermen, business owners and families from throughout the Chesapeake Bay region, charged that the state legislature had deferred critical environmental work and failed to address the state's mounting water pollution problems.

“At a time when the need for environmental leadership has never been greater, Marylanders were forced to suffer through a ‘do-nothing’ state legislature,” said Fred Tutman, the Patuxent Riverkeeper. “All of us have a responsibility not to let history repeat itself.”

“Today, we are calling on the Statehouse and on the public to re-focus and re-energize and address the environmental problems that threaten the long term sustainability of our environment and our way of life,” said Kathy Phillips, Assateague Coastkeeper. “With the clock ticking and water quality rapidly declining, the lost economic value, jobs and quality of life present real suffering for people and communities.”

Unsatisfied with the inaction of the most recent General Assembly, the flotilla arrived at City Dock at 1:00 p.m to insist that lawmakers make good on campaign promises to clean up our waterways. Concerned Marylanders joined the Waterkeepers at the event, demanding that elected leaders act during the next session. The flotilla was comprised of Waterkeepers and their boats, a symbol of the ever-vigilant presence that Waterkeepers provide throughout their individual watersheds.

“Waterkeepers and the people of Maryland whom we represent decry our State Legislature's failure to live up to promises made by its constituent lawmakers,” said Drew Koslow, The Choptank Riverkeeper. “Maryland sets the tone for Chesapeake Bay cleanup, and so Maryland's inaction calls into serious question the credibility and sincerity of our elected officials, particularly because it will now be much more difficult for Maryland to meet the Bay Pollution Diet set by EPA for the Bay States.”

Thursday's protesters are concerned in particular with the Chesapeake Bay, which is in precipitous decline, with increasing dead zones. Few if any of the rivers and creeks draining into the bay have managed to achieve a scorecard grade that rises above a “D” from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Studies. The Maryland Coastal Bays Program, an EPA

National Estuary Program, has not been able to issue a grade above “C+” for the Coastal Bays on the Eastern Shore. The Legislature is tasked with passing laws that curb pollution from sources such as pesticides, agricultural runoff including arsenic in chicken manure, natural gas fracking, plastic bags, problems associated with smart growth, and the increasing problem of stormwater runoff.

"The District of Columbia is doing its part to control plastic bags in the river by passing a Bag Bill," said Dottie Yunger, the Anacostia Riverkeeper. "With eighty percent of the Anacostia Watershed in Maryland, what will it take to get Maryland to do its part? We will never get a healthy Bay until all local jurisdictions take action."

Waterkeepers are local grassroots clean water advocacy organizations made up of concerned citizens and local residents. One of the most important bodies of water in the US from the standpoint of economics and diversity of life, Chesapeake Bay has a concentration of Waterkeepers, most of whom patrol a tributary that drains into the bay. The local Waterkeeper movement features people working in Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia, and has emerged as the eyes, ears and voices of waterways and communities that are struggling to turn the tide of the continuing decline of the waters they patrol.

"In the end, this is not about whether our elected officials have a good environmental score card or whether they have great intentions for the environment, but instead whether or not they have the political will to bring about a new and better day for the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays," said Carolyn Lott, a member of the Assateague Coastal Trust. "Our waterways are screaming out loud that they are dying. Our local Waterkeepers will continue to be the voice for our waterways and our communities."

The Waterkeepers Chesapeake include: Anacostia Riverkeeper, Assateague Coastkeeper, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, Chester Riverkeeper, Choptank Riverkeeper, Gunpowder Riverkeeper, Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper, Lower James Riverkeeper, Miles-Wye Riverkeeper, Patuxent Riverkeeper, Potomac Riverkeeper, Sassafras Riverkeeper, Severn Riverkeeper, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, South Riverkeeper, Upper James Riverkeeper, VA Eastern Shorekeeper, West RhodeRiverkeeper.

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