

Chesapeake Bay Commission,

I am writing in support of the continuing cooperation between Bay states and the federal government embodied in the latest draft of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement, an interstate compact now more than 30 years strong.

As a member of the Chesapeake Paddlers Association, Inc., a sea kayaking organization of more than 700 paddlers, I am particularly interested in the public access portion of the agreement. While the overall goal for increased public access, particularly for swimming and boating, is laudable and the call for 300 new public access sites is great, the section lacks any specifics for the State governments that are signatories to take to accomplish the goal. To that end, I'd like to offer some specific points that might be incorporated into this section of the agreement.

Some specifics:

There is a lot of local, state and federal investment in infrastructure that is carried out without any thought for the Bay, or at most, being careful to do no harm. However, public access opportunities could be incorporated in those projects at little or no additional cost with the appropriate attitude and foresight. I ask the Bay states and the Commission to initiate and support executive and legislative actions that require public access consideration be given in ALL cases of local, state and federal public infrastructure investment. NOT just park acquisition and development, but roads, ports, dredging projects, defense development and de-authorization, and any other investment opportunity where bricks and mortar are involved.

This agreement and many other laudable governmental actions are devoted to land conservation and open space preservation. However, conserving, preserving and acquiring open space land resources has a cruel irony if no provision is made for public access. There is nothing more bewildering to a Bay-starved public than to see public efforts directed at preserving land from development, only to see that land made off-limits for public access. Often the rationale is that the public can't be given access until planned improvements or developments are made. With reduced public budgets, this is often years and sometimes decades away. I ask that you make a direct connection between increased land conservation and open space acquisition and public access, even for lands that are in an undeveloped state. As paddlers, we seek out the wilder places, so dealing with an undeveloped access point is less of a challenge than an opportunity for our community.

This point is related to the one above. Often the planned developments of public access points seem like they are designed more to support the local construction industry than water access. I urge you to support more natural shoreline access and less over-engineered constructed access points. This would serve to spread the limited public access budgets over more successful access opportunities, and for a large part of the water-using community, would be more congenial than bulkheads, concrete and pavement. Our paddlers only really need a small amount of parking and a lot of beach.

The heart of the Bay Agreement is the spirit of cooperation. But when it comes to federal funding sources for public access and land acquisition, parties to the Agreement sometimes

revert to a spirit of competition for those limited funds. While understandable, I believe the Bay would benefit from a consistently cooperative approach to seeking more funds for public access acquisition and development to expand the pool of resources available in the Bay region, rather than competition for available resources.

Finally, while governments at all levels always focus on public expenditures and public resources, the engine of our economy is private enterprise. With regard to Bay lands, the Bay states and the Commission are in a perfect position to exercise a bit of regulatory judo by leveraging approval for development by seeking exactions that require developers to provide public access sites as a condition of development. I urge you to harness the energy and wealth of the private sector to the extent possible in seeking increased opportunities for public access to the Bay.

Thank you for continuing the long tradition of interstate cooperation and intergovernmental effort expended up to now to save the Chesapeake Bay. Please take my constructive criticism in the spirit in which it was intended and strengthen the public access section of the Agreement.

Sincerely,

Ralph Heimlich  
Laurel, Maryland