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RECREATIONAL ANGLERS FIGHTING FOR MARYLAND'S MARINE RESOURCES

March 17, 2014

Chesapeake Bay Program
410 Severn Avenue, Suite 109
Annapolis, MD 21403

RE: Comment of Coastal Conservation Association Maryland on the
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, January 29, 2014 Final Draft

To whom this may concern:

Coastal Conservation Association Maryland (CCA Maryland) is pleased to submit these comments on the Final Draft Chesapeake Watershed Agreement (Agreement), dated January 29, 2014.

CCA Maryland is a non-profit, grassroots organization that prides itself on its efforts to promote and advance the preservation, conservation and protection of the marine, animal, plant life and resources of Chesapeake Bay and the coastal areas of Maryland for the benefit and enjoyment of all of the state's citizens. We are an active and long-time participant in fisheries management in the state, Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic coastal waters and work closely and cooperatively with governmental entities and other stakeholder groups to support science-based conservation and management efforts. Our state organization is part of Coastal Conservation Association (CCA), the leading marine recreational fishing advocacy group in the United States. Originally formed in 1977, CCA has grown to represent approximately 100,000 members in eighteen state chapters, including Maryland, Virginia and Delaware.

CCA Maryland supports the purpose, intent and goals of the Agreement, and commends the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership for continuing collaborative, watershed-wide efforts to address the critical needs of the Chesapeake Bay. We appreciate and understand that a healthy Bay watershed is necessary to support a strong recreational fishery and that many of the actions required to achieve this goal will occur far from the waters of the Chesapeake itself. Our comments are intended to address those areas of the Agreement where CCA Maryland is traditionally involved and most directly implicate the work and interest of its members.

Foremost, CCA Maryland appreciates the significant focus of the Agreement on sustainable fisheries, and applauds the partnership for clearly recognizing the importance of the Chesapeake Bay's fisheries to the overall ecological and economic health of the watershed.

Marine recreational fishing in Maryland is a major economic driver for many communities on both sides of the Bay. CCA Maryland appreciates the inclusion of several quantifiable outcomes that will guide the partners in efforts to sustain healthy fish and shellfish populations, and we look forward to measurable progress on these. Additional comments on specific outcomes are included below.

Forage Fish Outcome: Steps should be taken to shorten the time between studying the forage fish base and implementing action to sustain it. Two years to simply develop a strategy for assessment is a significant amount of time; there should be no delay in action on this issue. More specifically, CCA Maryland urges the partnership to focus on the impact of the current commercial menhaden fishery. Emphasis should not be placed solely on the relative status of the menhaden population itself, but also on the role in the Bay-wide ecosystem as a filter-feeder and as a critical food source for many other key species. Following the development of the strategy and the subsequent assessment, the partnership should work toward a longer-term goal of ensuring the species is properly managed in accordance with the findings.

Fish Habitat Outcome: Efforts to assess and catalog important fish habitats throughout the Bay provide a necessary foundation for effective restoration and conservation actions. CCA Maryland certainly urges Agreement partners to continue and expand on these efforts, but also requests that this information be made readily available to the public for better targeting of limited non-public conservation resources. The timely integration and availability of such data on existing web-based GIS networks would clearly be in line with the Partnership's principle of transparency and science based decision making.

Oyster Outcome: CCA Maryland believes actions advanced through the Agreement can help to ensure that future oyster restoration activities are truly beneficial for the larger Bay ecosystem, beyond the commercial fishery alone. We support the goal of restoring native oysters to ten Bay tributaries by 2025; initiatives should be targeted to methods that have been scientifically demonstrated to provide the greatest opportunity for restoring the native oyster population. Additionally, we believe the Agreement should note the importance of measures to protect existing reefs while efforts are undertaken throughout the Bay to establish additional oyster populations. The viability of existing reef ecosystems and their physical structure, such as Man O' War Shoal in the Upper Bay, should not be sacrificed for efforts that do not have clearly defined goals and legally-binding funding commitments that will clear serve the larger purpose of restoring native oyster populations in the Bay.

Public Access Site Development Outcome: Providing the public with expanded opportunities to access the Bay and its tributaries is a laudable goal. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimates that in 2011, recreational fishing in Maryland and Virginia contributed nearly \$1.7 billion to the economy. Increasing angling access will only boost these figures. CCA Maryland recommends targeting these opportunities—when feasible—to underserved communities and areas of highest need.

CCA Maryland appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft Agreement, and offers to remain actively engaged in the implementation of the strategies and attainment of the goals therein. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions regarding these comments.

Sincerely,



Ed Liccione
Chairman



M. Trent Zivkovich
Chair, Government Relations Committee