



**2008 Report to the  
Chesapeake Bay Executive Council  
November 20, 2008**

**The Honorable Tommy Wells  
Chair, Local Government Advisory Committee  
The Chesapeake Bay Program  
and  
Council Member, District of Columbia City Council**

Good morning Governor O'Malley, representatives and members of the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council. My name is Tommy Wells. I am a Council Member representing the Sixth Ward in the District of Columbia, and last August was elected to chair the Chesapeake Bay Program's Local Government Advisory Committee. I thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you the most important issue facing local governments in the Bay Region.

In particular, I want to share and enlist your support for an exciting opportunity to overcome the gaps and barriers that too often prevent local governments from actively advancing the health and vitality of the Bay. By funding and implementing a network of circuit riders throughout the Bay area, the Executive Council can help spur local government coordination and action that will accelerate efforts to protect and restore the Bay.

**Committee Role**

As you know, the Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) advises the Executive Council on the most effective ways to engage the support of local governments in achieving the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. We are constantly looking for ways to educate local elected and appointed officials about those goals and determine how they might become full and active partners in Bay restoration and protection.

The Chesapeake Bay Program has elevated the profile of local governments. The Principals' Staff Committee, Implementation Committee, and various other technical subcommittees recognize the important local role in implementing Bay policies and

programs. They have invited local governments to provide direct, practical advice on how we can partner in on-the-ground implementation of programs such as Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs).

To strengthen the local role, our committee has instituted an outreach program to communicate with and educate the more than 1,700 local government officials throughout the Bay Watershed. Local government units are diverse, including cities, counties, towns, townships, municipalities, villages, and boroughs, but nearly all of them make land use decisions. LGAC has begun to provide workshops and educational programs to the associations that represent these units of local government.

### **Our Challenge**

Despite LGAC's outreach and the clear interest of local governments in playing an active role in the restoration of Chesapeake Bay, we confront an enormous barrier to their involvement: They are unsure of what they can do, what needs to be done, how to get started, and what types of help are available to them. There is no consistent support network to tell them. Although the local extension services, conservation districts, planning commissions, and state and federal offices offer some services, there is no single resource to assist local governments from start to finish.

Because government-supported resources often lack the capacity and sometimes the capability to help local governments pursue the Bay's goals and objectives, local governments often need to find additional funding sources to implement strategies that have been identified for them. As a result, implementation is delayed, or at worst non-existent.

This lack of resources and delayed implementation at the local level is a major obstacle in achieving a healthy Chesapeake Bay. To succeed, the Bay Program and its many partners need to enlist local governments to implement restoration projects throughout the watershed.

### **A Solution: Circuit Riders**

LGAC has discovered an extremely promising model for enabling local governments to assume a larger role in achieving the Bay's goals and objectives. The Codorus Creek Watershed in York Township, Pennsylvania, successfully facilitates local watershed projects through its Circuit Rider program.

Funded through the Codorus Watershed Endowment of the York County Community Foundation, the circuit rider offers technical assistance, grant writing support, proposal preparation, grant administration, funding identification, project coordination and management, and local priority setting to advance the many studies and plans in the county. These services are provided at no charge to local stakeholder groups, individuals, and municipalities.

Thanks in part to the circuit rider, completed projects in the Codorus Creek Watershed have markedly reduced nutrient and sediment pollution. The lessons learned from this success can be applied to many other local governments in the region that lack the professional support and financial resources to implement projects on the ground. We envision a network of circuit riders throughout the Chesapeake Bay to accelerate Bay cleanup and restoration.

The clear community benefit of a circuit rider program is a streamlined approach to project identification, the ability to establish local priorities, and the accelerated implementation of restoration strategies. The circuit rider can identify all of a project's social, economic, cultural, and political barriers and recommend strategies that have worked to overcome those obstacles. The circuit rider also helps to design projects to achieve the broadest possible environmental and social benefits from watershed stewardship.

One of the most promising features of a circuit rider program is the ability to unite a whole spectrum of stakeholders in support of nutrient and sediment reduction projects. Experience in York County has shown that everyone—from individual landowners and watershed groups to federal, state, and local governments; from foundations and nonprofit organizations to academic institutions—has become activated behind watershed projects. The circuit rider can form relationships with stakeholders, landowners, and citizens to change behavioral patterns about watershed stewardship and spur their active engagement.

### **Expanding the Circuit Rider Program**

In the Codorus Watershed, a functioning, funded circuit rider has made significant progress in moving local projects along in a state with overlapping local land use decision making authority that makes cooperation a necessity. York County alone contains 72 municipalities (townships, boroughs, villages, and one city). Building on the successful but limited circuit rider program in this region, we can demonstrate for other Chesapeake Bay watershed states with less complicated local government structures how such a program can be expanded into a network throughout the Bay.

Circuit riders in other states and the District of Columbia will reflect each jurisdiction's particular form of local government and the powers and authorities granted by the state. For example, Virginia has 95 counties and 139 independent cities that would benefit from the ability of a circuit rider to facilitate water quality projects in watersheds that cross numerous political boundaries. The state is also divided among eight regional Planning District Commissions (PDCs), each composed of county elected officials, which act as regional coordinating entities with no authority to implement regional plans. They could identify issues and use their informal networks of elected officials as a framework for the circuit rider program.

Maryland has approached the issue of watershed restoration and protection by setting up 10 key tributary teams throughout the state. The teams are composed of local citizens, farmers, business leaders, and local elected and appointed government officials

from multiple jurisdictions in the watersheds. The teams recommend and help implement pollution prevention measures needed to address local water quality issues. The state is considering a circuit rider program to provide coordination in the more rural and remote areas such as the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

The circuit rider approach would be particularly beneficial to the Anacostia River in the District of Columbia, which is dramatically impacted by pollution emanating from Maryland. The circuit rider could foster collaboration across both jurisdictions to stem the flow of pollution into the river.

### **The Executive Council's Opportunity**

I am asking the Executive Council and the Chesapeake Bay Program to support a demonstration project that will show how circuit rider programs can inform, equip, coordinate, and activate local communities. The experience I have described in Pennsylvania this past year reinforces our commitment to provide a road map to a circuit rider program. At this point and time in the history of the Bay Program, we think our approach offers the best opportunity to spur local initiatives and accelerate the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay.

In the coming year, we will monitor this demonstration project and explore how differences in the structure of local governments in each state will shape individual circuit rider programs. Next year we will come back to you with a vision of how circuit rider programs can be expanded throughout the Bay watershed.

We have seen how a circuit rider operating at a local watershed level can be a catalyst for successful watershed projects that protect the Bay. We are confident that with funding from the Chesapeake Bay Program and individual states, an expanded circuit rider program to provide much needed technical assistance and coordination among all groups of stakeholders will produce impressive and long-awaited results.