



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Chesapeake Bay Field Office
177 Admiral Cochrane Drive
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
<http://www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay>

January 14, 2013

Candice Quinn Kelly, President
Board of County Commissioners
Charles County Government
P.O. Box 2150
La Plata, Maryland 20646

RE: Charles County Draft Comprehensive Plan and Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act Draft Tier Map

Dear Commissioner Kelly:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has been following developments in the preparation of Charles County's Draft Comprehensive Plan and Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act Tier Map. It is with some concern that we observed the Charles County Planning Commission reject the December 2011 Draft Comprehensive Plan Merged Scenario that adhered to Smart Growth principles and contributed greatly to the conservation of fish and wildlife and the protection of water quality while providing for sustainable growth and economic development in the County. We also noted that, based on public input, the Merged Scenario was preferred by a majority of the citizenry of the County. The current Draft Comprehensive Plan prepared by the Planning Commission appears to be relatively unchanged from the 2006 Comprehensive Plan that leaves a majority of the County unprotected from sprawl development.

Additionally, the Planning Commission recently rejected a Tier Map prepared by Charles County Planning staff to address the requirements of the State's Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012. Instead the Planning Commission is proposing a Tier Map that does not adequately adhere to the intent of the law, which is to limit the spread of large-lot sprawl on forest and farmland and reduce the effects of associated pollution on rivers and bays and lessen the costs of the infrastructure required to support such development. We understand that the Board of County Commissioners has solicited public comment and will soon select a Tier Map to submit to the Maryland Department of Planning. We strongly encourage you to reject the Planning Commission Tier Map and instead submit a Tier Map that more closely adheres to the intent of the law.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is charged with protecting fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of the American people. Charles County supports some of the most important habitat for fish and wildlife in the Chesapeake Bay region. The Service's Chesapeake Bay Field Office has



identified several focus watersheds for conservation in Southern Maryland based on their importance to migratory birds, migratory fish, and federally-listed threatened and endangered species. These include Mattawoman Creek, Nanjemoy Creek, and Zekiah Swamp in Charles County. Mattawoman Creek is the Chesapeake Bay's most productive nursery for migratory fish like American Shad.

We encourage you to see that these watersheds are considered for special protection. Neither the Draft Comprehensive Plan nor the Planning Commission's Tier Map adequately protect these important stream valleys and ultimately will result in increased sediment and nutrient pollution in the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. Planning decisions in Charles County have ramifications well beyond its borders. Destruction of forests and farms in Charles County not only degrades local resources, it also reduces the quality of fish and wildlife resources throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

We strongly endorse the December 2011 Merged Comprehensive Plan Scenario and the Tier Map prepared by Charles County Planning Staff in 2012. Included in the Merged Scenario are Smart Growth elements such as the institution of a Purchase of Development Rights program, strengthening of the County's Transfer of Development Right program requirements, concentration of new development in an urban core, and redevelopment of existing developed areas.

The County's vision of the future outlined in the Merged Scenario and Planning Staff Tier Map nicely complements our goal of maintaining ecologically healthy watersheds in the Lower Potomac and the Chesapeake Bay. Your approval of sound landuse policies will assist us in our efforts by making projects in the County more competitive for state and federal conservation funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important effort. If you would like to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me at (410) 573-4577 or genevieve_larouche@fws.gov.

Sincerely,

Genevieve Larouche
Supervisor

Cc:

Richard E. Hall, Secretary, Maryland Department of Planning
John R. Griffin, Secretary, Maryland Department of Natural Resources