

Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team
Chesapeake Bay Program

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office
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http://www.chesapeakebay.net/groups/group/sustainable_fisheries

February 25, 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,

I am writing this letter as the chair of the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (Fisheries GIT) and as the Director of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office (NCBO) in response to the Charles County Draft Comprehensive Plan and Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act Draft Tier Map (Draft Comprehensive Plan). The Fisheries GIT, created by the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership and chaired by the NCBO, supports interjurisdictional fisheries management within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Our overarching goal is to restore, enhance, and protect the finfish, shellfish, and other living resources, their habitats and ecological relationships to sustain all fisheries and provide for a balanced Bay ecosystem. To accomplish this, the Fisheries GIT is working with executive fisheries and resource managers from across the Bay jurisdictions to develop a more holistic approach to resource management and planning. As such, the Fisheries GIT is concerned that Draft Comprehensive Plan under consideration by Charles County is inconsistent with our interests, which include preserving the largemouth bass fishery and its economic value, conserving anadromous fish spawning and nursery habitats, and preventing a decline of the tidal fish community.

Beyond the local loss of rural lands and valuable resources, we believe the Draft Comprehensive Plan will have broader regional implications across the Chesapeake Bay watershed and even the Atlantic coast for the quality and sustainability of species like striped bass and shad.

In June, 2012 the Fisheries GIT identified both Mattawoman Creek and the Wicomico River within Charles County as areas with the highest ecological value within the entire Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay's watershed. Both these tributaries were selected based on factors such as prioritized preservation of healthy areas, the density of impervious surfaces, ecological habitat, critical fish spawning and nursery areas, potential protection opportunities, high citizen involvement and

leadership, as well as important ongoing long-term monitoring programs. At a June 2012 workshop, the Fisheries GIT used a fleet of geospatial tools to develop a set of guiding principles for restoration and protection. Under this set of guiding principles were priority fish habitats, additional fisheries resources, high value ecological areas, fisheries landscape vulnerability assessments, and Maryland population growth projections. These criteria led to the selection of two locations deserving conservation above all other tributaries in Maryland; Mattawoman Creek and the Wicomico River.

The Fisheries GIT wants to stress that neither the Draft Comprehensive Plan nor the Planning Commission's Tier Map effectively protect the freshwater and estuarine fish resources provided by these important watersheds. If the Draft Plan is ultimately approved in its current state, Mattawoman Creek and the Wicomico River will undoubtedly undergo negative ecological pressures from the expansion of dispersed development within Charles County. The Fisheries GIT strongly encourages Charles County's Board of County Commissioners to accept the December 2011 merged Comprehensive Plan Scenario and the Tier Map prepared by the Charles County Planning Staff in 2012.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a letter of comment on behalf of the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team regarding the potential impacts of Charles County's local land use planning decisions on fisheries resources of state, regional, and national significance. If you have any questions or would like to further discuss this with membership from the Fisheries GIT, please contact me at (410) 267-5652 or Peyton.Robertson@NOAA.gov.

Sincerely,

Peyton Robertson
Fisheries GIT Chair

Cc:

Richard E. Hall, Secretary, Maryland Department of Planning

John R. Griffin, Secretary, Maryland Department of Natural Resources