



Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team
Chesapeake Bay Program
410 Severn Avenue
Annapolis, Maryland 21403
http://www.chesapeakebay.net/groups/group/sustainable_fisheries

March 1, 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 on behalf of the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (Fisheries GIT) of the Chesapeake Bay Program. As an organization established to support sustainable fisheries in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, we have concerns with the Charles County Draft Comprehensive Plan and Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act Draft Tier Map (Draft Comprehensive Plan), particularly the potential for these plans to negatively impact critical habitat and fisheries resources. The Draft Comprehensive Plan opens significant areas to development and affects conservation of the County's working farms and natural areas. This proposed expansion of development threatens to degrade the health of fish, shellfish, habitats, and the ecological, and economic benefits they provide.

The Draft Comprehensive Plan is inconsistent with the Fisheries GIT interest to preserve Mattawoman Creek's world-class largemouth bass fishery and its economic value, and conserve Charles County's anadromous fish spawning and nursery habitats, tidal fish, and shellfish communities. Beyond the local loss of rural lands and valuable resources, we believe the Draft Comprehensive Plan may have broader regional implications for the Chesapeake Bay and potentially the Atlantic coast on the quality and sustainability of species like striped bass and shad. The Fisheries GIT believes the Draft Comprehensive Plan sets a precedent for unsustainable growth and development over conserving healthy habitats and economically important fisheries.

The Fisheries GIT is working with fisheries and habitat managers from across the Bay jurisdictions to develop a more holistic approach to resource management through responsible land planning. At a June 2012 workshop, the Fisheries GIT used a wide range of geospatial tools to develop a set of guiding principles for restoration and conservation. This included 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 watersheds with high conservation value 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 Comprehensive Plan is ultimately approved in its current state, Mattawoman Creek and the Wicomico River will likely undergo negative ecological pressures from the expansion of dispersed development within Charles County.

If you have any questions or would like to further discuss the perspectives of 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