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ENVIRO MATTERS

General Assembly Budget Cuts to Shortchange Marylanders, Environment

Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. firmly believes that preserving our Bay is vital to our State's future, which is why he has included a substantial increase in funding his FY 2007 budget. There are those in the Legislature who say we need to do more and spend more on Chesapeake Bay Restoration. Yet, many of these same legislators are now planning to cut \$15 million in funding. The cuts will be from the budgets of the Departments of the Environment, Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Planning – most of which is currently earmarked for large-scale targeted watershed and Tributary Strategy projects that are critical to Bay restoration.

Action to Stop on Restoring Targeted Watersheds

Last September, the Governor announced the Corsica River Pilot Project - the first of its kind in the Bay watershed - to provide a blueprint for the future restoration of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. This multi-faceted targeted watershed project will demonstrate that with a focused approach, combined state, local, federal and private resources and a comprehensive strategy, we can potentially restore an entire river system. The Corsica project will initially focus on reducing nutrient pollution and sediment runoff through a proven set of urban, suburban and agricultural best management practices. This will also restore bay grass acreage and oyster habitat.

Targeting resources to restore one watershed will make only a small difference – we must immediately start the process to select and begin implementation in a second targeted watershed to replicate lessons learned from the Corsica Pilot Project. Maryland has about 135 watersheds that are about the same size of the Corsica, most of which have problems. We must continue to make progress every day in these watersheds. Progress is not possible, however, if the funding for these projects is cut.

Tributary Strategy Implementation will go Unfunded

The Tributary Strategy Teams have worked very hard to develop the necessary plans for implementing the restoration activities, but they have no funds to pay for them. The Governor has approved funds to accelerate the implementation of Tributary Strategies. These funds would improve stormwater management on state-owned lands and increase creation and restoration of wetlands.

Additional Environmental Programs will be Cut

In addition to these projects and programs, the Legislature wants to reduce or eliminate funding to additional environmental programs including bay grass restoration, cover crops, trail access and maintenance, the Rural Legacy Program, Soil Conservation District staffing, State Park staffing, the Urban Tree Canopy Project, and waste management programs. The Legislature also may reduce funding for the Hazardous Substance Clean-up Program, which helps to clean up sites that do not qualify for federal funding through the Superfund program and where the responsible person is not financially able to pay for the cleanup.

Our restoration and conservation initiatives are dependent upon a holistic approach. Just as our land conservation activities impact Bay restoration, each of the best management practices implemented by one agency has a positive and direct impact on other agencies. To achieve maximum Bay restoration effectiveness, these budgets must be preserved in their entirety. These cuts impact the State's ability to move forward with key Chesapeake Bay restoration initiatives, and thereby negatively impact the work of our local partners and non-governmental organizations. If these cuts are implemented, it will impact our quality of life, our environment and our economy at a detrimental cost to our treasured Chesapeake Bay and Maryland's citizens.



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