

Ellyn and John Vail



July 28, 2023

Secretary of the Environment, Mcllwain
Office of Secretary
Department of the Environment
Montgomery Park Business Center, 1800 Washington Blvd., Baltimore, MD 21230

Dear Secretary Mcllwain,

We are asking you to take strong action to hold the owners and operators of the Conowingo Dam responsible for the 50+ years of pollution they have allowed to flow into the Chesapeake Bay and the more than 10 year struggle to get a proper contract/license with the company who operates the dam.

I realize you are probably receiving many requests to protect the Bay from the pollution contained behind the Dam that is frequently released to the Chesapeake Bay after large storm events, however, I believe my husband and I have a unique perspective on the impact of this damage.

As a brief introduction, my husband, John Vail, and I started the Sassafras River Association in 2004 to preserve, protect and restore the Sassafras River which is directly South and East of the Dam. Our association grew into a successful watershed program with some millions of dollars in restoration funds working on the ground to restore the Sassafras River watershed in the upper Eastern Shore of Maryland. The association has since merged with three other Eastern Shore watershed groups into the Shore Rivers program.

One part of the watershed protection work of the Sassafras River Association and now Shore Rivers is an annual effort supported by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay - Project Clean Stream. Thousands of volunteers clean up trash along hundreds of miles of waterways and beaches in the Chesapeake. I have been a Site Captain for one cleanup since 2006 at a site which is directly impacted every year when the Conowingo Dam opens its gates to release massive amounts of water containing pollution, trash and sediment during and after major rain events.

I, and all of us who pick up trash on the Sassafras at the Natural Resources Management Area every year, know well one of the results of each opening of the Dam.

At our Project Clean Stream event **every year since 2006**;

- 20-40 of us pick trash up 1-2 **tons** from the beaches that face Northwest towards the Conowingo Dam;
- We do not find trash on the many paths and picnic areas or on the beaches not facing the entrance to Sassafras River;
- Therefore, it is clear to us that the trash is not accumulated from the residents of Kent County and park visitors, it comes from the Conowingo Dam;
- Opening the dam not only sends tons of trash down the Chesapeake, it also sends tons of pollution into the Chesapeake;
- We are fortunate to be able to see and remove the trash, but not the sediment and other pollutants.

Our on-going efforts to remove the excessive, damaging trash that is sent down the Chesapeake Bay annually inform us that this trash is coming from the waters trapped above the Conowingo Dam annually. This is not our trash, not our sediments, and not our pollution!

We, therefore, are strongly asking you to take appropriate steps to force the owners and operators of this Dam to clean up this mess rather than simply and cheaply dumping it off into our treasured Bay!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ellyn Vail" followed by a second signature that appears to be "John Vail".

Ellyn and John Vail

CC: Shore Rivers