



What is the Chesapeake Bay Watershed issue?

Nutrient pollution flows from Lycoming County lands into our local creeks, then into the West Branch Susquehanna River, and ultimately into the Chesapeake Bay. Those nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) cause algae blooms that choke out other aquatic life, creating a dead zone that can cover 40% of the Bay in summer months. This treasured estuary is classified as an impaired waterway, with reduced capacity to provide economic, environmental, and recreational services and amenities.

How does this affect Lycoming County residents?

Pennsylvania and neighboring states joined together to sign the Chesapeake Bay 2000 Agreement committing to cleaning up the Bay. As part of the state's Tributary Strategy, DEP is requiring "point sources" of pollution—i.e., wastewater treatment plants—to reduce their nutrient discharges. The seven plants in Lycoming County face millions of dollars in upgrade costs to comply. Combined with deferred maintenance needs for sewer plants and municipal collection systems, the total cost to the County is expected to be more than \$200 million.

Why is Lycoming County getting involved in this issue?

Although the County does not itself own a sewer plant or collection system, it is uniquely positioned to provide leadership and advocacy. The County strategy is a regional approach that brings together all stakeholders to seek ways to keep compliance costs in check. The major task at hand is creating a nutrient trading program that responds to local needs.

What is nutrient credit trading?

Credit trading is a new option, sanctioned by DEP, that will provide wastewater authorities with flexibility in meeting mandates and lowering costs. A wastewater plant can choose to fulfill part or all of its nutrient reduction mandate by purchasing nutrient credits to offset their own nitrogen and phosphorus discharges. These credits are created by "non-point sources" that implement DEP-certified conservation practices called Best Management Practices (or BMPs) that reduce nutrient pollution coming from other parts of the watershed.

Isn't credit trading like buying the right to pollute?

Not really. To the Chesapeake Bay, one less pound of nitrogen has the same positive effect, no matter how that pound is removed from the watershed. If a wastewater authority can meet its mandates more cost-effectively by purchasing credits, its ratepayers save money. Purchasing local nutrient credits has the added benefit of improving the County's own waterways, forests, farms and communities. Credit trading makes an investment in our own future by following the axiom "think globally, act locally." If every tributary community cleans up its own waterways, the Bay will clean up, too.

(Background photograph of Chesapeake Bay courtesy of Google Maps)