

Pennsylvania Will Be First to Benefit from Chesapeake Bay Cleanup Plan

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation told the [House Republican Policy Committee](#) investigating the cost of implementing the [Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy](#) that Pennsylvanians would be the first to benefit from cleaner water.

The hearing was co-chaired by Rep. Mike Fleck (R-Huntingdon) and Rep. Mike Turzai (R-Allegheny) and held at Juniata College in Huntingdon.

The Committee heard comments from the Department of Environmental Protection, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, Pennsylvania Builders Association and local government officials.

"Pennsylvanians will be the first to benefit from making investments to meet our Chesapeake Bay obligations because it will be our streams and rivers that will be cleaner," said [Matthew Ehrhart](#), Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Office Chesapeake Bay Foundation. "We will have cleaner, cheaper drinking water, improved recreation opportunities and quality of life, improved animal health on our farms, improved opportunities for tourism, and a legacy of clean water to pass on to our children and grandchildren.

"There have been numerous media reports in recent weeks focusing on the high costs to municipal wastewater treatment plants associated with complying with the Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy. A legal challenge to some of these issues has been filed. The critical point that has received far less attention is that these permit limits are not arbitrary – they are clearly required by the Federal Clean Water Act.

"The cost of achieving compliance with these nutrient load reductions is high for all sectors," said Ehrhart. "The most recent cost estimates for point source compliance ranges from \$620 million (PA DEP estimate) to \$1 billion (PMAA estimate). The cost for farmers to comply with the required reductions from agriculture is \$593 million (PA DEP). In 2005, DEP identified a gap of \$174.2 million annually between existing funding levels and the funding necessary to meet Tributary Strategy requirements for agriculture.

"The cuts in Conservation District and Department of Agriculture funding as proposed in the Governor's budget request for this year will set back Pennsylvania's ability to meet its Tributary Strategy requirements for agriculture. Conservation Districts should be funded with an additional \$10 million to ensure they are staffed, operational and capable of delivering the technical assistance needed to help implement conservation practices," said Ehrhart.

[A copy of CBF's testimony is available online.](#)

Legislators and those presenting testimony agreed action is needed to cleanup Pennsylvania's waterways flowing to the Chesapeake Bay, but all cited the need for the state to do its fair share to provide funding to lighten the burden on local sewer system ratepayers and farmers.

"The cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay is vital to the environment and the quality of life in central Pennsylvania; however, it shouldn't come at the expense of local governments and residents living in the watershed," said Rep. Fleck. "We have to find a better way to fund this project and look to the successful programs in Maryland and Virginia as examples. This

hearing was a step in determining how the Legislature can help reduce expenses for those living within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed."

"The total cost estimate of the project to upgrade Huntingdon's Wastewater Treatment Plant now stands at \$19.5 million," said Kenneth Meyers, manager for the Borough of Huntingdon. "About a third of those costs can be attributed to compliance with the new Chesapeake Bay requirements. This amounts to an 87 percent increase for our average residential sewer customer. We feel that DEP has not done its job when it comes to the Chesapeake Bay Initiative. DEP officials knew full well the economic impact the Chesapeake Bay requirements would have on central Pennsylvania, but they did nothing about it. DEP has taken at least four to five years to develop its Chesapeake Bay strategy and has now given many treatment plants, including Huntingdon, less than half that amount of time to comply with the new regulations. All this time should have been spent attempting to develop sources of funding for the projects."

Rep. Kerry Benninghoff (R-Centre) agreed that the state has not developed the funding sources needed to meet the mandates. "It's not that state does not have the money, but rather that the Governor continues to allocate existing dollars to new pet projects," he said. "The department needs to maintain funding for programs to clean our waterways instead of diverting dollars to new department programs."

"As legislators, we have a responsibility to the people we represent to protect their quality of life," said Rep. Jerry Stern (R-Blair). "This includes the environment in which they live and their cost of living. Over the past six years, the governor has continued to take funds away from programs to fund his pet projects. This needs to stop. We are charged to be fiscal stewards of the people's money. State funds need to be spent on programs, such as the cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, that best benefit the citizens of this Commonwealth."

Rep. Stern and a bipartisan group of Senate and House members, were successful in adding the new \$10 million [Resource Enhancement and Protection \(REAP\)](#) farm conservation tax credit program in this year's state budget. The full \$10 million was committed to projects in the first 10 days the application period was open.

Rep. Scott Perry (R-Cumberland) said he was introducing legislation to aid with the cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, helping to ease the funding burden on taxpayers and local governments. His legislation includes appropriating \$750 million over 10 years to help local governments fund needed plant upgrades and \$250 million over five years to help fund agricultural best management practices to reduce nutrient and sediment runoff.

"This legislation helps to remove the burden placed on local governments by this federal unfunded mandate agreed to by DEP," Rep. Perry said. "It is unrealistic to require municipalities located within the watershed to overhaul their plants and treatment programs without any type of assistance. The secretary of DEP agreed to these new requirements. The state is expected to have a surplus in funds. We have the money; the governor and his secretaries need to better prioritize the spending of that money."

"No one is denying the need for environmental cleanup of the watershed," Rep. Adam Harris (R-Juniata) said. "However, we have to take into account the cost this will have on middle-class families. If the state has mandated upgrades, they should shoulder some of the funding burden. This can be done without raising taxes or penalizing residents living in the

watershed. We need to use the funds we have more efficiently."

This week's hearing was the first in a series of hearings on the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Video of the hearing [will be available online](#).

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