

## **Impact of Chesapeake Bay Watershed Cleanup on Residents, Local Governments Topic of Today's House Republican Policy Committee Hearing**

---

The economic affects of federal clean-up requirements for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, as well as the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) role in the project, were the topics of Tuesday's House Republican Policy Committee hearing.

"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. Mike Fleck (R-Huntingdon/Blair/Mifflin), co-chair of today's hearing. "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."

Testifiers included representatives of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, Pennsylvania Builders Association and local government officials.

Many of central Pennsylvania's streams and rivers flow into the Chesapeake Bay. These water resources, collectively known as the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, encompass more than 64,000 square miles and cross the borders of six states. Pennsylvania accounts for 34 percent of the watershed.

Under the 2005 Clean Water Act, new federal requirements were put into effect to improve the water quality in the Chesapeake Bay. To meet these requirements, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency worked with the affected states in the watershed to create maximum nutrient load (cap load). DEP secretary Kathleen McGinty signed the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, along with the other states located in the watershed. By agreeing to meet those federal requirements without providing proper funding, the administration created an unfunded government mandate on local governments.

DEP has given the municipalities along the tributary sources a deadline of 2010 to meet the requirements contained in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. The bulk of the clean-up costs have been placed on the shoulders of local municipalities and boroughs, with little to no funding assistance from the DEP.

"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/Mifflin) 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. Scott Perry (R-York/Cumberland) is 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,” 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/Mifflin/Snyder) 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.”

Tuesday’s hearing was the first in a series of hearings on the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Rep. Mike Fleck  
81st District  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

(814) 644-2996

(717) 787-3335

Contact: Tricia Graham

[tgraham@pahousegop.com](mailto:tgraham@pahousegop.com)

(717) 260-6296

Member Site: [www.RepFleck.com](http://www.RepFleck.com)

Caucus Site: [www.PAHouseGOP.com](http://www.PAHouseGOP.com)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 26, 2008