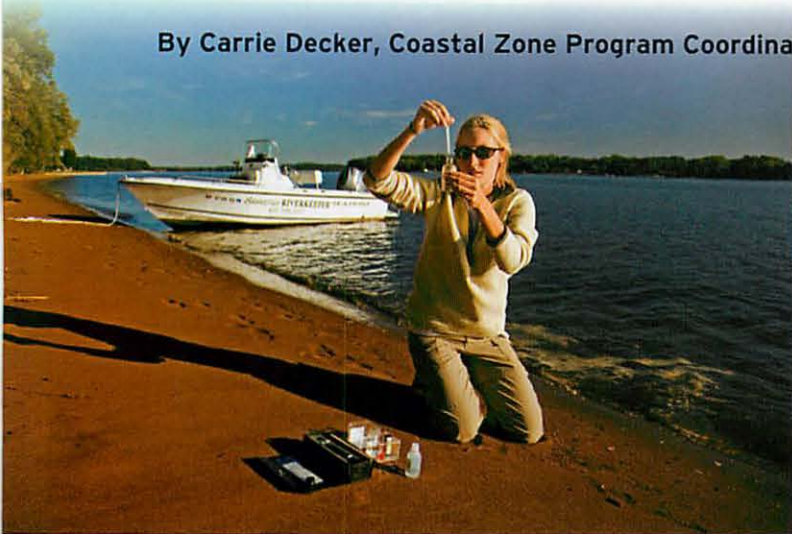


Watershed Assistance Collaborative: Working with Local Governments to Improve and Advance Water Quality in our Rivers and Bays

By Carrie Decker, Coastal Zone Program Coordinator, Maryland Department of Natural Resources



Protecting and restoring water quality and healthy habitat in our rivers and Bays is the responsibility of every local government, every business and every citizen. Marylanders are fortunate to enjoy the largest estuary in the United States and the many resources it provides; as such, we have a significant role to play in its successful restoration.

In 2009, Governor Martin O'Malley announced Maryland's commitment to an ambitious suite of 2-year milestones that will accelerate Maryland's on the ground efforts to reach its current nutrient reduction goals by a newly established end date of 2020. The milestones will also ensure greater accountability and allow for adjustments to programming when needed. See www.baystat.maryland.gov for more information.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) established the **Watershed Assistance Collaborative** in 2008 to connect local communities to the financial and technical resources they need to undertake comprehensive water quality projects in Maryland. The partnership includes DNR, the University of Maryland's SeaGrant Extension Center, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Maryland's Environmental Finance Center, and the Chesapeake Bay Trust. The Collaborative is funded in part by the EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program and NOAA's Coastal Zone Management Act.

By leveraging resources of existing programs, the Collaborative helps local governments develop the capacity and find the right technical and financial resources to implement their water quality goals. The Collaborative offers the following services:

❖ Resources: Watershed Assistance Grant Program

The Chesapeake Bay Trust provides funding to support watershed planning and design grants to local governments for future implementation projects. For 2009, the program provided \$200,000 in grants. Check the website at www.cbtrust.org for upcoming grant details, deadlines and eligibility.

❖ Support: Watershed Restoration Specialists

Three Specialists with the University of Maryland (UMD)

Extension Office are working directly with local partners to find, coordinate, and implement water quality protection and restoration projects: Jennifer Dindinger (Eastern Shore), Amanda Rockler (Central Maryland) and Jackie Takacs (Southern Maryland).

❖ Outreach and Capacity Building: UMD Environmental Finance Center

Staff is working to assist targeted communities with financing strategies and facilitation efforts on Chesapeake and Coastal Bays Trust Fund restoration projects, and planning activities. The Fund was created in 2007 to provide a dedicated source of funding to accelerate Bay restoration by focusing financial resources on the most effective nonpoint source pollution control projects. Over the past year, the Collaborative has worked with several local governments and watershed organizations.

"The Sassafras River Association has spent the past year developing a scientifically-based Sassafras Watershed Action Plan (SWAP) to serve as the blueprint for restoration efforts," says Kim Kohl, Executive Director of the Association. "Early on we identified key partners and funding through the Watershed Assistance Collaborative to support this effort. We could never have completed our plan in one year without the support of the Collaborative and our partners."

Collaborative Highlights in the Sassafras River over the last year include:

- Sassafras River Association received a **Watershed Assistance Grant Program** in the amount of \$35,000 for a comprehensive Watershed Action Plan, including finalizing the Characterization, Stream Corridor Assessment and Synoptic Survey with assistance from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Center for Watershed Protection, and Maryland Department of the Environment.
- UMD's Environmental Finance Center (EFC) provided pro bono work to **facilitate four stakeholder meetings** related to the Watershed Action Plan from February 2009 to January 2010.
- **UMD Sea Grant Extension** Regional Watershed Specialist (RWS) Jennifer Dindinger provides support and guidance to the Sassafras partners through the Core Team meetings. <http://www.mdsg.umd.edu/programs/extension/communities/watershed/specialists/>.
- UMD Environmental Finance Center researched and compiled a **Sassafras Watershed Action Plan Financing Recommendations document** (<http://www.efc.umd.edu/publications.html>) for key areas of restoration and protection activities in the watershed. ■

For more information please contact Carrie Decker at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources cdecker@dnr.state.md.us or 410/260-8723 or visit the website <http://dnr.maryland.gov/bay/czm/2010tfs.html>.