

Group Gives Ehrlich a 'D' for his Environmental Record

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A Maryland environmental group gave Governor Robert L. Ehrlich's administration a D on its report card for environmental performance during the last two years, blasting the governor's record on a host of issues ranging from water quality to land preservation.

Ehrlich, who received a D plus in the Maryland League of Conservation Voters previous report, for 2003-2004, was flagged for fighting air pollution legislation, not following Smart Growth principles, writing off certain waterways as too polluted to be cleaned up and not enforcing air and water violations.

"Governor Ehrlich's environmental record leaves a lot to be desired," said Cindy Schwartz, executive director of the league. "In short, this administration has slowed down environmental progress, fought against strong protections, and ignored and in some cases even exacerbated serious environmental problems."

Ehrlich's office dismissed the report as politically motivated.

"The league has had a longtime partisan agenda that has rendered them incapable of offering a fair and objective assessment of governor's accomplishments," said Ehrlich spokesman Henry Fawell.

The Maryland League of Conservation Voters describes itself as the non-partisan political voice of the environment.

Their report said that Ehrlich's poor performance on the environment comes against the backdrop of increasing development and population growth.

The group said that the governor failed to score better than a C on any single issue, which include air quality; water quality; energy; fisheries and wildlife; Smart Growth; transportation; land preservation and open space; and administration and appointments.

Ehrlich's past two scores "should give voters cause for serious concern at the ballot box," Schwartz and Charles Fox, chairman of the league's board of directors, wrote in a letter attached to the report. "Voters should seek a more steadfast environmental steward in the State House."

Former Gov. Parris Glendening, for the periods covering 1997 to 1998 and 1998 to 2001, received as grades a B and B+, respectively, according to the league.

Terry Harris, the league's political chair, said that Ehrlich, a Republican, and Glendening, a Democrat, differ most glaringly in their respective approaches to Smart Growth, Glendening's signature program intended to balance growth with land preservation. The report rips Ehrlich for not intervening against a planned \$1 billion development outside the Eastern Shore's Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. The governor has left the decision to the Cambridge City Council, which approved the undertaking last month.

"The hands off approach at the state level will lead us to local developments that are damaging across the state," Harris said.

But Fawell said that the people of Maryland don't want the state government interfering in local zoning decisions.

"Governor Ehrlich came into office committed to preserving environmentally sensitive lands while respecting local governments," he said.

The league also says the Department of Natural Resources revealed a proposal to drill state lands in order to sell water to private developers, although the Ehrlich camp denies the claim.

"There is no proposal whatsoever" and nor has "the governor ever endorsed such an action," said Fawell. "For the League of Conservation Voters to suggest otherwise is highly misleading and inappropriate."

Republicans tout land preservation as one of Ehrlich's signature achievements.

"The governor has a stellar record with preserving land in the state," said Audra Miller, state Republican Party spokeswoman, who noted that Ehrlich has preserved 60,000 acres of land while in office. "He has also made this year the most historic contribution of funds to Program Open Space in the histo