

Watershed group donates apparatus to state resource agency

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The Mattawoman Watershed Society recently donated a special measuring device to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to help with a water-quality monitoring project in Mattawoman Creek.

The given probe determines the water's electrical "conductance," a measure of how well the water conducts electricity. The higher the conductance, the more dissolved salts the water contains. "The additional probe will help us make comparisons among sub-watersheds with different types of land use," said Margaret McGinty with the state Fisheries Habitat and Ecosystem Program, a unit within the state Fisheries Service.

The team reported early results of the project at the annual conference of the Maryland Water Monitoring Council held in Timonium, Maryland on November 13th.

With over 500 participants from around the state, the well-attended conference highlighted advances in water monitoring and environmental trends.

By measuring the conductance at numerous locations in Mattawoman's river and tributaries, the team reported that more developed areas are associated with higher concentrations of dissolved salts. "We haven't determined the specific salts yet, but it's probably road salt because the higher conductance is correlated with higher road density," said Ken Hastings, a volunteer with MWS. Other research nationwide implicates road salts in elevating a stream's electrical conductance.

"This is another effect of urbanizing the land that sheds water to the Mattawoman," said Dr. Jim Long with MWS. "Elevated levels of salts in water are known to harm fish and the critters they eat. With Mattawoman at the tipping point for too much development, we hope that Charles County uses the ongoing revision of the comprehensive plan to better protect the Mattawoman."

The team expects to continue the water-measuring project into the future.

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