

Legendary Chesapeake Bay scientist to receive Mathias Medal

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SOLOMONS, MD (August 24, 2016)—Walter Boynton, longtime professor and estuarine ecologist at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science's Chesapeake Biological Laboratory and a fixture in the world of Chesapeake Bay science for more than 40 years, has been chosen to receive the Mathias Medal to recognize his distinguished career of scholarship and public service.

The award recognizes outstanding scientific research that contributes to informed environmental policy in the Chesapeake Bay region. It is awarded jointly by Maryland Sea Grant, Virginia Sea Grant, and the Chesapeake Research Consortium and is named for the late U.S. Senator Charles "Mac" Mathias of Maryland, who championed efforts to clean up the Bay.

"Over the last forty seven years, Walter has embodied what every good scientist should be – objective, passionate and engaged," said Tom Miller, director of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory. "These traits make him not only the one that his colleagues turn to for collaboration and advice, but also the one politicians and policy makers turn to when they want to understand the issues and get it right."

Boynton, a longtime resident of Prince Frederick, Md., was hailed by the selection board for his wide-ranging and foundational research, which has offered new insights into how the Bay's ecosystem works. Board members also applauded his work as a mentor for students and especially his efforts to educate the public about coastal science. Since the Mathias Medal was established in 1990, only six have been awarded.

Boynton coauthored one of the first scientific papers that implicated excess nitrogen washing into the Chesapeake from farms, parking lots, and other human sources as a key driver of the eutrophication process, which has damaged the Bay and other estuarine ecosystems worldwide. He and a variety of collaborators worked to persuade natural resource managers and policy makers to monitor nutrients in the Bay and to take bold actions to reduce nutrient loads. Eventually leaders responded with a series of management plans now credited with lowering amounts of nutrients in parts of the Chesapeake's vast watershed. Boynton helped to design the Chesapeake Bay Program's monitoring effort, which began in 1984 and is considered one of the best in the world.

Boynton's pioneering research about the Bay's ecosystem dynamics has also provided new understanding of the causes and ecological consequences of the decline of seagrasses. In addition, his research on the decline of the Bay's striped bass population contributed to the adoption of a fishing moratorium, which helped the population to rebound. More recently, Boynton published findings detailing how long-term management practices to reduce nutrients can lead directly to improvements in Chesapeake Bay ecosystems, as measured by higher abundance of seagrasses, clearer water, and smaller blooms of algae.

"Over many years, Walter has been an exemplar for the faculty of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science," said Don Boesch, president of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. "His dedication to leading-edge science and its effective communication and practical application for the benefit of society and world in which we live embodies everything this institution stands for."

Boynton's long list of influential public speaking and engagement projects includes advising members of Congress, Maryland's legislature, and local officials. He is known for his lively, friendly public speaking style that puts in simple terms both scientific concepts and the need to continue efforts to preserve the Bay. He regularly briefed the Calvert County Commission about trends in water quality around Solomons, Maryland, and he applied his knowledge as an ecologist while serving for 11 years on the county's Board of Appeals for zoning. He also spoke with citizens' groups, school teachers, college audiences, and journalists.

Located in southern Maryland, where the Patuxent River meets the Chesapeake Bay, the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory is the oldest publicly supported marine laboratory on the East Coast. Founded in 1925, it has long been a national leader in fisheries, environmental chemistry and toxicology, and ecosystem science and restoration ecology with a focus on whole ecosystem management and restoration. From developing successful fisheries management plans and breaking new ground in understanding how chemicals move between the atmosphere, sediments, and water to renowned work on nutrient dynamics and the food

web, the lab is developing new scientific approaches to solving environmental management problems that face our world.

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