

Letter from the Editor – Something worth saving

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Prince Frederick, MD - The latest numbers are out and there are reasons not to despair about the condition of Southern Maryland's waterways. The data released recently by the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) gives the Chesapeake Bay a passing grade of "C." Considering the estuary has previously received failing grades this average, tepid score does give those of us who love the water and live on it a reason to hope. Since the surrounding water is our responsibility, we earned this grade.

It's not enough to blame the usual culprits—those people who live to the north and south of us in the watershed who seem less concerned or the developers who have a penchant for building dwellings close to the water. There's enough work to be done that we all can render aid.

It should be noted that the Southern Maryland region's major tributaries the Patuxent and Potomac scored a D+ and C-, respectively. The center indicated that the rivers showed no improvement.

On their website, UMCES states that they offer "a variety of opportunities for the general public to peek into the science world and our part in it. Our labs open their doors to the public for free seminars hosted by visiting scholars and our own experts and our Visitors Center welcomes guests to learn about the health of the Chesapeake Bay, current research projects and more through videos and exhibits." Right in the heart of Southern Maryland is the university's Chesapeake Biological Laboratory. The Solomons facility hosts seminars called "Science for Citizens." The series held in the fall and spring begin at 7 p.m. Tuesdays at the Bernie Fowler Lab, 142 Williams Street. That may not seem and may truly not be convenient but claiming to not be real knowledgeable about the ecology is a lame excuse. Lamenting about the waterways' condition is not going to make it better. In a recent story posted on a Washington, DC area radio station's web site, UMCES' Dr. Bill Dennison exhorted anyone living in the watershed to become "citizen scientists. You can get down to the stream level," Dennison is quoted as saying. "To your backyard creek—and that citizen science initiative can get more eyes on the bay and the watershed."

Boaters, beach-goers, fishermen, watermen and farmers all have had their best practices spelled out for them. True, some of the mandates are controversial and will continue to be the subject of intense debate. Homeowners and average consumers also need to feel the pressure. Poorly maintained vehicles, homes (roofs, gutters, outdoor surfaces), lawns and landscape also hurt the waterways.

So, here's an idea. With summer just around the corner, all Southern Maryland residents and visitors should endeavor to make 2017 the best summer ever. Steam and eat those delicious hard shell crabs and dine on the tasty rockfish. Enjoy a day at a local beach (you might have to pay for access). Go for as many boat rides as you can book—either to fish or as a treat for your eyes. Take the whole family with you. It should convince you that the bay and the local rivers are truly worthy of your stewardship. These waters provide livelihoods and truly make life itself worth living. Helping perpetuate these treasured bodies of water is worth the effort. It's something we can all enjoy and leave to the coming generations.

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