



January 2008

Update from the Corsica River Conservancy (CRC) Board

Hello to all of our CRC members and to the residents and friends of our beautiful Corsica River Watershed. As we enter our third full year of existence as a chartered non-profit organization, it is gratifying to see that CRC membership has quickly grown to 300 members. In 2007 our members devoted more than 3000 hours to monitoring, restoring, preserving and building community awareness of our watershed. This is our semiannual update to report the status of the Corsica Restoration and other activities. For those of you who responded to our various outreach efforts, we thank you for your support and your continuing interest in the state of the Corsica watershed. For those of you just finding out about us, we ask that you visit us at our website, corsicariverconservancy.org, and join us in our mission to restore and preserve our watershed.

The bottom line for progress continues to be Water Quality. As measured by dissolved oxygen, clarity, bacteria count, and other variables such as chlorophyll content, the water quality of the Corsica River not only is essential to a healthy river, it is the prime indicator of the overall health of our entire 25,000 acre Corsica Watershed. You have probably read elsewhere that 2007 was not a good year for the Bay. Tributaries throughout the Bay, like the Corsica were plagued by extensive, nutrient fueled algae. This occurred, despite an extended drought that usually improves water clarity and promotes the growth of sunlight-loving underwater grasses.

From May through October CRC volunteers performed weekly monitoring of the Corsica's water quality. Our monitoring group grew to 18 volunteers in its third continuous year of operation. As in the past, CRC's weekly results were reported to state and federal data bases and posted on our CRC website. These measures supplemented those compiled by the state through its continuous monitoring sites along the river.

All of this monitoring produced similar results. In general, water clarity remained poor as in 2005 - 6. Chlorophyll (an indicator of algae blooms) was in the "good" range in less than 10% of the River – a worse result than in previous years. Dissolved Oxygen was slightly better than in previous years but remains near the critical limit for healthy fish populations. These and other results can be seen in numerical and graphic detail at our website.

Obviously, we would like to have seen improved results in water quality. However, we must be realistic in our expectations. We have completed just the second year in the five year Corsica Restoration Project. We know improvements in water quality take time. Improvements in management of the Corsica River Watershed have been considerable and will impact water quality eventually. How long that takes and in what ways it manifests itself is part of what the Corsica Restoration can help demonstrate for Bay restoration in general.

The CRC Board believes there are encouraging aspects of this past year's monitoring. First, the Corsica had no fish kill events in 2007. In 2005 and 2006, the Corsica experienced extensive fish kills due to abundant and toxic algae blooms. In those years, the Corsica was among only a few rivers that had fish kills. In 2007 there were many fish kills all around the Bay but none here. We take that as an encouraging sign. Second, while water clarity was the one key indicator that showed poorer results early in the season, CRC monitoring late in the season showed improved clarity matching that of previous years, reaching over one meter in some areas.

Finally, another bright spot in water quality was the infrequent occurrence of dangerous bacteria levels in the Corsica. CRC is the one organization that is monitoring bacteria through the water contact season as part of its water testing program in order to assure the River is safe for human contact. With the assistance of state Department of Health laboratory analyses, only three occasions having excessive bacteria were noted in 2007 and these always follow significant rainfalls which wash pet, farm animal and wildlife wastes into the river.

The key to improved water quality in the long term is Restoration throughout the watershed. The flagship CRC restoration effort at this time is the **rain garden program** that our volunteers have been promoting along with the help of the Alliance for the Chesapeake and the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) using a substantial grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. A total of 33 rain gardens have been installed at residences throughout our watershed. Rain barrels have been installed on five other properties. Another 40 rain gardens are planned for the upcoming season. Word continues to spread about how this program can protect the River and tributaries from excessive runoff while also establishing a beautiful and natural landscape feature around the home. Our goal is to install at least 200 residential rain gardens over the three-year program. We need your participation and help to spread this program to as many residences in our watershed as possible (contact: debbiep@dapelectric.com).

In September the large rain garden at the rear of the Centreville Library was formally dedicated. This garden was established through a partnership with QAC's Department of Public Works (DPW) and QAC Master Gardeners. This garden is an excellent demonstration site and continues to draw high levels of interest from Library visitors. DPW will establish a similar storm water facility at the County Senior Center in Centreville.

Speaking of the County, there have been some significant strides made in restoration in that sector. Public Works completed its Low Impact Development Manual to guide future construction in the county to minimize **storm water runoff**. This effort was funded through an EPA/MDE grant and anticipates new storm water regulations that will soon be implemented by the State under the title, Environmental Site Design (ESD). Earlier in the year, CRC proposed to Public Works that they apply for a similar grant for 2008 that would fund the pilot construction of bioswales as another storm water management technique. Current plans are to use that grant in coordination with the Town to construct a bioswale at the end of Chesterfield Avenue where storm water currently runs directly into the Corsica.

The County also has been working with the Town of Centreville to develop the new Centreville Community Plan that will guide future development in the area over the next five years. CRC members participated in the Citizens Advisory Committee for that effort which is now moving towards final approval by the County Commissioners and Town Council. The restoration of the Corsica, and specifically the provisions of the Corsica Watershed Restoration Strategy (WRAS) figure prominently throughout that plan. This is extremely important for the future impact of land use on the Corsica.

County Commissioners also approved an amendment to the Master Water and Sewer Plan that will require denitrifying septic systems in all new construction within the Critical Areas of the County, including the Corsica. CRC strongly endorsed this amendment proposed by the Chester River Association.

The Town of Centreville is making excellent progress in planning and actually implementing several projects to restore buffers and improve the management of storm water flowing from the town into the Corsica. Chris Clark continues as the Town's full time Corsica Watershed Manager and a driving force behind these efforts, as well as a member of the CRC Board. The Environmental Committee established by the Town is also taking substantial steps in recommending new policies to improve the health of the watershed. CRC volunteers are working closely with the Watershed Manager and DNR to further increase community awareness and participation.

CRC is happy to report that a possible timber harvest in open space bordering the Claiborne Fields, Three Creeks and Lently Farm communities will not go forward. This is a particularly sensitive environment including a pristine stream that feeds the River. It is reassuring to know that the soils in this area will not be disturbed and that the forest canopy will be preserved as is.

Another CRC initiative was to request that the historic Corsica River oyster bars that are being restored also be protected by being given sanctuary status. DNR and the Oyster Recovery Partnership considered and granted this request. We need to do everything possible to increase the number of filter feeders in the River. Oysters have been the historical mainstay in filtering but other species such as menhaden and mussels can make very significant contributions as we witnessed in 2004.

The last item of restoration we want to address here is Agriculture – and it continues to be the most significant of course. The biggest initiative in this area is the Cover Crop program which aims to cover as many acres as possible during late fall and winter with grains that take up excess nutrients and minimize runoff into tributaries and ground water. The results for expanding the number of acres put under this practice in 2007 were excellent.

Our County Soil Conservation District has also promoted a program for better horse pasture management and manure management. They have held workshops at various horse farms throughout the watershed and will continue to do so in the coming year.

CRC made a concerted effort in the last year to develop its program for **Education and Public Information**. We now have a PowerPoint presentation that describes the situation in the Corsica and how each person living in the watershed or using the River can contribute to its restoration. This program has been presented to a variety of interested community groups including the Rotary Club, Symphony Village, Lions Club, American Legion, Gunston Day School, Methodist Men, and Kennard School. Anyone interested in hosting a CRC presentation for their group should contact (Jmalara@intercom.net).

CRC is continuing to look for opportunities to present forums for public information and discussion of the Restoration as well as expositions of the science underlying the restoration effort. In October members took part in a CRC sponsored educational tour of restoration work at Poplar Island. Look for other educational opportunities as they are announced at **www.corsicariverconservancy.org**.

CRC continued its **Outreach** program to build community awareness and involvement by participating in various community events with its exhibits and outreach volunteers. CRC had exhibits at this fall's Eastern Shore Heritage Day, and the Tributary Team/CBEC Wade-in.

Of course our biggest boost to awareness and involvement was our second Corsica River Awareness Day held at Bloomfield Farm in September. The size and quality of the event exceeded even the high expectations we had based on 2006. Over 400 people came out on a spectacular Fall day to see over thirty exhibits describing aspects of the restoration and opportunities for residents to participate in it. Video segments of the event are being shown on QACTV. The outstanding response has encouraged us to go forward and schedule another Awareness Day for Saturday, September 20 – put it on your calendars now.

We are also planning an event together with the Corsica River Yacht Club and the County to help usher in the summer. This event will provide an opportunity to get out and enjoy the River and see some of the restoration efforts going on at the County's beautiful Conquest Preserve – much of which includes Corsica River shoreline. There will also be an opportunity to see and experience some of the ways to enjoy the River at the CRYC facility at Ship Point on the Corsica. Look for an announcement about the event set for June 21.

These are a few of the developments that make up our watershed community. CRC is trying to get each community to have a presence in the Restoration by having volunteer representation and an informal communication network. Most have a tributary running in or near their community that needs to be "adopted". Anyone interested in helping to form these groups, should contact CRC.

CRC welcomes three new members to its Board for 2008. Lou Armstrong is a resident of Centreville Heights and has been a volunteer water tester. His professional background is in Education. Rob Babbitt is a long time town resident with extensive planning experience including serving in several volunteer positions in Centreville Town governance. Debbie Pusey has coordinated our Stormwater and Rain Garden programs and has led the CRC Outreach efforts. These new Directors join our current group to give CRC leadership broad representation throughout the watershed. CRC will endeavor to maintain and increase that representation in the future as its membership has grown to encompass all residents of the watershed, as well as many who visit or work here.

The Year Ahead - Raising Our Voice for the Corsica. The State is beginning its legislative session as we write this update. Thus far, funding for the State's Corsica Restoration Project has been sustained as Governor O'Malley directed other budget reductions, while the actions of the recently concluded special legislative session focused on revenue. In late July, CRC sent a detailed letter to the Governor and to his Bay Cabinet explaining why the Corsica project should be continued. We received a positive response to the letter and were even more pleased, of course, to see the budget preserved. The letter is posted at www.corsicariverconservancy.org.

The Upper Eastern Shore Tributary Team has included the Corsica Restoration as one of its priority programs to address with its upcoming legislative meeting with the Eastern Shore Delegation in February, as well as its briefing to the Environmental Matters Committee. That Committee helped get approval for a new, annual fund to address Bay restoration needs during the recent special legislative session. That fund is slated at \$50 million/year. The Tributary Team is proposing that these funds be targeted to watershed level projects like the Corsica with a focus on local participation and results.

One of the most significant things that we are demonstrating here in the Corsica is that **it takes a community to save a watershed**. A healthy watershed is not only great for the River, it is great for all of us living here who treasure our quality of life and precious natural resources. This is your place. Speak up for the preservation of what we have and the restoration of what we've lost!

Sincerely,
Corsica River Conservancy Board of Directors

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Jim Malaro, Vice President

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