

# Talbot Creekwatchers hear Bay conditions report

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**ST. MICHAELS** —The Chesapeake Bay is not in the greatest shape, but it could be worse. On the other hand, the state of the Bay could become much worse if governments in the extensive watershed fail to take real action.

That was the main message conveyed to the annual gathering of the Talbot County Creekwatchers on Wednesday afternoon at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels. The address was given by Margaret Vivian of Wittman who serves as the grassroots coordinator for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Heart of the Chesapeake Program.

Vivian hit the basics, such as the size of the Bay's watershed (64,000 sq. miles), and the ratio of land area to water volume, which is the highest in the world (meaning that the area of land included in the watershed is enormous —from West Virginia to New York).

She also went over the basics element behind water pollution. For example, too much nitrogen in the water creates a eutropic system, or an environment where all the wrong kinds of organisms receive too much nourishment. Declining oxygen supply in the water leads to dead zones, or oxygen-destitute areas where fish can no longer breathe.

Vivian showed a map of the Bay, and asked why the biggest dead zone was adjacent to mainland Maryland.

"More junk goes in from the western shore," repeated Vivian. "A very scientific answer. I like that one."

But it's wrong, according to Vivian —the rotation of the Earth on its axis is what is actually responsible.

What can be done to improve the health of the Bay?

She pointed to the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement, or C2K for short, as one major initiative. While not all states in the watershed have signed off on C2K, she said, polls indicate strong public support for the initiative, with one poll showing 60 percent rating pollution of the Bay as a more severe problem than health care or education.

Bay restoration, however, is getting close to the CBF's goal —a score of 40, or the level of environmental health circa 1960. The CBF scoring system is based on 100 points —where 100 represents the Bay as John Smith found it ("That's probably never going to happen," she said.) The Bay scored a 29 in 2006.

“The system needs help, but it also has a great resilience and an ability to repair itself if it’s given the opportunity,” Vivian said.

Helping the system requires making priorities, such as figuring out what kind of pollution can be most economically controlled.

Vivian said agricultural run-off and not stormwater runoff is where “you get the most bang for your buck.”

But also working to make drainage areas “a green filter” (where water filters through the vegetation) rather than “a gray tunnel” (where water drains off parking lots and storm drains) is also important.

Vivian also pointed to CBF’s current priorities —establishing a Green Fund and restoring native oysters —and said that a past priority, establishing regional planning authorities, “met with a lot of resistance” and has temporarily fallen by the wayside.

She pointed to two bills —House Bill 133, the Native Oyster Restoration Act, and HB 1220, to establish a \$130 million fund for Bay restoration —as examples of political action that can be taken in Annapolis.

She commended the Creekwatchers for amassing the scientific data that may lead to environmental-friendly policy decisions and encouraged them to lobby their local officials.