



Press Release

January 19, 2012
For Immediate Release

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Two-thirds of Maryland Voters Support Bay Restoration Fund Increase; Large Majority of Voters – Even in Rural Areas – Support Restrictions on Septics

Poll Shows Strong Commitment to Clean Water and State Management of Growth

ANNAPOLIS, MD — Demonstrating strong support for improving Maryland waterways even in difficult economic times, nearly two-thirds of Maryland voters support increasing the Bay Restoration Fund, currently funded through an annual \$30 household fee, and large majorities believe the State should actively manage growth and restrict septic systems, according to a poll released today.

The polling results underscore the importance Maryland voters place on continuing to clean up the state's waters. Nine voters in 10 agreed it is important to take actions to make the Chesapeake Bay and local streams clean and healthy. Hearing that the Bay is in fact making progress towards clean water goals, three-quarters of voters surveyed agreed that "we need to do even more for the Bay to finish the job."

A memo about the poll notes that this support level is significant because "Maryland voters today have a strong underlying skepticism about public spending and taxes."

Erik Michelsen, Executive Director of the South River Federation, said, "We know Marylanders want the Bay and our streams to be clean and healthy. What the polling makes clear is that Marylanders are willing to spend more on clean water projects like upgrading wastewater treatment plants and reducing polluted stormwater runoff – even in these difficult economic times."

Alison Prost, Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Maryland Executive Director, added: "Maryland voters also support the state doing more to regulate septic systems as a way to reduce pollution. Even in rural areas we see strong support for stricter regulations."

The poll's findings include:

- Nine out of ten voters (91 percent) say it is extremely, very, or somewhat important to them “to take the actions necessary to make the Chesapeake Bay and local streams clean and healthy.”
- Having heard the Bay is halfway to its goal, three-quarters (77 percent) of voters think “we need to do even more for the Bay to finish the job.”
- Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of voters would spend more tax dollars to make the waters safe and healthy “if State leaders and scientists said more tax dollars were needed.”
- Sixty-four percent of voters support an increase in the Bay Restoration Fund, after being reminded it comes from a \$30/month household fee, “to finish upgrading major wastewater treatment plants and provide local governments with money to reduce polluted stormwater runoff and complete other water quality projects.”
- Knowing that the Bay Restoration Fund is a dedicated fee and has clear goals, deadlines, and accountability makes voters more willing to support it.
- Eight voters in ten (80 percent) want the State to have an active role in managing growth, with 40 percent wanting that role to be “very active.”
- Three-quarters (76 percent) of Maryland voters support the idea of “smart growth,” which directs growth away from less-developed areas and towards places that already have services such as schools, hospitals, and transportation.
- Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of voters support legislation that would tighten regulations on septic systems, and a similar large majority (69 percent) would limit the number of houses in rural areas that have septic systems in order to help clean up local waters.
- Voters in areas with more use of septic systems – in the more rural counties of Western Maryland, Southern Maryland, and the Eastern Shore – are nearly as supportive of restrictions on septic systems as voters statewide. Sixty-two percent of respondents in the rural counties support tightening regulations on septic systems and 57 percent of voters in those areas support limiting the number of septic systems.

The poll by OpinionWorks, an Annapolis-based firm, was conducted December 11-15, 2011, and surveyed 801 registered voters statewide. It was commissioned by the Clean Water, Healthy Families Coalition. View the detailed poll report [here](#).

Dru Schmidt-Perkins, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Maryland, said, “This poll clearly shows that Maryland voters are willing to invest in healthy waters, and they want the State to take action. Over the next three months, we hope members of the General Assembly are listening to their constituents and are ready to show their commitment to finishing the job of cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay and our local waters.”

In the 2012 General Assembly Session, the [Clean Water, Healthy Families Coalition](#) is advocating for legislation to meet the following goals: finish upgrading the wastewater treatment plants that Maryland has already committed to upgrade; ensure that local governments have resources to reduce polluted stormwater runoff and implement their local clean water plans; reduce pollution from poorly planned development – including limiting septic systems; and require a standard to make sure wastewater is better treated, so it can be safely released back into the environment.

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The members of the Clean Water, Healthy Families Coalition are: 1,000 Friends of Maryland, Anacostia Watershed Society, Audubon Naturalist Society, Blue Water Baltimore, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Chester River Association, Clean Water Action, Environment Maryland, Maryland League of Conservation Voters; Mid-shore Riverkeeper Conservancy, Patuxent Riverkeeper, Sierra Club, South River Federation, and West/Rhode Riverkeeper. More information is available at www.cleanwaterhealthyfamilies.org.