

October 9, 2023
Governor Wes Moore
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

Dear Governor Moore:

We are writing to request your help protecting one of Maryland's important ecological and economic assets, Mattawoman Creek. We think you could swiftly set in motion and empower the professional expertise of the State to rescue Mattawoman Creek from accelerated degradation from development by resuscitating the State's smart growth policies. A brake on decisions going in the wrong direction for Mattawoman would give local governments a chance to better understand the economic benefits of keeping Mattawoman Creek's living resources productive. Mattawoman Creek's watershed, natural resources, and people need the State to return to smart growth principles to prevent avoidable costly environmental damage from polluted runoff.

Mattawoman is 76% in Charles County and the remainder is in Prince George's County. It is the most endangered watershed in Charles County and needs immediate attention. Scientists in state and federal agencies studies of Mattawoman is a historical record that is scientifically valuable. If policies responsive to existing watershed science are pursued, it is still possible to keep Mattawoman from becoming another river lost to over-development.

Mattawoman Creek is highly valued for its living resources. It is positioned strategically between our Nation's Capital and Mallovs Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary. It has a deep indigenous history and is beloved by naturalists for its still vital living resources, by fishermen for its national Bass tournaments, and for its positive contributions to the Potomac River, and the Chesapeake Bay.

The town of Indian Head and Western Charles County present a great tourism opportunity. Mattawoman and Nanjemoy watersheds have remarkably intact natural resources, environmental sensitivity, and excellent location. This area is functioning as a natural biodiversity reserve south of Washington, greatly magnifying its value.

In the 2000s and 2010s, the State used its smart growth authority to prod Charles County way from a high development future for Mattawoman Creek's watershed in recognition of its ecological and economic value. The State made innovative recommendations with great potential to reduce the negative effects of development on natural resources that were incorporated into Charles County's 2016 Comprehensive Plan. 1 Unfortunately, the previous administration abandoned smart growth, leading to poor implementation and enforcement. State clearinghouse comments, in general, were not scientifically rigorous 2.

Charles County's Comprehensive Plan, which benefited so greatly from State help, is not being implemented effectively. One major innovation of this joint county, state,

and federal effort to plan for growth in Mattawoman Creek's watershed was the Watershed Conservation District (WCD). It potentially offered a high degree of protection of its natural resources by limiting further development of forests in Mattawoman Creek's watershed. The WCD is being dismantled through the zoning process.

Stormwater is a growing source of pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. The 2023 CESR report notes that "Given the competition for urban land, BMP implementation opportunities are often limited and exceedingly expensive." This aligns with Charles County's stormwater implementation plan found there weren't enough places to retrofit stormwater controls to achieve nutrient reduction goals. The bottom-line goal of the CESR report was preserving living resources and the most cost-effective way to do that for Mattawoman Creek is through sound implementation of its Comprehensive Growth Plan, and review the process of the many WCD removals. (Two such WCD removals are in the planning process right now.) Mattawoman Creek served as an example of a restored estuary in the CESR report, but that status is threatened by the unraveling of the WCD and other poor decisions that facilitate growth without adequate control of polluted runoff.

There is an opportunity for Federal, State, and local governments to cooperate in forming symbiotic economic and conservation strategies. The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, the upcoming US Fish and Wildlife Refuge (which includes all of Mattawoman), the Navy's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration, Maryland's Open Space, Rural Legacy, and other protection tools support the conservation direction. These programs should be optimized for achieving the living resources protection goals, which will also improve the quality of life for the residents.

The State of Maryland has recognized the importance of Mattawoman for decades with significant open space investments in the protection of its forests and wetlands, rooted in the long scientific history of state and federal Mattawoman studies. Perhaps the right carrot, and stick approach could lead to a better and more widespread understanding of the connection between forest retention, healthy watersheds, and an improved and sustainable economy that prioritizes safeguarding climate protection.

Mattawoman Creek's resources and people need the State to return to smart growth principles to prevent costly environmental damage from forest loss and polluted runoff. We hope that with the help of the deep knowledge of your Bay Cabinet, your attention to Mattawoman Creek can make a significant difference for the people of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Bick
Mattawoman Watershed Society

Dean Naujoks
Potomac Riverkeeper

1 In 2012, a Maryland DNR-initiated Inter-Agency State-Federal Task Force produced the report: "The Case for Protection of the Watershed Resources of Mattawoman Creek."

https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/Documents/tredmanAlliance_Presentation.pdf

2 MDE did not comment on the Bryans Road Sub-Area Plan: The approval process is proceeding without appropriate MDE review. Attached are the MDE State Clearinghouse comments on the BR Sub-area Plan. While the comments are labeled Bryans Road, they refer to an unrelated project. We request that MDE be given a chance to comment on the BR Sub-area Plan. The DNR State Clearinghouse comments are also attached. Their comments show a significant concern for Mattawoman Creek, and the fish nursery. The strength of the DNR comments highlights the insufficient attention invested by previous MDE leadership, on this project and others that removed the WCD. Unfortunately, during the BR Consultants presentations and Planning Commission process, there was no recognition or discussion of the DNR/Mattawoman comments, concerns, or understanding of the proposed plan for the future of Mattawoman Creek.