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PENNSYLVANIA UNVEILS DRAFT CHESAPEAKE BAY TRIBUTARY STRATEGY

Pennsylvania Bringing New, Innovative Tools to Water Quality Improvement Efforts

HARRISBURG: Environmental Protection Deputy Secretary Cathy Curran Myers today unveiled Pennsylvania's Draft Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy, outlining the state's plan to address nutrient and sediment pollution in the 13 sub-basins that make up the Susquehanna and Potomac Watersheds.

"The strategy demonstrates that by taking many small steps in each community to clean up Pennsylvania's watersheds, we can accumulate 50 million pounds of nutrient reduction and meet the challenging goals Pennsylvania accepted in the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement," Myers said. "More encouraging is the real water quality improvements being made in the Susquehanna, where all DEP monitoring stations are showing a trend of reduced levels of nitrogen, indicating we are on the right track."

Myers made the announcement at the Citizens Advisory Council of the Chesapeake Bay Program in State College, Centre County, explaining that the draft tributary strategy organizes and calculates the water quality benefits of multiple best management practices—from improved storm-water management and urban street sweeping in our towns, to forested streamside buffers and phosphate-reducing livestock feeds in our rural communities.

The practices encompass reductions from all sources including agriculture, urban, forestland, open land and wastewater treatment plants, as well as septic systems and emissions from the air that are deposited in streams.

“Each watershed and community will be asked to identify local projects that will contribute toward the goal,” Myers said. “If everyone does something somewhere to reduce nutrients in the watershed, we can be confident of success.”

More than 88 percent of Pennsylvania’s nutrient loads originate from nonpoint sources such as agriculture, storm-water runoff and dirt and gravel roads. Consequently, a major focus of Pennsylvania’s tributary strategy is on reductions in nonpoint source nutrient loads. The reverse is true in neighboring Maryland and Virginia, where a relatively small number of large sewage treatment plants are the point sources that drive their tributary strategies.

“The best tributary strategy is the one that best fits the land, communities and sources of nutrients of each watershed,” Myers said. “Our rollout of Pennsylvania’s strategy will match effective nutrient reduction practices with the communities and landscape of each watershed.”

Point source dischargers in Pennsylvania’s portion of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed also will be challenged with reducing nutrient loads delivered to the Bay by more than 3 million pounds. Annual load limits will be established based upon 2010 projected flows and a performance level of 8 ml/l for nitrogen and 1 mg/l for phosphorus.

Pennsylvania also is helping to bring new and innovative tools to this task. DEP is developing a nutrient trading program that will provide a market-based approach allowing Pennsylvania to address quicker and cheaper the challenges of the draft tributary strategy. The nearly 150 significant point source dischargers, representing about 98 percent of Pennsylvania’s point source load, may choose to meet their load caps through operational or technical upgrades or by acquiring nutrient reduction credits from other sources who made extra reductions.

In addition, expanding facilities can install equipment to cost effectively reduce more nutrients than required, and sell the extra reduction credits to facilities where similar reductions would be expensive. Similarly, smaller facilities may choose to reduce nutrients in collaboration with a farm neighbor by installing agricultural improvements instead of treatment plant improvements.

Governor Edward G. Rendell’s plan to protect Agriculture, Communities and Rural Environment, or ACRE, which was announced Aug. 10, will stimulate major nutrient reductions

from the agricultural sector by expanding nutrient management activities and targeting agriculturally impaired streams. ACRE will nearly double the number of farms with comprehensive nutrient management plans covering both nitrogen and phosphorus, and will establish minimum setbacks or buffers from all streams where no manure can be applied. CAOs and CAFOs will be required to set up either a 100-foot setback or a 35-foot vegetative buffer from water bodies, and farms that import manure must meet the same setback and buffer requirements as the farm that produces the manure.

Many of the 4,000 miles of streams in the Commonwealth designated as agriculturally impaired are located in the drainage of the Chesapeake Bay. A robust, collaborative agriculturally impaired watershed initiative between DEP and the Department of Agriculture will provide outreach to farmers so that all can better understand the linkages between farm practices and water quality challenges and practical solutions. The initiative also will direct existing cost sharing and technical assistance programs to promote best management practices included in the tributary strategy.

Governor Rendell's Growing Greener II proposal would provide about \$20 million in cost-sharing incentives to encourage wastewater treatment facilities to voluntarily install nitrogen reduction technology. Other sources of funding such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the Pennsylvania Energy Harvest grant program provide financial support for agricultural practices targeted by the strategy.

Public meetings will be scheduled throughout the summer and fall to receive comment on the strategy and recommendations for new program initiatives to put it into action. A final strategy will be published in December.

For more information on Pennsylvania Tributary Strategies, visit DEP's Web site at www.dep.state.pa.us, Keyword: "Chesapeake Bay."

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