

September 2, 2008

For Immediate Release

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ENVIRONMENTALISTS SUPPORT ANTI-POLLUTION MEASURE

Proposed Plan to Stop Polluted Stormwater Could Be Model for Watershed

Regional and national environmental groups today praised the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and Montgomery County today for a significant proposal that sets specific limits for a vexing and worrisome water pollution problem: the discharge of polluted rainwater into lakes, stream and rivers.

“This proposal represents real progress to reduce the polluted water that runs off streets, parking lots and other surfaces and into nearby waters,” said Lee Epstein, director of lands programs for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. “It contains much of what’s needed to clean up our rivers and streams. We are hopeful a final version of the proposal will be a model for the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed.”

MDE today proposed a tougher standards for controlling stormwater in Montgomery County, a heavily populated county outside Washington, D.C. The standards, in the form of a draft permit required by federal law, in effect would put the county on a pollution diet. The draft must be approved after a period for public comment and review.

This permit represents a smart investment in the long-term economic health of our county,” said Nancy Stoner, co-director of the Natural Resources Defense Council’s Water Resources Program, and a resident of Montgomery County. “Businesses, as well as families, will want to move to a county with clean creeks and rivers.”

Representatives of the Audubon Naturalist Society, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Anacostia Watershed Society, working with a network

of 22 environmental and watershed groups that together represent 55,000 Montgomery County residents, began advocating in 2005 for a stormwater pollution permit with specific pollutant limits and enforceable deadlines. The existing stormwater permit, issued for the past ten years, was rejected by the environmental and citizen groups as too lax.

“Our clean local streams are critical for the safety and purity of our drinking water supply, and for our kids to safely wade in them, but we’ve been watching these streams go down the tubes from stormwater pollution, despite the efforts of Montgomery County to monitor and maintain stormwater controls,” said Diane Cameron, conservation director for the Audubon Naturalist Society.

“This draft permit is an important step,” Cameron added. “It puts pollution prevention first. It also offers an opportunity for MDE to set specific deadlines for county compliance when it issues the final permit.”

The draft permit requires developers to use low-impact, environmentally-sound designs for new developments, and for the county to substantially enhance its own efforts to fix problems in streams that are already degraded or becoming so. Montgomery County stormwater drains into the Potomac, Patuxent and Anacostia rivers.

“We have been striving to clean up the heavily-polluted Anacostia River so that it’s clean enough for boating every day of the year. Yet, the existing stormwater permit didn’t direct Montgomery County to establish cleanup targets or deadlines that would require tougher stormwater controls. The final permit from MDE could be tough enough to put us on track to restore our degraded waters,” said Jim Connolly, acting president of the Anacostia Watershed Society.

Rain running off streets and parking lots and rooftops is a significant problem for the region’s streams and rivers. Stormwater carries with it harmful pollutants such as nitrogen and phosphorus, various oil products and heavy metals, as well as dirt. In many areas around the region these pollutants run quickly and directly into waterways. Montgomery County has done more than many jurisdictions to try to stop this pollution but as the county grows streams are becoming increasingly polluted..