

EDITOR'S NOTE: Senator Cardin writes periodic columns for Maryland publications. The following column about the need to strengthen efforts to clean up the Chesapeake Bay may be of interest to your readers. Please contact Susan Sullam at susan_sullam@cardin.senate.gov if you have any questions.

PRECEDE: Senator Cardin is a member of five Senate committees: Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Environment and Public Works, Budget, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. His web site is: cardin.senate.gov. He also can be found at YouTube.com/SenatorCardin

IT IS TIME TO STRENGTHEN EFFORTS TO CLEAN UP AND RESTORE THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

By U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

The Chesapeake Bay is our nation's largest estuary, and Maryland's greatest natural resource. As Chairman of the Water and Wildlife Subcommittee of the Committee on Environment and Public Works, one of my top priorities this year will be to reauthorize the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Chesapeake Bay Program. To that end, I recently held a field hearing in Annapolis to closely examine the effectiveness of the Chesapeake Bay Program and what steps are needed to make it more effective.

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to more than 17 million people, with tributaries in Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. Unfortunately, the Chesapeake Bay Program – a 25-year partnership between federal and state governments aimed at restoring the health of the Bay – has been unable to meet its own goals for improving the health of the Bay.

A recent report by the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science has found that the ecological health of the Chesapeake Bay remains poor. The Bay and its tributaries are unhealthy primarily due to pollution from excess nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment. The main sources of these pollutants are agriculture, urban and suburban runoff, wastewater from sewage treatment plants and airborne contaminants.

There are many reasons for the decline of the Bay's water quality and why it is time for significant changes in the Chesapeake Bay Program. In the last 25 years, there has been a 40 percent increase in the number of people living in the Bay's watershed. We've seen the amount of impervious surfaces -- hardened landscapes that funnel polluted water into our streams and rivers -- increase by 100 percent and we are losing approximately 100 acres of forest land every day in the watershed. We need better and more powerful tools for the Bay Program partners to make major progress.

At the hearing, I stressed that all sectors are going to have to do more. Much of the pollution entering the Bay comes from agricultural runoff. In 2008, we enacted the Farm Bill, which contains major increases in Bay conservation funding. While that was an

important step, we need to do more to halt the runoff of chicken waste, manure and other fertilizers from farms into our waterways. We also need to closely examine the problem of wastewater treatment plants. There are 483 major municipal and industrial wastewater treatment plants in the watershed, many of which need significant upgrades to remove pollution, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus. Polluted runoff from suburban lawns and city streets is a growing problem that demands a strong response.

This past year, the Chesapeake Bay Program celebrated its 25th anniversary. The Program has much to be proud of and we would have experienced much worse degradation of the Bay without it. But it's time to reshape the Program and develop new strategies based on sound science and technologies that will help us achieve our goal of fully restoring the Bay and its tributaries. The Chesapeake Bay is Maryland's greatest natural treasure and we have an obligation protect and preserve it for future generations.

--##--