

# The Patuxent Current

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The Newsletter of the Patuxent **RIVERKEEPER**



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*News for and about the river...*

## Advocacy Changes the Status Quo

An editorial by Fred Tutman, Patuxent **RIVERKEEPER**

The water quality in our river isn't getting any better. If we maintain the status quo, and do business as usual—it means the Patuxent will keep going downhill steadily. Sure enough, if the definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result, then we would be nuts to think that our current stewardship of the Patuxent will result in real improvements in water quality, more abundant crab or oyster harvests or a sustainable watershed ecosystem. Yet, the controversy surrounding the future of our watershed is not about the root causes of its ills. We know the causes. The real contest is one of public will—between those who want to save the river and those who have other priorities. Actually, I've never met anyone who was *against* cleaning up the river. More often I meet people every day who just don't know what can be done and who fear that there will never be enough "public/political will" to stop polluting our waterways. And while we are proud that our river cleanups are getting bigger annually, it is disheartening each year to know that next year, the river will be just as "trashy". Somehow our standards have changed from an ideal of having a clean river, to one where we measure our pride and our progress by the endless amounts of trash we remove. So, if we don't fix the problems then we'll obviously never be done cleaning it up. That is why Riverkeepers pursue advocacy oriented solutions to watershed problems. I like to think we go after problems and not symptoms. We try to avoid falling into the trap of following the path of least resistance (following the funding?). Environmental organizations too often do the tasks for which funding can easily be found—invariably this is the stuff that simply maintains the status quo. This risks leaving the necessary tasks undone. For example, we all spend lots of (continued



Cleanup Volunteers pull discarded carpet out of the river

## 2005 Clean-up Results!

The 2005 Annual Patuxent Cleanup was a watershed-wide success this past April, thanks to the efforts of over 500 volunteers in seven counties. Most sites participated on April 9th with some holding cleanup events either earlier or later in the month. Citizens hauled several tons of trash and manmade debris from the Patuxent. The "stats" include about 24 sites that pulled over 600 bags of trash, plus 2 dumpster loads and 12 pick-up trucks of bottles, cans, household and bulk litter. As in past years, the leading bulk items were auto tires, grocery carts and household appliances, including items such as propane tanks, space heaters, carpeting, foam insulation and auto parts of nearly every kind. The Riverkeeper organization sends a heartfelt thanks to the many people and organizations who make this possible. See you again next year! Watch the clean-up web site for related news and updates: [www.cleanpatuxent.org](http://www.cleanpatuxent.org)

## Two New Patrol Boats!

The Patuxent Riverkeeper patrols the river using kayaks, canoes, motor boats and airplanes. Now two new motorized water craft will join our fleet. A recent donation from the **Chaney Foundation** will fund the cost of a light weight and shallow draft "skiff" for use in the shallower reaches near the middle of the river. Also, after a year of using borrowed boats, a wholly owned 23 foot motor boat has been provided by a supporter. The new boat is being painted, and serviced and will be docked at a donated slip near Benedict, MD for deeper water patrols in the South Patuxent.



## Patuxent Hosts International Delegation

A high-level delegation from the Philippines and Thailand visited our watershed in late April as part of a USAID Study Tour of the Chesapeake Bay. The U.S. international aid agency supports a project called the Asian Environmental Partnership aimed at sharing best practices and good governance models to restore watersheds internationally. The delegation included various governors, mayors, governmental officials and ministers—all interested in learning how Riverkeepers in America and citizens help monitor and restore their rivers. Patuxent Riverkeeper staff and volunteers met the visiting delegation at Governor’s Bridge Road near Bowie, MD and answered questions, caught fish (a carp and a perch) and then released the fish to a burst of applause! This brief cultural exchange illustrated a universal constant: water and water quality are great equalizers among people from all the world’s cultures.



The Thai-Philippine Delegation on the Pax

**on next page) (from page 1)** time and money on public education. There is nothing wrong with that. But education does not replace advocacy. Education helps, but only if we preserve and foster a tradition of high quality advocacy. It’s baffling that some people think that educating the next generation will succeed somehow, by training our kids to do the things we lack the courage to do ourselves?! Is the legacy we are leaving our kids really about... passing the buck to the next generation? A much more meaningful legacy would be to leave our kids a clean river and to teach them how to keep it that way. Let’s also leave them better laws and some other tools they can use to fix the problems. Now that’s a legacy worth having! The simple truth is that something besides our rhetoric needs to be changed in order to fix what’s wrong with our rivers and of course social “change” is the hardest challenge of all. Lastly, it also takes more than just preaching to the choir, it means taking our messages to the folks who don’t already get it and to those who are not involved, who have just as much to lose as the rest of us--yet who have never been part of a river cleanup, or given money to the cause, or just stood next to the river lately and reconnected to it. Cleaning our watersheds for good is an aim that affects all of us. Bad water is everybody’s problem. We at Patuxent Riverkeeper believe that the solution lies in engaging the problems at their source, working directly on the problems (not the symptoms) and getting EVERYONE involved. That’s all advocacy really is. Don’t believe the negatives you might hear--advocacy is not ungracious, controversial, unfriendly or risky. It is essential and it’s our right!

## 2005 Patuxent Sojourn Garners Record Attendance



Sojourners use a tandem sail rig on the river

This year’s Patuxent Sojourn topped the charts in terms of attendance, diversity, community participation and...the sheer number of boats on the water. This year’s record was some 55 boats in the water, more than double than in any prior year! Sojourners ranged in age from 13-70+ years of age. Sojourners learned about Patuxent history and ecology, storytelling and more. Paddlers navigated waters with depths ranging anywhere from 2 feet to 30 feet. The fleet of colorful kayaks and canoes started out at the Queen Anne Boat Launch operated by M-NCPPC above Upper Marlboro, and covered some 36 miles of river down to the Benedict Bridge. The launch party featured a concert by local band Rockfish, and the journey ended with a “Buffalo Wings” snack under the Benedict Bridge in Southern Maryland. The Patuxent Sojourn team consisted of several organizations, and more Sojourn pictures can be found at [www.paxriverkeeper.org](http://www.paxriverkeeper.org)



## The Forgotten Patuxent

I took a fascinating trip at the end of May. The plan was to get as far as we could down a section of the river that I had only seen from the air. My paddle partners were the Shomette brothers (Dale and Don). Don has spent years of his life writing and publishing books about the history of the Patuxent and he (like me) longed to travel the Patuxent from one end to the next just as our ancestors once did by barge. The launch place was from a little park near downtown Laurel, just below the WSSC dam. Our send-off by Don's wife Carol was from a shady, moss-coated wall that is all that remains of a once busy mill installation. The river in this section is frisky with sections of small rapids. In the warm breeze we could hear the first strains of the "Laurel Day" as we drifted through small rapids and shady stretches of water. As our journey began, the first thing we noticed was.. the trash. The range and variety of discarded items that have ended up in the river is dazzling and vast. The areas near Laurel were navigable by barge well into the late 1800's. In those days the region was kept clear of obstructions in order to protect the iron foundry business that was operated by the Snowdens. Today, there is no way to imagine from this babbling brook in Laurel that this was once a busy commercial waterway. No evidence that the area once bustled with hundreds of slaves who toiled to keep the river free of blockages so the barges could get through. Want to read the rest of this article? A complete and illustrated version is on the web site: [www.paxriverkeeper.org](http://www.paxriverkeeper.org)



Marine Archeologist Don Shomette on a river snag

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## Thanks to our newest supporters!

### New Members:

- Bernie and Betty Fowler
- Frederick Sass
- Regis and Terri Johnston
- Norman and Helen Prince, Jr.
- Delegate P. Sue Kullen
- Deb McClure and Charlie Redden
- Timothy Barto and Star Mahaffey
- Cal and Cynthia Steuart
- Martha Canfield
- Andrea and Greg Sullivan
- Cathy Hines
- Liz Vanden Heuvel
- Erin Fitzsimmons
- Caren and Steve Franek
- Christine J. Schmitthenner
- Ann P. Drennan
- Mark and Brenda Ancarrow
- Gary Pendleton and Karyn Molines
- Michael and Carolyn Quinlan
- Jeff and Michele Quesenberry
- Frank Lagana
- George Owings III
- Jack and Susan Leighty
- The Friends of Jug Bay
- David and Marta Kelsey

### New Corporate Members

- Pleasants Development, Jerry Connelly
- Old Town Screenprinting and Embroidery
- Christopher J. Reynolds, Esquire
- B & B Auto Salvage, Ltd.
- The Show Place Arena
- TMM Corporation

### Foundation and other support:

- Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust
- Town Creek Foundation
- Spring Creek Foundation
- The Eugene Chaney Foundation
- Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment
- PEPCO
- Medart Galleries
- Fresco Tours
- DiGiovanni's Dock of the Bay
- Calvert County Dept of Economic Dev'lpmt
- Catering by Leslie
- Covered in Chocolate
- Cookie Occasions
- West Marine, Inc.

## Get your Patuxent Riverkeeper/ MVA Logo Plates!

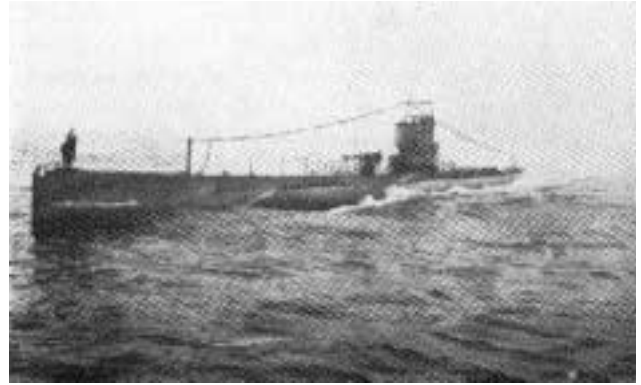
Now you can proclaim your support for River Preservation and the Patuxent Riverkeeper by sporting specialty auto license plates with the newly minted Riverkeeper logo on them. This offer is only available to members in good standing of the Patuxent Riverkeeper. The cost will be \$25 for logo plates. We will need to compile a list for MVA of those members wishing to participate. Please make an expression of interest no later than October 1, 2005. We will need to know your current MD License plate number. The MD Specialty Plates will be one of the first places to display the new Riverkeeper logo which is being designed by a local graphic artist for a Fall 2005 unveiling. The new logo will also appear on our patrol craft on the river.



## “Never Let Your Husband Buy a Submarine!”

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The above caption was the proposed title of a book once planned about one of the oddest submarine war stories of the last century. Resting in some of the deepest waters to be found in the Chesapeake Bay, near the mouth of the Patuxent River lies the sunken remains of the “USS-S49”; a WWI submarine. The “S” series boats were a transitional class of submarine built right after World War I. The boats were 240 feet long, nearly 22 feet wide and could only dive to about 200 feet. They looked a lot like German U-Boats which in that era could lead to alarm. Designed for a crew of 34 men and 4 officers, the S class boats saw combat during World War II but none remain afloat today. Fifty-one of the boats were built between 1918 and 1922. The S-49 was an unlucky boat. During operational testing at New London, Connecticut in 1926, one of the sub’s batteries exploded killing four crewmen and injuring eight others. After repairs the boat languished with no particular mission and was eventually sold to a Baltimore scrapyard in 1931. The boat was then bought by an enterprising man named Frank Christensen and became a side show attraction. Billed as a “\$2,000,000 Fighting Monster” and painted silver to draw crowds, the boat was displayed in 1934 at the Chicago World’s Fair and other big expositions of the day earning it the title of “Showboat Submarine”. Visitors toured the retired sub for the sum of 25 cents each (15 cents for kids!). However, at the start of WWII the owner encountered a variety of legal problems and also reportedly feared being mistaken for a hostile German sub while sailing the eastern seaboard, so he eagerly sold it back to the Navy for \$1. Too obsolete for combat, the S-49 was towed to Solomon’s and rigged for remote controlled operation to be used for target practice and testing of new torpedoes. The plan was to submerge the submarine by remote control on the Patuxent but on a day in December 1941 the S-49 submerged... and then just refused to come up to the surface again. There she sits today—upright on the bottom at 130 feet at a place 525 yards from the tip of Point Patience near the Solomon’s Bridge where sadly, at least two curious recreational divers have been killed in the treacherous currents along the silvery hulk which is sheathed in oyster shells and abandoned fishing line in the gloomy river depths. The S-49 has now become the stuff of Patuxent legend.



Archival Photo of the S-49

## Riverkeeper Promotes Paddle Path Web Site



PATUXENT  
RIVER  
COMMISSION

*Have You Had Your  
Paddling, Today?*

The Patuxent Riverkeeper has joined force with the State’s Patuxent River Commission in order to upgrade and improve the existing Patuxent Water Trail web site. Creating and promoting the Patuxent Paddle Path is a joint partnership with several organizations such as Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission and others to provide information to the public about scenic areas and resources that can be used by the public to get better value from the Patuxent for recreational paddling. While many people think only of the deep water sections of the river in the South of Maryland as navigable, the northern and central portions of the 110 mile river also have numerous and growing paddling opportunities, rich in history, archeology and other attractions. The Patuxent was once commercially used to transport iron, tobacco and other commodities—which cemented its worth to the early economy of Maryland. Now tourism and other

recreational opportunities also bring considerable value to the state and to citizens. The Paddle path web site will be upgraded to list a growing number of public accommodations to be found along the river including canoe launches, primitive campsites, landmarks, mapping, restaurants and more. Watch the site as it become updated and improved with new and more current information. <http://www.patuxentwatertrail.org/>



## Riparian Tree Planting Gearing Up!

What do you get if you combine a boom box with Motown music, a BBQ Grill, some sodas...then add dirt, fertilizer and baby trees? The answer is of course a "potting party"! This past spring a couple dozen plucky volunteers showed up at the Riverkeeper offices to pot some 900 tree seedlings that will eventually go into the ground and do some good for the Bay. This was a partnership between the Chesapeake Bay Trust, the Patuxent River Commission the Riverkeeper, and dedicated volunteers potted and maintained some 900 tree seedlings of various types destined to reforest riparian areas in our watershed and left to mature. The repotting process allows us to buy less expensive, bare root stock so we can acquire lots more trees which then get treated with fertilizer, water and tender loving care so they will be ready for Fall and Spring planting all over the watershed. Since our late Spring "rites of potting" party we now have a deer resistant enclosure full of happy expectant young trees just waiting to get into the ground, where they will help filter sediment away from our streams and tributaries. Please help us build our list of volunteer tree planters and also please help us identify candidate sites to receive these trees in Fall 2005. Send inquiries to: [trees@paxriverkeeper.org](mailto:trees@paxriverkeeper.org) or call us at 301-249-8200



Happy tree planters surveying their work!

## The Patuxent Minute debuts on Podcast and Local Radio

The Patuxent Riverkeeper has entered into an agreement with WSMD Radio in Southern Maryland (**STAR 98.3**) to produce and air a weekly "Patuxent Minute" radio series. Each one minute broadcast will air on all five of the AM & FM radio stations owned by the regional radio chain. The "Patuxent Minutes" will be public service and information oriented, featuring sound bytes, actuality and narrative news and information to help listeners stay in touch with what is happening on their River while also learning more about the related science, ecology, wildlife and folk history. In addition to a new "Patuxent Minute" each week, listeners will have the option of downloading an expanded version of each program from the worldwide web using "Podcasting" technology. Podcasting allows audiophiles to subscribe (for free); plus listen to the material at a time of their choosing. To hear the short format material, you can tune into Star Radio FM (98.3) in Southern Maryland or on any of their affiliates. To hear to the expanded "Podcast" programs you can download them from the Patuxent Riverkeeper web site starting in August 2005: [www.paxriverkeeper.org](http://www.paxriverkeeper.org)

## The Patuxent Agate The State Gemstone?

Enthusiasts and hobbyists have discovered a new gemstone that is unique to Maryland and Governor Robert Ehrlich has signed a proclamation naming the "Patuxent Agate" as the unofficial state gemstone. To make it official requires an act of the legislature. Formed over fifteen million years ago, the Patuxent Agate features "wisps of red and yellow, traces of bone like cell structure, and a glowing translucence making it an excellent stone for cutting, polishing, carving, and setting into jewelry". This lovely semi-precious stone is made of silica replaced fragments of petrified bone material, mostly dinosaur bone, and is evidence of Maryland's roughly 115 million year old bay type environment. To see samples of these "Agates" visit the web page set up by collectors which is linked from our web site at: [www.paxriverkeeper.org](http://www.paxriverkeeper.org)

## New Stormwater Web Site Debuts

The Riverkeeper has partnered with several other environmental groups to launch a new web site to help citizens learn about proposed legislation to improve how stormwater is regulated in Maryland. Visitors to the web site can submit pictures of problematic stormwater sites, read proposed legislation, join a coalition of like-minded groups and find out who the official regulators of stormwater are in their locale. The web site can be found at: [www.MDStormwater.org](http://www.MDStormwater.org)



2005/2006 Patuxent RIVERKEEPER Action Plan

Just over one year ago, The Patuxent Riverkeeper organization embarked on our first efforts to make a useful contribution to the many individuals and organizations who seek to protect, improve and advance the cause of clean water in the Patuxent River. At that time we had a theoretical action plan (Public Outreach, Issues/Advocacy, and Concensus Building Projects) and now after a year on the job, we have "hardened" that original plan with a stronger set of guiding visions and aims. These aims serve as the basis for all of our work on the Patuxent:

**Treating the river holistically.** The Riverkeeper plan is to work with the landowners, citizens, municipalities, counties and others and encourage all to think more about how their section of the river connects to the greater whole. Many are reluctant to do this and some feel they just need to deal with the section nearest them. We believe that a broader, greater vision of the river is needed in order to deal effectively with its large scale problems.

**Getting better monitoring and improved enforcement.** Citizens must be involved directly in taking back their watersheds. We seek to provide opportunities for everyday people to get involved in protecting the resource and to merge their local efforts into a more global network to protect the river. We foster activities that will make the river better and empower people to create positive outcomes.

**Tackling the tough and nasty jobs** We have to pinpoint the actual problems (not the symptoms!) on the river and attack those issues at their source and firsthand. We cannot just focus on those matters that are easy, non controversial. We need to be willing to get our hands dirty and start with the tough jobs, all while applying our resources on those areas that will really make a difference in water quality.

**Raising awareness and interest** It is key that the public understands the magnitude of the challenges facing the river and that the river will benefit from better laws, policies, designations, recognitions and any other form of suitable protections aimed at ensuring that the resource is protected from private efforts to set policies based on personal profit or gain instead of the public interest.

**Involving those who have been overlooked.** Just reaching out to the conservationists is not likely to result in the type and scope of activity we need in order to protect the river. We don't need to preach to the choir; instead we need to find new audiences and reach out to them, so that a wider circle of influence will be concerned enough to take action and to get involved.

Join & Support the Patuxent RIVERKEEPER...

(membership application)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Regular \$35

Student \$25

Booster \$100

Sustainer \$500



## WSSC Signs Legal Pact

The Maryland Department of the Environment, The Environmental Protection Agency and four local conservation groups have unveiled a binding agreement that if approved by the Federal courts would call for millions of dollars to be spent improving systems and operations related to some 5,000 miles of pipeline that serve Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission operations. WSSC owns and operates the sanitary sewage collection system that collects wastewater from residents of Montgomery and Prince George's counties in Maryland. WSSC allegedly violated the Clean Water Act by failing to properly operate and maintain its sewage collection system, resulting in sanitary sewage overflows into area streams and backups into buildings. Additionally there will be improvements in the quality and extent of waste water treatment (enhanced nutrient reduction) at the Western Branch Plant on the Patuxent River plus added preservation of lands in the near vicinity of the drinking water reservoirs located in the north of the Patuxent River. There are also requirements to make storm drain improvements in Prince George's and Montgomery County.

## Mercury in the Patuxent ?

There is nationwide concern about the ill effects of mercury contamination found in our waterways from the deposition of airborne emissions from coal burning power plants. The mercury is passed up the food chain—from bacteria in mercury-laden sediments to phytoplankton to fish and shellfish and then to birds, wild animals, and humans. Since animals accumulate mercury faster than they can eliminate it from their bodies, animals consume higher and higher levels of mercury at each successive step in the food chain. So, even at very low atmospheric deposition rates, in areas far from point sources, mercury biomagnification can produce toxic levels in humans consuming contaminated seafood. The Patuxent Riverkeeper has embarked on an independent study of fish from our river to take a fresh look at the risks to everyday anglers. Laboratory testing for this effort is being provided by The Environmental Quality Institute in North Carolina with funding and technical assistance from Waterkeeper Alliance. However, various surveys have revealed that people at greatest risk for contamination from the seafood they eat are often those least knowledgeable about the risks. This includes working poor, ethnic minorities and immigrant communities. The Riverkeeper is seeking new ways to reach out to these overlooked and under-notified sectors of the river community. The outcomes should recognize the importance of fishing in the Maryland culture and economy while encouraging more prudence by consumers. Maryland has several coal burning power plants that lack modern scrubbing technology to cleanse emissions of harmful contaminants (like Mercury) before they enter the atmosphere. During the spring 2005 Legislative session several MD legislators had their personal mercury levels tested and came up with unusually elevated levels. There was a bill introduced that would have put tighter limits/controls on the old power plants resulting in lowered mercury emissions. It did not pass. The regulators have been much faster to suggest moderation of fin and shellfish in our diets. While there are other alarming contaminants to be found in our waterways and food supply, mercury is one that has been thoroughly studied with its negative effects on human health well documented. At a recent meeting of all the Chesapeake Regional Waterkeepers there was unanimous support to work together on mercury related issues and awareness. You can link to the State's advisories from the [www.paxriverkeeper.org](http://www.paxriverkeeper.org) web site. Results of our studies will be made available in future newsletters and on our web site.

## New Riverkeeper Tee-Shirts Available!

These cool-looking shirts feature a delicate reproduction of an original Great Blue Heron pencil drawing created by local artist Gary Pendleton. Order them now from the Patuxent **RIVERKEEPER** in muted shades of yellow, tan, taupe, putty and pale blue. The shirt design and production was contributed by the folks at Old

Town Screen Printing & Embroidery in Huntingtown. Cost is \$16 plus 2.50 shipping. When ordering, please specify size plus first and second color choice. Herons don't wear tee-shirts so we have to do it for them. Get them while we still have them (the shirts that is)!



### Water Quality Monitoring

Regional monitors to help conduct citizen based stream and river water quality monitoring in support of scientific surveys, cleanups and advocacy work. Training and resources provided. Contact: [Info@paxriverkeeper.org](mailto:Info@paxriverkeeper.org)

### Whistleblowers

Do you know of contamination, pollution or an activity that harms the watershed but fear reprisals if you tell what you know? The Patuxent Riverkeeper investigates anonymous tips. No questions asked. If you do the right thing and report a hazard or an issue then you can have the satisfaction of knowing we will pursue a complaint at no risk to you. Send a fax, phone us after hours, or send a letter. Use any means you feel confident will protect your privacy and we will do the rest.

### Staff Position Available

We have a job opening for an individual to help us with recruiting and coordinating volunteers for our cleanups, monitoring activities and other work on behalf of the river. This is an Americorps position in partnership with Volunteer Maryland. The full text of the job posting is on our web site. [www.paxriverkeeper.org](http://www.paxriverkeeper.org)

### Patuxent Clean-up Site Coordinators

Volunteers to help serve as local coordinators and points of contact for the Annual Patuxent River Clean-up in April. Help rally local volunteers, tally clean-up stats, distribute clean-up supplies and related tasks. Contact: [info@cleanpatuxent.org](mailto:info@cleanpatuxent.org)

### Complaint Researchers

Help the Riverkeeper respond to and track complaints about pollution, water quality, and issues on the Patuxent River. Assemble case files, interface with regulatory agencies, collect data from observers, compose correspondence and assemble evidence and supporting information. Contact: [fred@paxriverkeeper.org](mailto:fred@paxriverkeeper.org)

### Tree planters

Transplant and maintain seedlings at our tree "grow-out" stations. Assist in distribution and promotion of trees in the planting seasons. Teach others how to properly plant trees in buffer and riparian areas. Contact: [Trees@paxriverkeeper.org](mailto:Trees@paxriverkeeper.org)

## 2005 Bernie Fowler Wade-in portrays losses

Former Senator Fowler is often credited with legitimizing the tradition of using citizen wade-in events as a touchstone for first hand observations of clarity as an indicator of health and vitality for local waters. Copycat wade-ins occur all over the Chesapeake now. This past June the Patuxent wade-in yardstick wielded by Congressman Steny Hoyer and Bernie Fowler topped out only 27 inches. This was by no means the worst historical indicator of water quality, but it is only on a par with similar readings taken in 1994. 2005 waders left with the impression that water quality continues to roll backwards both in time and in quality. Bernie vows to never stop fighting until the promises made to the Patuxent are kept. As he puts it, "It is futile to claim we can clean the Bay if we can't clean this river!"



Senator Bernie Fowler

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