

# PRA NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY, 2011

Dear PRA Supporters,

With this newsletter, our first of 2011, the Board of Directors of the Potomac River Association will bring you up to date on our activities of the past year and our plans for the future.

Our overriding goal for the past year has been to build membership and to attract a new generation of environmental activists. We tried various strategies to that end with little success. In 2009 and into 2010 we issued a bimonthly newsletter that reported on recent events and upcoming opportunities and challenges. The newsletter was widely-distributed and widely-praised but failed as a membership-generating strategy. The expense and human resource demands of producing a regular print product caused us to abandon that enterprise. In these pages we will describe other PRA-sponsored projects of 2010.

As you know, PRA was founded, in 1967, to fight. It hit the ground running, a grass-roots struggle to undo an already done deal that would have resulted in an oil refinery being built on the Potomac River. And the organization's accomplishments since then, and there are many, were won by a willingness to take on the fights that that no other group would. In many cases we were the only organization that recognized that there was a fight that needed to be fought. The PRA

of 2011 is more focused on its educational mission and the following pages will describe these projects. But make no mistake--we remain vigilant and possess the willingness to take on the next fight. We have been a frugal organization the past couple of years, rebuilding our war chest that was depleted by the lawsuits to prevent building on the fragile, steep slopes of the Patuxent shoreline. When we see the need to intervene to prevent an insult to the environment or to challenge misguided policy or legislation we won't hesitate to enter the fray. Your continued support, financial and moral, will allow us to stand ready.

Until we are called to take on such a mission we will be sponsoring some worthwhile and interesting projects. We hope that you will judge these enterprises worthy of your support. We are funded primarily by your dues and legal fund contributions. But if you would like to help with one of the projects described herein please give me or one of the board members a call. We need money and we need human resources. I hope that you will recognize PRA as the advocate for, and protector of, the land and water of southern Maryland. I propose a motto for PRA: *In terra, pro aqua.* "On the land, for the water." (Latin courtesy of PRA board member Pat O'Donnell.)

Bob Elwood  
President

---

## JANSSON PRIZE FIRST ANNUAL ESSAY CONTEST

Last year PRA initiated the Jansson Prize for Environmental Writing. The Jansson Prize is an essay contest with cash prizes awarded for the best composition on a specific environmental question. In 2010 participants were invited to submit essays that explored concepts of private property rights and Maryland's critical area law. It was our belief that this challenge went to the heart of the environmental program. Specifically, where should public

environmental interests supercede private needs and wants?

PRA partnered with the Center for the Study of Democracy at St. Mary's College of Maryland on this project. The Center provided media promotion and part of the monetary award which is \$500.00 for the winner. Contest winners should be announced in March.

PRA will be considering topics for the 2011 contest. Last year's contest was limited to four Maryland counties. We restricted

the participation out of fear that we would be deluged with entries. That did not happen so we might consider expanding the eligibility to the entire state. The contest is open to everyone, not just students.

If you have ideas for an essay topic or would like to help promote the contest (identifying places where the essay contest could be announced and sending out press releases) please e-mail Potomac.org@verizon.net. □

---

## MARYLANDERS GROW OYSTERS

PRA lent human and (modest) financial resources to the Wicomico Scenic River Commission (WSRC) to help support their oyster cultivation project. The WSRC recruited over 90 waterfront property owners *cont. on back.*

## PUBLIC ACCESS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM

This might be PRA's most ambitious and exciting project. As we mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, it is our belief that the more we can get people informed about and engaged in the outdoors, the more likely they will be to defend the land from threat. One way to further citizens' sense of investment in the natural world is to bring them a half-hour news/public interest show, weekly or biweekly, on the **public access** channel of the cable network. Each show will highlight some aspect of our local environment or some aspect of government or society that affects environmental quality.

Apart from fulfilling our mission of informing and engaging the public we have another reason for being enthusiastic about this project. One of our board members, David Triantos, has singlehandedly maintained the public access portion of the county cable network. For many years he has, at his own expense, taped footage of county events and brought them to the cable company for broadcast. The cable company has never appreciated his effort and made it difficult at times for David to carry out his self-appointed mission of keeping public access television alive. Recently the cable company rescheduled the public access portion of the broadcast day to run from Midnight to 3AM! That is not what we call public access. Once we have completed a number of episodes of our proposed programs we look forward to engaging the cable company in discussion about restoring the public access broadcast time to prime time.

This presents the opportunity for the PRA membership to bring their concerns and ideas about government and the environment to a larger audience and to personally participate in the process. We really could use some help from knowledgeable individuals, and some equipment, to make this project come through. If you have skills or equipment relevant to video recording and editing that you would like to lend we'd love to hear from you. If you have program ideas that you'd like to suggest or programs that you might like to produce yourself, give us a call. Or perhaps you would like to sponsor such a program, paying the broadcast fee in exchange for mention of your company or whatever. Call David Triantos at [mtriantos@erols.com](mailto:mtriantos@erols.com) or Barne Wheeler at [sunset365@md.metrocast.net](mailto:sunset365@md.metrocast.net). □

## FISHERIES

A little, oily, unappetizing fish that supports the food chain of the Chesapeake Bay, the **menhaden** has been systematically hunted down by one company out of Reedville, Virginia. Omega Protein uses spotter planes and decommissioned military ships to ruthlessly extract this cornerstone species. Over two hundred million pounds annually. Our board member Bill Bartlett has kept us informed on the activities of Omega Protein and its seemingly unassailable position near to the hearts of politicians and regulators. This is one of those stories that the more you know the more depressing it gets. But Bill keeps his unflinching gaze on this and other travesties of the fisheries and reports each month to the PRA Board. His fearless criticism of law-breaking watermen and corrupt practices in fisheries management has earned him the enmity of those who prefer to live in ignorance of threats to the shared environment. His research has fueled PRA's efforts to protect the menhaden from commercial predation. Bill is probably the only board member who has received threats of harm because of his stances. If you'd like to learn more about the menhaden issue, or would like to use PRA as a organizational umbrella to operate some kind of advocacy campaign on behalf of a specific fishery, contact Bill Bartlett at [wbartlett@md.metrocast.net](mailto:wbartlett@md.metrocast.net). □

## PUBLIC FORUM AT ANNUAL MEETING

In November PRA sponsored a public information forum on outdoor recreation opportunities in ST. Mary's County. Presentations on hiking, biking and paddling were given by local subject matter experts and examined all aspects of these activities—locations of trails and boat launches, information about relevant organizations and clubs, equipment overview. Also on hand was a state DNR official who reported on the newly-acquired state park on Newtowne Neck, a 700-acre property bordering three bodies of water (Potomac River, Breton Bay, St. Clements Bay) that had been owned by the Jesuits since the 1600s and never developed. It is a hidden gem, a pristine peninsula of sandy beaches, open fields and woods.

This event was a great success—well attended by an enthusiastic and appreciative audience. We felt that through this meeting the PRA had enabled citizens to become more aware and knowledgeable about outdoor recreation opportunities. In this way they become more engaged with the local environment and, we assume, more supportive of efforts to protect it.

We are thinking that we might schedule more meetings of this type in the coming year, perhaps bimonthly. If you have suggestions for topics or speakers for such meetings, or if you would like to help with the logistics of running one of these meetings (room prep, refreshments, etc.), please email [potomac.org@verizon.net](mailto:potomac.org@verizon.net) □

## PRA Board of Directors

William Bartlett	<i>Tall Timbers</i>
Robert Elwood	<i>Bushwood</i>
Dudley Lindsley	<i>Leonardtown</i>
Pat O'Donnell	<i>Leonardtown</i>
Nancy Rogers	<i>California</i>
Bryan Siebert	<i>Scotland</i>
David Triantos	<i>Leonardtown</i>
Barne Wheeler	<i>Tall Timbers</i>
Georgia Wheeler	<i>Tall Timbers</i>

## OTHER ACTIVITIES OF 2010

APRIL--PRA sponsored the **PRA Environmentalist of the Year Award** at the annual Earth Day celebration in Leonardtown, as we have for the past five years. This year's recipient was Scott Hymes, a DNR employee who has worked with a variety of local organizations to initiate and execute a variety of projects. He was DNR liaison to the Lower Potomac Tributary Team and located expertise and funding for many worthwhile projects.

SEPTEMBER—In the spring of 2010 a vast forest running alongside route 235, behind the Chaney gravel operation, was **cut to the ground** and the detritus piled and burned. Subsequent rains caused the fragile and now-unprotected topsoil to get washed down the slope behind the property into a creek bordering the Woods at Myrtle Point. In September PRA and a local citizen met with officials from Land Use and Growth Management and from the Soil Conservation District to inquire why this didn't constitute a tragedy and if it was a legal act how did that happen? The officials explained to us that the clearcut of this 100-some acres was a timbering operation which did not disturb below the soil and was therefore permitted. If trees are cut to the ground, and the stumps and roots left in the ground, then it is allowed without mitigation. The conditions of the permit state that after such a clearcut development on the site is prohibited for five years while the area grows back. You can believe that PRA will be keeping an eye on this parcel for the next five years.

DECEMBER—Several years ago PRA was contacted by a representative from the **People's Republic of China** who asked if we would like to meet with a delegation of the Yellow River Conservancy Commission during their US visit, to discuss areas of mutual interest and experience. We said, "Sure." We were pretty sure that the Chinese thought by our name that we were a more "official" organization than we are. But we put on a good tour for the delegation and arranged meetings with soil and water scientists that they found informative. The fact that we were not an "official" organization allowed us to offer a more informal discussion of resource management and rights, which they very much appreciated. In the fall of 2010 we were asked to meet with a group of 25 soil and water officials from the region we used to call Chungking. We made arrangements for them to meet us at the Maryland Marine Archeology Center at Jefferson Patterson Park where we had five speakers address them on a range of topics related to soil and water management. In addition to presentations from government officials and scientific experts, we also exposed them to the perspectives of citizen advocates like those of, well, PRA. We also had a musical entertainment during lunch and they joined us in an enthusiastic if strangely-worded rendition of Jingle Bells. Helping improve the health of the Yangtze River doesn't directly further PRA's local mission, but we felt we were doing a good deed by providing a service to Chinese citizens that they wouldn't necessarily get on a more formal tour—namely, how to effect change from the bottom up. As the mass-murderer Chairman Mao Zedong said, "A revolutionary must move through society as a fish moves through the water." □

---

## NERVOUS MAKING DEVELOPMENTS

In January of this year the head of **Land Use and Growth Management**, Derek Berlage, told the county commissioners that 1) he was meeting with some of his counterparts in other counties to explore ways to "lessen the burden" of the critical areas regulations and 2) he was looking into ways to "streamline" the development review process. Talk like this raises the hair on the backs of our necks and makes our skin crawl.

Berlage also told the new board of county commissioners that it was time for **Charlotte Hall** to take its rightful place as a commercial destination alongside St. Charles and Prince Frederick. Watch soon for public hearings on a Charlotte Hall master plan.

In fairness we have to give praise where praise is due, and we commend **Mr. Berlage** for proposing to the Board of County Commissioners that the **Development Review Forum** be abolished. Members of the environmental community had long maintained that the DRF was a too-cozy relationship between development interests and the department heads of the county's land use agencies. Founded in 1995 to fulfill a specific short-term goal, the DRF mutated into a volunteer board that essentially institutionalized development interests within county government. Tireless activists like Walter Burch, Clare Whitbeck and our own Jack Witten had campaigned for years to have this entity retired. Finally their counsel was heard. And a tip of the hat to Mr. Berlage.

The PRA has a special connection with **Myrtle Point**. We were instrumental in identifying that piece of property as worthy of public ownership and we advocated for public purchase for close to two decades. It is safe to say that if it were not for PRA that site would have been built over by now. The park is now being abused by out-of-county visitors to the point that it is impairing the enjoyment of those who just want to take in the natural beauty of the place. People are camping out on the beaches, building fires and generally trashing the joint. Teenage drunkenness and licentious behavior are frequently encountered. We are working with Friends of Myrtle Point trying find an affordable and tasteful solution with the Parks department. □

## STAYING IN TOUCH

Members, we would like to have your e-mail address if you would like to give it to us. We would only use it for two purposes—to let you know of PRA-sponsored activities OR to let you know of some sudden event or development on the environmental front that deserves your attention. You won't get e-mails from us very often—I imagine months will go by with no message. And we will not provide the list to any organization or person, it goes without saying. Try it. You might like it. Send an e-mail to [Dlindsley@verizon.com](mailto:Dlindsley@verizon.com) with a request to be added to our notification list. If later for some reason you want to be removed, use a similar procedure. Questions? Call Bob Elwood 301-769-3840 ☐

## MARYLANDERS GROW OYSTERS

*cont. from front*

along the Wicomico River to grow oysters in cages suspended from piers. They have 490 cages in the water. The oysters, suspended above the river bottom, stand a better chance of survival in their first year of existence; less chance of being silted over or eaten by predators. In spring, the quarter-sized oysters are transferred to a ten acre sanctuary site (off-limits to harvesting) near the mouth of the Wicomico where the oysters will, it is hoped, become a self-perpetuating oyster reef. This is the second year of the long-term project and PRA is proud to be part of the effort. As you probably know the oyster has phenomenal ability to filter water, so a thriving oyster population is not only a sign of a healthy aquatic environment but also an essential component of a healthy aquatic environment.

If you have waterfront property in southern Maryland and might like to start an oyster growing project in your watershed, PRA would be willing to serve as your sponsoring organization to help you get started. Call Bob Elwood for more information, 301-769-3840. ☐

## JOIN THE POTOMAC RIVER ASSOCIATION

I would like to support the PRA in its mission to educate and advocate for better land use policy and environmental protection.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TEL NO \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

- Enclosed is an annual membership \$10.00
- I would like to contribute to the PRA legal defense fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL ENCLOSED** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Contributions to PRA are tax-deductible.

Make checks payable and mail to:

**Potomac River Association, Inc.**  
**Box 76, Valley Lee, Maryland 20692**

Valley Lee, Maryland 20692  
P.O. Box 76  
Potomac River Association, Inc.