



News

County to bring 'Status of the Choptank' to public forum June 23

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DENTON At the urging of the Caroline County Commissioners, a "Status of the Choptank River" discussion has been scheduled for Tuesday, June 23, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Health and Public Services building in Denton.

The meeting is set up to be a discussion of the current health of the Choptank watershed, which earlier this year received a Bay Health Index rating of D from EcoCheck, a group that assesses the ecological state of the Chesapeake Bay watersheds. EcoCheck's report cited the Choptank's poor ecosystem health.

Many experts on environmental sciences and the health of the Bay are expected to attend along with the Secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment Sherri Wilson, or a representative of her office.

"There has been a good bit of discussion and reporting about the health of the Choptank. We wanted to assemble a group of experts that could give the public a report on its condition and to discuss future plans of preventing the Choptank from getting worse," said County Commissioner John Cole.

Allison Dungan, a planning specialist with the county's department of planning and codes, said she hoped that at least one elected official from Talbot, Dorchester, Queen Anne's and Caroline, the counties that make up the watershed, would attend so that the discussion could take on a regional approach to the problem, and not just represent Caroline County views.

"It would be nice to talk to the representatives from other counties concerning their wastewater treatment capacities and see how they compare with ours. Are we using too much? It all goes to the same place (the Chesapeake Bay), so we're all in it together," Dungan added.

Among those who are currently scheduled to attend the meeting are Scott Getchell, director of Denton's Division of Public Works; Doug Abbott, superintendent of Easton's Wastewater Treatment facility; Adam Noble Corry, of Caroline County Environmental Health Services; Tom Horn, a professor from the Horn Point Laboratory's Center for Environmental Science; Dr. Heath Kelsey, lead science integrator for EcoCheck; John Shepard, district manager for Caroline County Soil Conservation; Dr. Ken Staver, research scientist for the University of Maryland's Wye Research and Education Center; and Bill Wolinski, from the Talbot County Department of Public Works.

In getting a D rating, the Choptank was cited for having a rapidly declining level of aquatic grasses, poor water clarity and a decrease in chlorophyll between 2007 and 2008.

"The Choptank River has traditionally not scored well (on the report card)," said Dungan, who said that there has been so much initial interest in the discussion that the Easton cable TV station has stated an interest in taping it for replay.

EcoCheck is a partnership program between NOAA Chesapeake Bay Program Office and the Integration and Application Network (IAN) at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Sciences. EcoCheck is located at the Cooperative's Oxford Laboratory.

The purpose of EcoCheck is to enhance and support the science, management and restoration of Chesapeake Bay through the integration of geographically detailed assessments and forecasts.

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