

Critical Efforts to Save the Bay

By Amy Blades Steward

For property owners in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, it has never been more important than now to care for properties in ways that protects the Chesapeake Bay watershed from the impact of human activities.

In 1984, the State of Maryland designated the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, a 1,000-foot wide ribbon of land around the Bay and its tidal tributaries, and set criteria to minimize adverse effects on water quality and natural habitats. In 2002, the Critical Area Program was expanded to include the Atlantic Coastal Bays watershed. Human activity within 1,000 feet of tidal waters has direct and immediate impact on the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

"Each person living in the Critical Area can make a difference, whether it is through caring for their septic systems, decreasing fertilizers on their lawns, or properly caring for their shorelines. Collectively, we have a responsibility to restoring the health of the Bay." Debbie Pusey

For Debbie Pusey, a Critical Area property owner on the Corsica River near Centreville, the reality of this impact became real when she had to prohibit her grandchildren from swimming in the river when they visited her. She recalls, "We had been observing increased pollution and decreased water quality in the river, but when Hurricane Isabel came, the pollution was brought into our yards and homes – even contaminating our wells. It was a wake-up call and motivated us as homeowners to create the Corsica River Conservancy, www.corsicariverconservancy.org, a grassroots citizens group hoping to monitor the river's health while raising environmental awareness about how it can impact the Chesapeake Bay."

Similar groups have sprung up in communities across the Eastern Shore over the last 10 years, hoping to address similar



environmental concerns facing the Bay. One of the newest of these citizen groups, Shore Land Stewardship Council (SLSC), an initiative of Adkins Arboretum, is providing property owners and professionals accurate and consistent information, technical support, and referrals on best landscaping practices in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area.

Ellie Altman, executive director of Adkins Arboretum, comments, "Property owners in the Critical Area are often confused about both the rules and the process they must follow to be good stewards of the land they own. Shore Land Stewardship Council was formed to provide technical support to property owners so that they can make informed decisions about changes to their properties, ultimately impacting the Bay in a positive way."

Contractors, state and local regulatory agencies, realtors, developers, conservation-oriented nonprofits, and private landowners in the Upper-Shore meet monthly to assimilate these best landscaping practices and to communicate them to Critical Area property owners. The first goal of the group is to engage Critical Area landowners through the organization's First Stop campaign.

Launched as a pilot project in January 2008 in Talbot County, the First Stop campaign encourages property owners to seek advice and proper permits before they begin landscaping changes, such as removing trees or altering their shoreline. Many landscaping practices that cause disturbance in the Critical Area require permits from several agencies – local, state, and federal. In some areas there are limits in the percentage of a Critical Area property that can be an impervious surface. These percentages are determined based on the acreage and location of a property. The First Stop campaign encourages Critical Area property owners to contact their local planning offices first to determine which permits they need. As part of the pilot project, Critical Area property owners settling on properties in Talbot County this spring are given a First Stop pewter blue crab key chain and a rack card educating them on the Critical Area.

www.WhatsUpMag.com



The SLSC next hopes to give landowners the skills and motivation to implement stewardship practices that exceed the requirements of the Critical Area law through the publication of an illustrated guidebook on how to care for their properties. The guidebook will be printed in 2009. Best landscaping practices range from reducing lawn area to reduce pollution from chemicals, to properly planting and pruning trees and shrubs to maintain wildlife habitat, to creating living shorelines.

By slowing the force of water, proper shoreline management protects the land and water while creating a natural habitat for wildlife.

Debbie Pusey adds, "It took a long time for the Chesapeake Bay to get this way, and it's going to take a long time to fix it. Each person living in the Critical Area can make a difference,

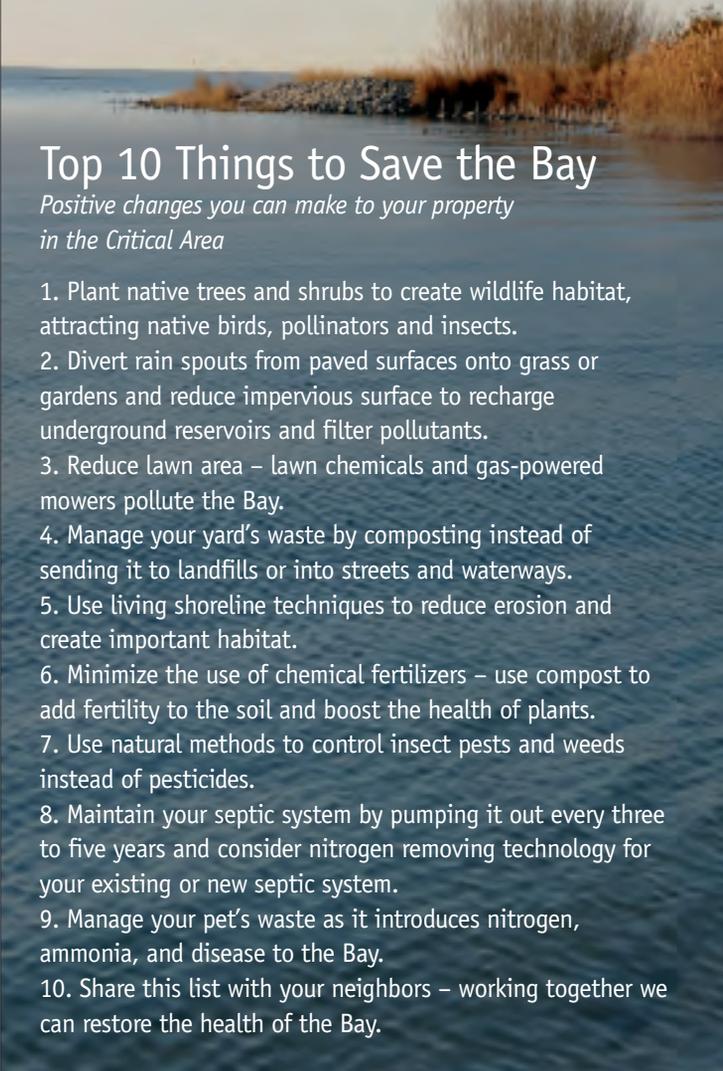
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Like Debbie Pusey, The Shore Land Stewardship Council hopes to create a stewardship ethic among Critical Area property owners, one property owner at a time, so that water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries can improve for generations of families to come.

The First Stop Campaign asks property owners to remember to call their county or town planning office before planning their next project.



Top 10 Things to Save the Bay

Positive changes you can make to your property in the Critical Area

1. Plant native trees and shrubs to create wildlife habitat, attracting native birds, pollinators and insects.
2. Divert rain spouts from paved surfaces onto grass or gardens and reduce impervious surface to recharge underground reservoirs and filter pollutants.
3. Reduce lawn area – lawn chemicals and gas-powered mowers pollute the Bay.
4. Manage your yard's waste by composting instead of sending it to landfills or into streets and waterways.
5. Use living shoreline techniques to reduce erosion and create important habitat.
6. Minimize the use of chemical fertilizers – use compost to add fertility to the soil and boost the health of plants.
7. Use natural methods to control insect pests and weeds instead of pesticides.
8. Maintain your septic system by pumping it out every three to five years and consider nitrogen removing technology for your existing or new septic system.
9. Manage your pet's waste as it introduces nitrogen, ammonia, and disease to the Bay.
10. Share this list with your neighbors – working together we can restore the health of the Bay.

For further information on about how to care for properties in the Critical Area, visit www.firststopforthebay.org or contact Carol Jelich at Adkins Arboretum at 410-634-2847, ext. 40 or cjelich@adkinsarboretum.org.

For specific questions about the local Critical Area Program and local permits, use the list of contact numbers noted below. For general questions or information about the Critical Area Program or questions relating to State oversight of local programs, contact the Maryland state Critical Area Commission: E-mail Mary Owens at mowens@dnr.state.md.us or call 410-260-3480.

Landscaping Practices *Permits, Approvals, and Violations*

Permits

Shoreline construction – new or replacement, including:

- Piers
- Boathouses
- Shoreline erosion control – rock revetment; living shorelines; bulkhead replacement
- Construction in the 1,000 foot Critical Area – new or replacement, including:
 - Buildings—houses, sheds
 - Decks or patios
 - Fences
 - Swimming pools
 - Grading

Approvals

Clearing of existing trees or other vegetation – within at least 100 feet of tidal waters and streams, and generally within the 1,000 foot Critical Area, including:

Tree removal or pruning – living, diseased, or dead
Brush clearing
Invasive plant removal

Violations

Certain activities are not allowed in the Critical Area and will be subject to enforcement of the law:

Filling of tidal and/or nontidal wetlands or clearing any vegetation without permits
Building any structure without a permit
Clearing and/or burning of marsh vegetation
Stockpiling construction materials or dumping

If you suspect a violation of the Critical Area law, contact your county about it. Reports can be made anonymously and your vigilance will help to preserve the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

Local Planning Department Telephone Numbers

Caroline County	(410) 479-2230
Cecil County	(410) 996-5225
Dorchester County	(410) 228-3234
Kent County	(410) 778-7473
Queen Anne's County	(410) 758-4088
Somerset County	(410) 651-1424
Talbot County	(410) 822-2030
Wicomico County & Salisbury	(410) 548-4860
Worcester County	(410) 632-1200