

SHORE RIVERS ADVOCATE

CHESTER | MILES, WYE, & EASTERN BAY

CHOPTANK | SASSAFRAS & BAYSIDE CREEKS

SPRING 2023



THE NUMBERS ISSUE!

Reflecting on ShoreRivers, its legacy, and its impact five years after our founding.



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



This year we are celebrating five years under the organizational name of ShoreRivers, built upon 37 years of grassroots work.

In 1986, a group of citizens concerned about the declining health of their beloved river gathered in a basement room to stuff envelopes for their first membership appeal: *Join the **Chester River Association!*** In 2002, after years existing as a purely volunteer enterprise, they hired their first Riverkeeper. In 2007, they hired an Agricultural Specialist and began developing the collaborative and innovative approach to agricultural conservation that ShoreRivers embodies today (read more on page 7).

Almost 20 years ago, a similar group of concerned citizens started the **Sassafras River Association**, also with a Riverkeeper and an Agricultural Specialist, and launched a rigorous water sampling program under the leadership of two resident scientists (read more about our water quality monitoring activities on the next page). The association quickly became known for its science-based selection of innovative projects, the large scale of projects undertaken, and the pollutant reductions achieved.

In 2009, a Washington, D.C. lawyer moved back to his cherished childhood home of Easton to start the Choptank Riverkeeper program. His passion for the rivers and natural world of the Eastern Shore drove the rapid growth of **Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy** to encompass a Miles-Wye Riverkeeper and a robust advocacy program to hold polluters accountable and support pro-river legislation at the municipal and state level. The group developed the first education team in the area supporting environmental literacy standards in local public schools (read more about where this program stands today on page 6).

In 2018, these three organizations, strengthened by decades of volunteer service, science-based strategies, and collaborative community approaches, merged to create ShoreRivers. **Five years later, we have built upon this strong, grassroots foundation to achieve greater impact for our rivers:** bringing millions of dollars of federal and state funding onto the Eastern Shore, putting more effective projects in the ground, advocating for more pro-river legislation, educating thousands of children each year, and bringing more communities into this critical work. Many of the people integral in those early years are still involved—serving on the governing board, volunteering at events, and signing their friends and neighbors up to become members.

This history is important—it reminds us that this is long-term work that requires the love and dedication of many people, as evidenced by the long list of supporters we were proud to showcase in our Annual Report this year. Our rivers did not become degraded in a day; they will not become healthy and vibrant in a day either.

In this “by the numbers” issue, you will find quantifiable metrics showcasing the work ShoreRivers has done over the past five years—and prior—working toward that vision of healthy, vibrant waterways.

Thank you for being a part of the movement for clean rivers on the Eastern Shore.

Isabel Hardesty
Executive Director

Cover photo by Jeff Russell,
Sassafras Watershed
Advisory Board Member.

Background photo by
Mike Hardesty.

All photos by ShoreRivers
staff unless otherwise noted.

SHORERIVERS CURRENT MAKE-UP



29

STAFF MEMBERS



1,016

VOLUNTEERS



2,083

MEMBERS

EXAMINING FIVE YEARS OF WATER QUALITY DATA ON OUR RIVERS

By Chester Riverkeeper Annie Richards, Choptank Riverkeeper Matt Pluta, and Sassafras Riverkeeper Zack Kelleher



Water quality is at the core of ShoreRivers' vision of "healthy waterways across Maryland's Eastern Shore." Initiated more than three decades ago by citizen scientists on the Chester River, our water quality monitoring program is now led by four professional Riverkeepers who compile 882 data points annually (or, 63 sites tested 14 times per year) using rigorous scientific standards and protocols defined by the Mid-Atlantic Tributary Assessment Coalition. This serves as the largest summary of water quality data collected on the Eastern Shore.

We test the core parameters of dissolved oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus, clarity, and chlorophyll (used to detect the presence of algae) and use this information to better understand the health of our rivers; identify pollution hotspots; strategically prioritize restoration efforts; and inform land use decisions, policies, and homeowner behavior.

As we analyze data we've collected over the past five years, noticeable trends emerge: water quality has been improving in some tributaries and stretches of our rivers, and has been declining in others. What we do on the land impacts the health of our waterways; in our region, nutrient and sediment pollution comes primarily from row crop agriculture, fertilized lawns, roads and buildings, septic systems, and wastewater treatment plants. Factors like soil type, average rainfall, annual weather patterns, and groundwater infiltration affect how quickly pollution from these sources enters waterways. Additionally, increasingly high tides and more frequent and intense storms—local impacts of global climate change—are impacting water quality by accelerating shoreline erosion and overwhelming septic systems and public utility lines in shallow water tables.

Your local Riverkeepers work hard to discern and explain these datasets as we give voices to these rivers and the challenges they face. Below we explore trends that have emerged over the previous five years of collecting data on our rivers.

SASSAFRAS RIVER AND BAYSIDE CREEKS

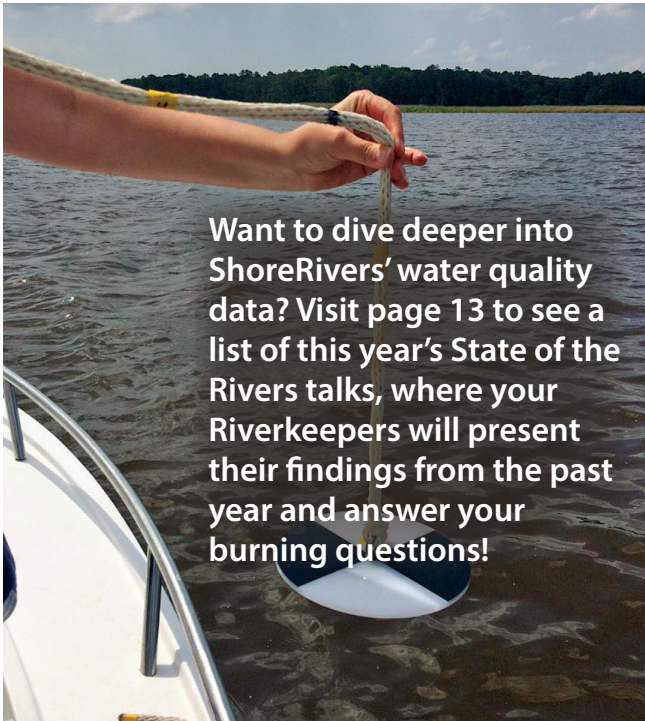
The five-year Water Quality Index for the Sassafras shows that it meets acceptable water quality standards 70% of the time.

On the Sassafras, the past five years of data show that water quality is improving, even in the face of climate change.

Nitrogen, phosphorus, dissolved oxygen, and chlorophyll scores are trending in a positive direction. The one water quality parameter that has stayed relatively constant over the past five years is clarity. Dissolved oxygen scores meet acceptable water quality standards almost 100% of the time, with slight decreases during the especially hot summers of 2017 and 2020. Scores for nitrogen and phosphorus decreased significantly after heavier than average rainfall, such as in 2018, when more excess nutrients were flushed into our waterways. Chlorophyll levels meet water quality standards 80% of the time in drier years, but in wet years with hot summers, such as in 2018 and 2020, they only meet standards 40% of the time and often produce large, frequently toxic, algal blooms.

ShoreRivers added the watershed of the Bayside Creeks (Churn, Fairlee, Still Pond, and Worton) into our territory in 2019 and began water quality monitoring in this region in 2020. Over three seasons of sampling, all water quality parameters have shown steady improvement.

(continued)



Want to dive deeper into ShoreRivers' water quality data? Visit page 13 to see a list of this year's State of the Rivers talks, where your Riverkeepers will present their findings from the past year and answer your burning questions!

CHESTER RIVER

The five-year Water Quality Index for the Chester shows that it meets acceptable water quality standards 56% of the time.

Data collected in the Chester River over the past five years show improving trends in some water quality parameters and declining trends in others.

The main stem of the Chester shows a 15% improvement in dissolved oxygen, a key indicator for water health and the biodiversity it supports. We also saw a 9% improvement in phosphorus and water clarity. It's not unusual for phosphorus and clarity scores to follow similar trends, as phosphorus can only move into our waterways when bonded to sediments. As innovative practices on land continue to reduce surface erosion into our waterways, and as upgrades are made to septic systems and wastewater facilities, we predict these scores will continue to improve.

While phosphorus, clarity, and oxygen scores are improving, nitrogen scores have declined by 30%. Generally, 70% of all nitrogen enters our waterways through groundwater in the form of nitrates, a process that can take several decades. Therefore, much of the nitrogen pollution we measure in our rivers today is the result of land practices from many years ago.

CHOPTANK RIVER

The five-year Water Quality Index for the Upper Choptank shows that it meets acceptable water quality standards 56% of the time, while the Lower Choptank meets standards 66% of the time.

A defining moment in water quality in the Choptank River came in 2018–2019, when heavy precipitation brought high pollution loads from which the river is still trying to recover. While conditions have improved in some sections between 2020–2022, wide variances exist between its upper and lower stems.

Conditions fluctuate greatly year to year in the upper Choptank River, where weather impacts water quality more dramatically than in the lower mainstem. In the upper river, nutrient pollution was at an all-time high in 2019. Since then, nutrient levels have returned to normal, though overall conditions remain poor.

MAKING OUR VISION OF HEALTHY WATERWAYS A REALITY



4,410

TIDAL WATER QUALITY SAMPLES TAKEN IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS



63 SITES

TESTED FOR WATER QUALITY

44 SITES

TESTED FOR BACTERIA LEVELS

SUPPORT FROM **54 SWIMTESTER VOLUNTEERS** TO MONITOR PUBLIC SITES DURING SUMMER MONTHS



105 ACRES AND 11 MILLION SEEDS OF SUBMERGED AQUATIC VEGETATION

PLANTED BETWEEN 2018–2023

2,700 TANKS EMPTIED AND **119,367 GALLONS OF WASTE** KEPT OUT OF THE MILES & WYE RIVERS AND EASTERN BAY THANKS TO THE PUMPOUT BOAT SINCE 2016



In fact, monitoring data collected in Greensboro by the United States Geological Survey shows that the upper Choptank is the only tributary in the Bay's long-term monitoring program that still shows increasing nutrient pollution. This station monitors nutrients coming from a predominantly agricultural watershed and is used by the Chesapeake Bay Program to assess how the agricultural sector is progressing toward Chesapeake Bay pollution reduction goals—making clear that pollution reductions from farms are not happening fast enough.

In the lower Choptank River, dissolved oxygen has remained at consistently good levels. Chlorophyll levels have improved over the past five years but still remain worse than desired, a result of the continued high levels of nutrient input to the upper Choptank River. Salinity levels in the river were at an all-time low in 2018 and 2019 due to the above-average rainfall in those years. The influx of fresh water made it difficult for oysters to survive and reproduce, causing the Horn Point Oyster Hatchery to shut down operations. The return to historically average salinity levels and the massive oyster restoration efforts occurring in the lower Choptank should allow the species to thrive once again.

MILES AND WYE RIVERS AND EASTERN BAY

The five-year Water Quality Index for the Miles River is 57%, for the Wye River is 44%, and for Eastern Bay is 71%.

These scores reflect improving conditions in the bigger waters of Eastern Bay, Prospect Bay, and Cox Creek, and worsening conditions in the smaller waterways of Crab Alley, Greenwood and Shipping creeks, and the Wye River. One outlier, the Miles River, showed little change in overall conditions over the past five years, with water quality remaining below desired standards. These discrepancies are likely due to the different land-to-water ratios in these watersheds: the larger bodies of water are able to dilute pollution running off the surrounding land, while the smaller creeks are hit harder.

Phosphorus scores improved in Eastern Bay by a moderate 10% to a condition that nearly meets acceptable standards, and nitrogen scores show improvement throughout the watershed. However, in both the Miles and Wye rivers, phosphorus scores are declining. Across the region, clarity scores are also declining—another indication that phosphorus and sediment pollution go hand in hand.

Grown from humble grass roots, our monitoring program now helps inform Bay cleanup progress and is used to support pro-river policy and advocacy efforts region-wide.

WORKING TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

The following pages detail the multi-pronged approach we take to address pollution in our rivers: advocacy, restoration, education, and community engagement. Restoration work that mitigates erosion and nutrient pollution and buffers our lands and communities from the increasing impacts of climate change is our highest priority. Advocating for laws that promote innovative technology and strong water protections is vital to ensuring region-wide change, as is holding polluters accountable by enforcing those laws. Educating our students and elevating youth voice cultivates a whole generation of knowledgeable, empowered stewards of our natural resources. All of these actions are necessary in order to see improvements in water quality and in the health of our local rivers.

WATCHING STUDENTS BECOME TEACHERS, LEADERS, STEWARDS

By Suzanne Sullivan, Director of Education



Ten years ago, I started my first salaried job at Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy, one of ShoreRivers' legacy organizations, and immediately discovered my passion for educating. Looking back at photos from that time,

I have to laugh. I was a 23-year-old kid, teaching high school students. I could relate to these students; I had just been in their shoes. With the unique enthusiasm only a young person has, I set out to provide the best field trips ever! We canoed, tested water quality, hiked forested trails, climbed piles of oyster shells, and collected animals from the water. **I was convinced that every high school student who attended our field trips was going to want to become a Riverkeeper when they grew up.**

Ten years later, two of those students I took on a field trip are now teachers we partner with, and I find myself relating more with the teachers than I do with the students. Sarah White is a ninth-grade biology teacher in Dorchester County Public Schools, but she was once a high school student on a field trip at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science's Horn Point Campus. While Sarah didn't grow up to become a Riverkeeper, she is now a science teacher who partners with ShoreRivers to embed

environmental education into her curriculum and ensure students meet Maryland's environmental literacy graduation requirement. Sarah recalled that "the most memorable part of that field trip was canoeing and being on the water with my friends." Could it have been our field trip that convinced Sarah to become a science teacher? Sarah said that it was her repeated, lifelong exposure to our local rivers that inspired her career choice and her desire to connect students to their local environment.

Our education programs have grown exponentially in the past 10 years, and particularly since we became ShoreRivers in 2018. Our programs began as ninth-grade field trips with Talbot County Public Schools. Now, our high school programs are included in Dorchester, Talbot, and Queen Anne's county public schools and we're growing a program in Kent County. We have also expanded to provide second-grade programs in Caroline and Queen Anne's county public schools and third-grade programs in Talbot and Dorchester.

Ten years ago, my goal was to inspire students to become Riverkeepers. **Now, my goal is to inspire students to become environmental stewards in whatever career they choose.** I want students to understand that whether they choose to be a teacher, a lawyer, or a business owner, they can still have a positive impact on their local environment. Ten years ago, I believed that one field trip could inspire students to become environmental stewards. Now, I understand that it is repeated exposure to their local environment that inspires students to care. The need for those repeated outdoor experiences is why our programs have expanded into new grades and new school districts. **It is why ShoreRivers is an active participant in statewide networks that advocate and work to advance environmental education in our school systems.**

It's been so meaningful to work with teachers who were former students in our program. It helps me to imagine where the thousands of students we've worked with in the past five years will end up in their careers and the unique ways they will become environmental stewards. And it makes me proud, both of where we've been and where we're going next.



EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS



11,705
STUDENTS
SERVED BETWEEN 2018–2023



MORE THAN 200
FIELD TRIPS
LED BY SHORERIVERS



339
TEACHERS EDUCATED THROUGH
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
OPPORTUNITIES

BUILDING & GROWING IN AG & RESTORATION THANKS TO A LEGACY OF INNOVATION

By Laura Wood, Ag & Outreach Coordinator



Agricultural Specialist Ariana Muñoz collects samples as part of ShoreRivers cutting edge research into biological nitrogen and its impacts on water quality.



When ShoreRivers merged five years ago, it brought together three legacy organizations—each with its own defined and distinct history of work in the agricultural field as a key strategy to improving the health of local rivers:

The SASSAFRAS RIVER ASSOCIATION was a small group doing big, innovative projects commonly involving treatment wetlands and stream restorations on agricultural land.

The CHESTER RIVER ASSOCIATION was focused on building relationships within the agricultural community and, with the help of that community, rethinking how to achieve nutrient reductions at the source. The organization tested new technologies in precision nutrient management and launched a multi-farm, multi-year research study on cover crop practices with the University of Maryland in 2016.

MIDSHORE RIVERKEEPER CONSERVANCY was at the forefront of conservation drainage practices in the area, installing the first bioreactor on Delmarva in 2013.

Since merging, we have made sure to preserve the spirit of innovation and collaboration valued by all three groups. ShoreRivers has grown into a leader in implementing innovative and strategic restoration projects that improve water quality in, and for, our communities.

These projects include not just agricultural projects but also urban and suburban ones focused on stormwater practices and community greening. Take, for instance, our work with local municipalities to develop stormwater management plans in Chestertown, Cambridge, Wye Mills, and Denton, and our work at a farm in Warwick, where our successful stream restoration and floodplain reconnection project is now being used as an example for technical staff at the local Soil Conservation Districts and Natural Resources Conservation Service. We're also proud of our current biostimulant research project, where we're doing cutting edge research into the impacts of biological nitrogen on water quality and crop yield across the Mid-Atlantic. *(continued)*



This stream restoration and floodplain reconnection project was completed by ShoreRivers at a farm in Warwick, Maryland.



ShoreRivers Ag & Restoration Team is pictured at the site of a completed stream restoration project in the Chester River watershed. From left are 2022 summer intern Connor Maycott, Agricultural Specialist Ariana Muñoz, Environmental Engineer William Ryall, Restoration Manager Whitley Gray, Ag & Outreach Coordinator Laura Wood, Restoration Designer Katie Drummond, and Director of Agriculture & Restoration Tim Rosen.

In order to complete this important work, ShoreRivers has grown its staff of dedicated and experienced restoration professionals. We now have an Ag & Restoration Department of eight staff working on projects ranging from buffer installations to wetland designs, stream restorations, conservation drainage, bioretention installations, tree plantings, stormwater assessments, and agricultural research. Our staff includes an in-house engineer and a restoration designer who make it possible to complete a larger quantity of projects on a more efficient timeline. ShoreRivers has brought together a team with the skills and knowledge to take projects of all sizes from landowner inquiry to site assessment, project design, implementation, and maintenance guidance.

Our increased capacity to move projects forward from design to implementation has allowed us to work even more effectively for our rivers.

"I'm incredibly proud of the work ShoreRivers' agriculture and restoration team has done across the region to help solve problems of nutrient and sediment loss to our waterways," said Tim Rosen, ShoreRivers' Director of Agriculture & Restoration, who got his start as a Chesapeake Conservation Corps Member working for the Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy (see page 14 for more on the Corps program). "Not only have we grown the quality and quantity of projects we can put in the ground, we've also increased our investment in our communities and in farm fields across Delmarva in ways that both improve water quality and support those making their living off the land."

In addition to our organizational investment in staff capacity, another key factor in our ability to complete hundreds of innovative projects is the support of our community. Each project represents a farmer, school, town, faith community, or individual landowner who stepped up to partner with ShoreRivers in our mission for clean waterways across the Eastern Shore. We are grateful to be working with a community that understands the importance of restoring ecosystems and protecting water quality.

Thanks in large part to the hard work of our legacy organizations, ShoreRivers is an established grassroots organization that is able to build trust and buy-in from the communities we serve. This is critical to our progress in moving the needle toward healthy, fishable, swimmable rivers.

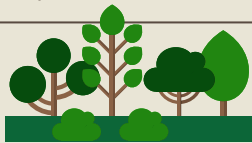
Our goals in the next five years include pursuing more flexible funding sources that can support full-farm comprehensive programs, building on our experience and knowledge of our watersheds to prioritize our efforts where they're most needed, and continuing to build and strengthen our relationships with farmers and community partners.

SHORERIVERS PROJECTS TO DATE

(since 2015)



186 FARMLAND PROJECTS



74 NON-FARMLAND PROJECTS



122 FARMERS



8 SCHOOLS



14 STATE, COUNTY, & TOWN PARKS



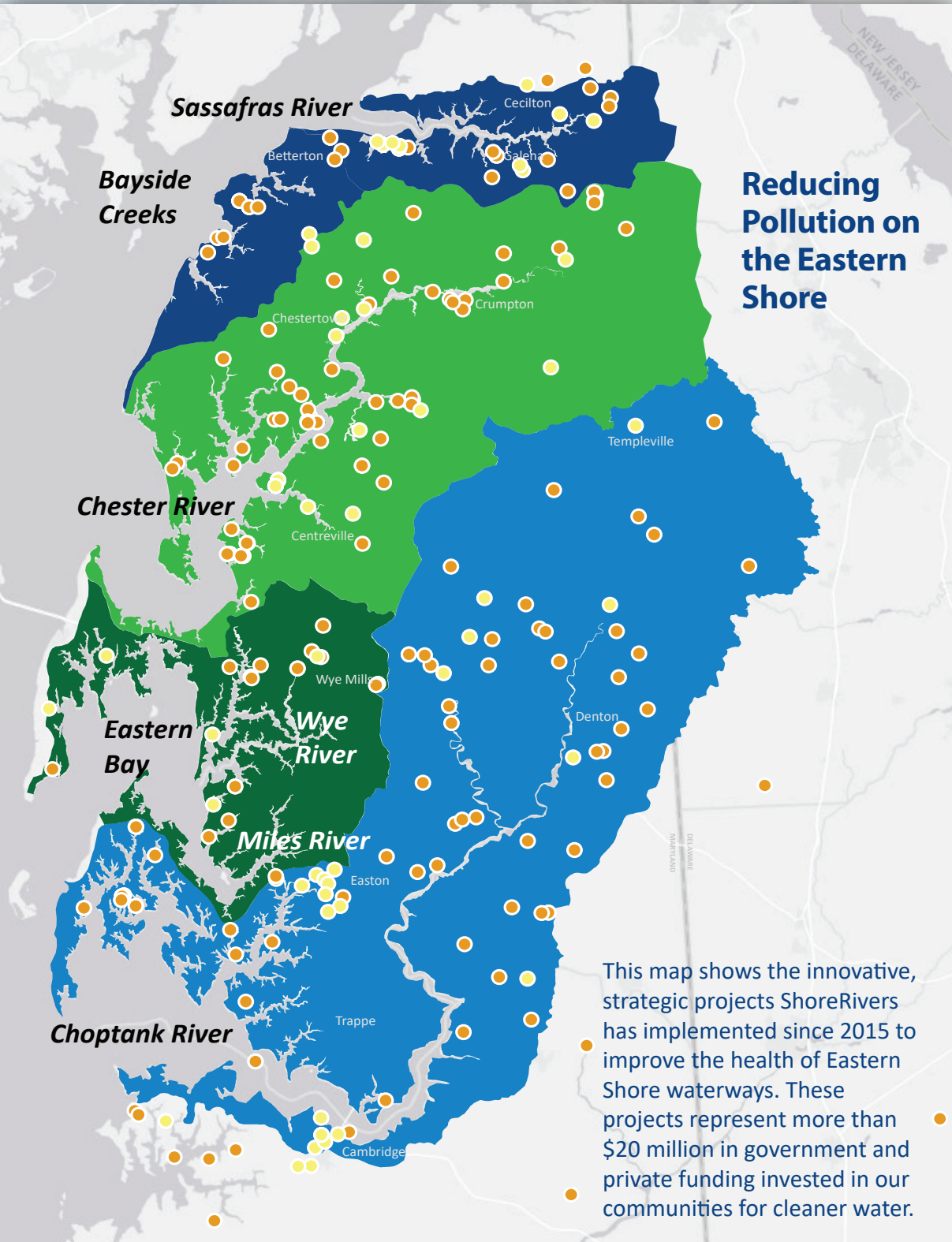
7 FAITH COMMUNITIES

\$20.8 MILLION
IN GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE FOUNDATION FUNDS THAT ARE INVESTED BACK INTO OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES



151 ACRES OF WETLANDS RESTORED; 20,180 FEET OF STREAMS RESTORED

159,841 LBS. OF NITROGEN
16,820 LBS. OF PHOSPHORUS
5,500 TONS OF SEDIMENT
REDUCED EVERY YEAR



Reducing Pollution on the Eastern Shore

This map shows the innovative, strategic projects ShoreRivers has implemented since 2015 to improve the health of Eastern Shore waterways. These projects represent more than \$20 million in government and private funding invested in our communities for cleaner water.

Pollution Reduced Every Year				
Project Location	No. of Projects	Nitrogen	Phosphorus	Sediment
● Farmland	186	141,930 lbs	15,545 lbs	4,966 tons
● Non Farmland	74	17,911 lbs	1,276 lbs	535 tons
Total	260	159,841 lbs	16,821 lbs	5,501 tons

SHORIVERS ARE YOUR RIVERS— ADVOCATING FOR YOUR RIGHT TO HEALTHY WATERWAYS ON THE EASTERN SHORE



By Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper & Director of Riverkeeper Programs

Since its founding, ShoreRivers has developed an advocacy program that has gained state-wide recognition as the voice for clean water from the Eastern Shore. As reputable advocates, our Riverkeepers have formed

partnerships with lawmakers from around the state and on both sides of the aisle, worked through coalitions to influence change on the issues impacting Eastern Shore rivers, and have held our government accountable when resources and the will to enforce clean water laws were at an all-time low.

We've come a long way, from providing testimony on just a few pieces of legislation in 2018, to this year managing a legislative platform of nearly a dozen bills that include some of the most aggressive actions to protect water quality on the Eastern Shore.

In five years, we have engaged with and supported more than 230 bills that directly affect the Eastern Shore's environment, and provided written or oral testimony on more than 90.

We've helped craft legislation that enhanced protection zones for underwater grasses, encouraged smart development practices in coastal areas, and eliminated zombie (expired but still in use) permits while enhancing state inspections and enforcement of violations. Our work on these efforts has brought forward more government funding and resources to protect habitat, stronger and more diligent oversight of polluters, and a greater emphasis on responsible development.

Since 2018, our advocacy work has made measurable progress in protecting oyster reefs, underwater grasses, forest lands, and other natural filters central to the environment on the Eastern Shore. Our front-line advocacy work to promote and protect oyster restoration saw success with the passing of several pieces of legislation that fully funded restoration work, protected oyster restoration sanctuaries from competing interests, and authorized the development of the first-ever oyster stock assessment—an invaluable tool for scientifically managing the oyster fishery. Our voice for oysters led to our state-appointed position on the Oyster Advisory Commission, where we continue to advocate on behalf of the ecosystem services that oysters provide our rivers.

From fighting for more forest protection at Planning Commission meetings in Kent County, to challenging the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in D.C. Circuit Court, our focus on developing solution-oriented strategies has no limits. When the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission decided to give the operators of the Conowingo Dam a 50-year free pass on cleaning up the pollution from behind the dam—pollution that directly harms the Sassafras River and Bayside Creeks—we **joined a coalition of Waterkeepers, took our fundamental right for clean water to the courts, and set a national precedent to ensure our citizens are being given the ability to benefit from a natural resource that belongs to us all.**

We've grown from occasionally providing public comments on a clean water act discharge permit to building grassroots support strong enough to overturn negligent permits, like the one proposed for the AquaCon salmon factory on the Marshyhope Creek. We've led local campaigns, like the one for the Lakeside at Trappe discharge permit, where we



Photo by Dave Harp

engaged with experts, worked with partners, and rallied thousands of voices and comments, leading to a court-ordered remand of that permit that eventually resulted in one that was significantly reduced and much more environmentally friendly. We've raised awareness on the potential negative impacts of spray irrigation of wastewater and the pollution created by the use of biosolids and industrial sludge materials as fertilizers. And through our appointment on the state's Phosphorus Management Tool Advisory Committee, we're working on solving pollution problems stemming from the management of poultry manure.

Our work to address the state's failure to renew discharge permits set the state on a path to eliminate zombie permits, or expired discharge permits that are carried over seemingly in perpetuity. ShoreRivers' diligent investigation of the oldest expired permit in the state—Valley Proteins—exposed major untracked pollution coming from the Dorchester facility and forced the state to finally exercise their duty to enforce clean water laws. It was this local permitting and enforcement issue that led to the development of legislation that required the Maryland Department of the Environment to significantly increase their permitting and enforcement resources, tighten their inspection protocols, and put the protection of our rivers back on top of the agency's priority list.

Over the past five years, we've grown our grassroots advocacy work in a way that proves that civil engagement is alive and thriving on the Eastern Shore.

In Kent County, more than 400 people joined our petition to support strengthened protection of forested land—some of our best natural filters for addressing pollution and the impacts of climate change. In Queen Anne's County, we spoke

alongside more than 40 others against irresponsible land-use decisions in its last remaining critical area zones—transitional land that is necessary to combat the flooding from sea level rise and coastal storms. In Federalsburg, ShoreRivers' members and supporters generated more than 360 letters in opposition to a discharge permit that would've allowed a Norwegian company to discharge millions of gallons of contaminated water into the fragile Marshyhope Creek daily—posing a grave threat to the already endangered Atlantic sturgeon. And in Cambridge, the community demonstrated its prioritization of clean water by joining us in demanding that the city invest money and resources in fixing its sewer overflows—a critical infrastructure problem that directly pollutes oyster beds and takes away our right to swimmable rivers.

Advocacy is how we change the systems that govern the way we protect our resources. Whether its supporting permits that authorize the responsible discharge of wastewater, land-use decisions that best impact our natural filters, or legislation that ensures the protection of our rivers, strong and effective advocacy is how we give our rivers a voice. And when you're doing what's right for the river, you can't be doing wrong.

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT!



**OPERATION
BUILD A REEF**
— EASTERN BAY —

\$62,125 OF \$75,000 GOAL
COLLECTED FOR OPERATION
BUILD-A-REEF: EASTERN BAY
(help us reach our goal at
shorerivers.org/give/reef)

**\$3.989
MILLION**

IN TOTAL GIFTS
BETWEEN
2018-2022

DEEPENING COMMUNITY ROOTS THROUGH TREE PLANTINGS

by Darran White Tilghman, Director of Community Engagement



On a bright, chilly morning the week before Thanksgiving, ShoreRivers staff and volunteers huddled over steaming cups of clove-brewed coffee topped with fresh whipped cream. The Li'l Saints youth group and the pastor and community of Big Woods New Christian Chapel of Love had invited us to a feast. The morning had already

brimmed with gifts: we had been welcomed by prayer, heard a young woman read a well-chosen poem, jammed to music piped through outdoor speakers, and reported our sizes for complimentary hoodies emblazoned with Li'l Saints in glittery applique.

What were we doing together? Planting trees, of course.

We call belonging to a community **"having roots,"** and a community planting like the one at Big Woods in Worton, Maryland, is a perfect reminder of why. The Li'l Saints is a multi-generational effort expertly led by Latonya Cotton and Arlyn Wesley. Both women are incredibly skilled at making community connections that help the young people in their church thrive. Arlyn's brother, Aaron Wesley, chef/owner of Life of Cake catering, contributes what he calls "food ministry" for the group (luckily for us).

"The leadership of this wonderful youth group is amazing," says Pastor Bernadette Wright. "They have added such vitality to our church."

That vitality was in evidence as church elders and youth group members gathered. "So excited!" was how many of the Li'l Saints responded as we shared how we were feeling before heading outside to learn how to plant and care for their new trees. The Li'l Saints' energy carried all of the adults through the morning's work. This historic church property must once have been thick with trees, as the name of the community suggests, but only a few old sentinels remained in an expanse of turf and farm fields until the Li'l Saints planted eight that day. ShoreRivers' certified volunteer Tree Stewards Secethia Boardley-Davis and Andy Goddard created a planting plan that includes 30 more native trees the congregation can continue to add.

The congregants chose native tree species for their stature, beautiful blooms, and fond associations: Eastern redbud, serviceberry, and flowering dogwood, all of which have religious significance.

Perhaps the sweetest lore is around the serviceberry. The early spring blooming of the serviceberry is said to have signaled an end to winter's impassable roads, so traveling ministers could once again reach remote communities to perform weddings, and with the earth's thaw, bury those who had died over the winter. Services could resume.

The antioxidant- and nutrient-rich berries that come later in the season are edible for both birds and people, providing another excellent service.

SHORERIVERS AND TREES



30,477 TREES

PLANTED SINCE 2018
THROUGH OUR AGRICULTURE &
RESTORATION DEPARTMENT



300 TREE STEWARD VOLUNTEERS

SINCE 2021



13

COMMUNITY PLANTINGS
SINCE 2021



SHORERIVERS IS GRATEFUL TO THE NATIONAL FISH & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION AND THE CHESAPEAKE BAY TRUST FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF THIS EFFORT.

Why does a tree planting feel so good for the soul? Planting a tree in community is an act of mutual gift-giving, a connection to the past, and active participation in the future.



"The Eastern redbud is a beautiful tree. I can hardly wait to see it bloom, God's will," said Pastor Wright. "I may not see these trees full-grown," she added, nodding toward the Li'l Saints, "But they will."

Learn more about the health of your river at this year's **STATE OF THE RIVERS** events:

Wednesday, April 26

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum 5:30–7 pm
featuring your Choptank & Miles-Wye Riverkeepers

Wednesday, May 3

Cult Classic Brewing 5:30–7 pm
featuring your Chester & Miles-Wye Riverkeepers

Thursday, May 4

Kent County Community Center 5:30–7 pm
featuring your Chester & Sassafras Riverkeepers

Tuesday, May 9

Galena Fire Hall 5:30–7 pm
featuring your Sassafras Riverkeeper

Wednesday, May 10

447 Venue 5:30–7 pm
featuring your Choptank Riverkeeper



Please help us welcome Ben Ford—your new Miles-Wye Riverkeeper—to the ShoreRivers team! Make sure to attend our April 26 & May 3 events to meet him in person and hear about his vision for the watershed.

"The mission of ShoreRivers inspires me, as does the chance to use my creative skills and network to help ShoreRivers fulfill its mission on a river that feels like home. The rivers of the Eastern Shore are so special to me—I want to help others see them the same way"—Ben

Each event is free and open to the public; light fare will be served. Learn more at shorerivers.org/events.

SHORERIVERS PARTNERSHIP WITH CHESAPEAKE BAY TRUST HELPS BOTH ACHIEVE THEIR VISIONS

By Bethany Ziegler, Communications Specialist



ShoreRivers has accomplished much over the past five years—and very little of it in a silo. Partners, be they granting organizations, local landowners, contractors, or schools are vital

to our work, and when our missions align there's little we can't accomplish.

The Chesapeake Bay Trust is one such organization with whom ShoreRivers has partnered in myriad ways over the years. The organization's vision, that "the Chesapeake Bay and local watersheds are healthy and safe, our waters are fishable and swimmable, local communities benefit from these healthy resources, and everyone participates in restoring and protecting our natural resource treasures" sounds like a summary of the work ShoreRivers does every day. So, it should come as no surprise that they're a longtime supporter of that work.

Since 2017, the Trust has awarded ShoreRivers with 53 grants totaling \$2.7 million for projects including engaging faith communities, educating school children, educating partners on water pollution, and putting projects in the ground to achieve healthy rivers.

"ShoreRivers exemplifies what can be accomplished when mission, leadership, collaboration, and resources come together," said Jana Davis, president of the Chesapeake Bay Trust. "Their vision of what communities and residents can do together is a driving force for restoration, capacity building, education, agricultural, and Riverkeeper programs on the Eastern Shore. The Trust is honored to partner with an organization that has such immediate and lasting impacts on our environment and natural resources."

The Trust's support isn't just financial, either. The Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps is a Chesapeake Bay Trust program that places individuals ages 18–25 with nonprofit or government agencies throughout the watershed for a one-year term of service in an effort to support and train the next generation of stewards in professions that restore and protect our natural resources. **ShoreRivers has hosted 16 corps members since 2011, with half of them being hired after their year of service into full-time positions. Three help make up ShoreRivers' current staff.**

"It would be hard to overstate the impact the Chesapeake Bay Trust has had on our ability to put restoration projects in the ground, to provide education about healthy waterways, and to advocate for the fundamental right to clean water," says ShoreRivers' Executive Director Isabel Hardesty.

"We've long believed that what benefits one of our partners benefits all of us and that working together as a united environmental community is the best way to a healthier planet for generations to come."

A teacher from Queen Anne's County takes part in a professional development workshop at Adkins Arboretum. These workshops were funded by a 2022 grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust.



If you treasure the Chesapeake as much as we do, please consider purchasing a Bay plate for your vehicle. Your contribution is distributed through the Chesapeake Bay Trust in the form of grants to schools, community groups, and other not-for-profits for K-12 environmental education, restoration, and protection of our waterways. Visit bayplate.org to learn more.

One fall decades ago, Marilee Talley remembers venturing across the channel to Ordinary Point where she and her brother, Gregg, beached their jon boat and went exploring. After a time, they came back to the beach to find their craft “rapidly migrating downriver!” They scurried after it as fast as they could and eventually wrangled it back to shore. She remembers with a laugh, “we were much less afraid of drowning than we were to face our grandfather if we lost his boat!”

Marilee’s grandparents bought what they would fondly call *Quest End* on the *Sassafras* in the early ‘60s. They were friendly with a nearby farmer who alerted them of the property being offered for sale and he implored them to buy it outright. Located in what’s now called Kentmore Park, the home is distinctive and grand, with a tall, pillared porch facing the bend in the river.



Gregg and Marilee fondly recall boating, rowing, swimming, and sailing the *Sassafras* on summer weekends as children. But now, Marilee fears Eastern Shore rivers have been “loved too much” and it’s time to act on their behalf. Gregg agrees: “It’s our obligation to know the issues and get involved.” After riding along with *Sassafras* Riverkeeper Zack Kelleher one summer afternoon, Marilee realized, “it’s not all just fun and games and water sampling.” Environmental advocacy, education, and restoration are complex and take time.

Over the years, the Talley family migrated more and more often down the Chesapeake from their homes in Westville, New Jersey, to their beloved Eastern Shore retreat. Mary Ruth, the matriarch of the family and mother of Marilee and Gregg, admires her slice of the *Sassafras* and thinks of it as a “very, very unique area” that she feels thankful has stayed largely undiscovered in comparison to other areas of the Shore. **When visiting her residence today, her affinity for the area and pride in her family’s history is evidenced by her careful preservation of the home and surrounding property.**

Bringing community members into this work, educating residents and visitors alike to the consequence of their actions on the environment, and acting as stewards of this place have become Talley family values. Newly retired, Marilee loves to pair her love of the ecosystem with her passion for data science as a supporter and volunteer for *ShoreRivers*. Whether it’s a paddling trip, a fundraiser, or a homeowner’s association meeting, Marilee, Gregg, and Mary Ruth are committed to doing what’s right for the river.

Let your legacy tell the story

*Just like your connection to the river, gifts to *ShoreRivers* are special.*

Thanks to your annual gifts, we’re able to meet our current needs and respond to opportunities immediately with flexible dollars that benefit water quality today.



In addition to annual contributions, *ShoreRivers* is building its endowment to secure our ability to restore and protect Eastern Shore waterways in perpetuity. Planned gifts to endowment take the form of a bequest in your will, a gift of property or securities, a charitable gift annuity or trust, a gift of life insurance, or a gift from a retirement account.

We would love to hear your story and, together, preserve clean rivers for generations to come.

To learn more, contact Rebekah Hock, Director of Development, at 443.385.0511 ext. 206 or rhock@shorerivers.org.



SHORE RIVERS

Eastern Shore Conservation Center
114 S. Washington St., Suite 301
Easton, MD 21601

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



19th Annual

RIDE *for* CLEAN RIVERS

Scenic 20, 35, or 62
mile courses available!

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2023
Chesapeake College, Wye Mills, MD
REGISTER NOW! shorerivers.org/events

SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

Saturday, June 24, 2023 | 6–10 pm | Wilmer Park, Chestertown MD

Celebrate with us at our signature summer event! For nearly a decade, ShoreRivers has hosted a summer Solstice Celebration on the banks of the Chester River. Enjoy live music, refreshing cocktails, delicious food, good company, and an exceptional live auction.

Tickets and sponsorship opportunities now available: shorerivers.org/events

