

An Investment Worth Protecting

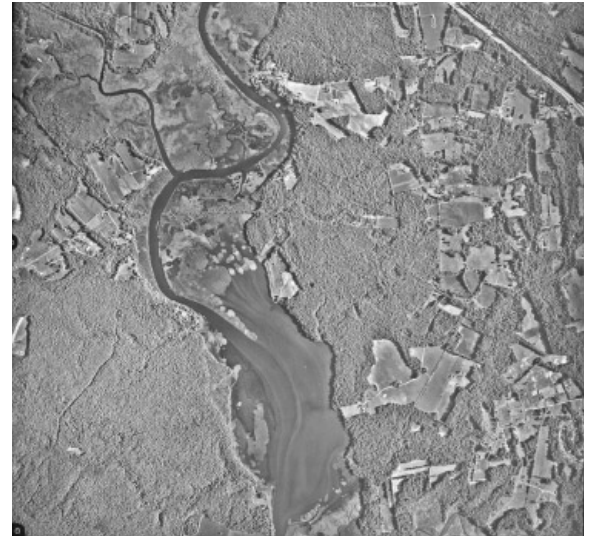
By Chris Swarth

Sanctuaries and nature preserves may seem to be protected forever, but are they? Parks, refuges and wildlife sanctuaries were historically located in rural or wild areas. An hour or more was needed to drive there. Today, distant parks are not so distant as suburban development creeps ever outward to formerly rural areas. Consider Dyke Marsh in Alexandria, the Patuxent Wildlife Refuge in Laurel, or the Anita C. Leight Estuarine Center, in Harford County. Each of these nature preserves is experiencing heavy development pressures that may push right up against their boundaries. At Blackwater Refuge on the Eastern Shore, for example, there is a plan to build 3,200 houses along the Little Blackwater River, which drains directly into the refuge. As sprawl begins to engulf refuges, they become “habitat islands”—regions of protected natural lands that are surrounded by a “sea” of development.

Another threat could come from efforts to sell off publicly owned parklands or to convert them to uses for which they were not intended. In recent years, efforts to sell public regional and state parklands in Maryland were thwarted by outraged citizens. Could this happen at Jug Bay? Not likely! Actions by hard-working citizens and dedicated government officials working together should make this scenario very unlikely. I describe here some of the ways that lands within and around the Sanctuary are protected.

Levels of Protection Around the Sanctuary

Several important government-sponsored plans preserve open space and the rural lifestyle of southern Anne Arundel County. The Anne Arundel County **Greenways Master Plan** was prepared in 2002 by former Recreation and Parks Department Environmental Chief Brian Woodward. It calls for



Aerial photo of the Jug Bay region showing wetlands, forests and agricultural fields. The Patuxent River is on the left and Route 4 is in the top right corner.

creating a network of greenways that protect ecologically valuable lands as a means of reducing the fragmenting effects of development and preserving open space. The Patuxent Greenway comprises a broad swath of land along the east side of the Patuxent River north to Route 50, including the entire Sanctuary. Once the goals of the plan are achieved, open space lands will be linked in a network that will enhance habitats for wildlife and will help to preserve the Patuxent and the Chesapeake Bay. This plan can be viewed by going to <http://www.aacounty.org/PlanZone/MasterPlans/Index.cfm>.

Program Open Space (POS) conserves our natural resources and provides outdoor recreational experiences for everyone in Maryland. The idea is that open space lands will be preserved to match the pace at which the landscape develops. Funds generated from the state’s real estate transfer tax are placed in the POS fund and made available to every county. Over 300,000 acres have been preserved in Maryland since the program began in 1969. Most of the parcels that comprise the Sanctuary were purchased with POS funds. While POS limits development, certain activities that would not be appropriate here (for example, hunting areas, playgrounds, golf courses, and ball fields) are allowed on POS lands. This year Anne Arundel County Recreation and Parks Department has about \$22,000,000 available for POS land purchases.

Another county effort to encourage preservation of open space is the **South County Small Area Plan (SAP)**. The County authorized 16 of these SAPs all

Contents

Message from FOJB president	3
Of Mud and Microbes	4
Eagle Scout Projects/Turtle Habitat	5
Upcoming Events and Programs	insert
Sanctuary News	6
Volunteer Duo Highlighted	7



Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary
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Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary is operated by the Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks. It was established in 1985 with the goals of wetlands research and environmental education. The Sanctuary is a limited-use park. Visitors are requested to make a reservation by calling the office before planning a visit.

Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary is a member of the Chesapeake Bay - National Estuarine Research Reserve system, which promotes scientific research, public education, resource management and stewardship in estuarine reserves across the nation.

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Continued from page 1

across the county. The plan for our area was completed in 2001 by a committee of 16 south county residents (whose rallying cry was “Keep South County Rural”) led by the Trust for Public Land’s Debi Osborne. The SAP vision states: “A high priority is placed on protecting the area’s natural resources, including its wetlands, shorelines, woodlands, fields, wildlife and their habitats.” The SAP is only “advisory” at this time, but there are efforts to give parts of the plans some regulatory force. The SAP calls for low-scale development in Wayson’s Corner where a Target Store is now proposed. The South County SAP can be viewed at <http://www.aacounty.org/PlanZone/SAP/Index.cfm>

A number of our direct neighbors on Wrighton Road, Plummer Lane and Pindell Road have their property in an agricultural, conservation, or forest easement. According to the Maryland Environmental Trust, “a conservation easement is a tool for landowners to protect natural resources and preserve scenic open space. The landowner who gives an easement limits the right to develop and subdivide the land, now and in the future, but still remains the owner. The organization accepting the easement agrees to monitor it forever to ensure compliance with its terms. No public access is required by a conservation easement.”

Easements provide a critical buffer surrounding the Sanctuary, shielding the Sanctuary from harm. Because many animals readily move back and forth between protected lands and private property, populations are safer and healthier, using larger habitat areas that support their needs. These buffers also help improve water quality and reduce soil runoff.

Levels of Protection in the Sanctuary

Purchasing land for resource protection is the first critical step to creating a nature preserve. But long-term protection does not end with this one act. For example, at some point in the future protected lands could be converted to incompatible uses for which the land was never intended. Legal documents with explicit language or with codified management practices may be needed. To make certain that the Sanctuary is protected for future generations of citizens

and wildlife populations, government officials and dedicated citizens have worked long and hard to ensure that the Sanctuary will remain protected in perpetuity. Today, there are several layers of county, state, and federal protections over the Sanctuary. The most important of these is the **Environmental Covenant** that was signed by County Executive Janet S. Owens in March 2006. This document sets forth restrictions and makes explicit the County’s intent to manage the Sanctuary for the purposes of environmental education, ecological research, and habitat stewardship. Activities that are not consistent with this mission are simply not allowed.

In 1990, the Sanctuary joined the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The Reserve program is a partnership between the National Oceanic and Administrative Administration, Maryland’s Department of Natural Resources, and the county. As part of that process the county signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the state to manage the Sanctuary in ways that do not harm the environment. The MOU is very specific and covers such issues as erosion, commercial activities, degradation to water quality, excavations and trash dumping.

In 2001, the Sanctuary was expanded with the purchase of the 600-acre Parris Glendening Nature Preserve—the first such parcel purchased as part of the Governor’s innovative GreenPrint program. The land is also subject to special restrictions that are outlined in a Conservation Easement that is held by the state. The easement requires the County to minimize damage to water quality and to wetlands, among a host of other activities. By paying attention to threats from without as well as to improper actions within, we—staff, volunteers, the Friends of Jug Bay—can ensure that the Sanctuary will remain in healthy natural condition for generations to come.

To learn more about these issues, contact FOJB Stewardship Committee Chair Al Tucker (301 229-4826).

To view the MOU, the Environmental Covenant and the Conservation Easement, go to the Sanctuary web page at www.jugbay.org, and click the links on the home page under “More Information.”