

# The Capital

## South County

### West, Rhode rivers get a riverkeeper

By E.B. FURGURSON III. Staff Writer

Bob Gallagher is acting on faith. He doesn't have funding or a full-fledged conservation organization backing him, but he's taking on the job as the new riverkeeper for the West and Rhode rivers.

The Waterkeepers Alliance, an international umbrella organization based in New York, earlier this month approved Mr. Gallagher, a soon-to-retire lawyer and Shady Side resident, to monitor, protect and enhance the water quality of the south county bodies of water.

"It is a dream job, really," he said yesterday. "I have lived on the river for 10 years now and this is a real opportunity to make a difference."

He will begin patrolling the two rivers in May on a volunteer basis while funding sources are nailed down and other people are rounded up to keep the program working.

"In a year or two from now, we hope to have a paid staff," he said. "But no matter how successful we are, we will need a large number of volunteers, people who believe there is a problem and there is something we can do about it."

The rivers are lucky in that there are no major polluting industries or power-generating plants as other rivers have.

"But we do have considerable development pressure that impairs water quality in the West and Rhode watersheds," he said.

The Chesapeake Environmental Protection Agency, which first broached the idea of a West and Rhode riverkeeper last year, is encouraging Mr. Gallagher to pursue the certification from the international Riverkeeper Alliance now rather than later.

CEPA's new president Lee Greenbaum expressed support for Mr. Gallagher's effort. "CEPA will work with Bob, providing whatever help possible," he said in the organization's newsletter.

That help could come in the form of fund-raising as the organization embarks on a new, more active tack marked by more public outreach.

The West and Rhode are in a unique position with an existing riverkeeper at work while funds are raised to back the long-term project. The South River Federation took two years to streamline its organization and raise funds before hiring former Department of Natural Resources biologist Drew Koslow as its riverkeeper last year.

"I am really excited to have another keeper in Maryland," Mr. Koslow said. "It is the way to go. Working at the grass-roots level is the way to get our voices heard."

He also thinks the Rhode and West rivers waterkeeper might help local conservation efforts gel. "There are a lot of small groups in the area that have not worked together. Maybe he can bring the communities together with the work he is doing."

Other local Chesapeake Bay tributaries with riverkeepers include the Severn, South, Patapsco, Patuxent and Chester.

Mr. Gallagher reports he has already taken his first official actions after getting sanctioned March 8. He joined the National Resources Defense Council in backing clean air legislation in Maryland, and the South River Federation in its opposition to new county regulations of development on steep slopes.

Mr. Gallagher said his mission will also be shaped by the views of the residents who live along the rivers, and those who use them too.

"We plan to meet as many people and groups ... as we can to listen to their views and priorities for protecting the rivers," he said.

To share information about specific pollution issues or ideas about priorities or to volunteer to help, contact Mr. Gallagher at 301-261-5021 or by e-mail at [riverkeeper@comcast.net](mailto:riverkeeper@comcast.net).

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