

The Capital

South County

Workshop focuses on storm runoff 'disaster'

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

Storm water rushes from county roadways, roofs, and parking lots every time it rains. It silts in county creeks and transports Chesapeake Bay-choking nutrients downstream.

Over the past 300 years, steady urbanization has stymied this once forested landscape's ability to absorb rainfall.

On Sunday a collection of conservation groups will host "Storm Water: An Unnatural Disaster," at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater.

"The first step toward solving any problem is understanding it," said Jerry Hill, a board member with the Chesapeake Environmental Protection Association, one of the sponsoring organizations. "This forum will give people an understanding of how storm water affects our quality of life."

The forum, at SERC's Philip D. Reed Center for Education from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., will feature two speakers, a series of community leaders talking about conditions in specific areas and a series of exhibits.

Ron Bowen, county director of public works, will describe the critical stormwater problems in the County, what his department is doing to address them and what additional efforts will be required.

Phil Davenport, business manager for Virginia Beach, will make a presentation on his community's experience in creating a storm-water fee to deal with the problem.

"The purpose of the forum is to help the public understand why storm water is a problem, the magnitude of the problem, and what it will take to solve it," said Joan Turek, board chairman of South County Exchange, one of the community forum sponsors.

Other sponsors of the forum are South River Federation, the Alliance for Sustainable Communities and Maryland Aquatic Resources Coalition.

A major item on the agenda is the need for a county stormwater fee, or some other means to pay for repairing the damage. A proposal would have county property owners pay amount, perhaps \$60 per year, to be used exclusively for storm-water repairs, retrofits and watershed restoration. That fee, based on the amount of impervious surface on a property, could raise approximately \$20 million per year. The county has a \$400 million backlog of watershed restoration work.

So far, neither County Executive Janet S. Owens nor members of the County Council

have taken up the fee issue, though Councilman Ed Reilly, R-Crofton, will moderate the forum.

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