

# The Capital

## Academy professor steps up fight for Chesapeake

### New book calls for tougher laws, 'dark green' dedication

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In 2003, Howard Ernst shook up the Chesapeake Bay restoration movement with his scathing book, "Chesapeake Bay Blues."



J. Henson — The Capital

Naval Academy professor and author Howard Ernst is out with his second book on the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort. Ernst, shown here on the banks of the Severn River, argues it's time for environmentalists and politicians to step up their efforts.

Now he's back with another book, this one a call to action for people who want to rescue the bay's health once and for all.

" 'Chesapeake Bay Blues' was a kick in the pants" for environmentalists and politicians, Ernst said. "This is a compass for them."

The new book, "Fight for the Bay: Why a Dark Green Environmental Awakening is Needed to Save the Chesapeake Bay," comes out in mid October.

It's a short book, at just about 130 pages, but Ernst packs in analysis of how environmentalists, politicians and

journalists have failed the bay, and how they can make a difference. It wraps up with essays from environmentalists recalling some of their biggest struggles to help the bay.

Ernst, who teaches political science at the Naval Academy, argues that politicians and environmentalists are too quick to compromise, adopting what he calls a "light green" mentality.

While compromise is good, and a part of a healthy political system, Ernst said there are too many people with a light green mind-set working on the bay. He said the bay needs

more "dark greens" - people who believe that clean air and clean water are basic human rights.

Politicians often fall into light-green mode, passing compromised bills that don't do much, Ernst said.

As a result, we get voluntary programs without teeth - such as the Environmental Protection Agency-led Chesapeake Bay Program - or laws weakened under the pressure of industries, he added.

Altogether, Ernst calls the result "the political dead zone."

"The political dead zone is not dangerous merely because it stifles meaningful environmental innovation, though it does; its ultimate danger is that elected officials are able to take credit for symbolic environmental policies that require little political will and that do not reverse the decline of the ecosystem," he writes.

### **Urgency for bay**

Ernst sees things starting to change, however.

"There's been a darkening of the environmental community," he said.

He praised mainstream environmental groups such as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation for sharpening their message and advocating strong pollution control programs with penalties for polluters. He likes that the CBF has ramped up its legal efforts, even suing the federal government for dropping the ball when it comes to cleaning the bay.

Ernst said, however, that bay advocates need to work even harder in the coming months. He believes it may be now-or-never time for saving the Chesapeake Bay.

Finally, he said, it's accepted as fact that bay restoration efforts aren't working. Federal agencies are working on new plans for how to manage bay pollution, and are due to issue recommendations in November.

And the EPA is working on a "pollution budget" that, if enforced, could lead to meaningful reductions in the nutrients and sediment that sully the bay and rob oxygen from the water.

But Ernst said he fears this window may be short.

"I truly believe the next six to 12 months determine the fate of bay restoration," he said. He said the book can be a guide for fed-up environmentalists to finally make a stand.

"The environmental community now is angry, but that doesn't necessarily translate to good policy," he said. "This book can be a good asset to them."

## **Advocates, journalists**

Politicians and environmentalists aren't Ernst's only targets. He also devotes a chapter to environmental journalism, laying out how problems in the media - especially in newspapers - can lead to fewer people being informed about the bay.

He raises concerns that financial woes at newspapers like The Capital might lead to less in-depth reporting on the environment.

"Like removing oysters from the Bay, or the filter from an aquarium, it is likely that the fall of environmental journalism has left the system less resilient and more susceptible to the ills of the political dead zone," Ernst writes.

There's also a local spin to the book, with essays contributed by some well-known local environmentalists: Anne Pearson, the Edgewater-based director of the Alliance for Sustainable Communities; former state senator Gerald Winegrad of Annapolis; and south county activist Mike Shay.

Ernst said it was people like Pearson, Winegrad and Shay who inspired the second book. When he was giving lectures after the publication of "Chesapeake Bay Blues," he met people who told him over and over that there was more to the story of the failure of bay restoration.

"I heard their stories and heard their frustrations," he said.

So he went to work on "Fight for the Bay" in early 2008.

Jonathan Sisk, senior executive editor at Rowman & Littlefield, said it was an easy choice to publish another book by Ernst.

"Chesapeake Bay Blues" not only made a splash in the environmental community, it also sold well. It sold about 5,000 copies, which is significant for an academic book. Sisk said "Fight for the Bay" is "more timely than ever." It will be sold regionally in bookstores and online at Amazon.

"The public is open to this book in a way they weren't before," Sisk said. "It seems to me although what Howard is saying is a pretty radical call to rethink how we approach the Chesapeake Bay, I think people understand it's not getting any better and they're open to that."

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