

The Capital

Our Bay: Stimulus for the bay

Chesapeake projects receive federal recovery money

By PAMELA WOOD, Staff Writer
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On Beards Creek in Edgewater, bulldozer operators are using giant claws to pluck apart an old, wooden bulkhead.

On Clements Creek north of Annapolis, more heavy equipment is at work, transforming a ravine into a living, flowing stream.

Soon in other places around the county, wetland grasses will be planted and stormwater runoff will be attacked - all with federal stimulus money.

The state was awarded \$121.6 million in money for environmental projects from the federal stimulus program, which is officially called the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

About \$3.3 million of that chunk of cash is coming to Annapolis and Anne Arundel County for projects that will benefit local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

In some cases, the stimulus money is paying for projects that otherwise wouldn't have been done or would have taken many more years to patch together the money.

"It's great to see tax dollars used for restoration," said South River Federation Executive Director Erik Michelsen, who attended a ceremony at Southdown Shores in Edgewater, where a wooden bulkhead is being replaced by a living shoreline. Almost directly across Beards Creek from Southdown Shores is Annapolis Landing, where stimulus money is also paying for a living shoreline.



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Landscape architect Keith Underwood operates a "track hoe" at the site of a stream restoration on Clements Creek near the Severn River, just north of Annapolis. The restoration is one of several local environmental projects being funded by federal stimulus grants

Earlier this week, officials congregated at Southdown Shores to highlight the stimulus spending on environmental project. With a chill in the air, dignitaries praised the federal government's decision to invest in the environment while creating jobs.

After the speeches, the assembled group watched the crew from ShoreLine Design use bulldozer claws pluck the bulkhead's pilings out of the ground as easily as if they were little weeds.

Del. Virginia Clagett, D-West River, stopped by to see the work at Southdown Shores. She said people are always asking her, "All right, Virginia, what is the stimulus money doing for us?"

Now, a very pleased Clagett said, she has answers for them.

Many Republicans have been critical of the stimulus spending, but state Sen. Ed Reilly, R-Crofton, liked what he saw at Southdown Shores.

"It's a jobs creation program and it's good to see you guys at work," he said to the ShoreLine Design crew.

"We are very grateful to President Obama and EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson for ensuring there are green projects funded with this money," said Shari T. Wilson, the state secretary of the environment.

Wilson's agency had the challenging job of selecting which projects would get the money.

Once the state found out it would be getting \$121.6 million for clean-water and drinking-water projects, the Maryland Department of the Environment solicited projects for the money. The applications poured in from all over the state, totalling \$3.8 billion in requests.

The nonprofit Chesapeake Bay Trust, which gets most of its money from "Treasure the Chesapeake" license plates, had 12 "shovel-ready" projects in mind. The bay trust had already paid for work on some of the projects, such as initial designs for the Southdown Shores shoreline. In the end, seven were picked for stimulus money.

One of the stimulus-funded projects for the bay trust is a living shoreline and wetlands project along the Chesapeake Bay in Churchton's Franklin Manor community, where the shoreline is eroding rapidly.

The Franklin Manor project is big and expensive - \$681,800 - and likely wouldn't have been possible without the stimulus money, said Jana Davis, associate executive director of the bay trust.

Up the road a few miles on the Severn River's Clements Creek, another work crew is attempting to rescue a creek badly damaged by polluted stormwater runoff.

Before work started earlier this month, a steep ravine ran 450 feet through the woods, heading from a drainage pipe in the Carriage Hills neighborhood toward Clements Creek.

The ravine was 20 feet deep and only carried water during storms, when the rainwater would run hot and fast through the gorge.

Now with \$450,000 in stimulus money awarded to the Severn Riverkeeper organization, the gorge is being leveled out and returned to a functioning stream that will filter out sediment and nutrient pollution and recharge the groundwater.

Fred Kelly, the Severn Riverkeeper, said the Clements Creek stream restoration was made a reality by the stimulus money.

Kelly said more environmental tax dollars should be spent on on-the-ground projects rather than studies, especially when it comes to the Chesapeake Bay.

The riverkeeper group first tried to get money from the state's Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund, but didn't make the cut after the fund was hacked in the budget-cutting process. So when the riverkeeper staff heard about the stimulus money for the environment, they jumped on it and were glad to get approved.

"It made it happen," Kelly said while observing work on a recent chilly morning. "Unfortunately, the county doesn't have any money, the state doesn't have any money."

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