

Former Del. Guns to run DNR's bay programs

Cecil Democrat often fought environmentalists

By Rona Kobell
Sun Staff

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The Ehrlich administration has appointed a former legislator known for his support of industry and his clashes with environmentalists to an assistant secretary job at Maryland's Department of Natural Resources.

Ron Guns, a Cecil County Democrat who served for nearly a decade as chairman of the House Environmental Matters Committee, will become DNR's assistant secretary for Chesapeake Bay programs.

Guns, a former lineman and budget manager for Verizon, replaces Mark Bundy, a 27-year DNR employee with a doctorate in resource economics. DNR officials said Bundy resigned Monday after he was offered another job in state government and declined it.

Guns has been serving on the Public Service Commission since 2001, the year then-Gov. Parris N. Glendening appointed him to the \$94,000-a-year position. Glendening offered Guns the job in large part to remove him from the powerful committee, where Guns was viewed as an obstruction to Glendening's environmental initiatives.

Natural Resources Secretary C. Ronald Franks, who served with Guns in the legislature, said Guns' work on the committee showed his balanced views and his knowledge.

"His exposure in that position gives him as good a look at environmental issues as anyone could have from a policy point of view," Franks said.

Guns, 56, says he sees himself as a consensus-builder. Though he has more than a year left in his PSC term, Guns said he jumped at the DNR opportunity because, after nearly 19 years on the committee, the bay is "just a part of me now."

Former Del. Leon G. Billings, a Montgomery County Democrat who considers Guns a friend, remembers the former chairman blocking proposals for stricter auto-emissions standards, tougher critical-area laws and stronger controls to handle outbreaks such as pfiisteria.

"He facilitated bad legislation, and he stopped good legislation," said Billings, who now owns a consulting firm. "He was extremely close to the business and industry advocates."

Among the causes Billings says Guns championed were those of the commercial chicken and electricity industries. Billings and others said Guns routinely skewered the work of DNR staff under Glendening.

"He didn't want to have a resource-protective agency. He wanted a resources-exploitative industry," Billings said.

Guns, who said he does not yet know his new salary, will be overseeing water-quality programs, bay grass restoration and other bay initiatives. Though he acknowledged some disputes with environmentalists, he said criticisms like Billings' are unfair.

"I'm not 100 percent environmentalist. I'm not sure you can afford to be," he said. "But I'm certainly someone who wants to make progress to improve the quality of the bay."

News of Guns' appointment shocked many in legislative and environmental circles.

"I don't know what to say. You can say I'm speechless," said Sen. Brian E. Frosh.

Terry Harris, a Baltimore lawyer who serves on the board of the League of Conservation Voters, recalls an adversarial relationship with Guns, who scored 16 out of a possible 100 on the league's scorecard for 1997-1998, his lowest mark. In 1999-2000, he received a rating of 50.

Though Harris said Guns brings a good understanding of environmental issues, he questioned putting such a contentious figure into an agency struggling with budget cuts and morale problems.

"It's kind of odd that Ron would want this job," Harris said.

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