

Testimony of Congressman John P. Sarbanes
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Protecting and Restoring America's Great Waters – Part II: Chesapeake Bay

Chairwoman Johnson, thank you for allowing me to testify today and thank you for holding this hearing on Chesapeake Bay environmental restoration and protection. I think you will find a refreshing bipartisan consensus among the Members representing the Chesapeake Bay watershed that we must be successful in our efforts to save the Bay. That this consensus exists is, in and of itself, a strong statement about the Bay as a historic, cultural, economic and environmental symbol for this region.

I am proud to represent Maryland's 3rd Congressional District, whose residents have a strong tradition of environmental advocacy rooted in a passion for the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay is our Nation's largest estuary and, in many ways, the soul of our state. It is a national environmental treasure and an economic catalyst as it pertains to the region's tourism and seafood industries.

Unfortunately, the Bay's health has been significantly affected by multiple factors from locally produced nutrient runoff to sea level rise as a result of global warming. I am committed to reversing these trends and restoring the Bay's water quality and natural habitats. There's no doubt that the EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program is central to those efforts and I welcome the opportunity to improve upon its work.

Although the EPA is the lead agency for the Chesapeake Bay Program, the Program is actually a partnership among several federal agencies, as well as the states of Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. County and municipal governments have also made strong contributions to the Bay restoration effort. This widespread participation allows for more resources to be brought to bear but it also poses challenges with respect to setting common goals, coordination, management, and evaluation. I suspect these challenges, along with overall funding commitments, will be among the most common topics of debate as you begin to craft reauthorizing legislation. I look forward to participating in that discussion and hope that members from the Bay region, who are absolutely committed to succeeding in our efforts to save the Bay, can work with the committee to ensure the Chesapeake Bay Program achieves its water quality and living resource goals.

In closing, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to testify before the committee today and I hope the Chair will indulge me for a moment to say that the Water Resources Development Act reauthorization next year is also critical to Bay cleanup. The Army Corps of Engineers is an integral partner in the Chesapeake Bay Program. I, along with 21 other members representing Bay watershed districts, have introduced legislation, H.R. 6550, to expand the Corps' role in Bay cleanup. The legislation would make permanent the Corps' Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection Program, which was established as a pilot program under WRDA 1996. It would also expand the Corps' work to all six states in the Bay watershed and the District of Columbia and provide flexibilities for the Corps to work with other federal agencies, state and local governments and not-for-profit groups engaged in Bay cleanup. I also believe we should authorize the Corps, on a pilot basis, to engage in storm water management projects in the Bay watershed. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals with members of the Committee in the future and look forward to working with you on the EPA program reauthorization and WRDA next year.