



NEWS

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CCA MD chairman calls for greater support of Natural Resources Police

ANNAPOLIS (MD)—Maryland’s elected officials—both in the legislature and the executive branch—must place a greater focus on supporting the state’s Natural Resources Police (NRP) if the Chesapeake Bay is to be restored and prosper, according to Andy Hughes, chairman, Coastal Conservation Association Maryland (CCA MD).

“While Maryland, as other states, is facing difficult fiscal times, funding cuts for the Natural Resources Police is a short-sighted solution for budget cutting,” Hughes said. “The Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries are a tremendously valuable resource, which annually produce close to \$1 billion dollars from recreational fishing alone for the state. The NRP is the only agency that has marine capabilities to protect the Bay.”

Hughes has set an agenda to increase CCA MD’s efforts in advocacy as a cornerstone of his administration. The association represents more than 1,800 recreational anglers and citizens concerned about marine resources throughout the state.

Recently, a number of positions have been cut from the NRP budget.

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“What is especially tragic at this time is that Maryland has demonstrated a renewed enthusiasm toward protecting the Bay,” Hughes said. “Governor O’Malley, along with his counterpart in Virginia, worked hard to develop a plan to protect blue crabs this year. Additionally, organizations, including CCA MD, are working with local citizens to grow oysters in the Bay.

“These are all fine efforts, but without enforcement, regulations and programs will fail. Maryland’s leaders are facing a difficult time as they strive to manage very limited fiscal resources, but we implore the Governor, the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, and state legislators to provide NRP officers what they need to protect our Bay.”

Hughes noted that NRP and the Maryland Park Service had 451 authorized law enforcement officers in 1990. Now merged, there are only 258 positions. Actual manpower on the ground is down 50 percent due to unfilled positions with an increasing level of statewide responsibilities. Plus, 67 officers are currently eligible for retirement.

“Recreational anglers, commercial interests, the Maryland Fisheries Task Force, and the Maryland Oyster Advisory Commission have all called for greater enforcement of our marine resource laws,” said Hughes. “Even though we are in tight economic times, our leaders must provide adequate support for NRP officers to complete their mission. To do less would risk the health of these extremely valuable resources for years to come.”