



THE WICOMICO ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST NEWSLETTER

WICOMICOENVIRONMENT.ORG

Vol. 11, No. 3, Fall 2015

Letter from the Executive Director



It was uplifting to attend the Salisbury City Council meeting on September 14, when dozens of our neighbors spoke on behalf of protecting the Naylor Mill Park forest, our drinking water source, and family recreation. The issue was whether to transfer the city-owned land to Wicomico County, which would cut part of the forest over the Paleochannel well

head protection area to expand ballfields at the Henry S. Parker Athletic Complex. After the City Council listened for two hours to citizen concerns, it allowed the proposed transfer to the county to die—effectively voting to keep the area as a mature forest, at least for the present. It was even suggested that the city put this land into a conservation trust, to protect the forest and the well head from future development proposals.

Some were disappointed, believing that we lost an opportunity to give our economy a needed boost. Many who wanted to protect the forest did not see this as an either/or decision, however. They pointed to other locations for the ballfields away from the well area.

I've attended lots of local government council meetings over the years, and many are not pretty, with each side of a controversy so locked in to its own point of view that it's blind to opportunities to work together. At this Salisbury City Council meeting, in contrast, there was listening and acknowledgement that we can come together in good faith to make wise community decisions. The City Council should be applauded for setting a positive and welcoming atmosphere for all sides. The energy from this experience can help guide us through the many environmental challenges we still face.

Wicomico County and Salisbury have been working to reduce pollution, and both have projects in various stages of implementation. WET is partnering with local government and other nonprofits to help citizens have a voice in the future of our area's environment, and a role in helping to improve the health of our waterways and natural areas.

WET is coordinating the Faith and the Environment initiative in Wicomico County and has been meeting with congregations to consider how our faith-based partners can take leadership in protecting our planet. WET is looking for neighborhoods interested in holding workshops and beginning projects for best conservation management practices for homeowners. Local government, nonprofits, businesses, and individuals are all needed in the effort to clean up our waters.

The recent City Council meeting demonstrates how citizens can

protect our waterways, forests, farmland, and way of life if we become actively involved. We have trails for family hiking, and ponds, rivers, and the Bay to explore. We are fortunate to have these treasures. However, these resources are threatened and need our constant protection. If we respond with the same energy to other environmental issues as we did in this case, we can insure that our children and grandchildren will continue to benefit from our wonderful natural blessings.

Thank you for your ongoing support and involvement.

Barry Johansson
Barry Johansson
Interim Executive Director

WET Invites You to **2015 Annual Dinner and Art Auction** **Friday, Nov. 6, beginning at 6:00 pm** Wicomico Room, Guerrieri Center, Salisbury University

6:00 p.m. • Cash bar and silent auction;
7:00 p.m. • Dinner
(Art works for the silent auction
will be displayed in advance on WET's website.)

Keynote speaker: Dr. Michael Lewis,
Chair of the Environmental Studies Department,
Salisbury University

The John Groutt Award
for Environmental Stewardship will be presented to
Dr. Judith Stribling
and the WET Award for Environmental Advocacy
will be presented to Mike Pretl, Esq.

To make reservations, see the reply form
on the back page of this newsletter,
or you can order tickets online at
www.wicomicoenvironment.org/events.html.
For further information, call 443-614-4122
or email wet@wicomicoenvironment.org.



Since 2009, few requests for approval of new housing developments have been brought to the Salisbury/Wicomico County Planning and Zoning Commission. That began to change in September with a request for final approval for a new development at Raegan's Run, on Riverside Drive Extended.

This new development on farmland was strongly opposed by neighbors since it was first proposed in 2006. Now, however, several of those neighbors have died and others have moved. Even so, three neighbors and a WET representative testified about the repeated flooding in the area, which will almost certainly result in sewage from the new septic systems reaching the wells of some current homes during heavy rains. Other concerns were the added traffic on the already heavily traveled, narrow Riverside Drive, which is popular for cycling and walking.

The proposed new development is only 10 houses, but 31 acres remain for possible expansion development. This appears to be greatly reduced from the original 62 in the

earlier 2006 proposal. Several citizens at the meeting expressed concern as to how the remaining 31-acre parcel bordered by a stream will be used. WET urged that it be placed in a conservation easement so it would remain open land.

This proposal portends what we face in the future. A large number of sprawl development proposals are currently in the approval pipeline and will begin advancing as the real estate market improves. The zoning regulations in Wicomico County are arguably the most permissive in Maryland. Sprawl has few restrictions in Wicomico unless we can strengthen our zoning regulations. Only an informed public can accomplish that. As we have seen from environmental successes such as Salisbury's creation of the new stormwater utility and its rejection of the county's request for transfer of the forested land protecting the Paleochannel, if we all pull together and speak up about our desire for a healthy environment and protections for our natural landscape, we can persuade our elected officials to do the right thing.

The Paleochannel and Salisbury's Drinking Water

A non-vote at the September 14 meeting of the Salisbury City Council brought a year-long quiet but intense campaign to an end—with a whimper rather than the explosion some had anticipated. At issue was a request that the city transfer thirty-two acres of forested land to Wicomico County so that new ballfields could be added to those already in the adjacent county-owned Henry S. Parker Athletic Complex.

After a public hearing lasting two hours, with an overflow standing-room-only audience, Council President Jake Day asked for a motion to bring the resolution to a vote. He was greeted with silence. No member of the Council even moved the resolution for adoption. The hot-button resolution died for lack of even one member's support.

The final outcome was uncertain up to the last moment. Over the past year, WET, Friends of the Forest, and the Eastern Shore Mountain Bike Association have all been working in different ways and with differing concerns about the outcomes that would result from cutting and bulldozing the thirty-acre mature forest.

For WET, the most serious concern was the risk to the purity of Salisbury's drinking water supply. The supporters of cutting the forest framed the issue as an "either/or": either we cut the forest to build the new ballfields or we lose the national softball tournament that promised to locate here, along with millions of dollars of potential revenue from increased tourism.

WET and others pointed out many alternative locations, one as simple as moving some existing soccer fields from the Henry S. Parker Complex to another park, and replacing

them with softball fields. Other alternatives were to acquire adjacent already-cleared properties for the new ballfields. Cutting the forest in the Paleochannel Well Head Protection Area was only one alternative of several. It was no "either/or."

WET is not opposed to the additional fields. Our overriding concern was to maintain the mature forest with its tree canopy and forest floor that protects the bountiful aquifer lying just beneath the surface. This aquifer, protected as it is by this lush forest, provides drinking water so pure that it requires almost no treatment.

WET prepared a 14-page report on the forest and the aquifer, and shared it with Council members and county officials during the year. It showed how the forest protects the water supply and detailed legal, environmental, health, and policy reasons that it should remain in place.

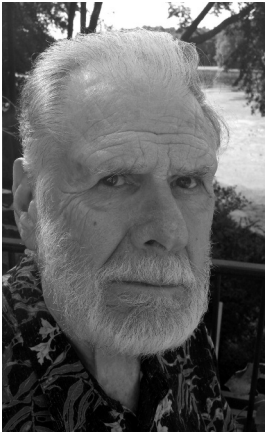
The action of the entire City Council and the Mayor's strong support showed once again how effective citizen efforts can be, provided we are willing to become informed and speak up. In this case, citizen concerns won. Everyone who spoke out at the hearing or by email to protect Salisbury's drinking water can be proud of the success of their efforts.

We thank our City officials, our allies, and especially all of our WET members who helped this happen. We need your participation in future efforts to protect nature and the health of our environment. Together we can make a difference for ourselves and our children.

WET Board Members

We are grateful for the hard work of WET's Board members and other volunteers, who contribute so much of their time to accomplish WET's goals. In this newsletter, we introduce you to Bob Hocutt.

BOB HOCUTT



Board member Bob Hocutt moved from Baltimore to Salisbury with his wife, Winona, ten years ago. Soon afterward he was "drafted into WET" when he attended a meeting called by the County Planning Department to seek citizen input into the Water Resources Element of the County Comprehensive Plan. He has been active ever since in efforts to protect the local environment. He and Winona volunteer in WET-sponsored litter pickups, tree planting in county parks, hosting cyclists during the Seagull Century to raise money to support WET, attending environmental meetings, and many other activities. Bob is a former secretary for the Board and serves as chair of its Water Resources Committee.

Bob received bachelor and master's degrees in Public Policy from the University of North Carolina where he was raised. He served four years in the US Air Force and spent the remainder of his working life with the Social Security Administration as an analyst.

He sees WET as an opportunity to advocate for the environment, and especially local waterways. He and Winona live on Schumaker Pond, where they volunteer as Creekwatchers, taking water samples every two weeks for nine months of the year to help document long-term trends in water quality.

"I continue in WET because it continues to be one of the foremost forces in working to maintain and improve the integrity of our local environment," said Bob. His and Winona's passion and hard work make Wicomico County a much more beautiful and environmentally healthy place for all of us.



Winona Hocutt working with Bob to collect a water sample for the Wicomico Creekwatchers project.

Keep In Touch!

Sign up for WET's eNews or watch our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/WicomicoEnvironment) for breaking news and updates. To be added to our eNews list, you can sign up at our website (www.wicomicoenvironment.org) or email your request (with "signup" in the subject line) to enews@wicomicoenvironment.org.

Join Us for Green Drinks!

In September, we kicked off Salisbury's Green Drinks, a fun, casual monthly social gathering of people with an interest in the natural environment. Salisbury's Green Drinks will be held at various local restaurants and watering holes, on the second Friday of the month, from 5-7 p.m.

Here is the schedule through the end of 2015:

Friday, Oct. 9, 5-7pm at Evolution Public House (EVO)

Friday, Nov. 13, 5-7pm at EVO

Friday, Dec. 11, 5-7pm at EVO

To receive announcements of where upcoming Green Drinks will be held, watch WET's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/WicomicoEnvironment) or sign up to receive our eNews (sign up on our website, www.wicomicoenvironment.org, or email your request, with "signup" in the subject header, to enews@wicomicoenvironment.org).

Live green, love green, think green!

How Creation-Friendly Is Your Faith?

Faith and the Environment Task Force Formed

As reported in WET's spring newsletter, an Eastern Shore task force of the Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake has been formed. Representatives from more than 10 local congregations meet regularly to share ideas and plan for a "Faith and the Environment" retreat to be held in the spring of 2016. The Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore is providing grant support to undertake this project.

The goal is for people of all faiths to reflect on our beliefs and scriptures, consider new ways to live them as they affect creation and stewardship, and learn from and work with other faith congregations as each gives witness to the vitality of their religious beliefs.

Fall: Need Help with Tree Planting

We hope that members of faith communities (and other interested volunteers) will join in planting trees this fall in areas particularly well located to protect the water quality of local streams, ponds, the Wicomico River, and the Bay. These locations were identified based on a tree canopy assessment undertaken by the Mayor's River Committee and Wicomico County's Natural Resources Committee.

Land around Salisbury's new headquarters firehouse has been selected to begin landscaping with native trees and plants. Funds for purchase of the trees and plants have been identified. Planting will begin this fall.

- **Volunteers are needed to help plant and care for the new trees until they become established.** For more information contact John Groult, jwgroutt@hotmail.com or 410-548-2563.

Please join us: We welcome members from all faith communities in Wicomico County and surrounding areas to join us in examining and sharing how their beliefs are being expressed in actions to protect creation and demonstrate stewardship.

For further information, go to: www.interfaithchesapeake.org. To learn about or join our local Faith and the Environment Task Force, contact John Groult, jwgroutt@hotmail.com or 410-548-2563.



1320 Belmont Avenue - Suite 403E
Salisbury, MD 21804

"Pass this newsletter on to a friend!"

WET Annual Dinner & Art Auction

R.S.V.P. by Friday, October 23, 2015

Friday, November 6 • 6:00 pm

Wicomico Room, Guerrieri Center, Salisbury University

Please include the form below with your payment.

WET Annual Dinner & Art Auction

Individual Ticket @ \$60.00

Individual Patron @ \$100.00

Table of 8 Sponsor @ \$800.00

Total enclosed \$_____ (please make check payable to WET)

I cannot attend, but please accept my donation of \$_____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

If possible, please seat me with _____

Vegan entrée(s), please specify # _____

Mail form with your check to:
WET, 1320 Belmont Ave., Suite 403E, Salisbury, MD 21804
For additional information, 443-614-4122
or wet@wicomicoenvironment.org



Please enroll me as a member

JANUARY 2015 – DECEMBER 2015

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

SPECIAL INTERESTS: _____

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL _____ AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____

- ☐ Student/Limited Income (\$5)
- ☐ Family (\$25)
- ☐ Patron(\$50)
- ☐ Supporter (\$100)
- ☐ Sustainer (\$250)
- ☐ Underwriter (\$500)

For more information or
to return membership:
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wet@wicomicoenvironment.org

Make checks payable to:
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WET Contributions are tax deductible.