

Bay pollution starts right here at home

Why stormwater runoff is a big factor

By **Cortney Langley**

WILLIAMSBURG — A local waterway expert will explain Wednesday how our streams and creeks fit into restoring the Chesapeake Bay.

Randy Chambers is the director of William & Mary's Keck Environmental Field Lab. For more than five years, he and his students have been testing the 17 waters of the College Creek watershed, ranking them according to health. Most of them are failing.

His colleague, geology Prof. Greg Hancock, has been studying stormwater ponds and found that they fail to perform as designed.

Chambers will discuss how those findings fit together and how they play into the larger scheme of the Bay.

The talk is timely. Last week the Environmental Protection Agency settled a suit with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation by agreeing to strictly enforce environmental regs. The foundation had sued the EPA for failing to enforce its own standards.

At the time, critics of the foundation blew off the suit as a publicity ploy. But it paid off with the EPA settlement and commitment.

Last week the Obama administration set a goal to clean up the Chesapeake Bay by 60% within 15 years. Last year the administration committed to stricter cleanup as part of an executive order.

Environmentalists greeted the announcements with some skepticism, noting that promises have been made by various agencies over two decades with little to show for it.

Chambers said in an interview that he will use his and Hancock's findings as a local case study about efforts to deal with stormwater and other runoff in the Bay watershed.

He views stormwater treatment as the next pivotal area of focus in order to improve the Bay's health. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation has found that urban and suburban stormwater runoff is the only source of pollution into the Bay that is actually increasing.

"Much of what we need to do locally should be oriented toward stormwater management, as it is during storms that most water, nutrients, sediment and associated contaminants are directed into the Chesapeake's plumbing," Chambers said. "I'll use aspects of stormwater management on the college campus to highlight some successes, and failures."

Chambers said that despite the ebb and flow of regulatory promises, ultimately healing the Bay is in the hands of homeowners and businesses, whose daily actions affect pollution.

Want to go? Chambers will speak at 7:30 p.m. this Wednesday, May 19, at the Williamsburg Library, 515 Scotland St.

*What
we
need*



Chambers