



Ten Mile Creek plan a big step forward in journey to protect drinking water

April 1, 2014

The Save Ten Mile Creek Coalition, with 32 member groups including labor, business, faith-based and Latino organizations, hailed the Montgomery County Council's unanimous vote today approving the Ten Mile Creek Limited Master Plan Amendment.

Diane Cameron, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) Conservation Director and the Save Ten Mile Creek Coalition Coordinator, called the vote "a victory for citizens and scientists working together with elected officials to protect our last, best creek – Ten Mile Creek." Cameron noted, "Ten Mile Creek is the cleanest source of water to Little Seneca Reservoir, our only nearby emergency drinking water source in severe droughts serving 4.3 million people in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia."

The Ten Mile Creek plan approved by the Council includes imperviousness limits of 6% on new development projects in the most sensitive areas; mandates 80% open space requirements and 200-foot buffers for wetlands, streams and groundwater springs; and spurs reforestation with a goal of 65% forest cover for the entire watershed.

"The Council's vote is a big step forward in the long journey to protect our region's drinking water supplies," said Pablo Blank, founder of Latino Environmental Awareness and Direction (LEAD). The work remaining was noted by Caroline Taylor, Executive Director of Montgomery Countryside Alliance: "There is no rest for the weary. With the latest climate change modeling predicting significant effects on weather patterns, our collective and proactive work to protect our region's source waters is essential."

Erin Yeagley, Field Representative/Organizer for UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, said, "It's no small thing that environmental groups and labor banded together and pushed the Council to unanimously enact some protections for Ten Mile Creek. We keep pushing together like that, and in the end we will get Ten Mile Creek the full protection it needs. We've got to continue moving forward on this to protect our drinking water."

Citizen scientists along with biologists from the County's Department of Environmental Protection informed the Council's decision on the Ten Mile Creek plan: "I had no idea, when we started monitoring Ten Mile Creek 17 years ago, that our data would lead to such an important decision for the County and region," said Cathy Wiss, ANS Water Quality Monitoring Coordinator.

Save Ten Mile Creek Coalition member groups: Am Koleh Jewish Renewal Community, Audubon Naturalist Society, Canoe Cruisers of America, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, Chesapeake Sustainability Institute, Chesapeake Sustainable Business Council, Clean Water Action, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Conservation Montgomery, Izaak Walton League B-CC Chapter, Kehila Chadasha Jewish Community, Latino Environmental Awareness and Direction, Little Falls Watershed Alliance, Maryland Native Plant Society, Montgomery Countryside Alliance, Montgomery County Civic Federation, Montgomery County Green Party, Montgomery County Progressive Alliance, Montgomery County Young Democrats, Muslim Youth of Maryland, Potomac Riverkeeper, Progressive Neighbors, Safe Healthy Playing Fields Coalition, Seneca Creek Watershed Partners, Sierra Club Montgomery County Group, Stormwater Partners Network, Sugarloaf Citizens Association, The Timber Oak Citizens Association, UFCW Local 1994-MCGEO, UpCounty Action, Watts Branch Watershed Alliance, WeAreMoCo.

"In the past, our County's scientists have monitored stream degradation and used that as evidence to support restoration projects," said Ginny Barnes, Conservation Montgomery co-founder and an ANS volunteer water quality monitor. "Ten Mile Creek's high quality water captured scientists' attention, and moved them to testify to protect the creek from degradation, not repair it after the fact."

Andy Fellows, Chesapeake Regional Director for Clean Water Action, and his colleague, Brittani Garner, delivered 2,099 hand-written letters asking the Council to protect Ten Mile Creek, collected by canvassers from residents countywide. Coalition leaders thanked Montgomery County Council President Rice and the entire Council and its staff, and in particular Councilmembers Berliner, Elrich, Riemer, and Andrews, for their thorough, science-based process.

The Council held seven work sessions and two nights of public hearings in coming to this decision to limit development in the Clarksburg area. District of Columbia Council Chair Phil Mendelson and Arlington County Board Chair Jay Fissette each wrote to Council President Rice, urging protection of these drinking water sources. Montgomery County Executive Leggett committed to forgoing development of County-owned land in Ten Mile Creek.

Gail Dalferes, member of the Safe Healthy Playing Fields Coalition, thanked the Council for "putting the water quality of millions above the wallet quality of a few." Sugarloaf Citizens Association Legislative Director Beth Daly said "Congratulations to all for protecting Ten Mile Creek for the generations to come, and for moving closer to the promise of a Town Center for Clarksburg. Let's hope a new bar is set for preserving and restoring the environment throughout Montgomery County!"

"The Montgomery County Young Democrats are incredibly proud of the County Council's unanimous decision to protect Ten Mile Creek," said Nik Sushka, the group's President. "With this vote, the Save Ten Mile Creek Coalition has won an important victory for smart, sustainable growth in our community. Economic development doesn't have to come at the expense of clean air, land or water. And today, our County ensured it won't."

Sharon Dooley of Upcounty Action applauded "the victory of rational decisions made on the basis of true scientific findings. The coalition gave voice to a community of concerned county residents who are too often left out of important environmental decisions. We, together, spoke up to save this pristine waterway. Now we and the County Council must be vigilant for its future."

Alan Bowser, member of the Coalition's coordinating team, said "The residents of Montgomery County owe the Council a debt of gratitude for their hard work in developing a science-based solution to challenging environmental and land use issues. I commend the tireless advocacy of our Save Ten Mile Creek Coalition, thirty member organizations strong, which came together to protect the County's 'last, best creek!'"

Dana Beyer, who represents Progressive Neighbors, said, "Today's unanimous Council vote to protect Ten Mile Creek was a victory for science in the public interest, and an example of the power of the people working together to preserve and enhance our world for the benefit of all." Hamza Khan of Muslim Youth of Maryland noted "our community is thankful that so many hardworking citizens could come together to protect our most precious resource: clean water."

Sarah Morse, Executive Director of Little Falls Watershed Alliance, thanked the Council for their work on the Ten Mile Creek plan, and all those "who sent letters on behalf of the environment. We didn't get full protection, but the current plan with its impervious cover caps, is a big improvement over previous plans which proposed much higher development levels."

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