



# THE COMMITTEE OF 100

## FYI

March 17, 2014

### The Committee of 100 and the Delaware Nature Society Join to Support Clean Water Initiative

The Committee of 100 Environment and Energy Committee has supported looking for issues on which the C100 and the Delaware Nature Society might be able to agree and join in concerted action. The Governor's Clean Water for Delaware's Future initiative turned out to be the first such issue. The joint letter below was printed in the News Journal on Saturday, March 15 and will be sent to the members of the General Assembly in the coming days.

#### **Cleaning Up our Water is Good for Business and the Environment**

The environmental community and the business/development community do not always see eye to eye. But it happens more often than one might think and the Delaware Nature Society and The Committee of 100 are joining now in support of Governor Markell's Clean Water for Delaware's Future initiative. Crafted by DNREC

Secretary Collin O'Mara, it is an ambitious proposal to accelerate the clean-up of Delaware's water resources, while creating jobs and strengthening the economy. As proposed, the Governor's plan will generate \$800 million in projects over the next 5 years, financed by leveraging \$30 million in annual revenues from a fee levied on real estate parcels. The average homeowner will pay about \$45 a year. It has been estimated that the program will create 5,000 jobs over 5 years.

Delaware has some outstanding examples of programs in which government and the private sector, working together, have made progress in cleaning up and preventing water pollution. The Brownfields program assists property owners in remediating contaminated sites – legacies of Delaware's industrial past. At the same time, every \$1 spent by the program produces over \$17 in economic benefits, creating jobs and returning lands to productive use.

Many farmers have long contributed to soil and water conservation and pollution prevention by participating in voluntary state and federal cost share programs. They understand that nutrient management plans can minimize inputs, while reducing water pollution from the application of too much costly fertilizer. This is good business for farmers as well as good stewardship of the land and we should encourage more of it.

In both these examples, it is important to realize that the programs succeed because they are supported by dedicated, or reasonably consistent, revenue streams, because they share costs between the public and private sectors, and because they do not regulate or assess blame – they focus on cleaning up the environment. This is the same approach proposed for the Clean Water for Delaware's Future initiative: create a dedicated source of revenue, borrow against it to increase and accelerate the clean-up projects, cost share with local governments and private industry, and focus on measurable environmental results.

There are many details yet to be worked out before the concept becomes a plan. Assurance is needed that the fees will be assessed equitably and that the project selection process will be transparent and science-based, just to

name a couple. But this can be a creative, no nonsense, fiscally responsible way to fast-track the restoration of our water resources for the benefit of our state's economic and ecological health, without relying on regulations alone. Like no-fault insurance, the program does not waste time pointing fingers. Instead, we all chip in, roll up our sleeves, and get to work.

Delaware's environment, economy and quality of life are inextricably intertwined. Tourism is a major contributor; imagine what would happen if we allowed our beaches to become as polluted as our ponds, lakes and waterways. Thankfully, our beaches still are a major attraction but imagine how tourism will grow when visitors can swim and fish throughout the state, which they can't do today.

Imagine how corporate executives and young entrepreneurs will consider those same resources when deciding where they would like to live and grow their businesses. Imagine the economic and social benefits when we make our historic waterfront towns more resilient to rising sea levels. Imagine neighborhoods and commercial centers freed from the threat of flooding. Imagine reduced inland flooding and pollution as a result of mapping and planning for development on a watershed basis, rather than relying on ad hoc parcel-by-parcel decisions as we do now. Imagine Delaware's unique freshwater wetlands permanently protected by conservation easements.

Reaching these goals and restoring our water resources to health is no longer a distant dream. We can start now and achieve measurable and meaningful progress before the end of this decade. We support Governor Markell's Clean Water for Delaware Future's initiative which outlines a bold strategy and challenges us to act. We understand the issues and the science behind them. Cleaning our waters is the right thing to do and it will pay us back many times over, if we have the wisdom to follow through.

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