

Now About That Environment

Over the years, Mattawoman Creek, a slice of heaven right here in our own backyard, has made quite a name for itself. In a state that is all about the Chesapeake Bay, this single 27-mile long body of water stands out for many reasons. In decades past, Maryland fishery scientists' "best, most productive tributary to the Chesapeake Bay" has been repeatedly recognized at local, state, and national levels for its biological importance. Words such as "unique", "diverse", and "rich" are found in texts describing it.

Its waters are prime nursery locations for dozens of fish species who spawn there every year. It is one of Maryland's premier sites for reptile and amphibian diversity. And it is home to plants and animals that are rare, threatened, or endangered, including two Magnolia Bogs recognized as imperiled, not locally or nationally, but globally.

Those who frequent the Mattawoman, who know this world-class spot for sport fishing, or who enjoy its waters kayaking or sightseeing along the Indian Head Rail Trail, don't need to read the literature to understand its value. They live it.

And for Charles County, the creek is a ready source of annual revenue, both in terms of eco-tourism and sport fishing. Mattawoman Creek is still one of the best venues for high-profile national largemouth bass fishing tournament, bringing in millions of dollars to our county every year.

Note the "still". This is the other side of the famed story: Mattawoman as "poster child" for what unfettered development can do to our waters. As sprawl residential development has replaced wetlands, forests, and fields around the creek, its fish populations, and the health of the creek itself, have begun to seriously, and permanently, decline.



Charles County Government has a long history of proclaiming, on the one hand, what an invaluable gem we have in the Mattawoman, while rubberstamping an amazing amount of bad development, on the other. But you can't have it both ways. Too much badly-planned development on the land surrounding a body of water will ultimately, negatively, impact the water. There's no getting around that fact.

Waldorf Station is the most recent example of such bad planning. Call it "business as usual", "dumb growth", what have you. But yet again, here is a project that, as proposed, is being built in the wrong place for the wrong reasons.

It will have a developer-driven Western Parkway alignment going through a resource protection zone, put in place by the county to protect Mattawoman Creek. If built, the highway will require acres of protective wetlands and floodplain be filled in and leveled. The Parkway is needed but the proposed alignment is not.

Considering the high environmental sensitivity of the site, why has an Alternatives Study not been done to find the best, least impactful route? One that would give Waldorf residents an alternative to U.S.301 and protect our multimillion dollar gem, Mattawoman Creek.