

Involvement of Volunteers in Watershed Management of Chesapeake Bay

Kathleen Ellett

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Inc., U.S.A.

Volunteers have made significant contributions to the water quality data base in the Chesapeake Bay Basin. The Chesapeake Bay Citizen Monitoring Program has been collecting water quality data since 1985 and now has about 160 people monitoring some 135 sites in three states. Two new projects began in 1991---riparian buffer zone management and monitoring and collection of rain samples for an atmospheric deposition study.

The use of volunteers in environmental monitoring has been increasing nationally over the last 5-7 years. This involvement of citizens directly in watershed management has important benefits:

- 1.Data and information needs far outstrip the resources available to managers for this purpose and citizens can fill the gap.

- 2.Citizens become aware of and gain an understanding of the ecological processes going on in their watershed which develops a solid constituency committed to raising and spending the money necessary to restore and protect the watershed.

- 3.An overall watershed management program that involves citizens (including students), businesses, industries and scientific institutions as well as government personnel can develop a true partnership and working relationship among these groups so that implementing restoration and protection programs will progress.

- 4.When enough citizens become true stewards of the land, air, and water, desired goals for preservation of a watershed--be it a stream, lake, river, or bay---will be reached.

We have demonstrated that volunteers can contribute credible scientific data to the understanding of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. These data can be used to define the baseline, to detect trends, to screen for particular pollutants, to identify gross visual problems, and to augment data being collected by professionals.