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Thursday, Feb. 14, 2008

## Put strong storm-water plans in place now to prevent future disasters

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Maryland has a tremendous opportunity to avoid disasters caused by an unpredictable climate, such as the flooding experienced by our fellow Prince Georgians in Edmonston. Improving storm-water management can restore the quality of streams and rivers flowing through the neighborhoods where we live.

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Thanks to the work of some local legislators (Sens. [James C.] Rosapepe, [Paul G.] Pinsky, and the late Sen. [Gwendolyn T.] Britt, as well as Delegates [Barbara A.] Frush, [Doyle L.] Niemann, and [Anne] Healy), the Maryland Legislature passed the Maryland Stormwater Management Act of 2007. Creating and enforcing the regulations required by the law will be challenging. However, better regulations are critical to combat existing storm-water problems and projected increases in storm-water loads resulting from development and global warming.

In developed areas, storm water flows from thousands of acres of roofs and pavement into concrete underground sewer systems that converge, tributary by tributary, to the Anacostia River and the Chesapeake Bay. Inadequate storm-water management leads to flooding of low-lying towns.

One example illustrating the devastating effects of storm water can be found in the town of Edmonston. That community experienced four significant floods within the past four years due to storm-water flows. These floods demonstrate how development in a watershed primarily affects the areas downstream, rather than newly constructed areas. The problems of Edmonston are similar to being situated downwind from a hog farm. Because it is low-lying, Edmonston is an unwilling recipient of storm-water runoff that originates some distance from the town. Edmonston recently implemented a \$6 million public works storm-water management project, and while this is a major engineering and civic achievement, it is still not an adequate long-term solution.

Global warming has caused gradual changes in weather patterns and more frequent weather extremes. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change cites a 90 percent chance of more frequent heavy rainfall events in the 21st century. Thus, it is becoming ever more important to control, convey and treat storm water in a sustainable fashion. In the not-too-distant future, runoff produced by more frequent severe storms will overwhelm the present storm-water management facilities of Edmonston and other river towns.

To avoid disaster in the future, we must reduce the amount of storm-water runoff. Washington, D.C., is leading the way by implementing innovative measures to stem storm-water flow and pollution, using natural systems such as trees, green roofs and vegetated buffers. Many cities are also adopting smart growth strategies, encouraging developers to design limited clusters of dense development while also conserving green space. Smart growth eases traffic congestion, reduces sprawl, preserves open space, and, if implemented properly, reduces and manages storm water.

The Maryland Department of the Environment needs to develop strong regulations requiring these low impact development practices. More innovative measures to reduce and treat urban runoff will be needed for existing development where practicable. This approach will ensure the

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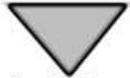
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equitable sharing of costs and benefits of storm-water management by both existing and future development, regardless of its relative location within a watershed. If you share our concerns, please contact MDE and demand strong, enforceable storm-water management regulations.

Elaine Friebele, co-chairperson of Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek, Cheverly,

Lisa Lincoln, co-chairperson of Progressive Cheverly Environmental Committee, Cheverly