

Bay-area home owners need to be aware of critical areas legislation

For property owners in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, it has never been more important than it is now to care for properties in ways that protect the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

In 1984, the state of Maryland designated the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, the 1,000-foot-wide ribbon of land around the Bay and its tidal tributaries, and set criteria to minimize adverse effects on water quality and natural habitats.

In 2002, the Critical Area Program was expanded to include the Atlantic Coastal Bays watershed.

In 2008, legislative changes expanded the authority of the Critical Area Commission to further protect Maryland's tidal shoreline from the negative impacts of growth and development.

Activity within 1,000 feet of tidal waters is believed to have a direct and immediate impact on the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

Among the most prominent changes in the recent legislation, which took effect on July 1, are the expansion of the 100-foot Shoreline Development Buffer to 200 feet on undeveloped rural land (Resource Conservation Areas); the strengthening of shore erosion protection measures to require considering the use of non-structural shoreline stabilization as first course; and significantly larger fines for violations by property owners and contractors.

The Shore Land Stewardship



Members of the Shore Land Stewardship Council attended the Mid-Shore Board of Realtors Green Expo in Easton to teach realtors about educating area homeowners on Critical Area stewardship practices. Pictured are, from left, Roby Hurley, natural resource planner, Maryland Department of Planning; Suzanne Pittinger-Slear, president, Environmental Concern; Carol Jelich, project manager, Shore Land Stewardship Council; and Steve Gojn, arborist representative, Bartlett Tree Experts.

(Photo courtesy Steward Writing & Communications)

Council (SLSC), an initiative of Adkins Arboretum, was launched in August 2006.

The goals of the SLSC are to provide property owners and professionals accurate and consistent information, technical support and referrals on best landscaping practices in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area.

“Property owners in the Critical Area are often confused about both the regulations and

the process they must follow to be good stewards of the land they own,” said Ellie Altman, executive director of Adkins Arboretum. “Shore Land Stewardship Council was formed to help property owners make informed decisions about changes to their properties, ultimately impacting the Bay in a positive way.”

Contractors, state and local regulatory agencies, realtors, developers, con-

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ervation-oriented nonprofits, and private landowners in the Upper Shore are meeting monthly to discuss best landscaping practices and ways to communicate them to Critical Area property owners.

The first goal of the group is to engage Critical Area landowners through the organization's First Stop Campaign.

Launched as a pilot project in the spring of 2008 in Talbot County, the First Stop Campaign encourages property owners to seek advice and proper permits before they begin landscaping changes, such as removing trees or altering their shoreline.

Many landscaping practices that cause disturbance in the Critical Area require permits from several agencies — local, state and federal.

There are limits in the percentage of a Critical Area property that can be an impervious (hard) surface, such as a roof or asphalt driveway.

The First Stop Campaign encourages Critical Area property owners to contact their local planning offices first before embarking on a landscape project to determine which permits they need.

As part of the pilot project, Critical Area property owners purchasing properties in Talbot County this spring will receive a First Stop pewter blue crab key chain and a card educating them on the Critical Area from their title company at settlement.

The pilot will be eventually be extended into Caroline, Queen Anne's and Kent counties during the summer and fall.

The SLSC said it next plans to give landowners the necessary skills and motivation to implement stewardship practices that even exceed the requirements of the Critical Area law through the publication of an illustrated guidebook on how to care for their properties in the Critical Area.

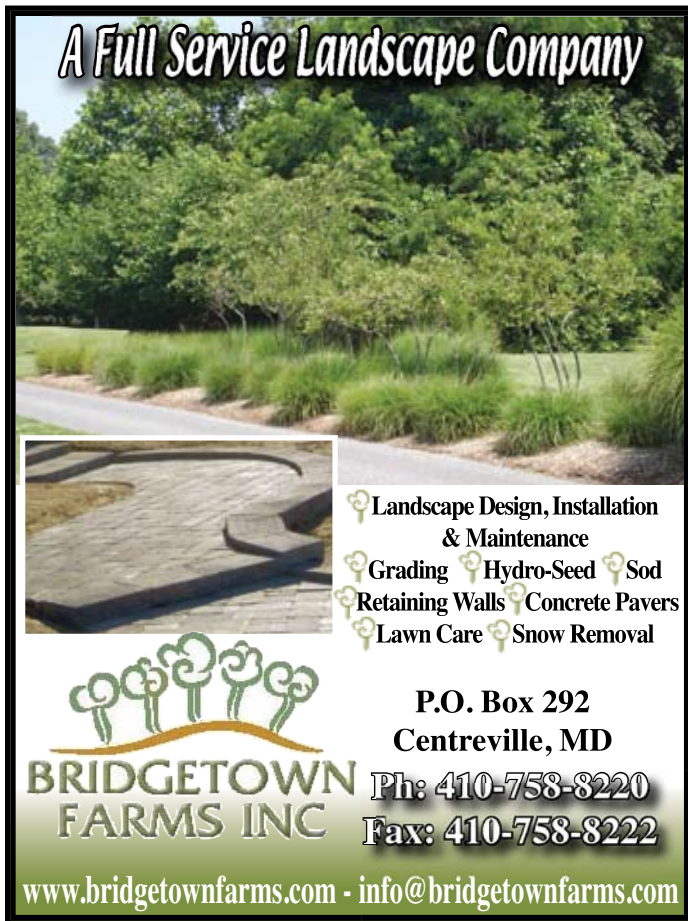
The guidebook will be published later this year.

Best landscaping practices range from reducing lawn area to reduce pollution from fertilizers and pesticides, to properly planting and pruning trees and shrubs to maintain wildlife habitat, to creating living shorelines.

Shore Land Stewardship Council said it is dedicated to promoting a stewardship ethic among Critical Area property owners — one property owner at a time — so that water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries will improve for generations of families to come.

The First Stop Campaign asks property owners to remember to call their county or town planning office before planning their next project.

For further information about how to care for properties in the Critical Area, visit www.firststopforthebay.org or call Adkins Arboretum at 410-634-2847. ➔



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A little-known fact ...

- Use a lightweight pot for boiling pasta; water will come to its initial boil faster and will return to the boil faster, too, saving time and preventing the pasta from clumping at the bottom of the pot.

Source: www.thefunplace.com



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