

The Maryland Voter



Spring 2014

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Agriculture Issues in Maryland

Environmental Implications or Complications

By Linda Silversmith

The League of Women Voters began to look at water issues in the early 1950s, becoming perhaps the first organization to say that we must look at both ends of a pipe (inflow and outgo). It probably comes as no surprise then that when we look this year at state agricultural topics and the legislation proposed during the General Assembly session, water conditions are still – or again -- quite relevant.

Immediately after the passage of the federal Clean Water Act Amendments of 1972, the focus for improving water quality was on regulating what is allowed to come out of a pipe – from a factory or sewage treatment plant – for disposal into a waterway. The federal Environmental Protection Agency delegated to the states the responsibility to issue and supervise National Pollution Discharge Elimination System

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permits (NPDES) for those pipe discharges. It turns out, however, that regulating pipe discharges covers only about half of the ways that human beings contaminate waterways.

The other half of water pollution is caused by rainwater running off across urban and agricultural lands as well as over paved surfaces (roofs, pavements, streets, parking lots), carrying contaminants along to rivers and streams. In the mid-1980s EPA began focusing on what are the best management practices (BMPs) for farm land, later adding on best stormwater management practices for urban and suburban areas. [In Maryland the latter has led to nine counties and Baltimore city being issued and required to meet MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems) permits, which are part of the NPDES system.]

One of the major reasons for having agricultural BMPs is to protect waterways from having soil and various chemicals dumped into them due to runoff from farms. As indicated on the website for the Maryland Department of Agriculture (<http://mda.maryland.gov/Pages/homepage.aspx>) “MDA strives to ensure the maximum use of conservation practices including cover crops and other on-farm BMPs to prevent soil erosion, manage nutrients, and safeguard water quality in streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay.” Some of the other practices besides cover crops are crop rotation changes, vegetative filter strips, vegetated/riparian buffers, and waste management plans. Calculating the right amount of fertilizer and limiting its phosphorus content to the minimum necessary can help too, as can limitations on the amount of phosphorus in animal feed.

Maryland's Water Quality Improvement Act of 1998 requires that farmers who are raising poultry and livestock develop and implement nutrient management plans using phosphorus as the limiting factor. Over the years a Maryland Nutrient Management Manual has been developed and updated. In fall 2013 after MDA announced that it was going to propose a new Phosphorus Management Tool (PMT) that had been developed by faculty of the University of Maryland, many farmers wrote letters of protest, particularly citing economic factors.

When legislation on phosphorus management came before the 2014 General Assembly none passed. A truce or compromise led instead to inserting language into budget bill SB170 to require an economic impact analysis before any other PMT actions can be taken. MDA has subsequently negotiated an agreement for Salisbury University to conduct the analysis in conjunction with a 25-member advisory committee, with the study to be completed by December 2014. The advisory committee will include at least a half dozen representatives from the environmental organizations that lobbied in favor of the PMT bills.

Another kind of legislation that would have helped water quality while affecting farmers that was also introduced in the 2014 General Assembly was **HB905/SB725 Chesapeake Bay - Nutrient Management - Poultry Fair Share Act**, which proposed establishing a specified chicken manure pollution fee payable to the Comptroller by poultry integrators, with the funds collected going to MDA's Agriculture Water Quality Cost Share Program.

It is important to note that these fees would have been on the “poultry integrator” (e.g., Perdue) and not on the farmer. After Governor O'Malley stated publicly that he would veto this bill, the House bill was withdrawn and the Senate bill died in committee.

Thus, regarding agriculture, environmentalists had one big water-quality victory (saving the stormwater management fee), one wait-and-see (the delay while the phosphorus management tool gets its economic analysis), and one try-again-another-day (the chicken manure pollution fee) during the 2014 state legislative session.



How to Have a Meaningful Vote

By Susan Cochran

President of the League of Women Voters of Maryland

The story is told: An anxious woman asked Benjamin Franklin, as he left the Constitutional Convention of 1787 in Philadelphia, "What kind of government have you given us?" Franklin replied, "You have a republic, madam, if you can keep it."

Keeping our republic means a lot of responsibility for us citizens. The source of our power is the vote. Our vote is meaningful if it is informed.

In this world of a million distractions, sometimes it is difficult to know the candidates and the issues when we go to the polls. Bombarded as we are by political ads, we see major political candidates on television many times. But do we know what they stand for beyond the slogans, and what their background is beyond the smiling faces? And what about the many minor candidates without money who don't even get that exposure?

The League of Women Voters of Maryland is an all-volunteer, nonpartisan organization. One of our important jobs is to try to inform our fellow citizens of the candidates for public office and the issues. We do it through candidate forums and voters' guides for the whole state accessible at VOTE411.org. We also take on the job of advocating for easy and accessible, yet secure, voting so *all* our citizens can exercise their right and duty to go to the polls.

Many laws have been adopted in Maryland to make voting easier and accessible. No excuse is necessary for absentee voting. You can apply online and receive your absentee ballot online. You can't vote online, however. You have to download and mail in your absentee ballot. Also, you can now register to vote online. Some of these online innovations make it possible for Maryland citizens to do what our armed service people overseas have been able to do when they vote, as required by the federal government.

This year, early voting will be available for an expanded period of time and more voting centers have been added. (In 2012, 11 percent of ballots were cast during early voting).

To get to know more about the candidates, do your research. Your local newspaper is a start, but some newspapers have their own viewpoint. To find out where the candidates' money is coming from, check the financial reports they are required to send to the State Board of Elections at elections.state.md.us.

You also can attend candidate forums to get some insight into the candidates' views and suitability for the office.

VOTE411.org is a very valuable resource. It is a special one-stop place for comprehensive information on voting. On this site you will find the well-regarded voters guide, tailored for each jurisdiction with links to voting information at the State Board of Elections. All candidates for the same office are asked the same questions. Comparing answers side by side is possible on the site. From your private VOTE411 page you can enter your choices for each

office and download your own guide to take to the polling place. The candidates' entries will be available on VOTE411.org starting in early May.

Our newspapers are full of stories about agonizing efforts around the world to secure the vote. And blood was shed to secure ours. We must use our vote wisely to express our power as citizens.

Adapted from an opinion column in the Capital Gazette in March 2014



*Photo by Dave Anderson
Montgomery Voter*

Hopefully, we have seen the last of the snow so it is time to get those VOTE411 bumper stickers on your car. And if you don't want them on your bumper they work equally well in the back window. Every Leaguer and all their friends should be sporting and promoting VOTE411.

VOTE411 covers the state *Publicity needed*

Voters Service volunteers from local Leagues throughout Maryland have been working diligently to secure responses from candidates to the questions posed by the League. Responses from candidates for all offices will be published both in paper and pdf versions of the Voters' Guide by local Leagues and will also be available online at www.VOTE411.org. The Maryland League of Women Voters is a leader in providing this service to voters as we have included every candidate from Governor through Board of Education and have also covered every county in the state. Thanks to volunteers from across the state, we are able to include the candidates in those seven counties that do not have a local League.

Having invested so much time in preparing questions and reaching out to candidates, the Voters Service volunteers are now seeking the help of every League member in publicizing VOTE411.org as widely as possible. LWVMD has printed 2,500 bumper stickers and approximately 10,000 business cards with the VOTE411.org logo. These have been distributed to local Leagues and we hope to have them available at many of the annual meetings. The bumper stickers are \$1 each and the business cards are free. As soon as VOTE411 goes live (target date May 5), we hope that League members will display the bumper stickers or send emails to their Maryland friends with the news that VOTE411.org is the place to get the most complete information on all the candidates.

Ralph Watkins, LWVMD Voters Service Chair

Mixed Results in 2014 General Assembly Session

By Neilson Andrews, LWVMD Action Chair

The 2014 Legislative Session ended with mixed success for the League. Some of the bills we supported passed and many others failed, but that is the way of the Maryland Legislature. Often a bill must be filed for several years before we are lucky enough to see an issue addressed.

Our **redistricting** efforts were stymied again this year. None of the 12 redistricting reform bills that the League monitored, including the one authorizing a task force or study commission, came out of committee in time to crossover from one chamber to the other. Many of the bills remained in the Rules Committee in the House.

Nancy Soreng and LWVMD President Susan Cochran testified on many of the bills the League supported. They were particularly successful on the **Open Government** front. Five of the bills we supported passed and the Governor has already signed two of them. It will now be easier to obtain copies of information, printouts and photographs from State Government, and there will also be a compliance board setup to monitor and assure the proper dispensing of records.

We had mixed success on the **Energy and Environment** front. The pesticide registry will become a reality this session and will be funded by an increased registration fee. There will also be recycling at special events. All of the efforts to weaken or repeal the stormwater fee failed. However, Carroll and Frederick counties will be allowed to continue using property taxes for their remediation efforts instead of the fee. We were not so lucky in banning the burning of black liquor and wood ash. The bill died in the House Economic Matters Committee.

HB 1168 *Electricity - Certificate - Wind Turbines – Limitation* became a hot issue late in the session when the Southern Maryland delegation raised concerns about the effect of the **wind turbines** on the radar at the Patuxent Naval Station. The bill forbids any permits before July 1, 2015. The bill passed and we are waiting to see if the Governor will sign it or veto it.

Two of the **marijuana** bills passed. SB 364 *Criminal Law - Possession of Marijuana - Civil Offense* passed the Senate and crossed over. It was amended in the House Judiciary Committee to a task force; however, Delegate Keiffer Mitchell amended the bill on the floor returning it to the Senate version. Following several efforts to amend it and special order it, the bill passed and has been signed by the Governor. All of the medical marijuana bills were rolled into HB 881/SB 923 *Medical Marijuana - Natalie M. LaPrade Medical Marijuana Commission* and passed after many amendments and attempts to derail it. The final bill went to conference where it was decided to have 15 distributors and physicians will recommend rather than write a prescription for the marijuana. The Governor has signed the bill.

Thanks to Nancy Soreng, Susan Cochran and Barbara Schnackenberg for all of their help during the session and with Legislative Day. I cannot thank enough all of the Report from State Circle reporters. They have done a yeoman's job all session. We could not have Legislative Day or get all of that testimony to the proper committees without the help of Niecy Chambers in our Annapolis office. She deserves a big hand and many thanks!

A LEAGUE PRESENCE WITH CONGRESS? YES!

You know those priorities we choose among LWVUS positions every year? It's a request for your priorities that comes in autumn and gets sent to the LWVUS office. Then when the LWVUS board meets in January, the priorities are adopted as *our* priorities to take up with Congress that year.

What might those priorities be? They may pertain to health care, voting rights, gun control, public financing of political campaigns, energy, treaties, environment, immigration—whatever the membership throughout the country wants among our already adopted positions.

Carefully the professional staff at the national office, namely Lloyd Leonard, Senior Director of Advocacy, Betsy Lawson, Senior Lobbyist, and Jessica Jones, Grassroots Advocacy Manager, watches what specific legislation is developing in Congress on those priority issues we selected. On a third Thursday of a month, 10 a.m., the volunteer Lobby Corps team is notified to come to the national office conference room, tenth floor, 1730 M, for a briefing.

The Lobby Corps team consists of League members in the District of Columbia area who are trained to lobby the US Senate and House of Representatives. Singly, they go to the appointments they have set to meet with the Congressional staffers who are specialists for their Senator or Representative on the topic to be discussed. It'll be one topic and one bill. Meetings can take as little as five minutes consisting of "the ask" (the League's request), the supporting points, "the ask" again, and a request for the staffer to explain the elected official's views and position on the bill.

The volunteer Lobby Corps team covers all of Congress, both Senate and House, and team members have their assigned states perhaps Alaska and Delaware and Florida or maybe Arizona, New Jersey and New Mexico or possibly Montana, Rhode Island and Virginia. Rather than set appointments with all Senators and Representatives in their assigned states, because the bill is either a Senate or a House bill, they will lobby Senators or Representatives, not both. What is more, not all of their Senators or Representatives will be "targets." The professional staff will provide a list of those elected officials they believe to be appropriate to target for the given assignment. No assignment is larger than 10 targets/10 appointments.

Dress is business dress including shoes but shoes must be good for walking due to the many long marble halls team members walk going from office to office. Visits are always pleasant despite the fact that there can be considerable disagreement. There is always respect demonstrated for the views of others. Some set their appointments 30 minutes apart, dashing from one office to another, and always writing their notes about the meeting along the way. They have their favorite places to do so. The Rayburn House Office Building has wonderful yellow stools at a counter in the ladies rest rooms; they are the just the right height. There are deep window sills in Longworth House Office Building and Hart Senate Office Building has foot wide flat stone banisters, just right for papers and jotting notes provided they don't fall down and down and down from floor to floor in the stair well.

Alas, there is always the "where-to-eat" decision with an eating hole in the basement of all three of the Senate and all three of the House office buildings. Longworth food court is a favorite with one stand featuring food of a different country each day and a salad bar that cannot be topped.

All important is a report to the professional staff relating the reactions to our “ask” in each office, and also important are the emails to the state presidents to let them know what Senators’ or Representatives’ offices were visited in their states. And there is the follow-up email to the staffer.

Volunteer Lobby Corps team members like what they do and hope they are playing a role in furthering the advocacy priorities of their fellow members from throughout the USA.

*Carole Conors
Chair, Volunteer Lobby Corps
League of Women Voters of the United States*

LWVUS National Convention, June 6-10 in Dallas

Time to make plans to attend LWVUS Convention 2014 in the Big D, Dallas, Texas, June 6 - 10, 2014. The State League has proposed an update to the LWVUS Social Policy position. Every local League has a delegate to the LWVUS convention. The state Board has three delegates and only 1 is going so there is an extra spot.

Register for Convention

Please use the [Convention 2014 registration form](#) to register as a delegate or visitor. (Please note that you will need to log in to access the form.) The \$335 fee includes participation in all trainings, briefings, caucuses, general sessions, and national networking events, and includes the LWVUS-hosted banquet and program on Monday evening. The registration fee before May 24th is \$335. After that date, a late fee of \$50 will be added, which will make the total cost \$385. Pre-registration closes on May 31. Anyone wishing to register after that date can do so on-site in Dallas for a cost of \$385.

Reserve a Hotel Room

[The Omni Dallas Downtown Hotel](#) is the Convention 2014 hotel and has provided a special convention room rate for participants (booking deadline is May 12). This rate is available a few days before and after the League’s Convention dates for those interested in combining Convention travel with [tourism in the Dallas area](#).

Print or E-mail

If you receive a print copy of The Maryland Voter and would prefer to receive it electronically (or vice versa), please notify the League office at info@lwvmd.org.



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MARYLAND
BIENNIAL COUNCIL**

SATURDAY, MAY 10, 2014
Linden Hall, 4765 Dorsey Hall Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21042



**FEATURING A CELEBRATION OF OUR NEW LEAGUE
LET'S PARTY FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY FULL-FLEDGED LEAGUE!**

Join us at LWVMD Council, the biennial meeting held in years when we do not have a state League Convention. The purpose of Council is to adopt the annual budget for LWVMD and to provide a yearly update to League members about LWVMD activities.

Two delegates from each local League may vote, and all League members are invited and encouraged to attend.

LWVMD COUNCIL 2014 AGENDA	REGISTRATION & CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST	9:30 AM
	MORNING SESSION - REPORTS AND BUDGET PRESENTATION	10:00 AM
	RAISE A SHOUT ABOUT OUR VOTERS GUIDE:	10:45 AM
	PROMOTING OUR VOTERS GUIDE AND VOTE411	
	MARYLAND'S COASTS - RISING SEAS AND RISING CONCERN	11:00 AM
	FEATURED SPEAKER: DR. DONALD BOESCH, PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER	
	LUNCH AND CELEBRATION	12:15 PM
	GROWING MEMBERSHIP - TIPS AND SUCCESSSES	1:00 PM
	AFTERNOON SESSION - VOTE ON BUDGET AND ADOPTION OF STUDY	1:45 PM
	DIRECTIONS TO THE BOARD AND QUESTIONS ANNOUNCEMENTS	



LWVMD COUNCIL 2014 RESERVATION FORM

Deadline April 30, 2014

Name _____ Local League _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Delegate _____ Visitor/Guest _____ Please state any dietary restrictions _____

\$35.00 Registration Fee

Includes Continental breakfast, lunch and Council Workbook (emailed unless hard copy is requested)

Mail check made out to LWVMD with this registration form to:
LWVMD, 111 Cathedral Street, Ste. 201, Annapolis, MD 21401

Or register by phone - 410-269-0232 - or by email - lwwmd@verizon.net and pay at the door

If you or someone you know would like assistance from the Lois Stoner Scholarship Fund for the Council registration fee, please contact the LWVMD office.