



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION  
*Saving a National Treasure*



# PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release: 12/6/2021**

**For Information Contact:**

*Leanna Powell*  
*Director of Development & Communications*  
*Blue Water Baltimore*  
*301-602-0699*  
[lpowell@bluewaterbaltimore.org](mailto:lpowell@bluewaterbaltimore.org)

*John Surrick*  
*Director of Media Relations*  
*Chesapeake Bay Foundation*  
*410-271-0907 (cell)*  
[jsurrick@cbf.org](mailto:jsurrick@cbf.org)

Blue Water Baltimore (BWB), partnering with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), today filed a petition for judicial review of the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permits recently issued for Baltimore City and County. These permits, reviewed and re-issued every five years by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), provide requirements for municipalities to address pollution and flooding caused by stormwater runoff and exacerbated by development and climate change.

Despite [MDE's claims](#) that the permits, which were issued years late, will reduce flooding and make communities more resilient to climate change, review by BWB, CBF, and other environmental protection groups, revealed that the permits are over-reliant on short-sighted, ineffective solutions like street sweeping that do nothing to reduce the volume of runoff from rainfall. These permits also do not address the increasing frequency and severity of rainfall that comes with climate change. This unmanaged stormwater causes flooding in vulnerable communities, increasing the threat to lives and property as climate change brings wetter weather to the region.

Furthermore, a review of 10 years of rigorous monitoring by BWB has demonstrated that the MS4 permitting regime has not resulted in improvements to key indicators of water health in Baltimore's streams and Harbor, a major tributary of the Chesapeake Bay.

"MDE has the duty, both under state law and the federal Clean Water Act, to ensure the state's most populated jurisdictions mitigate the damage to our communities and waterways caused by stormwater runoff. Residents of Baltimore City and Baltimore County have felt the impacts of the increased intensity of storms due to climate change," said CBF Maryland Executive Director Josh Kurtz. "MDE's failure to adequately address climate change in these permits will likely lead to even more damage to

both human health and the health of our waterways in the future. The agency must be held accountable and revise the permits to protect local waterways as well as reduce the flooding and sewage backups that are already affecting communities in the region.”

More effective climate and water-quality solutions, including street tree planting and other natural stormwater management practices, are insufficiently emphasized in the new permits, despite detailed and unanimous comments from the environmental community that these projects are the best way to restore local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay, and protect residents from inland flooding associated with climate change.

“At the end of the day, street sweeping isn’t going to do anything to reduce stormwater runoff or keep our neighbors safe from flooding. And without better permits, municipalities are going to keep putting on a bandage instead of investing in real change. MDE needs to be leading the way into the future, not maintaining the status quo.” says Alice Volpitta, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper and a member of the BWB senior leadership team.

Baltimore County’s permit also presents significant equity concerns. The County permit allows under-compliance with stormwater remediation requirements, meaning that MDE is allowing upstream communities, often white and affluent, to save money by making fewer environmental investments, to the detriment of downstream neighbors including those in Baltimore City. These are predominantly Black, and less affluent neighborhoods that are already suffering from unmitigated stormwater, poor water quality in receiving waterways, increased flood volumes, and associated public health impacts and property damage. More consistent stormwater runoff requirements would be a significant step toward environmental equity.

These permits were issued in draft form in January of 2021, and BWB was joined by the Chesapeake Accountability Project (CAP), Waterkeepers Chesapeake (WKC), and the Choose Clean Water Coalition (CCWC), and others including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, in providing formal comments to this effect. The November 5 release of final permits, without significant changes, also included those for Anne Arundel, Montgomery, and Prince George’s Counties. Through this legal intervention, BWB and CBF aim to create model permits that can influence the management of other major urban centers across the state.

Blue Water Baltimore’s full comments on the January 2021 draft permits can be found [online here](#).

###