

For Immediate Release:

Contact: Caroline Taylor,
Executive Director
Montgomery Countryside Alliance
caroline@mocoalliance.org
301-461-9831



Montgomery Countryside Alliance releases a timely report on the impacts of climate change and development on groundwater and surface water resources in Poolesville, MD – kicking off water conservation outreach campaign in rural Montgomery County.

Here in the Washington metro region when we turn on our taps... water flows. Many don't question how their water gets to their homes. However, this second summer of prolonged heat and drought conditions and climate change projections beg attention to [our regional water resources and how to plan for the future](#). This week, 3.1 million Marylanders are experiencing drought according to [NOAA government data](#). For much of the region, water taken from the Potomac or local reservoirs is treated and conveyed to homes and businesses by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC). However, by design, Montgomery County's 93,000-acre Agricultural Reserve and surrounding rural communities instead rely on ground water from wells that are fed by an underground aquifer and individual septic systems for disposal of waste. This aspect of Montgomery County's water and sewer plan helps to contain sprawl, allowing for stronger protection for working farms and lower cost of providing public infrastructure. How will our region plan for and integrate measures to protect our water supplies in the future?

The federally designated Piedmont Sole Source Aquifer, a vast unconfined aquifer extends from Frederick County through Montgomery County and likely, though not yet mapped, into Loudoun County.

Increasing demand and changes in climate patterns are raising questions about how regional water supplies, whether surface water or groundwater, will meet our future needs.

WSSC is currently evaluating the siting of multiple new reservoir locations to ensure that the system can meet reduced flow and increased demand. Yet the Sole Source Aquifer has no such opportunity for backup. It is the only economically viable source of potable water for thousands of residents and businesses, particularly agricultural businesses.



Fifth Generation farmer Gene Kingsbury of Kingsbury's Orchard puts it best, "our aquifer is the bloodstream for farms in the Agricultural Reserve. It's what sustains us."

Montgomery Countryside Alliance, a respected nonprofit protecting the Ag Reserve since 2001, was granted funding from the Chesapeake Bay Trust and Clean Water Montgomery supported through the Montgomery County Water

Quality Protection Fund to complete groundwater research and an associated outreach campaign for local residents, businesses, and decision makers. The [Good Gift Groundwater Campaign](#) will highlight both the nature of and means to conserve the high quality yet fragile groundwater aquifer and the watersheds that feed it.

The first phase of the project has been completed –as presented in a report from long time state Hydrogeologist Pat Hammond entitled “[A study on the reliable drought yields of Poolesville’s Public Water Supply Wells, Montgomery County Maryland.](#)” The report comes at a critical time as the Town of Poolesville is revising its growth plan that will map out growth for the coming years. A preliminary report was shared with Poolesville Town Manager Wade Yost and Poolesville Commissioners in April 2024.

Local hydrogeologist and Reserve resident Robert Tworkowski provides a preface to the report which is meant to reach a much larger audience. Across the nation – one third of all homes rely on groundwater.

“We are looking to take the science to inspire action among residents and businesses in the County’s rural communities. With our aquifer, we are all quite literally drinking from the same limited tap. Clearly this could be viewed as a precarious, even potentially dire situation, but we prefer to see it as opportunity for collaboration and stewardship,” says Kristina Bostick, MCA Conservation Associate.

MCA will host webinars, produce videos and other media to educate and inspire residents that rely on wells about what they can do on their own property to safeguard the Aquifer. “Even small actions can make a difference,” says Abby Mann, the groundwater campaign coordinator. There are the obvious actions like taking shorter showers or letting lawns go dormant but we are looking to help folks make other life style changes that will yield big impact.

“Both the detailed hydrogeological report and Good Gift educational campaign will serve as an important case study for a wider regional audience,” Caroline Taylor, MCA’s Executive Director said, adding “the entire region will feel the impacts of a changing climate on water resources. We hope that this project will help to serve as a wakeup call to our local decision makers. The time is now for multi-jurisdictional collaboration to ensure a resilient regional water system.”

MCA, along with Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) filed numerous public information act requests with the Maryland Department of the Environment, finally gaining public release of an important Hammond report entitled, “[The Effects of Climate Change on Maryland’s Water Supplies.](#)” Among other forecasts, the report reveals that drought cycles increasing in both frequency and intensity will have larger impacts on groundwater supplies than water sourced from surface water. Increases in volume and velocity of precipitation events will affect how effectively the groundwater aquifer will be recharged.

This campaign is a starting point in the necessary work to address a changing climate and the water that sustains us according to hydrogeologist Robert Tworkowski in the report preface, who writes “this case study stands as just one example of the studies that will be required to maintain a fragile resource in order to benefit our future generations. We have the knowledge, and it is time that we show that on an individual and societal level we make decisions that fully embrace the facts underlying that knowledge in order to ensure the future security of our critical water resource.”

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