18600 Queen Anne Rd, Rear Barn
Upper Marlboro, MD 20774
301-249-8200 (office)
301-249-3613 (fax)
www.paxriverkeeper.org

Patuxent River Earns "D-" second year in a row

March 23, 2009
For Release March 25, 2009

Contact: Fred Tutman, Executive Director
301-249-8200 x9 (office)/301-240-393 (cell)
fred@paxriverkeeper.org

The overall water quality health of the Patuxent River reveals no meaningful progress toward desirable water quality some 30 years after the State of Maryland embarked on efforts to clean up the river. This is confirmed by a report card released by the Patuxent Riverkeeper and the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. This report card gives the health of the Patuxent River estuary a score of D- for 2008.

The full results of the report card and details about ongoing efforts to monitor the river and detect pollution sources will be made available at a press conference at 11 a.m. on March 25, 2009 at The Patuxent Wildlife Visitor's Center. Address: 10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop, Laurel, MD 20708. The press conference for the Annual Report Card will be digitally recorded. We invite requests from radio broadcasters wishing to acquire actuality from the event.

Water quality and biological data collected by state and federal agencies was analyzed to provide the second geographical look at the estuary's health. Key findings were:

- The middle estuary scored the highest (46%), largely due to the increased aquatic grass cover and dissolved oxygen levels that more frequently met the target levels.
- While aquatic grass cover in the upper estuary had relatively high scores in the previous report card, this year saw a small but insufficient increase, which did not raise the overall score or compensate for the decrease in water clarity and phytoplankton community health.

- Water clarity was consistently poor throughout the estuary, reaching target levels at a frequency of zero to four percent.
- The lower estuary scored the lowest (19%), despite an increase in the overall health score from 2007, with all indicators scoring poorly relative to target levels.

For copies of the report card, please visit: www.eco-check.org/communication/. or www.paxriverkeeper.org

To create a more comprehensive look at the entire watershed the Patuxent Riverkeeper, a four year-old non-profit organization of more than 400 citizens, conducted trainings throughout the watershed to equip citizen volunteers to test the Patuxent for temperature, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, nitrates, pH, phosphate, biochemical oxygen demand, and fecal coliform. Over fifty citizen volunteers began a long-term effort to monitor water quality in the Patuxent River, Maryland's longest intrastate waterway, as part of the Patuxent Riverkeeper's Water Quality Initiative. The information collected is posted on a website, www.pwqi.net, available for public viewing. The citizen testers found that nitrate and pH levels are higher in the northern half of the watershed while temperature was higher in the southern half. Turbidity levels were highest in the northern tidal section of the watershed.

"It's necessary that citizens take leadership in monitoring water quality in the Patuxent. The persistent lack of progress in healing our waterway is making citizens cynical that there is genuine willpower to correct the problems. We plainly need to turn up the heat if we expect to have clean water again in this tributary," said Fred Tutman, Patuxent Riverkeeper.

Patuxent Riverkeeper is seeking additional water quality monitor volunteers and will be providing additional training during 2009. Those testing water will be provided all the necessary equipment with instructions on their use. More information about volunteering can be obtained from Lauren Webster, Restoration Coordinator, 301-249-8200 x6. The Riverkeeper web site is at: www.paxriverkeeper.org.