



Celebrating 25 Years of Conservation

Dave Blazer – Moving the Program Forward

This is the fourth in a series of articles celebrating our “Coastal Bay Heroes” – those who have contributed to the establishment and ongoing work of the Maryland Coastal Bays Program.

Dave Blazer was selected to fill the shoes of MCBP’s Executive Director when Steve Taylor left in 1999 and served the program until 2008, when he was offered a well-deserved position with the State.

We really wanted to caption this tribute to Blazer as the trail blazer for the program, but when we spoke about his leadership, anyone that knows Blazer, he is always first to give credit where credit is due. He credited Taylor as the trail blazer explaining, “My thought coming into the program when I was hired, was, I was so excited as the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) was done, and they told me here’s 538 actions of a 200-page plan. I love to follow a plan. And Taylor was the one that was instrumental in engaging the community and partners into creating the plan.”

Blazer however can be credited as the great navigator of the program. “I was with MCBP for only six months when we were tasked to set up as a non-profit,” commented Blazer, adding “we had to set everything from the ground up. Dave Wilson and Kate Hults were an integral part of the process.”

He and his team developed the mantra of the ‘Forgotten Bays.’ Referring to the fact that when most people think of bays in Maryland, they think primarily of the Chesapeake Bay, not our five coastal bays. “We have different issues to deal with than the Chesapeake Bay,” he explains “for instance, the fisheries for the Chesapeake Bay are completely different than the fisheries of the coastal bays.”

Blazer, board, and staff members set out to start the coastal bays fisheries advisory committee. They reached out to local watermen, marinas, fishing charter businesses, and tackle shops to talk about specific issues of the coastal bays. “We were fortunate to have the staff and directors of fisheries involved in the Chesapeake Bay meet with us as well to initiate the program,” added Blazer. This committee is still successfully implemented by the DNR to this day.

When talking about the program with Blazer, rarely would I, me or myself be referenced. He genuinely sees the success of the program during his tenure due to the people that worked together for the cause. “We got a lot done in the early years. We did a tremendous amount of outreach and education programs including, newsletters, homeowners guides, and articles in the newspapers every week with education and pictures to make folks aware of our bays. Dave Wilson (a director who filled Blazer shoes after he left) did an amazing job and I credit him with much of the success of the early outreach programs,” explained Blazer.

“Another positive thing we did for the forgotten bays was ramp up the water quality monitoring program,” he explained. “At one point we had more monitoring stations and data than what the Chesapeake Bay was doing at the time.”

And along with the monitoring stations, Blazer established partnerships that were able to get the coastal bays added to the critical area state guidelines. “Guidelines were established in the 80s for the Chesapeake Bay, but not for the coastal bays until 2001. The science that we had accumulated thanks to Cathy Wazniak, biologist for the Department of Natural Resources and last month’s coastal bay hero, and Dave Goshorn who is now the Assistant Secretary at DNR, was instrumental in this accomplishment,” stated Blazer.

After the critical areas’ accomplishment, MCBP launched a Builders for the Bays initiative where program partners and representatives connected with builders, realtors and developers and working through the Center for Watershed Protection, a national organization dedicated to protecting and restoring our streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and bays, developed a book on how to do environmental site design.

Right before the end of his tenure, MCBP had accumulated a lot of data that Wazniak and Taylor help start. The program approached Bill Dennison, author of the Chesapeake Bay Report Card, to assist the program with creating a coastal bays report card. “The report card helped educate folks that our bays are different than the Chesapeake Bay and we have different issues,” commented Blazer.

The report card is still created annually for the program.

When asked what was one of Blazer’s favorite moments with the program, he responded there were many, but when prodded, he highlighted three moments.

The first was the first Osprey Sprint Triathlon. He and his wife, Gail Blazer (Ocean City’s Environmental Engineer), started the triathlon which generated significant funds and awareness of the bays. It was hosted at Public Landing which truly showcased the magnificence of Chincoteague Bay. The event ran for 19 years generating funds for the program.

He was always excited for the policy committee meetings. "At the policy committee meetings, we had all the high-ranking officials from the state, county, and cities convene in one place to allow us to showcase our achievements with our partners," he explained.

He also enjoyed the annual boat trips MCBP coordinated during the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) conference typically hosted in Ocean City in August. "This was a great opportunity to showcase our bays to the governor and other officials. It was pretty eye opening. We always had a good contingent on the boat and of course, a captive audience," Blazer observed, adding "we also did it with the legislature during the critical area legislation as well which really provided an eye-opening opportunity."

The other achievement created during his tenure is an endowment fund which truly allows MCBP to continue to be sustainable in the event current funding were to become an issue and the program must regroup.

Upon reflecting on his tenure Blazer remarked, "we really had an amazing board, citizen advisory committee, and fundraising committee. Because of these groups we built a strong network which created positive events. I was really lucky to have the opportunity to step into a great network and be a part of building a better network."

Dave's list of all the amazing individuals that built the program during his tenure was too many to list, but many of these names can be found in the CCMP book.