

Looking Ahead to Maryland 2050: Living in Our Environment

The greatest impact upon the natural environment comes from the people who live in it and, in turn, the state of our environment impacts our quality of life. In Maryland, pressures upon the environment arise from our changing population, our life style and values, and the way in which we use the land. If we are to secure Maryland's environment and our associated quality of life for the future, it is imperative that we understand where we are presently positioned with regard to human-environmental concerns and start to address how these will change over the coming years.

This is the focus of an exploratory workshop planned for early Fall 2006, hosted by the Department of Geography at the University of Maryland, College Park under the auspices of a new and emerging campus-wide Center for Integrative Environmental Research (CIER). MD2050 will be a one day campus-wide workshop that will focus upon the issues central to protecting Maryland's environmental future while at the same time enhancing the quality of life for its citizens. The workshop will be the foundation on which to base a larger dialogue involving state and local decision makers, and from which to launch future funded research and education activities.

Researchers from across the campus are invited to participate in the workshop. Human-environment issues in Maryland that will be discussed are those that are expected to undergo significant changes by 2050. During the workshop a number of intriguing questions will be posed about the future of our State. For example, how will an aging population, changing racial diversity and increased energy costs change our urban and suburban landscapes? What will be the associated changes in the tax base and the ability of the state and local government to provide the necessary infrastructure? How will our transport systems change and how might these affect air quality? How will changing markets and growing demand for suburban homes change agriculture in our State? What changes can be anticipated in land use and how will they affect our watersheds, the Chesapeake Bay and the associated river ecosystems? How will land use changes impact our water quality and supply? Will coastal development expand to meet an increased demand for retirement homes? How will a changing climate and sea level rise impact our State? Such questions address specific issues and impacts but a more complex and compelling question is how will these various changes work in concert and interact.

These questions concerning the future of our State require research that integrates, from the start, insights from the social, physical, engineering, natural and health sciences. Promoting such integrative research is a major goal of CIER. It is the intention of the workshop to foster a more integrative program of research across the campus, bringing together researchers from different departments and centers. By examining the current situation, recent trends and projected scenarios of change, we will be better able to identify the challenges we face to maintain and improve the quality of life for our citizens and to better manage our resources. This research will require a combination of theory, observations, statistical analyses, process studies, spatially explicit model simulation, and dialogue across disciplines and with decision makers aimed at generating consensus about issues and strategies.

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