



PHOTO BY ERIN FLUHARTY

Oxford living shoreline

Environmental Concern Vice President Gene Slear, right, explains Oxford's living shoreline project at the ferry dock to U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., and his wife, Myrna, along with Oxford Commissioner Peter Dunbar, left.



PHOTO BY ERIN FLUHARTY

Oxford living shoreline

U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., right, stands among native grasses during a tour Sunday of Oxford's two living shoreline projects. Environmental Concern Wetland Restoration Manager Kody Cario explains the project, while Oxford Commissioner Peter Dunbar and Commissioner-elect Gordon Graves listen.

Cardin tours Oxford living shorelines

By **KELLEY L. ALLEN** Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, June 28, 2011 1:00 am

OXFORD U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., toured two living shoreline projects Sunday morning in Oxford.

Cardin and his wife arrived at Oxford's ferry dock shortly after 11 a.m. to an awaiting crowd that included Oxford Commissioner Peter Dunbar, who spearheaded both projects, Commissioner-elect Gordon Graves, Gene Slear, vice president of Environmental Concern, which did both projects, and Kody Cario, Environmental Concern's wetlands restoration manager.

"It's good to be here," Cardin said. "I'm excited about what you're doing here good work."

Standing at the ferry dock, overlooking a shoreline there, Cardin donned an Environmental Concern baseball cap Slear gave him and started asking questions about the project. Cario explained the shoreline's sill structure, and Dunbar explained the native grasses and bioretention area.

"This is the one they gave you something of a fit on," Cardin said of the ferry dock shoreline, which almost didn't happen because of a problem between regulatory agencies.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, part of the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), provided most of the money for the ferry dock project. But another branch of NOAA, the National Marine Fisheries Service, objected generally to living shorelines.

"Here I had the same mother agency giving funding and raising objections," Dunbar said.

Those objections went to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency that issues permits for shorelines.

"Meanwhile I'm getting threats from the other funding agency, The Chesapeake Bay Trust, that since we were so late in initiating the project they could withdraw funds. We came close to losing that funding," Dunbar said.

That's when he appealed to Cardin. Within a few weeks, the Army Corps put Oxford's project out for public comment, and the National Marine Service Fisheries did not object.

The permit came through, followed with approval from Maryland's Board of Public Works, and the project moved forward.

"I don't want to imply Cardin influenced the outcome of the permit," Dunbar said. "But his interest did help the parties get away from a stalemate."

"We've got to figure out a way to make sure we're all working in the same direction," Cardin said Sunday. He noted a recent partnership among 11 federal agencies, working together on an urban waters initiative.

"We're making progress," he said.

Cardin also asked about more living shorelines in Oxford.

"We need to keep finding more of these, there's no way we can do one massive project," he said. "We have to do community projects and we'll work with you."

Dunbar said he has one small area in town that could support a third public living shoreline. There also are several private projects in the works.

Cardin's support has also included federal funds allocated for local projects. As chairman of the Water and Wildlife Subcommittee of the Environment and Public Works Committee, he has included in his budget appropriation requests money for several projects in Oxford.

Those requests include \$20 million for the Oxford Cooperative Lab last year, and \$161,000 for Oxford's town park living shoreline, which Cardin also toured Sunday.

"That's fabulous," he said of the parks' living shoreline. "This is exactly what we like to see."