

December 22, 2009

Queen Anne's Conservation Statement of Opposition to the proposed Federal Hard Skills training facility in Ruthsburg.

Since being made aware in early September that a federal "Hard Skills" Training Center could be possibly be located in this County, Queen Anne's Conservation Association has monitored the process, asked questions, and sought information about the facility from various local, state, and federal sources. We have evaluated the projected economic benefits and consequences, the potential stress on the county's infrastructure, and the overall environmental impact on local citizens, neighboring facilities, and the county as a whole. Most recently, we attended last Thursday's meeting at the Ruthsburg community center, where we heard overwhelming opposition from the citizens most directly affected by the potential facility. These are Queen Anne's County citizens, farmers, landowners and residents, concerned for their livelihoods, their property values, and their community.

Queen Anne's Conservation shares these concerns. The mission of Queen Anne's Conservation Association has always been to promote stewardship of the County's natural resources, and to protect and promote the rural character and small towns of the County. The Association has long supported prudent and focused residential and commercial growth that contributes to the economic benefit of all its citizens.

Based on our thorough analysis, **Queen Anne's Conservation Association now takes a formal position of opposition to the Federal Hard Skills facility that has been proposed for farmland near Ruthsburg.** We believe the proposed facility does not contribute to, but rather greatly impairs, those aspects of our County which make it a great place to live and work. In addition, we feel the proposed facility will become a financial burden to Queen Anne's County.

The proposed facility's serious adverse impacts on adjacent Tuckahoe State Park, Adkins Arboretum, Tuckahoe Creek and the Choptank River (all of which are valued resources of the region), and all of which are in the heart of prime and productive agricultural lands, are major factors in our decision. No less important to us is our deep concern for what this facility will do to the lives, economic activities, and property values of persons residing within the wide radius of the facility, subjecting those residents to noise, traffic, explosions and weapons-firing at the facility.

Queen Anne's Conservation was organized 40 years ago to support the maintenance of the rural character of the county. Our organization has focused its activities on the preservation of farmland, forests, wildlife, and natural resources. We recognize that these are our most important economic resources and are the basis of our local economy. We believe the planned operations at the Hard-Skills facility, as identified in the various documents that have become available, are incompatible with the visions for the County set forth by the citizens in the Comprehensive Planning Process and by the County Commissioners themselves.

The original justification for the facility in terms of new jobs in the County, with which Queen Anne's Conservation was naturally sympathetic, has apparently turned out to be superficial and exaggerated. The County Commissioners are no longer claiming anything like 500 new jobs, as it has become apparent that most of the jobs at the facility will be filled by existing personnel transferred in from the facilities being consolidated here. Some of these individuals will live in the County, others will become commuters from other jurisdictions creating additional new traffic challenges. Further, no evidence has been offered that any significant number of existing County residents possess the specialized skills required by this type of anti-terrorist facility that will be training a large and diverse population of foreign nationals as well as U.S. citizens.

We do not question the economic benefit of consolidating 19 facilities into one, and we assume it will also enhance the training of these individuals who are directly involved in maintaining our national security. However, it is our belief that there are alternative sites for this facility elsewhere in Maryland, and in nearby states which meet the State Department criteria for this type of facility. Given these alternatives, no properly-conducted environmental analysis can support the choice to locate this facility on 2000+ acres of pristine farmland on the Eastern Shore, adjacent to a state park, in the watershed of an impaired tributary of the Chesapeake Bay.

Moving forward, Queen Anne's Conservation will vigorously oppose locating the Federal Hard-Skills facility in this County, and we call on citizens, other conservation organizations and citizen groups in the Bay region to join in this cause.

###