

Hogan's budget cuts environment funds, phosphorus regs

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The governor cut \$66 million from environmental project funding compared to 2015.



(Photo: AP/FILE)

[With phosphorus pollution regulations now off the books \(/story/news/local/maryland/2015/01/21/hogan-halts-poultry-regs/22127497/\)](/story/news/local/maryland/2015/01/21/hogan-halts-poultry-regs/22127497/), the fight over the Chesapeake Bay now turns to Gov. Larry Hogan's 2016 budget.

After Hogan spokeswoman Erin Montgomery confirmed Wednesday that regulations meant to limit Shore farmers' use of chicken manure on their crops were to be sent for further public review, Hogan followed it Thursday with a Fiscal Year 2016 budget that would see sizable cuts to state water quality improvement projects.

Thursday afternoon, Hogan laid out his \$16.4 billion budget, saying all of its expenditures would be balanced by \$16.4 billion in state revenue.

While certain areas of the budget grew, such as funding for the University System of Maryland, Hogan's plan would call for \$66 million less in capital funding for environmental programs and land preservation compared to former Gov. Martin O'Malley last budget.

In addition, the majority of the cuts are to water quality improvement projects, which would see \$279 million in capital funding, a \$58 million cut over 2015.

O'Malley's Fiscal Year 2015 budget allocated \$456 million to environmental programs and \$337 million to water quality measures, according to the state Department of Budget and Management.

In a statement, Hogan called the overall budget "a structurally balanced budget that puts our state on sound financial footing."

"My administration will continue to work to put Maryland's economy back on track, attract new businesses, and create jobs for the long-term stability of our budget," his statement read.

While Thursday was about the budget, advocates for the Chesapeake Bay and the agriculture industry were still surprised to hear the news out of Hogan's camp regarding the repeal of the pollution regulations.

Hogan pulled regulations after his inauguration on Wednesday which would've required Shore farmers to limit the phosphorus output of their farms. The regulations were a move to limit nutrient pollution into the Chesapeake Bay pushed by former Gov. Martin O'Malley and researchers at the University of Maryland.

A controversial issue with reports of millions of dollars at stake for Shore farmers and billions for industries situated by the bay, Hogan's move further angered environmental advocates while establishing his position among the Shore's agricultural leaders.

Alison Prost, the Maryland executive director of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, said Wednesday was "a sad day in the long fight to make Maryland waters clean enough for swimming and fishing."

"The Chesapeake Bay Foundation welcomes the opportunity to work with the Administration to ensure farmers have the resources they need to implement the (phosphorus management tool), and all residents see cleaner water," Prost added. "But we can't compromise on science, or accept further delays on cleaning up Maryland's rivers, streams, and the Chesapeake Bay."

Bill Satterfield, executive director of Delmarva Poultry Industry, welcomed Hogan's move.

"We have said all along that this risk management tool, even according to its developers, could not estimate how much less phosphorus might reach the Chesapeake Bay," Satterfield said in a statement. "We look forward to working with Governor Hogan and his team and members of the General Assembly to develop regulation that will provide improved environmental stewardship by the agricultural community."

With questions as to the validity of Hogan's move and the regulations being pushed back to public review, farmer Quint Riley, son of former Secretary of Agriculture Lewis Riley, said he doesn't expect this to be the end.

"I don't think it's going to go away altogether," Riley said. "I think they'll start working on other pollutants instead of just laying it all on agriculture."

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