



Eyes of Paint Branch

Grassroots Conservation, Education, and Action for the Paint Branch and its Watershed

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ICC Contractor's Mistake Damages Paint Branch Streams

An ICC contractor drilling holes in the Upper Paint Branch Special Protection Area has damaged local streams. In a letter about the incident to the State Highway Administration (SHA), Eyes of Paint Branch Vice-President David Dunmire said, "This is a clear indication that the existing policies and procedures for ICC construction are not adequate to protect the Paint Branch. We request that SHA provide a full report detailing this incident. . . . If SHA is indeed serious about protecting the Paint Branch, then this review must also identify multiply redundant safeguards to ensure that similar incidents do not occur again. [letter attached]"

On Saturday, August 12, members of the Eyes of Paint Branch received word from an alert resident that something was wrong with the stream. The resident said that "although the stream has been clear recently, today the water is very cloudy and appears milky. Someone is doing something upstream [north] of Fairland Road."

Members of Eyes of Paint Branch went out to assess the situation on Saturday and Sunday and determined that the milky condition extended past Pilgrim Hills to the south and almost to Briggs Chaney to the north, with the cloudiness becoming more pronounced the farther north one went.

Following our inquiries on Monday morning, we were told that a contracting crew doing preliminary work for the ICC punctured a water main on Friday, August 11, depositing fine sediments in the Upper Paint Branch streams. The Upper Paint Branch watershed, which is in a Special Protection Area designated by the county, is well-known for the high quality of its water and the health of its streams. Because of their pristine condition and gravelly, sediment-free streambeds, the streams can support certain kinds of fish and other aquatic creatures that cannot survive in most other streams in the county, which have been degraded from excessive development. Sedimentation degrades the streams and is potentially harmful to these creatures.

The crew was working near the intersection of Nees Lane and Pond View Road, drilling holes as part of a geotechnical survey for the ICC. At about 10 a.m. on Friday the crew hit a 10-inch water main, and chlorinated water gushed out for about an hour, eroding a large pit to a depth of about 6 feet, until it was turned off by WSSC. The water flowed down a hill into a swale and then into a small tributary of the Paint Branch, where it deposited a ¼-inch layer of sediments in two main areas, at the mouth of the tributary and in the Main Stem.



As far as the Eyes of Paint Branch can determine, there was no independent environmental monitor on site at the time of the spill. In addition, the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection was not notified by the state about the spill until Monday morning. Throughout the ICC study process, residents had been reassured by the State Highway Administration that an independent environmental monitor would be in place during the ICC work and that great care would be taken to build the highway in an “environmentally sensitive” way. Eyes of Paint Branch is outraged about this careless mistake and greatly concerned about what it bodes for the future “environmental sensitivity” of the ICC project.