Fred Tutman: I'm Fred Tutman. I've been the Patuxent Riverkeeper in Maryland for the last 16 years, the founding Riverkeeper on the Patuxent.

Speaker 2: Let me ask you to talk about your roots, where you're from, and the depths of connection that you have to Southern Maryland and the Patuxent River.

Fred Tutman: So I grew up on the Patuxent River. My great-grandfather established a farm in Prince George's County in the 1920s, and I still live on that family plot of farmland. My mother is a next-door neighbor. In fact, she turned 84 yesterday. So I grew up on a tobacco farm, basically that drew its water from the Patuxent River and drew its sustenance in various ways. We used to fish for yellow perch, and swim in the Patuxent River, and draft water for our crop fields, kind of like Huck Finn. I always thought of my connection to the Patuxent as kind of a vast, at least as a boy, as a vast playground.

As an adult, I moved away, worked in television and radio for 27 years, and got very involved in my spare time in community activism, mostly around watershed and environmental themes. So eventually, I decided to invest my time and energy in something close to home. My media career was mostly overseas. I lived and worked in Rome, in Italy, covered the Falklands war for the BBC. For union reasons, it was easier for me to find work as a stringer outside of the United States, and I got a little flat on that. I wanted to really make some kind of a contribution to my home river and my home community.

So my transition was Law School, very hard transition really, because people saw me as a media guy. I still meet people on airplanes nowadays that I used to work with at CBS or BBC, and they look at me like, "Oh my God, I thought you were dead. What happened to you? You were just gone." I kind of broke ties with that whole universe. As a matter of practicality, in some ways I don't think those people I used to work with see me as relevant to their careers now. Because I covered the White house for a bunch of years for various organizations, and I just completely dropped off the face of the earth.

So they asked me what I'm doing, I ran into people like that now, and I tell them "I'm a Riverkeeper," and I can see in their eyes I'm really dead now. I'm good and dead as far as they're concerned. So it's different world, it's a different chapter for me in terms of what I used to do and what I do now, which is very, I guess you could say it's insular in the sense that it stays in a watershed. I really only am interested and only do work in the Patuxent drainage in terms of the water keeping work that I do.

And, I mean it's not very base centric. It's environmental in a broad way, only to the extent the communities we serve sometimes have broader issues than just water. Sometimes we work on other stuff, because we think of ourselves as kind of a

service organization to the communities along the track of the Patuxent river seven counties. The state's longest and deepest intrastate waterway. A river with a particular history it's quite unique actually an activist history that's very dynamic.

Really, the Chesapeake Bay program actually came out of the Patuxent movement in the 1960s. People had been suing on the Patuxent river literally since the '50s or '60s to get the state to do something to bring the fate of the waterway back.

Essentially what happened was in the 1980s, the state had a number of lawsuits pending against it. But the Patuxent lawsuits for the most part were victorious and successful in terms of the plaintiffs winning. But the state didn't really have a plan for fixing the Patuxent. And mind you, I don't know that we have a really good plan now. I'm not aware of a good plan or at least one that one could easily follow that would tend to restore the Patuxent river.

But that said, back in the '80s, Governor Harry Hughes made the call to essentially create a Chesapeake Bay program because when they tried to get anything passed in the general assembly that specifically touched the Patuxent, only the Patuxent people were interested. And so the idea was that if they had a Bay program, they could bring more people to the table over these watershed protection issues. So the irony is that while the Patuxent led the charge that resulted in creation of a huge and very thriving Chesapeake Bay protection movement, it now takes a number behind a whole lot of other rivers in order to get attention paid to its various burdens, its various problems and its various concerns.

Patuxent's the deepest water in the Chesapeake Bay, 190 feet under the Solomon's Bridge with a sunken submarine from world war one. It's geopolitically significant. People argue that if you can't clean this river up, how are you going to clean all those others up, because this one is entirely in Maryland. It starts and ends in Maryland. And I also think it has some mojo. It has a particular regional culture attached to it. People are deeply tied on a spiritual level. I mean, I'm sure that's true for lots of rivers, but again, the Patuxent is one that has a particular significance in Maryland because of it's really fascinating community activist based history. That's how I think of it as a community activist based watershed movement that has really set the stage for lots of others.

The Bernie Fowler weightings, for example, that have migrated into other rivers. They started on the Patuxent. Many of the reforms, critical areas and things of that sort that we now rely on to protect all rivers in the Chesapeake Bay, they were piloted on the Patuxent river.

I know it sound like instant check-off on star Trek, it's all about [inaudible 00:05:34], or it's all about the Patuxent. But I do believe the Patuxent has a very particular significance in this Chesapeake Bay protection movement. That's the

move. And remember that the rest of the nation's watching in order to see how the cleanup, the nation's largest estuary. So it sets the stage for water and many more places not just in Maryland.

Speaker 2: Let me ask to talk a little bit about your heritage. Your family tree, your ancestry and your family's place in American history and Maryland history.

Fred Tutman: So my family tree is very much a Maryland thing. My father is from Baltimore, Druid Hill Avenue actually, which incidentally has changed a lot since I was a kid. I drove down Druid Hill Avenue the other day and I was really stunned at some things that had really changed there. My father married the farmer's daughter. My mother's grew up in Annapolis and then later in Prince George's County, where her grandfather started a farm. So my great grandfather established the farm that we live on now.

When I was a boy, my father would send me to Baltimore to visit with cousins in the summer months when we were out of school so I could see his side of life. He wanted me to experience Baltimore as well as the country. And in reverse, my Baltimore cousins would come out to the country where we lived, where they were amazed that we lived in places where people didn't lock their doors and we were in the woods and there were no street lights and they thought Freddy Krueger lived in the woods. The Baltimore cousins were right. How do people live out here with no street lights and none of the cities stuff that they were accustomed to.

So I got a slice of both, I guess is the point that I'm making. I was named after a famous Maryland guy named Fredrick Douglas. I'm actually, there are two versions. There's one story that says that I was named after a race horse that was named after Frederick Douglas. I prefer the one where I was named after the guy that the racehorse was named after, but at any rate.

I also have other ancestors who have had some real contributions to I'd say Maryland's eco existence. One of my mother's uncles, Uncle Shooge, I remember him quite well, lived on Dolphin Street and he was one of the guys who helped found the National Aquarium. In fact, there's a statue of my mother's uncle Henry Hall, and there's an award they give every year for science achievement in his name. He was a fish freak, basically. He was an engineer, but he was also a guy that made it his life's passion to collect tropical fish. I used to help and feed the fish when I was a teenager over on his Dolphin Street place. Actually the family just sold that house not too long ago.

So I have pretty deep ties, I guess to Maryland generally, to Baltimore in particular, the Annapolis area, my mother's family also owns a funeral home on West Street. It's fairly well known in the black community there. So it cracks me up, I go to Annapolis now and people say, "Oh, let me tell you about Annapolis and where

stuff is." It's like, "Hey, I'm a native." It's so funny. I mean, Annapolis used to be frankly a black neighborhood for the most part. People don't think of it that way now. So it amuses me a little bit. The presumption is that I'm from somewhere other than where my hometown is. I'd say my hometown is as much Annapolis as anywhere.

Speaker 2: You are Maryland's longest standing Riverkeeper, also Maryland's only African American river keeper. Is that right?

Fred Tutman: I think I'm the nation's only African-American Riverkeeper at the moment. There have been others before me, but they've come and gone. I'm the longest serving Riverkeeper in the Chesapeake Bay region, and I think there's 19 Riverkeepers and most of them are relatively new. Some have retired and moved away over the years. But yeah, those are credentials of sorts. I guess I have something of a long view of the water keeping movement in this region, let me put it that way.

Speaker 2: Let me ask you to share your thoughts about the intersection of race, class and environmental justice. I know it's something you've done a lot of thinking about and a lot of activism around.

Fred Tutman: Well, I've struggled with how to create a programmatic identity for water protection work that includes, attracts and embraces as many different types of folks as we possibly can. And some of that's a necessity, because as an African American Riverkeeper, I think black communities expect me to be astute and tuned in to the issues that disproportionately affect African Americans. On the other side of the street, I think in white America, I think there's a presumption that diversity is important, but I generally reject the idea of diversity because I don't know any black communities looking for it.

I don't know any black communities saying, "You know, what we really need to solve our environmental problems is more diversity." I think what they want is more equity, more power, more self determinism. I think that's hard to accomplish sometimes in movements where the space has been claimed by white Americans, by habit, by tradition. The people in communities that have traditionally supported mass movements to protect water have not been in the black community. I think black communities are an afterthought.

So I find myself in this weird predicament. On one hand, I don't want to style our water keeping work around racial definitions, but it troubles me when we have events. I'll give you an example. I had a member of our organization complain when we had a jazz concert at our office, and we had a jazz concert because some African American members of Patuxent Riverkeeper said, "you know, this'll be a great place to play jazz. Your offices on the waterfront, you got a dock and all this stuff."

Now a white member said, "Blue grass is the only suitable music to play next to a river." I'm thinking, wow, can't we have as many different flavors, colors, types of music as possible? To me that's kind of a metaphor for how these movements have to roll. They really have to touch people from many walks, and so we have to be open to many different types of stories that people have to tell, their connections to the environment. Yeah, music's part of it, but also the cultural association that comes with the environment.

I think there's a presumption among some white Americans that black people don't care about the environment, which is ridiculous. I don't know any people of color, I don't know any people of any color who are indifferent to their surroundings or their natural environment or their natural habitat. And so I think that's a myth that has been created, and it's one that people of color ended up having to rebut in these movements. We find ourselves where the definition of our environmentalism has been somehow entrusted to people who don't know our communities, who don't necessarily care about our communities in particular, because the presumption that the environment isn't really there, it's where our richest donors are, or where people join our organizations, where people sustain these organizations.

So there's a real disconnect I think that exists within the environmental movement. On one hand, I think people of color are trying to claim our own stories, because we have a lot of stories and associations and connections to these waterways. On the other side of the fence, we have people in these movements that have been created around environmental causes that don't really reflect our needs or wants sometimes. It's hard for us to be ourselves in these movements. I don't have an answer. I struggle with it. I literally struggle with it almost daily. I struggle in the sense that I don't want to style our work, as I said around looking at someone's skin color or ethnicity. But on the other hand, I also don't want to be blind to it. I want to be able to help people exemplify their own environmentalism through I guess the vector of Patuxent Riverkeeper if I'm making any sense.

And that's a struggle because I think people's expectations guide a lot of that. Let me say one more thing about that. So I work in other realms. I work with a hiking club, very well known, I won't say them out loud because I'm not trying to call them out. There, we were trying to do diversity, and I heard someone muttering in the audience during one of our debates on the subject of diversity, "Oh now we're going to have hoods in the woods." And so this is kind of an example of the thinking that some people have that people of color represent either a threat or need to be vetted in order to make sure that trails are safe and that familiar environmental venues are not in some way at risk because we're bringing new faces in.

I went to some other meeting where I had people talking against the public access, arguing that we should keep beaches very, very private and isolated away from

outsiders. And I had a woman stand up and say, "If you open this place up for general public access, you're going to have guys in baggy jeans and gold jewelry drinking old English malt liquor down by the river, out of paper sacks." I mean it couldn't be more vivid. I had this picture of Menace to Society or Run-DMC hanging out next to the river. Which is, well that's an intriguing picture to get in your mind, but my point is that sometimes I think people of color have to dig ourselves out of a deep hole in order to convince people who are white that we really are environmentalist, which is shocking and frustrating.

I think that is why these movements sometimes get boycotted by black and brown communities. That's what's really going on. It's not that people aren't interested in the environment, they're not just in these organizations where an afterthought, where they're second fiddle, where they can't tell their stories when they don't feel secure.

The last time I had an event at my office and we had Muslims praying on the front lawn, I was excited because I knew they felt safe there. And that's the kind of organization I think Patuxent Riverkeepers always tried to create. A place where everybody feels safe and trusts us with their environmental spirit. Was something I prized quite greatly. I take quite seriously. It's people are you know what I mean, making themselves vulnerable to us by sharing their aspirations with them.

Speaker 2: Let me ask you to talk about your own personal awakening of your own environmental consciousness. Was there a moment that opened your eyes to the fragility of the environment, and sparked this sense of purpose in you?

Fred Tutman: There've been all kinds of wake up moments for me throughout my life. While it's true, I'm from Maryland, when I was a boy, my father joined the peace Corps as a staff person, and he took the family overseas. So a lot of my formative years were in British schools and in frankly, war torn parts of West Africa. I managed to live through two military coups in Sierra Leone. And so a lot of my experiences with the environment at an early age were really forged from game parks in Tanzania, and traveling on riverboats literally up inland rivers in Sierra Leone in West Africa.

I went swimming in a sea storm once in Dar es Salaam and that was very formative. I don't think my parents knew and would be shocked to know even today, but what was a familiar beach and a place for body surfing became turbulent Indian Ocean, and I wanted to test myself against nature. I know it sounds kind of wild, I was probably about 13 years old, and so I went swimming in the sea storm. And man, it was extraordinary. I mean the waves were flinging me onto the beach, I was getting abraded. This familiar and very benign place that I was used to body surfing at had suddenly turned ugly and mean a cauldron.

But my point is it formed a sense of connection to this resource where I am testing

myself against this resource. I spent a lot of years since testing myself in nature. Climbing mountains, hiking the Appalachian trail, paddling on various rivers. I feel these are very personal transactions with nature where in a sense, you become more alive, more yourself through these, I call them transactions, I guess that sounds kind of clinical, but I don't know what else to call them.

So I've had lots of these bright moments where I felt especially connected and soulful in nature. And that's what attracted me to water keeping. I heard Bobby Kennedy JR, the founder of our movement, give a talk and he talked about God speaking to people through nature, regardless of who your particular God is. And there is a vector in nature where people want to find wisdom or inspiration. They go hiking in the wilderness, right? They don't go to the shopping mall, they go to the desert, or they go to the mountain or they go someplace where they feel more alive and more connected to the world around them.

So that's kind of my perspective is that these are very personal transactions that we all have to discover on our own basis, on our own terms. And I believe our work has to be flexible enough to help people find their own terms. I can't do it by the numbers. I can't hand somebody a track and say, "Say this, do this and live this way." I think people have to find their own way to grace with nature. I'm sorry these are not soundbite answers, but ...

Speaker 2: They're thoughtful answers, which is even better. Talk to me about what exactly a Riverkeeper does. I mean, you could have with the sort of different career paths and experiences that you had amassed at this point in your life. You could have done communications work for environmental movements, lobbying work, political sort of rubbing elbows in Washington type environmental work. You chose a very localized boots on the ground or boots in the canoe, sort of a path. Talk to me about what that involves on a daily basis and why.

Fred Tutman: So I find the work grueling at times, but it's also work that's energizing. It gives back in a way too. A lot of what we do is working with local communities to help them achieve their own environmental vision or goals. We're working with a town right now in Southern Prince George's County is the smallest and municipality, I think in the state and town of Eagle Harbor, about 69 people in the town, predominantly black town with a history of segregation. It was a beach or resort town created in the era when beaches were segregated and people of color, native Americans as well couldn't go to public beaches usually. So Eagle Harbor was created by folks as a black destination resort back in the 1920s and '30s.

It is also the site of a former Steamboat slave transshipment site from the 1800s, early 1800s. So it has a lot of stuff clinging to it in terms of the legacy of slavery, the difficulty that black towns find in raising revenue in order to deal with infrastructure problems. These are very particular problems that face communities

of color all over this country. And I don't think the same environmental programs or prescriptions will work in a town like say Eagle Harbor, as would in say, I don't know, Poolesville Maryland or Potomac, or Alexandria for that matter.

I think you have to tailor your environmental work to serve the local community. And so the conversations we have with these towns, and this is one of several towns we work with along the Patuxent track, is to find out what they want to do, what their goal is. This town wants all a number of things. It wants solar panels, it wants to green itself, it wants to repair. Infrastructure has storm water issues that need to be dealt with. There is a stream in the middle of town that needs restoration. They really couldn't get much traction from the Bay movement that largely is focused entirely on the Bay.

In fact, they got rejection letters from various funders when they looked for a project funding for various things they wanted to do. That said, "Well, we can't help you because there's no nexus between the future of your town or the existence of your town and saving the Chesapeake Bay." So there was a predetermination that their goals weren't important to a movement that's primarily focused on the downstream interest of the Chesapeake Bay. So our work is sometimes litigious.

We often have been involved in litigation to help get environmental laws enforced. It's listening in order to find out what communities need and want. It's deliberative in the sense that we're working also with various interest groups and parties to improve water quality. I think we provide a voice of sorts of our clearing house of where the Patuxent River people who are interested in science stuff and various other things related to the river. We run the Patuxent Water Trail, which is an interconnected scheme of public access sites along the Patuxent River.

It's a lot of different stuff that we do. We fill a gap. I think we fill a gap as a community resource related to protecting water primarily. But like I said, sometimes we're a little more flexible. We'll work on other issues other than just water.

Speaker 2: I wonder if you might speak to potential or rather younger environmental activists who may be listening to this recording about sort of the tight rope you need to walk between holding hands and butting heads. In terms of the way that you operate politically, economically. Talk about the politics involved, talk about the search for money involved, and just sort of what you've learned along the way about just how to conduct yourself in those arenas.

Fred Tutman: Well, you've asked a complicated question. So again, I struggle with a means not only of helping communities actualize as best we can, but we also struggle to protect them from encroachment from groups that simply want to expropriate their voice. And that's a business model for at least some conservation

organizations. In a sense they're looking for communities to lead. They have funding to work on whatever, climate change or storm water or whatever, and they're looking for folks to jump on that bandwagon, the bandwagon that funds them. And often enough of these are corporate funded or foundation funded, remember foundations are often the corporate tax advantaged front for corporate America.

So we roll in completely the opposite, as essentially the Waterkeeper movement does general. We're not a top down movement, we work from the ground up. And grassroots, I know it sounds a cliché, but it actually means that we make eye contact with and we have kind of a touchy feely relationships with the folks that every rung of the community to get them engaged and to help exemplify their voice. That's very, very different from groups, like I said, they want to swoop in or parachute in and basically tell people how to live and you've got to recycle and here's a petition and here's something you can sign onto and all that stuff.

In other words, they don't bring resources to the community. They want to take resources from the community, in a sense. We try to do exactly the opposite of that. We try to bring resources in. We bring grant writing skills in. We've assisted Eagle Harbor in getting some grants. Other communities, we've also worked with in order to help them plan their way or grant their way through various things.

What I've seen, I'm 61 and I've been an activist for most of my adult life. I would say back in the '60s and '70s, I don't know anybody in Maryland that had a full time job protecting the environment. Now we have a huge industry surrounding that. And it's changed the way I think we think about the environment. For one thing. We think of the environment in terms of issues rather than problems to be solved.

And the distinction is, an issue I think is something that can be readily defined in a sound bite to convince a funder or a backer to jump on the bandwagon. An issue would be storm water, or like I said, climate change, or pesticides or fracking or something that. A problem is very local, the problem is actually much more specific. And it's very, very hard to find funding to work on problems, easy to find money to work on issues up the wazoo. Problems, much harder.

And there's a presumption, I think that small local problems are either NIMBY, not in my backyard, or they're too small to be important enough to make kind of a bang for the buck. The presumption is the bigger the campaign, the more mass it has, the more likely it is to succeed. I'm not so sure that's true. I actually look at other movements, civil rights in particular where there was no expectation that it was going to take home a good paycheck and benefits for fighting to get justice. And I believe that it is just as radical to fight for clean water.

We haven't cleaned up a single watershed in the Chesapeake Bay in 40 years of

trying. Not one. And yet there's a presumption that if we keep putting one foot in front of the other and following these various programs, eventually these watersheds are going to get cleaned up. I'm not so sure that's the way it works. I think it takes local struggle, local fighting. I think it takes descent. I think we have to fight the government sometimes, that largely issues permits.

I mean, when I go to Baltimore Harbor and look around me and I see everything out here has a permit to do exactly what it's doing, and everything out here is practically influencing and degrading the harbor, the water. So I think mimicking or supporting government action reflexively will lead you to perdition. You have to be a citizen voice from a standpoint of speaking truth to power. Not appeasing power, but challenging it. And that's how you get clean water. And that's what's worked for us traditionally on the Patuxent.

When we've won litigation, it's largely been by taking the paths less traveled. How do I convey that to a generation of people coming up behind us who expect environmental jobs? Something we never had. We didn't have environmental jobs in the '70s and '80s, very few of us. The joke was you'd have a spouse with a real job if you wanted to be a full time environmentalist. Now there's an expectation that you can get a competitive salary in some cases. That's huge in terms of the mojo of what we're prepared to work on. There's a lot of stuff that needs to be done out here that no one's ever going to fund from a corporate base. Ever.

And particularly like I said, local community work, which is not seen as important work. Actually it's seen by the environmental community as amateur work. The grassroots work is amateur work, which I think is shocking. Grassroots is where the energy and where the passion is. Guys who are doing this for a job have different motivations, which I don't say that to impugn their motives, only the toolbox that they have. 9 times out of 10 they'll make better career decisions than they will better environmental decisions.

Speaker 2: Let me ask you to share a story, an example of what you're talking about. Maybe think about your decades doing this and think about what was the one toughest environmental fight of your career so far? And what did it teach you?

Fred Tutman: Wow. So we were involved not too long ago in helping a community, a community came to us, a neighborhood came to us, and asked for our help filing a civil rights complaint over too many burdens in their community, industrial burdens. Couple of super fun sites, five power plants. Gosh, what else? A coal waste dump. These guys were getting hit from all sides, and it couldn't possibly be by accident. I mean, it'd be lightening striking something repeatedly over and over and over again.

And so we filed, which may or may not have been perhaps the first environmentally oriented civil rights complaint in Maryland's history. And at the time we filed the

complaint on the eve of it, or on the heels of it. Of course, the Trump administration came in and he was in the process of basically decommissioning huge parts of EPA. So we weren't sure since we had submitted a complaint to EPA that it would ever really see the light of day. So we agreed to negotiate with the state of Maryland to resolve the complaint.

So we entered into a negotiation that involved our community partners and I think five different state agencies. And it was a struggle. But one thing, because Maryland I think had a reluctance to admit that anything was wrong with the way in which they decide where new power plants go. And that's what brought this issue to a head. They were adding yet another power plant to a community that already had way too many in the same zip code.

I think the truth is, I think the state knows this too, if you really look at the full cradle to grave impacts on some of these really onerous projects, nobody would want them in any community. And so there's a reluctance to look at cumulative impacts because that's a killer. I think for projects that have to go somewhere but that no single community is eager to have them. And I think the state's in denial about this even to this day. The presumption is that we can look at all the good science and we can mitigate these impacts that are going to affect the community.

But in many instances, people are fighting for everything they have. They have no other place to go. This is where they live, this is where they were born. And this is where they care about, and they're prepared to fight pretty hard to protect things the way they are.

That lens is very hard to convey to a permit writer or to somebody who's just trying to do this by the numbers, or look at the paperwork, or read what's on an application. So it was grueling in terms of the negotiations. Ultimately we were not able to come to an agreement with the state. It was soul searing in the sense that there's a lot on the table and we're reluctant to negotiate on behalf of a community. We don't have that power. We don't make deals for these watersheds. We try to get the citizens voice brought to the forefront and we let nature take it's, democracy take its course.

So that was a difficult posture to have. Actually the community partners wanted very specific things. Some things they wanted that really couldn't be done through a negotiation process, probably should have required litigation, activism of various sorts. So, I don't know, it's kind of a long winded example, but that's one that's kind of fresh in my mind as one where I had to walk carefully, I had to juggle a lot of different competing interests. I had to deal with angry state officials who were reluctant to even be in the same room to haggle with those of us that are exterior to the permitting process. I think they think that we should be governed rather than parties in negotiation, sit there and be governed.

The same problem I had with the diversity label, by the way, sit there and be diverse. Don't make trouble. Just sit there and take what we dish out. Tough spot.

Speaker 2: You mentioned the phrase cumulative impact. You've been at this for a long time. How many years as Patuxent Riverkeeper?

Fred Tutman: This is my 16th year for what was supposed to be a five year cruise.

Speaker 2: You're always traveling up and down the Patuxent in your canoe. Last time I had the pleasure of hanging out with you was remaking a recording in your canoe. Maybe zoom out and talk about what you've seen over that span of time in the grand scheme of natural history, 15 years is relatively small sliver. But I wonder if you could look at that, look at the river through the lens of those 15 years and talk about what's changed for the better or worse?

Fred Tutman: As I said at the outset, after 15, 16 years of working on this stuff, I don't see a lucid or a sensible plan in anybody's back pocket that would lead to a cleaned up Patuxent. I think there's a presumption that we can keep on issuing permits for every little project that comes along that has economic value attached to it, and we can mitigate, offset and trade the impacts away and that's idiotic.

At some point, there's a carrying capacity problem on these rivers. We have so many crazy power plants and wastewater treatment plants. We have 36 wastewater treatment plants incidentally, on the Patuxent River, all of them upstream, not one of them in Southern Maryland. So Southern Mellon inherits whatever flows out of those wastewater plants and frankly quite a lot does. Quite a number of them that are in violation frequently, or that have spills or discharges that are not permitted.

I also find jurisdictions that won't say no to a single permit. They're eager to get any shopping center, strip mall, Amazon warehouse, you name it. These guys are eager to put a permit on it as quickly as they possibly can. And that doesn't make sense to me on paper how you can keep on adding exactly the things that destroy these watersheds, and expect that you're going to get better results. That would be just plain insane. The river gets a D- on anybody's scorecard that I'm aware of, which has been true as long as I've been a Riverkeeper.

It's an embarrassment in a way. Is it an embarrassment for the Riverkeeper? I think it's an embarrassment for the system that keeps insisting that there's a plausible plan to protect these resources and yet can't make a single progress towards cleaning up a single river. Something's wrong here. Something doesn't add up. So, yeah, I think our deal is to create enough constructive dissent to bring to the table enough angst that citizens understand what the stakes are. If the presumption is

you can plant trees and get some rain barrels and keep recycling, and somehow that will magically in a few years result in the cleaned up Chesapeake Bay or Patuxent, that's bizarre in my book.

As much as those are really good things that we should be doing, they don't add up to a plan for a restored river. And I don't know why people, I know why ... I think people love protecting these rivers up until the point that it interferes with their everyday life. Taking the kids to school on time, getting to work on time. I'm not getting fired for doing or saying something controversial. Not angering the government, I mean not making waves. I think we have to make waves and make trouble. If we want clean water, we need to make as much waves as we can, and as much trouble as we can.

And I think we've created a culture surrounding protecting these resources that prefers not to make trouble because it might scare off some money. There's a presumption that we'd rather partner with these corporate interests like Tyson and Purdue and Dominion, and who else, Smithfield. These guys shell out big bucks. If you go to a Chesapeake Bay Trust fundraiser, look at who's sponsoring these, the worst polluters in the region.

Does that mean they've changed their ways and they're trying to appease the rest of us? I don't think so. I think they're greenwashing and minimizing the extent of the harm being caused by their business activity. And I think people have gotten into the habit of accepting that as a status quo that we need to appease the polluters, right? Not the end users like the waterman or people who live in mobile home parks. Or frankly, where the worst problems are in these watersheds, because I guarantee you, is not where most of the investment is going. It's actually going into some of the wealthiest neighborhoods, because those are the squeaky wheels, those are the people with influence. That's where the perks go.

And I've had people say to me in the environmental community, it's also where the money goes the furthest. That there's more bang for the buck. That we go into ghettos and try and fix the environmental problems there will deplete all those monies and not get much done. So we need to work on the low hanging fruit. I mean, I've had people make those arguments. It's not a fair portrayal of what it takes, I think to clean up a watershed. How do I know? It's intuition. I can't prove it. I've never cleaned up a watershed either, but it just doesn't add up for me that we're on a course by trend.

If you look at the trend on these waters, the fish are less plentiful, the dead zones are bigger. Granted there are a few things that have gotten better. They say the Bay grasses on some parts of the bay have gotten better. And the best argument I've heard for staying on the current course is that if we had not done any of the things that we've done in the last 40 years, things will be much better. But every

time I hear that argument, I think it's saying we're better than nothing and nothing is a low bar. Surely we can do better than nothing.

Speaker 2: What is your answer to people who have just given in, given up, given in to cynicism or despair, people who think it's just too late to do anything about this amount of damage that's already been done to the environment. We can't turn the ship around at this point.

Fred Tutman: I don't know if I've heard people make the arguments that it's pointless to try or that we should just go to Mars. Maybe I've heard that argument, that maybe there's an answer to be found on some other planet. Let me tell you, first of all, the Mars ain't an answer. The water is what? 40 miles under the surface, if at all. You and I aren't going to get on that train, right, because we can't afford the ticket. We've got to fix this planet or not.

And yes, I agree. It's daunting. The background radiation in the oceans is climbing at an alarming rate from scuttled nuclear reactors and other stuff. Some of this stuff's so deep in the trenches, there's no way to recover them and fix them. These are almost seemingly insolvable problems. I believe there's a moral basis for us to fight hell to do whatever we can, even if we may fail. Because I think there in lies preserving our own relationship, our own spiritual relationship. I know that probably sounds lame, but people would rather be able to swim in their water than spiritually appreciate them, it'd be nice to have both, but I do believe we have to fight.

We have to struggle in order to protect these resources, no matter how daunting those odd seem. And I do believe, again, we have a regional culture now that increasingly resents struggle. I think struggle is seen as evidence that you don't fundraise well. Or struggle is seeing as evidence that maybe you're not doing great work because surely if you were doing really good environmental work, someone would be funding it, as though funding is somehow the barometer that tells you what work is worth doing. And that's scary, because I think it actually adopts corporate values.

We're corporatizing the environmental movement slowly but surely by creating attainments that linked to money, as though we're going to fundraise our way to clean resources. I don't think that's logical. I'll tell you one quick reason why, because I came from the television industry where multimillion dollar corporations are used to throwing money at their problems, and it just makes a bigger problem. It depends on what you're funding.

When I was in the Falklands, we were throwing millions of dollars at crazy projects because we had nothing to cover. We thought by throwing money at a story, maybe we could come up with something that'd be worth putting on television.

And I think we sometimes fall into that trap in the ... Well, let me put another way too, in the environmental community, have you noticed the people who run the organizations, they're actually the best fundraisers. The most adept fundraisers. Not the best scientist. Not the best program people. Not the best thing. They're not the most obnoxious and passionate and determined activists, it's the best fundraisers.

That says volumes about the course that we're on in this movement. Am I arguing against having funding? Of course not, but I'm simply pointing out fundraising is only part of it. It really has to come from a base of passion. The kind of passion it takes to clean these rivers up, you can't pay people for that. You can't pay people enough money to fight hell to get locked up, to go to jail, to do whatever they have to do, to not compromise in order to get the clean water. But if you're going to rely on paying people to do it, I think you're going to have a different kind of movement. And I think that's the movement we've ended up with.

Speaker 2: You speak about these issues, it seems to me with sort of a sober clear-eyed perspective that kind of hints at a man who's figured out how to deal with multiple and repeated frustration in his work. I wonder if you can talk about how someone in your position wakes up and finds the energy and determination to go out another day in the face of those constant frustrations.

Fred Tutman: Some of your listeners or people who listen to this recording might remember Tom Wisner, folk singer, very interesting guy. Tom befriended me early in this work, and he taught me a lesson I thought was very important. He said, "When things are really getting you down, when you really don't see a way forward on something, go sit next to the river and talk to it." I thought, "Okay, sure, I'll give that a try."

It works. You really have powerful mojo at your back I think, if you are trying to follow what this river tells you to do. River I think is a personality. It's a constant in your life if you are connected to these resources in the way that I think people at Patuxent Riverkeeper become. Anybody who works there, a lot of our members have that kind of soulful, heartfelt connection to the resource. So you don't get down because there's so much to do and it's very rich work. See, that's what I think is so fascinating about grassroots work.

In the end, it has a better story to tell than work that talks about saving crabs and oysters for example. That's not a real good story at all. I mean it's an interesting one, but if you really want to capture our hearts and minds, I think we need to talk about something other than crabs and oysters. You talk about vindicating, and justice, and creating equity, and frankly saving people's aspirations for the future, because these are public health problems. They aren't crab and oyster problems, they're fundamentally human in public health problems. A better framing altogether.

I believe the movement that is currently dominating the Bay protection work is not tapping into that, because I don't think they can control the public health movement and they need to control. It's important to brand I think, these issues and the solutions to durable organizations. But a populist, deep-dyed people-driven grassroots movement, a, it's not a very good business model for building big organizations, b, you don't have the latitude to control the issues. Because remember the issues are controlled by the funders, right? Very few of these organizations I'm describing do work that is unfunded. In fact, I've never seen anyone get fired for doing bad program work only for blowing their fundraising goals. That's why people get fired in the nonprofit universe.

So funding does dominate. And the most extraordinary thing is when I talked to other waterkeepers and I talked to other environmentalists about this, ones who are in the professional realm, I haven't met one yet that would agree that their funders have anything to say about what they do. I've had guys say to me, "The funders don't order me around. They don't tell me what to do." And I think the answer to that is, they wouldn't fund you if they had to explain it. You're being funded precisely for the reason that they don't have to spell it out. That they understand, and you understand intuitively, that if you do certain types of work, they're going to take your funding away.

They don't want their name or their brand to these funders, attached to work that they don't approve of. And work that they approve up tends to be crowd pleasing work. And I don't think you can ... You're going to at least piss somebody off if you start cleaning these rivers up for real. I guarantee it. Somebody is going to be real unhappy. They might sue you, they might physically attack you, and those things have happened to me personally. I've been punched by housing developers. I've been slapped, sued, by polluters. I'm arguing that reports of their pollution to the government are a form of defamation.

You have to stick your neck pretty far out if you want to make what I ... Well, it's transformative change, and transformative change means changing the system. We're not going to do this by coloring within the lines. We have to fight outside the borders. If you're a Trekkie, you have to use the Kobayashi Maru strategy. If you're a Trekkie, that means that you change the rules of the game such that you can win.

If we play by the rules as they're laid out already, we are guaranteed to lose every day of the week, and we're guaranteed to hand out environmental justice every day of the week too. Because in effect, we don't have a lens or a filter for equity or justice. It's about the science. Well, science doesn't get you to the heart. I'm not discounting the importance of science, but I'm saying a science based movement is about as exciting as a science lecture. A people based movement again has a much better story to tell, but it's a very chaotic and disorderly story too, because it comes

with all of the stuff that comes with people, and people are extraordinary.

The people in my watershed who love this river are extraordinary what they will go through, the lengths they will go through. The struggles they will engage in. The sacrifices they will make, in order to get what they know fundamentally is right and correct for everyone. Water you can drink, swim and what's the third thing? Swimable, fishable, drinkable water. That's huge.

Speaker 2: You know you're being recorded for posterity here. So your words are going to go on and be heard in the future by environmental activists who maybe aren't even born yet. I'll just give you a chance to share a final thought directly to them. What do you want them to know about the stakes of this work and about what it ultimately is going to take to make a difference?

Fred Tutman: It's important to look at the long view of what has happened before and what's as a result, likely to happen ahead with these resources, which is why trends are very, very important. I think in the Chesapeake Bay area, we have this sense that if the crabs are plentiful, one year we're saved. If the big grasses are looking pretty good, we're saved. And the reality is the trend over time for these resources is that they're not looking very promising unless we change what we're doing.

If I thought it was hopeless, I wouldn't be pouring as much energy as I have. I've given quite a lot to this work and I believe in it, and I believe in how it connects to people's hearts. People reveal themselves to you in this work in so many precious and special ways. They entrust their goals and aspirations for the river to you, which is no small thing. And I take that very, very seriously.

So I would say to someone who is younger or coming up as an activist or involved in water work, be prepared to take the path less traveled, be prepared to take financial risks and chances if necessary, in order to do what you genuinely believe is right, and anchor your work. Keep it honest by establishing a strong grassroots accountability. That's what keeps us honest. We are accountable to the community that we serve. We don't just walk in and hand them a policy off the website or something and say, "If you all do this, you can be in our organization. And by the way, don't forget to send in your membership dues."

That's a whole different game that we're in. It's becoming participants in these communities, part of these communities to the extent that we have a perspective to share that is relevant, particularly relevant. And if I didn't say it well earlier, these groups have to work harder to become more relevant in black and brown communities. A movement that thinks that only white people can clean up these rivers, and heroically are going to ... Look, that's insane.

We need not only everybody at a table, but remember the dominant folks who are

running these movements now are aging out. The demographics in this country are changing and diversity only gets you part of the way because it means you get to handpick. The truth is these movements have to be open to all, not just the folks who are vetted by the existing participants. It's a bitter pill, I know for people who believe that they want to hand off to their kids and their descendants, exactly the movement that they enjoyed and they appreciate it. Good luck with that. Because the demographics are changing and black folks, brown folks, folks of many walks, many ethnicities, we all care about the environment.

But we need a movement that is prepared to let us be ourselves and to pursue these aims through our own self actualization. If we're just followers, then we're not going to join these movements, and we're not going to participate. In fact, we'll fight them. I see that all the time. I see people putting themselves in an oppositional stance with local black communities. That would be suicide for me, not only as a black American to stand against the determinism of a local community, but it also would be a squandering of what my value is, I think in this movement.

I think my value is as a connection to a much more diverse visionary movement, that has the generosity of spirit and compassion to be open to everybody's environmental story, regardless of where they came from, regardless of whether it came with a grant. And I think this movement is still young enough. We're still learning how to do that.

So again, I'm sorry that wasn't a soundbite, but yeah, I have high hopes that other people will jump on the train behind us and build on our work. Surely we did. I stand on the shoulders of lots of people who came before me, the Bernie Fowler's and many other people in my watershed who struggled. You have no idea how much they struggled. None of it came from writing a grant proposal. It all came from fighting the man.

Speaker 2: Thank you for sharing this time and sharing your wisdom.

Fred Tutman: Thanks for your patience with my long winded answers.

Speaker 2: Is there anything else you wanted to add that I neglected to give you a chance to talk about?

Fred Tutman: No, only that it's taken me 20 years maybe to learn how to talk about things that are white and black in public. I used to be shy about that because I didn't want to offend anybody, and because I thought they'd think I was racist. I now believe that people welcome and embrace an opportunity to speak openly in safe space about that which connects us and that which divides us. Especially now. I think we're more divided than ever, given the current political scene that we're in. No better

way to do this work than I think do that kind of work, that kind of human connectivity work, but through the environment. That's something I learned from Bobby Kennedy and from the Waterkeeper Movement.

The analogy I often use in my public talks is the color of water, you know that old James and McBride book, that, what color is God? He's the color of water. He's the color of all of us. He or she. And that fascinates me, that water is that precious commodity that ties us together in so many ways, that maybe we can make a better world through water, through air, through land.

Somebody called it LAWS, L-A-W-S, land, air, water, and sun. So I think we've got a great story to tell. The best story there is, we just haven't told it well enough, I think in the environmental movement, in order to get the outcomes that we want.