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# WATERSHED WATCH

ST. MARY'S RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

PO Box 94

St. Mary's City, MD 20686

July 30, 2014

## INSIDE THIS EDITION

- LEAD Teen Volunteers
- DNR Moves Aquaculture Lease Applications
- SMRWA named Conservationist of the Year
- Upcoming Events

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## WANTED



SPONSORS - VENDORS  
EXHIBITORS

Saturday, September 27  
11:00 am to 4:00 pm

For more information,  
please call 301-737-2903

## NEXT VOLUNTEER EVENT

Saturday, August 30  
Marylanders Grow Oysters  
Cage Refill  
RSVP 301-737-2903  
or email:  
[info@stmarysriver.org](mailto:info@stmarysriver.org)

## LEAD Teen Oyster Planting Volunteers ROCK!



The Leadership Southern Maryland Teen LEAD Leadership Conference was held June 22 through 25 at St. Mary's College. As a learning opportunity and oyster planting service project, more than forty teens from the southern Maryland area planted 500,000 oysters in the St. Mary's River on

Tuesday June 24. Volunteers also had a chance to dissect oysters learn about their unique habitat, seine for fish and crabs, and participate in an interactive discussion on ocean trash. (Did you know that US retailers spend \$4 billion every year just for those plastic shopping bags?)



We have posted more photos on our Facebook page - as well as underwater video of the oyster reef project.

## DNR Moves Aquaculture Lease Applications

Of the eleven applications for lease bottom in the St. Mary's River oyster "sanctuary," Maryland Department of Natural Resources moved three applications forward in the approval process. Having made a finding that these three applications will not adversely impact the native oyster beds, DNR held a public meeting on July 1 to solicit the public's comments. The



event was well attended by both advocates for the lease areas as well as many waterfront property owners who are opposed to the commercial operations within the "sanctuary."

A separate legal process is also underway. More than forty residents along the tidal St. Mary's River have signed-on to a Petition of Protest, which will be handled through the state's attorney's office. Typically in this process a moderator attempts to find a way to allow the projects to move forward while making adjustments in the operations in order to limit impacts on the petitioners.

The St. Mary's River Watershed Association is opposed to commercial harvests in the sanctuary, as it is our belief that sanctuary is defined as a *no harvest area* (hence the use of quotes around "sanctuary"). Regardless, authorizing aquaculture operations within sanctuaries passed in the 2012 session of the state legislature. Therefore, the Association worked closely with DNR over the past two years to create specific criteria that ensures that any aquaculture shall be compatible with restoration—both man-made as well as natural restoration. Under this new criteria, which is specific to the St. Mary's River, aquaculture can only exist in areas where there are extremely low population of oysters. Therefore the allowable area where aquaculture could take place was reduced by nearly 80%. The Association did not take a position for or against any of the three proposed lease areas.

## Southern Maryland Audubon Society names SMRWA Conservationist of the Year



The Southern Maryland Audubon Society has given its annual Conservationist of the Year award since 1993 to recognize outstanding contributions to protecting, conserving and enhancing the environmental quality and natural resources of Southern Maryland.

This year, the recipient of the award was the St. Mary's River Watershed Association. Bob Lewis, executive director, and Ken Gill, program director, of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association, accepted the award on behalf of the association at the Audubon Society's annual meeting on June 1.

Since it was established in 2004, the mission of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association has been to protect and enhance the watershed in ways that both enhance the biological health of the St. Mary's River system and that revitalize the economic, social and cultural health of the community, according to a news release from the Audubon Society.

One of the watershed association's prominent projects is to enhance both the water quality and the oyster fishery of the St. Mary's River. This is being done in part by establishing a five-acre artificial oyster reef at Horseshoe Bend near St. Mary's College of Maryland, and by promoting the aquaculture of oysters by private waterfront homeowners along the river, the

release states.

The Association was a past recipient of the Conservation award in 2006. President Nancy McAllister accepted the award as the Conservationist of the Year.

As part of the award this year, the Audubon Society made a donation to the watershed association's effort.

## Suspected River Bacteria Infects Executive Director

Considerable attention has been given in local media to health concerns when interacting with local waters or eating raw seafood products. Vibrio is one of many bacteria found in local waters that can cause illness. Infections of the skin can spread rapidly requiring immediate medical attention. People over 75 or with compromised immune systems are particularly vulnerable. Most people don't even know they had it or may feel sick for a brief period of time.

"We dove on the reef on Thursday and the water temperature was about 85 degrees," said SMRWA executive director Bob Lewis. "I felt a little punky Friday afternoon and awoke Saturday night with a major purge throughout my digestive tract. It lasted about 35 hours and I returned to work on Monday."

Lewis suspects Vibrio was the cause as he did not eat out nor eat anything not from his garden. Vibrio can cause major skin rashes and infections that may lead to sepsis within just a day or two. Swimming and diving can cause small amounts of water to enter the mouth resulting in possible intestinal tract infections. Anyone who has contact with the water or eats raw seafood should be certain to watch for skin conditions that worsen quickly or diarrhea that last for more than 24 hours. Seek medical attention right away.

"It's a job-related risk and I've never had a case that required medical attention. But folks should be aware and avoid the water if they have open sores or cuts in their skin," Lewis said.

Hospitalizations from Vibrio are uncommon but dozens occur each year in our region. In the Gulf of Mexico beaches, Vibrio is much more common and thrives in warm waters. The US averages about two dozens deaths each year from Vibrio contracted through swimming and eating raw seafood.

## We need your help!

***Please join St. Mary's Watershed Association as a member.*** A family membership is only \$50.00 a year. Your membership dues and donations enable us to carry out projects that help the environment - like the oyster restoration that you can see every day at the College waterfront.

Come volunteer and help us do the work that needs to be done. Please attend the events throughout the year, and bring your family and friends. This helps to spread the word about the work we are doing! Thank you so

much for your continued support.

[Join or Renew Today!](#)



#### OUR MISSION

To protect, improve, and promote the well-being of the St. Mary's River Watershed through the collaborative efforts of economic, agricultural, environmental, social, cultural, and political stakeholders in the community.

[We're on the web!](#)

[www.smrwa.org](http://www.smrwa.org)



[Join or Renew Today!](#)

#### Upcoming Events:

- **Governor's Cup**  
Friday & Saturday, August 1 & 2, 2014  
Starts out in Annapolis, and ends up at the College Waterfront
- **SAVE THE DATE**



Saturday, September 27, 2014,  
11:00 am to 4:00 pm  
State House, Historic St. Mary's City  
More info 301-737-2903

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