PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

February 4, 2020                     Contact: Bob Lewis
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Police Fail to Cite Poacher in Sanctuary

January 9, 2020—The call was made to the Maryland Poacher Hotline at 8:22 am reporting a vessel dredging and harvesting oysters in the St. Mary’s River shellfish sanctuary. A photo was texted to the hotline at the same time documenting the violation. A Natural Resources Police officer showed up about 45 minutes later, simply told the violator to depart the area, and allowed the poacher to keep and sell the oysters. The officer failed to do his job, which is to cite the violator for poaching in a sanctuary, to confiscate their license or licenses, and to confiscate the illegally harvested oysters.

“Unbelievable,” was the response from Association executive director Bob Lewis to the lack of enforcement. “I caught them red-handed and the responding officer failed their oath of office, failed the public trust, and failed our river and oysters.”

Upon further inquiry to the resources police, Area commander Lt. Catherine Medellin called Lewis to inform him on what went down. She indicated that the suspected waterman told the officer he was confused as to where the sanctuary boundary line was and pointed out a sign on the shoreline. That sign was indicating the boundary of the conditional area, a designation of potential health risks, which has nothing to do with sanctuary boundary lines.

“The sanctuary boundary was designated on October 1, 2010 and a buoy sign was placed in the river,” Lewis told Medellin. “That boundary signage has remained unchanged to this day. I do not believe that anyone was confused over the boundary line.”

Medellin told Lewis the waterman had worked southern Maryland for years and the officer was in southern Maryland for about five years. “It was an error by the officer. [They] are very upset over this incident. He realizes now that he should have confiscated the oysters,” Medellin told Lewis over the phone on January 13.

In answer to Lewis’ disbelief that an officer would overlook a blatant poaching violation, Medellin stated that the investigating officer told her that he “had spoken with this waterman just a couple days before” telling them that the “conditional line and sanctuary line were the same.”

“Therefore, the officer felt that he could not cite the waterman,” Medellin said.

“This is incredible,” responded Lewis to Medellin. “I do not believe either the officer or the waterman was confused over the boundary. The waterman knew he was poaching. They all have GPS and they sign an affidavit at the time of license purchase stating that they will comply with restricted area boundaries.”

Lewis requested a copy of the written report of the incident only to be told there was none. “So the extent of Resources Police action on this was to verbally ask the poacher to depart the area.” Lewis responded to Medellin. “This whole story lacks credibility.”

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