



# 2015 Year in Review & Action Plan 2016



Our Mission: To **Protect**, **Improve**, and **Promote** the sustainability of the St. Mary's River Watershed through the collaborative efforts of economic, agricultural, environmental, social, cultural, and political stakeholders in the community.

# Our 2015 Successes

Thanks to members like you, the St. Mary's River Watershed Association was able to maintain our programming, credibility, and effectiveness in 2015. We stood firm in our belief that healthy waterways and a clean environment are essential to a high quality of life today and a fundamental right of future generations. Our successes are your successes because it is you who provide the moral and financial support that make this all possible. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!



## Outreach and Education

- Our outreach to youth from the Chesapeake Public Charter School, Capital City Public Charter School, Hollywood Elementary School, GMHS STEM Academy, Brownie Troops 6996 and 4882, and Eagle Scout Troop 1634 provided hands-on opportunities to diverse communities.
- We hosted activities for Maryland's high school students involved in the 2015 Envirothon State Championship. 120 participants learned about oyster reef ecosystems and planted 500,000 oysters.
- GMHS STEM Academy and St. Mary's College of Maryland students planted more than five million spat—our largest single-day planting.
- Outreach festivals and events like Earth Day, Juneteenth, Crab Festival, Oyster Festival, Governor's Cup, and RiverFest attracted new volunteers, informed the public of our work, and engage in discussions on sustainability.

## River Friendly Neighborhoods

- Our two-year National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grant for work on the River Friendly Neighborhoods program allows us to install rain gardens at members' homesteads. We have begun recruitment for rain gardens installations for the spring of 2016. Call us if you are interested.



- Volunteers, staff, and professionals worked together to install four rain gardens. Native plants and organic soil amendments provide filtration of storm water runoff before it reaches our streams.





### Three Dimensional Oyster Reef

- The five-acre Oyster Reef Project is a partnership project of the Leonardtown Rotary Club, St. Mary's College of Maryland, and St. Mary's River Watershed Association.
- We were awarded generous grants from Patagonia and Boeing totaling \$32,000 in support of the reef project.
- Our oyster nursery produced five million spat which we planted on our reef site. The nursery was labor intensive and required hundreds of hours from interns and volunteers to get shell prepared for spat and to operate the system.
- Three more reef mounds were installed—one as Alec Vanderborcht's Eagle Scout Project and two by interns. To date, we have 35 reef mounds.



### Future Bay Leaders - STEM Interns

- We recruited two STEM and one Tech Center students, and a recent STEM graduate who interned last summer.
- Each student learned skills applicable to life situations as well as experience in a field directed toward their future professions. Each gained knowledge on how to be a successful advocate for the Bay.
- STEM students conducted their own research projects which included oyster recruitment on three dimensional reef vs. flat bar—Emerson Schaeffer, and fauna diversity on reefs—Chandler Wyatt.



### Monitoring Oysters and Water Quality

- Underwater observation and photography provided data to evaluate natural recruitment vs. plantings, survival, and growth on our reef restoration site.
- Sampling using tongs on our other oyster restoration sites compared population sustainability and mortality rates to previous years.
- Water quality data was collected weekly for salinity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, specific gravity, and clarity.

# Top Challenges for 2016

## County Adoption of the St. Mary's River Watershed Plan

- 2016 will be a pivotal year as we develop public support for and then advocate for county adoption of our St. Mary's River's restoration plan.
- We will maintain a strong relationship with county officials who will be key in getting funding to support restoration and retrofit projects throughout the county.

## River Friendly Neighborhoods

- We will be recruiting new homeowners to implement cost-sharing enhancements in residential neighborhoods. (rain gardens)
- We will re-engage with, certify, and recognize the neighborhoods already in our program.

## Future Bay Leaders

- Our paid student summer internship program will continue to become more structured and require individual responsibilities and commitments.

## WIP Implementation

- We will maintain a strong relationship with county officials who will be key to implementing the clean-up of our county waterways.

## Oyster Reef Project & Partnership

- 2016 will be the final year for development of the five-acre oyster reef project.
- We will continue to support college and high school experiments and long-term monitoring of our oyster restoration projects.
- We will develop an evaluation program to look at the economic and ecological value versus the cost for this project, and determine whether it is a model for restoration around the Bay.
- Placement of signage at the college waterfront will be key to recognizing the partners and contributors to this project.

## Sharing Our St. Mary's River

- Our education and outreach programs are integral to our mission and provide a greater understanding of our dependence on clean and healthy waterways.
- Field trips for children provide opportunities to develop interest in and concern for our natural resources. And they are fun!

Thank you for your support and dedication as a member of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association.

