



# 2024 Year in Review & Action Plan 2025



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, political, and recreational stakeholders in the community.

# Our 2024 Successes

With every oyster planted and community member engaged, 2024 brought us closer to a healthier, more vibrant St. Mary's River. With your shared dedication, we will continue our work to create a brighter future for our river in 2025.

SHARED OUR MISSION WITH  
**1163**  
PEOPLE AT NINE  
FAIRS AND FESTIVALS



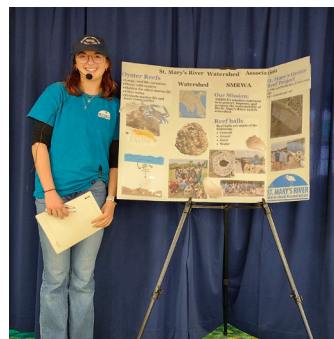
**625**  
COMMUNITY  
MEMBERS ATTENDED  
OUR OWN ANNUAL  
RIVERFEST



**782** VOLUNTEERS, INCLUDING **472** YOUTH,  
PARTICIPATED IN HANDS-ON RESTORATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS.\*



OVER  
**2400**  
VISITORS TO OUR  
NEW AND IMPROVED  
WEBSITE LAUNCHED  
IN AUGUST

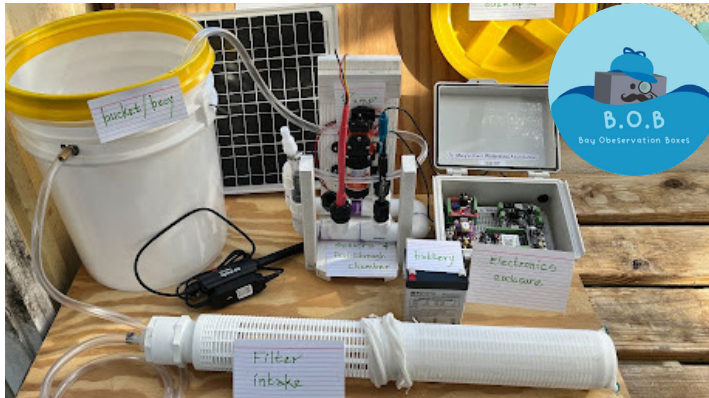


HOSTED FIVE  
PRESENTATIONS AND  
ONE WORKSHOP THAT  
REACHED  
**165**  
PEOPLE

PLANTED **1.7** MILLION OYSTERS IN BRETON BAY AND THE ST. MARY'S RIVER



\*Please note that volunteers are counted at each volunteer event and may represent the same individual more than once.



## Introducing BOB 3.0

- We continued developing our low-cost continuous water quality monitoring devices known as BOBs (Bay Observation Boxes).
- BOBs are built for under \$1,000 while similar commercial equipment cost at least 10 times more.
- This year, volunteers Norm and Shelly O'Foran logged over 900 volunteer hours characterizing sensor performance, improving procedures, and developing a new design that incorporates lessons learned from the past two years
- This new design, dubbed BOB 3.0, features a filter and pump to bring water to the sensor to reduce biofouling.



## Building Organizational Capacity

- Thanks to your support, we made significant investments in SMRWA's future in 2024.
- In June, we purchased a 2010 Toyota Tundra for hauling reef balls, oyster cages, shells, and festival supplies.
- Our new 21' C-Hawk boat funded through a federal grant is now central to our monitoring and restoration programs.
- Our new field site, once a vacant lot, now features a shed and a rebuilt fence, transforming it into a bustling workspace.

## Future Bay Leaders

Since 2013, we've partnered with the Great Mills High School Science Technology Engineering, and Math (STEM) program to provide students with meaningful internships and capstone projects. Our 2024 interns were Victoria Wynman and Lucas Price.

Lucas Price designed his own experiment that compared the critters on oyster reefs to barren bottom. He also learned how to drive a boat!



Victoria Wynman worked with Dr. Santos from St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) on our study of disease resilience in the St. Mary's River.

*"This was a chance to have hands-on experience with a real organization that is helping the marine community, and helping to better the environment." - Lucas Price*

Thanks to funding from SMCM and the Lindsey Paul Rudolph Memorial Endowment Fund, we hosted three college interns from SMCM this year.



Sarah Luersen, an Environmental Studies major, led environmental education initiatives and learned about oyster restoration this summer. She stayed on staff as our fall Outreach Coordinator.

Kaley Christman, a Biology and Environmental Studies major, spent the summer photographing our restoration efforts, working on our website, and revamping our social media pages.



Meredith Nishiura, a Marine Science major, returned as our oyster reproduction study intern. This study tells us where baby oysters settle and how many there are in the St. Mary's River.

# Challenges and Action Plan for 2025

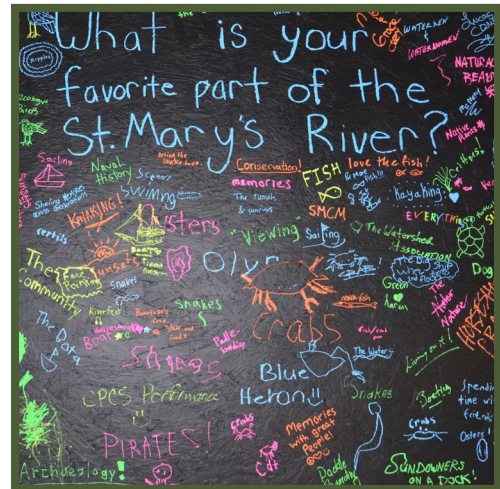
## Studying the Sanctuary's Impact

- We will continue our study on the oyster sanctuary's impact on the public fishery.
- Our partnerships with SMCM and the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science will be ongoing.
- Year 1 of the study focused on oyster disease resilience and role in providing habitat.
- During Year 2, we will design a study to evaluate larval drift.

## Building Watershed Resilience

- In 2025, we will continue to track development in our watershed and advocate for sustainable and low impact development approaches.
- Our advocacy priorities will include solutions that minimize runoff and protect critical habitats.
- We will remain on the Navy's PFAS ("forever chemicals") Restoration Advisory Board.

Your support is essential in helping us protect and restore the St. Mary's River. Please consider becoming a member at the Friend (\$103), Steward (\$303), or Guardian (\$1,303) level. Together, we can make a lasting impact on the health of our river.



*From fishing to family memories, our RiverFest community prompt board highlights why the St. Mary's River is worth protecting.*

## Fostering Watershed Stewardship

- With the addition of "recreational" stakeholders to our mission upon the adoption of our new strategic plan, we will work to increase public access to the St. Mary's River.
- We will host additional outreach activities that will connect more people to our river.
- Events like kayak tours and workshops will foster a deeper sense of stewardship.

## Expanding Restoration Area

- Our five-acre oyster reef adjacent to SMCM meets all metrics for a successful and self-sustaining oyster reef.
- We will work to find a new area to restore using reef balls in the oyster sanctuary.

COVER PHOTO: Kayakers explore the river at RiverFest 2024.

