



WATERSHED WATCH

ST. MARY'S RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION
PO Box 94, St. Mary's City, MD 20686

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MAY 2007

Association Launches Two-Year Watershed Study

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Next Board of Directors meeting 10 AM Saturday, June 2, 2007 at the Lexington Park Library*
- *St. Mary's County Commissioners Public Hearing on the TDR Proposal—6:30 PM on May 15 at the College of Southern Maryland*
- *Sign up for a Rain Barrel Workshop—see page 4*
- *We are now located on the web! Check us out at www.smrwa.org*

St. Mary's City—The St. Mary's River Watershed Association announced at their annual meeting on May 5 that they will lead a unique planning project with the intent of producing a comprehensive, holistic watershed management plan for the St. Mary's River. Several important elements of the study include strengthening partnerships between St. Mary's County Government, citizen stakeholders (SMRWA), St. Mary's College of Maryland, and private business partners; utilizing a comprehensive, whole systems based model that addresses, incorporates, and integrates the Federal- and State-mandated environmental requirements into the community planning process; and creating a holistic watershed planning model that can be used and replicated by other jurisdictions to address the requirements of the Chesapeake Bay 2000 Agreement and community planning goals.

The study will result in relevant data that will inform planning efforts in St. Mary's County. The study will touch upon many of the important issues facing us today, and integral to life within the watershed.

The Lexington Park Development District is currently one of the fastest growing "mini-urban" areas in the rural counties of the mid-Atlantic region; and most of Lexington Park is within the St. Mary's River watershed. The area is grappling with growing pains and is currently seeking solutions to problems concerning educational facilities, transportation, economic development, work-force housing, historic and cultural heritage, environmental conservation, quality of life, and encroachment on Patuxent

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 - SEE PLANNING



Joe Anderson

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of the St. Mary's River,

At our annual meeting on May 5th, we announced our intent to initiate a two-year sustainability study of the St. Mary's River watershed, which as you know includes much of the Lexington Park Development District. Seeking partnership with St. Mary's County Government, St. Mary's College of Maryland, and a local business, we've laid the groundwork for what may well be the largest and most comprehensive study ever undertaken in Southern Maryland.

Our annual meeting will feature a discussion about this exciting and ambitious initiative by St. Mary's College professor Dr. Bob Paul, who is also SMRWA vice president and co-director of the St. Mary's River Project, and St. Mary's County planner, Sue Veith. While on sabbatical

next year, Bob will devote his entire effort to this project, which will undoubtedly be precedent setting.

I recently sent a letter to the St. Mary's County Commissioners that explains the importance of this project and that requests financial support from the county over the next two fiscal years to help us undertake this work. While this newsletter will undoubtedly reach you after the public hearing on the county budget is held, I ask each of you to contact our commissioners and urge them to support this project, which is so important to the future of the St. Mary's River and our county.

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,
Joe Anderson
President

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Oyster Project Update

By Roger Stone

Last November and December, work on our project began in earnest when project research associate Henry Bush, under the supervision of Dr. Bob Paul at St. Mary's College of Maryland, attached two floats to each of ten docks on the river near the college. One float of each pair carried three mesh bags, each containing about 200 live, selectively bred from the Circle C Oyster Ranch in Ridge. For control purposes, the other float carried oyster shells.

By the end of our oyster experiment this October, we hope to help confirm scientifically the hypothesis of Circle C's Rich Pelz that his method of raising oysters just below the water surface rather than on the bottom steps up their growth rate and makes them legally harvestable before the parasite diseases MSX and dermo destroy them—and also his observations as to the positive effects of "his" oysters on biodiversity and water quality. We are conducting a similar experiment at the Chesapeake Bay Field Lab on St. George Island.

Regrettably, thanks to the combination of very cold weather, ice formation, and very low tides during February, most of our original oysters literally froze to death. At three docks we experienced 100% mortality. Major losses were suffered at four others (at one of these, a muskrat or otter invaded one full bag of live oysters and consumed them all). At only two of the docks did high percentages of oysters survive. We are not alone with these kinds of misfortunes: Pelz reports similar losses by private oyster float-owners up and down the river.

This spring we will replenish the floats where few or no oysters made it through the winter. And now that the water is warming and oysters becoming more active, students from the college will be checking our floats on a regular basis through the summer and keeping records that will make their way



into our comprehensive final report.

Financially, the project is supported principally via federal funds administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in Washington, as well as by grants from the Abell and Spring Creek Foundations. With their help the project is running smoothly and all is well except that one communications failure led to the unfortunate consumption of one float-full of oysters by people unaware of our experiment!

FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE ST. MARY'S RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

—CONTINUED FROM LAST
NEWSLETTER—

Elizabeth Polin
Margie McAllister
Jeanette Findley
Sara Greenback
R. Wasinchism
Dolores Vautier
Christine Driscoll
John Vernon Poole
Kathleen Sanders
Philip & Phyllis Margolius
Sheryl Shields
Michael & Carrie Kline
Ed & Tammy Brugger
Bev Schwartzburg
Frank & Christina Allen
Iris Carter Ford
Hester Burch

Harold T. Allen
Stephanie Thompson
Dave Doherty
Raymond Cannetti & Julia King
Kevin Boyle
Elizabeth C. Reisman
Christopher Mark
Erik Jansson
Karen & James Nutter
John & Helen Paradis
Susan Bennett & Trish Cole
St. Mary's Parish Outreach
Committee
Fran, Stevie, & Steve Hawkins
Kay Clark
Catherine Ann Kennedy &
Philip Bell
Larry Haskell
Bill Williams & Holly Gorton

Lewie Aldridge Jr.
Aldridge Ford
Joan & Richard Timbie
Virginia Rae Thompson
WLP Consulting
Ronald Fishman
Andy Angel
Shahin Firoozmand
Susan Nash
Sarah Tyson & David Kung
Christopher Tanner &
Jean Illingworth
Jeffrey & Julia Nichols
Ed Merrifield
Vicky Costello Leake
Georgia & John Wheeler
Andrea Watters & Jim Laws
Larry & Clare Whitbeck
Dudley & Robert Lindsley

Glazed Pines—Live Work Play
John Roberts & Karen Horton
Mary Adams
Katherine Reed
Stephen M. Fadeley
Russell Crenshaw Jr.
Booz Allen Hamilton
Senator Bernie Fowler
Dr. Fred & Betty Czarra
Barry S. Friedman
John & Mary Walker
Peter & Elizabeth Egeli
Martel T. Ricketts
Julia & Frank Lawrence
Carol J. Evans
Catherine & Oliver Kangas
David & Diane Reumont
Reumont CPA, PC
—TO BE CONTINUED—

OPINION — Changes Proposed to the St. Mary's County Transferable Development Rights Program

By John Parlett

St. Mary's County has a Transferable Development Rights (TDR) program that was initially established in the early 1990's, and modified in 2002 as part of the St. Mary's County Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance update. The purpose of this voluntary program is to encourage the protection of farmland and resource protection areas by allowing the transfer of development potential, from a site that has resources deserving protection, to a site in a designated receiving zone for residential as well as commercial uses.

Most would agree that the current St. Mary's County TDR program is not very user friendly, not widely utilized, and is not achieving its intended purpose at any meaningful level. TDRs have only accounted for approximately 3,000 acres of land preservation since its inception, with virtually all of that acreage having been saved since 2004.

In January 2005 the St. Mary's County Chamber of Commerce Governmental Affairs Committee formed a task force consisting of Chamber members as well as community stakeholders to examine the current TDR program, and make recommendations as to how it might be improved. The task force included over fifteen members representing stakeholders from the business, development, agricultural, and environmental communities, as well as members from the St. Mary's County Planning Commission, Land Use and Growth Management, Department of Economic and Community Development, and the Board of Education.

The current TDR proposal under review by the county is the result of hundreds of hours of work by this dedicated community based committee that met weekly for months on end. Their proposal will provide considerable changes to the current TDR program, and is considered

by most to be a giant step forward for land preservation efforts in the County. It has been well received by a number of environmental, agricultural, business, and development groups, and these groups have provided letters of endorsement for the proposal. All of these disparate groups agree that the proposal is not exactly what they would prefer, but recognize what a huge step it takes toward addressing the issues of preserving land, slowing the run-away growth in the RPD, slowing the deterioration of our watersheds, and helping to maintain the rural character and charm of St. Mary's County.

TDRs are intended to provide property owners with a monetary alternative to development by allowing a property owner to remove the residential development rights from all or a portion of a parcel of their land located in the RPD.

Once certified by the County, these TDRs can then be sold, and ultimately transferred to another property to allow for an intensification of development on that property. After selling the TDR the property owner will continue to own the property and be allowed to utilize the property for agricultural and open space purposes.

The community-based TDR proposal will provide considerable changes to the current program, and anyone interested in preserving the rural character of our county should invest the time necessary to understand the specifics of the proposal. The new proposal will simplify the removal of TDRs from the sending parcel, thereby encouraging participation in the TDR program, which will accordingly increase the supply of TDRs available in the marketplace. The proposal will also increase the requirements for the use of TDRs for virtually all residential development in the county, thereby increasing the

demand for TDRs. The balancing of the supply and the demand for TDRs is of utmost importance to assure the success of the program. The value of a TDR has to be high enough to encourage land owners to sell them, yet affordable enough for the developer/home buyer to be able to afford them.

The proposal will reduce the maximum potential number of dwelling units in the RPD from approximately 21,400 units to 10,700 units, leaving thousands more acres available for agricultural uses and open space. It will also however cause the cost of housing to increase in the County, because of the increased requirement to use TDRs to develop properties.

Some may say this is harsh medicine, increasing the cost of already expensive housing, but if we want our children and grandchildren to enjoy the rural beauty and character of the St. Mary's County we have all come to know and love, we need to take positive steps to make certain they can. The new TDR program proposal will go a long way toward meeting that goal.

The Board of County Commissioners will be holding a public hearing on this proposal on May 15th, 6:30 pm at the College of Southern Maryland, Leonardtown campus, please make plans to attend and provide your support.

EDITOR'S NOTE—John Parlett serves on the St. Mary's County Chamber of Commerce-appointed TDR Task Force and is the President of CMI General Contractors, a local land development company. The Chamber's TDR Task Force proposal is supported in concept by SMRWA.

OTHER NEWS



SMRWA member Bob Lewis volunteers in the Stream Waders program for Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Photos by Richard Holden.



Rain Barrel Workshops

SMRWA is registering interested people for free rain barrel workshops. The next workshop will likely be in late May or June—and another workshop is scheduled for September 29. Barrels and hardware will be given away to new SMRWA members who sign up and pay dues for a full membership. Existing members can get a free rain barrel for a donation of \$50. To sign up, call 301-862-3517 or drop an email to us at: smwatershed@yahoo.com

Annual Report Available Online

The SMRWA Annual Report is available on our web site. Since we did not publish a report in year 2005, this report will cover the two years 2005-6.

Although the report is less detailed than our newsletters have been in their coverage of programs, the report does serve as an overview of the Association's many facets, as well as provide information about the people who make up SMRWA. Full color photos highlight the work and mission. The report is available in PDF-format for download or in HTML for viewing online.

The Strategic Plan is also available for downloading.

Executive Director Position Formalized

At their meeting in April, the SMRWA Board of Director's moved to formalize the Executive Director position in the organization. Former Acting ED Bob Lewis will continue on in this position.

Bob has been instrumental in growing the SMRWA to it's current capacity. His knowledge of grant writing and organizational development have been key to the success of SMRWA. Bob can be reached at 301-862-3517 or by email: smwatershed@yahoo.com

DNR Continues Stream Monitoring

Maryland Stream Waders is a volunteer stream sampling program sponsored by DNR that began in February 2000. The goals of this program are: 1) To increase the density of sampling sites for use in stream quality assessments. 2) To educate the local community about the relationship between land use and stream quality. 3) To provide quality assured information on stream quality to state, local, and federal agencies, environmental organizations, and others. 3) To improve stream stewardship ethics and encourage local action to improve watershed management.

Volunteers agree to participate in a one day training session and then spend two or more days during the March-April sampling window collecting aquatic invertebrate samples (insects in larval phase) from stream beds. Samples are taken to the DNR laboratory in Annapolis in order to identify, quantify, and assess diversity of the invertebrate animals for each sampling site. Streams are then categorized as Good, Fair, or Poor in their overall health.

SMRWA member Bob Lewis has led a team of volunteers collecting samples for the Stream Waders program since 2001 in the Breton Bay watershed—and since 2004 in the St. Mary's River watershed. Data is also available for year 2000 in the St. Mary's watershed. Generally, streams in southern Maryland are in Fair to Good health. To view searchable data, go to:

<http://mddnr.chesapeakebay.net/mbss/streamwaders.cfm>

We're on the web!

www.smrwa.org

OPINION—RPD Task Force

By Robin Hahnel

Everyone wants to eat their cake and have it too. Unfortunately in St. Mary's County we have neither preserved rural land effectively, nor have we avoided imposing financial losses on rural landowners through "down zoning." Between 1978 and 2002 base zoning in the rural preservation district, or RPD, has been decreased from 1 house per 1 acre, then to 1 house per 3 acres, and finally to 1 house per 5 acres. Each of these changes was a down zoning of rural land, but none of these mild changes in base density prevented houses from spreading across fields and woodlands at an increasingly alarming pace. In sum, previous attempts to protect rural character AND property rights in St. Mary's County have accomplished neither – and left a bitter political historical legacy of conflicts between "land preservationists" and "property rights advocates."

Three citizen task forces in the county have labored to come up with recommendations to better preserve rural land while permitting healthy economic development and compensating rural landowners fairly: I believe the TDR Task Force recommendations would make significant improvements in the terribly flawed current TDR program. I believe the APF Task Force recommendation that the County adopt a growth plan is even more encouraging. The newly appointed RPD Task Force, which I chair, has yet to make its recommendations. The RPD Task Force will recommend changes in current Purchase of Development Rights, or PDR programs. And it will recommend further changes in the County TDR program in addition to the recommendations made by the TDR Task Force.

At present all PDR programs in the County are part of State programs, and the bulk of the funds used to purchase easements are State moneys. I believe the RPD task force will recommend: (a) ways to increase County funding for PDR programs; (b) creation of a County PDR program where rules of participation are not subject to State regulations and thereby allow for greater flexibility; (c) ways to leverage moneys more effectively by using installment purchase programs which pay the full amount for easements at the time of purchase.

It is more difficult to predict at this point what changes the RPD Task Force will recommend regarding further changes in the TDR program. We are considering ways to define agricultural and environ-

mental "preserves" within the RPD where zoning would be different from zoning elsewhere in the RPD. We are considering what an alternative zoning "package" for some parts of the RPD might look like. We would like to create incentives for landowners to accept a dramatic increase in base density in exchange for greater financial compensation in the form of additional TDRs. We are debating the pros and cons of "fixed" zones versus "floating" zones. We will also consider ways to further increase the demand for TDRs by builders in development districts, and ways to ensure farmer/landowners that they will be able to rely on a reasonable price for their TDRs in the future.

A great deal will be decided – for better or worse – over the next six months. Anyone who is concerned



about the future of St. Mary's County should be especially attentive to developments as they unfold. People should avail themselves of all opportunities to express their views: Talk to friends and neighbors. Write letters to our local newspapers. Attend and speak at public informational meetings. Attend and speak when possible at Planning Commission meetings. Attend and speak when possible at BOCC meetings. When you cannot attend watch the meeting on cable TV. Call, email, or write commission and task force members -- and especially your county commissioners.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Dr. Robin Hahnel serves as the chairperson of the commissioner-appointed RPD Task Force and is a member of SMRWA. He is a Professor of Economics at American University.

I would like to become a member of the SMRWA

Annual Membership Options	Price
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$35.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$50.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior	\$20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student/Limited Income	\$10.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate	\$500.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	_____

Total: _____

Yes, I would like to become an active member/volunteer

Please make checks payable to:
St. Mary's River Watershed
Association and mail this form
along with your check to the
address below:

PO Box 94
St. Mary's City, MD 20686

Name

Address

Email Address

Phone



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.

PLANNING—CONT'D FROM PAGE 1

River Naval Air Station and St. Mary's College of Maryland.

The two-year study will update and incorporate many studies done in the past or currently underway such as the St. Mary's County Chamber of Commerce's TDR study and the county commissioner's RPD Task Force study. Included in this newsletter are points-of-view from members serving on each of these planning committees.

Funding for the two-year study to develop the Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan for the St. Mary's River is being sought from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Chesapeake Bay Small Area Watershed Grants Program as well as The Abell Foundation, The Town Creek Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Trust, and Norcross Wildlife Foundation.

This newsletter and the SMRWA web site will serve as the official news sources for the members of SMRWA. The study will begin September 1, 2007 and end August 31, 2008. Volunteers are needed; call 301-862-3517 or email: smwatershed@yahoo.com

