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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release - March 14, 2006. Contact person: Nancy McAllister 443-535-9922 or Robert Paul 240-895-4211.

The Eastern Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) has long been considered the Chesapeake Bay's claim to fame. The oyster, or arster as it is referred to by local watermen, has historically been a major economic resource for Maryland. In the 1916-17 season, Maryland's harvest was 4,120,819 bushels. The annual harvest over the past twelve years now averages less than 200,000 bushels per year. What caused this rapid decline in oyster population? And to what extent has the oyster's decline impacted the Bay's health?

The public is invited to St. Mary's River Watershed Association's first Backyard Seminar on Saturday April 1st. Learn how to help clean the Bay – one adult-size oyster purifies 55 gallons of water each day – and enjoy dining on one of the region most prized delicacies. You can grow oysters in the creek behind your house or directly support one of the “farms” located here in St. Mary's County. And you can deduct all (or most) of your oyster-growing expenses on your Maryland income taxes.

Local oyster farmer Rich Pelz will lead a seminar and hands-on demonstration of oyster growing. Pelz, who currently sits on the Maryland Oyster Roundtable, the American Farm Bureau Federation Aquaculture Advisory Commission, and the Maryland Farm Bureau Aquaculture Advisory Committee, holds a degree in marine biology and has operated the Circle C Oyster Ranch in Ridge, Maryland for more than ten years. Local scientists will be on hand to answer questions.

Events begin at 1:00 PM at Trinity Church Parish Hall located on Old Route 5 in St. Mary's City. The St. Mary's River Watershed Association's Annual Meeting (40 minutes) will be followed by the first Backyard Seminar, an ongoing program sponsored by the Watershed Association. Future seminar topics will include yard maintenance and fertilizers, rain gardens, and home pest management. For more information, call 240-895-4211 or 301-862-3517.