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Contact: Lindsay Tempinson
or Bob Lewis 301-737-2903

St. Mary's River Chosen to Grow Oysters for Sanctuary

The St. Mary's River and its tributaries have been chosen to participate in the Marylanders Grow Oysters program, along with ten other rivers, including the Patuxent and Wicomico Rivers.

"We are delighted and grateful to be chosen to participate in the Marylanders Grow Oysters program. I can think of no more appropriate place to restore a healthy oyster population than the St. Mary's River, which may well be the most historic and beautiful river in Maryland," said Joe Anderson, President of St. Mary's River Watershed Association.

Launched by Governor Martin O'Malley in September 2008 and led by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Marylanders Grow Oysters is a program designed to foster stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and create living oyster reef populations in sanctuaries.

Through the program, citizen volunteers tend to young oysters in wire mesh cages suspended from their piers for the oysters' first year of life. The oysters require minimal care – mostly rinsing the cages every two weeks. After a year, the oysters will be collected and placed in an oyster sanctuary on the St. Mary's River.

Oysters are important because they clean the water, are a vital part of the food web, and create living reefs that attract fish and other aquatic species.

The Association is seeking dock owners on the tidal St. Mary's River, St. Inigoes Creek, St. George Creek, and Carthagena Creek to participate in the project and act as caretakers for oysters in their first year of life. Cages and spat will be distributed to volunteers at no charge in August.

If you are interested in participating please contact the St. Mary's River Watershed Association at info@StMarysRiver.org. The Association will hold an informational meeting on **Thursday, June 25 at 5:30 p.m.** at the St. Mary's College of Maryland River Center at the intersection of Route 5 and Trinity Church Road.

You can learn more about the St. Mary's River Watershed Association at www.SMRWA.org and Marylanders Grow Oysters at www.oysters.maryland.gov.

The Association will be working in partnership with the Coastal Conservation Association Maryland, Historic St. Mary's City Museum, and St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Photo 1 Caption: An oyster cage from the Marylanders Grow Oysters program. Cages are made by inmates in the Maryland correctional system. (Photo courtesy of MDDNR).

Photo 2 Caption: Chris Judy of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources loads oyster cages to take to the Tred Avon River in October 2008, where there are now about 177 growers caring for about 854 cages. (Photo courtesy of MDDNR)

