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Secretary Griffin to talk about St. Mary's River oyster sanctuary

A proposed oyster sanctuary in the upper St. Mary's River is at the center of one of the hottest debates around the Chesapeake Bay.

The Oyster Recovery and Aquaculture Development Plan was announced last December by Governor Martin O'Malley, and since has been a subject of great debate. Now that the 2010 Maryland General Assembly has ended, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is expected to issue maps of the proposed sanctuaries and rules for the operation and maintenance of the sanctuaries, leaseholds, and aquaculture areas. Watermen are concerned that they will not be able to make a living on any less bottom than they are currently allowed to harvest, and environmentalists believe that the oyster population is at a historically low level and that a network of sanctuaries throughout the Bay is the only hope for their recovery.

"There is no question that the St. Mary's River is in decline. Nutrient pollution continues to increase every year. Dead zones return every summer to the river's deeper waters," said Joe Anderson, president of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association.

Oysters are filter feeders and can remove the pollutants from the water column and place them into the bottom sediments. Without these excess nutrients, oxygen levels will remain stable and life will return to the deep areas of the river.

"We all know that the oyster is key to the health of the St. Mary's River. Long ago, oysters filtered all of the river's water every day. If Captain John Smith visited the St. Mary's, he would have written in his journal about the clarity of the water and the richness of the resource," Anderson continued.

Is an oyster sanctuary in the upper St. Mary's River a good idea? Why pick the St. Mary's? These questions and others will be answered Saturday May 22 by John Griffin, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. His talk will headline the St. Mary's River Watershed Association's annual meeting at 4 PM at the Muldoon River Center on the campus of St. Mary's College of Maryland. This event is free and the public is invited to attend. For more information, go to <http://www.SMRWA.org> or email info@stmarysriver.org

