

\* \* \* \* \* PRESS RELEASE \* \* \* \* \*

For immediate release, September 12, 2011 - contact: Bob Lewis 301-862-3517

# One million rescued then dumped into river

## Spat stranded by flat

St. Mary's City—Early last Saturday, twenty-two St. Mary's College students gathered at the Muldoon River Center with a dozen community volunteers to release one million baby oysters into the St. Mary's River. The month-old oysters, known as "spat" and grown by Johnny Oyster Seed at the Morgan State oyster hatchery, had already been delayed two weeks by Hurricane Irene. Yet their adventure was just beginning.

The contractor arrived twenty minutes late. He had no spat with him.

"The oysters are stuck on the side of Indian Bridge Road where the trailer's tire went flat," said Jon Farrington, owner and CEO of Johnny Oyster Seed Company. One million oysters were stranded on the side of the road in the hot morning sun.

Project coordinators Allison Rugila and Bob Lewis quickly assessed the situation and put a rescue mission together. Rugila immediately began making phone calls requesting pickup trucks and drivers. Lewis gathered together the volunteers and announced the new plan.

"We're recruiting several pickup trucks and we will go up the highway, transfer the oysters into the trucks, and bring them back here for planting. We'll need about ten to twelve volunteers for this mission," said Lewis.

Hands shot up and the students chanted, "I'll go. Take me!"

Once the trucks began to return, those volunteers that were left behind began executing the original plan—taking the oysters out into the river and planting them onto an existing, but depleted, oyster bar where they will continue to feed and grow.

Oysters are filter feeders and can remove algae and pollutants from the water column and then deposit those sediments on the river bottom. An adult oyster can filter 55 gallons of water each day. While the baby oysters will need to grow another two or three years before reaching adult size, they are already filtering and cleaning the St. Mary's River, albeit a bit slower. It takes about 250 dime-size spat



working together to filter the amount of water that one adult oyster can filter. With each new oyster placed into the St. Mary's River the water becomes cleaner.



The St. Mary's River Watershed Association hopes to plant twelve million oysters into the St. Mary's River by 2015. Saturday's planting brings the total planted-to-date to two million. Clean water is the Association's ultimate goal and oyster restoration is one of several methods the Association is pursuing. Saturday's project was funded by generous grants from Boeing Global Corporate Citizenship and Tidewater Dental.

By mid-Saturday morning, pickup trucks arrived about every ten to fifteen minutes. The spat was quickly unloaded from the trucks, placed on barges, ferried out to a location north of Pagan Point, and shoveled overboard.

"Everybody pitched in and worked hard. We could not have done it without them. Our volunteers are our strength," said Rugila.

The project was completed on time, regardless of the flat tire and extra work. Now it's time for the oysters to do their job—cleaning the waters of the St. Mary's River.

For more information, contact us at [info@stmarysriver.org](mailto:info@stmarysriver.org) or visit our web site at <http://www.smrwa.org>.



\* \* \* \* \*