

The Severn River Log



SEVERN RIVER ASSOCIATION • BOX 146, ANNAPOLIS MD 21404 • severnriver.org • 443.569.3556 • NOV 2009

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Wardour Improvement Assn
Wells Cove
West Annapolis Civic Assn
West Severna Park Commun Assn
Winchester on the Severn

Meetings of the Severn River Association are held 7 PM, on the third Tuesday of each month, at the Calvary Methodist Church, 301 Rowe Blvd, Annapolis MD 21401, free and open to the public. Come meet some nice people dedicated to protecting, preserving and restoring the Severn River watershed!

Yes. We have Oysters !

But not to eat.

We're growing oysters for Severn River sanctuaries, returning a bit of Nature to our River, to filter and clean it.

In this issue of the SRA Log you will find a few photographs, and a description of oyster restoration efforts being led by SRA.

And toward the back is our annual membership/renewal drive.

Please join or rejoin to add your voice to great work for the Severn River watershed during the coming year.



Saefern volunteers Mark Scharf, Richard Mosher, John Wright, Dick Hopkins, Lee Meadows (standing) and Glen Nemecek (sitting) helped unload 300 oyster cages delivered by ORP including Buddy Willey on the right.



Lee Meadows and Dick Hopkins carry cages out the dock to Glen Nemecek, and Buddy Willey. Zachary White is placing them on submerged pallets.

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Bacteria Plague the Severn

You CAN help solve it!

You've heard frightening stories about flesh-eating bacteria in the Chesapeake. Nasty bacteria like *Vibrio* are on the rise in coastal waters.

This dangerous trend likely has dual causes in rising water temperatures and nutrient pollution.

Nutrient, algae, bacteria connection

Too many nutrients from lawn fertilizer, agricultural runoff, and pet waste create a perfect soup for the runaway growth of algae – the hosts for the *Vibrio* bacteria, tiny crustaceans called copepods.

Runaway algae growth causes dead zones of oxygen-depleted water, and “leaks” sugars supporting the growth of *Vibrio* and other undesirable marine bacteria.

The “sugar-leaking algae” scenario is from our own SRA board member Dr. Sally Hornor, microbial ecologist and professor at Anne Arundel Community College.

“In late summer the Bay has the right salinity and temperature to create an optimal environment for bacteria. Combine this with algal secretions, and we have the perfect environment for bacteria,” says Dr. Hornor.

What can you do to help fight this terrible situation? The simplest way is to reduce nutrients and bacteria releases

Published by The Severn River Association. We welcome contributed articles, letters, op-ed pieces and photos for publication to:

Newsletter Editor
editor@severnriver.org



into our waterways, if you:

- Pick up pet wastes (put in trash or toilet)
- Add rain gardens and rain barrels
- Reduce impervious surfaces that generate stormwater, like pavement
- Eliminate/reduce lawn fertilizer
- Fix, replace, and/or upgrade the nitrogen removal capability of failing septic systems

You can get a 10% County property tax break per year for five years (a total of 50%) for certain improvements to your property that reduce the impact of impervious surfaces – such as rain barrels, rain gardens, and the like.

For more information, consult the County Dept of Planning and Zoning or check severnriver.org and click on “Stormwater Tax Credit Guidance” for information and how to apply.

Septic systems in the Critical Area

There are thousands of septic systems along the Severn River. Many are not being maintained as they should be. Some are failing, discharging a lot of nutrients and bacteria into the river.

According to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, about 180 systems in the Severn watershed are failing – a lot of excess nutrients and bacteria to be swimming, boating or fishing in.

If you have a septic system, maintain it. If it's failing, repair or replace it. And

Protect yourself from bacteria in our waterways:

- Don't swim for 48 hours after rain
- Don't swim with an open cut
- If you have a serious skin infection, seek medical help quickly
- Don't swallow water while swimming
- Wash off with fresh water and soap after swimming.

The 2009 Chesapeake Bay Foundation report “Bad Water 2009: The Impact on Human Health in the Chesapeake Bay Region” is at bit.ly/waterbad

How many septic systems are there in your neighborhood? AA County Public Works mapping tool is at bit.ly/aawers

Zoom in on your area of the watershed and display features such as septic systems on the map. You'll be surprised how many septic systems there are along the Severn.

if you are close to a river or waterway, consider upgrading your system to one of the new nitrogen-reducing kind – if you live in the Critical Area, you may be eligible for County funding.

Please take these simple steps to improve our water quality, our health, and our very way of life along the Severn. We can work together to make a genuine difference in our watershed.

Take advantage of the financial incentives for upgrading septic systems and reducing the impact of development. And encourage our legislators to continue to fight for ways to entice residents to do the right thing and protect our waterways.

For more information, contact the Severn River Association and attend our monthly meetings.

– Thistle A. Cone

President's Column

I began making plans as your new president for several educational programs that would help individual residents to become better stewards of the Scenic Severn River. Before embarking on those plans, an opportunity presented itself that seemed too good to be true!

The Governor proposed the Marylanders Grow Oysters (MGO), a free program by which the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) would supply oyster spat (baby oysters) in cages to watersheds that would organize and recruit volunteers to care for them in their first year of growth.

With the SRA Board's concurrence, I applied for the Severn to be one of those watersheds and created a partnership with the Spa Creek Conservancy, Annapolis Maritime Museum, Long Point and Herald Harbor Community Associations and others. We were selected among 10 other Chesapeake rivers. Our recruiting efforts led to more than 20% of the MGO oyster cages being delivered to SRA volunteers.

Over 1100 cages containing spat on old shells now are being cared for by volunteers from the mouth of Round Bay down the river. How did we achieve this? Primarily through the very hard work of a key group called the Oyster Steering Committee.

The Long Point and Herald Harbor folks (Tom Lenge, Charlotte Lubbert, and Ray Dumentat) hit the ground running as soon as our Application was approved last May. They identified more than 70 waterfront residents who would hang cages from their piers, and asked for 350 cages from DNR.

Next came Burnell Vincent and others in the Spa Creek Conservancy, recruiting owners of piers at houses, apartments and condominiums, ask-

ing for 250 cages.

Meanwhile Michael Moran, Pierre Henkart, Bonnard Teagarden and others recruited residents of mid-River communities. Don Carren did the same for the creeks at Whitehall Bay. Each coordinator also found locations to serve as a "distribution warehouses" to receive DNR cages for placing quickly in the water, for later pickup by residents.

Volunteer growers typically took four cages each to hang from their piers. Recruiting was very successful, with unanticipated high demand creating a backlog for cages being built by prisoners at Hagerstown's Maryland Correctional Institution.

Delivery of the spat cages began in late August, delay caused by late August contract approval with the Oyster Recovery Project, hired to provide the delivery trucks and manpower.

We dealt with several logistical issues during July/August, and things fell into place perfectly for the first MGO cage delivery to Smith's Marina, just off Round Bay, on August 27 with wonderful press coverage. Tom, Ray, and Charlotte had recruited volunteers to help with the distribution, so all spat were delivered to their new "nursery" homes within a few days.

The second delivery of 250 cages went to the Maritime Museum, where Ray and helpers distributed them to waterfront residents along the City's creeks. A surprise diversion was 20 cages to the Sailing Museum for placement along their two piers just outside the Naval Academy.

The City Harbormaster learned of our efforts and asked for his own delivery, which DNR arranged once cage production caught up – 40 cages now hang from the visitors' piers along City Dock.



Meanwhile, I made arrangements for my community to be the mid-River "warehouse," and took delivery of 300 cages on September 10. Over the next two weekends many arrived, received instruction on how to care for the "baby spat," and picked up their cages. Neighborhood teenagers were recruited to be caretakers, to raise cages out of the water every two weeks for cleaning and shaking.

SRA's participation in the MGO Program has brought out over 250 volunteers to help in a great project that will eventually contribute significantly to cleaning our River. Next Spring, these oysters will be collected and planted on oyster reef sanctuaries in the Severn River built by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Oyster Recovery Program, and the Corps of Engineers. An adult oyster filters 60 gallons of water/day and we hope to restore enough oysters to create clearer water in our River.

Since Severn water salinity is low, oysters on these reefs are unlikely to reproduce, and we'll need oyster spat volunteer growers for years to come. As one who's been an oyster gardener for over 10 years, I know that helping to clean the River "gets in your blood," so expect that this year's volunteers and many more will want to continue for years.

SO HERE'S A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL WHO ARE HELPING RESTORE OYSTERS ON THE SEVERN!

– Bob Whitcomb

Give Oysters a Chance

That trail of rainwater running off your property discharges pollution to our river. Rainwater and the pollutants it carries have the capacity to suffocate marine life, but you can tame it to make a difference in the health of our waterways.

Marine life in the Severn is in trouble because of silt and nutrients carried by stormwater. You may wonder, “Is the rainwater leaving my land just ‘a drop in a bucket,’ and therefore inconsequential?”

It really matters, as it combines with everybody else’s ‘inconsequential’ runoff, for fearsome collective consequence.

Your rainwater needs to slow down so that it can seep into the ground rather than promptly exiting your property.

So slow the flow, allow rainwater to soak into the ground, and eliminate your stormwater runoff as a source of pollution.

The SRA and many of your neighbors have just planted 1100 cages of oysters to help clean up the water in our River, so PLEASE slow down your rainwater.

Techniques include baffles to slow water flows, landscaping with timbers and plants to slow, absorb and transpire



water. Native plants, strategically planted in well designed water-conscious landscaping, will help Mother Nature to clean up.

And join the SRA to work with us and your neighbors to make a difference.

These plants love your stormwater in shade:

bit.ly/shadelist

These evergreens are good too:

bit.ly/evergreens

– Betsy Love

Trees Can Save the Severn

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources is offering \$25 coupons off the purchase of trees with a retail value of \$50 or more at participating nurseries around the state.

Full information on the program at

trees.maryland.gov

So go out, purchase a tree and plant it in your yard for the health of the Severn and the Bay. There is NO LIMIT to the number of coupons each person can use!

The goal is have citizens plant and register 50,000 trees a year to help improve air and water quality.

Get your coupons at

bit.ly/mdtree

SRA Polls

“Which would be better, restoring Nature to the Critical Area or to land outside the Critical Area?”

That’s one of the Poll questions on the SRA web site severnriver.org. (Do the polls – they’re fun.)

The Polls’ purpose is to provoke thought among visitors to our web site and to educate people to concepts and problems of the Severn watershed. Our visitors are smart, educated, and up-to-date on environmental matters, as the polls bear out.

But the result for this one poll rocked me back on my heels, because it suggests a widespread misconception about the origin of our water quality problem.

Two-thirds of the respondents answered “Critical Area.”

I’d argue this is wrong because the majority of land generating pollutant-laden stormwater lies outside the Critical Area. Until we get control over generation of stormwater, and it’s mostly generated outside the critical area, our problems will persist no matter how well we protect and restore land close to the Bay and River.

Now if we have the option of restoring 1 acre to natural conditions, choosing land inside the Critical Area would provide better environmental results because that land is in direct contact and communication with the water and the life it contains.

But we should not delude ourselves into thinking that we can ignore what happens on land that is out of sight of the water. After all, half the Bay’s polluted water flow comes from the Susquehanna and its tributaries, way out of sight of the Chesapeake.

– Kurt Riegel

Chesapeake Bay Town Hall Meeting

On Aug 11, 2009, over 300 people including SRA members attended a standing room only town hall meeting convened by Environment Maryland to discuss issues facing the Chesapeake Bay. Brad Heavner, the Director of Environment Maryland, served as the moderator for an impressive panel of bay activists, scientists, and public officials.

The meeting was called to encourage public input into Federal plans for more effective management of the Chesapeake Bay.

This meeting fed into a process that was created when President Barack Obama issued the Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration Executive Order (CBPREO) on May 12, 2009. Public input to this plan was due on Sep 9, 2009.

Chuck Fox, the EPA senior advisor for

the Chesapeake Bay, discussed sources of pollution impacting the Bay and the development of an EPA restoration plan to address these problems. If you missed the event, here's a link to a video of part of Chuck Fox's presentation:

bit.ly/foxbay

Petitions were circulated to encourage Congress to support expanded programs and more effective policies for the Chesapeake Bay. Environment Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation submitted over 19,000 petition signatures.

Under CBPREO the Federal Leadership Committee will issue plans by Nov 12, 2009, reportedly to rely more strongly on regulation.

On Oct 21, 2009, Maryland Sen. Ben Cardin introduced the Chesapeake Clean Water and Ecosystem Restoration Act, S.1816 for substantial Federal

investment in the Bay. Details can be found at

bit.ly/chesclean

Let's hope that these initiatives will result in improved water quality and healthier ecosystems in the Bay and the Severn River.

– Don Morris-Jones

Coming Up

SRA's November meeting will feature Zora Lathan of the Chesapeake Ecology Center, speaking about *Rainscaping, Beautiful Solutions to Water Pollution*.

For a preview of the concepts she will be talking about, see

bit.ly/rainscape

SRA's December meeting will be devoted to SRA's 2010 agenda and to holiday cheer.



Art Fanton of the Oyster Restoration Project stages cages for unloading from the truck.

Missing: SRA Board Members

Community Associations that are members of SRA are entitled to a seat on the Board of Directors, but many have neglected to designate their community's representative or, if they have, such designees are inactive.

If you would like to serve in that role, please check our web site at

severnriver.org

for how to determine whether your community is represented and, if not, how you might step up to the plate personally.

Ernst's New Book



Fight for the Bay: Why a Dark Green Environmental Awakening is Needed to Save the Chesapeake Bay is just out. (ISBN 9780742563247)

Author Howard R. Ernst, professor of political science at the United States Naval Academy, is a member of the Severn River Association Board of Directors, and is well known for his prior book, *Chesapeake Bay Blues*.

In this book he reveals a Chesapeake Bay that is functionally dead.

Efforts described as "light green" environmentalism based more on compromise than on confrontation, have produced a "political dead zone"—politicians posture but fail to act with the hard steps needed for the Bay's health.

While blunt in his evaluation of past and present failures to restore the Bay, Ernst believes that there is still time to turn the restoration effort around, and sets out new "dark green" strategies to do so.

bit.ly/fightbay

HowardErnst.com

Membership Letter

Dear Fellow Watershed Resident:

November 2009

The Severn River continues to suffer mightily from too many impacts that we have created. I say we, because there is too much stormwater runoff from our homes and neighborhoods, carrying sediment, pollutants, and bacteria into the river and Chesapeake Bay. It's time to take individual responsibility for the amount that each of us contributes to this runoff, which is causing the dead zones in the Severn, severely challenging aquatic life, and reducing the River's attraction for swimming and recreation.

The Severn River Association is leading the way to help residents reduce their environmental impact on our watershed. SRA has organized major spring cleanups for the last four years to remove tires, old junk, and trash from creeks feeding the Severn. Most recently, we have recruited over 250 volunteers to grow oyster spat at their piers, as part of a major effort to restore oyster reefs on the River. We continue to use our monthly meetings to feature speakers demonstrating techniques for reducing bacteria, nitrogen, sediment and other harmful substances that are carried by stormwater runoff into the River.

Upcoming presentations will include:

- RainScaping as a technique to reduce stormwater runoff
- Gardening techniques to make your yard more Bay friendly
- Community efforts to capture stormwater runoff
- Reducing runoff from large parking areas

This is a call for individuals and communities to join our effort. Officially, this is the annual request to renew your dues, and especially for all communities and neighborhood associations in the Severn River Watershed to join the SRA in 2010.

Won't you support us by sending in your dues and indicating how you can help us next year? We need your participation, so we can make progress towards restoring our river to its official designation as a Scenic River. The newly simplified dues schedule means that you may join either as an Individual or as an Organization, and select whether you want to be a Regular, Patron, or Benefactor Member. Benefits of being a Patron or Benefactor are admission for your guest to the annual June dinner meeting, and special recognition.

The dues are:

	Person	Organization
Regular	\$ 25	\$ 55
Patron	\$ 50	\$ 125
Benefactor	\$ 125	\$ 200

Again, please join the SRA in 2010 and support the restoration of our wonderful Severn River. And I look forward to hearing how you can help your river.

Bob Whitcomb
President

Join the Severn River Association

All membership donations are fully tax deductible since SRA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization:

	Person	Organization
Regular	\$ 25	\$ 55
Patron	\$ 50	\$ 125
Benefactor	\$ 125	\$ 200

For convenience, you may use the Checkout button on the SRA web site at severnriver.org
 Voluntary contributions in larger amounts are gratefully accepted.

Alternatively, you may handle this by mail, sending in this form with your check to:

The Severn River Association (Telephone 443 569 3556 to leave voicemail)
P.O. Box 146, Annapolis, MD 21404-0146

Name:

Mailing address:

Telephone number(s):
 (specify home/work/cell)

E-mail address(es):

Type of membership selected:

For Community Associations (Please provide the Community Association's Representative's name who will be on the SRA Board of Directors, and their phone, address, and email):

Can you volunteer on SRA programs, projects, outreach or governance? YES NO (circle below)

Zoning & Variances	Legislation & Regulation
Membership	Volunteer Coordination
Restoration & Other Projects	Oyster Grower
Officer or Board Member	Outings and/or Social
Land/Water Issues	Publications
Enforcement/legal action	Public Access to Water
Education	Other:

What programs & actions do you think are needed to better protect and restore the Severn River, and other comments?