



# WATERSHED WATCH

ST. MARY'S RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION  
PO Box 94, St. Mary's City, MD 20686

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Ladies and gentlemen, it's time to take off the gloves.

Though we're a new organization, our expertise is strong, our membership is growing rapidly, our goals are clear and our resolve to protect the St. Mary's river is steadfast.

We have always said that the protection of a watershed, a school, a community cannot be successful if approached with tunnel vision. To be successful we must offer solutions that address the "whole system". Whole Systems Planning should always be the approach of choice whether applied to a watershed, river, business, community, county, or nation.

All of St. Mary's County's watersheds are under assault. The St. Mary's River runs through the Lexington Park Development District, our largest, but the rules and regulations to protect and preserve this great natural resource are inadequate to say the least and badly enforced at that. This is a situation

that we must change.

On the other side of our beloved peninsula, an equally beautiful, historic and important watershed and River, the Patuxent, is equally at risk and under active assault.

I'm sure that you've all been following with interest and concern (disgust) the debacle unfolding with the development of the housing project at "The Woods at Myrtle Point". Incredibly, the St. Mary's County Board of Appeals has ignored the law, not to mention common sense, and has allowed development to occur unabated on a number of lots which are essentially very steep slopes, which as I write, have been stripped of their forest cover, greatly accelerating soil erosion and causing the siltation and the ultimate destruction of Mill Creek, a beautiful and sensitive tributary of the Patuxent River. The Woods at Myrtle Point indeed. What cynicism.

I know from my long experience as a planner in St. Mary's County as a

member of the Planning Commission, as a County Commissioner, and now a president of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association that some places in St. Mary's County that simply cannot sustain the pressure of development without serious or permanent damage to the environment, and to a piece of that whole system that we call our home. Such land exists within The Woods at Myrtle Point. After each rain, and we have had plenty of it recently, mud flows unchecked into Mill Creek, creating a hostile environment that is suffocating the very oysters, crabs, fish, aquatic vegetation and other wild things that we say are so important to our rural character, our way of life.

Right now the battle rages on the Patuxent, but it's only a matter of time before the front moves to the St. Mary's, the Potomac, the Wicomico, and the soul of Maryland, the Chesapeake Bay.

**[Continued on Page Four—see President]**



Joe Anderson

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Green Building Forum Saturday, Feb. 24 from 9 AM until 1 PM at Carver Elementary School - Sponsored by the St. Mary's County Commission on the Environment*
- *Next Board Meeting is December 2nd, 2006, 10am, at Lexington Park Library.*
- *We are now located on the web! Check us out at [www.smrwa.org](http://www.smrwa.org)*

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### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL?

If you receive a renewal form with this newsletter, then it is time to renew. Thank you.

# Bay's bleeding to death from bulldozers

by Karl Blankenship—reprinted from the *Bay Journal*

This month's article about grassroots groups fighting for a stormwater utility to fix long-standing runoff problems in Anne Arundel County highlights an interesting trend in the Bay cleanup effort - growing activism by local groups advocating for the health of their waterways.

One of those activists, Paul Spadaro, president of the Magothy River Association, finds much of his time swallowed up by going to local zoning and planning meetings that deal with land use decisions—which the group often finds itself fighting, sometimes in court. “It becomes a necessity to be comfortable sticking your neck out,” Spadaro said.

Development decisions made at those meetings, Spadaro contends, have more impact on local water quality—and the Chesapeake—than high-level Bay policy meetings. What's important, he said, “is what's going on in all of these planning and zoning hearings. It is sort of the death by a thousand stabs, which is really hurting the Magothy, if not the rest of the Bay.”

I thought about that as I attended this year's Executive Council meeting, where cleanup leaders touted the importance of the region's agricultural and forest lands, which continue to dwindle away. It has been 18 years since a committee appointed by a previous generation of council members warned that existing patterns of growth and development “will slowly overtake the gains being made in improving environmental quality.”

The failure to address the recommendations in that report by the Year 2020 panel were echoed in the latest report to the council, this year's “State of the Chesapeake Forests,” which warned about the toll that continued forest loss will take on Bay water quality. In the years between those two reports, forests were lost at a rate of more than 100 acres a day.

The failure to grapple with regional land use issues is already undoing at least some of the Bay cleanup efforts. Council members touted the amount of streamside forests planted and wetlands restored. Yet they did not mention the amount of forested buffers and wetlands being lost (which are not even being tracked)—victims of the “death by a thousand stabs” that Spadaro spoke of.

Also touted was the \$2.5 million in Small Watershed Grants announced this summer, which would support 68 local restoration projects to protect or manage 2,600 acres of critical fish and wildlife habitat, plant more than 5 miles of forest buffers, and restore 21 miles of streams.

But when I wrote about the Small Watershed Grants for the September Bay Journal, I was struck by its relationship to two other short articles in the same issue: The city of Cambridge, MD, approved a 2,700-home resort on 1,020 acres of land, a third of it in the state's Critical Area. Meanwhile, environmental groups were suing to stop the plans of Newport News, VA, to build a reservoir that would flood a 1,526-acre valley, and destroy 437 acres of wetlands along with 21 miles of streams.

Put another way: Just two local government land use decisions (in a watershed that contains more than 1,600 local governments) could offset the accomplishments of the Small Watershed Grants Program for the entire year.

Regardless of the relative merits of those projects, the bottom line remains: The resource lands in the watershed—and the services they provide—will be reduced. After all, no one is bulldozing subdivisions or shopping malls to plant new forests or crop lands.

For the sake of the Bay and its tributaries, it may become important for more people to feel comfortable sticking their necks out.

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## LOCALLY

by Bob Lewis

This past September in St Mary's County, citizens appealed a zoning permit for steep-sloped lots claiming that the lots could not meet the section of the local ordinance prohibiting development on steep slopes. The Board of Appeals ruled in favor of the applicant and county permits office—in effect, saying that the landowner's property rights trump the health of the environment and our quality of life.

Meanwhile, Maryland Department of the Environment is finalizing their case for what could be the largest fine ever levied for an environmental infraction in St. Mary's County. Ironically, both cases involve the same developer and the same development.

The bulldozers are currently running and houses are rising while the citizens appeal their case to Circuit Court. For more information, call 301-862-3517.

# St. Mary's River Oyster Restoration Feasibility Study

by Bob Paul

The third week in October marked the beginning of the St. Mary's River Oyster Restoration Feasibility Study, a research project funded by grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Abell Foundation. The project is being conducted in cooperation with St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) and Circle C Oyster Ranch, the source of the native Eastern oyster.

The project is in two parts. The first part is designed to test the filtering capability of oysters growing in aquaculture floats. Kevin Boyle, a senior Biology major, (pictured) is responsible for this project at Chesapeake Bay Field Laboratory. Two large tanks hold the oyster floats, and Kevin measures changes in water quality with a specific focus on sediments and algae removed from the water by the oysters. Our objective is to compare the tank with dead oysters (the control treatment) to the tanks housing live oysters (the experimental treatment).

The second part uses the same comparative technique of matched live and dead oysters on separate floats, but these floats are placed in the St. Mary's River and will monitor biodiversity. Ten pairs of floats were placed at volunteer "host" docks over the past 3 weeks. To get a range of conditions the floats were located from Tippity-Witchity Island to near the mouth of St. Inigoes Creek on both sides of the river. In this experiment we expect that living oysters will influence colo-

nization by other organisms and will have a higher biodiversity than the floats with dead oysters.

Not much will happen in the winter months as oysters essentially hibernate when water temperatures drop much below 42 degrees F, but we wanted the oysters to become acclimated to St. Mary's River conditions before they resume growing in the spring. The oysters will remain in place for the duration of the experiment—one year. Then, we will assess their growth and EAT 'EM.





**OUR MISSION**

To protect, improve, and promote the well-being of the St. Mary's River Watershed through the collaborative efforts of economic, agricultural, environmental, social, cultural, and political stakeholders in the community.



**[Continued from page one]**

The Patuxent River Association is currently waging a noble and hard fought campaign on our behalf to save Mill Creek, as they have done time and again in St. Mary's County, whenever there was a need to protect something that we hold dear.

I urge you to support them with your dollars, your letters to the editor, and with passionate phone calls to our planning commission, board of appeals, and to our newly elected county, state, and federal officials.

If we lose this battle on the Patuxent River, a precedent will be set, and the St Mary's, Potomac, and the Wicomico will surely be next.

You can help us to protect the St. Mary's River and to help us reach our goal of 200 members by the end of 2006, by becoming a member today of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association.

Thanks for your support and work in protecting the St. Mary's, and indeed all of our county's beautiful watersheds.

Sincerely,

Joe Anderson

President, St. Mary's River Watershed Association

