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WATERSHED WATCH

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

January 8, 2015

Happy New Year!

Lower Tide Than Normal Might Impact Oysters

INSIDE THIS EDITION

Low Tide
Watershed Plan
Thank You!

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St. Mary's City-January 8, 2015-The tide dropped lower than usual, even for this time of year, in the upper St. Mary's River. Lunar low tide was forecast for 10:14 am, when these photos were taken. But other events were more responsible for the extremely low tide. The sun was within a couple days of its closest point to earth, causing additional gravitational pull. But the biggest impact comes from several days of northerly winds that push the water out of the St. Mary's River...and out of the Chesapeake Bay. The result was a tidal reading in front of the college of 2.3 feet *below* mean low water. That's -2.3'.

Coupled with the very cold temperatures overnight (some areas along the river recorded lows of 11 degrees), the impact on aquatic life, especially oysters, could be significant.

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"Those animals with a means of transportation just move offshore to deeper waters. Fish can swim away," said Bob Lewis, local advocate for oyster restoration. "But the oysters are stuck there, literally, and when the water level drops way down, those oysters become exposed to the frigid air. Many of them could freeze and die."



The Association's three dimensional oyster reef has built into its design a tolerance for low tide events up to one foot below mean low water. Thursday's low tide exposed the top 12 to 16 inches of those higher reefs, as seen in the photograph above. Association staff surveyed several sites in the upper river and in some places natural oyster bars were left with areas sticking up out



of the water. One of these natural bars is in front of the college's River Center (see photo at left), and many of the oysters looked to be quite healthy and market size (over 3 inches), an encouraging sign.

Tidal events like this happen every winter. Coupling those events with extreme cold can spell death for oysters living near the surface. In the fall of 2012, St. Mary's River

had a good oyster strike and spat were everywhere along the shore on rip rap and pilings. That winter we saw most of them die in low tide and frigid air temperature events.

Watershed Plan Moving Forward

The surveys and documentation of the St. Mary's River watershed started in the summer of 2007, and was intended to lead into the creation of a whole-systems based plan to restore the river and have it removed from the EPA's list of "impaired rivers" under section 303d of the Clean Water Act. After two and a half years and the publication of three scientific studies, the Association had to table this important work due to a lack of funding and resources.

That changed this past year when the Center for Watershed Protection was able to complete a draft action plan. Since the weather turned colder, Association staff has been hard at work dusting off the surveys and documentation and reviewing the draft with the intent of making the St. Mary's River plan compatible with the county's watershed implementation plan (WIP).

"We want to make sure that we're all on the same page," said project director Bob Lewis making reference to the county's mandate under the Bay TMDL or 'pollution diet.' "It's important that we work together and plan to implement the same projects."

Many funding agencies require a watershed plan before funds are made available for projects. St. Mary's already has a Breton Bay plan and, although outdated, a Wicomico River plan. The St. Mary's River watershed covers 20% of the county's land area and is host to the county's primary development district.

The Association hopes to partner with the county to host a public meeting in late winter to solicit public input on the draft plan. By that time drafts will be made available to the public on the Association's website. Anyone wishing to get involved sooner should contact Lewis at info@stmarysriver.org.

Thank You!

St. Mary's River Watershed Association is grateful to everyone who sent in their membership renewals over the busy holiday season. If you have not done so, we encourage you to renew your membership, or join our Association. It's easy, and a great way to help save our environment. Please read our [2014 Year in Review](#).

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The St. Mary's River Watershed Association's mission is to protect, improve, and promote the sustainability of the St. Mary's River watershed through the collaborative efforts of economic, agricultural, environmental, social, cultural, and political stakeholders in the community. The Association is registered with the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization and our federal identification number is 20-2518203. Your donation to us is tax deductible!

Upcoming Events:

- Join us for the
7th Annual
RIVER CLEAN UP
Saturday, April 11, 2015
9 am to noon
Paddling event
Call to register to volunteer at
info@stmarysriver.org
- **Earth Day on the
Leonardtwn Square**
Sunday, April 19, 2015
12:30 - 4:00 pm
- **Potomac River Swim**
Saturday, June 6, 2015
Point Lookout State Park
Bring a dish to share -
lunch begins at 10:00 am



[We're on the web!](#)

www.smrwa.org



[Join or Renew Today!](#)

More info 301-737-2903.

- **National Envirothon
Oyster Planting**
Monday, June 15, 2015
9:00 am to noon
College Waterfront

- ***SAVE THE DATE***



Saturday, September 26, 2015
11:00 am to 4:00 pm
State House,
Historic St. Mary's City
More info 301-737-2903

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