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Constellation Energy Awards \$5,000 Eco-Star Grant to Create Oyster Sanctuary at Chancellor's Point

Of the 62 grant awards nationwide totaling \$300,000, St. Mary's County's only recipient—St. Mary's River Watershed Association—was awarded \$5,000 to create a mid-river oyster sanctuary. The project is in partnership with Historic St. Mary's City Museum and the newly reconstituted Chancellor's Point Project community center.

The collaborative project will, in its first phase, identify five acres of suitable river bottom for an oyster sanctuary, acquire appropriate state permits, and create an oyster sanctuary by placing shell and oyster spat on a hardened bottom. In the second phase, students will monitor and care for the oysters, utilized the bar for ongoing research on oyster culture and aquaculture, long term promotion of sustainable living practices and fostering stewardship of water resources, and ongoing community outreach and environmental education programs on all aspects of restoration of water quality utilizing oysters and other means.

“Constellation Energy continues to support oyster growing programs in Southern Maryland. We are grateful that they chose us for their next oyster project,” said Bob Lewis, executive director of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association.

Oysters are a keystone organism in the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. An adult oyster can filter 50 gallons of water each day. Historically, oysters filtered the entire Bay once every 3 ½ days. Their ability to cleanse the water is well documented and their importance in water quality is unquestioned.

In December 2009, Boeing Charitable Corporate Citizen awarded the Association \$10,000 to support the Marylanders Grow Oysters project and the oyster sanctuary project at Chancellor's Point. Boeing community investor Oscar Ocasio was instrumental in getting that award.

“When we get a certain number of oysters thriving in three-dimensional reefs in the upper river, we'll see an incredible difference in water quality and water clarity. What that total number of oysters is, we have not yet determined. Our goal is to have enough oysters so that all of the water in the upper river is filtered by oysters *every day*,” added Lewis.

The Association will determine that number based on river volume studies done last year. Lewis suggested that the number was somewhere between 30 and 60 million oysters. “In 2010 we hope to place more than one million oysters into sanctuaries. Once they reach breeding age, about 3-4 years, they should be able to multiply very quickly on their own. Students from St. Mary's College of Maryland and local high schools will monitor the sanctuary reef and provide any care needed.

The Chancellor's Point Project community center is a collaborative program with Historic St. Mary's City Museum and St. Mary's College of Maryland that fosters connections between the public, the St. Mary's River Watershed Association, and the two institutions. They offer workshops as well as courses of interdisciplinary interest in a community arena. As an exploration in progressive museum and classroom practices, the program aims to merge exhibition, education, and service to the community. The site offers expansive views of the river as well as river access. Visit the Chancellor's Point Blog at: <http://www.smcm.edu/chancellorspoint/blog/>

