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WATERSHED WATCH

ST. MARY'S RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

December 19, 2017

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Maryland Proposes St. Mary's River for Major Oyster Restoration Project

Breton Bay Proposed for Federal Partnership Oyster Restoration

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>>State to Restore Oysters
in St. Mary's River

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In a press release on Friday, Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary Mark Belton announced a comprehensive plan on oyster restoration. He also announced as a part of this plan the recommendation to put forth the upper St. Mary's River and Breton Bay as Maryland's fourth and fifth tributaries to satisfy the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, which has the goal of restoring oysters in ten tributaries by 2025—five in Maryland and five in Virginia.

Breton Bay is proposed as a federal partnership project, which triggers considerable federal monetary investment with some state match. The release states that the St. Mary's restoration would be conducted by the State. The proposal will be reviewed by the Maryland Oyster Restoration Interagency Workgroup, NOAA, and the Army Corps of Engineers, and go through an open and transparent public process, according to the press release. Briefed yesterday on the proposal to designate these two tributaries, the regional Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team, meeting locally at St. Mary's College of Maryland, gave their approving nod.



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"This is excellent news!" said Joe Anderson, president of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association in an email. These restorations "will undoubtedly have a very positive impact not only in terms of our environment and ecosystem, but will also prove significant in regards to economic development, tourism, and recreation."

"These restoration recommendations strike the right balance between the environment and the economy by concentrating limited yet targeted resources on existing sanctuaries with the most potential for success, based on the best available science," DNR Secretary Mark Belton said in the press release. "These two sites have the broad support of environmentalists and riverkeepers as well as county leaders and watermen."



SMRWA executive director Bob Lewis was at the meeting yesterday at St. Mary's College and spoke with DNR's director of fisheries David Blazer about the announcement and the Association's commitment to working closely with the State. Blazer said the Department was also excited to be working with an organization that has restoration experience and a long term commitment to the river's health. After the meeting Lewis, Blazer and Jodi Baxter, staff in the Shellfish Division, all met at the waterfront to overlook the existing 5-acre restoration project and to enjoy a fabulous sunset.

"It's inspiring and encouraging to stand here overlooking a project that has enjoyed success," said Baxter. "I've seen the underwater videos and photographs."

"My one concern," said Lewis, "is that the state apparently is not taking advantage of federal monies. Why? What does the state have in mind for the St. Mary's? Is there something the federal partners will not agree to?"

For Breton Bay, Lewis said it's a win-win all around. Earlier this year the newly formed Friends of Clement's Bay formed a partnership to pursue a community restoration project looking first at the city wharf area. Breton Bay has not had a commercial fishery for over thirty years as it has very few oysters living there. The cost to restore it might exceed \$20 million based on what has been spend in Maryland's other three restoration tributaries—Harris Creek, the Little Choptank, and the Tred Avon River. The State might be trying to earmark extra funds toward Breton Bay by offering to fund the St. Mary's entirely with state funding.

[Underwater images of the St. Mary's River Oyster Reef Project]



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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.

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