



2023 Year in Review & Action Plan 2024



Our Mission: 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.

Our 2023 Successes

Through the collaborative efforts of our members, volunteers, and donors, the St. Mary's River Watershed Association (SMRWA) made significant progress toward our mission in 2023. Together, we can continue this momentum into 2024!

24 teachers from all over the country experience the Chesapeake Bay



Students from the Chesapeake Public Charter School learn about Reef Balls



Volunteers head out to plant oysters in Breton Bay



Sailors with disabilities learn about the critters that rely on oyster reefs



Girl Scouts from St. Mary's County plant oysters in the St. Mary's River



Forrest Tech Center students work together to build a Reef Ball

over
650
volunteers
engaged in our hands-on
environmental stewardship
initiatives

Oyster Reproduction in Breton Bay

- Since 2017, the Friends of St. Clements Bay and SMRWA have worked together to restore the oyster population near Lover's Point
- For the past two years, the community has come together to plant 1 million oysters in Breton Bay
- In September, our efforts paid off when we recorded oyster reproduction in upper Breton Bay for the first time in two decades!



Restoration in the St. Mary's River

- This summer, we expanded our oyster restoration footprint and planted 1.5 million baby oysters on 2.5 acres west of Horseshoe Point
- Our members and volunteers helped in every step of the process





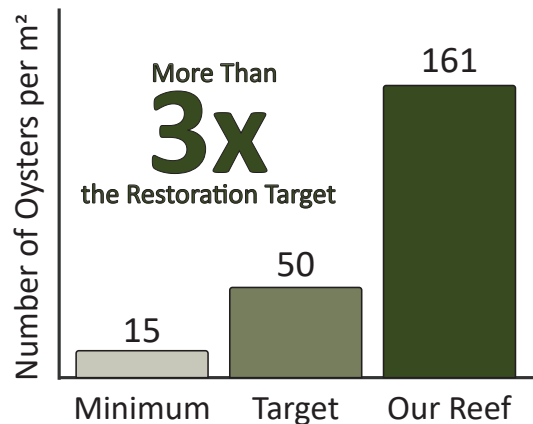
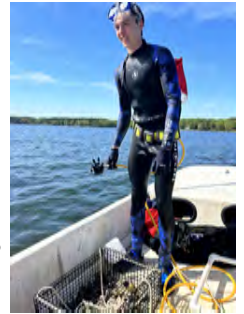
Future Bay Leaders

- This summer, we hosted five *Future Bay Leaders* who developed both personally and professionally through our mentorship program
- Anna Redman and Wes Boyers (pictured above with Greenwell Fishing campers) completed their capstones for the Great Mills High School Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) program along with 100 hours of service
- St. Mary's College of Maryland students, Nathaniel Richardson, a Marine Science major, and Bella Ramirez, an Environmental Studies major, learned the skills necessary to succeed in conservation careers through their summer internship
- Morgan Watkins returned for her second summer and is now studying Biology at the University of Pennsylvania



Monitoring Our Five-Acre Reef Site

- In 2023, we completed surveys of our five-acre reef site adjacent to St. Mary's College of Maryland
- We used the Chesapeake Bay Program's established minimum and target for oyster density (oysters per meter²) to evaluate our reef's success
- The five-acre oyster restoration site is far above the target!



Bay Observation Boxes (BOBs)

- Continuous water quality monitoring data are not available for the majority of the Chesapeake Bay
- We partnered with volunteers Norm and Shelly O'Foran to add five BOBs to the St. Mary's River this summer
- The BOBs send data about the health of the St. Mary's River to the Internet every fifteen minutes



Top Challenges for 2024

Expanding Our Oyster Restoration

- Our work on the five-acre oyster reef project adjacent to St. Mary's College of Maryland is nearing completion
- Finding new areas will require extensive water quality monitoring and bottom surveys
- Developing and refining the BOBs to expand coverage and increase accuracy

Sharing Our St. Mary's River

- Finding and acquiring additional public access to the St. Mary's River
- Building partnerships with other recreational users and implementing activities together



Intergenerational Leadership

- In October, our board promoted 27-year-old Emma Green to Executive Director
- Emma's passion and energy complement her marine science background
- Please help us to welcome and support Emma!

Quantifying the Sanctuary's Success

- Crafting a scientific study to evaluate the sanctuary's effectiveness in reaching its goals
- What impact does the sanctuary have on the downstream public fishery?

Land Development in the Watershed

- We will continue to advocate for sustainable, low-impact development
- We will monitor the Navy's clean-up plans for PFAS, "forever chemicals"

Thank you for your support and dedication as a member of the St. Mary's River Watershed Association. Please continue to support our work by renewing your membership at the Friend \$103, Steward \$303, or Guardian \$1,303 level.

COVER PHOTO: Campers from Greenwell Foundation's fishing camp proudly pose with a Reef Ball that they built

