



Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association
8461 Ft. Smallwood Rd, Suite C, Pasadena, MD 21122 - 410-255-5535 - www.mssa.net

MSSA Supports Governor's Oyster Restoration Plan

More Oysters, More Fish

With oyster populations hovering around 1% of historic levels since 1994 the Maryland Saltwater Sportfishermen's Association (MSSA) is giving its full support to Governor O'Malley's oyster restoration and aquaculture plan. This plan calls for 25% of the Chesapeake Bay's quality oyster bars to be protected and classified as sanctuaries, leaving 75% of existing habitat for traditional harvest by Maryland watermen.

"Over the past 25 years Maryland has lost 80% of its oyster bars, we are at one percent of historic levels, it is time to make the tough decisions and restore our native oyster and give all our fisheries the habitat they need", Dave Smith Executive Director of the MSSA said.

The oyster plan would set aside certain areas of the bay for aquaculture designed to transition the Maryland waterman from traditional oyster harvesting to aquaculture. \$21 million in federal and state funding is being used to mitigate economic impacts to watermen including \$4 million to contract watermen for restoration work and to help them invest in aquaculture business. Over the past two years the Department has contracted 500-800 watermen each year to perform restoration work for an annual payout of \$2-2.5 million.

"The more oysters we have in the bay the more habitat it provides our fisheries, there is no better spot to fish than right over the top of an oyster bar" said Frank Holden, MSSA Secretary and Essex Chapter president.

DNR staff and other state officials have held over a hundred meetings with legislators, advisory commissions, local officials, watermen, recreational fisherman, environmental organizations, aquaculturists, scientists and other citizens to gain additional input in advance of this formal regulatory proposal submittal. Since December, DNR received formal comments from nearly 1,000 citizens — more than 90% of whom support the plan. There were four scheduled public comment meetings throughout the summer with the last one on August 5.

The MSSA worked with the Department and Secretary Griffin to ensure the plan would not limit our opportunities to fish and enjoy the waters of the Chesapeake Bay as recreational anglers and boaters are the major user-group. MSSA's main concern was access and opportunity for recreational anglers as well as oyster restoration.

MISSION OF THE MSSA: *The MSSA is working to provide a unified voice to preserve and protect the rights, traditions, and the future of recreational fishing*



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“Recreational anglers provide this state with so much, we can’t afford to limit them as they put so much into the bay as conservationists and even more into our state budget”, Smith said

The plan is on schedule and will slowly be implemented starting in the fall of 2010. For more information on this plan visit www.dnr.state.md.us/fisheries.

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