

Committee: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
Legislation: SB 830
Position: SUPPORT
Date: March 1, 2022

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

The Severn River Association (SRA) requests a favorable report for SB 830, which would accelerate oyster restoration in the Severn River.

Introduction

Senate Bill 830 will accelerate oyster restoration throughout Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake Bay and will facilitate ongoing oyster restoration work by Severn River Association to restore oysters in the Severn--Maryland's capital river.

Background on Severn River Oyster Restoration

The entire Severn River (7,804 acres) was officially designated as an Oyster Sanctuary in 2010. The Severn River contains 1,383 acres of historic oyster bottom consisting of twenty seven historic oyster bars, twenty five fully within the sanctuary and two extending over the boundary (in addition to several reef areas that have been constructed that are not on historic oyster bars.) The DNR has defined 1,020 acres as currently restorable oyster habitat in the Severn River Oyster Sanctuary (not including reefs created from alternative substrate).¹

Communities along the Severn River are among the strongest supporters of oyster restoration in Maryland. They have shown continued support for sustained oyster restoration. In 2018 advocates with SRA lobbied the Oyster Advisory Commission to be selected as the 5th targeted tributary for large-scale oyster restoration pursuant to the Bay Agreement, because we know that with the level of investment those tributaries receive for oyster restoration, the Severn could once again be made into the thriving river it once was. When the effort to have the Severn named a designated tributary under the Bay Agreement did not succeed, SRA partnered with the Oyster Recovery Partnership to launch Operation Build-a-Reef, an enthusiastic, home grown oyster restoration program that has planted over 85 Million spat-on-shell planted since inception. Severn River residents are passionate about restoring oysters to the Severn River. The Severn River has over 300 volunteers supporting over 1500 cages of oysters through the Marylanders Grow Oysters (MGO) program. We believe this is the largest single-tributary MGO program in the Chesapeake Bay. Moreover,

Oysters planted in the Severn do very well. Despite the record rainfall of 2018 and the subsequent low salinity levels in 2018-2019, the survivability of the plantings of 2018 is high,

¹ https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/Documents/AnneArundel_ComplexPlan.pdf

based on data from SRA-sponsored reef monitoring dives in 2020 and 2021. These data are collected by deeply motivated volunteers and outside partners. The SRA has a reef monitoring protocol in place and plans to monitor oyster reefs for the long term, working with organizations such as Black Girls Dive Foundation. The SRA also monitors water quality at each oyster planting site which shows acceptable levels of dissolved oxygen and salinity for oysters to survive in those areas.

Policy Considerations

Historically the Severn had 27 significant oyster bars. Based on the excellent survival rate and even some limited natural reproduction resulting from restoration efforts to date, we expect that with enough brood stock and dense enough plantings that the Severn will experience sustainable natural spat set. However getting a dense enough population to become self-sustaining has encountered occasional challenges, such as extreme precipitation in 2018 causing depleted spat on shell availability from Horn Point Laboratory, currently the only provider of this critical resource in the State. Senate Bill 830 would overcome this limitation by establishing an additional hatchery to increase overall spat availability for all stakeholders in the State, including SRA.

The Department of Natural Resources has developed the "Anne Arundel Complex-Magothy, Severn and South Rivers Oyster Restoration Plan"² which can be used as a framework for siting specific plantings for large-scale oyster restoration in the Severn. This detailed plan "evaluates areas within the Magothy, Severn and South River sanctuaries that are suitable for restoration efforts. The plan includes specific areas targeted for restoration work, an analysis of the seed required, and an estimated cost." Thus, much groundwork has already been accomplished to facilitate direction resources for oyster restoration into the Severn River.

For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on SB830.

Respectfully submitted,



Jesse L. Iliff
Executive Director
Severn River Association
jesse@severnriver.org

² https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/Documents/AnneArundel_ComplexPlan.pdf