



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary
Allan Fisher, Deputy Secretary

Bill Number: House Bill 1133

Short Title: Oysters – Tributary–Scale Sanctuaries

Department’s Position: Letter of Information

Explanation of Department’s Position

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides the following information on HB 1133, which repeals provisions of law that include the Manokin River oyster sanctuary as one of five oyster sanctuaries in the state selected for tributary-scale restoration by 2025, and replaces it with the Severn River.

The 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, which guides the work of the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP), calls for state and federal partners to “Continually increase finfish and shellfish habitat and water quality benefits from restored oyster populations. Restore native oyster habitat and populations in 10 tributaries by 2025 and ensure their protection.” (Chesapeake Executive Council 2014). Five tributaries are to be located in Maryland and five in Virginia.

In 2018, the Oyster Advisory Commission recommended to DNR that the Manokin River be named as the fifth tributary. Responsibility for achieving this goal rests with CBP’s Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (GIT). For Maryland, the Sustainable Fisheries GIT convened a Maryland Interagency Workgroup (Workgroup) to plan, implement, and track progress toward this goal. That workgroup included broad representation from academia, environmental groups, scientists, and the commercial industry.

A portion of the Manokin River was designated as an oyster sanctuary and has been closed to wild commercial oyster harvest since 2010. The Workgroup developed a goal of restoring 441 acres within the 17-mile long river. The locations where restoration would actually occur was determined by identifying the areas within the sanctuary that were most “suitable” for oyster restoration and then eliminating areas that were not; however in 2019, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation designating the entire Manokin River as a sanctuary. The bill also codified in statute that the Manokin be the fifth tributary and that all work be completed by 2025.

This proposed legislation would nullify all efforts expended to date related to the design and planning of the Manokin River oyster restoration project. As the legislation is currently drafted, it would not be possible to meet the 2025 federal and state deadline if the large-scale restoration

Contact: Bunky Luffman, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services
Bunky.luffman1@maryland.gov ♦ 410-689-9165

area was switched to the Severn River.

The department is currently undergoing restoration in the Anne Arundel County tributaries. Hatchery spat-on-shell has been planted in these sanctuaries, including the Severn River, in recent years and approximately 70 million spat-on-shell is scheduled to be planted in 2022.

For any additional information, please feel free to contact our Legislative and Constituent Services Director, Bunky Luffman.