

## **Wicomico oyster growers wanted**

### **Riverfront pier owners sought to grow spat**

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(view clip)

The Wicomico Scenic River Commission and the Cobb Island Citizens Association are looking for waterfront homeowners to participate in the Marylanders Grow Oysters project and act as caretakers for oysters in their first year of life.

The Wicomico is one of 10 rivers in the state, including the St. Mary's River and Patuxent River, to participate in the project this year.

"We sent out letters to waterfront owners on the St. Mary's and Charles side of the river," said Bill Montgomery, chair of the Wicomico commission. He said the group has had some response and there are certainly more cages available.

"The goal is simple," he said.

Waterfront owners will tie off four to 10 cages from private piers. They will act as caretakers of several small cages of spat, or baby oysters, during their vulnerable first years of life, until they are large enough to be relocated to a protected sanctuary in the Wicomico River.

There is no cost, but the personal and environmental benefits are numerous, according to the commission member Bob Elwood, who spearheaded the Wicomico project. Oysters filter their food from the water, a process that helps clean the bay and its tributaries.

Cages containing baby oysters that were grown at either the Horn Point or Piney Point hatcheries will be distributed on Aug. 29 at two locations on the waterfront — Bushwood Wharf in St. Mary's and at a private residence on Cobb Island in Charles.

Maryland's citizen oyster growing program involves nongovernmental organizations that will coordinate oyster-growing efforts in Maryland tributaries in 2009. The Coastal Conservation Association Maryland's Patuxent River chapter is seeking waterfront property owners to grow oysters in creeks along the Patuxent. The St. Mary's River Watershed Association is spearheading the program for that river

Participants will hang the cages from their piers in places where they can remain underwater. Once installed, the care is minimal, including periodically rinsing the oysters to keep them clean and making sure they aren't exposed to freezing winter air, which will kill them.

The oysters are not to be eaten or harvested, but are being grown to be planted on an oyster sanctuary for ecological benefits. At the end of the nine- to 12-month growing period, the cages will be collected and the oysters will be planted on a reef sanctuary in the Wicomico River.

Statewide the response has been overwhelming for the 11 rivers involved in the project this year.

To meet the need the state has ordered more cages, which are being produced at the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

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