

## DNR To Host Four Public Oyster Regulation Hearings

Annapolis, MD (June 21, 2010) - The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has set the dates, times and locations for four public regulatory hearings as part of the implementation of Governor Martin O'Malley's Oyster Restoration and Aquaculture Plan. Governor O'Malley and DNR submitted the proposed regulations in May after months of public discussion, DNR open houses and robust input from thousands of citizens following the Governor's announcement of the plan in December 2009.

"We stand on the threshold of implementing a plan that was called for by the very first oyster advisory commission in the 1800s, but was never achieved," said Governor Martin O'Malley. "We need to change course and take bold action to rebuild our oyster population- both for its ecological value and for the jobs and economic impact that an expanded aquaculture industry will provide for Maryland families for generations to come."

In January 2009, Governor O'Malley sponsored legislation to promote oyster restoration and aquaculture in Maryland by streamlining the regulatory process, expanding oyster sanctuaries in the Bay and opening areas to aquaculture to reduce the pressure on wild oysters and to provide alternative economic opportunities for Maryland watermen. The legislation passed overwhelmingly in the General Assembly.

"Since Governor O'Malley announced this groundbreaking proposal in December, we have worked diligently with legislators, local elected officials and all of our stakeholders- including members of the oyster industry, aquaculture interests, scientists, environmentalists, sport fishermen and citizens," said DNR Secretary John Griffin. "This unprecedented public process resulted in more than 150 meetings during which we made numerous adjustments to our proposal to address the concerns of our watermen while maintaining the integrity of the Governor's plan."

The Chesapeake Bay's oyster population has languished at one percent of historic levels since 1994, quality oyster bars have decreased by 80 percent and the number of harvesters has dwindled from 2,000 in the mid-1980s to just over 500 annually since 2002. Today there are only eight oyster processing companies in Maryland, down from 58 in 1974. These public events will feature an overview of the proposed regulations by DNR staff followed by opportunities for individual comments. Comments may also be submitted online at [fisheriespubliccomment@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:fisheriespubliccomment@dnr.state.md.us) or by mail to:

MD-DNR Fisheries Service  
Oyster Recovery  
Tawes State Office Bldg  
580 Taylor Ave. B-2  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The public hearings are scheduled as follows:

- July 7, 6:00 p.m., Anne Arundel Community College, Pascal Center for the Performing Arts, 101 College Parkway, Arnold, MD 21012
- July 13, 6:00 p.m., Leonardtown High School Auditorium, 23995 Point Lookout Road, Leonardtown, MD 20650
- July 22, 6:00 p.m., Salisbury University, Caruthers Hall Auditorium, 1101 Camden Avenue, Salisbury, MD 21801
- August 5, 6:00 p.m., Chesapeake College, Todd Performing Arts Center, Route 50 and Route 213, Wye Mills, MD 21679

A concise overview of the proposed regulations is located at [www.dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/oysters/OysterRestoration&AquacultureDevelopmentProposedRegulationsFactsheet.pdf](http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/oysters/OysterRestoration&AquacultureDevelopmentProposedRegulationsFactsheet.pdf)