

Coastal Conservation Association Maryland

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PRESS RELEASE

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Anglers Seek Moratorium on Harvest of Native Oysters

Annapolis, MD – Coastal Conservation Association Maryland (CCA MD) has petitioned the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to declare the native oyster threatened or endangered under Maryland’s Endangered Species of Fish Conservation Act and declare a moratorium on oyster harvest.

“CCA Maryland supports the goal of a restored oyster population but finds restoration and a sustainable oyster fishery to be incompatible at this point,” said CCA MD Board Member Sherman Baynard. “It’s time to shuck short-term economic gain for the importance of the ecological value of live, prolific Chesapeake Bay oyster populations that benefit all of Maryland’s citizens who want a cleaner Bay.”

For several years, CCA MD has opposed DNR attempts to bring back power dredging, a very efficient harvest method that flattened the once bountiful three-dimensional oyster reefs that filtered the Bay before the gear was banned. The current fishery is characterized by scarcity of the resource and a realization by fishermen that more efficient gear is needed to take this decimated resource economically.

CCA MD is convinced that power dredging will provide a brief increase in harvest, but it will inevitably lead to a rapid collapse of remaining oyster populations

“Maryland’s oyster cartel of government and private entities that controls all aspects of oyster management has disguised maintaining the commercial oyster fishery as oyster restoration for far too long,” said Baynard, explaining CCA MD’s concern at being excluded from participating in the management process for the Bay’s native oyster. “The result is an economically extinct oyster industry and no measurable gains in restoration.”

Maryland has been faced with similar situations in the past when striped bass and Canada geese stocks were depleted to a point where it was feared they would not be able to sustain themselves. Moratoriums were put in place and recoveries followed. Concerned conservationists now believe that the state must make a similar commitment to oyster restoration, rather than continue to follow a failed policy of subsidizing the oyster industry.

“CCA Maryland is confident that when the Secretary reviews the current state of our native oyster he will find that the criteria to list it as endangered or threatened under Maryland’s Endangered Species of Fish Conservation Act has been met and will thus institute a moratorium,” said Don Silliman, Chairman of CCA MD.

Native oysters are currently at historically low populations despite efforts to recover the resource. Calls by the commercial fishing industry for more efficient gear to make the economics of continued harvest viable are a classic warning of a fishery in steep decline.

“Recreational fishermen and conservationists can wait no longer for others to speak out for the resource,” said Silliman. “The remaining native oysters are much too valuable to the future of the Bay to be exploited by the commercial oyster fishery. The longer each oyster remains in the Bay the greater its contribution to a cleaner environment.”

For more information about CCA Maryland and to view its petition to the Secretary, visit our website at www.ccamd.org.

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Coastal Conservation Association Maryland is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization working to Conserve, Protect, and Restore marine resources for the benefit of all Maryland citizens.