

Charles County Oyster Partnership

March 17, 2023

Presented for: Chesapeake Bay and Water
Resources Policy Committee (CBPC)
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments



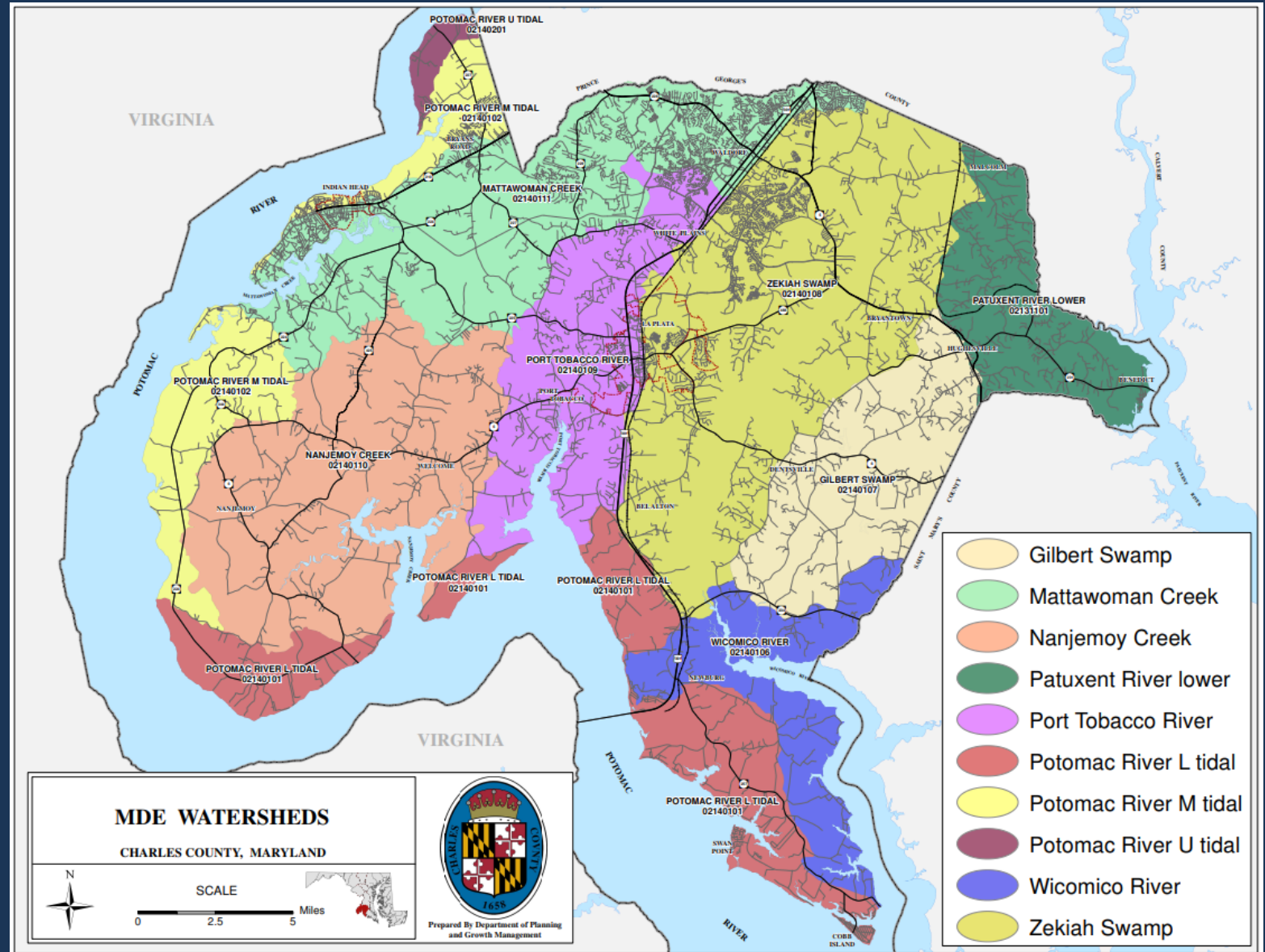
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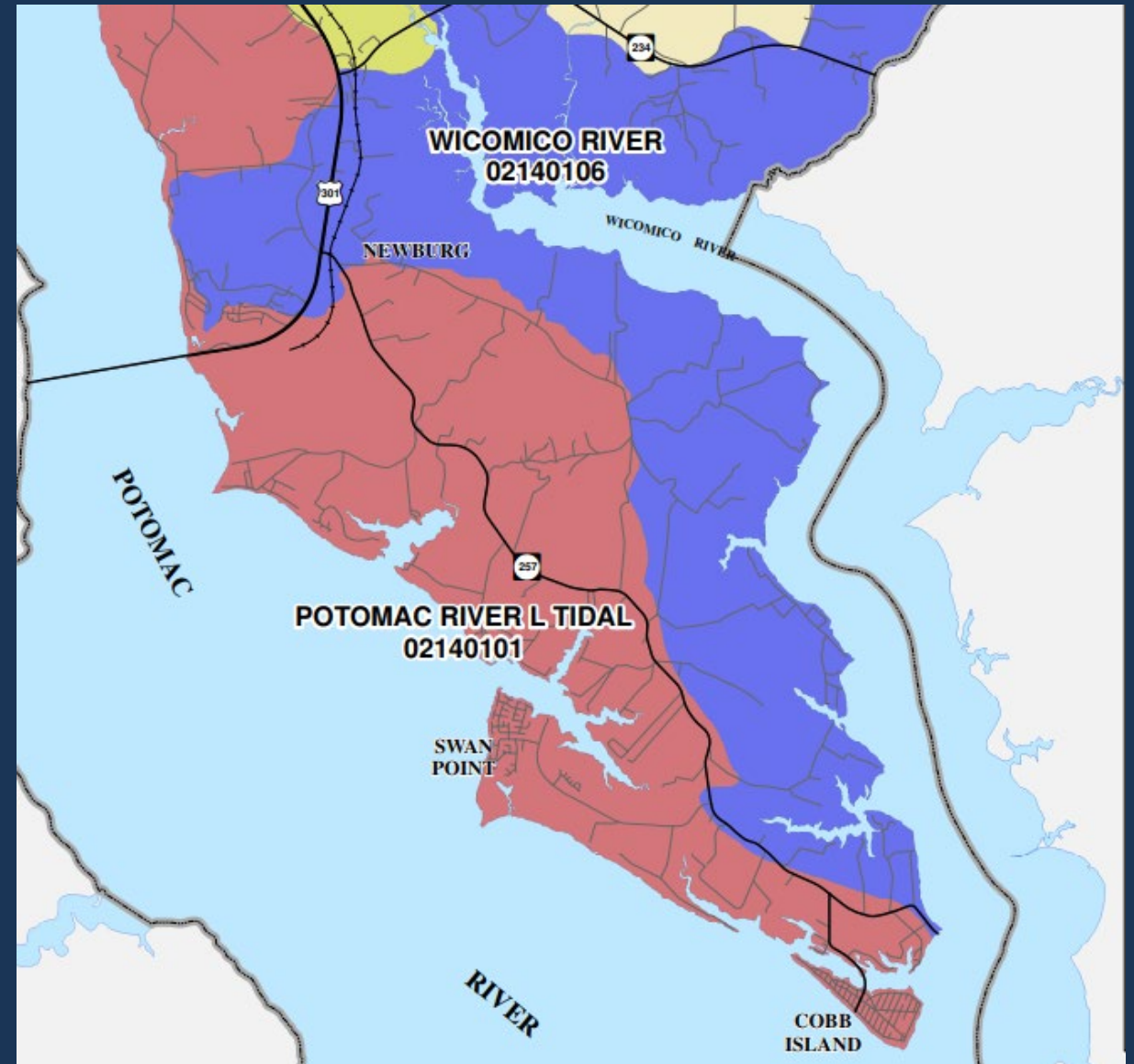
Charles County is Surrounded by an Aquatic Environment

- Potomac, Patuxent and Wicomico Rivers
- 10 watersheds with many smaller tributaries
- Watermen harvest:
 - Blue Crabs
 - Striped Bass
 - Catfish
 - Shad
 - Eel
 - Oysters



Oysters are a Sustainable Fishery

- Several oyster bars are located in the lower Potomac River from the 301 Bridge south and in the Wicomico River.
- Hand tonging or oyster dredges are used to harvest, based on location.
- Oyster Aquaculture is becoming more prevalent and profitable
- Planting oysters on an oyster bar and let them grow 3 to 4 years before harvesting.



Oysters are a Sustainable Fishery

- Group of Charles County watermen operate an oyster farming cooperative with a Rotational Harvest Program.
- Money from up to 54 watermen is pooled together to buy and plant spat on shell in designated areas.
 - Wicomico bars planted in 2015 (15 million spat), 2016 (22 million spat), and 2018 (800 bushels of wild oyster seed).
- Proceeds of harvest are divided among the members.
- Sale of oysters are a significant part of the local rural economy



Oysters are a Sustainable Fishery

Rotational Harvest

- This concept is a win-win for everybody.
 - Oysters provide habitat for many different aquatic species;
 - Filter pollutants from water, and
 - Support the local seafood industry and provide fresh local product.



Oysters are Susceptible to Weather

Wicomico River

- In FY20 the Charles County Watermen's Association requested funding from Charles County Government to plant 12 million juvenile oysters in the northern portion of Wicomico River.
 - This effort was to help recover from oyster decimation in 2018 due to historic rainfalls
 - Planted area is closed for commercial harvest for a minimum of 5 years.



Photo Credit
Dave Harp

Oysters for Regulatory Requirements

A Unique Agreement

- In 2022 a Water Quality Credit Agreement was initiated and agreed between Wicomico River Oyster Cooperative, LLC and the Board of Charles County Commissioners.
 - For five years the County annually invests about \$50,000 for planting oyster spat on shell
 - 3-4 years after planting, the oysters are to be harvested and water quality credits certified with the State of Maryland.



Oysters for Regulatory Requirements

- Under the partnership agreement, all certified water quality credits generated from the harvest of oysters planted with County funds are transferred to the County for at least five years, starting in year three.
 - These water quality credits will be applied toward the County's Municipal Stormwater Permit restoration requirements.
 - This is a win-win opportunity for meeting water quality goals, enhancing aquatic habitat, supporting the local seafood industry, creating an opportunity for outreach and education on important environmental issues and serves as a model for other areas.



Photo Credit
Dave Harp



Presented By:
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Department of Planning and Growth
Management

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Photos courtesy of the Charles County Watermen's Association and
the Bay Journal, Dave Harp

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