

# SAV-ING THE SASSAFRAS RIVER

ShoreRivers' success story of SAV restoration in the Chesapeake Bay watershed

ShoreRivers is a watershed organization whose mission is restoring and protecting the Sassafras, Chester, Choptank, and Miles and Wye Rivers and their adjacent water bodies. In recent years, they have turned their attention to restoring submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) in the waters they look after. Their waterways could gain numerous benefits from SAV beds, including habitat for fish species and the associated recreational benefits, water quality support, and resilience to climate change.

ShoreRivers has found that SAV is a tangible way for them to connect with local citizens about water quality; when SAV is present, water quality is generally good. Elle Bassett, the Miles-Wye Riverkeeper, noted the sense of nostalgia around SAV. People who have lived in the region for decades remember where SAV used to be and want to help it return to these areas.

Working with Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Anne Arundel Community College (AACC), ShoreRivers has been attempting to plant beds of SAV in various locations in the rivers they care for. Zack Kelleher, the Sassafras Riverkeeper, has indicated that the process has been a learning experience, but that they are starting to see indications of success.

In the fall of 2019, working with DNR and AACC, they harvested 1.2 million wild celery seeds from Elk Neck State Park. AACC processed the seeds and stored them over the winter. ShoreRivers then planted these seeds in June of 2020 at several locations and, towards the end of last summer, began to see seeds sprouting at Money Creek on the Sassafras River. Their harvesting efforts have improved as well. In the fall of 2020, they were able to harvest 4 million seeds from the Sassafras which, according to DNR, is the most successful wild celery seed harvest recorded. These seeds were again processed and stored by AACC and then planted by ShoreRivers at 5 different two-acre sites this past May. The Riverkeepers will be looking for signs of new wild celery plants over the coming summer.

ShoreRivers is working towards its own, independent SAV seed harvesting and processing operation. They were recently awarded a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust to build their own seed processing equipment, which will be housed at Washington College. Their goal is to step up their SAV restoration efforts across their rivers. Ultimately, they want to be able to provide seeds to waterfront landowners so that they can try their hand at growing SAV off their own property.



A seed and sand mixture is distributed from a boat. The sand prevents clumping and allows a more even distribution.

photo credit: ShoreRivers



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*“People have a sense of nostalgia around SAV.”*