ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MD - Congressman Steny Hoyer today joined officials from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and students from Leonardtown High School at Greenwell State Park on the Patuxent River for a demonstration of the "B-WET" program in recognition of Environmental Education Week (April 10 – 16) and Earth Day (April 22).

In 2002, NOAA established the Chesapeake Bay B-WET Program to provide hands-on watershed education to students and teachers to foster stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay. In recognition of National Environmental Education Week – a week of "Educational Preparation" for Earth Day 2005 – Congressman Hoyer joined students today from Leonardtown High School, who are participating in the B-WET Program, to sample the Patuxent River's water quality. St. Mary's County Public Schools have received grant funding from NOAA for the B-WET program for the past two years.

"This week is the single largest organized environmental education event, involving hundreds of thousands of teachers, nature educators, and students from across the country," said Congressman Hoyer. "It also serves as an inspiring week-long education prelude to Earth Day 2005, which we will celebrate next Friday, April 22."

"St. Mary's Public School's Baykeeper Program is a shining example of how NOAA's B-WET funds are providing hands-on environmental education for students and professional development for teachers throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed," said Marlene Kaplan, Director of the Office of Education and Sustainable Development at NOAA. "By providing B-WET funds on an annual basis, NOAA is dedicated to ensuring that all students in the watershed are involved in a meaningful field experience before graduation--a keystone goal of the Chesapeake Bay Program and an integral part of strengthening stewardship of our environment."

"This year Congress passed a budget that devastates federal funding for environmental protection programs," added Hoyer. "Once again, this year we must go back to the drawing board and restore federal funds that play an important role in keeping our environment healthy, this is especially important for the Chesapeake Bay.

"Water quality remains the largest challenge we face to improve and restore the Bay watershed. Each year, hundreds of millions of pounds of nutrients and sediments wash from the farm fields, development projects and streets, and wastewater treatment plants. Sediment buries oyster beds, destroys bay grasses and excess nitrogen and phosphorus spur the growth of

unwanted algae and other microorganisms that deplete the bay's oxygen, cloud the water, and destroy other living resources.

"This is why I am a big supporter of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay B-WET program – because it invests in education and involves students in stewardship throughout the entire six-state Bay watershed. I look forward to continuing to work with all of these enterprising young people as we recognize Earth Day's call to action. As a community, we can influence the quality of our water and air, the beauty of our local stream or woods, and the richness of our recreational surroundings," Hoyer said.

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