



Oyster Growers

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENT & SOCIETY • CHESTER RIVER • MGO



The Center for Environment & Society at Washington College began its oyster stewardship efforts in 2008 with community volunteers on the Chester River and 25 Taylor floats at **Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge**. Funded by a grant from the **Friends of Eastern Neck**, these projects culminated in 20 bushels of oysters that were placed on a new oyster bar at **Hail Cove** in September 2009.



Hail Cove—an important waterfowl site—was restored by constructing headland breakwaters, laying an arc of stone to promote oyster habitat, and planting aquatic vegetation to protect the isthmus sandbar from erosion. Washington College and the Friends were among 17 partners who contributed to the **Hail Cove Restoration** project, and in April 2010 we received a **Coastal America Partnership Award** for these efforts.

Starting in 2010, the College is partnering with the **Marylanders Grow Oysters Program** (MGO) to continue restoration projects along the Chester River. (www.oysters.maryland.gov) The state program is designed to foster stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and create living oyster reef populations in sanctuaries.

Citizen volunteers with waterfront access are given mailbox-sized cages filled with spat (seed oysters) to be hung on their piers so that the oysters can be free to grow without the threat of predation and siltation. With careful maintenance from the oyster grower and periodic dunking of the cages to prevent siltation, the oysters will be

ready for transplanting to a local oyster sanctuary in about 9 months. *Cages and oysters are given free of charge!*

A program coordinator is available to help determine the suitability of your property. If you think you may have a viable site, please consider:

Salinity

Salinity levels are a limiting factor for oyster survival. Oysters grow and reproduce

quicker in higher salinity waters, but are also more susceptible to disease. The Chester's relatively low salinity waters will support oysters but with lower mortality due to disease. Sites downriver of the main stem of Southeast Creek typically have high enough salinity for the program.

Water Depth

Oyster cages need at least 16 inches of water at low tide and must be below ice in the dead of winter. Oysters can be exposed to warm air for a number of hours and survive, but even short periods of exposure to freezing air temperatures can kill them.

Securing Cages

Cages need to be secured and easily retrievable. Underneath a dock is a great place—the pilings allow for easy tie-off and the cages and lines will not become a navigation issue. Tying cages to a mooring is possible, but you must be able to routinely access the cages for maintenance in all seasons.

Maintenance & Monitoring

Dunking the cages once or twice a week will help keep silt and sediment off the oysters. Sediment can suffocate

the vulnerable spat. Once the water warms, the cages will begin to foul. Taking the cages out of the water and allowing them to dry for 2 hours will help limit algal growth. If algal growth persists or becomes heavy, remove the cages and scrub them with a wire brush. Consistent cleaning will limit competition from other species (like barnacles) and increase water flow to allow the oysters to feed.

You may monitor growth and mortality rates, and observe things like other species living with the oysters, to give to DNR's Bay-wide database on oyster restoration.

Program Timeline

SEPTEMBER: Oyster Recovery Partnership delivers cages and bags with spat on shell. First-year growers come and collect cages and spat; current members collect spat only.

OCTOBER - FEBRUARY: Dormant period due to falling water temperatures. Be mindful of low tides and ice on lines. Periodic dunking prevents siltation on shells.

MARCH: Oysters are feeding more; make sure cages and oysters are clean to allow water to flow freely.

APRIL: Oysters are actively feeding and may reach dime size. Maintain cages regularly to prevent fouling. MGO picnic at Hynson Pavilion.

MAY/JUNE: Oysters are collected and planted in a Chester River sanctuary. Pass cages on to a waterfront neighbor or welcome more spat.

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The College's Center for Environment & Society supports interdisciplinary research and education, stewardship of natural and cultural resources, and the integration of ecological and social values.