



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Marine Resources Commission
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VMRC Annual Fossil Oyster Shell Mining Effort

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Fort Monroe, VA. – The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), by contract with H & L Contracting, LLC, during the month of June, will be planting up to 620,000 bushels of fossil or reef oyster shell material within the James River, York River, Rappahannock River, Great Wicomico River, Chesapeake Bay, Tangier Sound, and Pocomoke Sound.

The fossil shell deposits are well below the river bottom in areas within the James River and at the mouth of the Nansemond River. **The dredge used for this effort is believed to be the only such dredge in the world.** The only state that uses this dredge for such shell mining effort is Virginia. After the shell is dredged and placed onto barges it is then placed on Public Oyster beds to help sustain the public oyster fishery in Virginia. Keeping a layer of shell on such public grounds allows oyster larvae to attach to such substrate material and grow to market size for harvest in future years. Shell planting has been undertaken annually by VMRC since 1929.

The VMRC Shellfish Management Division manages over 300,000 acres of such grounds and works with the shellfish industry, working water men and women, and our scientific advisors at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science on establishing harvest seasons each year that promote sustainable harvest and increased oyster populations. **Based on the most recent surveys of the public oyster resource, oyster populations in Virginia Waters are at a 30 plus year high.**

The dockside value of oysters harvested in Virginia in 2019 alone was over \$38,000,000.00. In addition, oysters are a “keystone” species and provide habitat for other ecologically and economically important species.

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