



MEDIA RELEASE

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Virginia Celebrates Earth Day with Chesapeake Bay Oyster Restoration Milestone

Gloucester, Virginia – At a timely celebration of Earth Day 2024, Governor Glenn Youngkin joined Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Travis Voyles and representatives from Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) to announce the completion of a monumental achievement in the ongoing effort to restore the native oyster habitat and populations within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Virginia has solidified its leadership in natural resource conservation by exceeding expectations with the completion of over 200 acres of restored oyster area in the Lower York River.

Addressing the gathering of legislators, marine scientists, regulators, and oyster industry representatives, Governor Glenn Youngkin formally declared the completion of the restoration project: “It is my privilege to commemorate this year’s Earth Day by officially announcing and celebrating the completion of the Lower York River Oyster Restoration Goal. By reaching this restoration goal, we are sending a clear message that this administration’s year-round commitment to preserve our natural resources is unwavering. As Virginians, we are blessed to be surrounded by an abundance of treasured natural resources and we will protect them.”

In 2014, the Chesapeake Bay Program set forth a plan to restore native oyster habitat and populations in ten Bay tributaries across Virginia and Maryland by 2025. Thanks to vital cooperative scientific and resource support from NOAA, VMRC announces the completion of the large-scale oyster restoration project in the Lower York River, marking a pivotal milestone in our ongoing efforts to restore and sustainably manage the oyster populations of the Chesapeake Bay.

Virginia Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Travis Voyles adds, “From oyster restoration to water quality improvements, Virginia remains fully committed to ensuring a vibrant and healthy Chesapeake Bay for generations to come. This accomplishment is a tremendous example of what can be achieved through a true partnership approach. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure the sustainable growth of Virginia’s oyster population and the Commonwealth’s position as the East Coast’s top oyster producer”.

With the completion of the Lower York River Restoration Project, VMRC Commissioner Jamie Green acknowledged the years of hard work that brought this project to fruition: “I am extremely proud of our Shellfish Management Division and the pivotal role that we have played in this historic achievement, which not only supports the most economically important commercial fishery in Virginia but also sets a precedent for

sustainable coastal conservation efforts nationwide. The completion of the largest alternative substrate planting restoration project of the year in the Lower York River demonstrates our commitment to science-based management strategies and public-private partnerships.”

This milestone is the result of collaborative efforts spearheaded by the VMRC Shellfish Management Division. The support and funding provided by NOAA have been instrumental in driving the success of this project, enabling the implementation of innovative restoration techniques and the monitoring of ecosystem health. Through partnerships such as this, Virginia has executed the largest oyster restoration and replenishment effort in the United States.

"NOAA is excited to celebrate not only the tremendous work to restore more than 200 acres of oyster reef in the York River—and the habitat these reefs will provide for species including black sea bass, summer flounder, and blue crabs—but also to highlight the partnership among Virginia agencies and NOAA that made it happen," said Dr. Sunny Snider, deputy director of NOAA Fisheries' Office of Habitat Conservation.

Governor Youngkin joined delegates and representatives in attendance to commemoratively sign the final oyster shells to be added to the restored Lower York River oyster reef. These symbolic shells were then scattered on the oyster reef, marking the completed restoration of this Chesapeake Bay tributary.

Virginia remains dedicated to the long-term success of oyster restoration efforts. The success of this endeavor serves as a testament to the power of collaboration and innovation in addressing complex environmental challenges, and VMRC is confident that similar restoration models can be replicated on a global scale.

VMRC extends its sincere gratitude to NOAA, VIMS, and all partners and stakeholders involved in this remarkable journey towards a healthier Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.

For more information, please contact Zach Widgeon at 757-709-8737 or Zachary.widgeon@mrc.virginia.gov.



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Shell Signing Photo Left to Right: Delegate Anne Ferrell Tata, VIMS Dean & Director Derek Aday, Delegate AC Cordoza, Delegate Chad Green, Representative Bobby Scott, Governor Glenn Youngkin, VMRC Commissioner Jamie Green, Representative Delores McQuinn, Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Travis Voyles. (Photo Credit: Kylie Muir)



Signed oyster shells being scattered on the restored Lower York River Oyster Reef. (Photo Credit: Kylie Muir)



VMRC Commissioner Jamie Green gives an overview of the restored Lower York River oyster reef. Left to Right: Representative Bobby Scott, Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Travis Voyles, Governor Glenn Youngkin, VMRC Commissioner Jamie Green. (Photo Credit: Kylie Muir)