

For Immediate Release
June 30, 2009

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Virginia's Eastern Shore Receives Economic Stimulus Funding for Oyster, Seagrass, and Scallop Restoration

NOAA Funding Will Create 55 Jobs

NASSAWADOX, VIRGINIA— Today the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced the Virginia Seaside Bays Restoration project will receive support from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to support 55 jobs that will restore oyster reefs, scallops, and seagrass beds on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

The project is a partnership between The Nature Conservancy of Virginia, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, and the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program.

"Restoring our marine environment is of critical importance and this project should yield wide-ranging benefits for many decades to come," said **L. Preston Bryant, Jr., Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources**. "I'm grateful for the hard work done by so many people -- the Nature Conservancy, NOAA, VMRC, VIMS and the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program -- on this cooperative effort. This truly is a landmark initiative."

"By encouraging more oysters and seagrass to grow we will be improving the health of Virginia's seaside bays for people and wildlife," said **Barry Truitt, chief biologist at The Nature Conservancy's Virginia Coast Reserve**. "In the case of the scallop restoration, it will be a complete reintroduction, because scallops were completely wiped out from Virginia's seaside bays back in the 1930s."

"NOAA's support of this integrated restoration program will greatly accelerate our collaborative efforts to restore these valuable coastal resources", said **Mark Luckenbach, Director of the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences Eastern Shore Laboratory**. "These natural resources are not only critical to the ecological health of these coastal bays, but also to the economic health of the region's valuable seafood industry."

“The Seaside of Virginia’s Eastern Shore has been a proving ground for the notion that nature is resilient. When we conduct sound science to understand natural systems, restore their damaged elements, and carefully manage use of their resources, they can rebound,” said **Laura McKay, of Virginia’s Coastal Zone Management Program**. “NOAA’s willingness to provide this additional \$2 million which builds on our Seaside Heritage Program investment of \$3 million from NOAA over the past 8 years is testament to the success of our joint efforts.”

Oysters play an important role in marine systems as food for people and wildlife, and also help to clean water by filtering it as they feed. Seagrass also plays an important role in helping keep water clean, by knocking down and absorbing sediment. Seagrass also serves as a nursery for wildlife, such as seahorses, clams, crabs, and other shellfish, including scallops.

The \$2 million restoration project will occur from Wachapreague Inlet to the Chesapeake Bay mouth, including Burton Bay, Bradford Bay, Swash Bay, Hog Island Bay, Spider Crab Bay, Ramshorn Bay, Mockhorn Bay, and Magothy Bay.

Over an 18-month period, 24 acres of functional oyster reefs, 100 acres of seagrass, and 2.4 million scallops will be created or introduced in the seaside bays. Five of these oyster acres will be designated as rotational harvest areas on the seaside, providing economic return to the watermen of the local seaside communities.

In addition to this Virginia Seaside Bays project, The Nature Conservancy also received funding for seven other coastal restoration projects across the U.S., to restore and protect coral reefs, oyster reefs, seagrass beds, salt marshes, salmon streams, and floodplains. Marine habitats such as these provide people and nature with a variety of essential services such as water filtration, protection from the effects of natural disasters and storm surges, fisheries, as well as economic and recreational opportunities.

“During the selection process, NOAA received over 800 proposals totaling more than \$3 billion in requests for restoration funding, yet only \$167 million in NOAA funding was available,” said **Lynne Hale, Director of the Global Marine Program at The Nature Conservancy**. “This overwhelming response demonstrates the profound need for increased restoration and the stewardship of our oceans and coasts,” added Hale.

For nearly 10 years, The Nature Conservancy and NOAA have worked in partnership to implement community-based restoration projects at sites across the United States. The projects selected under ARRA will employ nearly 450 people who will devote more than 500,000 hours of labor to the engineering, project management, contracting, planting, and monitoring associated with completing these eight projects over the next two to two and a half years. The Conservancy will begin work immediately in Alaska, Alabama, California, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, US Virgin Islands, Virginia and Washington.

For more information about the Conservancy’s marine work, visit: www.nature.org/marine

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The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 18 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 117 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at www.nature.org.