

# 1st volunteer-grown Md. oysters transplanted

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OXFORD, MD. — The first crop of oysters grown by volunteers in a new restoration effort were transplanted Tuesday to a sanctuary reef on the Tred Avon River.

"How do they look? I worked hard on those oysters," said volunteer Owen Wormsel after the baskets that hung from his pier over the winter were emptied.

The oysters were muddy, but healthy, with several small oysters growing on many of the larger shells.

"Are they going to be OK out of the water?" Wormsel said as ospreys and eagles circled nearby over stately waterfront homes.

"We're going to put them right back in," said Stefan Abel, executive director of the Oyster Recovery Partnership, which is working with volunteers in the Marylanders Grow Oysters program.

The Tred Avon was the first river to have volunteers grow oysters under the year-old program between the Oyster Recovery Partnership, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Services, which provided the spat, and the Maryland Department of Corrections, which provided the wire mesh baskets.

In the first year, 174 participants hung 858 cages in the river, growing about a million oysters, Abel said.

The program is expanding to 11 rivers, streams and creeks next year and 5,000 cages will be used.

Unlike other programs run in which individuals can hang cages from their piers, the Marylanders Grow Oysters program is tributary based. The groups involved are selected to grow oysters in a particular waterway on a continuing basis, said Chris Judy, a shellfish program biologist for the DNR.

"It's hands-on stewardship," Judy said.

Oyster restoration efforts are important to state officials, conservationists and watermen because of their commercial value and because they are keystone species that filter bay

water and provide habitat for other species on their reefs. The oysters transplanted Tuesday were placed on a nearby sanctuary reef that is closed to commercial harvesting.

Oxford homeowner Mike Klein said he became involved with the program because he has lived in Maryland his entire life and has watched the bay deteriorate over the years.

Tending the cages at the end of his dock was a simple task he could do, requiring him only to shake the cages every week or so to make sure water could flow freely over the oysters.

The cages became covered with algae at times, but the oysters grew, he said.

"By the end, I could hardly lift the cage out of the water," Klein said.

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