

Large-Scale Oyster Restoration Moves Ahead

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LEXINGTON PARK, Md. - Last spring, the state began the St. Mary's River large-scale oyster restoration by planting spat-on-shell, known as "seed", in areas of the sanctuary that has insufficient density of wild oysters. The seed was grown from St. Mary's River brood stock at the state's Horn Point Hatchery in Cambridge. The state hired local watermen and the Papa Francis, which was built in Piney Point about a decade ago, to plant more than 75 million spat (baby oysters). This initial seeding in areas designated for seed-only is finishing up this week as the Papa Francis again plies our water in the upper river. The state will repeat this seed-only planting again next year with the goal of having a density of 150 oysters per square meter and at least two year classes. They anticipate having to plant an additional 30 million spat in 2022.

Last week, the state's contractor for applying rock and/or shells substrate positioned two barges in the sanctuary and were to begin work yesterday. Areas with no oysters but river bottom suitable for restoration will have 6 to 12 inches of substrate spread on the bottom. These areas will receive 40 million seed next year.

In all the state will restore 15.8 acres with seed-only and another 8.7 acres with substrate and seed. These 24.5 acres are all the state plans to do in the St. Mary's River sanctuary. The estimated cost for this project is \$966,800. The St. Mary's is known as a good oyster tributary and currently has 35 acres of thriving oyster reefs that already meet restoration criteria. Other large-scale tributaries have gotten much more attention: Harris Creek restoration is 351 acres, Little Choptank is 358 acres, and the Tred Avon is 130 acres. The Manokin is slated for 400 acres of restoration over the next two years, although the watermen there are trying to stop the effort. In all the state proposes to restore a total of 1,439 acres in five tributaries at a cost of \$57 million. To read the state's plan for the St. Mary's restoration, visit https://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/St._Marys_%28Maryland%29_Oyster_Restoration_Tributary_Plan.pdf

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