



January 2018

## **Bringing Back the Virginia Oyster**

*State support for watermen and oyster reefs through passage of Budget Items 376 #1s (Wagner), 376 #2s (Lewis), and 376 #2h (Bloxom), which increase funding each year by \$1,500,000 for oyster replenishment and by \$500,000 for oyster restoration activities.*

The oyster is an iconic species in Virginia, important historically, economically, and ecologically. However, decades of overharvesting, pollution, and disease have decimated the Chesapeake Bay's oyster population to a fraction of its historic numbers. Fortunately, oysters are finally rebounding in Virginia, leading to a burgeoning industry. But this recovery needs increased state support.

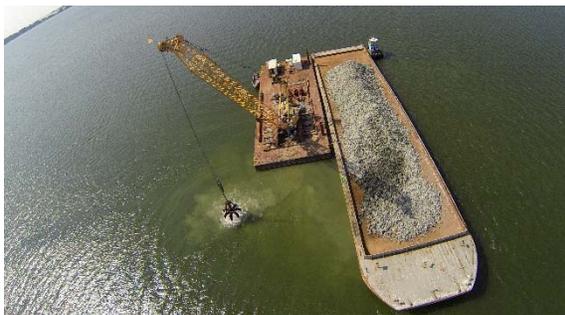
Investments in oyster replenishment boost wild harvests by watermen. Separate support for oyster restoration helps build sanctuary reefs, which are off-limits to harvest. The current budget allocates \$2 million for oyster replenishment and no funding for oyster restoration. Virginia shellfish industry and restoration partners across the Commonwealth are advocating for additional funds to help grow the industry and help conservation partners meet Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals for oyster restoration.

### **Why support \$3.5 million (total) for oyster replenishment?**

- Replenishment dollars are used to manage and improve Virginia's wild oyster harvest.
- According to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, every \$1 spent on oyster replenishment yields \$7 in economic benefits in the form of larger oyster harvests and increased jobs for watermen.
- The current \$2 million allocation for oyster replenishment is limiting; at this level of funding, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission can only maintain half of state harvest ground.

### **Why support \$500,000 for oyster restoration?**

- Oyster restoration programs create sanctuary oyster reefs closed to harvest.
- Oysters are one of the most critical filters in the Bay. They reduce sediments and pollutants that harm water quality.
- Oysters build reef habitat for a myriad of reef-dwelling organisms that support a healthy ecosystem. In addition, these ecological engineers form three-dimensional structures that help protect our shorelines and cost effectively offset the challenges of sea level rise.
- Wild oyster larvae from restoration reefs populate new areas, boosting a network of oyster communities throughout Virginia.



The Nature Conservancy and Virginia Marine Resources Commission partnered to build restoration reefs using recycled materials in the Piankatank River.



The reefs now boast an oyster population that improves water quality- and provides a source of oyster larvae that could be harvested by watermen.