



Lafayette River Oyster Survey

Oysters filter and clean remarkable amounts of water, helping to clear river water naturally of excess algae and silt. Oysters are also vital sources of food and habitat for a great variety of other Bay creatures. But sadly, oyster numbers have dwindled over the years because of disease, poor water quality, and overfishing.

Since 1999, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Rotary Club of Norfolk, Virginia Marine Resources Commission, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Elizabeth River Project, and numerous volunteers have made great restoration progress. They have stocked two Lafayette River sanctuary reefs with 1.5 million oysters and built several shoreline reefs.

In 2010, CBF's oyster restoration staff partnered with Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) to survey the shoreline of the Lafayette River and provide a benchmark of the current oyster population. Twenty-two miles of shoreline were surveyed through carefully taking hundreds of oyster samples in order to identify habitat features and oyster density.



Tommy Leggett, CBF Oyster Restoration and Fisheries Scientist, monitors reef balls planted in June 2010.



CBF staff measure four-month-old oysters attached to a reef ball in November 2010.

Oysters were found in relatively high abundance along the shoreline from the mouth of the river to the Granby Street Bridge and less abundant to the Tidewater Drive Bridge. Results show that there is a respectable, even surprising oyster population in the Lafayette. Though hardly robust or restored, the oyster population is better than expected and enough to build upon as part of a broader, more comprehensive river restoration initiative. Having an estimate of the river's current oyster population will help us gauge future success. Reducing pollution and improving the river's water quality will play an even larger role in the recovery of the Lafayette.

For More Information:

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