

2023 MARYLAND OYSTER ANNUAL REPORT



**CHESAPEAKE BAY
FOUNDATION**

Saving a National Treasure

CBF.ORG

KELLIE FIALA/CBF STAFF



JULIANNA FALCONER

Students from the University of Maryland joined over 25 other volunteers at CBF's November cage cleaning at the Downtown Sailing Center and Baltimore Museum of Industry Campus. Members of the public are invited every month to care for a 60-cage oyster garden on site.

Record-Breaking Year for Oyster Gardening

This year was an exceptional year for our oyster gardening program, record breaking in fact. With a great spat set (baby oysters adhering to empty oyster shell), favorable growing conditions, and attentive care from our oyster gardeners, we were able to plant more than 1.6 million oysters on sanctuary reefs throughout the state of Maryland.

We welcomed 98 new gardeners to our strong cohort who have decades of combined experience with the program. In addition to this great influx of new interest we had spat sets much higher than in past years, up from the previous year average of two to nine spat per shell.

Growing Our Partnerships

Just as the oysters grew this year, so did the partnerships for the oyster gardening program. We have hosted public cage cleanings in Baltimore for years—with more demand from volunteers and community members than we could accommodate. Given this excitement from residents and with support from our partners, we launched our second public oyster gardening location in the Baltimore Peninsula at the Port Covington Marina. Installation of the new 60-cage oyster garden took place at the inaugural [Oysters, Blues and Brews](#) event, which celebrated all things oyster.



ALLISON COLDEN/CBF STAFF



DOM J. PHOTOGRAPHY

In addition to great food and music, CBF hosted the Rod and Reef Slam Youth Fishing Derby, which provided youth anglers an opportunity to fish over the restored oyster reef at Fort Carroll near the Key Bridge. Fort Carroll is the final home for all the oysters grown in Baltimore, so it was a great opportunity to see the cycle of restoration from spat to habitat up close.

Across the Bay in Stevensville, we established our first public oyster gardening location on the Eastern Shore. A 100-cage public oyster garden was installed at the property of Silver Swan Bayside at Queen Anne Marina, the largest public oyster garden of its kind. We look forward to working with local residents, students, and visitors to the event venue to demonstrate the benefits and importance of oysters to the Bay.

Inspiring the Next Generation

This year, we launched an exciting new partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to bring oyster gardening to sixth graders at the YMCA Camp Letts in Edgewater this fall. The new program will enable students to participate in hands-on lessons about oysters and their importance to the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.

CBF will contribute about 2,500 spat-on-shell oysters each year that students will take care of in 16 cages. Each year about 3,000 students and 300 adults will interact with the oyster garden at Camp Letts through MCPS's outdoor education program, which includes lessons on how to evaluate the health of watersheds and ecosystems.

The oysters raised by students at Camp Letts will be added to sanctuary reefs in the South and Rhode Rivers each year so they can continue to grow.

Building Reef Balls at CBF's Clagett Farm



JULIANNA FALCONER

Maryland continued steady progress toward completing large-scale oyster restoration in five tributaries. Restoration construction was completed in the St. Mary's River, Maryland's fourth tributary to be completed. On the lower Eastern Shore, restoration construction in Maryland's final tributary, the Manokin River, was slowed by litigation, but is still on track to be completed by the 2025 deadline set by the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. The Manokin River, at 441 acres, will be the largest oyster restoration project in the world, surpassing nearby Harris Creek.

With restoration in Maryland's five tributaries winding down, CBF is working with state and federal partners and other community organizations to help define next steps for oyster restoration. These large-scale restoration projects have demonstrated that meaningful restoration in Chesapeake Bay is possible, and continued momentum is critically needed as we determine what comes next for oyster restoration.

Oyster Gardening

CBF oyster gardeners grew 1,608,358 adult oysters that were planted on reefs from Baltimore to the southern Eastern Shore. Our 249 oyster gardeners donated a total of 9,700 hours as active participants in oyster restoration.



JULIANNA FALCONER

Shell Recycling

Our shell recycling program continues to grow, driven by community interest. This year, CBF recycled over 2,226 bushels of oyster shells. The restaurants, marinas, schools, and neighborhoods that donated shell helped save CBF over \$18,365 and provided enough shell to grow over two million oysters. Our volunteer drivers donated over 775 hours to collect enough recycled shell to supply our entire oyster gardening program.



CBF STAFF

VOLUNTEERS MAKE IT ALL WORK

Our oyster restoration program relies heavily on volunteer engagement, and hundreds of volunteers help each year with oyster-related projects. This year, CBF oyster gardeners, volunteers, members, and donors all came together to support the mission to save the Chesapeake Bay.

- A network of **619 volunteers** donated **11,034 hours of time** in 2023. Whether it's caring for oysters growing off a dock, collecting recycled oyster shell, caring for community cages, or building reef balls, we appreciate every minute our volunteers dedicate to helping us restore oyster populations in Maryland. We truly wouldn't be able to do it without them!
- **249 Oyster Gardeners:** CBF's Maryland Oyster Gardening Program started in 1998 to create opportunities for people across the state to take an active role in helping bring back this vital species.
- Thanks to our dedicated oyster gardeners, **1,608,358 oysters were planted** in suitable areas throughout Maryland this year. In addition to our veteran oyster growers, we welcomed 98 new gardeners this year and look forward to seeing another year of growth.

IT TAKES PARTNERS

The Chesapeake Oyster Alliance is a diverse coalition of non-profits, community organizations, oyster growers, and others committed to adding 10 billion oysters in the Bay by 2025. We believe that we will achieve this ambitious goal through increasing public investment in oyster restoration, implementing science-based fisheries management plans, and expanding the oyster aquaculture industry.

It is only with a healthy oyster population that a restored Bay is possible, and the dedication and hard work of this coalition help get us a step closer to that goal every day.



Chesapeake
OYSTER ALLIANCE
10 Billion for the Bay