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Outdoors: Students work to improve Downs Park fishing

By CHRIS D. DOLLAR, For The Capital

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Seventh grader Anthony Tritz often fishes at Downs Park Pier, hoping to catch white perch and rockfish, or maybe even a spot or two. But on more days than seems fair, he says he doesn't catch a lot. Mary Arlauska, his classmate at Chesapeake Middle School in Pasadena, echoed Anthony's comment. She said at times she gets frustrated at the lack of steady action, and she too wishes the fishing was better.

But they aren't whiners. They'd rather take action. So the pair, along with four of their classmates, is determined to change their luck by creating an artificial reef on the outskirts of the popular fishing pier.

The small group of student conservationists also includes Kelly Klovensky, Caroline Snead, Carli Heller and Morgan Buckwalter. None are newcomers to environmental restoration projects, however, having been involved with efforts to increase terrapin and yellow perch numbers and grow underwater grass in the classroom to transplant in the Chesapeake. In fact, a couple years ago the school raised more than \$2,500 for the Maryland Artificial Reef Initiative.

While the six students received guidance from science teachers Jake Gavin and Catherine Sherry, the instructors are quick to point out the students did the legwork and provided the energy to move the project ahead. They've spent more than 40 hours preparing their presentation, which they'll make before the state's Joint Evaluation Committee on Nov. 18. Caroline and Carli said they're more nervous about presenting their work before their peers than the JE committee. But if the practice run was any indication, they ought to do just fine at both viewings.

Last week, I saw a dry run of their Power Point in which each student took a component of the plan and explained how it would benefit the environment and the community. I was sold.

The proposed reef plan is fairly straight-forward: place about 100 reef balls in a horseshoe pattern around the pier with openings between the mounds to allow fish to swim through. The reef balls, which range in size from a bowling ball to a beach ball, would set about 50 yards off the pier and shouldn't interfere with fishermen using top-bottom rigs or casting lures. In fact, this kind of structure is ideal for both types of fishing.

In the interior of the reef, a bed of sea clams would be laid down to create nooks that attract worms and shrimp, key food for larger fish. Also, there are plans to place some reef balls under the pier, as well as set oyster spat on some of the balls. The entire reef area could encompass approximately two acres, and if all goes well with the bureaucrats - never a slam dunk - construction could begin in May 2010.

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- Nov 10** - ARTISTS NEEDED for Camp Letts Holiday Craft Fair
- Nov 12** - Men's Fraternity - Winning at Work & Home
- Nov 15** - Lighthouse Christian Academy's Annual Chicken Dinner
- Nov 16** - TOPS Meeting
- Nov 17** - Nature's Paintbox by Myra Copus

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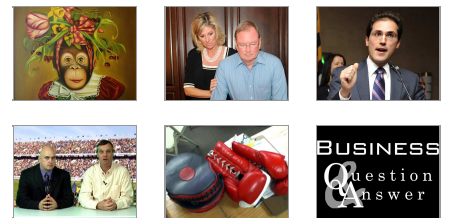
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Pasadena's active recreational fishing community, including the Pasadena Sportfishing Group and local chapters of the Coastal Conservation Authority and Maryland Saltwater Sportsfishermen's Association, are supporting the project. Agencies like the the Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Environmental Services and Anne Arundel County Parks and Recreation are also on board. The Bay Foundation will donate the use of their oyster boat to set the reef balls.

Vicki Lines, a Pasadena resident and member of CCA's North Anne Arundel chapter, said, "We (the fishing community) identified a need and the students took it from there."

I'd ballpark a cost of more than \$100,000 if one or two private contractors did the all of work. But it's expected that most of the material, time and labor expenses will be donated, meaning no one agency or group has to bear the brunt of the financial outlay. This leveraging of resources for habitat enhancement may be the new model in the next decade. It certainly makes sense during this economic downturn. Otherwise a good idea would remain just that - merely a good idea.

By creating the fishing reef, the Chesapeake middle schoolers hope more people will catch more fish at Downs Park. The project also raises an important point, albeit perhaps inadvertently. Shoreline access for anglers in Maryland, and Anne Arundel County in particular, isn't nearly what it could or should be.

The Downs Park fishing reef proposal seems like the definition of grassroots habitat enhancement project. After all the requirements have been met, those in charge of granting permits ought to bless the project. You know the saying: Lead, follow or get out of the way. These Chesapeake Middle School students are clearly leaders.

MD Record Tilefish Caught: On Oct. 22, Maryland angler Steve Doctor made the state record books with his 62-pound golden tilefish, landed in Baltimore Canyon off Ocean City. The fish bested the previous mark of 59.2 pounds set by Ron Callas in May 2007. Doctor was bottom fishing 800 feet in the deep blue, using bait on 80-pound test line and a 1-pound weight.

"At first he took off like a freight train and I was only able to get him up approximately 20 feet off the bottom," Doctor said in a DNR press release. "It was a slugfest." Golden tilefish live along the continental shelf, often in mud burrows, where they feed on crabs, shrimp and lobsters.

Fishing Forecast: The bay rockfishing gets better each week, it seems. We did well jigging Specialized Li'l Jimmys tipped with BKDs and Bass Assassins (pearl and albino) to take rockfish to 26 inches, holding in 17-23 feet over oyster lumps in the Chester River. I've heard ocean-run stripers have shown up. One charter captain said he pulled big baits (4-ounce bucktails with 9-inch shads) on planer boards in the deep trough off the CR Buoy to catch rock to 41 inches. Buoy 72 is another place to try for larger stripers. Capt. Charlie Sisson on the charterboat Backdraft hit the rock good off Chesapeake Beach, and I've heard the bite has also been on in 25-30 feet of water off Podickery Point. The shallower water (less than 30 feet) seems to hold the 18- to 26-inch schoolie rock. Jim from Marty's in Edgewater adds light tackle jiggers using red/orange tipped BKDs and Mann's Hard Nose Jerkbait are catching fat stripers. Also, one of his customers, Virginia Reed landed a citation white perch casting a -ounce Rat-L-Trap (Blueback chrome) in Glebe Creek. The fish measured 14 inches long with a 10-inch girth, and weighed 1.44 pounds - a beast!

OUTDOORS CALENDAR

Nov. 8 & Nov. 15: Glenbrook Rifle Assoc. "Sight In." 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Also, state qualification conducted at this time. Call Phil, 410-437-4806.

Nov. 13-15: Third Annual "Waterfowl Weekend For Combat Wounded Veterans," Centreville. Call 410-758-3584 for tickets.

Nov. 13-15: 39th Annual Waterfowl Festival, Easton, MD. Visit www.waterfowlfestival.org or call 410-822-4567.

Nov. 21-22: MSSA's 17th Annual Fall Tournament. Total payout estimated at \$47,000. Visit www.mssa.net.





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Nov. 21: CCA Kent Narrows Chapter Banquet, 6 p.m., Kent Narrows Yacht Club. Visit www.ccamd.org.

Send outdoor calendar items to Chris Dollar via email at cdollar@cdollaroutdoors.com.

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