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Reef ball placement helps oysters

BY MARY ANNA RODABAUGH
FROM FRONT

OYSTER -- A team of 16 workers on Wednesday deployed 200 concrete oyster reef balls into waters off the Eastern Shore's southern seaside areas in an effort to help restore Virginia's native oyster population.

Jake Perkinson, a 2007 graduate of Tandem Friends School in Charlottesville, with the help of Gus Lorber, president of Allied Concrete in Charlottesville, decided to build concrete reef balls for a senior project.

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"This project started when Gus called me about a year or so ago about getting involved in oyster restoration. He recruited Jake and got him working through the school," said Barry Truitt, the chief conservation scientist of The Nature Conservancy's Virginia Coast Reserve.

With the assistance of Todd Barber, founder and chairman of The Reef Ball Foundation,

Perkinson spent months molding and building the reef balls in time for summer deployment.

Truitt led the deployment team to two sites, one in Magotha Bay and one off the coast of Smith Island.

In all, 109 reef balls were deployed in Magotha Bay and around 91 off the coast of Smith Island.

An additional 90 reef balls will be deployed at another site near Smith Island next month.

The concrete is environmentally friendly and mocks an oyster habitat. Oyster shells were scattered along with the reef balls at the Smith Island site. This

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Jake Perkins along the oys will provide o

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allows oysters to achieve vertical relief, where the oysters grow on top of one another.

The initial goal is to restore functional oyster reefs in the coastal bays. A functional oyster reef occurs when the inter-tidal reefs show vertical relief of a variety of oysters in size and age that will filter and improve water quality, provide habitat for other species and assist in the overall food chain in the coastal bays, said Truitt.

The Nature Conservancy maintains about 32 acres of existing and restored reefs. Several members on the deployment team mentioned how it feels good knowing they are giving something back to nature through this project.

"I thought everything went great," Truitt said, calling it an "enthusiastic bunch of kids. All around it was a good experience for them and a benefit to the environment."

The team consisted of Perkinson along with high school friends Carter Hanson, Martin Palmer, brother Gabe Perkinson, father Paul Perkinson, Allied Concrete president Gus Lorber, Michael Wertheim and John Davis.

Additionally, volunteers Bob Jones and Ken Waltman assisted in the deployment of the reef balls. On the barge carrying the oyster reef balls were team members Marcus Killmon from the conservancy, Patrick Conroy, Josh Richards and Rachael Baker from the Long Term Ecological Research Lab located at the Anheuser-Busch Coastal Research Center in Oyster and Conservancy Oyster Restoration Technician Adam DiNuovo.

Virginia's Eastern Shore oyster population has become very troubled over the years. From the 1930's through the 1950's the annual oyster harvest on the seaside totaled half a million bushels.

From the 1950's until today, disease outbreaks and continual overharvesting have had detrimental effects on the oyster population. In the 1993-1994 harvest season, the seaside Eastern Shore public oyster harvest totaled about 1,500 bushels and the private oyster harvest over 4,500 bushels.

In the 2004-2005 season, public harvest was less than 500 bushels and private harvest was about 600 to 700 bushels.

This restoration effort was part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration -- The Nature Conservancy Community Restoration Program.

The object of the program is to get local community members and industries to support restoration projects. Allied Concrete served as an industry partner while Tandem Friends School and local volunteers served as community partners for this particular project.




This project was funded by NOAA, the Nature Conservancy's Global Marine Initiative and the Virginia Marine Resources Commission.

STORYCHAT 

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