VIMS Helps Local Students Aid Oyster Restoration Effort

Students from local schools are helping to restore Chesapeake Bay's beleaguered oyster population through a hands-on collaboration with two Gloucester Point agencies.

Researchers with VIMS' Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Virginia (CBNERRVA) and the Oyster Reef Keepers of Virginia (ORKV) helped the students transplant 104,000 one-year-old oysters onto the Felgates Creek Oyster Reef this past spring and summer. Felgates Creek empties into the York River between Yorktown and Williamsburg.

The students, from York, Gloucester, Hampton, Williamsburg, and Newport News, grew and monitored the oysters during the 2002-2003 school year through an ORKV oyster-restoration education program. CBNERRVA ran oyster-transplant field trips that allowed the students to access the Felgates Creek oyster reef with canoes launched from the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station, by wading to the reef from National Park Service property on the Colonial Parkway, or by boating to the reef from VIMS.

"We had great student interest and involvement during the oyster transplant field trips this past spring and summer," says CBNERRVA Education Director Bob Carroll, "and we'll continue the program in 2004."

ORKV Director Laurie Sorabella says it was "a great partnership" and notes that ORKV is looking for 10 new teachers to participate in the program this coming year. Sorabella is a recent VIMS graduate who started the ORKV program after she completed her master's thesis under Drs. Mark Luckenbach and Ken Moore.

Early monitoring suggests that the transplanted oysters are surviving and will hopefully increase oyster reproduction on the Felgates Creek reef and surrounding areas.

For more information about how school groups can start growing oysters in this restoration program, contact Laurie Sorabella at 804-721-8806 or email oysterreefkeeper@yahoo.com

Students from Gloucester Montessori school help restore oysters to Felgates Creek.