



## The Rebound of the Lafayette Oyster – Fast Facts



The Elizabeth River Project and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation began organizing the community to restore the Lafayette branch of the Elizabeth River in 2009. A Small Watershed Grant, administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), in cooperation with the US EPA and the federal Chesapeake Bay Program, provided the catalyst federal funding that allowed the non-profits to launch a community-wide plan for the Lafayette in 2011 with roles for all.

In turn, concerted efforts by many partners led to removal of the Lafayette in 2016 from the state list of waters impaired for bacteria. Today we celebrate progress toward another milestone: **The Lafayette is now closer than any other Virginia river to meeting goals set by bay scientists for restoration of the native oyster population (*Crassostrea virginica*)**. Today is also a call to action: Let's work together to ensure we have the resources and partners to cross this goal line and achieve additional goals for a healthy Lafayette, Elizabeth and Chesapeake Bay.

- With the 4.5-acre oyster reef currently under construction by the Elizabeth River Project, the **Lafayette is 93% to goal** for the 80 acres of functioning oyster reef prescribed for it by a workgroup of bay scientists.
- **The Elizabeth River Project has taken the lead with recent construction of oyster reefs in the Lafayette**, building 10 reefs already. The newest reef is being constructed with contractor Hodges & Hodges and **lead funding from NOAA** through the same NFWF program that launched the Lafayette focus. Continued federal funding of such efforts is imperative for progress across the Chesapeake Bay and leverages broad local and private support, as evidenced here.
- **The Chesapeake Bay Foundation** has seeded Lafayette oyster reefs with **40 million spat** and has placed **875 oyster reef balls** on Lafayette oyster reefs since 2010. **Hundreds of citizen oyster gardeners** and **80 citizen spat catchers** have helped restore the oysters in the river over the years. With the help from the **City of Norfolk**, CBF has **collected hundreds of bushels of oyster shells** to serve as a base for baby oysters. CBF will place **600 reef balls** on the oyster reefs this summer.

- **The Rotary Club of Norfolk funded the first oyster reef restoration efforts in the Lafayette**, holding an Oyster Fund Benefit Oct. 24, 1998 at the Norfolk Yacht & Country Club and additional events, raising more than \$150,000 for the initiative.
- A total of 22.5 acres of reefs have been restored in the Lafayette with additional partners, including early leadership by the **VA Marine Resources Commission** as one of the first entities to construct oyster reefs in the river, and further efforts by the **US Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Norfolk**. The City of Norfolk will build a 1.4-acre oyster reef in the Lafayette in 2017 with NFWF Coastal Resiliency Funds.
- Through a collaborative effort, the US Army Corps, **the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Christopher Newport University**, and NOAA discovered **48 acres of existing “relict” reefs** in 2014. These reefs have some of the largest oysters seen anywhere in the bay.
- **Lafayette Wetlands Partnership**, a non-profit, invented a small-scale oyster block, nicknamed the “oyster berg,” to facilitate residential scale oyster reefs. **SKW** and **HRSD** helped with molds and concrete.
- Combined partner efforts appear to be **tipping the scale to allow oyster populations to recover** in the Lafayette to a degree that’s rare around the bay. Example: Spat-on-shell success at the reef restored at the Granby Street bridge shows 118 oysters per square meter, two times the Bay Program goal of 50 oysters per meter. While the Lafayette oyster isn’t currently able to be consumed under Virginia Department of Health Standards, this restriction is being evaluated and we are hopeful that someday this will change.
- Oyster restoration has **many benefits**: creating habitat and feeding grounds for other species from fish to river otters to wading birds, improving water quality (oysters serve as natural filters), and protecting shorelines from erosion.
- Trawl surveys along restored reefs in the Lafayette have documented **25 species of fish**, including striped bass, red drum, summer flounder, silver perch and blue crabs.
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