

*Building Conservation Trust Provides Funding for Local, State, and National Fisheries, Habitat Conservation and Restoration Projects*

## **LIVING REEF ACTION CAMPAIGN**

### **Building Conservation Trust & CCA Maryland**

The Living Reef Action Campaign (LRAC) is a Building Conservation Trust (BCT)/CCA Maryland habitat project, partnered with Stevenson University, Lehigh Cement and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation that focuses on rebuilding the Chesapeake's oyster populations as well as their three dimensional reefs while engaging hundreds of students through restoration based STEM educational programs as the foundation for restoring our Chesapeake marine estuary.

#### **5 Key Principles of our Project Include:**

##### **1. Restore Degraded Habitats**

After a devastating bout with disease in the late 1980s combined with decades of overharvesting, habitat destruction, and water pollution, our Chesapeake oysters have been hanging on by a thread. Our project is raising awareness for the need to restore oyster populations and their reef habitat.

##### **2. Create new habitats**

Unfortunately here in the Chesapeake region, we have grown accustomed to thinking of the Bay as largely flat beneath the surface. We talk of "oyster beds" and "bars" and no longer of "reefs." History tells us that three dimensional reefs belong in our bay to create vital habitat for oysters, for marine life and for a healthier bay.

BCT and CCA have secured an 84 acre reef site off the western edge of Tilghman Island, Chesapeake Bay. The water depth is 18' – 23' with good tidal currents and a sand bottom. With the support of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, our project deploys student built concrete reef balls that are seeded with oyster spat along with recycled oyster shells to create a new living reef structure on this permitted site.

**Coordinates:** 38° 41' 32.295" N, 76° 22' 39.038" W

##### **3. Advance the science of habitat restoration and conservation**

It's well shown that oyster reefs are critical components within the Chesapeake's ecosystem, as they provide water filtering and cleaning benefits, which help control the bays nuisance algae blooms and excess nitrogen run off from our agricultural communities. Oyster reefs also parallel coral reefs in providing structure that supports an amazing array of other species, including important habitat which encourages the growth of many recreationally and commercially important fish species.

BCT and Stevenson University have developed experimental pilot projects on our reefs that will test the success of three dimensional reef habitat over the traditional shell on bottom approach, success of remote setting of oysters using our recycled shell over reef balls in our construction, and to trend the survival of oysters growing up in the water column versus laying flat on the bay bottom to support the rationale behind using three dimensional reef structures for restoration including the abundance of marine life structures like this attract.

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#### 4. Foster Habitat Stewardship

BCT partnerships within our communities have been instrumental in fostering habitat stewardship. In addition to funding and donation assistance, our partners have provided ground support to engage multiple public and private schools at the elementary and secondary levels. Students across the state are learning about oyster reefs in some manner and why three dimensional reef structures are important to the Chesapeake Bay's recovery. Each month, students are engaging in the construction of concrete reef balls that are being used to build restore oyster reefs.

#### The Living Reef Action Campaign Awards:

- Awarded the environmental *"Project of the Year"* by Carroll County's Environmental Advisory Council for oyster restoration efforts in creating new reef habitat while fostering bay stewardship within our community.
- House Delegate Susan Krebs awarded the project a Maryland General Assembly Official Citation for its *"Leadership and Commitment to Protecting Our Environment."*
- The Maryland Recycling Network awarded the project an *"Outstanding Environmental & Community Leadership"* award at their 2016 Annual Conference.

#### 5. Educate coastal communities on the value of conservation.

LRAC continues to educate the Chesapeake Bay watershed communities on the value of conservation by hosting an annual Oyster Stroll festival each October in Westminster, Maryland. Each year more than 2000 people attend our event which promotes sustainable oyster harvest by featuring the many different Oyster Aquaculture farms from Maryland and Virginia's Chesapeake region. Festival goers learn how tasty aquaculture farm raised oysters can be, while having different flavors depending on their location on the bay. During the festival, there are live oyster filtering tanks set up demonstrating the ecological importance of oysters, reef ball construction demonstration, live music stages and large outdoor beer garden.



Students Bagging Recycled Shells



Construction of Reef Balls



City of Westminster  
Annual Oyster Stroll Festival