

NAME: Restoration of Eelgrass and Bay Scallops to the Coastal Bays of Virginia

LOCATION: Northhampton and Accomack counties, VA

ACRES: 50 acres shallow water to eelgrass

NON-FEDERAL SPONSOR: Virginia Institute of Marine Science, College of William and Mary

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

This project will return eelgrass habitat to the coastal bays of Virginia's coast, and once established, introduce the closest extant population of bay scallop, a species native to NC. Both the local native eelgrass and bay scallops, which rely upon seagrasses during its juvenile stage, have been extirpated from the proposed restoration site since the 1930's. The project plan includes seeding 50 acres of shallow water with eelgrass over a two year period with the expectation, based on previous projects, of significant expansion.

EXPECTED BENEFITS:

A diverse coastal ecosystem is beneficial to migratory birds and marine mammals. The reestablishment of eelgrass beds in the coastal bays of Virginia will provide valuable habitat for a myriad of species, including the proposed reintroduced bay scallop. The project design is climate change driven as evident in the site location and selection of a more southerly occurring species of bay scallop, allowing for a higher temperature gradient in the future. These design elements should provide self-sustaining meta-populations of eelgrass and bay scallops that will improve the resilience of the coastal bay ecosystem to climate change and other threats.

STATUS: Planning and Design