

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
COMPLETE STATEMENT
OF
COLONEL DAVID HANSEN
DISTRICT ENGINEER, NORFOLK DISTRICT
FOR THE HEARING BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
OYSTERS RESTORATION, MANAGEMENT, AND RESEARCH**

**ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS COMMITTEE ROOM
LOWE HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND
10:00 am, 22 October 2001**

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

I am Colonel David Hansen, District Engineer, Norfolk District. With me today, is Lieutenant Colonel Scott Flanigan, Deputy District Engineer, Baltimore District. We are here today representing the Honorable Mike Parker, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. I am pleased to represent the Army and the Corps of Engineers on this important matter.

I appreciate the opportunity to inform you of the Corps' activities in support of the Chesapeake Bay oyster restoration efforts. I am very proud of the work that the Baltimore and Norfolk Districts have accomplished to date in seven rivers in the Chesapeake Bay region. I am looking forward to seeing more positive results as our completed projects continue to provide their benefits, and as new projects come on line in support of oyster restoration.

The Corps' involvement in oyster restoration began in 1995 when Congress directed us to carry out a project to improve the Bay's oyster population and appropriated \$500,000 to initiate that project. The project was a response to the precipitous decline in the oyster harvests in the Chesapeake Bay. The harvests in the mid-1990's were only 1/8 of the harvest from a decade earlier and less than 2 percent of what it was 100 years earlier [see *attached graphs*]. The decline in the oyster fishery has been attributed to overfishing, sedimentation, pollution, and disease. Not only has this decline hurt the regional water-based economy, but it has also depleted the Chesapeake Bay of natural filtering organisms and the aquatic habitat structure on which numerous marine animals thrive. As we have learned over the past few years, oyster restoration is critically important to the marine ecosystem of the Chesapeake

Bay, particularly in major tributaries such as the Lynnhaven, James, Rappahannock, Potomac, Patuxent, Choptank, and Chester Rivers.

Section 704(b), WRDA 1986 (Chesapeake Bay Oyster Restoration)

The authorization for the Corps' oyster restoration program comes from section 704(b) of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986. This language authorized the Corps to implement projects that provide alternative or beneficially modified habitats for indigenous fish and wildlife, including man-made reefs. Originally, the authorization was limited to \$5 million and the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay, but in subsequent WRDA's (section 505 of WRDA 1996 and section 342 of WRDA 2000), the areal extent was expanded to the Virginia watershed, and the Federal funding limit was raised to \$20 million. In keeping with other Civil Works projects, this authority requires cost sharing, with non-Federal sponsors providing 25 percent of the project costs.

The first project in this program was developed with Congress' initial appropriation and then funded for construction through the Corps' Civil Works budget process in fiscal years 1996-2000, at a total cost of \$3.3 million (\$2.5 million of Federal funds). The plan for this first project was the result of coordination among many project partners; the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), other Federal and state resource agencies, Maryland watermen, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the academic community, interested citizens, as well as non-profit groups such as the Oyster Recovery Partnership. The plan called for creation of new oyster bars, rehabilitation of non-productive bars, development of new seed bars, and planting of young oysters from the State hatcheries, as well as follow-on project monitoring. In turn, the State of Maryland upgraded its hatcheries to provide a sufficient supply of healthy seed oysters. For this project, the Maryland DNR acted as the non-Federal sponsor, providing the 25-percent cost share.

This restoration project identified six tributaries in the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay for oyster bar development. These tributaries were the Severn, Magothy, and Patuxent Rivers on the Western Shore, and the Chester, Choptank, and Nanticoke Rivers on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, two areas of the Eastern Shore, Kedges Strait and Eastern Bay, were planned for seed bar development. Over the past five years, the Corps and Maryland DNR have placed over 700,000 bushels of shell and millions of seed oysters in these rivers to create new oyster bars.

In conjunction with the University of Maryland, we have documented the ecological success of the oyster bars, including an underwater video, which demonstrates the value of the oyster bar habitat for other Chesapeake Bay aquatic species, such as blue crabs and rockfish. This monitoring has provided important information that is being used by the Corps, the state agencies, and the scientific community to design ongoing and future projects.

Building on the success of this first project, the Corps has moved out, thanks to Congress' FY 01 \$3-million appropriation, on what we call our Phase II projects for the oyster restoration program. The Phase II projects include an estimated \$2.55 million of construction in the Tangier-Pocomoke Sound region of Virginia that the Corps' Norfolk District is leading. In September 2001, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works and the Commonwealth of Virginia executed a project cooperation agreement to initiate this project. Construction of 8 acres of 3-dimensional and 150 acres of 2-dimensional oyster reefs is scheduled to start in the spring of 2002. Similarly, the Corps' Baltimore District is developing a Phase II project in Maryland which will continue the previous Phase I activities in the six tributaries over the next two years. Phase II Maryland construction activities are expected to start in the late spring of 2002.

Meanwhile, the Corps in concert with a committee of Federal, state, local, non-profit, and industry representatives is developing a long-term master plan to meet the oyster habitat goal of the 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement. This goal calls for a 10-fold increase in oyster biomass by the year 2010. This goal emanated from the June 1999 multi-state scientific consensus document that is the basis for our project's amended authorization in WRDA 2000. This long-term master plan is expected to lead to the next wave of projects in future years.

Section 510, WRDA 1996 (Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection Program)

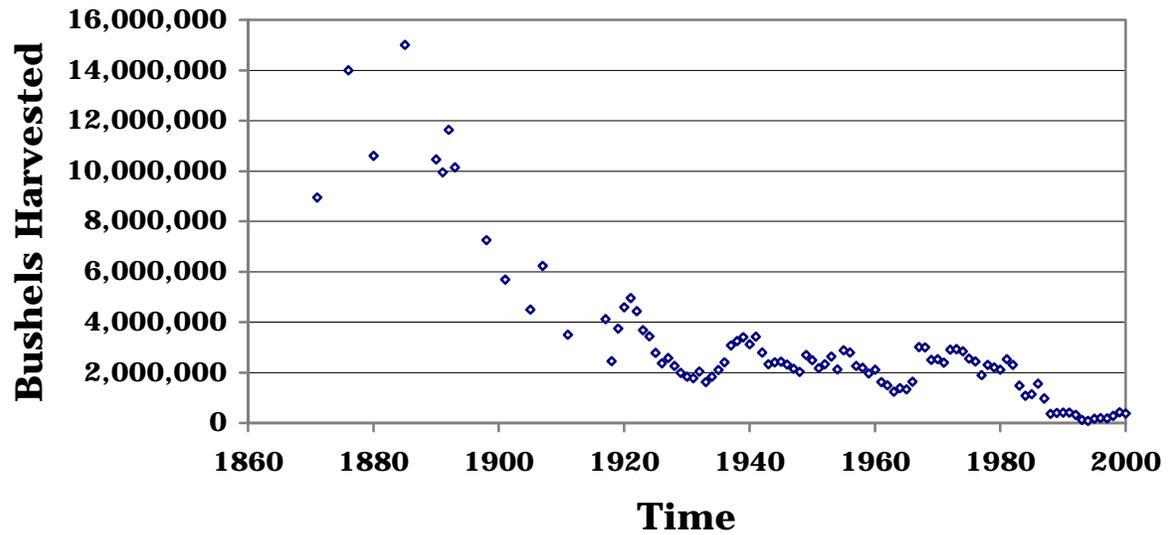
In addition to the two phases of the section 704(b) project, we have used our authority under section 510 of WRDA 1996 (the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection Program) in Virginia to fund a \$1.2-million oyster restoration project in the lower Rappahannock River. This project involved the creation of more than 170 acres of oyster reefs over the past two years. Similar to the section 704(b) project, the lower Rappahannock effort was cost-shared 75-25, with the Commonwealth of Virginia picking up the non-Federal share.

Summary

Over the past six years, the Army Corps of Engineers has enjoyed working with the numerous project partners in the Chesapeake Bay oyster restoration effort, particularly the state agencies in Maryland and Virginia. We are committed to continuing this partnership in the upcoming years. We appreciate your support for the Corps' oyster restoration program. We look forward to the year 2010, when the coalition of local, state, Federal, academic, non-profit, and industry groups can celebrate meeting the 10-fold goal for oyster restoration, and ... maybe even eat a few on the half-shell.

Thank you for your support and for allowing me the opportunity to discuss this incredible restoration program.

Figure 1 Maryland Oyster Harvest



Virginia Oyster Landings Data Spring and Fall Seasons, Public Only (1980-2000)

