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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF  
**COMMERCE**

**NEWS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

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NATIONAL  
OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC  
ADMINISTRATION

NOAA 02-R142

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Sept. 24, 2002

**NOAA CELEBRATES COMPLETION OF OYSTER PROJECT  
*PARTNERS PLANT 500,000 OYSTERS***

The Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service, in coordination with numerous partners, will celebrate the completion of an oyster reef restoration project by planting a half million oysters in the Chesapeake Bay on Sept. 26.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Restoration Center and its partners are celebrating the completion of an oyster reef restoration project called, "Shoreline Restoration Project at Horseheads Wetlands Center," located on Kent Island. The project is a 1.5 acre wetland/shoreline stabilization project that includes an offshore oyster reef breakwater to lessen wave action.

"This important restoration effort may just be one of the best integrated habitat restoration projects NOAA has funded to date," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA Administrator. "It incorporates shoreline protection, wetlands restoration, oyster reef habitat, fish habitat, and more. NOAA Fisheries is committed to participating in this Chesapeake Bay effort and sees this partnership as such an effective one that we've supported it through two of the Agency's Habitat Restoration partnership programs."

As part of the celebration, representatives from NOAA and others will roll up their sleeves and use state-of-the-art planting equipment in this innovative project. The oysters will be placed on an artificial reef created especially for them. Re-used concrete rubble was used as base material for the reef, oyster shell was used as a veneer, and concrete fish havens were used to create the living reef.

The reef is ready for the oysters, so partners will plant approximately 500,000 disease free oysters by placing them on the reef on the Horseheads site south of Grasonville. The project combines multiple habitat restoration strategies and techniques, including shoreline erosion protection using soft techniques, wetlands restoration, terrapin nesting habitat, oyster reef restoration and fish habitat structures.

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The project was funded by NOAA grant awards. The Horseheads Wetlands Center and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation were grantees. Other partners include Restore America's Estuaries, the Oyster Recovery Partnership, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the University of Maryland, Chesapeake Bay Trust and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

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